

RIPPING TIME
LINDA EVANS and ROBERT ASPRIN

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OUT OF THE FRYING PAN-
INTO THE TIME TUNNEL

Armstrong thrust one gun into a pocket, shoved the other two into Jenna's shocked hands. "If I tell you to shoot, do it!" Then the detective jerked her into motion once more.

They pelted down the alleyway and into heavy traffic. Armstrong ran right in front of a taxi. The car screeched to a halt, the driver cursing. Armstrong yanked open the driver's door and tossed the cabby into the street.

"Get in!"

Jenna dove for the passenger's door. She barely had her feet off the pavement before the car squealed into motion. Armstrong drove like a maniac. "Forget Europe, kid," he muttered. "They're not gonna let you get out of New York alive."

Jenna's eyes burned, and she couldn't get enough air down.

"Ever been time-touring, kid?" Armstrong asked before she could speak.

"Wh-what?"

"Time-touring. Have you ever?"

She blinked, tried to force her brain to function again. "No. But . . . Carl and I, we were going to go . . . through TT-86, to London. Got the tickets and everything, used false ID to buy them, to keep it a secret . . ."

The taxi that Armstrong had taken from its driver slewed around another corner, merged with traffic on Broadway, slowed to a decorous pace.

"Kid," the detective said softly, "those tickets might just save your life."

Because the only by-God way out of this city now is through TT-86."

Other Books in the Time Scout Series:

Time Scout
Wagers of Sin
Ripping Time
The House That Jack Built (forthcoming)

Baen Books by Linda Evans:

Far Edge of Darkness
Bolos: The Triumphant
(by David Weber & Linda Evans)

Chapter One

She hadn't come to Shangri-La Station for the usual reasons.

A slight and frightened young woman, Jenna had lost the lean and supple dancer's grace which had been hers . . . God, was it only three days ago? It seemed a year, at least, for every one of those days, a whole lifetime since the phone call had come.

"Jenna Nicole," her aunt's voice had startled her, since Aunt Cassie hadn't called in months, not since before Jenna had joined the Temple, "I want to see you, dear. This evening."

The commanding tone and the use of her full name, as much as the unexpected timing, threw her off stride. "This evening? Are you serious? Where are you?" Jenna's favorite aunt, her mother's only sister, didn't live anywhere near New York, only appeared in the City for film shoots and publicity appearances.

"I'm in town, of course," Cassie Tyrol's famous voice came through the line, faintly exasperated. "I flew in an hour ago. Whatever you've got on your calendar, cancel it. Dinner, class, Temple services, anything. Be at Luigi's at six. And Jenna, darling, don't bring your roommate. This is business, family business, understand? You're in deep trouble, my girl."

Jenna's stomach clenched into knots. Oh, my God. She's found out! Aloud, she managed to say, "Luigi's at six, okay, I'll be there." Only a lifetime's worth of acting experience and the raw talent she'd inherited from the same family that had produced the legendary Jocasta "Cassie" Tyrol got that simple sentence out without her voice shaking. She's found out, what'll she say, what'll she do, oh my God, what if she's told Daddy? She wouldn't tell him, would she? Jenna's aunt hated her father, almost as much as Jenna did.

Hand shaking, Jenna hung up the phone and found Carl staring at her, dark eyes perplexed. The holographic video simulation they'd been running, the one they'd been thrown into fits of giggles over, trying to get ready for their grand adventure, time touring in London, flickered silently behind Jenna's roommate, forgotten as thoroughly as last summer's fun and games. Carl blinked, owl-like, through his glasses. "Nikki? What's wrong?" He always called her by her middle name, rather than her more famous given name—an endearing habit that had drawn her to him from the very beginning. He brushed Jenna's hair back from her brow. "Hey, what is it? You look like you just heard from a ghost."

She managed a smile. "Worse. Aunt Cassie's in town."

"Oh, dear God!" Carl's expressive eyes literally radiated sympathy, which was another reason Jenna had moved in with him. Sympathy was in short supply when your father was the John Paul Caddrick, the Senator everybody loved to hate.

Jenna nodded. "Yeah. What's worse, she wants me to meet her by six. At Luigi's, for God's sake!"

Carl's eyes widened. "Luigi's? You're kidding? That's worse than bad. Press'll be crawling all over you. Remind me to thank the Lady of Heaven for not giving me famous relatives."

Jenna glared up at him. "Some help you are, lover! And just what am I supposed to wear to Luigi's? Do you see any six-thousand-dollar dresses in my closet?" Jenna hadn't put on much of anything but ratty jeans since hitting college. "The last time I was seen in public with Aunt Cassie, she had on a blouse that cost more than the rent on this apartment for a year! And I still haven't lived down the bad press from that horrible afternoon!" She hid her face in her hands, still mortified by the memory of being immortalized on every television set and magazine cover in the country after slipping headlong into a mud puddle. "Cassie Tyrol and her niece, the mudlark . . ."

"Yep, that's you, Jenna Nicole, the prettiest mudlark in Brooklyn." Jenna put out her tongue, but Carl's infectious grin helped ease a little of the panic tightening down. He tickled her chin. "Look, it's nearly four, now. If you're gonna be in any shape to walk into Luigi's by six, with a crowd of reporters falling all over the two of you—" Jenna just groaned, at which Carl had the impudence to laugh "—then you'd better jump, hon. In case you hadn't noticed, you look like shit." Carl eyed her up and down, wrinkling his nose. "That's what happens when you stay out 'til four A.M., working on a script due at six, then forget to go to bed when you get back from class."

Jenna threw a rolled up sock at him. He ducked with the ease of a born dancer and the forlorn sock sailed straight through a ghostly, three-dimensional simulation of a young woman laced into proper attire for a lady of style, prim and proper and all set to enjoy London's Season. The Season of 1888. When Jenna's sock "landed" in the holographic teacup, while the holographic young lady continued smiling and sipping her now-contaminated tea, Jenna's roommate fell down on the floor, howling and pointing a wagging finger at her. "Oh, Nikki, three-point shot!"

Jenna scowled down at the idiot, who lay rolling around holding his ribs and sputtering with laughter. "Thanks, Carl. You're all heart. Remind me to lose your invitation to the graduation party. If I ever graduate. God, if Simkins rejects this script, I'll throw myself in the East River."

Carl chuckled and rolled over, coming to his feet easily to switch off the holoprojector they'd borrowed from the campus library. "Nah. You'll just film it, win an Oscar or two, and take his job. Can you imagine? A member of the Temple on faculty?"

Jenna grinned-and bushwhacked Carl from behind while he wasn't looking, getting in several retaliatory tickles. He twisted around and stole a kiss, which turned into a clutch for solid ground, because she couldn't quite bring herself to tell Carl the worst part of her news, that her aunt knew. Just how much Cassie knew remained to be seen. And what she intended to do about it, Jenna didn't even want to think about. So she just held onto Carl for a long moment, queasy and scared in the pit of her stomach.

"Hey," he said gently, "it isn't that bad, is it?"

She shook her head. "No. It's worse."

"Cassie loves you, don't you know that?"

She looked up, blinking hard. "Yes. That's why it's worse."

His lips quirked into a sad, understanding little smile that wrenched at Jenna's heart. "Yeah. I know. Listen, how about I clean up the place while you're out, just in case she wants to visit, then when it's over, I'll give you a backrub, brush your hair, pamper your feet, spoil you silly?"

She gave him a watery smile. "Lover boy, you got yourself a deal."

Then she sighed and stepped into the shower, where she could let the smile pour away down the drain, wishing the fear would drain away with it. Christ,

what could she tell Aunt Cassie? She tried to envision the scene, quailed inwardly. Cassie Tyrol, cool and elegant and very Parisian, despite her New Hollywood accent and the ranch up in the hills, where Jenna had spent the happiest summers of her life—the only happy ones, in fact, until college and the Temple and Carl. . . . Aunt Cassie was not likely to take the news well. Not at all. Better, of course, than her father.

Two hours later, Jenna was still quailing, despite the outward charm of her smile for the maitre d' at Luigi's, the most fashionable of the restaurants owned by increasingly wealthy members of New York's leading Lady of Heaven Temple. It was little wonder her aunt had chosen Luigi's. Given Cassie's prominence in the New Hollywood Temple, she probably had a stakeholder's share in the restaurant's profits. Jenna's only aunt never did anything by halves. That included throwing herself into her latest religion or making money the way Jenna accumulated rejection slips for her screenplays.

The maitre d' greeted her effusively, by name. "Good evening, Ms. Caddrick, your aunt's table is right this way."

"Thank you." She resisted the urge to twitch at her dress. Carl had, while she showered and did her hair and makeup with the most exquisite care she'd used in a year, worked a genuine theatrical miracle. He'd rushed over to the theater department and liberated a costume which looked like a million bucks and had only cost a few thousand to construct, having been donated by some New Hollywood diva who'd needed a tax write-off. Jenna, who existed by her own stubborn insistence on a student's budget that did not include dinner at Luigi's or the requisite fashions appropriate to be seen there, had squealed with delight at his surprise.

"You wonderful idiot! If they'd caught you sneaking this out, they'd have thrown you out of college!"

"Yeah, but it'd be worth it, just looking at you in it." He ran his gaze appreciatively across her curves.

"Huh. This dress is a lot more glamorous than I am. Now, if I just had Aunt Cassie's nose, or cheekbones, or chin . . ."

"I like your nose and cheekbones and chin just the way they are. And if you don't scoot, you'll be late."

So Jenna had slid gingerly into the exquisite dress, all silken fringe and swaying sheik, and splurged on a taxi, since arriving on a bicycle in a ten-thousand-dollar dress simply would not do. Jenna followed the maitre d' nervously into the glitzy restaurant, aware of the stares as she made her way past tables frequented by New York's wealthiest Templars. She did her best to ignore the whispers, staring straight ahead and concentrating on not falling off her high-heeled shoes and damning her father for saddling her with the price of an infamous family face and name.

Then she spotted her aunt at a dim-lit corner table and swallowed hard, palms abruptly wet. Oh, God, she's got somebody with her and it's not her latest.

If this was family only . . . The only person it could be was a private detective. Cassie'd hired more than her share over the years. Jenna knew her style. Which meant Jenna was in really serious hot water. Worse, her aunt appeared to be absorbed in a violent argument with whoever it was. The dark circles under Cassie Tyrol's eyes shocked her. When Jenna reached the table, conversation sliced off so abruptly, Jenna could actually hear the echoes of the silence left behind. Her aunt managed a brittle smile as she stooped to kiss one expertly manicured cheek.

"Hello, Jenna, dear. Sit down, please. This is Noah Armstrong."

Jenna shook hands, trying to decide if the androgynous individual in a fluid silk suit beside her aunt was male or female, then settled for, "A pleasure, Noah." Living in New York for the past four years—not to mention a solid year plunged into Temple life—had been an education in more ways than one.

"Ms. Caddrick." Firm handclasp, no clue from the voice. Noah Armstrong's eyes were about as friendly as a rabid pit bull challenging all comers to a choice cut of steak.

Jenna ignored Armstrong with a determination that matched Armstrong's dark scowl, sat down, and smiled far too brightly as Cassie Tyrol poured wine. Cassie handed over a glass in which tiny motion rings disturbed the wine's deep claret glint. Jenna hastily took it from her aunt before it could slosh onto snowy linen.

"Well, what a surprise, Cassie." She glanced around the elegant restaurant, surreptitiously tugging at her short skirt to be sure nothing untoward was showing, and realized with a start of surprise there were no reporters lurking. "Gawd. How'd you manage to ditch the press?"

Her aunt did not smile. Uh-oh.

"This was not an announced visit," she said quietly. "Officially, I'm still in L.A."

Worse, oh, man, she's gonna let me have it, both barrels . . .

"I see. Okay," she sighed, resigned to the worst, "let's have it."

Cassie's lips tightened briefly. The redness in her eyes told Jenna she'd been crying a great deal, lately, which only added guilt to an already-simmering stew of fear and defensiveness. Jenna, wishing she could gulp down the wine, sipped daintily, instead, determined to maintain at least a facade of calm.

"It's . . ." Cassie hesitated, glanced at Noah Armstrong, then sighed and met Jenna's gaze squarely. "It's your father, Jenna. I've discovered something about him. Something you deserve to know, because it's going to wreck all our lives for the next year or so."

Jenna managed not to spray wine all over the snowy linen, but only because she snorted thirty-dollar-a-glass wine into her sinuses, instead. She blinked hard, eyes watering, wineglass frozen at her lips. When she'd regained control, Jenna carefully lowered the glass to the table and stared at her aunt, mind spinning as she tried to reassess the entire purpose for this clandestine meeting. She couldn't even think of a rejoinder that would make sense.

"Drink that wine," her aunt said brusquely. "You're going to need it."

Jenna swallowed hard, just once. Then knocked the wine back, abruptly wishing this meeting had been about her highly secret down-time trip with Carl, a trip they'd been planning for more than a year, to Victorian London, where she and her roommate planned to film the East End terror instilled by Jack the Ripper. They'd bought the tickets fourteen months previously under assumed names, using extremely well-made false identifications she and Carl had managed to buy from an underworld dealer in new identities. New York teemed with such dealers, with new identifications available for the price of a few hits of cocaine; but they'd paid top dollar, getting the best in the business, because Jenna Nicole Caddrick's new identity had to be foolproof. Had to be, if she hoped to keep the down-time trip secret from her father. And what her father would do if he found out . . .

Jenna had as many reasons to fear her world-famous father as she had to adore her equally famous aunt. Whatever Cassie was about to lay on her, it promised to be far worse than having her father discover she was going time-touring in the face of the elder Caddrick's ultimatums about never setting foot through any time terminal gate, ever. Voice tight despite her relief at the reprieve, Jenna asked, "Dad, huh? What's the son-of-a-bitch done now? Outlaw fun? He's outlawed everything else."

Noah Armstrong glanced sharply into Jenna's eyes. "No. This isn't about his career as a legislator. Not . . . precisely."

Jenna glanced into his-her?-eyes and scowled. "Who the hell are you, Armstrong? Where do you fit into anything?"

Armstrong's lips thinned slightly, but no reply was forthcoming. Not to her, at any rate. The look Armstrong shot Jenna's aunt spoke volumes, a dismissive, superior look that relegated Jenna to the realm of infant toddlers who couldn't think for themselves or be trusted not to piddle on the Persian carpets.

Jenna's aunt said tiredly, "Noah's a detective, hon. I went to the Wardmann Wolfe agency a few months ago, asked for their best. They assigned Noah to the case. And . . . Noah's a member of the Temple. That's important. More important than you can begin to guess."

Jenna narrowed her eyes at the enigmatic detective across the table. Wardmann Wolfe, huh? Aunt Cassie certainly didn't do things by halves. She never had, come to that. Whatever her father had done, it was clearly more serious than the occasional sex scandals which, decades ago, had rocked the careers of other legislators possessing her father's stature. A chill ran through her, wondering just what Daddy Dearest was involved in.

Cassie said heavily, "You remember Alston Corliss?"

Jenna glanced up, startled. "The guy in Sacred Harlot with you? Blond, looks like a fey elf, loves Manx cats, opera, and jazz dance? Nominated for an Oscar for Harlot, wasn't he? And still a senior at Julliard." Jenna had been impressed-deeply so-by her aunt's talented young co-star. And more than a little envious of that Oscar nomination. And with his good looks, Jenna had just about melted all over the theater seats every time he smiled. Guiltily, she remembered a promise to try and get Carl an autograph, via the connection with her aunt. "Wasn't there some talk of you starring in another film with him? Something about A Templar Goes to Washington, sort of a new take on that old classic film?"

Her aunt nodded. "Alston wanted to spend a semester interning in Congress. Role research. I . . . I set it up, got him a job in your father's office. Asked him to snoop around for us. Find out things Noah couldn't, didn't have access to." Cassie Tyrol bit a well-manicured lip. "Jenna, he's dead."

"Dead?"

Cassie was crying, smudging her careful eye makeup into ruins. "Four hours ago. It hasn't hit the press yet, because the FBI's put a press blackout on it. I know because Noah dragged me out of my house, scared spitless because they'll come after me."

Jenna couldn't take this in. Alston Corliss dead, Cassie in danger? "But" Nothing intelligent would form coherently enough to say anything else.

Noah Armstrong spoke quietly, with just a hint of anger far back in those piercing grey eyes. "Surely you've heard the scuttlebutt about people close to your father? To know Senator John Paul Caddrick is to inherit a tombstone?"

White-hot anger blazed at the crude insult, jolting her out of shock sufficiently to glare murderously at the detective. There were plenty of reasons to hate John Paul Caddrick, Senator from Hell. But murder wasn't by God one of them! Then she saw the sick, anguished pain in her aunt's eyes. Anger slithered to the floor in a puddle at her feet and Jenna was quite suddenly very cold inside.

Cassie Tyrol's lips trembled. "When we leave here, Jenna, we're going to the FBI. What Noah's found, what your father's been doing, who he's involved with and what they've been doing . . . it's got to be stopped. Noah didn't want me to tell you, Jenna, I sneaked away to call you, asked you to meet me here . . ."

She was crying harder, voice shaking. Shocked by her collapse into violent tremors, Jenna reached out, grasped her aunt's chilled fingers, held on tight. "Hey. It's okay," she said gently.

Cassie tightened her fingers around Jenna's, shook her head. "No," she choked out, "it isn't. You're his little girl. It's going to hurt you so much when all of this comes out. I thought you deserved to know. If" she

hesitated. "If you want to take off for Europe for a while, I'll pay for the tickets. Take Carl with you, if your roommate wants to go."

Jenna had to scrape her lower jaw off the table.

Cassie tried to smile, failed utterly. "You're going to need a friend, someone to protect you, while this is breaking loose, Jenna, and . . . well, your father and I don't see eye to eye on a lot of things. He's never approved of either of us joining the Lady of Heaven Temple or the food I eat or the men I divorced or the way I make my living, any more than he's ever approved of your friends or your choice of career. You're growing up, Jenna. Who you're friends with-or sleep with-is your business, not mine or his or anyone else's, and frankly, a blind man could see Carl's good for you, say what your father will. For one thing," she said bitterly, "you're standing up to that bastard for once in your life, insisting on a film career, and I know how much Carl's had to do with that. And I know what's in that bank box of yours. Frankly, I approve. It's why I'm sending him with you. I know he'll take care of you for me."

"What?" Jenna gasped. Cripes . . . Where did Aunt Cassie get her information from? But her concern was so genuine, Jenna couldn't even take offense at the invasion of privacy which her really serious snooping represented.

Cassie tried to smile, failed. "Don't be angry with me for prying, sweetie, please. I'm just trying to look out for you. So." She slid an envelope across the table. "If you want to go, you can probably get out before the press gets wind of this. And don't go all stubborn and proud on me and tell me you've got to do things on your own. You think the press has been savage before? You have no idea how bad it's going to get, hon. They're going to crucify us. All of us. So take it, grab your passports, both of you, and get out of town. Okay, Jenna?"

She just didn't know what to say. Maybe that crazy scheme to get down time to film the Ripper terror wasn't so crazy, after all-and here was her aunt, handing Jenna enough cash to keep her hidden safely down time from the press corps for months, if necessary. Carl, too. Maybe they'd win that Kit Carson Prize in Historical Video, after all, with months to complete the filming, rather than a couple of weeks. The envelope she slid into her handbag was heavy. Thick, heavy, and terrifying. She poured another glass of wine and drank it down without pausing.

"Okay, Cassie. I'll go. Mind if I call Carl?"

Her aunt's attempt at a smile was the most courageous thing Jenna ever seen, braver and more real than anything her aunt had ever done in her presence. "Go on, Jenna. I'll order us dinner while you're gone."

She scooted back her chair and kissed her aunt's cheek. "Love you, Cassie. Be right back." She found the phones in the back beside the bathrooms and dug into her purse for change, then dialed.

"Hello?"

"Carl, it's Jenna. You're never going to believe--"

Gunfire erupted in stereo.

From the telephone receiver and the restaurant. Carl's choked-off scream, guttural, agonized, cut straight through Jenna. Rising screams out in Luigi's main dining room hardly registered. "Carl! Carl!" Then, as shock sank in, and the realization that she was still hearing gunfire from the direction of her aunt's table: "Cassie!" She dropped the receiver with a bang, ignoring its violent swing at the end of its cord. Jenna ran straight toward the staccato chatter of gunfire, tried to shove past terrified patrons fleeing the dining room.

Someone shouted her name. Jenna barely had time to recognize Noah Armstrong, elegant clothing covered in blood. Then the detective body-slammed her to the floor. Gunfire erupted again, chewing into the man behind Jenna. The wall erupted into splinters behind him. The man screamed, jerked like a murdered

marionette, plowed into the floor, still screaming. Jenna choked on a ghastly sound, realized the hot, wet splatters on her face were blood. A booming report just above her ear deafened her; then someone snatched her to her feet.

"Run!"

She found herself dragged through Luigi's kitchen. Screams echoed behind them. The gun in Armstrong's hand cleared a magical path. Waiters and cooks dove frantically out of their way. At the exit to the alleyway behind the restaurant, Armstrong flung her against the wall, reloaded the gun with a practiced, fluid movement, then kicked the door open. Gunfire from outside slammed into the door. Jenna cringed, tried to blot from memory the sound of Carl's scream, tried desperately not to wonder where Aunt Cassie was and just whose blood was all over Armstrong's fluid silk suit.

More deafening gunfire erupted from right beside her. Then Armstrong snatched her off balance and snarled, "Run, goddamn you!" The next instant, they were pelting down an alleyway littered with at least three grotesquely dead men. All three were dressed like middle-easterners, wearing a type of headdress made popular during the late twentieth century by a famous terrorist turned politician, Jenna couldn't recall the name through numb shock. The detective swore savagely, stooped and snatched up guns from dead hands. "It figures! They showed up as Ansar Majlis!" Armstrong thrust one salvaged gun into a pocket, shoved the other two into Jenna's shocked hands with a steel-eyed glance. "Don't drop them! If I tell you to shoot, do it!"

Jenna stared stupidly at the guns. She'd used guns before, Carl's black-powder pistols, which he carried in action-shooting re-enactments, the ones stored in her bank box along with their time-touring tickets and the diamond ring she didn't dare wear publicly yet, and she'd fired a few stage-prop guns loaded with blanks. The guns Noah Armstrong shoved into her hands were modern, sleek, terrifying. Their last owners had tried to kill her. Jenna's hands shook violently. From the direction of Forty-Second Street, sirens began to scream.

"Come on, kid! Go into shock later!"

Armstrong jerked her into motion once more. She literally fell off her high-heeled shoes, managed to kick them off as she stumbled after Armstrong. They pelted down the alleyway and emerged into heavy traffic. Armstrong ran right in front of a yellow taxicab. The car screeched to a halt, driver cursing in a blistering tongue that was not English. Armstrong yanked open the driver's door and bodily tossed the cabby onto the street.

"Get in!"

Jenna dove for the passenger's door. She barely had her feet off the pavement before the car squealed into motion. Armstrong, whatever his/her gender, was a maniac behind the wheel of a car. If anyone tried to follow, they ended up at the bottom of a very serious multi-car pileup that strung out several blocks in their wake. Jenna gulped back nausea, found herself checking the guns with trembling fingers to see how much ammunition might be left in them, terrified she'd accidentally set one of them off. She'd never used any guns like these. She asked hoarsely, "Aunt Cassie?"

"Sorry, kid."

She squeezed shut her eyes. Oh, God . . . Cassie . . . Carl . . . Jenna needed to be sick, needed to cry, was too numb and shocked to do either.

"It's my fault," Armstrong said savagely. "I should never have let her meet you. I told her not to wait at Luigi's for you, told her they'd trace her through that goddamned call to your apartment! I knew they'd try something, dammit! But Christ, an all-out war in the middle of Luigi's . . . with his own daughter and sister-in-law!"

Wetness stung Jenna's eyes. She couldn't speak, couldn't think. Her hands shook where she gripped the guns Armstrong had shoved at her.

"Forget Europe, kid," the detective muttered. "They're not gonna let you get

out of New York alive. They hit your apartment, didn't they? Killed your fiancé? Carl, wasn't it?"

She nodded, unable to force any sound past the constriction in her throat.

Whoever Armstrong was, he or she could out-curse a rodeo rider. "Which means," the detective ended harshly, "they were going to hit you anyway, even if Cassie hadn't met you. Just on the chance she might have mailed it to you. And they had to kill Carl, in case you'd said something to him. God damn them!"

"Who's 'them'?" she managed to choke out, not quite daring to ask what Cassie might have mailed, but hadn't.

Armstrong glanced sidelong at her for just an instant, long enough for Jenna to read the pity in those cold grey eyes. "Your father's business associates. One royal bastard in particular, who's been paying off your father for years. And the goddamned terrorists they're bringing into the country. Right past customs and immigration, diplomatic fucking immunity."

Jenna didn't want to hear anything more. She'd heard all the slurs, the innuendo, the nasty accusations in the press. She hadn't believed any of it. Who would've believed such filth about her own father, for Chrissake, even a father as lousy as hers had been over the years? Jenna had learned early that politics was a dirty, nasty game, where rivals did their damndest to smear enemies' reputations with whichever reporters they'd paid off that week. It was one reason she'd chosen to pursue a career in film, following her aunt's lead, despite her father's furious opposition. Oh, God, Aunt Cassie . . . Carl. . . . Her eyes burned, wet and swollen, and she couldn't get enough air down.

"Ever been time-touring, kid?" Armstrong asked abruptly.

"Wh-what?"

"Time-touring? Have you ever been?"

She blinked, tried to force her brain to function again. "No. But . . ." she had to swallow hard, "Carl and I, we were going to go . . . through TT-86, to London. Got the tickets and everything, used false ID to buy them, to keep it a secret . . ."

The taxi slewed around another corner, merged with traffic on Broadway, slowed to a decorous pace. "Kid," Armstrong said softly, "those tickets might just save your life. Because the only by-God way out of this city now is through TT-86. Where did you hide them? Do you still have the fake ID's you bought?"

She'd begun to shake against the cracked plastic of the taxi's front seat, was ashamed of the reaction, couldn't hide it. "Yeah, we've still-I've still-" she was trembling violently now, unable to block the memory of Carl's agonized screams. "Locked them up in . . . in my lock box . . ." The other secret hidden in that lock box brought the tears flooding despite her best efforts not to cry. Carl's ring, the one she couldn't wear openly, yet, not until she'd turned twenty-one, making her legally and financially independent of her hated father, lay nestled in the lock box beside the tickets.

Noah glanced sharply into her eyes. "Lock box? A bank box? Which bank?"

Jenna told him.

Twenty minutes later, after a brief stop at a back-alley stolen-clothes huckster for new clothes-something without blood on it-Jenna clutched the entire contents of her bank account-which wasn't much-and the false identification papers and tickets she and her secret fiancé had bought to go time-touring, a grand adventure planned in innocence, with dreams of making a film that would launch both their careers . . . and so much more. Jenna rescued the ring from the safe, too, still closed up its little velvet box that had once been Carl's mother's, wanting at least that much of Carl's memory with her.

She also carried a thick case which held Carl's two black-powder 1858

Remington Beale's pistols she'd kept in the vault, the heavy .44 caliber pistols Carl had carried during re-enactments of Gettysburg and First Manassas and the Wilderness campaigns, the ones he'd taught her to use, after he'd won that action-shooting match in up-state New York last month. The ones her father would've exploded over, had he known Jenna was keeping them in her bank box. Armstrong eyed the heavy pistols silently, that glance neither approving nor disapproving, merely calculating. "Do you have ammo for those?"

Jenna nodded. "In the bottom of the gun case."

"Good. We'll have to ditch this modern stuff before we enter TT-86. I'd just as soon be armed with something. How do you load them?"

Wordlessly, Jenna began loading the reproduction antique guns, but Noah's steel-cold voice stopped her. "Not yet."

"Why not?" Jenna demanded shrilly. "Just because it's illegal? My own father wrote those laws, dammit! It didn't stop . . ." Her voice shattered.

Noah Armstrong's voice went incredibly gentle. "No, that isn't it. We just won't be able to take loaded guns through TT-86's security scans. We can take them through as costume accessories, but not loaded and ready to fire. Tell me how to load them, and we'll do that the second we're on station."

Jenna had to steady down her thoughts enough to explain how to pour black powder into each cylinder and pull down the loading lever to seat bullets, rather than more traditional round balls, in each chamber of the cylinder, how to wipe grease across the openings to prevent flame from setting off the powder in adjoining chambers, how to place percussion caps . . . The necessity to think coherently helped draw her back from raw, shaking terror.

"They're probably going to figure out where we went," Armstrong said quietly when she'd finished. "In fact, they'll be hitting TT-86, too, as soon as possible." The detective swore softly. "Ansar Majlis . . . That's the key, after all, isn't it? After today, it's even money they'll hit her the next time Primary cycles. Part of their goddamned terrorist plan."

Jenna glanced up, asking the question silently.

"Those bastards at Luigi's were Ansar Majlis. Never heard of 'em? I wish to Christ I hadn't. Your aunt is-was-a prominent public supporter of the Lady of Heaven Temples. So are the owners of Luigi's. And half the patrons. The bastard behind that attack back there sent a death-squad of Ansar Majlis to do his dirty work for him. You've heard of Cyril Barris? The multi-billionaire? Believe me, kid, you don't want to know how he made all that money. And he can't afford to have your aunt's murder tied to him. Or to your father. Getting the Ansar Majlis involved makes goddamned sure of that. And those bastards have lined up another 'terrorist' hit, aimed right at the very soul of the Lady of Heaven Temples . . ."

Jenna gasped, seeing exactly where Armstrong was going with this.

The detective's glance was grudgingly respectful. "You see it, too, don't you, kid?"

Jenna truly, genuinely didn't want to know anything else about this nightmare.

Armstrong told her, anyway. Showed her the proof, sickening proof, in full color and stereo sound, proof which the elfin actor on the miniature computer screen in Jenna's hands had managed to give Armstrong before his death.

It killed what little respect for her father she'd still possessed.

In the year 1853, a stately man with a high forehead and thick, dark hair that fell down across his brow from a high widow's peak was inaugurated as the 14th US President under the name of Franklin Pierce. Armed conflict between Russia and Turkey heralded the beginning of the disastrous Crimean War. Further south, Britain annexed the Mahratta State of Nagpur, while in the British home islands, Charlotte Bronte published "Villette" and another writer on the opposite side of the Atlantic, American Nathaniel Hawthorne of Scarlet

Letter fame, brought out the "Tanglewood Tales." Noted historian Mommsen wrote "A History of Rome" and the legendary impressionist painter Vincent Van Gogh was born. European architecture enjoyed a renaissance of restoration as P.C. Albert began the rebuilding of Balmoral Castle, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and across the English Channel-Georges Haussmann began the reconstruction of Paris with the Boulevards, Bois de Boulogne.

In New York, Mr. Henry Steinway began manufacturing fine pianos. On the Continent, Italian composer Verdi wrote his great operas *Trovatore* and *La Traviata* and German composer Wagner completed the text of the masterwork *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Alexander Wood shot his first patient with a subcutaneous injection from a hypodermic syringe and Samuel Colt, that American legend of firearms design, revolutionized British small-arms manufacture with his London factory for machine-made revolvers.

In London, Queen Victoria ensured the increasing popularity of the previously little-trusted chloroform as a surgical anesthetic by allowing herself to be chloroformed for the birth of her seventh child. Britain established the telegraph system in India and made smallpox vaccinations mandatory by law. In America, the world's largest tree, the *Wellingtonia gigantea*, was discovered growing in a California forest. And in Middlesex Street, Whitechapel-otherwise known as Petticoat Lane, after the famous market which lined that cobbled thoroughfare-a child was born to Lithuanian immigrant Varina Boleslaus and English dock laborer John Lachley.

The child was not a welcome addition to a family of six subsisting on John Lachley's ten shillings a week, plus the shilling or two Varina added weekly from selling hand-crafted items made on her crocheting hook. In fact, in many parts of the world during that year of 1853, this particular child would have been exposed to the elements and allowed to die. Not only could its parents ill afford to feed the baby, clothe it, or provide an education, the child was born with physical . . . peculiarities. And in 1853, the East End of London was neither an auspicious time nor a hospitable place to be born with marked oddities of physique. The midwife who attended the birth gasped in horrified dismay, unable to answer every exhausted mother's first, instinctive question: boy or girl?

Statistically, the human gene pool will produce children with ambiguous genitalia once in every thousand live births, perhaps as often as once in every five hundred. And while true hermaphrodites-children with the genital tissues of both sexes-account for only a tiny fraction of these ambiguously genitaled infants, they still can occur once in every one million or so live human births. Even in modern, more culturally enlightened societies, surgical "correction" of such children during infancy or early childhood can give rise to severe personality disorders, increased rates of suicide, a socially inculcated sense of guilt and secrecy surrounding their true sexual nature.

In the year 1853, London's East End was an ethnically diverse, poverty-stricken, industrial cesspool. The world's poor clustered in overcrowded hovels ten and twelve to a room, fought and drank and fornicated with rough sailors from every port city on the globe, and traded every disease known to humanity.

Women carrying unborn children swallowed quack medical remedies laced with arsenic and strychnine and heavy metals like sugar of lead. Men who would become fathers worked in metal-smelting foundries and shipyards, which in turn poured heavy metals into the drinking water and the soil. Sanitation consisted of open ditches where raw sewage was dumped, human waste was poured, and drinking water was secured. In such areas, a certain percentage of embryos whose dividing cells, programmed with delicate genetic codes, inevitably underwent massive genetic and teratogenic alterations.

And so it was that in Middlesex Street, Whitechapel, in that year of 1853, after a protracted debate, many condemnations of a God who would permit such a

child to be born, and a number of drunken rages culminating in beatings of the woman who had produced this particular unfortunate offspring, the child was named John Boleslaus Lachley and reared as a son in a family which had already produced four dowerless sisters. Because he survived, and grew to manhood in London's East End, where he was tormented into acquiring a blazing ambition and the means to escape, the infant born without a verifiable gender grew in ways no innocent should ever have to grow. And once grown, John Lachley made very certain that the world would never, ever forget what it had done to him.

On a quiet, rainy Saturday morning in the waning days of August, 1888, Dr. John Lachley, who had long since dropped the foreign "Boleslaus" from his name, sat in a tastefully decorated parlour in an exceedingly comfortable house on Cleveland Street, London, opposite his latest patient, and brooded over his complete dissatisfaction with the entire morning while daydreaming about his last encounter with the one client who would finally bring into his life everything his soul yearned to possess.

The room was cold and damp, despite the coal fire blazing in the hearth. August in London was generally a fine month, with flowers in bloom and warm breezes carrying away the fog and coal smoke and damp chill of early autumn with glorious blue skies and sunshine. But rain squalls and thunderstorms and an unseasonable chill had gripped the whole South of England for months, leaving arthritic bones aching and gloomy spirits longing for a summer that had seemed indefinitely postponed and then abruptly at an end before it had properly begun. John Lachley was tired of hearing the week's complaints, never mind those which had been lodged in all the previous weeks since winter had supposedly ceased to plague them.

He had little tolerance for fools and whiners, did John Lachley, but they paid his bills—most handsomely—so he sat in his parlour with the curtains drawn to dim the room and smiled and smiled at the endless parade of complainers and smiled some more as he collected his money and let his mind drift to remembered delights in another darkened room, with Albert Victor's hands and mouth on his body and the rewards of Albert Victor's social status firmly within his grasp.

He had been smiling steadily for the past hour or more, concealing his loathing for his current patient with an air of concerned understanding, while the bloody idiot of a Liverpoolian who'd appeared on his doorstep rambled on and endlessly on about his health, his illnesses, his medicines, his incessant chills and shaking hands, his itching skin and aching head . . .

It was enough to drive a sane man round the twist and gone. Which was where, in John Lachley's private opinion, this pathetic cotton merchant had long since departed. Hypochondria was the least of Mr. James Maybrick's woes. The fool daily swallowed an appalling amount of "medicinal" strychnine and arsenic in the form of powders prescribed by his physician, some doddering imbecile named Hopper, who should have known better than to prescribe arsenic in such enormous quantities—five and six doses a day, for God's sake. And as if that weren't enough, Maybrick was supplementing the powdered arsenic with arsenic pills, obtained from a chemist. And on top of that, he was downing whole bottles of Fellow's Syrup, a quack medicine available over any chemist's counter, liberally laced with arsenic and strychnine.

And Maybrick was so dull of mind, he honestly could not comprehend why he now suffered acute symptoms of slow arsenic poisoning! Grant me patience, Lachley thought savagely, the patience to deal with paying customers who want any answer but the obvious one. If he simply told this imbecile, "Stop taking the bloody arsenic!" Maybrick would vanish with all his lovely money and never darken Lachley's doorstep again. He would also, of course, die somewhat swiftly of the very symptoms which would kill him, anyway, whether or not he discontinued the poisonous drug.

Since the idiot would die of arsenic poisoning either way, he might as well

pay Lachley for the privilege of deluding him otherwise.

Lachley interrupted to give Maybrick the one medication he knew would help—the same drug he gave all his patients before placing them into a mesmeric trance. Most people, he had discovered, could easily be hypnotized without the aid of drugs, but some could not and every one of his patients expected some spectacular physical sensation or other. His own, unique blend of pharmaceuticals certainly guaranteed that. Success as a mesmeric physician largely depended upon simple slight-of-hand tricks and the plain common sense of giving his patients precisely what they wanted.

So he mixed up his potent chemical aperitif, served in a glass of heavy port wine to help disguise the unpleasant flavor, and said, "Now, sir, drink this medicine down, then give me the rest of your medical history while it takes effect."

The drug-laced wine went down in two gulps, then Maybrick kept talking.

"I contracted malaria, you see, in America, trading for cotton shares in Norfolk, Virginia. Quinine water gave me no relief, so an American physician prescribed arsenic powder. Eleven years, I've taken it and the malaria rarely troubles me, although I've found I require more arsenic than I used to. . . . Poor Bunny, that's my wife, I met her on a return trip from Norfolk, Bunny worries so about me, dear child. She hasn't a brain in her pretty American head, but she does fret. God knows I have tried to gain relief. I even contacted an occultist once, for help with my medical disorders. A Londoner, the lady was. Claimed she could diagnose rare diseases by casting horoscopes. Told me to stop taking my medicines! Can you imagine anything more absurd? That was two years ago, sir, and my health has grown so alarmingly worse and Dr. Hopper is such a bumbling fool. So when I decided to visit my brother Michael, yes, that's right, Michael Maybrick, the composer, he publishes under the name Stephen Adams, I said to myself, James, you must consult a London specialist, your life is most assuredly worth the time and money spent, what with the wife and children. So when I saw your advert in The Times, Dr. Lachley, that you were a practicing physician and an occultist with access to the guidance of the spirit world for diagnosis of difficult, rare illnesses, and that you use the latest techniques in mesmeric therapies, well, I simply knew I must see you . . ."

And on, and on, ad infinitum, ad nauseum, about his nux vomica medications, his New York prescriptions that Dr. Hopper had so insultingly torn up . . .

John Lachley sat and smiled and thought If I were to jab my fingers into his larynx, I could put him on the floor without a sound, cut off his testicles, and feed them to him one bollock at a time. If he even has any. Must have, he said he'd fathered children. Poor little bastards. Might be doing them a favor, if I simply slit their father's throat and dumped his body in the Thames. Wonder what Albert Victor is doing now? Christ, I'd a thousand times rather be swiving Victoria's brain-damaged grandson than listening to this idiot. Dumb as a fence post, Albert Victor, but what he can do with that great, lovely Hampton wick of his . . . And God knows, he will be King of England one day.

A small, satisfied smile stole across John Lachley's narrow face. It wasn't every Englishman who could claim to have balled the future monarch of the British Empire. Nor was it just any Englishman who could tell a future king where to go, what to say, and how to behave—and expect to be slavishly obeyed. Stupider than a stick, God bless him, and John Lachley had him wrapped right around his finger.

Or rather, a point considerably lower than his finger.

Albert Victor, secretly bi-sexual outside certain very private circles, had been ecstatic to discover John's physical . . . peculiarities. It was, as they said, a match created in—

"Doctor?"

He blinked at James Maybrick, having to restrain the instantaneous impulse to draw the revolver concealed in his coat and shoot him squarely between the eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Maybrick?" He managed to sound politely concerned rather than homicidal.

"I was wondering when you might be able to perform the mesmeric operation?"

Lachley blinked for a moment, then recalled Maybrick's request to be placed in a mesmeric trance in order to diagnose his disease and effect a "mesmeric surgical cure." Maybrick was blinking slowly at him, clearly growing muzzy from the medication Lachley had given him.

"Why, whenever you are ready, sir," Lachley answered with a faint smile.

"Then you do think there is hope?"

Lachley's smile strengthened. "My dear sir, there is always hope." One can certainly hope you will pass into an apoplectic fit while in trance and rid the world of your unfortunate presence. "Lie back on the daybed, here, and allow yourself to drift with the medication and the sound of my voice." Maybrick shifted from the overstuffed chair where he'd spent the past hour giving his "medical history," moving so unsteadily, Lachley was required to help him across to the daybed.

"Now, then, Mr. Maybrick, imagine that you are standing at the top of a very long staircase which descends into darkness. With each downward step you take, your body grows heavier and more relaxed, your mind drifts freely. Step down, Mr. Maybrick, one step at a time, into the safe and comfortable darkness, warm and cozy as a mother's embrace . . ."

By the end of twenty-five steps, Mr. James Maybrick, Esquire, was in deep trance, having been neatly drugged into a state of not-quite oblivion.

"Can you hear my voice, Mr. Maybrick?"

"Yes."

"Very good. You've been ill, Mr. Maybrick?"

"Yes. Very ill. So many different symptoms, I can't tell what is wrong."

Nothing new, there. "Well, then, Mr. Maybrick, what is it that is troubling you the most, just now?"

It was an innocent question, completely in keeping with a patient suffering from numerous physical complaints. All he was really interested in was narrowing down which symptom troubled the fool the most, so he could place post-hypnotic suggestions in the man's drugged mind to reduce the apparent levels of that symptom, something he had done successfully with a score of other patients suffering more from hysteria and nervousness than real illnesses. He had been following the work of that fellow in Vienna, Dr. Freud, with considerable interest, and had begun a few experiments of his own-

"It's the bitch!"

John Lachley nearly fell backward out of his chair.

Maybrick, his drugged face twisting into a mask of rage, snarled it out. "She troubles me! The goddamned bitch, she troubles me more than anything in the world! Faithless whore! Her and her whoremaster! I'll kill them both, I swear to God, the way I killed that filthy little prostitute in Manchester! Squeezed the life out of her with my own hands, thinking of that bitch the whole time! Wasn't pleasurable, though, damn her eyes, I wanted it to be pleasurable! I'll squeeze the life out of that bitch, I swear I will, I'll cut her wide open with a knife, goddamn Brierly, fucking my own wife . . ."

Stunned, open-mouthed silence gripped John Lachley for long moments as he stared at the raving cotton merchant, for once completely at a loss as to how he ought to proceed. He'd never stumbled across anything even remotely like this homicidal fury. What had he said? . . . killed that filthy little prostitute in Manchester . . . squeezed the life out of her with my own hands . . . Lachley gripped the upholstered arms of his chair. Dear God! Should I contact the constabulary? This madman's murdered someone! He started to speak,

not even sure what he was going to say, when a frantic knocking rattled the front door, which was situated just outside the closed parlour. John Lachley started violently and slewed around in his chair. In the hallway just outside, his manservant answered the urgent summons.

"Your Highness! Come in, please! Whatever is wrong, sir?"

"I must see the doctor at once, Charles!"

Prince Albert Victor . . . In a high state of panic, too, from the sound of it.

John Lachley glared furiously at the ranting cotton merchant on the daybed, who lay there muttering about ripping his wife open with a knife for sleeping with some asshole named Brierly, about keeping a diary some servant had almost discovered, nearly ending in a second murder, and something about a room he'd rented in Middlesex Street, Whitechapel, so he could kill more filthy whores, and hated James Maybrick with such an intense loathing, he had to clench his fists to keep from shooting him on the spot. The crisis of his career was brewing outside and this homicidal maniac had to be dealt with first!

Outside, Charles was saying, "Dr. Lachley is with a patient, Your Highness, but I will certainly let him know you're here, immediately, sir."

Lachley bent over Maybrick, gripped the man's shoulders hard enough to bruise, hissed urgently, "Mr. Maybrick! I want you to be quiet now! Stop talking at once!"

The drugged merchant fell silent, instantly obedient.

Thank God . . .

Lachley schooled his features and stilled his hands, which were slightly unsteady, then crossed the parlour in two hurried strides, just as Charles knocked at the door.

"Yes, Charles? I heard His Highness arrive. Ah, Your Highness," he strode forward, offering his hand to the visibly distraught grandson of Queen Victoria, "welcome back to Tibor. You know my house is always open to you, whatever the time of day. Please, won't you come back to the study?"

Charles bowed and faded into the back of the house, his duty having been discharged. Prince Albert Victor Christian Edward was a tall, good-looking young man with an impressive dark moustache, a neck so long and thin he had to wear exaggeratedly high collars to disguise the deformity, and the dullest eyes John Lachley had ever seen in a human face. He was twisting expensive grey kidskin gloves into shreds. He followed Lachley down the corridor into the study with jerky, nervous strides. John closed the door carefully, guided his star client to a chair, and poured him a stiff shot of brandy straight away. Albert Victor, known as Eddy to his most intimate friends-and John Lachley was by far the most intimate of Eddy's current friends-gulped it down in one desperate swallow, then blurted out his reason for arriving in such a state.

"I'm ruined, John! Ruined . . . dear God . . . you must help me, tell me what to do . . ." Eddy gripped Lachley's hands in desperation and panic. "I am undone! He can't be allowed to do this, you know what will become of me! Someone must stop him! If my grandmother should find out-dear Lord, she can't ever find out, it would destroy her good name, bring such shame on the whole family . . . my God, the whole government might go, you know what the situation is, John, you've told me yourself about it, the Fenians, the labor riots, what am I to do? Threats-threats!-demands for money or else ruination! Oh, God, I am destroyed, should word leak of it . . . Disgrace, prison . . . he's gone beyond his station in life! Beyond the bounds of civilized law, beyond the protection of God, may the Devil take him!"

"Your Highness, calm yourself, please." He pulled his hands free of Eddy's grip and poured a second, far more generous brandy, getting it down the distraught prince's throat. He stroked Eddy's absurdly long neck, massaging

the tension away, calmed him to the point where he could speak coherently. "Now, then, Eddy. Tell me very slowly just exactly what has happened."

Eddy began in a shaken whisper, "You remember Morgan?"

Lachley frowned. He certainly did. Morgan was a little Welsh nancy boy from Cardiff, the star attraction of a certain high-class West End brothel right here on Cleveland Street, a boulevard as infamous for its homosexual establishments as it was famous for its talented artists, painters, and art galleries. Hard on the heels of learning that his ticket to fame and fortune and considerable political power was banging a fifteen-year-old male whore on Cleveland Street, he had drugged Eddy into a state of extreme suggestibility and sternly suggested that he break off the relationship immediately.

"What about Morgan?" Lachley asked quietly.

"I . . . I was indiscreet, John, I'm sorry, it's only that he was so . . . so damned beautiful, I was besotted with him . . ."

"Eddy," Lachley interrupted gently, "how, exactly, were you indiscreet? Did you see him again?"

"Oh, no, John, no, I wouldn't do that, I haven't been with him since you told me to stop seeing him. Only women, John, and you . . ."

"Then what did you do, Eddy, that was indiscreet?"

"The letters," he whispered.

A cold chill slithered down John Lachley's back. "Letters? What letters?"

"I . . . I used to write him letters. Just silly little love letters, he was so pretty and he always pouted so when I had to leave him . . ."

Lachley closed his eyes. Eddy, you stupid little bastard!

"How many letters, Eddy?" The whiplash of his voice struck Eddy visibly.

"Don't hate me, John!" The prince's face twisted into a mask of terror and grief.

It took several minutes and a fair number of intimate caresses to convince the terrified prince that Lachley did not, in fact, hate him. When he had calmed Albert Victor down again, he repeated his question, more patiently this time. "How many letters, Eddy?"

"Eight, I think."

"You think? You must be certain, Eddy. It's very important."

Eddy's brow creased. "Eight, it must be eight, John, I saw him eight weeks in a row, you see, and I sent him a letter each week, then I met you and didn't need to see him any longer. Yes, it's eight letters."

"Very good, Eddy. Now, tell me what's happened to upset you so deeply about these eight letters."

"He wants money for them! A great deal of money! Thousands of pounds, John, or he'll send the letters to the newspapers, to the Scotland Yard inspectors who arrest men for crimes of sodomy! John, I am ruined!" Eddy covered his eyes with his hands, hiding from him. "If I don't pay him everything he wants . . ."

"Yes, yes, Eddy, he'll make the letters public and you will go to prison. I understand that part of the situation, Eddy, very thoroughly, indeed. Now then, how has he demanded payment? Where is the money to be delivered and who is to take it there?"

"You know I enjoy little jaunts in to the East End, occasionally, dressed as a commoner? So no one suspects my identity?"

Lachley refrained from making a tart rejoinder that Eddy was the only person in London fooled by those pitiful disguises. "Yes, what about your little trips?"

"I'm to take the money to him there, tomorrow night, alone. We're to meet at Petticoat Lane and Whitechapel Road, at midnight. And I must be there! I must! If I don't go, with a thousand pounds, he'll send the first letter to the newspapers! Do you realize what those newspapermen-what my Grandmother-will do to me?" He hid his face in his hands again. "And if I don't pay him another

thousand pounds a week later, the second letter will go to the police! His note said I must reply with a note to him today, I'm to send it to some wretched public house where he'll call for it, to reassure him I mean to pay or he will post the first letter tomorrow."

"And when you pay him, Eddy, will he give you back the letters?"

The ashen prince nodded, his thin, too-long neck bobbing like a bird's behind the high collars he wore as disguise for the slight deformity, which had earned Eddy the nickname Collars and Cuffs. "Yes," he whispered, moustache quivering with his distress, "he said he would bring the first letter tomorrow night if he receives my note today, will exchange it for the money. Please, John, you must advise me what to do, how to stop him! Someone must make him pay for this!"

It took several additional minutes to bring Eddy back to some semblance of rationality again. "Calm yourself, Eddy, really, there is no need for such hysteria. Consider the matter taken care of. Send the note to him as instructed. Morgan will be satisfied that you'll meet him tomorrow with your initial payment. Lull him into thinking he's won. Before he can collect so much as a shilling of his blood money, the problem will no longer exist."

Prince Albert Victor leaned forward and gripped John's hands tightly, fear lending his shaking fingers strength. Reddened eyes had gone wide. "What do you mean to do?" he whispered.

"You know the energies I am capable of wielding, the powers I command."

The distraught prince was nodding. John Lachley was more than Eddy's lover, he was the young man's advisor on many a spiritual matter. Eddy relied heavily upon Dr. John Lachley, Physician and Occultist, touted as the most famous scholar of antiquities and occult mysteries ever to come up out of SoHo. And while most of his public performances—whether as Johnny Anubis, Whitechapel parlour medium or, subsequent to earning his medical degree, as Dr. John Lachley—were as fake as the infamous seances given by his greatest rival, Madame Blavatsky, not everything Dr. John Lachley did was trickery.

Oh, no, not by any means everything.

"Mesmerism, you must understand," he told Prince Albert Victor gently, patting Eddy's hands, "has been used quite successfully by reputable surgeons to amputate a man's leg, without any need for anesthesia. And the French are working the most wondrous marvels of persuasion one could imagine, making grown men crow like chickens and persuading ladies they have said and done things they have never said or done in their lives."

And in the parlour down the hall from this study, a homicidal Liverpoolian cotton merchant had just been spilling his darkest secrets under Lachley's considerable influence.

"Oh, yes, Eddy," he smiled, "the powers of mesmerism are quite remarkable. And I am, without modesty, quite an accomplished mesmerist. Don't trouble yourself further about that miserable little sod, Morgan. Contact him, by all means, promise to pay the little bastard whatever he wants. Promise him the world, promise him the keys to your grandmother's palace, for God's sake, just so long as we keep him happy until I can act. We'll find your letters, Eddy, and we'll get back your letters, and I promise you faithfully, before tomorrow night ends, there will be no more threat."

His oh-so-gullible, most important client gulped, dull eyes slightly brighter, daring to hope. "You'll save me, then? John, promise me, you will save me from prison?"

"Of course I will, Eddy," he smiled, bending down to plant a kiss on the prince's trembling lips. "Trouble yourself no more, Eddy. Just leave it in my capable hands."

Albert Victor was nodding, childlike, trusting. "Yes, yes of course I shall. Forgive me, I should have realized all was not lost. You have advised me so admirably in the past . . ."

Lachley patted Eddy's hands again. "And I shall continue to do so in future. Now then . . ." He walked to his desk, from which he retrieved a vial of the same medication he had given James Maybrick. Many of his patients preferred to consult with him in a more masculine and private setting such as his study, rather than the more public and softly decorated parlour, so he kept a supply of his potent little mixture in both locations. "I want you to take a draught of medicine before you leave, Eddy. You're in a shocking state, people will gossip." He splashed wine into a deep tumbler from a cut-crystal, antique Waterford decanter, stirred in a substantial amount of the powder, and handed the glassful of oblivion to Eddy. "Sip this. It will help calm your frayed nerves."

And leave you wonderfully suggestible, my sweet and foolish prince, for you must never recall this conversation or Morgan or those thrice-damned letters ever again. Eddy was just sufficiently stupid, he could well blurt out the entire thing some night after a drinking spree in the East End. He smiled as Eddy swallowed the drugged wine. Lachley's one-time public persona, Johnny Anubis, might have been little more than a parlour trickster who'd earned ready cash with the mumbo-jumbo his clients had expected-indeed, demanded. Just as his new clients did, of course.

But Dr. John Lachley . . .

Dr. Lachley was a most accomplished mesmerist. Oh, indeed he was.

He would have to do something about that drugged cotton merchant down the hall, of course. It wouldn't do to leave a homicidal maniac running about who could be associated with him, however innocently; but the man had mentioned an incriminating diary, so Lachley might well be able to rid himself of that problem fairly easily. A man could be hanged even for murdering a whore, if he were foolish enough to leave proof of the crime lying about. And James Maybrick was certainly a fool. John Lachley had no intention of being even half so careless when he rid the world of Eddy's blackmailing little Morgan.

His smile deepened as Prince Albert Victor Christian Edward leaned back in his chair, eyes closing as the drug that would leave him clay in Lachley's hands took hold, allowing him to erase all memory of that frightened, desperate plea:

Make him pay . . . !

Oh, yes. He would most assuredly make young Morgan pay.

No one threatened John Lachley's future and lived to tell the tale.

* * *

Senator John Paul Caddrick was a man accustomed to power. When he gave an order, whether to a senatorial aide or to one of the many faceless, nameless denizens of the world he'd once inhabited, he expected that order to be executed with flawless efficiency. Incompetence, he simply did not tolerate. So, when word that the hit he'd helped engineer at New York's exclusive Luigi's restaurant had failed to accomplish its primary objective, John Paul Caddrick backhanded the messenger hard enough to break cartilage in his nose.

"Imbecile! What the hell do you mean, letting that little bastard Armstrong get away? And worse, with my daughter! Do you have any idea what Armstrong and that vindictive little bitch will do if they manage to get that evidence to the FBI? My God, it was bad enough, watching Cassie turn my own daughter into a crusading, stage-struck fool! And now you've let her escape with enough evidence to electrocute the lot of us?"

The unfortunate lackey chosen to carry the bad news clutched at his nose. It bubbled unpleasantly as he whimpered, "I'm sorry, Senator, we sent six men to your daughter's apartment, ten into that restaurant! Who'd have figured Armstrong was such a slippery snake? Or that your kid would leave the table just before the hit went down?"

John Caddrick vented his rage with another backhand blow, then paced the dingy little hotel room, muttering curses under his breath and trying to

figure out what that little bastard Armstrong would do next. High-tail it to the FBI? Maybe. But with Jenna Nicole in tow? Armstrong was good at disguises—as John Caddrick had discovered, much to his chagrin—but Jenna was instantly recognizable. If they tried to go anywhere near the New York FBI offices, the men he and Gideon Guthrie had hired would nail them. The trouble was, Armstrong was bound to realize that. No, that meddling bastard would attempt getting them both out of the city. But how? And where would the detective go? Armstrong was more than smart enough to know they'd be watching the bus stations, the airports, the car rental agencies, the ferry launches, anything and everything that offered a way out of the city.

Caddrick swore explosively again. Dammit! After everything he'd worked to achieve, with the timetable counting down to the final few days, along comes that goddamned, nosy bastard Armstrong. . . . He paused in his pacing. Armstrong knew that timetable, knew enough of it, anyway, to calculate their next major move. And the rat-assed little detective was a Templar, too, same as the senator's worthless daughter and now-deceased sister-in-law. If Armstrong and Jenna Nicole didn't try to rescue the next target slated to die, John Caddrick didn't know Templars.

"They'll go to TT-86," Caddrick muttered under his breath. "Get your butt onto that station with a hand-picked team. I want Armstrong dead."

"And your daughter?" the lackey quavered.

John Paul Caddrick shut his eyes, hating Cassie Tyrol for turning his daughter against him, for bringing her into this mess, for showing her the evidence. . . . And John Caddrick's employers would demand blood. At this stage, security leaks had to be plugged. Fast. Regardless of whose family got in the way. So he snarled out, "I won't by God let anybody screw this up. Not as close as we've come!"

Speaking through a handful of blood, the messenger asked, "Same M.O. as Luigi's?"

"Hell, yes!" He ran a distracted hand through his hair. "We've already got Ansar Majlis on station, thank God. Infiltrated 'em into that construction crew weeks ago. The second your team sets foot on that station, I want them activated. Major blowup. Whatever it takes to make it look good."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't just stand there, goddammit! Move!"

The lackey scrambled for the door.

John Caddrick yanked open the hotel room's wet bar and upended an entire, miniature bottle of scotch, then hurled the empty against the wall. The thing didn't even have the decency to shatter. It just bounced off. His ragged temper left a considerable hole in the drywall above the television set, along with a broken lamp and three overturned chairs. Damn that meddling detective! And God damn that brainless bitch, Cassie Tyrol! His only child . . . who'd never quite forgiven him for all the missed birthday parties and recitals and graduation ceremonies, stranded on the campaign trail or conducting Congressional business . . .

But there wasn't a stinking, solitary thing he could do to save his little girl. And once Jenna knew the truth, Caddrick's ungrateful wretch of a daughter would do whatever it took to see her own father behind bars. If he wanted to keep his butt out of the electric chair, he'd better make damned sure she died. And before this business was done, Noah Armstrong would bitterly regret having ever interfered in Caddrick's business. The senator ripped out another savage oath, then stalked out of the hotel.

Cassie had finally been paid in full for the trouble she'd caused.

All that remained now was to finish the job.

Chapter Two

Of all the souls wandering the Commons of Time Terminal Eighty-Six, none

felt as out of place Skeeter Jackson. He wasn't lost, which was more than he could say of three-quarters of the people around him. But his status was so changed, he couldn't help but reflect wryly on how odd it was to be trundling a heavy cart stencilled "Station Maintenance" through Edo Castletown, past crowds of kimono-clad tourists jostling elbows with Victorian gents and bustled ladies and a few forlorn, middle-aged men with paunches, bald knees, and Roman tunics.

Confidence man to bathroom-cleaning man wasn't quite the transition Skeeter had hoped for, when he'd decided to give up his life of petty crime. There wasn't much glamor in a cart full of mops, detergent bottles, and vending-machine supplies. On the other hand, he did not miss having to dodge station security every ten minutes, or sweating bullets every time some chance acquaintance glanced his way. And while he didn't eat high on anybody's hog, at least he didn't regularly miss meals, any more, thanks to the uncertainty of a pickpocket's income.

Skeeter was very glad he'd switched careers. But he wasn't quite used to it yet.

A wry smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. As confused as he sometimes felt, the other up-time residents were goggle-eyed with shock to find La-La Land's most notorious confidence artist walking the straight and narrow, working the first honest job of his life. It had only taken an act of God and Ianira Cassondra to get him that job. But he couldn't have continued in his old career, not after the pain his greed and stupidity had caused the only friends he possessed in the world. He frequently marveled that he still possessed any friends at all. Never mind ones close enough to help him start his life over again. After what Skeeter had done, he wouldn't have blamed Marcus and Ianira if they'd never spoken to him again. Whatever their reasons, he wouldn't let them down.

As Skeeter maneuvered his cart through the bustling hoards of eminently lost humanity trying to find their way back to hotels, to restaurants that were impossible to find in the station's sprawling maze, or simply standing still and screaming for junior at the top of panic-stricken lungs, the public address system came to life from speakers five stories overhead. "Your attention, please. Gate One is due to open in three minutes. All departures, be advised that if you have not cleared Station Medical, you will not be permitted to pass Primary. Please have your baggage ready for customs inspection by agents of the Bureau of Access Time Functions, who will assess your taxes due on downtime acquisitions . . ."

A familiar voice, the sound of friendship in the middle of all the chaos, sounded at his ear. "Double gate day, yes?"

Startled, Skeeter turned to find Ianira Cassondra smiling up at him.

"Ianira! What are you doing up here in Edo Castletown?" The lovely cassondra of ancient Ephesus could usually be found at her kiosk down in Little Agora, surrounded by her adoring up-time acolytes. Ianira's self-proclaimed worshipers flocked to TT-86 by the thousands each year, on pilgrimage to honor the woman they considered the Goddess incarnate on earth.

Ianira, blithely ignoring the adoring worshippers who trailed her like pilot fish in the wake of an ancient schooner, swept long strands of glossy, raven's-wing hair back from her forehead. "I have been to visit Kit Carson, at the Neo Edo. The Council of Seven asked him to participate in the Festival of Mars next week."

Kit Carson, the planet's most famous and successful individual ever to enter the business of scouting the gates through time, had retired to TT-86. Having pushed most of the famous tour gates now operating through the terminal, Kit Carson was one of the station's major tourist draws, in his own right, despite his status as essentially a recluse who had vowed never to return to that up-time world again. Skeeter, however, steered clear of Kit whenever possible, on

general principle. He tended to avoid the older male relatives of any girl he'd tried to finagle into bed with him. Kit, he avoided even more cautiously than others. Kit Carson could seriously cripple a man, just looking crosswise at him. The day Kit had hunted him down and read him the riot act about staying away from Kit's granddaughter, Skeeter would've welcomed a double-gate day. He'd have crawled through an unstable gate, if one had been available, by the time Kit had finished with him.

Skeeter smiled ruefully. "Double gate day, is right. And I've got this funny feeling we'll be neck deep in lunatics before the day's over. First Primary, then Britannia, and tomorrow, another double gate day."

"Yes," Ianira nodded. "The Wild West Gate opens tomorrow."

"And that new tour gate they're ripping half the station apart over, adding to the Commons."

"At least, there won't be any tourists coming through for it, yet," Ianira smiled.

"No. For now, it's the Britannia tours, packing in the loons. In record numbers." He shook his head. "Between your acolytes and all those crazies coming in for the Ripper Season, this place is turning into the biggest nuthouse ever built under one roof. And those Scheherazade Gate construction workers . . . eergh!" He gave a mock shudder. "What slimy boulder did they turn over, hiring that bunch of thugs?"

As Ianira fell into step alongside Skeeter's push cart, she glanced up with a reproachful glint in her eyes. "You must not be so irritated by the construction workers, Skeeter. Most of them are very good men. And surely you, of all up-timers on station, must understand their beliefs and customs are different? As a down-timer, I understand this very well."

"Oh, I understand, all right. But some of the guys on the Scheherazade Gate crew are throwbacks to the dark ages. Or maybe the Stone Ages. Honestly, Ianira, everybody on station's had trouble with some of them."

She sighed. "Yes, I know. We do have a problem, Skeeter. The Council of Seven has met about them, already. But you, Skeeter," she changed the subject as they navigated a goldfish pond with its ornate bridge and carefully manicured shrubbery, "you are ready for the Britannia? There are only seven hours left. Your case is packed? And you will not be late?"

Skeeter let go the heavy handle of his push cart with one hand and rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment. "Yes, I'm packed and ready. I still can't believe you pulled off something like that." About seven hours from now, the first official Ripper Watch tour of the season was scheduled to arrive in London, on the very evening of the first murder officially attributed to Jack the Ripper. And thanks to Ianira, Skeeter would spend the next eight days in London, courtesy of Time Tours, working the gate as a baggage porter. Hauling suitcases wasn't the world's greatest job either; but carrying rich tourists' luggage beat hell out of scrubbing La-La Land's bathrooms for a living. He'd been doing that for weeks, now. And Ripper Watch Tour tickets were selling for five-digit figures on the black market, when they could be found at all. Every one of the Ripper tours had been sold out for over a year.

Skeeter rubbed his nose and smiled wryly. "Time Tours baggage porter. Who'd've believed that, huh? They never would've trusted me, if you hadn't offered to replace anything that went missing on my watch."

"They will learn," she said firmly, giving him a much-needed boost of confidence. Ianira rested a hand on his arm. "You will do well, Skeeter. But will you try to go with the scholars? To see who is this terrible man, the Ripper?"

Skeeter shook his head. "No way. The videotapes will be bad enough."

"Yes," Ianira said quietly. "I do not wish to see any of them."

"Huh. Better avoid Victoria Station, then," Skeeter muttered as he bumped his cart across the division between Edo Castletown and Victoria Station, the

portion of Commons which served the Britannia Gate. Bottles of cleaning solution rattled and boxes of toilet paper rolls, feminine supplies, and condoms (latex, spray-on, and natural for those going to appropriate down-time destinations) bounced and jiggled as he shoved the cart across the cobblestones. Mop handles sticking out the top like pungee stakes threatened tourists too slow to dodge-and on every side, pure-bred lunatics threatened everything in sight, including Skeeter and his awkward cart.

"God help us," Skeeter muttered, "Ripper Watch Season is really in full swing."

Ripperoons had come crawling out of the woodwork like swarming termites. So had the crazies preying on them. Saviors of the Gates, convinced the Savior would appear through one of the temporal gates . . . the Shifters, who drifted from station to station seeking Eternal Truth from the manifestations of unstable gates . . . Hell's Minions, whose up-time leader had convinced his disciples to carry out Satan's work with as many unsuspecting tourists and down-timers as possible . . . and, of course, the Ripper Cults.

Those were visible everywhere, holding hand-scrawled signs, peddling cheap literature and ratty flowers, hawking cheap trinkets in the shape of bloody knives. Most of them carried as sacred talismans the authentic surgical knives Goldie Morran was selling out of her shop, and all of them were talking incessantly in a roar of excited conversation about the one topic on everyone's mind.

"Do you suppose they'll catch him?"

"-listen, my brothers, I tell you, Jack is Lord, traveling to this world from another dimension to show us the error of our sins! Repent and join with Jack to condemn evil, for He cannot die and He knows the lust in your hearts--"

"No, how can they catch him, no one in 1888 ever discovered who he was."

"-I don't care if you do have a ticket for the Britannia, you can't take that surgical knife with you, it's against BATF rules--"

"-let the Sons of Jack show you the way to salvation! Condemn all whores and loose women! A whore is the downfall of righteousness, the destruction of civilization. Follow the example of Jack and rid our great society of the stain of all sexual activity--"

"Yes, but they're putting video cameras at all the murder sites, so maybe we'll find out who he was, at least!"

"-somebody ought to confiscate all those goddamned knives Goldie's selling, before these loons start cutting one another up like Christmas turkeys--"

"-a donation, please, for Brother Jack! He will come to Shangri-La to lead us into the paths of truth. Support his good works with your spare change--"

"A hundred bucks says it's that crazy cotton merchant from Liverpool, what's-his-name, Maybrick."

"Go back up time, you sick lunatics! What kind of idiots are you? Jack the Ripper, an alien from another planet--?"

"Hah! Shows what you know! A hundred-fifty says it was the Queen's personal physician, Sir William Gull, hushing up the scandal over Victoria's grandson and his secret marriage, you know, the Catholic wife and daughter!"

"-you want me to what? I'm not following Brother Jack or anybody else in a crusade against evil. My God, mister, I'm an actress! Are you trying to put me out of work?"

"-help us, please, Save Our Sisters! S.O.S. is determined to rescue the Ripper's victims before he can strike, they're so unimportant, surely we can change history just this once--"

"Oh, don't tell me you bought that Royal Conspiracy garbage? There's absolutely no evidence to support that cockamamie story! I tell you, it's James Maybrick, the arsenic addict who hated his unfaithful American wife!"

"-all right, dump that garbage into the trash bin, nobody wants to read your pamphlets, anyway, and station maintenance is tired of sweeping them up. We've

got parents complaining about the language in your brochures, left lying around where any school kid can find them--"

"No, you're both wrong, it's the gay lover of the Duke of Clarence, the queen's grandson, the tutor with the head injury who went crazy!"

Skeeter shook his head. La-La Land, gone totally insane. Everyone was trying to outguess and out-bet one another as to who the real Ripper would turn out to be. Speculation was flying wild, from genuine Scotland Yard detectives to school kids to TT-86's shop owners, restauranteurs, and resident call girls. Scholars had been pouring into the station for weeks, heading down time to cover the biggest murder mystery of the last couple of centuries. The final members of the official Ripper Watch team had assembled three days ago, when Primary had last cycled, bringing in a couple of dandified reporters who'd refused to go down time any sooner than absolutely necessary and a criminal sociologist who'd just come back from another down-time research trip. They'd arrived barely in time to make the first Ripper murder in London. And today, of course, the first hoard of tourists permitted tickets for the Ripper Season tours would be arriving, cheeks flushed, bankrolls clutched in avaricious hands, panting to be in at the kill and ready to descend on the station's outfitters to buy everything they'd need for eight days in London of 1888.

"Who do you think it is?" Ianira asked, having to shout over the roar.

Skeeter snorted. "It's probably some schmuck nobody's ever heard of before. A sick puppy who just snapped one day and decided to kill a bunch of penniless prostitutes. Jack the Ripper wasn't the only madman who ripped up women with a knife, after all. The way those Ripperologists have been talking, there were hundreds of so-called 'rippers' during the 1880s and 1890s. Jack was just better with his PR, sending those horrible letters to the press."

Ianira shuddered, echoing Skeeter's own feelings on the subject.

If Skeeter had still been a betting man, he might have laid a few wagers, himself. But Skeeter Jackson had learned a very harsh lesson about making wagers. He'd very nearly lost his home, his life, and his only friends, thanks to that last ill-considered, ruinous wager he'd made with Goldie Morran. He'd finally realized, very nearly too late, that his life of petty crime hurt a lot more people than just the rich, obnoxious tourists he'd made a living ripping off. For Skeeter, at any rate, ripping time was over. For good.

Unfortunately, for the rest of La-La Land, it was just getting started.

As though on cue, the station's PA system crackled to life as Primary cycled open. The station announcer blared out instructions for the newly arriving tourists--and at Skeeter's side, Ianira Cassondra faltered. Her eyes glazed in sudden pain and a violent tremble struck her, so hard she stumbled against him and nearly fell.

"Ianira!" He caught and held her up, horrified by the tremors ripping through her. All color had drained from her face. Ianira squeezed shut her eyes for a long, terrifying moment. Then whatever was wrong passed. She sagged against him.

"Forgive me . . ." Her voice came out whispery, weak.

He held her up as carefully as he would've held a priceless Ming vase. "What's wrong, Ianira, what happened?"

"A vision," she choked out. "A warning. Such power . . . I have never seen with such power, never have I felt such fear . . . something terrible is to happen . . . is happening now, I think . . ."

Skeeter's blood ran cold. He didn't pretend to understand everything this seemingly fragile woman he braced so carefully was capable of. Trained in the ancient arts of the Temple of Ephesus as a child, some twenty-five hundred years before Skeeter's birth, Ianira occasionally said and did things that raised the hair on the back of Skeeter's neck. Ianira's acolytes, who followed her everywhere, pressed closer, exclaiming in worry. Those farther back, unable to see clearly, demanded to know what was wrong.

"Dammit, get back!" Skeeter turned on the whole lot of them. "Can't you see she needs air?"

Shocked faces gawped at him like so many fish, but they backed away a few paces. Ianira sagged against him, trembling violently. He guided her toward a bench, but she shook her head. "No, Skeeter. I am fine, now." To prove it, she straightened and took a step under her own power, wobbly, but determined.

Worried acolytes formed a corridor for her. Skeeter glared silently at them, guiding her by the elbow, determined not to allow her to fall. Speaking as quietly as possible, in the probably vain hope their vid-cams and tape recorders wouldn't pick up the question, he murmured, "What kind of vision was it, Ianira?"

She shivered again. "A warning," she whispered. "A warning of dark anger. The darkest I have ever touched. Violence, terrible fear . . ."

"Sounds like everyday life, up time." He tried to make light of it, hoping to make her smile.

Ianira, the gifted Cassondra of Ephesus, did not smile. She shuddered. Then choked out, "It is from up time the danger comes."

He stared down at her. Then a prickle ran up his back. It occurred to him that Primary had just cycled. Skeeter narrowed his eyes, gazing off toward the end of Commons where Primary precinct would be filled with tourists shoving their way into the station. Screw the bathroom floors. I'm not letting her out of my sight.

They reached the junction between five of the terminal's major zones, a no-man's land where the corners of Urbs Romae and Victoria Station ran into El Dorado, Little Agora, and Valhalla, not too far from the new construction site where the Arabian Nights sector was going up. It was there in that no-man's land, with Ianira's acolytes making it impossible to see for any distance, that Skeeter heard the first rumbles. An angry swell of voices heralded the approach of trouble. Skeeter glanced swiftly around, trying to pin down the source. It sounded like it was coming from two directions at once-and was apparently triangulating straight toward them.

"Ianira . . ."

Four things occurred simultaneously.

Tourists screamed and broke into a dead run. A full-blown riot engulfed them, led by enraged construction workers shouting in Arabic. A wild-eyed young kid burst through the crowd and yelled something that sounded like, "No! Aahh!"-then pointed an enormous black-powder pistol right at Skeeter and Ianira. Gunfire erupted just as someone else lunged out of the crowd and swept Ianira sideways in a flying tackle. The blow slammed her against Skeeter, knocked them both sideways. They crashed to the floor. The maintenance cart toppled, spilling ammonia bottles, mop handles, and toilet paper rolls underfoot. Screams and alarm klaxons deafened him. Skeeter rolled awkwardly under running feet and came to his hands and knees, searching wildly for Ianira. He couldn't see her anywhere. Couldn't see anything but fleeing tourists and spilled cleaning supplies and embattled construction workers. They were locked in hand-to-hand combat with Ianira's howling acolytes.

"Ianira!"

He gained his feet, was rocked sideways by a body blow as a cursing construction worker smashed into him. They both went down. Skeeter's skull connected with El Dorado's gold-tinted paving stones. He saw stars, cursed furiously. Before he could roll to his hands and knees again, security killed the station lights. The entire Commons plunged into utter blackness. Shrieking riot faded to an uncertain roar. Somebody stumbled over Skeeter in the darkness, tripped and went down, even as Skeeter clawed his way back to his feet.

"Ianira!"

He strained for any sound of her voice, heard nothing but the sobs and cries

of frantic tourists, maddened acolytes, and screaming, erstwhile combatants. Somebody ran past him, with such purpose and certainty it could only be security. They must be using that night-vision equipment Mike Benson had ordered before the start of Ripper Season. The riot helmets had their own infrared light-sources built in, for just this kind of station emergency. Then the lights came up and Skeeter discovered himself hemmed in by a solid wall of security officers, armed with night sticks and handcuffs. They waded in, cuffing more rioters, breaking up combatants with scant regard for who was attempting to throttle whom. "Break it up! Move it--"

Skeeter peered wildly through the crowd, recognized the nearest officer. "Wally! Have you seen Ianira Cassondra?"

Wally Klontz stared at him, visibly startled. "What?"

"Ianira! Some crazy kid shot at us! Then somebody else knocked us both down and now she's missing!"

"Oh, Jeezus H., that's all we need! Somebody taking pot-shots at the most important religious figure of the twenty-first century!" A brief query over Wally's squawky produced a flat negative. Nobody from security had seen her, anywhere.

Skeeter let loose a torrent of fluent Mongolian curses that would've impressed even Yesukai the Valiant. Wally Klontz frowned and spoke into the squawky again. "Station alert, Signal Eight-Delta, repeat, Signal Eight-Delta, missing person, Ianira Cassondra. Expedite, condition red."

The squawky crackled. "Oh, shit! Ten-four, that's a Signal Eight-Delta, Ianira Cassondra. Condition red. Expediting."

More sirens hooted insanely overhead, a shrieking rhythm that drove Skeeter's pulse rate into the stratosphere and left his head aching. But the pain in his head was nothing to the agony in his heart. Wally let him pass the security cordon around the riot zone, then he fought his way clear of the riot's fringe, searching frantically for a flash of white Ephesian gown, the familiar gloss of her dark hair. But he couldn't find her, not even a trace. Skeeter bit his lip, shaking and sick. He had allowed the unthinkable to happen. Someone wanted Ianira Cassondra dead. And whoever that someone was, they had snatched her right out of his grasp, in the middle of a riot. If they killed Ianira . . .

They wouldn't get out of Shangri-La Station alive.

No one attacked the family of a Yakka Mongol and lived to boast of it.

Skeeter Jackson, adopted by the Khan of all the Yakka Mongols, a displaced up-time kid who had been declared their living bogda, spirit of the upper air in human form, the child named honorary uncle to an infant who one day would terrorize the world as Genghis Khan, had just declared blood feud.

Margo Smith glanced at her wristwatch for the tenth time in three minutes, fizzing like a can of soda shaken violently and popped open. Less than seven hours! Just seven more hours and she would step through the Britannia Gate into history. And, coincidentally, into her fiancé's arms. She could hardly wait to see Malcolm Moore's face when she showed up at the Time Tours gatehouse in London, guiding the final contingent of the Ripper Watch Team. Malcolm had been in London for a month, already, acclimating the other Ripper Watch Team members. Margo hadn't lived through four longer, lonelier weeks since that gawdawful misadventure of hers in southern Africa, going after Goldie Morran's ill-fated diamonds.

But she'd learned her lessons--dozens of them, in fact--and after months of the hardest work she'd ever tackled, her gruelling efforts had finally paid off. Her grandfather was letting her go back down time again. And not through just any old gate, either. The Britannia! To study the most famous murder mystery since the disappearance of the Dauphin during the French Revolution. All that stood between her and the chance to earn herself a place in scholarly

history-not to mention Malcolm Moore's embrace-was seven hours and one shooting lesson.

One she dreaded.

The elite crowd gathered in the time terminal's weapons range talked nonstop in a fashion unique to an assemblage of late-arriving wealthy tourists, world-class scholars, and self-important reporters-each hotly defending his or her own pet theories as to "whodunnit." They ignored her utterly, even when she stuffed earmuffs and lexan-lensed safety glasses into their gesticulating, waving hands. Most of the students stationed along the firing line were tourists holding ordinary tickets, many of them for the Wild West tour set to leave tomorrow.

The Denver-bound tourists, headed for some sort of action cowboy shoot down time, cast envious glances at the lucky ones who'd managed to beg, borrow, buy, or steal Ripper Watch tickets. Those were Margo's new charges, although they didn't know it yet. The mere tourists heading for London, Margo ignored. Her attention was focused on the three individuals with whom she would be spending the next three solid months, as their time guide.

Dominica Nosette, whose name, face, and body seemed quintessentially French, yet who was as staidly British as kippers and jellied eels, was chattering away with her partner Guy Pendergast. And Shahdi Feroz . . . Margo gulped, just approaching Dr. Feroz where she stood locked in conversation with a Ripper Watch tourist at the next lane over. Dr. Feroz had spent the past four months studying the rise of cults and cult violence in Imperial Rome, through the Porta Romae. At previous training classes like this one, Margo had met all the other team members now in London, before they'd left the station with Malcolm. But none of the others possessed the credentials or the fieldwork record Shahdi Feroz did. Not even the team's nominal leader, Conroy Melvyn, a seedy-looking Englishman who bore the impressive title of Scotland Yard Chief Inspector.

Looking as Persian as her name and voice sounded, Dr. Feroz awed Margo. Not only was she exotic and beautiful in a way that made Margo feel her own youth and inexperience as keenly as a Minnesota winter wind, Shahdi Feroz was absolutely brilliant. Reading Dr. Feroz' work, virtually all of it based on first-hand study of down-time populations, reminded Margo of what she'd seen in New York during her agonizing, mercifully short stay there, and of things she'd seen during her few, catastrophic trips through TT-86's time gates. Not to mention-and she winced from the memory-her own childhood.

Margo's lack of education-a high-school GED and one semester of college which Kit had arranged for up time, augmented with months of intensive study on the station-caused her to stammer like a stupid schoolgirl with stagefright. "Dr. Feroz. Your, uh, safety goggles and muffs, earmuffs, I mean, for your ears, to protect them . . ." Oh, for God's sake, stop shaking, Margo!

"Thank you, my dear." The inflection of dismissal in her voice reduced Margo to the status of red-faced child. She fled back down the line of shooting benches, toward Ann Vinh Mulhaney, resident projectile weapons instructor, and the reassuring familiarity of a routine she knew well: preparing for a shooting lesson. Ann, at least, greeted her with a warm smile.

"So, are you all set for London?"

"Oh, boy, am I just! I've been packed for two whole days! I still can't believe Kit managed to swing it with Bax to let me go!" She had no idea what it had taken to convince Granville Baxter, CEO of Time Tours, Inc. on station, to give Margo that gate pass. And not just a one-cycle pass, either, but a gate pass that would let her stay the entire three months of East End Ripper murders.

Ann chuckled. "Grandpa wants you to get some field experience, kid."

Margo flushed. "I know." She glanced at the journalists, at the woman whose scholarly work was breaking new ground in the understanding of the criminal

mind in historical cultures. "I know I haven't really got enough experience to guide the Ripper Watch Team through the East End. Not yet, even though I've been to the East End once." That trip, and her own greenhorn mistakes, she preferred not to remember too closely. "But I'll get the experience, Ann, and I'll do a good job. I know I can do this."

Ann ruffled Margo's short hair affectionately. "Of course you can, Margo. Any girl who could talk Kit Carson into training her to become the world's first woman time scout can handle mere journalists and eggheads. Bet Malcolm will be happy to see you, too," Ann added with a wink.

Margo grinned. "He sure will! He'll finally have somebody else to send on all the lousy errands!"

Ann laughed. "Let's get this class started, shall we?"

"Right!"

Margo needed to prove to Ann, to Kit, and to Malcolm that she was capable of time scouting. And-perhaps most importantly-Margo needed to prove it to herself. So she dredged up a bright smile to hide her nervousness, hoped she didn't look as young as she felt in such illustrious, enormously educated company, and wondered if the team members could possibly take seriously a hot-headed, Irish alley-cat of a time guide who'd just turned seventeen-and-a-half last week . . .

Her smile, which had been known to cause cardiac arrest, was one of the few weapons currently available in her self-defense arsenal, so she dredged up a heart-stopping one and got to work. "Hi! Is everybody ready to get in some weapons practice?"

Heads swivelled and Margo was the abrupt focus of multiple, astonished stares.

Oh, Lordy, here we go. . . . "I'm Margo Smith, I'll be one of your time guides to London--"

"You?" The sound was incredulous, just short of scathing. Another voice from further down the line of shooting benches said, "What high school is that kid playing hooky from?"

Margo's face flamed. So did her temper. She bit down on it, though, and forced a brittle smile. Ann Mulhaney, the rat, just stood off to one side, waiting to see how she handled herself. Oh, God, another test. . . . One she'd better pass, too, drat it. So Margo ignored the incredulous looks and scathing remarks and simply got on with the job. "Most of the other guides are already in London," she said firmly. "I've been assigned the job of shepherding you through weapons training, so let's get organized, shall we? We've got a lot to do. Everyone's signed in, been assigned a lane and a shooting partner? Yes? Good. We'll get started, then."

Dominica Nosette interrupted, in a voice acid enough to burn holes through solid steel. "Why d'you insist we learn to shoot? It isn't proper, isn't decent, handling such things. I'm a photojournalist, not some macho copper swaggering about and giving orders with a billycock, nor yet some IRA terrorist. I'm not about to pick up one of those nasty things."

Hoo boy, here we go . . .

Margo said as patiently as possible-which wasn't very-"You don't have to carry one with you. But you will have to pass the mandatory safety class if you want to be a part of the Ripper Watch Team. Not my rules, sorry, but I will enforce them. London's East End is a very dangerous neighborhood under the best of conditions. We're going into areas that will be explosive as a powderkeg. Tempers will be running hot. In the East End, gangs of thieves and cutthroat muggers routinely knife prostitutes to death, just to steal the few pence in their pockets. Any stranger will be singled out by suspicious minds--"

"Oh, sod off, I've never needed a gun, not on a single one of my photo shoots, and I've trailed mob hit men!"

Oh, man, it's gonna be a long three months . . .

Margo steeled herself to keep smiling if it killed her, and vowed to cope. "Ms. Nosette, I am fully aware of your credentials. No one is questioning your status as a competent journalist. But you may not appreciate just how dangerous it's going to be for us, even for the team members born in England, trying to blend in with Victorian East End Londoners. It's your right to choose not to carry a personal weapon. But the rules of the Ripper Watch Team are clear. You must be familiar with their use, because many of us will be carrying them. And the more you know about the kind of gun some Nichol-based gang member pulls on you, the more likely you'll be to survive the encounter--"

"Miss Smith," Dr. Shahdi Feroz interrupted gently, "I am sorry to disagree with you, but I have been to London's East End, several years ago. Most of the Nichol gangs did not carry guns. Straight razors were the weapon of choice. So popular, laws against carrying them were suggested by London constables, even by Parliament."

Margo was left with her mouth hanging open and blood scalding her cheeks until her whole face hurt. She wanted desperately to dig a hole through the concrete floor with the toe of her shoe and crawl down through it, pulling the top in after herself. Before she could recover her shattered composure, never mind think of anything to say that wouldn't sound completely witless, the station's alarm klaxons screamed out a warning that shook through the weapons range like thunder. Margo gasped, jerking her gaze around.

"What's going on?" Dominica Nosette demanded.

"Station emergency!" Margo shouted above the strident skronkk! Ann had already bolted toward her office. Margo was right behind, literally saved by the bell. Oh, God, how'm I ever gonna face that bunch again? Ann flung open her office door, snatched up the telephone, dialed a code that plugged her into the station's security system. Margo crowded in, then barricaded the doorway so tourists and the Ripper Watch Team couldn't barge in, as well. A moment later, Ann hung up, white-faced and shaken. "There's been a shooting! Skeeter and Ianira! Security's just put out a station-wide alarm. Ianira's missing! And there's a station riot underway!"

Her voice carried out through the doorway to the milling throng of tourists and Ripperologists. For one agonizing second, indecision crucified Margo. Ianira was a friend, a good friend, but Margo had a job to do here. And no matter how desperately she wanted to run from her own embarrassing mistake, she had to finish that job.

Dominica Nosette and Guy Pendergast, however, showed no such hesitation.

They grabbed equipment bags and ran.

"Margo! Go after those idiots!" Ann was already striding toward the exit, blocking the way with her body. "Nobody else leaves this range, is that clear? Nobody!" Diminutive as she was, none of the others challenged her. They'd all seen her shoot. And nobody wanted to face down the Royal Irish Constabulary revolvers she abruptly clutched in either hand, rather than wearing benignly in twin holsters.

Margo, however, broke and ran, pounding up the stairs after the fleeing British reporters. "Hey! Wait!" Yeah, like they're really gonna stop just because I said so . . .

They didn't even slow down.

Seconds later, Margo-hard on their heels and gaining ground-emerged straight into chaos. A seething mass of frightened, confused tourists tried to rush in fifty-eleven directions at once, kids crying, women shouting for husbands, fathers grimly dragging youngsters toward anything that promised shelter. The awesome noise smote Margo like a physical blow, a fist made up of alarm klaxons, medi-van sirens, and screaming, shouting voices. Security squads raced past. Officers were jamming riot helmets on, even as they ran.

Margo's AWOL reporters surged right into the thick of utter chaos, dragging out cameras and recorders on the fly and pounding along in the wake of

security. Margo swore under her breath and darted after them. She was small enough to dodge and weave with all the skill of a trained acrobat. An instant later, however, total darkness crashed down, engulfing the whole Commons. Margo skidded to a halt-or tried to, anyway. She caromed into at least half-a-dozen shrieking people before she managed to stop her headlong rush. Sobs of terror rose on every side. The insane wail of the klaxons shook through the darkness.

Margo stood panting in a film of sweat. The hair on her arms stood starkly erect. Unreasoning fear surged. Booted feet pounded past through the total blackness, startling Margo until she realized those odd helmets she'd seen security putting on were Mike Benson's new night-vision helmets. What seemed hours, but couldn't have been longer than a few minutes later, the lights started coming back up, moving gradually inward from the far edges of Commons. Margo blinked as the overhead lights flickered back to life in banks, illuminating Edo Castletown at one far end of the station and the Anachronism's Camelot sector and Outer Mongolia at the other end, around several twists and turns where Commons snaked through the massive cave system into which TT-86 had been built.

Tourists clung to one another, badly shaken. Margo searched the crowd for her charges and finally caught a glimpse of purposeful movement. The Ripper Watch reporters were on the move again. She swore in gutter Latin that would've shocked Cicero and pounded after them. "Are you crazy?" she demanded, catching up at last. "You can't go in there!"

Dominica Nosette flashed her a pitying smile. "Love, never tell a reporter what she can't do-can't is one word we don't understand."

Then they reached the zone of destruction. They'd beat SLUR-TV, the in-station television news crew, to the punch. Dominica and Guy started filming steadily on every side as more reporters arrived, trailing cameras and lights and microphones. Then Margo caught her first glimpse of the blood and the broken bones.

Oh, my God . . .

While the newsies interviewed shaken eyewitnesses, station security zipped up a body bag with an extremely deceased individual inside. It wasn't the first time Margo had seen a dead person. Not even the second. And her mother's murder had been far more brutal a shock. But blood had stained the golden "bricks" of El Dorado's floor, leaking down between the paving stones in rivulets and runnels, where Margo had never expected to see it. And if that glimpse into the body bag had been accurate, the dead man had been shot in the face, point-blank.

With a very large caliber firearm.

What in God's name happened up here?

Margo began to tremble violently as she remembered smell of burnt toast and spreading, stinking puddles of blood smashed into her from her own childhood, from that long-ago morning when it had been her mother's body zipped up and carted out, and her father led away in handcuffs. . . . She wrapped both arms around herself, biting her lips to keep them from shaking. Violence like this happened in places like New York or London or even Minnesota, where drunkards beat their wives to death. But murder wasn't supposed to happen in a place like La-La Land, not where happy tourists gathered for vacations of a lifetime, where residents pursued dreams that came true every single day, where delightful amounts of money changed hands and everybody had fun in the process. Margo discovered she'd pressed the back of her hand against her mouth, unable to drag her gaze away from the macabre load as security carried away the grey zippered bag with the remains of a stranger inside.

Who is he? she wondered grimly. Or, rather, who had he been? He hadn't been dressed in a tourist costume, or as one of those construction workers building the new section of the station. More than a dozen of the Arabian Nights

crewmen, bruised and bleeding, were being dragged off in handcuffs. Then station medical arrived, having to fight their way past newsies filming white-faced, bleeding, dazed survivors. Among the worst injured were the Lady of Heaven Templars, members of the cult which had singled out Ianira as their prophetess. And Ianira was missing, might be dead. . . . Ugly cuts, swollen bruises, and visibly broken bones had so badly injured more than a dozen Templars, medi-vans were required to rush them out of the riot zone.

"Margo!"

She stumbled around, dazed, and found her grandfather cutting through the crowd like an ice-breaking ship plowing through arctic seas. Margo ran to him, threw her arms around him. "Kit!"

Her grandfather hugged her close for a long moment, then murmured, "Hey, it's over, Imp, what's wrong?" He peered worriedly into her eyes.

"I know." She gulped, feeling stupid from lingering shock. "It's just . . . stuff like that isn't supposed to happen. Not here."

Lines of grief etched deeper into Kit's lean cheeks. "I know," he said quietly. "It isn't. I hate it, too. Which is why we're going to do something about it."

"Do what? I mean, what can we possibly do? And what happened, exactly? I got here a little late."

Kit thinned his lips. "Ansar Majlis is what happened."

"Answer who?"

The grim look in his eyes frightened Margo, worse than she was already. "Ansar Majlis," he said it again. "The Ansar Majlis Brotherhood is one of the most dangerous cults to form up time in the past fifty years. Where's Ann?"

"On the weapons range. She stayed with Dr. Feroz and the tourists, to keep anybody else from leaving. I tried to catch up with the reporters. They went charging straight up here, but they outran me." She ducked her head. "I'm sorry. I did try to stop them."

Kit muttered under his breath. "I'm sure you did. Listen, Imp, we've got big trouble on this station, with Ianira Cassondra missing. I don't have to tell you the repercussions of that, both on station and up time. And with the Ansar Majlis involved, this riot may be the first of a whole lot of station riots. When word of this gets out . . ." He thinned his lips. "Next time Primary cycles, we are going to be neck deep in more trouble than you can shake an entire tree at. I want you to find Marcus. Try the Down Time Bar & Grill. Tell him we need search parties organized, Found Ones as well as up-time residents. And see if you can find out how Skeeter is."

"Skeeter's hurt? Ann said there'd been a shooting . . ." She swallowed hard, abruptly queasy to her toes. Margo and Skeeter Jackson might have a mutually uncivil history, but the idea of someone having shot the admittedly charming, one-time con artist left Margo sicker and colder than before. She'd gradually been changing her opinion of Skeeter Jackson, particularly since he'd become Marcus and Ianira's latest rescue project. An apparently successful one.

But Kit was shaking his head. "No, not shot, just banged up. Security said he had a lump on his temple the size of a goose egg. Should've had medical look at it, but he bolted into this mess, trying to find Ianira. Get Marcus busy organizing the Found Ones, okay? And find out if Marcus needs help looking after the girls."

Margo drew a shaky breath. "Kit . . ."

If we can't find Ianira, ever . . .

"Yes, I know. When you've got all that set up, meet me at the aerie."

"Bull's office? Won't Bull be busy conducting the official investigation?"

"Yes. Which is why you and I are going to be there." When Margo gave him her best look of blank befuddlement, Kit explained. "In a major station emergency, every single time scout in residence becomes a de facto member of station security. Same with the independent guides, the ones not on a company payroll,

or with specific tour commitments to meet. And I'd say a riot, a murder, and a kidnapping qualify as a major station emergency in anybody's book. We're going to be busy, Margo, busier than you've been since you arrived on station."

He must have noticed the sudden panic Margo couldn't choke down, try as she might, because he said more gently, "Don't worry about the Ripper Watch tour, kid. You'll get to London, all right. But the Britannia doesn't open for almost six and a half hours and right now, we've got a murderer loose somewhere in this station. A killer who's very likely got Ianira Cassondra in his hands."

Margo shuddered. It was one thing, studying a serial murderer like Jack the Ripper, whose victims were quite well known. Hunting for a madman loose in TT-86 was another prospect altogether—one that terrified her. "Okay, Kit." She managed to keep her voice fairly steady. "I'll find Marcus, get the down-timers organized, try to find out about Skeeter, then meet you at Bull's office."

"Good girl. And for God's sake, Imp, don't let those damned newsies follow you!"

She tried to imagine the kind of story any reporter would take up time about this disaster, tried to imagine the impact that story would have, particularly the disappearance of the inspiration for the fastest-growing cult religion in the world, and nodded, jaw clenched.

"Right."

"Get moving, then. I'll see you later."

Margo turned her back on the chaos of the riot zone and headed for the popular residents' bar where Marcus worked, wondering how badly Skeeter had been injured and just who had grabbed Ianira—and what they were doing to her, now they had her. Margo bit her lip. What would Marcus do if they couldn't find her? Or if—she swallowed hard at the thought—if they didn't find her alive? And their little girls? They weren't even old enough to understand what had happened . . .

Margo's fear edged over into terror, mingled with helpless anger. If those little girls had been left motherless . . . Today's riot would be small potatoes compared to the explosion yet to come. And violence of that magnitude could get a station closed down, permanently. Even one as famous and profitable as TT-86. After the bombing destruction of TT-66 by whichever group of middle eastern religious fanatics had blown the station sky-high, all it would take was another major station rocked by violence to shut down the whole time-tourism industry. There was already a powerful up-time senator trying to close down the stations. If TT-86 went under because of riots and on-station murders, Kit wouldn't need to kick her out of time-scout training to wreck her dreams.

Up-time politics would wreck them for her.

Chapter Three

Marcus had not known such fear since his one-time master had tricked him through the station's Roman gate and sold him back into a slavery from which Skeeter Jackson had rescued him. Abandoning the Down Time's bar without a backward glance, he bolted into the chaos loose on Commons, hard on the heels of Robert Li, the antiquarian who'd burst into the bar with the white-faced news: "Marcus! Someone's shot at Skeeter and Ianira!"

Ianira! Fear for her robbed breath he needed for running. Everything that was good and beautiful in his life had come through her, through the miracle of a highly-born woman who had been treated cruelly by her first husband, who had still managed, somehow, to love Marcus enough to want his touch, to want the love he had offered as very nearly the only thing in his power to give her. He had been a slave and although Marcus was free now in a way he had never dreamed possible, he would never be a wealthy man, could never give

Ianira the kind of life she deserved.

If anything had happened to her, anything . . . He could not conceive of a life without her. And their children, how could he tell their beautiful little girls they would never see their mother again? Please, he prayed to the gods of his Gallic childhood, to the Roman gods of his one-time masters, but especially to the many-breasted Artemis of Ephesus, the Great Mother of all living creatures, whose temple Ianira had served as a child in that ancient goddess' holy city, please let her be unharmed and safe . . .

Marcus was struggling to thrust himself through a packed crowd at the edge of Urbs Romae when a hand closed around his arm. A voice he didn't recognize said, "As you value your children's lives, come with me."

Shocked, he turned-and found himself staring into haunted grey eyes.

He could not have said if the person watching him so narrowly was male or female. But there was pain in those grey eyes, desperate pain and fear and something else, something dark and deadly that made his pulse shudder.

"Who-?"

"Your wife is safe. For the moment. But I can't keep her safe forever, not from the people who want her dead. And your children are in terrible danger. Please. I can't tell you why, not here. But I swear to you, if you'll just come with me and bring your little girls, I'll do everything in my power to keep all of you alive."

It was insane, this impulse to trust. Too many people had betrayed Marcus over the years, and too much that was precious to him, more precious than his own life, depended on his making the right choice. This is Shangri-La Station, he found himself thinking desperately, not Rome. If I am betrayed here, there are people who will move heaven and stars to come to our aid . . .

In the end, it came down to one simple fact: this person knew where Ianira was. If Marcus wanted to see her, he had to go. And the girls?

"I will not risk my children until I know Ianira is safe."

Impatience flared in those grey eyes. "There's no time for this! My God, we've already killed one of them, before he could shoot her. They'll murder your little girls, Marcus, in cold blood. I've seen how they kill! Cassie Tyrol died right in front of me and there was nothing I could do to save her--"

Marcus started. "The woman from the movies? Who played the priestess of Artemis, the Temple harlot? She is dead?"

Pain shone in those grey eyes. "Yes. And the same people who killed her are trying to kill Ianira, her whole family. Please, I'm begging you . . . get your little girls out of danger while there's still time. I'll tell you everything, I swear it. But we have to move now."

Marcus pressed clenched fists to his temples, tried to think clearly, wishing he possessed even a hundredth the skill Ianira did in reading people's hearts and intentions. Standing irresolute in the middle of a panic-stricken crowd jammed into Commons, voices echoing off the girders of the ceiling five stories overhead, Marcus had never felt more alone and afraid in his life. Not even as a child, thrust into chains and caged like an animal for sale. Then, the only person at risk had been himself. Now . . .

"They are at the school and daycare center," he decided, voice brusque. "This way."

He still didn't know if the grey-eyed person at his side was a man or a woman.

But when they reached the day-care center and interrupted an ugly, heart-stopping tableau, Marcus discovered that his shaky trust in his new companion was well-founded. They skidded through the day care center's doors at an all-out run-and found an armed Arabian Nights construction worker holding Harriet Banks at gunpoint. Another armed man was dragging Artemisia and Gelasia away from the other children. Rage and terror scalded Marcus, blinded him, sent him forward with fists clenched, even as the grey-eyed person with him erupted

with a violence that would have struck terror, had that violence been aimed at his family.

Marcus barely had time to see the gun before it discharged. The roar deafened in the confines of little daycare center. His ears rang even as smoke bellied out from the antique gun's barrel. Children screamed and scattered like frightened ants. The construction worker closest to them, the one holding a gun on Harriet Banks, jerked just once, then fell like a man whose legs have been abruptly jerked out from beneath him. The hole through the back of his skull was far smaller than the one through his face, where the bullet had plowed through on its way out. Shock caught Marcus like a fist against the side of his head-then the black-powder pistol discharged again and the man holding Artemisia's wrist plowed into the floor, obscenely dead.

Marcus snapped out of shock with the grotesque thud as the second body landed on the daycare center's floor. He flung himself toward his screaming children. "Hush . . . it's all right, Daddy's here . . ."

He gathered the girls close, hugged them, wept against their hair.

"Marcus! Come on, man! More of the bastards are headed this way!"

Marcus had no time to say anything to Harriet Banks, who was trying to get the other children out through the back door, away from the carnage in the playroom. He simply scooped up his daughters and ran with them, following his unknown benefactor into the chaos on Commons. There were, indeed, more construction workers racing toward them, with weapons clutched in their hands as tourists screamed and scattered.

His benefactor's voice cut through shock and terror. "Do you know any better way to reach the Neo Edo Hotel? They're between us and any safety we've got on this station."

Marcus took one look at the burly construction workers running toward them and swore savagely in the language only he, alone of all residents on TT-86, could understand. His Gaulish tribe was as extinct as the language they'd spoken. But his children were still alive. He intended to keep them that way. "This way," he snarled, spinning around and plunging toward Residential. "Down-timers know all the secret ways through this station!"

Skeeter had taught Marcus routes he'd never suspected could be used to get from one side of the station to the other. Those escape routes had proven useful when he and Ianira had needed to slip away from the pressing attentions of her adoring acolytes, trying to gain a little privacy for themselves. Marcus had never dreamed he would need them to save his little family from cold-blooded murder. Why anyone would want to kill them, he could not imagine. But he intended to find out.

Marcus might be nothing more than an ex-slave, a down-timer without legal rights. But he was a husband and a father and an "'eighty-sixer," a member of the insane, fiercely independent, intensely loyal community of residents who called Time Terminal Eighty-Six home. Whoever sought to kill them, they had failed to take that particular fact into account. 'Eighty-sixers took care of their own.

Even if it meant breaking up-time laws to do so.

By the time Skeeter arrived at the aerie, Bull Morgan's glass-walled office was packed, standing room only. And that was without the howling mob of reporters trying to get past security to the elevator and stairs that led up to the station manager's ceiling-level office. The elevator had been crowded, too, with 'eighty-sixers responding to the emergency call for search teams. Connie Logan, owl-eyed behind her thick glasses and dressed as outlandishly as ever in bits and pieces of various costumes she'd been testing when the call had gone out, stood crammed into one corner, trying not to jab anybody with the pins sticking out of her clothes. Arley Eisenstein, restaurateur of one of the ten most famous restaurants on the planet and married to the station's

head of medicine, stared at the elevator doors with his jaw muscles clenched so tight, Skeeter wondered why his teeth hadn't broken yet. Brian Hendrickson, station librarian and a man who hadn't forgotten the circumstances of Skeeter's disastrous wager with Goldie, any more than he'd forgotten anything else he'd ever seen, heard, or read, was swearing colorfully in a language Skeeter had never heard in his life. Ann Vinh Mulhaney had come upstairs from the weapons range in company with a woman Skeeter recognized as one of the Ripper Watch Team members. Both women were as silent as ghosts and very nearly as pale.

Dr. Shahdi Feroz, Skeeter knew, was not just a world-renowned Ripperologist, she was also the team's cult-phenomena expert. She had made a life's study of criminal cults and intended to research first-hand Victorian London's teeming subculture of spiritualists, occult worshipers, Celtic-revivalists, magic practitioners, and the city's numerous flourishing, quasi-religious cult groups. It had led her to support some rather unusual ideas about the Ripper murders. What she knew about down-time occult groups made for a terrifying parallel to what Skeeter knew of up-time cults. He'd seen his share of them in New York. And over the past few years, the new ones popping up like malignant mushrooms made those older ones look positively apple-pie ordinary. Which was doubtless why Bull Morgan had personally requested her presence at this meeting. Shahdi Feroz, as elegant and composed as a Persian queen, dark hair upswept in a mass of thick, raven's-wing waves, glanced at Skeeter, evidently aware of his intent scrutiny, and started to speak-

And the elevator doors slid open onto pandemonium.

Shahdi Feroz turned aside at once, stepping out of the elevator to make room for the others. She glanced over at Ann through dark, worried eyes as they all crowded off the elevator and tried, somewhat vainly, to find space in Bull's packed office.

"I didn't expect quite so many people to be here." Her speech was rich and fluid. Skeeter, fascinated by the rising and falling inflections of her exotic voice, managed to locate a space that hid him from most people's view.

Ann answered in a strained undertone. "I did. In fact, I'm betting we won't be the last to arrive."

When the weapons instructor glanced around, her gaze paused on Skeeter. The look in Ann's eyes caused him to stiffen. Skeeter clenched his jaw and looked away first, unsure which was worse: the pity or the deep, lingering suspicion that Skeeter had only been using Ianira, the way most 'eighty-sixers thought he used everyone he came into contact with. There was nothing he could say, no explanation he could-or cared to-offer that anyone in this room would believe. With the down-timers on station, it was different. But in a room crammed shoulder-to-jowl with up-time 'eighty-sixers, Skeeter felt as alone and isolated as he'd felt in Yesukai's felt tent, a lost little boy of eight without the ability to understand a word spoken around him or to go home again to a family that didn't want him, anyway.

He set his jaw and wished to hell Bull would get this meeting underway. He needed to be down on Commons, searching. He'd only come to this meeting because he was not, by God, going to let them leave him out of whatever decisions were made on where and how to search for her. A door near the back of Bull's office opened and Ronisha Azzan, the deputy station manager, appeared, looking worried. She said something to Bull, too low for Skeeter to overhear. Bull ground his teeth over the stubby end of an unlit cigar, then spat debris into an ornate brass spittoon strategically positioned on one corner of his desk. Margo arrived a moment later via the elevator, breathless, her green eyes clouded with fear. She spotted Ann Vinh Mulhaney and Shahdi Feroz and bit her lower lip, then pushed past to Bull's desk. "I can't find Marcus," she said flatly. "He ran out of the Down Time with Robert Li and nobody's seen him since. Robert said Marcus was behind him one minute and he'd

vanished into the crowd the next." Ronisha Azzan stepped into the office behind Bull's, swearing under her breath.

Skeeter knew a moment of fear almost as deep as when Ianira had vanished right in front of him. Then reason reasserted itself, helped by the white-knuckled hands he used to push back heavy locks of hair sticking to his damp brow. Marcus would be with other Found Ones, searching, of course, there was no reason to panic, no up-timer on station knew the back routes the way the down-timers did, somebody had obviously got to him and maybe even told him they'd seen her somewhere . . .

Station alarms screamed to life again.

Fear tightened down once more, driving daggers through Skeeter's nerves. He very nearly pulled out two fistfuls of his own hair. Skeeter clenched his jaw and made himself wait, while sweat prickled out over his entire torso. Bull Morgan snatched the security phone off his desk and shouted, "What the hell is it now?"

Whatever was said on the other end, Bull's florid face actually lost color. The unlit cigar he chewed went deathly still. Then he spat out the cigar with a furious curse and snarled, "Turn this station upside down, dammit, but find them! And I want every construction worker in this goddamned station locked up on suspicion of attempted murder, do you hear me, Benson? Do it! Ronisha!" The phone didn't quite bend when he slammed the receiver back down, but a crack appeared in the plastic casing.

The deputy station manager, African-patterned silks swirling around her tall figure, reappeared from the back office, talking urgently to someone via squawky. She was snarling, "I don't care who you have to slap in the brig! Control that mess or find yourself another job! Yes?" she asked, turning her attention to Bull.

"Get down to the war room! Coordinate the search from down there. Have Benson's security teams report directly to you there. We've got another helluva mess breaking loose."

Ronisha fled down the back stairs, squawky in hand. La-La Land's station manager faced the expectant hush from the crowd in his office. The silence in the glass-walled office was as unbearable as the sound of fingernails on a blackboard.

Bull said heavily, "There's been a shooting at the day care center. Two construction workers messily dead, dozens of children in hysterics. Marcus and his little girls vanished in the middle of the shooting." Nausea bit Skeeter's throat. He forced himself not to bolt for the elevator, forced himself to wait, to hear the rest of it. "A couple of Scheherazade construction workers were trying to take his daughters out at gunpoint when Marcus showed up with someone Harriet didn't recognize. Whoever it was, they shot both construction workers dead and took Marcus and the girls out of there." Bull craned to peer through the crowd of white-faced, furious residents. "Is Dr. Feroz here yet?"

Shahdi Feroz pushed through the throng to the front of Bull's office. "Yes, Mr. Morgan, I am here. How may I help?"

"I want to know what we're up against. Kit Carson told security the bastards who've attacked Ianira and her family are members of the Ansar Majlis Brotherhood. He's not here yet, or I'd ask him to brief us."

Shahdi Feroz moved sharply at the mention of the Brotherhood, as though wanting to deny what he'd just said. Then she sighed, tiredly. "Ansar Majlis . . . This is very bad, very dangerous. The Ansar Majlis Brotherhood began when Islamic fundamentalist soldiers began recruiting down-time Islamic warriors for jihad through the gates where TT-66 used to be. The station is destroyed, but the gates still function, of course."

She spoke with a bitterness Skeeter understood only too well. He hadn't known anyone personally on the station, but hundreds of innocents had died when the station had been blown sky-high. The elevator's soft ping! sent

Skeeter two inches straight up the wall. But it was only Kit Carson, face haggard, eyes bleak. He moved quietly into the office as Dr. Feroz continued her explanation.

"Since the station was destroyed, thousands of down-time recruits have been brought through to fight jihad. Some of these soldiers have banded together to form a brotherhood. They have styled themselves after the nineteenth-century Ansar, fanatical religious soldiers of the Mahdi, an Islamic messiah who drove the British out of the Sudan and killed General Gordon at Khartoum. It operates very much like the social structure of a nomadic tribe. Those in the brotherhood are fully human; those outside are not. And the lowest, least human of all are the women of the Lady of Heaven Temples. Such women are considered evil and heretical by these soldiers. A female priesthood, a female deity . . ." She shook her head. "They have sworn the destruction of the Artemis Temple and all Templars. There has been trouble with them in the Middle East, but they were for many years contained there. It seems they are contained no longer. If they have managed to establish cells in major cities like New York, there will be terrible violence against the Temple and its members. The whole purpose of this cult is to destroy the Lady of Heaven Temples as completely as if they had never existed. It is jihad, Mr. Morgan, a particularly virulent, fundamentalist form of hatred."

Skeeter wanted to close his hands around someone's throat, wanted to center the bastards responsible for these attacks on Ianira and her family in the sights of any weapon he could lay hands on. Instead, he forced himself to wait. He had learned patience from Yesukai, had learned that to destroy an enemy, one must first know and understand him.

Bull Morgan clenched his teeth over the stub of his cigar, which he'd retrieved from his desk top and was now shredding between molars once again. "All of which explains the attack on Ianira. And her kids, goddamn it. But those construction workers have been on station for weeks. Why wait until now to attack? Why today?"

Margo spoke up hesitantly. "Maybe someone came through Primary today with orders? I mean, the whole thing blew up within minutes of Primary cycling."

Bull pinned her with a sharp stare. Kit nodded silently, clearly agreeing with that assessment. It made sense to Skeeter, as well. Too much sense. And there was that terrifying vision of Ianira's, right before the violence had erupted. Right after Primary had cycled.

Bull picked up his security phone again. "Ronisha, I want a dossier on every man, woman, and child who came through Primary today. Complete history. Anybody who might have ties to the Middle East or the Ansar Majlis Brotherhood, I want questioned."

Skeeter wanted to question two other individuals, too: the wild-eyed young kid who'd shot whoever it was behind Ianira and Skeeter in that riot, and the person who'd knocked both Ianira and Skeeter to the floor in time for that kid to do the shooting. Skeeter wondered which one of that pair had done the killing in the day care center. Whoever they were, they clearly knew about the threat to Ianira and her family. But why were they trying to protect her? Were they Templars? Someone else? Skeeter intended to find out, if he had to take them apart joint by joint to learn the truth.

Only to do that, he had to find them first.

He edged toward the elevator, impatient to do something besides stand here and listen. Bull hung up the phone again and started spitting orders. "All right, I want the biggest manhunt in the history of this station and I want it yesterday. Hotels, restaurants, shops, residential, library, gym, weapons ranges, physical plant and maintenance areas, waste management, storage, everything. Organize search teams according to the station's emergency management plan. Presume these bastards are armed and dangerous. Personal weapons are not only permitted, but encouraged. Questions?"

Nobody had any.

Least of all Skeeter.

"Let's move it, then, people. I want Ianira and her family found."

Skeeter got to the elevator before anybody else and found himself sharing a downward ride with Kit Carson, of all people. The retired time scout glanced at him as others crowded into the elevator. "You'll organize the Found Ones?"

The question surprised Skeeter. He and Kit Carson were hardly on civil terms, not after his ill-conceived attempt to get Margo into bed with that ruse about being a time scout, himself. Of course, he hadn't known Margo was Kit's granddaughter at the time. In point of fact, not even Kit had known, then. But when the scout had discovered the truth, his visit to Skeeter had been anything but grandfatherly—and nothing even remotely resembling cordial. Kit's concern now surprised Skeeter, until he realized that it had nothing to do with Skeeter and everything to do with how Kit felt about Ianira Cassandra.

So he nodded with a short jerk of his head. "They'll be organized already, but I'll join them."

"Let me know if you need anything."

Again, Skeeter stared. He said slowly, grudgingly, "Thanks. We're pretty organized, but I'll let you know if something comes up we can't handle." Not that he could think of anything. The Found Ones' Council of Seven had made certain the resident down-timers on station were as prepared as possible for any station crisis that threatened them. The down-timers were, in fact, as prepared as Sue Fritchey's Pest Control officers were for an invasion of anything from hordes of locusts to prehistoric flying reptiles—which, in point of fact, TT-86 had been forced to deal with, just a few months previously.

Kit's next question startled the hell out of Skeeter.

"Would you mind if Margo and I joined you and the Found Ones to search?"

Skeeter's brows dove down as suspicion flared. "Why?"

Kit held his gaze steadily. "Because if anyone on this station has a chance of finding them, it's the down-timers. I'm aware of those meetings held in the subbasements. And I know how underground organizations operate. I also want rather badly to be there if and when we do find whoever is responsible for this."

Skeeter had known for a long time that Kenneth "Kit" Carson was a thoroughly dangerous old man, the sort you didn't want as an enemy, ever. It came as a slight shock, however, to realize that the retired time scout would relish taking apart whoever had done this as thoroughly as Skeeter, himself, would. He hadn't expected to share anything in common with the world's most famous recluse.

"All right," he found himself saying tightly. "You're on. But when we do find them . . ."

"Yes?"

He looked the man he was mortally afraid of straight in the eye. "They're mine."

Kit Carson's sudden grin was as lethal as the look in his eyes. "Deal."

Skeeter was left with the terrifying feeling that he'd just made a deal with a very formidable devil, indeed. A deal that was likely to lead him places he truly didn't want to go. Before he could worry too intensely about it, however, the elevator bumped to a halt and the doors opened with a swoosh. Five minutes later, he was leading the way through Commons, an unlikely team leader for a search team consisting of himself, Kit Carson, the fiery tempered Margo, and—surprisingly—Dr. Shahdi Feroz.

"The Britannia opens in less than six hours," Margo said pointedly when she insisted on joining them.

"Yes, it does. And I am as ready as I will ever be. I may not know how to shoot a gun yet, but I am certain you can remedy that for me once we reach London, Miss Smith."

The look Margo shot the breathtakingly beautiful older woman wavered somewhere between pleased surprise and wary assessment. Skeeter wondered why, but he didn't have the time to pursue it. Then he spotted Bergitta, a young down-timer who'd fallen through an unstable gate from medieval Sweden. She'd been crying, to judge from her reddened, swollen eyes. She'd hooked up with young Hashim ibn Fahd, a down-time teenager who'd fallen through the Arabian Nights gate, and with Kynan Rhys Gower, whose face was a lethal mask of fury.

Bergitta gave a glad cry when she spotted him. "Oh, Skeeter! We have looked and looked . . ."

Kit was already speaking rapidly in Welsh with the bowman, who had sworn an oath of fealty to Kit down that unstable gate into sixteenth-century Portuguese southern Africa. Skeeter gave Bergitta's hands a swift and reassuring squeeze. "The search teams are organized and out?"

"Yes, Skeeter, and I am told to say to you, please search the escape routes from Little Agora to Frontier Town. You will need a team . . ."

"They're with me," Skeeter said roughly, nodding at the others. "Not my choice, but they're good."

It was a monumental understatement, one of his all-time best, in fact.

Bergitta, who knew their reputations perfectly well, for all that she'd been on station only three months, widened pretty blue eyes; then nodded. "Kynan and Hashim and I go to search also, then." She hugged him, very briefly, but it didn't take more than a fleeting contact to feel the tremors shaking through her.

"We'll find them, Bergitta." Skeeter forced the conviction in his voice. We have to find them. Dear God, please let us find them soon . . . and safe.

She nodded and tried to smile, then departed with Kynan Rhys Gower and Hashim, whose glance looked ready to kill anyone who hurt Ianira, despite his youth. Skeeter found Margo's speculative gaze on Bergitta as she moved away into the crowd. What he read in her eyes defied translation for several moments. At first, he thought it was simply distaste for sharing company with a girl who'd been forced by circumstances to sell the only commodity she possessed to make a living on the station: herself. Then he looked again, struck forcibly by the memories lurking in Margo's shadowed green eyes, which had filled with pain, shame, remorse. But for what? He knew how other kids Margo's age had been forced to make a living in New York. He rather doubted Margo had been there long enough to get into serious trouble, given her determination to get onto TT-86 and begin her career as a trainee time scout. But with the kind of pain and the depth of shame he could see in Margo's eyes, Skeeter found himself wondering how she'd raised the money for a ticket through Shangri-La Station's expensive Primary gate.

If Kit's granddaughter had resorted to . . . that . . . Skeeter wasn't sure how Grandpa would take the news. Or-Christ, talk about complications-Malcolm, who planned to marry her. Noneya, Skeeter told himself severely. Whatever the reason for that look in Margo's eyes, it was very much none of Skeeter's business.

"We'll start in Little Agora," he said gruffly. "It's closer. Let's go, I've waited too long as it is."

Wordlessly, his little search party followed.

Jenna Nicole Caddrick didn't take Ianira to the hotel room she'd reserved nearly a year previously in Carl's married sister's name. She hadn't dared try to check into the luxury hotel, not with Ianira Cassondra draped, unconscious, across her back and shoulders in a fireman's carry where Noah Armstrong had put her. "Get her to the hotel!" the detective had ordered. "Take the stairways to the basement-I've got to find her husband and kids!"

So, staggering with every step, because Jenna was not that much larger than Ianira, herself, she carried the sacred prophetess through the station's

Commons during security's riot-control blackout, bumping into people and stumbling into walls until she finally found a staircase, its emergency "Exit" sign glowing in the stygian darkness. The lights down here, at least, hadn't been shut off. Shangri-La Station's basement was a twisting montage of pipes and conduits and crowded storage rooms where, with any luck—and the Lady alone knew they deserved a little of that—the Ansar Majlis wouldn't think to look. Or anyone else, for that matter, not right away, at least. Jenna, legs and arms trembling with the effort, joints all but cracking, finally spotted a thick pile of hotel towels, in a big packing crate that someone had pried open to remove part of its contents. Moving gingerly, she lowered Ianira onto the piled towels. The prophetess was still as death, with a nasty bruise along her brow where Noah had slammed her to the floor, saving her life.

Jenna didn't know much about medicine or first aid, but she knew how to test a pulse, anyway, and remembered that a shock victim had to be kept warm. So she covered Ianira with a whole pile of the crated towels and tested her pulse and wondered if slow and regular might be good or bad news. She bit one lip, then wondered how to let Noah Armstrong know where to find them. We'll meet at the Neo Edo, kid, that's where you've got reservations and they'll expect you to show up.

Yeah, she thought glumly. But not with an unconscious prophetess across her shoulder. Showing up with Ianira, Cassondra of Ephesus, in a state of coma was a great way to get the attention of all the wrong people, fast. When Jenna heard the footfalls and the distant murmur of voices, she spun on her heel, gripping Carl's reproduction pistol in both hands, terrifying herself with that blurred, instinctive reaction. I don't want to get used to people trying to kill me . . . or having to kill them. The thundering shock of shooting down a living human being up on Commons would have left Jenna on hands and knees, vomiting, if Ianira Cassondra's life hadn't been in mortal jeopardy with every passing second. She wanted to go into shock now, needed to be sick, was shaking violently with the need, but there was someone coming and she couldn't let them kill Ianira.

The voices drew closer, voices she didn't recognize. Jenna scowled, fist tight on the reproduction antique weapon in her hand, trying to make sense of what they were saying. She realized abruptly that the words weren't going to fall into any recognizable patterns because they weren't in English. Whatever it was, it sounded like . . . Classical Latin, maybe? Would the Ansar Majlis speak Latin? She couldn't imagine it, not a pack of medieval terrorists imported from the war-wracked Middle East for the express purpose of destroying the Temple which formed the bedrock of Jenna's faith.

Then the speakers rounded an abrupt corner and Jenna gasped, giddy with relief. "Noah!"

Armstrong swung around sharply, recognized her, relaxed a death grip on the trigger. "Kid," Noah muttered, "you are gonna get yourself shot one of these days, doing that. Where is she?"

Jenna pointed, eyeing the people who accompanied Noah. The ashen-faced young man in jeans and an ordinary short-sleeved work shirt, she recognized as the Cassondra's husband—the Roman slave—and the two little girls with him looked so much like their mother it closed Jenna's throat. Another young man with them was a kid, really, younger than Jenna. A lot younger. At the moment, Jenna Nicole Caddrick felt about a thousand years old and aging rapidly.

"Ianira!" Marcus cried, running toward his wife.

"She's unconscious," Jenna said, voice low and unsteady. "She hit her head on the floor . . ."

Marcus and the teenager broke into a voluble spate of Latin, Marcus nodding his head vehemently up and down, the kid looking stubborn. A fragment of historical research for a film class came back to her, that Romans bobbed their heads up and down to indicate disagreement, not wagging them from side

to side the way moderns did. At length, the younger kid muttered something that sounded foul and trotted away into the dim-lit basement.

"Where's he going?" Jenna asked. What if they brought the station authorities in? If that happened, Ianira and Marcus and those beautiful little girls would die. Nobody could protect them, not as long as they remained on this station.

Marcus didn't even glance up. He was stroking his wife's hair back from her bruised forehead, holding her cold hand. Their little girls whimpered and clung to his leg, too young to know or comprehend what was happening around them, but old enough to know terror. "He goes to bring medicine. Food, water, blankets. We will hide her in the Sanctuary."

Jenna didn't know exactly what or where Ianira's Sanctuary might be, although she suspected it was hidden deep under the station. But she knew enough to blurt out, "You can't! It won't be safe there. These bastards will hunt through every inch of this station, looking for her. For you, too, and the children."

Frightened brown eyes lifted, met hers. "What can we do, then? We have friends here, powerful friends. Kit Carson and Bull Morgan--"

Armstrong cut him off. "Not even Kit Carson can stop the Ansar Majlis," Noah bit out, bitterness darkening the detective's voice, leaving it harsh and raw. "You have to get completely off this station. The faster, the better. We sure as hell are," Noah nodded toward Jenna. "The only place that's gonna be safe is someplace down time. There's a whole lot of history to hide in, through this station's gates. We hide long enough, stay alive long enough, I can slip back through the station in disguise--and I'm damned good at disguises--and get the proof of what we know to the up-time authorities. If we're going to stop the bastards responsible for this," Noah jerked a glance toward Ianira, curled up on her side, fragile as rare porcelain, "the only way is to destroy them, make sure they're jailed for life or executed. And we can't do that if we're dead."

"Who is it?" Marcus grated out. "I will kill them, whoever they are!"

Jenna believed him. Profoundly. Imagination failed her, trying to comprehend what this ordinary-seeming young man in blue jeans and a checkered shirt had already lived through. Noah told Marcus what they were up against. All of it. In thorough and revolting detail. The suspicion that flared in Marcus' eyes when he looked at Jenna wounded her.

"I'm not my father!" she snapped, fists aching at her sides. "If that son-of-a-bitch were in front of me right now, I'd blow his head off. He always was a lousy, rotten, stinking bastard of a father. I just never knew how much. 'Til now."

The suspicion in the other man's brown eyes melted away while something else coalesced in its place. It took a moment to recognize it. When he did, it shook Jenna badly. Pity. This ex-slave, this man whose family was targeted for slaughter, pitied her. Jenna turned roughly aside, shoved her pistol through her belt and her hands into her pockets, and clenched her teeth over a flood of nausea and anger and fright that left her shaking. A moment later, Noah settled a hand on her shoulder.

"You never killed a man before." It wasn't a question, didn't have to be a question, because it was perfectly obvious. Jenna shook her head anyway. "No." Noah sighed, tightened fingers against her shoulder for a moment. "They say it's never easy, kid. I hadn't either, you know, until that hit in New York." Jenna glanced up, found deep pain in Noah's enigmatic eyes. "But I always knew I might have to, doing the job I chose. It's worse for you, probably. When a kid comes to the Temple young as you are, she's hurting inside already. You got more reason than most. And Cassie told me you cried when you accidentally ran over a mongrel dog on the road out to the ranch."

She clenched her teeth tighter and tried to hold back tears she did not want

the detective to witness. Noah didn't say anything else. Just dropped the hand from Jenna's shoulder and turned away, moving briskly around the confined space Jenna had chosen to defend, making up a better bed for Ianira. That it was necessary only upset Jenna more, because she hadn't done a good enough job of it, herself. The Latin-speaking teenager returned a few silent minutes later, bringing a first aid kit, a heavy satchel that wafted the scent of food when he lifted the flap, blankets piled over one shoulder, and a couple of stuffed toys, which he gave to Ianira's daughters. The children grabbed hold of the shaggy, obviously home-made bears, and hugged them with all their little-girl strength. Jenna's eyes stung, watching it. No child only three years old should ever look at the world through eyes that looked like that. And Artemisia's sister was even younger, barely a year old. Barely walking, yet.

"We can't stay here long," Noah was saying, voice low. "They'll be searching for her. We'll have to smuggle her up into the hotel room Jenna's reserved. We can hide there until the Britannia Gate opens." The detective checked a wristwatch. "We won't need to hide long. But we've got to outfit for the gate between now and then. And find a way to smuggle Ianira through."

"Us," Marcus said sharply. "We all go through."

But Noah was shaking a head that ought to've gone grey by now, if the detective's private life was anything like what they'd already lived through. "No. They're going to send a death squad after us, Marcus. They'll send somebody through every gate that opens during the next week, trying to get her. I won't risk all of you anywhere in one group. Just in case the worst happens and the bastards who follow her through the gate do catch up."

"Not the Britannia," Marcus insisted stubbornly. "They cannot get through the Britannia. It is Ripper Season. There have been no tickets for today's gate for over a year. I could get through working as a porter hauling baggage, because I am a station resident, but no one else."

"Don't underestimate these people, Marcus. If necessary, they'll kill one of the baggage handlers, take his place, and get through that way, using their victim's ID and timecard."

Marcus' already pale cheeks ran dead white. "Yes," he whispered. "It would be easy. Too easy."

"So." Noah's voice, so difficult to pin down as either a man's light voice or a woman's deep one, was cold and precise. "We put Ianira in a steamer trunk. Same thing for the girls. You," the detective nodded at Marcus, "go through one of the other gates with your children. And we'll disguise you as a baggage handler, since they're almost invisible. The problem is, which gate?"

The teenager spoke up at once. "The Wild West Gate opens tomorrow."

Jenna and Noah exchanged glances. It was perfect. Too perfect. The Ansar Majlis would track Marcus and the girls straight through that gate, figuring it would be the one gate Jenna was likeliest to choose. The tour gate into Denver of 1885 was the only gate besides the sold-out Britannia where the natives spoke English. And Carl had been such a nut about that period of American history, the killers tracking them would doubtless figure Jenna had cut and run through the gate she and Carl would've known the most about, the only one she could get tickets for, not knowing, thank the Lady, that Jenna had secretly bought tickets through the Britannia in another name more than a year ago.

Noah, however, was frowning in concentration, studying Marcus closely. "It could work. Put you and the girls down Denver's Wild West Gate, with me as guard, send Jenna and Ianira through to London."

"But—" Jenna opened her mouth to protest, terrified at the prospect of Noah abandoning her.

A dark glance from steel-cold grey eyes shut her up. "There are two of us. And two groups of them." The detective nodded at Marcus and Ianira, who still

lay unmoving except to breathe. Fright tightened down another notch, leaving Jenna to wonder if she'd ever be hungry again, her gut hurt so much. Noah said more gently, "We have to split up, kid. If we send Marcus and the girls through without a guard . . . hell, kid, we might as well shoot them through the head ourselves. No, we know they're going to follow whoever goes through the Wild West Gate. So I'll go with them, pose as somebody they're likely to think is you, use a name they'll think is something you'd come up with, something you'd think is clever--"

The teenager interrupted. "You don't look like her. Not anything like her. Nobody would believe you were her. You are too tall."

For the first time, Jenna Nicole Caddrick saw Noah Armstrong completely flummoxed. The detective's mouth opened onto shocked silence. But the kid who spoke Latin—which probably meant he was a down-timer, too, same as Marcus—wasn't finished. "I look more like her than any of us. I'll go in her place. If I dress up like a rich tourist, wear a wig the color of her hair, pretend to be rude and obnoxious, wear a bonnet low over my eyes and swear a lot, the people hunting her," the kid nodded toward Jenna, "will think she's me. Or I'm her. It will work," he insisted. "There is a tour leaving tomorrow that plans to shoot in a special competition, men and women both. I have watched every John Wayne movie ever made, twice, and I have seen thousands of tourists. I can pretend to be a woman cowboy shooter with no trouble at all."

The very fact that he'd come up with the idea in the first place told Jenna a great deal about how much the residents of this time station loathed tourists. Obnoxious and rude . . . It probably would work beautifully, given half a chance. "You realize you're risking your life?" she asked quietly.

The teenager stared her down. "Yes. They have tried to murder Ianira." It was all that needed to be said.

"Julius—" Marcus started to protest.

"No," Julius swung that determined gaze toward his older friend. "If I die, then I will die with honor, protecting people I love. What more can any man ask?"

How did a kid that young end up that wise? Jenna thought about ancient Rome and what men did to other men there and shuddered inside. The fact that she, herself, had done exactly what this boy was volunteering to do didn't even occur to her. Jenna, too, was risking her own life to save Ianira's.

"That's settled, then," Noah said briskly. "Julius, I don't have words to thank you. Right now, I'd better go up to Commons, check into the hotel under the name on my station pass, find an outfitter. You, too, Jenna. I'll need help getting those steamer trunks back to the hotel, and all the gear we've got to buy along with it." The detective glanced at Marcus and Julius. "We'll bring the steamer trunks back right away, get Ianira and the rest of you into a hotel room until the gate goes. We're going to hide you right in the open, in a perfectly ordinary hotel room, and let them tear the basement and the rest of the station apart, looking for you. Then I'm going to establish my Denver persona with a vengeance, draw the attention of the bastards after us, so they'll concentrate on Denver, rather than London. There's going to be one more rude and obnoxious cowboy added to the station's population, today, I believe, the sooner the better. With a name that ought to grab somebody's attention."

The purloined letter . . . Jenna grimaced. She sure as hell didn't have any better ideas. Noah had gotten her out of New York alive. She was pretty sure Noah could get them all out of the station alive, too. Whether or not she and Ianira stayed that way in London was up to Jenna. She prayed she was up to the job. Because there just wasn't anybody else around to do it. Thoughts of her father brought her teeth together, hard and brutal. You're gonna pay for this, you son-of-a-bitch. You'll pay, if it's the last thing I ever do on this earth!

Then she headed up to Commons on Noah Armstrong's heels to fetch a steamer trunk.

Chapter Four

Shangri-La Station was an Escheresque blend of major airport terminal, world-class shopping mall, and miniature city, all tucked away safely inside a massive cavern in the heart of the uplifted limestone massifs of the Himalayan mountains, a cavern which had been gradually enlarged and remolded into one of the busiest terminals in the entire time-touring industry. Portions of the station emerged into the open sunshine on the mountain's flank, or would have, if Shangri-La's engineers hadn't artificially extended that rocky flank to cover the station's outer walls in natural-looking concrete "rock" faces. Because the terminal's main structure followed the maze of the cave system's inner caverns, TT-86 was a haphazard affair that sprawled in unexpected directions, with tunnels occasionally boring their way through solid rock to connect one section of the station with another.

The major time-touring gates all lay in the Commons, of course, a vast area of twisting balconies, insane staircases and ramps, and all the glitter of high-class shops and restaurants that even the most discriminating of billionaires could wish to find themselves surrounded with. But because Commons followed the twists and turns of the immense cavern, there was no straight shot or even line-of-sight view from one end to the other. And station Residential snaked back into even more remote corners and crannies, with apartments tucked in like cells in a beehive designed by LSD-doped honeybees.

The underpinnings of the station descended multiple stories into the mountain's rocky heart, where the nitty-gritty, daily business of keeping a small city operational was carried out. Machinery driven by a miniature atomic pile hummed in the rocky silence. The trickle and rush of running water from natural underground streams and waterfalls could be heard in the sepulchral darkness beyond the station's heating, cooling, and waste-disposal plants. Down here, anybody could hide anything for a period of many months, if not years.

Margo had realized long ago that Shangri-La Station was immense. She just hadn't realized how big it really was. Not until Skeeter Jackson led them down circuitous, narrow tunnels into a maze he clearly knew as well as Margo knew the route from Kit's palatial apartment to her library cubicle. Equally clearly, Skeeter had taken full advantage of this rat's maze to pull swift disappearing acts from station security and irate tourists he'd fleeced, conned, or just plain robbed.

Probably what saved his life when that enraged gladiator was trying to skewer him with a sword, she thought silently. Under Skeeter's direction, their search party broke apart at intervals, combing the corridors and tunnels individually, only to rejoin one another further on. She could hear the footsteps and voices of other search parties off in the distance. The echoes, eerie and distorted, left Margo shivering in the slight underground chill that no amount of central heating could dispel. Occasional screams and girder-bending shrieks drifted down from the enormous pteranodon *sternbergi* which had entered the station through an unstable gate into the era of dinosaurs.

The size of a small aircraft, the enormous flying reptile lived in an immense hydraulic cage that could be hoisted up from the sub-basements right through the floor to the Commons level for "feeding demonstrations." The pterodactyl ate several mountains of fish a day, far more than they could keep stocked through the gates. So the head of pest control, Sue Fritchey, had hatched an ambitious project to keep the big *sternbergi* fed: breeding her own subterranean food supply from an up-time hatchery and any down-time

fingerlings they could bring in. The sub-basement corridors were lined with rows and high-stacked tiers of empty aquariums, waiting to be filled with the next batch of live fingerlings. Piles and dusty stacks of the empty glass boxes left the tunnels under Little Agora and Frontier Town looking like the ghost of a pet shop long since bankrupt, its fish sold below cost or dumped down the nearest toilet.

It was a lonely, eerie place to have to search for a missing friend.

Margo glanced at her watch. How long had they been searching, now? Four hours, twenty minutes. Time was running out, at least for her and anyone else heading down the Britannia Gate. She bit one lip as she glanced at Shahdi Feroz, who represented in one package very nearly everything Margo wanted to be: poised, beautiful, a respected professional, experienced with temporal gates, clocking in nearly as much down time as some Time Tours guides. Time Tours had actually approached Dr. Feroz several times with offers to guide "seance and spiritualist tours" down the Britiannia. She'd turned them down flat, each and every time they'd offered. Margo admired her for sticking by her principles, when she could've been making pots and kettles full of money. Enough to fund her down-time research for the next century or two.

And speaking of down-time research . . .

"Kit," Margo said quietly, "we're running short of time."

Her grandfather glanced around, checked his own watch, frowned. "Yes. Skeeter, I'm sorry, but Margo and Dr. Feroz have a gate to make."

Skeeter turned his head slightly, lips compressed. "I'm supposed to work that gate, too, you know. We're almost directly under Frontier Town now. We finish this section of tunnels, then they can run along and play detective down the Britannia as much as they want."

Margo held her breath as Kit bristled silently; but her grandfather held his temper. Maybe because he, too, could see the agony in Skeeter's eyes. Kit said only, "All right, why don't you take that tunnel?" and nodded toward a corridor that branched off to the left. "Dr. Feroz, perhaps you'd go with Margo? You can discuss last-minute plans for the tour while you search."

Margo squirmed inwardly, but she couldn't very well protest. She was going to spend the next three months of her life in this woman's company. She'd have to face her sooner or later and it might as well be sooner.

Kit pointed down one of the sinuous, winding tunnels. "Take that fork off to the right. I'll go straight ahead. We'll meet you-how much farther?" he asked Skeeter.

"Fifty yards. Then we'll take the stairs up to Frontier Town."

They split up. Margo glanced at Shahdi Feroz and felt her face redden. Margo barely had a high school diploma and one semester of college. She had learned more in Shangri-La's library than she had in that stuffy, impossible up-time school. And she had learned, enormously. But after that mortifying mistake, with Shahdi Feroz correcting her misapprehension about Nichol gangs' weapons of choice, it wouldn't matter that Margo had logged nearly two-hundred hours through the Britannia or that she spoke fluent Cockney. Kit had drilled her until she could not only make sense of the gibberish that passed for Cockney dialect, but could produce original conversations in it, too. Without giving herself too savage a headache, remembering all the half-rhymes and word-replacement games the dialect required. None of that would matter, not when she'd goofed on the very first day, not when Margo's lack of a diploma left her vulnerable and scared.

Shahdi Feroz, however, surprised Margo with an attempted first gesture at friendliness. The scholar smiled hesitantly, one corner of her lips twisting in chagrin. "I did not mean to embarrass you, Miss Smith. If you are to guide the Ripper Watch Tour, then you clearly have the experience to do so."

Margo almost let it go. She wanted badly to have this woman think she really did know what she was doing. But that wasn't honest and might actually be

dangerous, if they got into a tight spot and the scholar thought she knew more than she did. She cleared her throat, aware that her face had turned scarlet. "Thanks, but I'm not, really." The startled glance Dr. Feroz gave her prompted Margo to finish before she lost her nerve. "It's just that I'm in training to be a time scout, you see, and Kit wants me to get some experience doing fieldwork."

"Kit?" the other woman echoed. "You know Kit Carson that well, then, to use his first name? I wish I did."

Some of Margo's nervousness drained away. If Dr. Shahdi Feroz could look and sound that wistful and uncertain, then maybe there was hope for Margo, after all. She grinned, relief momentarily transcending worry and fear for Ianira's family. "Well, yeah, I guess you could say so. He's my grandfather."

"Oh!" Then, startling Margo considerably, "That must be very difficult for you, Miss Smith. You have my sympathy. And respect. It is never easy, to live up to greatness in one's ancestors."

Strangely, Margo received the impression that Shahdi Feroz wasn't speaking entirely of Margo. "No," she said quietly, "it isn't." Shahdi Feroz remained silent, respecting Margo's privacy, for which she was grateful. She and the older woman began testing doors they came to and jotting down the numbers painted on them, so maintenance could check the rooms later, since neither of them had keys. Margo did rattle the knobs and knock, calling out, "Hello? Ianira? Marcus? It's Margo Smith . . ." Nobody answered, however, and the echoes that skittered away down the tunnel mocked her efforts. She bit her lower lip. How many rooms to check, just like these, and how many miles of tunnels? God, they could be anywhere.

No, she told herself, not just anywhere. If they had been killed, the killer would either have needed keys to unlock these doors or would've had to use tools to jimmy the locks. And so far, neither Margo nor Shahdi Feroz had found any suspicious scratches or toolmarks indicating a forced door. So they might still be alive.

Somewhere.

Please, God, let them still be alive, somewhere . . .

Their tunnel twisted around, following the curve of the cavern wall, and re-joined the main tunnel fifty yards from the point they'd left it. Kit was already there, waiting. Skeeter, grim and silent, arrived a moment later.

"All right," Skeeter's voice was weary with disappointment, "that's the whole section we were assigned." The pain in his voice jerked Margo out of her own worry with a stab of guilt. She hadn't lost anything, really, in that goof with Shahdi Feroz, except a little pride. Skeeter had just lost his only friends in the whole world.

"I'm sorry, Skeeter," she found herself saying, surprising them both with the sincerity in her voice.

Skeeter met her gaze steadily for a long moment, then nodded slowly. "Thanks. I appreciate that, Margo. We'd better get back up to Commons, get ready to go through the Britannia." He grimaced. "I'll carry the luggage through, because I agreed to take the job. But I won't be staying."

No, Margo realized with a pang. He wouldn't. Skeeter would come straight back through that open gate and probably kill himself searching, with lack of sleep and forgetting to eat. . . . They trooped wordlessly up the stairs to the boisterous noise of Frontier Town. With the Wild West gate into Denver set to open tomorrow, wannabe cowboys in leather chaps and jingling spurs sauntered from saloon to saloon, ogling the bar girls and pouring down cheap whiskey and beer. Rinky-tink piano music drifted out through saloon doors to mingle with the voices of tourists speculating on the search underway, the fate of the construction workers who'd attacked Ianira, her family, and her acolytes, on the identity of the Ripper, and what sights they planned to see in Denver of 1885 and the surrounding gold-mining towns.

In front of Happy Jack's saloon, a guy with drooping handlebar mustaches, who wore an outlandish getup that consisted of low-slung Mexican sombrero, red silk scarf, black leather chaps, black cotton shirt, black work pants tucked into black, tooled-leather boots, and absurdly roweled silver spurs, was staggering into the crowd, bawling at the top of his lungs. "Gonna win me that medal, y'hear? Joey Tyrolin's the name, gonna win that shootin' match, l'il lady!"

He accosted a tourist who wore a buckskin skirt and blouse. She staggered back, apparently from the smell of his breath. Joey Tyrolin, drunker than any skunk Margo had yet seen in Frontier Town, drew a fancy pair of Colt Single-Action Army pistols and executed an equally fancy roadhouse spin, marred significantly by the amount of alcohol he'd recently consumed. One of the .45 caliber revolvers came adrift mid-air and splashed into a nearby horse trough. Laughter exploded in every direction. A scowl as dark as his clothes appeared in a face that matched his red silk bandanna.

"Gonna win me that shootin' match, y'hear! Joey Tyrolin c'n shoot th' eye outta an eagle at three hunderd yards . . ." He bent, gingerly fishing his gun out of the horse trough.

Margo muttered, "Maybe he'll fall in and drown? God, am I ever glad we're going to London, not Denver."

Kit, too, eyed the pistolero askance. "Let's hope he confines his shooting to that black-powder competition he's bragging about. I've seen far too many idiots like that one go down time to Denver and challenge some local to a gunfight. Occasionally, they choose the wrong local, someone who can't be killed because he's too important to history. Now and again, they come back to the station in canvas bags."

Shahdi Feroz glanced up at him. "I should imagine their families must protest rather loudly?"

"All too often, yes. It's why station management requires the hold harmless waivers all time tourists must sign. Fools have a way of discovering," Kit added with a disgusted glance toward the drunken Joey Tyrolin, who now dripped water all over the Frontier Town floor and any tourist within reach, "that the laws of time travel, like the laws of physics, have no pity and no remorse."

Skeeter said nothing at all. He merely glared at the drunken tourist and clamped his lips, eyes ravaged by a pain Margo could literally feel, it was so strong. Margo reached out hesitantly, touched his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Skeeter. I hope you find them. Tell them . . . tell them we helped look, okay?"

Skeeter had stiffened under her hand. But he nodded. "Thanks, Margo. I'll see you later."

He strode away through the crowd, disappearing past Joey Tyrolin, who teetered and abruptly found himself seated in the horse trough he'd just fished his pistol out of. Laughter floated in Skeeter's wake. Margo didn't join in. Skeeter was hurting, worse than she'd ever believed it possible for him to hurt. When she looked up, she found Kit's gaze on her. Her grandfather nodded, having read what was in her eyes and correctly interpreted it, all without a word spoken. It was one of the reasons she was still a little in awe of him-and why, at this moment, she loved him more fiercely than ever.

"I'll keep looking, too, Imp," he promised. "You'd better scoot if you want to get into costume and get your luggage to the gate on time."

Margo sighed. "Thanks. You'll come see us off?"

He ruffled her hair affectionately. "Just try and keep me away."

She gave him a swift, rib-cracking hug, having to blink salty water out of her eyes. "Love you, Kit," she whispered.

Then she fled, hoping he hadn't noticed the tears.

Time scouting was a tough business.

Just now, Margo didn't feel quite tough enough.

The night dripped.

Not honest rain, no; but a poisonous mist of coal smoke and river fog and steam that carried nameless scents in the coalescing yellow droplets. Above a gleam of damp roofing slates, long curls of black, acrid smoke belched from squat chimney pots that huddled down like misshapen gargoyles against an airborne, sulphurous tide. Far above, an almost forgotten moon hung poised above the city, a sickle-shaped crescent, the tautly drawn bow of the Divine Huntress of the Night, pure as unsullied silver above the foul murk, taking silent aim into the heart of a city long accustomed to asphyxiating beneath its own lethal mantle.

Gas jets from scattered street lamps stung the darkness like impotent bees. The fog dispersed their glow into forlorn, hopeless little pustules of light along wet cobblestones and soot-blackened walls of wood and stone and ancient, crumbling brick. Diffuse smells lurked in eddies like old, fading bruises. The scent of harbor water thick with weeds and dead things afloat in the night drifted in from the river. Wet and half-rotted timbers lent a whiff of salt and moldering fungus. Putrefied refuse from the chamber pots and privies of five million people stung the throat and eyes, fighting for ascendancy over the sickly stench of dead fish and drowned dogs.

The distant, sweet freshness of wet hay and muddied straw eddying down from the enormous hay markets of Whitechapel and Haymarket itself lent a stark note of contrast, reminding the night that somewhere beyond these dismal brick walls, fresh air and clean winds swept across the land. Closer at hand came the stink of marsh and tidal mud littered with the myriad flotsam cast up by the River Thames to lap against the docks of Wapping and Stepney and the Isle of Dogs, a miasma that permeated the chilly night with a cloying stink like corpses too long immersed in a watery grave.

In the houses of respectable folk, rambling in orderly fashion to the west along the river banks and far inland to the north, candleshades and gas lamps had long since been extinguished. But here in the raucous streets of Wapping, of Whitechapel and of Stepney, drunken voices bellowed out the words of favorite drinking tunes. In rented rooms the size of storage bins, huddled in ramshackle brick tenements which littered these darkened streets like cancerous growths, enterprising pimps played the blackmail-profitable game of "arse and twang" with hired whores, unsuspecting sailors, and switchblade knives. Working men and women stood or sat in doorways and windows, listening to the music drifting along the streets from public houses and poor-men's clubs like the Jewish Working Men's Association of Whitechapel, until the weariness of hard work for long, squalid hours dragged them indoors to beds and cots and stairwells for the night. In the darkened, shrouded streets, business of another kind rose sharply with the approach of the wee hours. Men moved in gangs or pairs or slipped singly from shadow to shadow, and plied the cudgels and prybars of their trade against the skulls and window casements of their favorite victims.

Along one particular fog-cloaked street, where music and light spilled heedlessly from a popular gathering place for local denizens, bootheels clicked faintly on the wet cobbles as a lone young man, more a fair-haired boy than a man fully grown, staggered out into the wet night. A working lad, but not in the usual sense of the word, he had spent the better part of his night getting himself pissed as a newt on what had begun as "a quick one down to boozer" and had steadily progressed-through a series of pints of whatever the next-closest local had been selling cheapest-into a rat-arsed drunken binge.

A kerb crawler of indeterminate years appeared from out of the yellow murk and flashed a saucy smile. "You look to be a bloke what likes jolly comp'ny, mate." She took his arm solicitously when he reeled against a sooty brick wall, leaving a dark streak of damp down his once-fine shirt, which had seen

far better days in the fashionable West End. She smiled into his eyes. "What about a four-penny knee trembler t' share wiv a comfy lady?" A practiced hand stole along the front of his shapeless trousers.

He grabbed a handful of the wares for sale, since it was expected and he had at least the shreds of a reputation to maintain, then he sighed dolefully, as though a sluggish, drunken thought had come to him. He carefully slurred his voice into the slang he'd heard on these streets for weeks, now. "Ain't got a four-pence, luv. No ackers a'tall. Totally coals an' coke, 'at's what I am, I've spent the last of what I brung 'ome t'night on thirty-eleven pints."

The woman eyed him more closely in the dim light. "I know 'at voice . . ."

When she got a better look, she let out a disgusted screech and knocked his hand away. "'Oo are you tryin' t'fool, Morgan? Grabbin' like it's me thripenny bits you'd want, when it's cobbler's awl's you'd rather be gropin' after? Word's out, 'bout you, Morgan. 'At Polly Nichols shot 'er mouth good, when she were drunk, 'at she did." The woman shoved him away with a harsh, "Get 'ome t' yer lovin' Mr. Eddy-if th' toff'll 'ave you back, whoever he might be, unnatural sod!" She gave a short, ugly bark of laughter and stalked away into the night, muttering about wasting her time on beardless irons and finding a bloke with some honest sausage and mash to pay her doss money for the night.

The cash-poor-and recently infamous-young drunk reeled at her sharp shove and plowed straight into the damp wall, landing with a low grunt of dismayed surprise. He caught himself ineffectually there and crumpled gradually to the wet pavement. Morgan sat there for a moment, blinking back tears of misery and absently rubbing his upper arm and shoulder. For several moments, he considered seriously what he ought to do next. Sitting in muck on a wet pavement for the remainder of the night didn't seem a particularly attractive notion. He hadn't any place to go and no doss money of his own and he was very far, indeed, from Cleveland Street and the fancy West Side house where he'd once been popular with a certain class of rich toffs-and until tomorrow night, at least, when Eddy would finally bring him the promised money, he would have nothing to buy food, either.

His eyes stung. Damn that bitch, Polly Nichols! She was no better than he was, for all the righteous airs she put on. Just a common slattern, who'd lift her skirts for a stinking fourpence-or a well-filled glass of gin, for that matter. Word on the streets hereabout was, she'd been a common trollop for so many years her own husband had tossed her out as an unfit mother and convinced the courts to rescind the order for paying her maintenance money. Morgan, at least, had plied his trade with respectably wealthy clients; but thinking about that only made the hurt run deeper. The fine West End house had tossed him out, when he'd lost their richest client. Wasn't my fault Eddy threw me over for that bloody mystic of his, with his fancy ways and fine house and his bloody deformed . . .

And Polly Nichols, curse the drunken bitch, had found out about that particular house on Cleveland Street and Morgan's place in it, had shoved him against a wall and hissed out, "I know all about it, Morgan. All about what you let a bloke do t'you for money. I've 'eard you got a little rainy day fund put aside, savin's, like, from that 'ouse what tossed you onto the street. You 'and it over, Morgan, maybe I won't grass on you, eh? Those constables in H Division, now, they might just want to know about an 'andsome lad like you, bendin' over for it."

Morgan had caught his breath in horror. The very last thing Morgan needed was entanglements with the police. Prostitution was bad enough for a woman. A lad caught prostituting himself with another man . . . Well, the death penalty was off the books, but it'd be prison for sure, a nice long stretch at hard labor, and the thought of what would happen to a lad like himself in prison . . . But Morgan had come away from the house on Cleveland Street with nothing

save his clothes, a half-crown his last client had given him as a bonus, which he'd managed to hide from the house's proprietor, and a black eye.

And Eddy's letters.

"Here . . ." He produced the half-crown, handed it over. "It's everything I've got in the world. Please, Polly, I'm starving as it is, don't tell the constables."

"An 'alf a crown?" she screeched. "A mis'erable 'alf crown? Bleedin' little sod! You come from a fine 'ouse, you did, wiv rich men givin' it to you, what do you mean by givin' me nuffink but a miserly 'alf crown!"

"It's all I've got!" he cried, desperate. "They took everything else away! Even most of my clothes!" A harsh, half-strangled laugh broke loose. "Look at my face, Polly! That's what they gave me as a going away present!"

"Copper's'll give you worse'n bruises an' a blacked eye, luv!" She jerked around and started to stalk away. "Constable!"

Morgan clutched at her arm. "Wait!"

She paused. "Well?"

He licked his lips. They were all he had . . . but if this drunken whore sent him to prison, what good would Eddy's letters do him? And he didn't have to give them all to her. "I've got one thing. One valuable thing."

"What's 'at?" She narrowed her eyes.

"Letters . . ."

"Letters? What sort of fool d'you tyke me for?"

"They're valuable letters! Worth a lot of money!"

The narrow-eyed stare sharpened. "What sort o' letters 'ave you got, Morgan, that'd be worth any money?"

He licked his lips once more. "Love letters," he whispered. "From someone important. They're in his handwriting, on his personal stationery, and he's signed them with his own name. Talks about everything he did to me when he visited me in that house, everything he planned to do on his next visit. They're worth a fortune, Polly. I'll share them with you. He's going to give me a lot of money to get them back, a lot of money, Polly. Tomorrow night, he's going to buy back the first one, I'll give you some of the money--"

"You'll give me the letters!" she snapped. "Hah! Share wiv you? I'll 'ave them letters, if you please, y'little sod, you just 'and 'em over." She held out one grasping hand, eyes narrowed and dangerous.

Morgan clenched his fists, hating her. At least he hadn't told the bitch how many letters there were. He'd divided them into two packets, one in his trouser pocket, the other beneath his shirt. The ones in his shirt were the letters Eddy had penned to him in English. The ones in his trouser pocket were the other letters, the "special surprise" Eddy had sent to him during that last month of visits. The filthy tart wouldn't be able to read a word of them. He pulled the packet from his trouser pocket and handed them over. "Here, curse you! And may you have joy reading them!" he added with a spiteful laugh, striding away before she could realize that Prince Albert Victor had penned those particular letters in Welsh.

Now, hours later, having managed to find himself a sailor on the docks who wanted a more masculine sort of sport, Morgan was drunk and bitter, a mightily scared and very lonely lad far away from his native Cardiff. He rubbed his wet cheek with the back of his hand. Morgan had been a fool, a jolly, bloody fool, ever to leave Cardiff, but it was too late, now, to cry about it. And he couldn't sit here on his bum all night, some constable would pass and then he would be spending the night courtesy of the Metropolitan Police Department's H Division.

Morgan peered about, trying to discern shapes through the fog, and thought he saw the dark form of a man nearby, but the fog closed round the shadow again and no one approached nearer, so he decided there was no one about to help him regain his feet, after all. Scraping himself slowly together, he

elbowed his way back up the wall until he was more or less upright again, then coughed and shivered and wandered several yards further along the fog-shrouded street. At times, his ears played tricks with the echoing sounds that spilled out onto the dark streets from distant public houses. Snatches of laughter and song came interspersed faintly with the nearer click of footfalls on pavement, but each time he peered round, he found nothing but swirling, malevolent yellow drifts. So he continued his meandering way down the wet street, allowing his shoulder to bump against the sooty bricks to guide and steady him on his way, making for the hidey hole he used when there was no money for a doss-house bed.

The entrance to a narrow alley robbed him of his sustaining wall. He scudded sideways, a half-swamped sailboat lashed by a sudden and brutal cross-wise gale, and stumbled into the dark alley. He tangled his wobbling feet, met another wet brick wall face on, and barely caught himself from a second ignominious slide into the muck. He was cursing softly under his breath when he heard that same, tantalizing whisper of faint footfalls from behind. Only this time, they were no trick of his hearing. Someone was coming toward him through the fog, hurrying now as he clung to the dirty brick wall in the darkness of the alley.

Another tart, perhaps, or a footpad out to pinch what he didn't any longer possess. Alarm flared slowly through his drunken haze. He started to turn-but it was far too late. A blow from something heavy smashed across his skull from behind. Light exploded behind his eyes in a detonation of pain and terror. Unable even to cry out, he crumpled straight down into darkness.

As Morgan toppled toward the filthy alley, a wiry man in his early thirties, dark-skinned with the look of Eastern Europe in his narrow face and eyes and dark moustaches, caught him under the arms. This second man grunted softly, curling his lip at the reek of alcohol and sweat which rose from the boy's grimy, once fancy clothes. This was no time, however, for fastidiousness. He twisted the boy around with a practiced jerk and heaved the dead weight over one shoulder. A swift glance told him the thick fog and darkness of the narrow alleyway had concealed the attack from any chance observation.

Well, Johnny my boy, he smiled to himself, you've made a good start. Now to finish this pathetic little cockerel. Dr. John Lachley was as pleased with the enshrouding yellow murk as he was with his swift handiwork and the drunken little fool he'd trailed all evening, who'd finally wandered so conveniently close to a place he could strike. He'd feared he might have to trail the boy all the way back to the filthy hole he'd been living in, on the first floor of a ramshackle, abandoned warehouse along the docks, so dilapidated and dangerous it was in the process of being torn down.

Quite a come-down, eh, pretty Morgan?

Dark-haired, dark-eyed, darker-souled, John Lachley moved deeper into the darkness of the alleyway, staggering slightly under his burden until he found his new center of balance. The alley was narrow, clotted with rubbish and stench. A rat's eyes gleamed briefly in the foggy gloom. A street-little wider than the alley he followed-appeared through the murk. He turned to his right, moving toward the invisible docks a mere three blocks away, which were concealed from sight by grim warehouses and tumble-down shacks. Their bricks leaned drunkenly in the night, whole chunks of their walls missing in random patterns of darkness and swirling, jaundiced eddies.

John Lachley's clothes, little cleaner than those of his victim, revealed very little about their current owner; neither did the dark cloth cap he wore pulled low over his eyes. During daylight, his was a face that might well be recognized, even here, where many years ago Johnny Anubis had once been a household name, sought out by the poorest fishwives in search of hope; but in the darkness, in such rough clothing, even a man of his . . . notoriety . . . might go unremarked.

He smiled and paused at the entrance to one of the soot-streaked blocks of ramshackle flats. An iron key from his pocket unlocked a shabby wooden door. He cast a glance overhead and spotted the waning horns of the sickle-shaped moon. He smiled again. "Lovely night for scything, Lady," he said softly to the sharp-edged crescent. "Grant me success in mine, eh?"

Sulphurous fog drifted across the faintly glowing horns of that wicked sickle, seeming almost to catch and tear on the sharp points. He smiled again; then ducked inside, swung his victim's legs and head clear, and locked the door behind him. He needed no light to navigate the room, for it contained nothing but coal dust and scattered bits of refuse. A savage barking erupted from the darkness of the next room, sounding like every hound in hell had been loosed. Lachley spoke sharply. "Garm!"

The barking subsided into low growls. Heaving his burden into a slightly more comfortable position on his shoulder, John Lachley entered the next room and swung shut another heavy door which he located by feel alone. Here he paused to grope along the wall for the gas light. The gas lit with a faint hiss and pop; dim light sprang up. The windowless brick walls were barren, the floor covered with a cheap rug. A wooden bed frame with a thin cotton tick stood along one wall. A battered dry sink held a jug and basin, a lantern, and a grimy towel. An equally battered clothes press leaned drunkenly in one corner. The chained dog crouched at the center of the room stopped growling and thumped its tail in greeting.

"Have a pleasant evening, Garm?" he addressed the dog, retrieving a meat pie from one pocket, which he unwrapped from its greasy newspaper wrapping. He tossed it carelessly to the huge black hound. The dog bounded to its feet and snatched the food mid-air, wolfing it down in one bite. Had anyone besides himself entered this room, the dog would have shredded them to gobbets. Garm had earned his meat pies on more than one occasion.

Lachley dumped his victim onto the bed, then pulled back the rug and prised up a wooden trap door cut into the floorboards. He heaved this to one side, lit the lantern and set it beside the gaping hole in the floor, then retrieved the unconscious boy from the bed and shouldered his inert burden once again. He paused when he approached the edge and felt downward with one foot, finding the top step of a steep, narrow staircase. Lachley descended cautiously into darkness, retrieving his lantern as he moved downward. A wet, fetid smell of mold and damp brick rose to meet him.

Light splashed across a clammy wall where a rusty iron hook protruded from the discolored bricks. He hung the lantern on this, then reached up and dragged the trapdoor back into place. It settled with a scrape and hollow bang. Dust sifted down into his hair and collar, peppering his clothes as well as his victim's. He dusted off his palms, brushed splinters from a sleeve, then rescued his lantern from its hook and continued the descent. His feet splashed at the bottom. Wavering yellow light revealed an arched, circular brick tunnel through the bowels of Wapping, stretching away into blackness in either direction. The filthy brick was chipped and mottled with algae and nameless fungi. He whistled softly as he walked, listening to the echoes spill away like foam from a mug of dark ale.

As Lachley paralleled the invisible Thames, other tunnels intersected the one he'd entered. The sound of rushing water carried through the sepulchral darkness from underground streams and buried rivers—the Fleet River, which had blown up in 1846 from the trapped rancid and fetid gasses beneath the pavements, so toxic was the red muck leaking from the tanneries above; the once-noble Walbrook, which ran through the heart of the City of London; and River Tyburn, which had lent its name to the triple-tree where convicts were hanged at the crossroads—each of them was now confined beneath London's crowded, filthy streets, churning and spilling along their former courses as major sewers dumping into the mighty Thames.

John Lachley ignored the distant roar of water as he ignored the sewer stench permeating the tunnels. He listened briefly to the echoes of his footfalls mingle with the squeals of rats fighting over a dead dog's corpse and the distant sound of mating cats. At length, he lifted his lantern to mark the exact spot where the low entrance loomed. He ducked beneath a dripping brick arch, turned sharp left, and emerged in a narrow, coffin-sized space set with a thick iron door. An brass plaque set into it bore the legend "Tibor."

Since the word was not English, the owner of this door had little fear of its meaning being deciphered should anyone chance to stumble across the hidden chamber. Lachley was not Hungarian by birth, but he knew the Slavic tongues and more importantly, their legends and myths, had studied them almost since boyhood. It amused him to put a name that meant "holy place" on the door of his private retreat from workaday London and its prosaic, steam-engine mentality.

Another key retrieved from a coat pocket grated in the lock; then the stout door swung noiselessly open, its hinges well oiled against the damp. His underground Tibor welcomed him home with a rush of dark, wet air and the baleful glow of perpetual fire from the gas jet he, himself, had installed, siphoning off the requisite fuel from an unsuspecting fuel company's gas mains. Familiar sights loomed in the dim chamber: vaulted ceiling bricks stained with moss and patchy brown mold; the misshapen form of gnarled oak limbs from the great, dead trunk he'd sawn into sections, hauled down in pieces, and laboriously fitted back together with steel and iron; the eternal gas fire blazing at its feet from an altar-mounted nozzle; huddled cloaks and robes and painted symbols which crawled across the walls, speaking answers to riddles few in this city would have thought even to ask; a sturdy work table along one wall, and wooden cabinets filled with drawers and shelves which held the paraphernalia of his self-anointed mission.

The reek of harsh chemicals and the reverberations of long-faded incantations, words of power and dominion over the creatures he sought to control, spoken in all-but-forgotten ancient tongues, bade him welcome as he stepped once more across the threshold and re-entered his own very private Tibor. He dumped his burden carelessly onto the work table, heedless of the crack of his victim's head against the wooden surface, and busied himself. There was much to do. He lit candles, placed them strategically about the room, stripped off his rough working clothes and donned the ceremonial robes he was always careful to leave behind in this sanctuary.

White and voluminous, a mockery of priestly vestments, and hooded with a deep and death-pale hood which covered half his face when he lowered it down, the semi-Druidic robes had been sewn to his specifications years previously by a sweatshop seamstress who had possessed no other way to pay for the divinations she'd come to him to cast for her. He slipped into the robes, shook back the deep hood for now, and busied himself with the same efficient industry which had brought him out of the misery of the streets overhead and into the life he now sought to protect at all cost.

John Lachley searched the boy's appallingly filthy, empty pockets, then felt the crackle of paper beneath Morgan's shirt. When he stripped off his victim, a sense of triumph and giddy relief swept through him: Morgan's letters were tucked into the waistband of his trousers, the foolscap sheets slightly grimy and rumpled. Each had been folded into a neat packet. He read them, curious as to their contents, and damned Albert Victor for a complete and bumbling fool. Had these letters come into the hands of the proper authorities . . .

Then he reached the end and stared at the neatly penned sheets of foolscap.

There were only four letters.

John Lachley tightened his fist down, crushing the letters in his hand, and blistered the air. Four! And Eddy had said there were eight! Where had the little bastard put the other half of the set? All but shaking with rage, he

forced himself to close his fists around empty air, rather than the unconscious boy's throat. He needed to throttle the life out of this little bastard, needed to inflict terror and ripping, agonizing hurt for daring to threaten him, Dr. John Lachley, advisor to the Queen's own grandson, who should one day sit the throne in Victoria's stead . . .

With a snarl of rage, he tossed Morgan's clothing into a rubbish bin beneath the work table for later burning, then considered how best to obtain the information he required. A slight smile came to his lips. He bound the lad's hands and feet, then heaved him up and hauled him across the chamber to the massive oak tree which dominated the room, its gnarled branches supported now by brackets in ceiling and walls.

He looped Morgan's wrist ropes over a heavy iron hook embedded in the wood and left him dangling with his toes several inches clear of the floor. This done, he opened cabinet doors and rattled drawers out along their slides, laying out the ritual instruments. Wand and cauldron, dagger, pentacle, and sword . . . each with meanings and ritual uses not even those semi-serious fools Waite and Mathers could imagine in their fumbling, so-called studies. Their "Order of the Golden Dawn" had invited him to join, shortly after its establishment last year. He had accepted, naturally, simply to further his contacts in the fairly substantial social circles through which the order's various members moved; but thought of their so-called researches left him smiling. Such simplicity of belief was laughable.

Next he retrieved the ancient Hermetic deck with its arcane trumps, a symbolic alphabetical key to the terrible power of creation and transformation locked away aeons previously in the pharaohonic Book of Thoth. After that came the mistletoe to smear the blade, whose sticky sap would ensure free, unstaunchable bleeding . . . and the great, thick-bladed steel knife with which to take the trophy skull . . . He had never actually performed such a ritual, despite a wealth of knowledge. His hands trembled from sheer excitement as he laid out the cards, mumbling incantations over them, and studied the pattern unfolding. Behind him, his victim woke with a slow, wretched groan.

It was time.

He purified the blade with fire, painted mistletoe sap across its flat sides and sharp edge, then lifted his sacred, deep white hood over his hair and turned to face his waiting victim. Morgan peered at him through bloodshot, terrified eyes. Morgan's throat worked, but no sound issued from the boy's bloodless lips. He stepped closer to the sweating, naked lad who hung from Odin's sacred oak, its gnarled branches twisting overhead to touch the vaulted brick ceiling. A ghastly sound broke from his prisoner's throat. Morgan twisted against the ropes on his wrists, to no avail.

Then Lachley shook back his hood and smiled into the lad's eyes.

Blue eyes widened in shock. "You!" Then, terror visibly lashing him, Morgan choked out, "What-what'd I ever do to you, Johnny? Please . . . you got Eddy for yourself, why d'you want to hurt me now? I already lost my place in the house--"

He backhanded the little fool. Tears and blood streamed. "Sodding little ponce! Blackmail him, will you?"

Morgan whimpered, the terror in his eyes so deep they glazed over, a stunned rabbit's eyes. John Lachley let out a short, hard laugh. "What a jolly little fool you are, Morgan. And look at you now, done up like a kipper!" He caressed Morgan's bruised, wet face. "Did you think Eddy wouldn't tell me? Poor Eddy . . . Hasn't the brains God gave a common mollusk, but Eddy trusts me, bless him, does whatever I tell him to." He chuckled. "Spiritualist advisor to the future King of England. I'm at the front of a very long line of men, little Morgan, standing behind the rich and powerful, whispering into their ears what the stars and the gods and the spirits from beyond the grave want them to say

and do and believe. So naturally, when our distraught Eddy received your message, he came straight to my doorstep, begging me to help him hush it all up."

The lad trembled violently where he dangled from the ropes, not even bothering to deny it. Not that denial would have saved him. Or even spared him the pain he would suffer before he paid the price for his schemes. Terror gleamed in Morgan's eyes, dripped down his face with the sweat pouring from his brow. Dry lips worked. His voice came as a cracked whisper. "W-what do you want? I swear, I'll leave England, go back to Cardiff, never whisper a word . . . I'll even sign on as deck hand for a ship out to Hong Kong . . ."

"Oh, no, my sweet little Morgan," Lachley smiled, bending closer. "Hardly that. Do you honestly think the man who controls the future King of England is so great a fool as that?" He patted Morgan's cheek. "The first thing I want, Morgan, is the other four letters."

He swallowed sharply. "H-haven't got them--"

"Yes, I know you haven't got them." He brushed a fingertip down Morgan's naked breastbone. "Who has got them, Morgan? Tell me and I may yet make it easier for you."

When Morgan hesitated, Lachley slapped him, gently.

The boy began shaking, crying. "She-she was going to tell the constables-I hadn't any money left, all I had was the letters-gave her half of them to keep her quiet--"

"Who?" The second blow was harder, bruising his fair skin.

"Polly!" The name was wrenched from him. He sobbed it out again, "Polly Nichols . . . filthy, drunken tart . . ."

"And what will Polly Nichols do with them, eh?" he asked, twisting cruelly a sensitive bit of Morgan's anatomy until the boy cried out in sharp protest. "Show them to all her friends? How much will they want, eh?"

"Wouldn't-wouldn't do any good, all she has is my word they're worth anything--"

He slapped Morgan again, hard enough to split his lips. "Stupid sod! Do you honestly think she won't read your pitiful letters? You are a fool, little boy. But don't ever make the mistake of thinking I am!"

Morgan was shaking his head frantically. "No, Johnny, no, you don't understand, she can't read them! They're not in English!"

Surprise left John Lachley momentarily speechless. "Not in English?" It came out flat as a squashed tomato. "What do you mean, not in English? Eddy doesn't have the intelligence to learn another language. I'm surprised the dear boy can speak his own, let alone a foreign one. Come, now, Morgan, you'll have to do better than that."

Morgan was crying again. "You'll see, I'll get them for you, Johnny, I'll show you, they're not in English, they're in Welsh, his tutor helped him--"

He backhanded the sniveling liar. Morgan's head snapped violently sideways.

"Don't play me for a fool!"

"Please," Morgan whimpered, bleeding from cut lips and a streaming nose, "it's true, why would I lie to you now, Johnny, when you promised you wouldn't hurt me again if I told you the truth? You have to believe me, please . . ."

John Lachley was going to enjoy coercing the truth from this pathetic little liar.

But Morgan wasn't done blubbering yet. His eyes, a watery blue from the tears streaming down his face, were huge and desperate as he babbled out, "Eddy told me about it, right after he sent the first one in Welsh, asked me if I liked his surprise. He thought it was a grand joke, because the ever-brilliant Mr. James K. Stephen--" it came out bitter, jealous, sounding very much, in fact, like Eddy "--was always so smart and learned things so easily and made sure Eddy was laughed at all through Cambridge, because everybody but a few of the dons knew it was Mr. James K. Stephen writing Eddy's translations

in Latin and Greek for him, so Eddy could copy them out correctly in his own hand! He told me about it, how much he paid dear Jamesy for each translation his tutor did for him while they were still at Cambridge! So when Eddy wanted to write letters nobody else could read, he got the dotting Mr. James K. Stephen to help him translate those for him, too, paid him ten sovereigns for each letter, so he wouldn't whisper about them afterwards . . ."

It was, Lachley decided, just possible that Morgan was telling him the truth. Paying his tutor to translate his Latin and Greek at University was very Eddy-like. So was paying the man to translate his love letters, God help them all. He caught Morgan's chin in one hand, tightened down enough to bruise his delicate skin. "And how much did Eddy pay his tutor to keep the secret that he was writing love letters in Welsh to a male whore?"

"He didn't! Tell him, I mean. That I'm a boy. He told Mr. Stephen that 'Morgan' was a pretty girl he'd met, from Cardiff, said he wanted to impress her with letters in her own native Welsh, so Mr. Stephen wouldn't guess Eddy was writing to me. He's not so very bright, Eddy, but he doesn't want to go to prison! So he convinced Mr. Stephen I was a girl and the gullible idiot helped Eddy write them, I swear it, Eddy said he stood over his shoulder and told him all the right Welsh words to use, even for the dirty parts, only when Eddy wrote out the second copies to me in private, he changed all the words you'd use for a girl's body to the right ones for a boy, because he looked that up, himself, so he'd know--"

"Second copies?"

Morgan flinched violently. "Please, Johnny, please don't hit me again! Eddy thought it would be funny, so he sent me the first copies attached to the ones he wrote out especially for me . . ."

His voice faded away as Lachley's white-faced fury sank in, mistaking Lachley's rage honestly enough. My God, the royal bastard is stupider than I thought! If it would do any good, I'd cut off Eddy's bollocks and feed them to him! Any magistrate in England would take one look at a set of letters like that and throw away the bloody key!

He no longer doubted Morgan's sordid little tale about Welsh translations. Eddy was just that much of a fool, thinking himself clever with such a trick, just to impress a money grubbing, blackmailing little whore not fit to sell his wares for a crust of bread, much less royal largesse.

Morgan was gasping out, "It's true, Johnny, I'll prove it, I'll get the letters back and show you . . ."

"Oh, yes, Morgan. We will, indeed get those letters back. Tell me, just where might I find this Polly Nichols?"

"She's been staying at that lodging house at 56 Flower and Dean Street, the White House they call it, rooming with a man, some nights, other nights sharing with Long Liz Stride or Catharine Eddowes, whoever's got the doss money for the night and needs a roommate to share the cost . . ."

"What did you tell Polly Nichols when you gave her the letters?"

"That they were love letters," he whispered. "I didn't tell her who they were from and I lied, said they were on his personal stationery, when they're on ordinary foolscap, so all she'll know is they've been signed by someone named Eddy. Someone rich, but just Eddy, no last name, even."

"Very good, Morgan. Very, very good."

Hope flared in the little fool's wet eyes.

He patted Morgan's cheek almost gently.

Then Lachley brought out the knife.

Chapter Five

The reporters were waiting outside his office building, of course.

Senator Caddrick stepped out of his chauffeured limo and faced the explosion

of camera flashes and television lights with an expression of grief and shock and carefully reddened eyes.

"Senator! Would you comment on this terrorist attack--"

"--tell us how feels to lose your sister-in-law to terrorists--"

"--any word on your daughter--"

Caddrick held up his hands, pled with the reporters. "Please, I don't know anything more than you do. Cassie's dead . . ." He paused, allowing the catch in his voice to circle the globe live via satellite. "My little girl is still missing, her college roommate has been brutally murdered, that's all I know, really . . ." He was pushing his way through the mob, his aide at his side.

"Is it true the terrorists were members of the Ansar Majlis, the down-time organization that's declared jihad against the Lady of Heaven Temples?"

"Will this attack cause you to re-open your campaign to shut down the time terminals?"

"Senator, are you aware that Senator Simon Mukhtar al Harb, a known Ansar Majlis sympathizer, is spearheading an investigation into the Temples--"

"Senator, what do you plan to do about this attack--"

He turned halfway up the steps leading to his office and faced the cameras, allowing his reddened eyes to water. "I intend to find my daughter," he said raggedly. "And I intend to find the bastards responsible for her disappearance, and for murdering poor Cassie . . . If it turns out these down-timer terrorists were responsible for Cassie's murder, if they've kidnapped my only child, then I will do whatever it takes to get every time terminal on this planet shut down! I've warned Congress for years, the down-timers flooding into the stations are a grave threat to the stability of our up-time world. And now this . . . I'm sorry, that's all I can say, I'm too upset to say anything else."

He fled up the steps and into his office.

And deep in his heart, smiled.

Phase Two, successfully launched . . .

Ianira Cassondra regained consciousness while Jenna and Noah were still packing. The faint sound from the hotel bed where she rested brought Jenna around, hands filled with the Victorian notion of ladies' underwear, which she'd purchased specifically for Ianira with Aunt Cassie's money. Jenna would be going through to London in disguise as a young man, something that left her shaking with stage fright worse than any she'd ever experienced. Seeing Ianira stir, Jenna dumped corsets and woolen drawers into an open steamer trunk and hurried over to join Marcus. Noah glanced up from the telephone, where the detective was busy scheduling an appointment with the station's cosmetologist. Armstrong wanted Jenna to go in for some quick facial alterations before the gate opened, to add Victorian-style whiskers to Jenna's too-famous, feminine face. Noah frowned, more reflectively than in irritation, then finished making the appointment and joined them.

Ianira stirred against the pillow. Dark lashes fluttered. Jenna discovered she was clenching her hands around her new costume's trousers belt. The leather felt slippery under the sweat. She realized with a sinking sensation in her gut that it was one thing to carry the prophetess on earth unconscious through the station's basement. It was quite another to gaze eye-to-eye with the embodiment of all that Jenna had come to believe about life and how it ought to be lived. Then Ianira's eyelids fluttered open and Ianira, Cassondra of Ephesus, lay gazing up at her. For a breathless moment, no intelligence flickered in those dark eyes. Then an indrawn breath and a lightning flicker of terror lashed at Jenna. Ianira flinched back, as though Jenna had struck her. Marcus, who knew Ianira better than anyone, surely, pressed the tips of his fingers across her lips.

"Hush, beloved. We are in danger. Cry out and you warn them."

Ianira's gaze ripped away from Jenna's, met her husband's. "Marcus . . ." It was the sound of a drowning soul clinging to a storm-battered, rocky shore. His arms went around her. The former Roman slave lifted her trembling figure, held her close. Jenna had to turn aside. The sight of such intimacy tore through her, a bitter reminder of the emptiness of her own life before Carl, an emptiness which had brought her, shaking and sick in her heart, into the Temple in the first place. The Temple, where she'd found real friendship for the first time in her life, friendship and Carl . . . The loss tore through her, still too new and raw to endure. Across the hotel room, Marcus was speaking, voice low, the words in some language other than English or the Latin he'd used earlier. Greek, probably, since Ianira had come to the station from Athens.

Someone touched Jenna's arm. She glanced up and found Noah watching her. "Yeah?" she asked, voice roughened, uncertain.

"She's asked for you."

Jenna's pulse banged unpleasantly in the back of her throat as she crouched down at the edge of the hotel bed. Ianira's dark, unearthly gaze shook her so deeply she couldn't even dredge up a greeting. When the prophetess lifted a hand, Jenna very nearly flinched back. Then Ianira touched Jenna's brow, slowly. "Why do you Seek," she murmured, "when you already know the answers in your heart?"

The room closed in around Jenna, dizzy and strange, as though voices whispered to her from out of a shimmering haze, voices whose whispered words she could not quite hear. From the depths of the blackness which filled her mind, a blackness which had swallowed nearly all of her childhood—which was far better forgotten than relived in aching emptiness again and again—a single image blazed in Jenna's mind. A woman's smiling face . . . arms held out to her . . . closing around her with a sense of safety and shelter she had not felt since her mother's death, so many years ago, now, it was blurred in her memory. What this sudden memory meant, Jenna wasn't sure, but it left her gasping and sick on her knees, so violently shaken she couldn't even wipe her burning eyes.

Someone crouched beside her, braced Jenna all along one side, wiped her face with a warm, damp cloth. When the stinging, salty blindness had passed, she found Noah gazing worriedly at her. "You okay, kid?"

"Yeah." The fact that it was true shocked her. She was okay. Then it hit her why: she wasn't quite alone any longer. She knew almost nothing about Noah Armstrong, not even the most basic thing one person can know about another—their gender—but she wasn't alone, facing this nightmare. Noah might not be going with her when Jenna stepped through the Britannia Gate a couple of hours from now, but Noah cared. Somehow, it was enough. She managed to meet the enigmatic detective's eyes. "Thanks."

"Sure." Noah gave her a hand up, steadied her.

Jenna turned slowly to face the woman whose presence, whose touch and single question had triggered . . . whatever it had been. "Did—" Jenna had to clear her throat roughly. "Did Marcus tell you what's happened?"

She studied Jenna gravely. "He has told me all that he knows."

Jenna drew breath, trying to find the words to make sense of this. "My father . . ." She stopped, started again, coming at this mess from a different direction, trying to find the words to explain to a woman who had never seen the up-time world and would never be permitted to visit it. "You see, lots of people don't like the Temples. The Lady of Heaven Temples. They've got different reasons, but the prejudice is growing. Some people think Templars are immoral. Dangerous to society. Perverting children, that kind of garbage.

"There's this one group, though . . . down-timers, mostly, coming up-time from the remains of TT-66. They formed a cult to destroy us. The Ansar Majlis hate us, say it's blasphemous to worship a goddess. Rather than their idea of

a god." It came out bitter, shaky. The expression in Ianira's eyes left Jenna gulping, terrified to her bones. She got the rest out in a rush, trying to hold onto her nerve. "As long as the Ansar Majlis were kept bottled up in the Middle East, where they started coming through the down-time gates, they were pretty much harmless. But a lot of people would like to see the Temples destroyed, or at least hurt badly enough they're not a political threat, anymore. Some of the lunatics who live up time have been helping that murdering pack of terrorists . . ."

"Your father," she said quietly. "He is among them."

Jenna didn't have to answer; Ianira knew. Jenna bit one lip, ashamed of the blood in her own veins and furious that she couldn't do anything besides smash Ianira's world to pieces. "He gave the orders, yes. To a death squad. They murdered my mother's sister. And my . . . my best friend from college . . ." Jenna's voice went ragged.

Ianira reached across, touched Jenna's hand. "They have taken him from you," she whispered, the sympathy in her voice almost too much to bear, "but you have his final gift to you. Surely this must bring some consolation, some hope for the future?"

Jenna blinked, almost too afraid of this woman to meet those dark, too-wise eyes. "What . . . what do you mean?"

Ianira brushed fingertips across Jenna's abdomen, across the queasiness which had plagued her for nearly a full week, now. "You carry his child," Ianira said softly.

When the room greyed out and Jenna clutched at the edge of the bed in stupid shock, the prophetess spoke again, very gently. "Didn't you know?"

Someone had Jenna by the shoulders, kept her from falling straight to the floor. Dear God . . . it's not fear sickness, it's morning sickness . . . and I am late, oh, God, I'm going to Victorian London with Daddy's killers trying to find me and I'm carrying Carl's baby. . . . How long would they have to hide in London? Weeks? Months? Years? I can't go disguised as a man, if I'm pregnant! But she had no real choice and she knew it. Her father's hired killers would be searching for a frightened girl in the company of a detective, not a lone young man travelling with several large steamer trunks. When she looked up, she found Ianira's dark gaze fastened on her and, more surprisingly, Noah Armstrong's grey-eyed gaze, filled with worry and compassion.

"You're . . . sure . . . ?" Jenna choked out.

Ianira brushed hair back from Jenna's brow. "I am not infallible, child. But about this, yes, I am certain."

Jenna wanted to break down and cry, wanted to curl up someplace and hide for the next several decades, wanted to be held and rocked and reassured that everything would be all right. But she couldn't. She met Ianira's gaze again. "They'll kill us all, if they can." She wrapped protective arms around her middle, around the miracle of Carl's baby, growing somewhere inside her. A fierce determination to protect that tiny life kindled deep within. "I'd be in a morgue someplace, already, undergoing an autopsy, if Noah hadn't dragged me out of that trap where Aunt Cassie died. I'm not going to let them win. Not if I have to spend the next forty years on the run, until we can find a way to stop them."

"And they have come here," Ianira whispered, fingers tightening around Jenna's arm, "to destroy the world we have built for ourselves."

Jenna wanted to look away from those too-knowing eyes, wanted to crawl away and hide, rather than confirm it. But she couldn't lie to the prophetess, even to spare her pain. "Yes. I'm sorry . . ." She had to stop for a moment, regain her composure. "We can get you off station, make a run for it down time. I don't give a damn about the laws forbidding down-timers to emigrate through a gate."

Ianira's gaze went to her children. Mute grief touched those dark eyes. "They cannot come with me?"

Noah answered, voice firm. "No. We don't dare risk it. They'll find a way to follow us through every gate that opens this week. If we put your children in the same trunk we smuggle you out of the station in, and their assassins get to Jenna . . ."

Ianira Cassondra shuddered. "Yes. It is too dangerous. Marcus . . ."

He gripped her hands hard. "I will guard them. With my life, Ianira. And Julius has pledged to help us escape. No one else must know. Not even our friends, not even the Council of Seven. Julius only knows because he was using the tunnels to run a message from one end of Commons to the other. He found us."

At the look that came into her eyes, a shudder touched its cold finger to Jenna's spine. Ianira's eyelids came clenching down. "The death that stalks us is worse than we know . . . two faces . . . two faces beyond the gates . . . and bricks enclose the tree where the flame burns and blood runs black . . . be wary of the one with grey eyes, death lives behind the smile . . . the letters are the key, the letters bring terror and destruction . . . the one who lives behind the silent gun will strike in the night . . . seeks to destroy the soul unborn . . . will strike where the newborn bells burn bright with the sound of screams . . ." She sagged against her husband, limp and trembling.

Jenna, too, was trembling, so violently she could scarcely keep her feet where she crouched beside the bed.

Marcus glanced up, eyes dark and frightened. "I have never seen the visions come to her so powerfully. Please, I beg of you, be careful with her."

Jenna found herself lifting Ianira's cold hands to warm them. They shook in Jenna's grasp. "Lady," she whispered, "I'm not much good at killing. But they've already destroyed the two people I cared about more than anything in the world. I swear, I will kill anything or anyone who tries to hurt you."

Ianira's gaze lifted slowly. Tears had reddened her eyes. "I know," she choked out. "It is why I grieve."

To that, Jenna had no answer whatever.

Dr. John Lachley had a problem.

A very serious problem.

Polly Nichols possessed half of Eddy's eight letters, written to the now-deceased orphan from Cardiff. Unlike Morgan, however, whom nobody would miss, Polly Nichols had lived in the East End all her life. When she turned up rather seriously dead, those who knew her were going to talk. And what they knew, or recalled having seen, they would tell the constables of the Metropolitan Police Department's H Division. While the police were neither well liked nor respected in Whitechapel, Polly Nichols was, despite her infamous profession. Those who liked and respected her would help the police catch whoever did to her what John Lachley intended to do to anyone who came into possession of Eddy's miserable little letters.

God, but he had enjoyed carving up that little bastard, Morgan . . .

The very memory made his private and unique anatomy ache.

So . . . he must find Polly Nichols, obtain her letters, then cut her up the same delightful way he had cut Morgan, as a message to all blackmailing whores walking these filthy streets, and he must do it without being remarked upon or caught. He would disguise himself, of course, but John Lachley's was a difficult face to disguise. He looked too foreign, always had, from earliest childhood in these mean streets, a gift from his immigrant mother. Lachley knew enough theatrical people, through his illustrious clientele, to know which shops to visit to obtain false beards and so on, but even that was risky. Acquiring such things meant people would recall him as the foreigner

who had bought an actor's bag of makeup and accouterments. That was nearly as bad as being recalled as the last man seen with a murdered woman. Might well prove worse, since being remembered for buying disguises indicated someone with a guilty secret to hide. How the devil did one approach the woman close enough to obtain the letters and murder her, afterwards, without being seen?

He might throw suspicion on other foreigners, perhaps, if he disguised himself as one of the East End's thousands of Jews. A long false beard, perhaps, or a prayer shawl knotted under his overcoat . . . Ever since that Jew, what was his name, Lipski, had murdered that little girl in the East End last year, angry Cockneys had been hurtling insults at foreigners in the eastern reaches of London. In the docklands, so many refugees were pouring in from the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, the very word "foreigner" had come to mean "Jew." Lachley would have to give that serious consideration, throwing blame somehow onto the community of foreigners. If some foreign Jew hanged for Lachley's deeds, so much the better.

But his problem was more complicated than simply tracing Polly Nichols, recovering her letters, and silencing her. There was His Highness' tutor to consider, as well. The man knew too much, far too much for safety. Mr. James K. Stephen would have to die. Which was the reason John Lachley had left London for the nearby village of Greenwich, this morning: to murder Mr. James K. Stephen.

He had made a point of striking up an acquaintance with the man on the riding paths surrounding Greenwich just the morning previously. Lachley, studying the layout of the land Stephen preferred for his morning rides, had casually trailed Stephen while looking for a place to stage a fatal accident. The path Eddy's tutor habitually took carried the riders out into fields where farm workers labored to bring in the harvest despite the appalling rain squalls, then wandered within a few feet of a large windmill near the railway line. Lachley gazed at that windmill with a faint smile. If he could engineer it so that Stephen rode past the windmill at the same time as a passing train

. . . .
So he followed Stephen further along the trail and cantered his horse up alongside, smiling in greeting, and introduced himself. "Good morning, sir. John Lachley, physician."

"Good morning, Dr. Lachley," Eddy's unsuspecting tutor smiled in return. "James Stephen."

He feigned surprise. "Surely not James K. Stephen?"

The prince's former tutor stared in astonishment. "Yes, in fact, I am."

"Why, I am delighted, sir! Delighted! Eddy has spoken so fondly of you! Oh, I ought to explain," he added at the man's look of total astonishment. "His Highness Prince Albert Victor is one of my patients, nothing serious, of course, I assure you. We've become rather good friends over the last few months. He has spoken often of you, sir. Constantly assigns to you the lion's share of the credit for his success at Cambridge."

Stephen flushed with pleasure. "How kind of His Highness! It was my privilege to have tutored him at university. You say Eddy is quite well, then?"

"Oh, yes. Quite so. I use certain mesmeric techniques in my practice, you see, and Eddy had heard that the use of mesmeric therapy can improve one's memory."

Stephen smiled in genuine delight. "So naturally Eddy was interested! Of course. I hope you have been able to assist him?"

"Indeed," John Lachley laughed easily. "His memory will never be the same."

Stephen shared his chuckle without understanding Lachley's private reasons for amusement. As they rode on in companionable conversation, Lachley let fall a seemingly casual remark. "You know, I've enjoyed this ride more than any I can recall in an age. So much more refreshing than Hyde Park or Rotten Row,

where one only appears to be in the countryside, whereas this is the genuine article. Do you ride this way often?"

"Indeed, sir, I do. Every morning."

"Oh, splendid! I say, do you suppose we might ride out together again tomorrow? I should enjoy the company and we might chat about Eddy, share a few amusing anecdotes, perhaps?"

"I should enjoy it tremendously. At eight o'clock, if that isn't too early?"

"Not at all." He made a mental note to check the train schedules to time their ride past that so-convenient windmill. "Eight o'clock it shall be." And so they rode on, chatting pleasantly while John Lachley laid his plans to murder the amiable young man who had helped Eddy with one too many translations.

Early morning light, watery and weak, tried vainly to break through rainclouds as Lachley stepped off Greenwich pier from the waterman's taxi he'd taken down from London. The clock of the world-famous Greenwich observatory struck eight chimes as Lachley rented a nag from a dockside livery stable and met James Stephen, as agreed. The unsuspecting Stephen greeted him warmly. "Dr. Lachley! Well met, old chap! I say, it's rather a dismal morning, but we'll put a good face on it, eh? Company makes the gloomiest day brighter, what?"

"Indeed," Lachley nodded, giving the doomed tutor a cheery smile.

The scent of the River Thames drifted on the damp breeze, mingling with the green smell of swampy ground from Greenwich Marshes and the acrid, harsh smell of coal smoke, but Dr. John Lachley drew a deep, double-lungful and smiled again at the man who rode beside him, who had but a quarter of an hour to live.

Riding down the waterfront, past berths where old fashioned, sail-powered clipper ships and small, iron-hulled steamers creaked quietly at anchor, Lachley and Mr. Stephen turned their nags up King William Walk to reach Greenwich Park, then headed parallel to the river past the Queen's House, built for Queen Anne of Denmark by James the First in 1615. Greenwich boasted none of London's stink, smelling instead of fresh marshes and late-autumn hay and old money. Tudor monarchs had summered here and several had been born in Greenwich palaces. The Royal Naval College, once a Royal Hospital for Seamen, shared the little village on the outskirts of London with the Royal Observatory and the world-famous Greenwich Meridian, the zero line of oceanic navigation.

As they left behind the village with its royal associations, riding out along the bridle path which snaked its way between Trafalgar Road and the railway line, Lachley began sharing an amusing story about Eddy's latest forays into the East End, a low and vulgar habit Eddy had indulged even during his years at Cambridge, in order to drink and make the rounds of the brothels, pubs, and even, occasionally, the street walkers and fourpence whores who could be had for the price of a loaf of bread.

" . . . told the girl he'd give her quid if she'd give him a four-penny knee-trembler and the child turned out to be an honest working girl. Slapped his face so hard it left a hand-print, little dreaming she'd just struck the grandson of the queen. And poor Eddy went chasing after her to apologize, ended up buying every flower in her tray . . ."

They were approaching the fateful windmill Lachley had spied the previous morning. The screaming whistle of a distant train announced the arrival of the diversion Lachley required for his scheme. He smiled to himself and slowed his horse deliberately, to be sure of the timing, leaning down as though concerned his horse might be drawing up lame. Stephen also reined in slightly to match pace with him and to hear the end of the story he was relating.

The train whistle shrieked again. Both horses tossed their heads in a fretting movement. Good . . . Lachley nodded approvingly. A nervous horse

under Mr. James K. Stephen was all the better. The sorrel Stephen rode danced sideways as the train made its roaring, smoking approach. A moment later they were engulfed in a choking cloud of black smoke and raining cinders.

Lachley whipped his hand into his coat pocket and dragged out the lead-filled sap he'd brought along. His pulse thundered. His nostrils dilated. His whole body tingled with electric awareness. His vision narrowed, tunnelling down to show him the precise spot he would strike. They passed the whirling blades of the windmill, engulfed in the deafening roar of the passing train. Now! Lachley reined his horse around in a lightning move that brought him alongside Stephen's sweating mount. Excitement shot through him, ragged, euphoric. He caught a glimpse of James Stephen's trusting, unsuspecting face-

A single, savage blow was all it took.

The thud of the lead sap against his victim's skull jarred Lachley's whole arm, from wrist to shoulder. Pain and shock exploded across Stephen's face. The man's horse screamed and lunged sideways as its rider crumpled in the saddle. The nag bolted straight under the windmill, crowded in that direction by Lachley's own horse and the deafening thunder of the passing train. Stephen pitched sideways out of the saddle, reeling toward unconsciousness. And precisely as Lachley had known it would, one of the windmill vanes caught Stephen brutally across the back of the skull. He was thrown violently to one side by the turning blade. The one-time tutor to Prince Albert Victor Christian Edward landed in a crumpled heap several feet away. Lachley sat watching for a long, shaking moment. The sensations sweeping through him, almost sexual in their intensity, left him trembling.

Then, moving with creditable calm for a man who had just committed his second murder with his own hands—and the first in open view of the public eye—John Lachley wiped the lead sap on his handkerchief and secreted his weapon in his pocket once more. He reined his horse around and tied it to the nearest tree. Dismounting from the saddle, he walked over to the man he'd come here to kill. James K. Stephen lay in a broken heap. Lachley bent down . . . and felt the pulse fluttering at the man's throat.

The bastard was still alive! Fury blasted through him, brought his vision shrieking down to a narrow hunter's focus once more. He stole his hand into his pocket, where the lead sap lay hidden—

"Dear God!" a voice broke into his awareness above the shriek and rattle of the train. Lachley whirled around, violently shaken. Another man on horseback had approached from the trail. The stranger was jumping to the ground, running towards them. Worse, a striking young woman with heavy blond hair sat another horse on the trail, watching them with an expression of shock and horror.

"What's happened?" the intruder asked, reasonably enough.

Lachley forced himself to calmness, drew on a lifetime's worth of deceit and the need to hide who and what he was in order to survive, and said in a voice filled with concern, "This gentleman and I were riding along the trail, here, when the train passed. Something from the train struck him as it went by, I don't know what, a large cinder perhaps, or maybe someone threw something from a window. But his horse bolted quite abruptly. Poor devil was thrown from the saddle, straight under the windmill blades. I'd just reached him when you rode up."

As he spoke, he knelt at Stephen's side, lifted his wrist to sound his pulse, used his handkerchief to bind the deep wound in his head, neatly explaining away the blood on the snowy linen. The stranger crouched beside him, expression deeply concerned.

"We must get him to safety at once! Here . . . cradle the poor man's head and I'll lift his feet. We'll put him in my saddle and I'll ride behind, keep him from falling. Alice, love, don't look too closely, his head's a dreadful sight, covered in blood."

Lachley ground his teeth in a raging frustration and gave the man a

seemingly relieved smile. "Capital idea! Splendid. Careful, now . . ."

Ten minutes later the man he'd come all this way to murder lay in a bed in a Greenwich Village doctor's cottage, in a deep coma and not-as the doctor said with a sad shake of his head-expected to survive. Lachley agreed that it was a terrible tragedy and explained to the village constable what had occurred, then gave the man his name and address in case he were needed again.

The constable said with genuine concern, "Not that there's likely to be any inquest, even if the poor chap dies, it's clearly an accident, terrible freak of an accident, and I appreciate your help, sir, that I do."

The bastard who'd come along at just the wrong instant gave the constable his own name, as well, a merchant down from Manchester, visiting London with his younger sister. Lachley wanted to snatch the lead sap out of his pocket and smash in the merchant's skull with it. Instead, he took his leave of the miserable little physician's cottage while the constable arranged to contact James Stephen's family. It was some consolation, at least, that Stephen was not likely to survive much longer. And, of course, even if Stephen did live, the man would not realize that the blow which had struck him down had been an intentional one. The story of the accident would be relayed to the victim by the constable, the village doctor, even his own family. And if Stephen did survive . . .

There were ways, even then, of erasing the problem he still represented.

The matter being as resolved as he could make it at this juncture, John Lachley set his horse toward Greenwich Village pier for the return trip to London and set his seething mind toward Polly Nichols and the problems she represented.

He was still wrestling with the problem when he returned home to find a letter which had arrived, postmarked, of all places, Whitechapel, London, Liverpool Street Station. "My dearest Dr. Lachley," the missive began, "such a tremendous difference you have made! Many of my symptoms have abated immeasurably since my visit to your office, Friday last. I feel stronger, more well, than I have in many months. But I am still troubled greatly by itching hands and dreadful headaches. I wondered if you would be so good as to arrange another appointment for me in your surgery? I am certain you can do me more good than any other physician in the world. As I have returned to London on business, it would be most kind of you to fit me into your admittedly busy schedule. I eagerly await your response. Please contact me by return post, general delivery, Whitechapel."

It was signed James Maybrick, Esquire.

John Lachley stared at the signature. Then a slow smile began to form. James Maybrick, the murderous cotton merchant from Liverpool . . . With his delightful written diary and its equally delightful confession of murder. And not just any murder, either, but the murder of a whore, by damn, committed by a man with all the motive in the world to hate prostitutes! Maybrick wasn't a Jew, didn't look even remotely foreign. But if Lachley recruited Maybrick into this hunt for Polly Nichols, worked with him, there would be two descriptions for eyewitnesses to hand police, confounding the issue further, throwing the constables even more violently off Lachley's trail. Yes, by damn, Maybrick was just the thing he required.

It was so simple, he very nearly laughed aloud. He would meet the man in Whitechapel this very night, by God, induce a state of drugged mesmeric trance, then turn that lethal rage of his into the perfect killing machine, a weapon he could direct at will against whatever target he chose. And the diary would ensure the man's death at the end of a rope. Lachley chuckled, allowing the seething frustration over his failure to silence the prince's tutor to drop away. He would encourage Maybrick to dutifully record every sordid detail of Polly Nichols' murder, would even place mesmeric blocks in Maybrick's mind to prevent the imbecile from mentioning him in the diary.

James Maybrick was a godsend, by damn, a genuine godsend!

But as he turned his thoughts toward the use he would make of Maybrick, the enormity of the threat Polly Nichols represented drained away his jubilant mood. God, that Nichols bitch had been in possession of the letters long enough, she might have found someone to translate the bloody letters into English! He had to move quickly, that much was certain. Tonight. He would risk waiting no longer than that.

Lachley opened his desk and removed pen, paper, and penny-post stamps, then composed a brief reply to his arsenic-addicted little cotton merchant. "My dear sir, I would be delighted to continue your treatment. It is an honor to be entrusted with your health. I am certain I can make a changed man of you. Please call upon me in my Cleveland Street surgery this evening by eight P.M. If you are unable to keep this appointment, please advise me by telegram and we will arrange a mutually agreeable time."

He left the house to post the letter, himself, wanting to be certain it would go out in plenty of time for the late afternoon mail delivery bound for Liverpool Street Station, Whitechapel—no more than a handful of miles from his house in Cleveland Street. London was the envy of Europe for its mail service, with multiple pickups a day and delivery times of only a few hours, particularly for general delivery mail service. Lachley smiled to himself and whistled easily as he strolled past the fashionable artists' studios which lined Cleveland Street, giving it the air of respectability and fashion its other, less reputable inhabitants could never hope to achieve. Men of wealth and high station patronized the studios on Cleveland Street, commissioning paintings for their homes, portraits of their wives and progeny, immortalizing themselves on the canvasses of talented artists like Walter Sickert and the incomparable Vallon, who'd recently painted a canvas which the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, had just purchased for the astonishing sum of five hundred pounds, merely because members of his family were included in the work.

John Lachley had chosen Cleveland Street for his residence because of its association with the highly fashionable artistic community. Here, a mesmeric physician and occultist appeared to his wealthy clientele as a model of staid respectability compared with the somewhat more Bohemian artists of the district. Lachley knew perfectly well he would have been considered outlandish in more sedate surroundings such as Belgravia. So to Cleveland Street he had come, despite the reputations of one or two of its pubs and houses, which catered to men of Eddy's persuasion. And it was in Cleveland Street where he had first met the darling prince Albert Victor Christian Edward and turned that chance meeting to his considerable advantage. His scheme was certainly paying handsome dividends.

All he had to do now was protect his investment.

Polly Nichols didn't yet know it, but she had less than a day to live. Lachley hoped she spent it enjoying herself. He certainly intended to enjoy her demise. He hastened his footsteps, eager to post his letter and set into motion the events necessary to bring him to that moment. James Maybrick would make the perfect weapon. Why, he might even let Maybrick have the knife, once Lachley, himself, had vented his rage.

He chuckled aloud and could have kissed the fateful letter in his gloved hand.

Tonight, he promised Polly Nichols. We meet tonight.

When Margo arrived at the Britannia Gate's departures lounge, Victoria Station had taken on the chaotic air of a tenting circus in the process of takedown for transit to the next town. Not a cafe table in sight, either on the Commons floor or up on one of the balconies, could be had for less than a minor king's ransom and it was standing room only on every catwalk and balcony overlooking Victoria Station. If many more spectators tried to crowd onto the

concrete and steel walkways up there, they'd have balconies falling three and four stories under the weight.

Besides the ordinary onlookers, the loons were out in force, as well, carrying placards and holding up homemade signs. Delighted news crews filmed the chaos while Ripperoons and assorted lunatics gave interviews to straight-faced camera operators about how Lord Jack was going to appear through an unstable gate created by a passing meteor and step off into the open Britannia amidst a host of unheavenly demons charged with guarding his most unsacred person from all earthly harm . . .

It might almost have been funny if not for the handful of real crazies demanding to be allowed through, tickets or no tickets, to serve their lord and master in whatever fashion Jack saw fit. Margo, jockeying for position in the crowd, trying to get her luggage cart through, stumbled away from one wild-eyed madman who snatched at her arm, screaming, "Unchaste whore! Jack will see your sins! He will punish you in this ripping time . . ." Margo slipped out of his grasp and left him windmilling for balance, unprepared for someone who knew Aikido.

Security arrived a moment later and Margo waved at Wally Klontz as the nutcase came after her again. "Wally! Hey! Over here!"

"What's the prob-oh, shit!" Wally snatched out handcuffs and grabbed the guy as he lunged again at Margo and screamed obscenities. More security waded in as a couple of other frenzied nutcases protested the man's removal. Violence broke out in a brief, brutish scuffle that ended with Margo gulping down acid nervousness while security agents hauled away a dozen seriously deranged individuals—a couple of them in straightjackets. Standing in the midst of a wide-eyed crowd of onlookers and glassy camera lenses, Margo brought her shudders under control and shoved her way past news crews who thrust microphones and cameras into her face.

"Aren't you Margo Smith, the Time Tours special guide for the Ripper Watch—"

"—true you're training to become a time scout?"

"—give us your feelings about being accosted by a member of a 'Jack is Lord' cult—"

"No comment," she muttered again and again, using the luggage cart as a battering ram to force the newsies aside. If things were this bad on station . . . What was it really going to be like in London's East End, when the Ripper terror struck?

And what if it'd been one of those madmen who'd grabbed Ianira? As a sacrifice to Jack the Ripper? It didn't bear thinking about. Margo thrust the thought firmly aside and turned her luggage over to Time Tours baggage handlers, securing her claim stubs in her reticule, then lunged for the refuge of the departures lounge, where the news crews could follow her only with zoom lenses and directional microphones. It wasn't privacy, but it was the best she could do under the circumstances and Margo had no intention of giving anybody an interview about anything.

Once in the Time Tours departures lounge, she searched the crowd, looking for her new charges, Shahdi Feroz and the two journalists joining the Ripper Watch Team. She'd made one complete circuit of the departures area and was beginning to quarter it through the center when the SLUR-TV theme music swelled out over the crowds jamming Commons and a big screen television came to life. Shangri-La's new television anchor, Booth Hackett, voiced the question of the hour in booming tones that cut across the chaos echoing through Commons.

"It's official, Shangri-La Station! Ripper Season is underway and the entire world is asking, who really was Jack the Ripper? The list of suspects is impressive, the theories about conspiracies in high-government offices as convoluted as any modern conspiracy theorist could want. In an interview taped several hours ago with Dr. Shahdi Feroz, psycho-social historical

criminologist and occult specialist for the team . . ."

Margo tuned it out and kept hunting for the Ripper scholar and wayward journalists, who should've been here by now. She wasn't interested in what that ghoul, Hackett, had to say and she already knew all the theories by heart. Kit had made sure of that before consenting to send her down the Britannia. First came the theories involving cults and black magic—hence Shahdi Feroz's inclusion on the team. Robert Donston Stephenson, who had claimed to know the Ripper and his motives personally and was at the top of several suspect lists, had been a known Satanist and practitioner of black magic. Aleister Crowley was on the cult-member suspect list, as well, although the evidence was slim to non-existent. Neither man, despite individual notoriety, fit the profile of a deranged psychopathic killer such as the Ripper. Margo wasn't betting on either of them.

She didn't buy any of the Mary Kelly theories, either—and some of them were among the weirdest of all Ripper theories. Honestly, Queen Victoria ordering the Prime Minister to kill anyone who knew that her grandson had secretly married a Catholic prostitute and fathered a daughter by her, guaranteeing a Catholic heir to the throne? Not to mention the Prime Minister drafting his pals in the Masonic Temple to re-enact some idiot's idea of Masonic rituals on the victims? It was just too nutty, not to mention the total lack of factual support. And she didn't think Mary Kelly's lover, the unemployed fish porter Joseph Barnett, had cut her up with one of his fish-gutting knives, either, despite their having quarrelled, or that he'd killed the other women to "scare" her off the streets. No, the Mary Kelly theories were just too witless

. . .

"You are looking very irritated, Miss Smith."

Margo jumped nearly out of her skin, then blinked and focused on Shahdi Feroz' exquisite features. "Oh! Dr. Feroz . . . I, uh, was just looking . . ." She shut up, realizing it would come out sounding like she was irritated with the scholar if she said "I was looking for you," then turned red and stammered out, "I was thinking about all those stupid theories." She nodded toward the big-screen television where Dr. Feroz' taped interview was still playing, then added, "I mean, the ones about Mary Kelly."

Shahdi Feroz smiled. "Yes, there are some absurd ones about her, poor creature."

"You can say that again! You're all checked in and your luggage is ready?"

The scholar nodded. "Yes. And—oh bother!"

Newsies. Lots of them. Leaning right across the departures lounge barricades, with microphones and cameras trained on Shadhi Feroz and Margo. "This way!" Margo dragged the scholar by the wrist to the most remote corner of the departures lounge, putting a mass of tourists between themselves and the frustrated news crews. As Margo forced their way through, speculation flew wild amongst the tourists milling around them in every direction, eager to depart.

"—I think it was the queen's grandson, himself, not just some alleged lover."

"The queen's grandson? Duke of Clarence? Or rather, Prince Albert Victor? He wasn't named Duke of Clarence until after the Ripper murders. Poor guy. He's named in at least three outlandish theories, despite unshakable alibis. Like being several hundred miles north of London, in Scotland, for God's sake, during at least one of the murders . . ."

A nearby Time Tours guide in down-time servant's livery, was saying, "Ducks, don't you know, just everybody wants it to've been a nice, juicy royal scandal. Anytime a British royal's involved in something like the Ripper murders or the drunk-driving death of the Princess of Wales, back near the end of the twentieth century, conspiracy theories pop up faster than muckraking reporters are able to spread 'em round."

They finally gained the farthest corner, out of sight of reporters, if not out of earshot of the appalling noise loose in Victoria Station. "Thank you, my dear," Shadhi breathed a sigh. "I should not be so churlish, I suppose, but I am tired and reporters . . ." She gave an elegant shrug of her Persian shoulders, currently clad in Victorian watered silk, and added with a twinkle in her dark eyes, "So you believe none of the theories about Mary Kelly?"

"Nope."

"Not even the mad midwife theory?"

Margo blinked. Mad midwife? Uh-oh . . .

Shadhi Feroz laughed gently. "Don't be so distressed, Miss Smith. It is not a commonly known theory."

"Yes, but Kit made me study this case inside out, backwards and forwards--"

"And you have been given, what? A few days, at most, to study it? I have spent a lifetime puzzling over this case. Don't feel so bad."

"There really is a mad midwife theory?"

Shadhi nodded. "Oh, yes. Mary Kelly was three months pregnant when she died. With a child she couldn't afford to feed. Abortions were illegal, but easily obtained, particularly in the East End, and usually performed by midwives, under appalling conditions. And midwives could come and go at all hours, without having to explain blood on their clothing. Even Inspector Abberline believed they might well be looking for a woman killer. This was based on testimony of a very reliable eyewitness to the murder of Mary Kelly. Abberline couldn't reconcile the testimony any other way, you see. A woman was seen wearing Mary Kelly's clothes and leaving her rented room the morning she was killed, several hours after coroners determined that Mary Kelly had died."

Margo frowned. "That's odd."

"Yes. She was seen twice, once between eight o'clock and eight-thirty, looking quite ill, and again about an hour later outside the Britannia public house, speaking with a man. This woman was seen both times by the same witness, a very sober and reliable housewife who lived near Mary Kelly, Mrs. Caroline Maxwell. Her testimony led Inspector Abberline to wonder if the killer might perhaps be a deranged midwife who dressed in the clothing of her victim as a disguise. And there certainly were clothes burned in Mary Kelly's hearth, shortly after the poor girl was murdered."

"But she died at four A.M.," Margo protested. "What would've kept her busy in there for a whole four hours? And what about the mutilations?"

"Those," Shadhi Feroz smiled a trifle grimly, "are two of the questions we hope to solve. What the killer did between Mary Kelly's death and his or her escape from Miller's Court, and why."

Margo shivered and smoothed her dress sleeves down her arms, trying to smooth the goose chills, as well. She didn't like thinking about Mary Kelly, the youngest and prettiest of the Ripper's victims, with her glorious strawberry blond hair. Margo's memories of her mother were sharp and terrible. Long, thick strawberry blond hair, strewn across the kitchen floor in sticky puddles of blood . . .

The less Margo recalled about what her mother had been and how she'd died, the better. "A mad midwife sounds nutty to me," she muttered. "As nutty as the other theories about Mary Kelly. Besides, there probably was no such person, just a police inspector groping for a solution to fit the testimony."

Shadhi Feroz chuckled. "You would be wrong, my dear, for a mad midwife did, in fact exist. Midwife Mary Pearcey was arrested and hanged for slashing to death the wife and child of her married lover in 1890. Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle suggested the police might have been searching for a killer of the wrong gender. He wrote a story based on this idea."

"That Sherlock Holmes should've been searching for Jill the Ripper, not Jack the Ripper?"

Shadhi Feroz laughed. "I agree with you, it isn't very likely."

"Not very! I mean, women killers don't do that sort of thing. Chop up their victims and eat the parts? Do they?"

The Ripper scholar's expression sobered. "Actually, a woman killer is quite capable of inflicting such mutilations. Criminologists have long interpreted such female-inflicted mutilations in a psychologically significant light. While lesbianism is a perfectly normal biological state for a fair percentage of the population and lesbians are no more or less likely than heterosexuals or gays to fit psychologically disturbed profiles, nonetheless there is a pattern which some lesbian killers do fit."

"Lesbian killers?"

"Yes, criminologists have known for decades that one particular profile of disturbed woman killer, some of whom happen to be lesbians, kill their lovers in a fit of jealousy or anger. They often mutilate the face and breasts and sexual organs. Which the Ripper most certainly did. A few such murders have been solved only after police investigators stopped looking for a male psychotically deranged sexual killer and began searching, instead, for a female version of the psychotic sexual killer."

Margo shuddered. "This is spooky. What causes it? I mean, what happens to turn an innocent little baby into something like Jack the Ripper? Or Jill the Ripper?"

Shahdi Feroz said very gently, "Psychotic serial killers are sometimes formed by deep psychological damage, committed by the adults who have charge of them as young children. It's such a shocking tragedy, the waste of human potential, the pain inflicted. . . . The adults in such a person's life often combine sexual abuse with physical abuse, severe emotional abuse, and utter repression of the child's developing personality, robbery of the child's power and control over his or her life, a whole host of factors. Other times . . ." She shook her head. "Occasionally, we run across a serial killer who has no such abuse in his background. He simply enjoys the killing, the power. At times, I can only explain such choices as the work of evil."

"Evil?" Margo echoed.

Shahdi Feroz nodded. "I have studied cults in many different time periods, have looked at what draws disturbed people to pursue occult power, to descend into the kind of killing frenzy one sees with the psychotic killer. Some have been badly warped by abusers, yet others simply crave the power and the thrill of control over others' lives. I cannot find any other words to describe such people, besides a love of evil."

"Like Aleister Crowley," Margo murmured.

"Yes. Although he is not very likely Jack the Ripper."

Margo discovered she was shuddering inside, down in the core of herself, where her worst memories lurked. Her own father had been a monster, her mother a prostitute, trying to earn enough money to pay the bills when her father drank everything in their joint bank account. Margo's childhood environment had been pretty dehumanized. So why hadn't she turned out a psychopath? She still didn't get it, not completely. Maybe her parents, bad as they'd been, hadn't been quite monstrous enough? The very thought left her queasy.

"Are you all right?" Shahdi asked in a low voice.

Margo gave the scholar a bright smile. "Sure. Just a little weirded out, I guess. Serial killers are creepy."

"They are," Shahdi Feroz said softly, "the most terrifying creation the human race has ever produced. It is why I study them. In the probably vain hope we can avoid creating more of them."

"That," Margo said with a shiver, "is probably the most impossible quest I've ever heard of. Good luck. I mean that, too."

"What d'you mean, Miss Smith?" a British voice said in her ear. "Good luck with what?"

Margo yelped and came straight up off the floor, at least two inches

airborne; then stood glaring at Guy Pendergast and berating herself for not paying better attention. Some time scout trainee you are! Stay this unfocused and some East End blagger's going to shove a knife through your ribcage. . . . "Mr. Pendergast. I didn't see you arrive. And Miss Nosette. You've checked in? Good. All right, everybody's here. We've got—" she craned her head to look at the overhead chronometers "-eleven minutes to departure if you want to make any last-minute purchases, exchange money, buy a cup of coffee. You've all got your timecards? Great. Any questions?" Please don't have any questions . . .

Guy Pendergast gave her a friendly grin. "Is it true, then?"

She blinked warily at him. "Is what true?"

"Are you really bent on suicide, trying to become a time scout?"

Margo lifted her chin a notch, a defiant cricket trying to impress a maestro musician with its musicality. "There's nothing suicidal about it! Scouting may be a dangerous profession, but so are a lot of other jobs. Police work or down-time journalism, for instance."

Pendergast chuckled easily. "Can't argue that, not with the scar I've got across me arse-oh, I beg pardon, Miss Smith."

Margo almost relaxed. Almost. "Apology accepted. Whenever I'm in a lady's attire," she brushed a hand across the watered silk of her costume, "please watch your speech in my presence. But," and she managed a smile, "when I put on my ragged boy's togs or the tattered skirts of an East End working woman, don't be shocked at the language I start using. I've been studying Cockney rhyming slang until I speak it in my dreams at night. One thing I'm learning as a trainee scout is to fit language and behavior to the role I play down time."

"I don't know about the rest of the team," Dominica Nosette flashed an abruptly dazzling smile at Margo and held out a friendly hand, completely at odds with her belligerence over the shooting lesson, "but I would be honored to be assigned to you for guide services. And of course, the London New Times will be happy to pay you for any additional services you might be willing to render."

Margo shook Dominica's hand, wondering what, exactly, the woman wanted from her. Besides the scoop of the century, of course. "Thank you," she managed, "that's very gracious, Ms. Nosette."

"Dominica, please. And you'll have to excuse my scapegrace partner. Guy's manners are atrocious."

Pendergast broke into a grin. "Delighted, m'dear, can't tell you how delighted I am to be touring with the famous Margo Smith."

"Oh, but I'm not famous."

He winked, rolling a sidewise glance at his partner. "Not yet, m'dear, but if I know Minnie, your name will be a household word by tea time."

Margo hadn't expected reporters to notice her, not yet, anyway, not until she'd really proved herself as an independent scout. All of which left her floundering slightly as Dominica Nosette and Guy Pendergast and, God help her, Shahdi Feroz, waited for her response. What would Kit want me to do? To say? He hates reporters, I know that, but he's never said anything about what I should do if they talk to me . . .

Fortunately, Doug Tanglewood, another of the guides for the Ripper Watch tour, arrived on the scene looking nine feet tall in an elegant frock coat and top hat. "Ah, Miss Smith, I'm so glad you're here. You've brought the check-in list? And the baggage manifests well in hand, I see. Ladies, gentlemen, Miss Smith is, indeed, a time scout in training. And since we will be joining her fiancé in London, I'm certain she would appreciate your utmost courtesy to her as a lady of means and substance."

Guy Pendergast said in dismay, "Fiancé? Oh, bloody hell!" and gave a theatrical groan that drew chuckles from several nearby male tourists. Doug Tanglewood smiled. "And if you would excuse us, we have rather a great deal to

accomplish before departure."

Doug nodded politely and drew Margo over toward the baggage, then said in a low voice, "Be on your guard against those two, Miss Smith. Dominica Nosette and Guy Pendergast are notorious, with a reputation that I do not approve of in the slightest. But they had enough influence in the right circles to be added to the team, so we're stranded with them."

"They were very polite," she pointed out.

Tanglewood frowned. "I'm certain they were. They are very good at what they do. Just bear this firmly in mind. What they do is pry into other people's lives in order to report the sordid details to the world. Remember that, and there's no harm done. Now, have you seen Kit? He's waiting to see you off."

Margo's irritation fled. "Oh, where?"

"Across that way, at the barricade. Go along, then, and say goodbye. I'll take over from here."

She fled toward her grandfather, who'd managed to secure a vantage point next to the velvet barricade ropes. "Can you believe it? Eight minutes! Just eight more minutes and then, wow! Three and a half months in London! Three and a half very hard months," she added hastily at the beginnings of a stern glower in her world-famous grandfather's eyes.

Kit kept scowling, but she'd learned to understand those ferocious scowls during the past several months. They concealed genuine fear for her, trying to tackle this career when there was so much to be learned and so very much that could go wrong, even on a short and relatively safe tour. Kit ruffled her hair, disarranging her stylish hat in the process. "Keep that in mind, Imp. Do you by any chance remember the first rule of surviving a dangerous encounter on the streets?"

Her face went hot, given her recent lapses in attention, but she shot back the answer promptly enough. "Sure do! Don't get into it in the first place. Keep your eyes and ears open and avoid anything that even remotely smells like trouble. And if trouble does break, run like hel-eck." She really was trying to watch her language. Ladies in Victorian London did not swear. Women did, all the time; ladies, never.

Kit chuckled her gently under the chin. "That's my girl. Promise me, Margo, that you'll watch your back in Whitechapel. What you ran into before, in the Seven Dials, is going to look like a picnic, compared with the Ripper terror. That will blow the East End apart."

She bit her lower lip. "I know. I won't lie," she said in a sudden rush, realizing it was true and not wanting to leave her grandfather with the impression that she was reckless or foolhardy—at least, not any longer. "I'm scared. What we're walking into . . . The Ripper's victims weren't the only women murdered in London's East End during the next three months. And I can only guess what it's going to be like when the vigilance committees start patrolling the streets and London's women start arming themselves out of sheer terror."

"Those who could afford it," Kit nodded solemnly. "Going armed in that kind of explosive atmosphere is a damned fine idea, actually, so long as you keep your wits and remember your training."

Margo's own gun, a little top-break revolver, was fully loaded and tucked neatly into her dress pocket, in a specially designed holster Connie Logan had made for her. After her first, disastrous visit to London's East End with this pistol, Margo had drilled with it until she could load and shoot it blindfolded in her sleep. She just hoped she didn't need to use it, ever.

Far overhead, the station's public address system crackled to life. "Your attention please. Gate Two is due to cycle in two minutes. All departures . . ."

"Well," Margo said awkwardly, "I guess this is it. I've got to go help Doug Tanglewood herd that bunch through the gate."

Kit smiled. "You'll do fine, Imp. If you don't, I'll kick your busted backside up time so fast, it'll make your head swim!"

"Hah! You and what army?"

Kit's world-famous jack-o-lantern grin blazed down at her. "Margo, honey, I am an army. Or have you forgotten your last Aikido lesson?"

Margo just groaned. She still had the bruises. "You're mean and horrible and nasty. How come I love you?"

Kit laughed, then leaned over the barricade to give her a hug. "Because you're as crazy as I am, that's why." He added in a sudden, fierce whisper, "Take care of yourself!"

Margo hugged him tight and gave him a swift kiss on one lean, weathered cheek. "Promise."

Kit's eyes were just a hint too bright, despite the now-familiar scowl. "Off with you, then. I'll be waiting to test you on everything you've learned when you get back."

"Oh, God . . ." But she was laughing as she took her leave and found Douglas Tanglewood and their charges. When the Britannia Gate finally rumbled open and Margo started up the long flight of metal stairs, her computerized scout's log and ATLS slung over her shoulder in a carpet bag, Margo's heart was pounding as fast as the butterflies swooping and circling through her stomach. Three and a half months of Ripper Watch Tour wasn't exactly scouting . . . but solving the most famous serial murder of all time was just about the next best thing. She was going to make Kit proud of her, if it was the last thing she ever did. Frankly, she could hardly wait to get started!

Chapter Six

Polly Nichols needed a drink.

It'd been nearly seven hours since her last glass of gin and she was beginning to shake, she needed another so badly. There was no money in her pockets, either, to buy more. Worse, trade had been miserably slow all day, everywhere from the Tower north to Spitalfields Market and east to the Isle of Dogs. Not one lousy whoreson during the whole long day had been willing to pay for the price of a single glass of gin to calm her shaking nerves. She hadn't much left to sell, either, or pawn, for that matter.

Polly wore cheap, spring-sided men's boots with steel-tipped heels, which might've been worth something to a pawn broker, had she not cut back the uppers to fit her small legs and feet. Worse, without boots, she could not continue to ply her trade. With rain falling nearly every day and an unnatural chill turning the season cold and miserable, she'd catch her death in no time without proper boots to keep her feet warm and dry.

But, God, how she needed a drink . . .

Maybe she could sell her little broken mirror. Any mirror was a valuable commodity in a doss house—which made Polly reluctant to give it up. For a woman in her business, a mirror was an important professional tool. She frowned. What else might she be able to sell? Her pockets were all but empty as she felt through them. The mirror . . . her comb . . . and a crackle of paper. The letters! Her fingers trembled slightly as she withdrew the carefully folded sheets of foolscap. That miserable little puff, Morgan, had lied to her about these letters. There was no name on the paper, other than a signature. She suspected she could figure out who the letter-writer was if she could only get the letters translated from Welsh into English. A translation would make Polly a rich woman. But that wouldn't get her a drink right now.

Well, she could always sell some of the letters, couldn't she? With the agreement that as soon as they found out the identity of the author, they would share the spoils between them. Or, if Polly found out quickly enough, she might simply buy them back by saying she'd had them translated and Morgan had lied to her and the letters were worthless. Yes, that was what she would

do. Sell three of the four now, to get her gin money, then get them back with a lie and figure out who to blackmail with the whole set of four. But who to convince to buy them in the first place?

It must be someone as desperate for money as herself, to buy into the scheme. But it couldn't be anyone like an ordinary pawn broker. No, it had to be someone she could trust, someone who would trust her. That left one of a few friends she had made on the streets. Which meant she wouldn't be able to get much up front. But then, Polly didn't need much right now, just enough to buy herself a few glasses of gin and a bed for a night or two. She could always get the letters back the moment she had money from her next paying customer, if it came to that.

The decision as to which of her friends to approach was made for her when Polly saw Annie Chapman walking down Whitechapel Road. Polly broke into a broad smile. Annie Chapman was a prostitute, same as herself, and certainly needed money. Dark Annie ought to buy into a blackmail scheme, all right. Annie was seriously ill, although to look at her, a body wouldn't guess it. But she was dying slowly of a lung and brain ailment which had put her into workhouse infirmaries occasionally and siphoned much of what she earned on the streets for medicines.

Yes, Annie ought to be quite interested in making a great deal of money quickly.

"Well, if it isn't Annie Chapman!" she said with a bright smile.

The other woman was very small, barely five feet tall, but stoutly built, with pallid skin and wide blue eyes and beautiful teeth that Polly, herself, would have given much to be able to flash at a customer when she smiled. Annie's dark brown hair was wavy and had probably been lustrous before her illness had struck. Her nose was too thick for beauty and at forty-five she was past her best years, but she was a steady little individual, meeting life quietly and trying to hold on in the face of overwhelming poverty, too little to eat, and an illness that sapped her strength and left her moving slowly when she was able to walk at all.

Annie Chapman smiled, genuinely pleased by the greeting. "Polly, how are you?"

"Oh, I'm good, Annie, I'm good. I'd be better if I 'ad a gin or two, eh?"

The two women chuckled for a moment. Annie was not the drinker Polly was, but the other woman enjoyed her rum, when there was enough money to be spared for it, same as most other women walking these dismal streets.

"Say, Annie, 'ow's your 'ealth been these past few weeks?"

The other woman's eyes darkened. "Not good," she said quietly, with a hoarse rasp in her voice. "It's this rain and cold. Makes my lungs ache, so it's hard to breathe." She sounded like it hurt her to breathe.

"I'd imagine a good bit more money would 'elp, eh? Maybe even enough to take you someplace warm and dry, right out o' London?"

"Daft, are you, love?" Annie laughed, not unkindly. "Now, just tell me Polly, how would I get that sort of money?"

Polly winked and leaned close. "Well, as it 'appens I just might be set to come into a small fortune, y'see. And I might be willin' to share it." She showed Annie the letters in her pocket and explained her scheme-and let on like she knew who the author was and was only willing to share the money because she was totally broke, herself, and needed a bed for the night. When she finished her proposition, Annie glared at her. "But Polly! That's blackmail!" The anger in the other woman's eyes and rasping voice astonished Polly.

She drew herself up defensively. "An' if it is? Bloke should 'ave thought of that before 'e went about dippin' 'is Hampton into a bloke's arse'ole! Besides, Annie, this 'ere bastard's rich as sin. And what've you got, eh? A dead 'usband and a sickness eatin' away at you, 'til you can't 'ardly stand

up. If we went to a magistrate, this 'ere bloke would go t'prison. I'm not talkin' about 'urting a decent sort of chap, I'm talkin' about makin' a right depraved bastard pay for 'is crimes against God an' nature. An' 'ow better should 'e pay, than to 'elp a sick woman? I ask you that, Annie Chapman, 'ow better to pay for 'is sins than to 'elp a woman 'oo needs it most? Think of it, Annie. Enough money t'go someplace where it don't rain 'alf the year an' the fogs don't make it near impossible to breathe of a night. Someplace warm, even in winter. A decent 'ouse wiv a roof over and enough to eat, so's you aren't weak all the time, wot lets the sickness gets a better grip than ever. Annie, think of it, enough money to pay a real doctor an' get the sort of medicines rich folk 'ave . . ."

Annie's expression had crumpled. Tears filled her eyes. "You're right," she whispered. "Isn't my fault I'm sick. Not my fault this nasty chap went out and seduced a half-grown boy, either. God, to have enough money for real medicine. A warm place to live . . ." She coughed, swaying weakly. Misery and longing ploughed deep gullies into her face.

Polly patted her shoulder. "That's right, Annie. I'll share wiv you. There's four letters. You take three of 'em. All I need's enough money to pay me doss 'ouse for a few nights. Can you spare that much, Annie? A few pence for now . . . and a lifetime of medicine and rest in warm beds, after?"

Annie was searching through her pockets. "I've got to have enough for my own doss house tonight," she muttered, digging out a few coins. "I've had some luck today, though. Made enough money to pay for almost a week's lodging. Here." She gave Polly a shilling. "That's fourpence a letter. Is it enough?" she asked anxiously.

Polly Nichols had to work hard not to snatch the shilling out of Annie's hand. She was looking at enough money to buy four brimming glassfuls of gin. "Oh, Annie, that's a gracious plenty." She accepted the shilling and handed over three of her precious letters. "An' 'ere you are, luv, three tickets to the life you deserve."

Annie actually hugged her.

Polly flushed and muttered, "I'll not forget this, Annie. An' we'll send the letter to this nasty Mr. Eddy together, eh? Tomorrow, Annie. Meet me at the Britannia pub tomorrow an' we'll compose a lovely letter to Mr. Eddy an' send it off. You got a better education than I 'ave, you can write it out all posh, like, eh?"

By tomorrow she would have found someone to translate her remaining letter for her and be able to keep that promise. And she just might let Annie keep one of the letters, after all, rather than buying them all back.

Annie smiled at her, eyes swimming with gratitude. "You're a grand friend, Polly Nichols. God bless you."

They said their goodbyes, Annie tucking three of the letters into her pockets while Polly pocketed the remaining letter and her precious shilling. As they went their separate ways, Polly smiled widely. Then she headed for the nearest public house as fast as her steel-capped boots would carry her there. She needed a drink, all right.

To celebrate!

Skeeter wasn't certain what, exactly, he was looking for as he worked the Britannia Gate's baggage line. But the Britannia was the first gate to cycle since Ianira's disappearance. If Skeeter had kidnapped someone as world-famous as Ianira Cassondra, intending something more subtle than simply killing her and dumping the body somewhere, he'd have tried to smuggle her out through the first open gate available.

For one thing, it would be far easier to torture a victim down a gate. Fewer people to hear-or at least care about-the screams. And if her abductor really was the person who'd shoved her out of the way of an assassin's bullet, if he

actually was interested in keeping her alive, then getting her off the station would be imperative. Too many people had far too many opportunities to strike at Ianira on station, even if her rescuer tried to keep her hidden. In a gossip-riddled place like La-La Land, nothing stayed secret for long. Certainly not an abduction of someone as beloved and strikingly recognizable as Ianira.

So Skeeter had abandoned his search of the station, donned a shapeless working man's shirt and the creaseless trousers of the Victorian era—the costume worn by all Time Tours baggage handlers working the Britannia—and reported for work, as planned. As Ianira had planned . . . He couldn't think about that now, couldn't dwell on the fear and the dull, aching anger, not if he hoped to catch what might be a very fleeting, subtle clue betraying a smuggler.

How someone might successfully sneak someone through a gate occupied Skeeter's thoughts as hotel bellhops arrived in steady streams from hotels up and down Commons, bringing cartloads of luggage tagged for London. Tourists generally carried no more on their person than an average passenger was permitted to carry aboard a jetliner, which meant—and Skeeter stared in dismay at the flood of baggage carts on direct approach to the Britannia's lounge—that bellhops and baggage handlers had to transport every last trunk, carpet bag, portmanteau, and ladies' toiletry case from hotel room door to down-time destination, through a gate which opened only so wide and stayed open only so long.

Sloppy handling, broken contents, and lost luggage had resulted in the firing of many a baggage handler, not to mention four baggage managers in just the past few months. And Celosia Enyo, the latest in that dismal line of unhappy managers, was not the kind of woman to tolerate mistakes by anyone, not on this gate's cycle, anyway. After all, this wasn't just any gate opening. This was a Shangri-La Event: Ripper Season's official kickoff. And true to 'eighty-sixer predictions, the social gala on the other side of the departures-lounge barricades had roared to boisterous, ghoulish life.

"I don't care what those experts say," a severely dressed woman was saying as she passed through the check-in procedures, "I think it was that barber-surgeon, the bigamist. George Chapman."

Her companion, an equally severe woman with upswept, greying hair, said, "Chapman? His real name was Severin Klosowski, wasn't it? I don't think he was a very likely suspect."

"Well, Inspector Abberline named him as a leading candidate! Klosowski killed lots of women. Wives, mistresses, girlfriends—"

"Yes, but he didn't use a knife, my dear, he poisoned them. The Ripper wasn't that devious. Klosowski killed his women when they got too inconvenient. Or too expensive to keep. Jack the Ripper killed for the pleasure of it."

And behind those two, a professorial-looking little man in a seedy suit was holding forth at length to a drab little woman with a dumpy build and a rabbitly, frightened look in her eyes: "A serial killer needs to punish the woman or women he hated in his own life. He acts out the violence he wished he'd had the nerve to commit against the women who injured him. Jack the Ripper simply transferred that violence to the prostitutes of London's East End. That's why it can't be Klosowski," he added, nodding at the two severely dressed women in line ahead of him. "Personally, I favor the Mysterious Lodger, that Canadian chap, G. Wentworth Bell Smith. He went about in rubberized boots, changing clothes at all hours, railing against loose women. I'd stake my reputation on it, Bell Smith's the man . . ."

The nearest of the ladies championing Chapman rounded on the Bell-Smith supporter. "A killer proven is a killer proven!" she insisted, refusing to be swayed in her convictions by any amount of evidence or reason. "Mark my words,

Claudia," she turned back to her friend, "Chapman or Klosowski, whichever name you prefer, he'll turn out to be the Ripper! I'm sure of it . . ."

While overhead, on the immense SLUR television screen, the scholarly debate raged on. "-a very common pattern," Scotland Yard Inspector Conroy Melvyn was saying in a taped interview with fellow Ripper Watch Team member Pavel Kostenka, "for a male serial killer to attack and kill prostitutes. Bloke sees 'em as a substitute for the powerful woman in 'is life, the one 'e feels powerless to strike at, instead."

"Indeed," Dr. Koskenka was nodding. "Not only this, but a prostitute represents a morally fallen woman. And prostitutes," Dr. Kostenka added heavily, "were and still are the most easily available women to such killers. Add to that the historical tendency of police to dismiss a prostitute's murder as less important than the murder of a 'respectable' woman and streetwalkers surge into prominence as victims of mass murderers--"

Skeeter tuned out the debate as best he could and grunted under the weight of massive steamer trunks, portmanteaus, carpet bags, leather cases, smaller trunks and satchels until his back ached. The arriving luggage was transferred case by case to a growing pile at the base of a newly installed, massive conveyor system which Time Tours' new baggage manager had finally had the good sense to install. Skeeter glanced up to the gate platform, five stories overhead. Thank God for the conveyer. Some of those steamer trunks weighed more than Skeeter did. Considerably more. He eyed the gridwork stairs he'd be climbing soon and blessed that conveyer system fervently.

Geographically speaking, the Britannia was the highest of Shangri-La's active tour gates. When it opened, tourists climbed up to an immense metal gridwork platform which hovered near the steel beams and girders of the ceiling. Until the advent of that conveyer, sweating baggage handlers and porters had climbed that same ramp, gasping and hurrying to make it through before the gate disappeared into thin air once more.

"Sheesh," Skeeter muttered, grabbing another trunk by its leather handles and hauling it over to the conveyer, "what's in some of these monsters? Uranium bricks?" One of the other baggage handlers, a down-timer who worked most gate openings as a porter, grunted sympathetically as Skeeter grouched, "They're only staying in London eight days, for Chrissake. And they'll be bringing back more than they left with!"

They would, too. Right down to the last yammering, whining kid in line. Parents had to pay a hefty amount of extra cash demanded by Time Tours, Inc. for children's tickets, a policy put into place after a couple of kids had managed to get themselves fatally separated from tours out of other stations. Children on a time tour were like gasoline on an open campfire. But parents still brought their brats with them in droves, and a surprising number paid the extra fees for kids' tickets. Others simply dropped the kids off at the station school to "have fun" in the zany world of the station while Mommy and Daddy went time hopping.

Skeeter dragged over another portmanteau. Why anybody would take a child into something like the Ripper terror . . . He could see it now. My summer vacation: how a serial killer cut up women who make their living sleeping with strangers for money. And kids had grown up fast in his day.

"C'mon, Jackson," an angry voice snapped practically in his ear, "enough goofing off! Put your back into it! Those baggage carts are piling up fast. And more are coming in from the hotels every minute!"

Skeeter found the baggage manager right behind him, glaring at him through narrowed, suspicious eyes. He resisted the urge to flip her a bird and said, "Yes, ma'am!" Just exactly how he was supposed to work faster than top speed, Skeeter wasn't quite sure, but he made a valiant effort. He cleared the cart in front of him and shoved it out of the way so another could take its place. Celosia Enyo watched him sharply for the next couple of minutes, then stalked

further down the line, browbeating some other unfortunate. At least she was impartially horrible to everyone. Of course, after the miserable track record her four immediate predecessors had compiled between them, Enyo doubtless sweat bullets every time a gate opened, hoping she'd still have a job when it closed again. Skeeter could sympathize. Not much, maybe-anybody that universally rude deserved a dose of unpleasantness right back, again. But he could sympathize some.

Of course, Skeeter grunted sharply and dropped another case onto the stack, by that same logic, he'd still be working off his own karma when he was four-hundred ninety. Yeah, well, at least I was never obnoxious to anybody I ripped off. . . . A polite thief, that's what he'd been, by God. But no longer a thief, thanks to Marcus and Ianira.

Skeeter blinked sweat out of his eyes, fighting a sudden tightness in his chest as he emptied yet another baggage cart. Surely Marcus realized he could trust Skeeter? After what Skeeter'd gone through in Rome, damn near dying in that gladiatorial combat in the Circus Maximus before wrenching Marcus out of slavery again, surely Marcus could've trusted him enough to let him know they were alive, at least? Whoever was trying to kill them, he had to realize that Skeeter, of all people, wouldn't betray him and his daughters?

He ground his teeth in silent misery. If somebody had tried to shoot his wife, if he'd walked into his daughters' daycare center to find two armed thugs trying to drag off his kids, would he have risked contacting anybody? Just on the remote chance they might be followed, trying to bring help? Skeeter knew he wouldn't have. Wouldn't have dared risk his loved ones, no matter what risks he, himself, might have been willing to run. The realization hurt, even as he was forced to admit he understood the silence. But the girls were just babies, Artemisia not yet four, Gelasia barely turned one. Marcus couldn't stay in hiding with them, not for long. Which was doubtless what the faceless bastards trying to kill them were counting on. If Skeeter were Marcus, he'd seriously consider trying to jump station. Through any gate that opened.

Skeeter closed his hands around the stout handles of yet another steamer trunk and heaved it into place, wishing bitterly he could get his hands on whoever had dragged Ianira away through that riot. It must have been staged. Create a perfect diversion, shoot her down in the midst of the chaos . . . Only somebody had interrupted the attempt. Had the shooter dragged her off? To finish the job at his leisure? Or someone else? Skeeter couldn't bear to keep thinking in ragged circles like this, but he couldn't not think about her, either, not considering what he owed her.

Skeeter wiped sweat from his forehead. Just another few minutes, he told himself fiercely. Another few minutes and the gate would have cycled, all this ridiculous luggage would be on the other side of the Britannia, and he could get back to combing the station with the finest-toothed comb ever invented by humanity.

Meanwhile . . .

Watching the freakshow beyond the barricades helped keep his mind off it and watching the tourists inside the barricades occupied the rest of his mind, searching faces for clues, for any similarity to the face in his memory, that wild-eyed kid with the black-powder pistol. Gawkers formed an impenetrable barrier around the edges of the departures lounge, so thick, security had formed cordons to permit ticketed tourists, uniformed Time Tours employees, freelance guides, baggage handlers, and supply couriers to reach the roped-off lounge. The noise was appalling. Troops of howler monkeys had nothing on the mob of humanity packed into the confined spaces of Victoria Station. And every man-jack one of 'em wanted to be able to tell his grandchildren some day, "I was there, kids, I was there when the first Ripper tour went through, let me tell you, it was something . . ."

It was something, all right.

There weren't words disgusting enough to describe it, that electric air of anticipation, of excitement that left the air supercharged with the feeling that a major event is happening right before your eyes, an excitement sensed in the nerve endings of skin and hair, completely independent of sight and sound and smell. Skeeter was the kind of soul who loved excitement, thrived on it, in fact. But this . . . this kind of excitement was a perversion, even Skeeter could sense that, and Skeeter Jackson's moral code, formed during his years with the Yakka Mongols, didn't exactly mesh with most of up-time humanity's. What was it going to be like when next week's gate opened? When all these people and probably a couple hundred more, besides, newly arrived through Primary, jammed in to learn who the ghoul really was?

Maybe after he dragged all this luggage through the Britannia and came back to look for Ianira some more, he'd volunteer to haul baggage to Denver for a couple of weeks, just to miss out on the whole sordid thing? The Wild West Gate opened tomorrow, after all, and Time Tours was perennially short of baggage handlers. If only they'd found Ianira by then, and Marcus, and little Artemisia and bright-eyed, laughing Gelasia.

If, if, IF!

It was the not knowing that was intolerable, the not knowing or being able to find out. He wanted this job over with, so he could get back to searching. Skeeter stared intently through the crowd, trying to spot anybody he might recognize from The Found Ones. Any news was better than none. But he couldn't see a single down-timer in that crowd who wasn't already busy to distraction hauling luggage. Which meant they wouldn't know spit about the search underway, either.

God, how much longer until this blasted gate cycled?

He peered up at the huge chronometer boards suspended from the distant ceiling, picking out the countdown for Gate Two: five minutes. At the rate time was creeping past, it might as well be five years.

"Jackson! Do you really like scrubbing toilets that much?"

He started so violently he nearly dropped the carpet bag dangling from his hands. Celosia Enyo was glaring at him, lips thinned to a murderous white line.

"Sorry, ma'am," he muttered. "I was hoping I might see someone who'd heard about Ianira--"

"We're all worried! But that gate doesn't give a damn who's missing or found. We get that--" she jabbed a finger toward the small mountain of luggage "--through the gate on time or some millionaire will have your head on his dinner platter for having to buy a new wardrobe in London. Worry about your friends on your own time. Or by God, your own time is all you'll have!"

She was absolutely right, in a cold-blooded, mercenary sense. The moment she turned away to snarl at someone else, Skeeter gave her a flying eagle salute and dragged another portmanteau off a groaning luggage cart. He scowled at the enormous stack of luggage on the conveyer already, mentally damning Time Tours for insane greed. No wonder the last four baggage managers had failed disastrously with gate logistics. Time Tours was sending through too many blistering tourists at once.

Never mind way too many trunks per tourist.

If he'd kept accurate count, the last five steamer trunks and three portmanteaus alone had belonged to the same guy. Benny Catlin, whoever the hell he was. Rich as sin, if he could cart that much luggage through in just one direction. The big conveyer rumbled to life with one jolting squeal and a grating of metal gears. Then the rubberized surface began moving upward, ready to carry all that luggage to the platform overhead. Skeeter glanced around to look for the boss. Enyo wasn't in sight, but the shift supervisor was busy sending handlers aloft. He caught Skeeter's eye and said, "Get up top,

Jackson. Start hauling that stuff off the conveyer as it arrives."

"Yessir!"

The climb up to the Britannia platform was a long one, particularly after all the hauling he'd done in the past few minutes, but the view was spectacular. Commons spread out beneath his feet, a full five stories deep, riotous with color and sound. Costumed tourists scurried like rainbow-hued bugs whipped around in the currents and eddies of a slow-motion river. Great banners-bright holiday-colored ribbons curling and floating through a hundred-foot depth of open air from balconies and catwalks-proclaimed to the world that Ripper Season had begun, and advertised other not-to-be-missed down-time events. A cat's-cradle tangle of meshwork bridges stretched right across Commons from one side to the other, supported from below by steel struts or suspended from above by steel cables disappearing into the ceiling. The noise from hundreds of human throats lapped at the edges of the high platform like crashing surf against jagged rocks, leaping and splashing back again, indistinct and unintelligible from sheer distance.

And booming above it all came the voice of the public address system, echoing down the vast length of Commons: "Your attention, please. Gate Two is due to open in two minutes . . ."

The first luggage on the conveyor belt arrived with a jolt and scrape against the gridwork platform. Skeeter joined a human-chain effort, hauling luggage clear of the moving conveyor and piling it on the platform. Railings ran all the way around, with a wide metal gate set into one side. Until the Britannia actually opened, that wide metal gate led to a sheer, hundred-foot drop to the cobblestones of Victoria Station. Despite the railing, Skeeter stayed well away from the edge as he hauled, piled, and stacked a steadily increasing jumble of trunks, cases, and soft-sided carpet bags across the broad stretch of platform.

At the far corner, a second conveyor system rumbled to life, moving downward rather than up. Celosia Enyo was testing the system, making sure everything was ready for the returning tour and all of its luggage. So engrossed was Skeeter in the monumental task of shifting the arriving baggage, the gate's opening took him by surprise. A skull-shaking backlash of subharmonics rattled his very bones. Skeeter jumped, wanting instinctively to cover his ears, although that wouldn't have done any good. The gate's frequency was too low for actual human hearing. He glanced around-and gasped.

A kaleidoscope of shimmering color, dopplering through the entire rainbow spectrum, had appeared in the middle of empty air right at the edge of the platform. The colors scintillated like a sheen of oil on water, sunlight on a raven's glossy feathers. The hair on Skeeter's arms stood starkly erect. He'd seen gates open hundreds of times, had stepped through a number of them, when he'd had the money for a tour or had conned someone else into paying for it. But he'd never been this close to the massive Britannia as it began its awe-striking cycle a hundred feet above the Commons floor.

From below, a wall of noise came surging up to the platform, gasps and cries of astonishment from hundreds of spectators. A point of absolute darkness appeared dead center in the wild flashes of color. The blackness expanded rapidly, a hole through time, through the very fabric of reality . . . Something hard banged into Skeeter's elbow. He yelped, jumped guiltily, then grabbed the steamer trunk thrust at him. It went awkwardly onto the top of the stack, canted at an angle, too unstable for anything else to go on top. The next portmanteau to arrive thudded against the steel gridwork, starting a new pile.

Skeeter rearranged wetness on his brow with a limp, soaked sleeve, then straightened his aching back and started piling up the next stack, all while keeping one eye on the massive gate rumbling open behind him. The blackness widened steadily until it stretched the full width of the platform. A Time

Tours guide climbed up from the Commons floor and opened the broad metal gate at the edge of the platform to its full extent, as well.

A blur of motion caught his eye and the first returnee arrived, rushing at them with the speed of a runaway bullet train. Skeeter resisted the urge to jump out of the way. Then the apparent motion slowed and a gentleman in fancy evening clothes, protected by a wet India-rubber rain slicker, stepped calmly onto the platform and turned to assist the returning tourists through. Men and women in silks and expensively cut garb, most of them holding 1880's style umbrellas and brushing water off their heavy cloaks, jostled their way through, many chattering excitedly. Quite a few others had gone slightly greenish and stumbled every few steps. Guides in servants' uniforms and working men's rougher clothes helped those who seemed worst off to stagger through the open gate. Porters rushed through on their heels, tracking mud onto the platform, then a mad scramble ensued to get all the arriving luggage—every bit of it slick with what must be a drenching downpour on the other side of the gate—onto the downward-rumbling conveyer. Below, tourists raced up the five flights of stairs to hurry through in the other direction. Skeeter worked fiendishly. He hauled trunks which arrived from down time onto the downward-rumbling conveyer, in an effort to clear the jam at the gate. Then the Britannia was finally clear and outbound tourists rushed past, laughing excitedly and squealing as they stepped off the edge of the platform into what their hindbrains insisted was a hundred-foot sheer drop to the floor below.

"Get that outbound baggage moving!"

Skeeter lunged to the task, along with a dozen other porters. He staggered through the open gate and emerged into a rain-lashed garden. It was nearly dark. Worse, the ground was cut up from all the foot traffic across it, muddy and treacherous with slick leaves. There was a flagstone path, but that was crowded with tourists and guides and gatehouse staff holding umbrellas. The porters didn't have time to wait for them to clear out of the way. Following the lead of more experienced baggage handlers in front of him, Skeeter plunged into the muddy grass and slogged his way toward the gatehouse. The rain was icy, slashing against his clothing and soaking him to the skin. He dumped his first load at the back door of the three-story gatehouse and pelted back through the open gate to grab another load. The sensation was dizzying, disorienting.

Then he was through and staggering a little, himself, across the platform. His muddy shoes slipped on wet metal. Skeeter windmilled and lurched against a stack of luggage waiting to be ferried through. The topmost steamer trunk, a massive thing, slid sideways and started to topple toward the edge of the platform. The corner of the trunk was well out beyond the periphery of the open Britannia gate, teetering out where it would plunge the full hundred feet to the Commons floor. As Skeeter went to one bruised knee, furious shouts and blistering curses erupted. Then somebody lunged past him to grab the steamer trunk by the handle before it could fall.

"Don't just sit there, goddamn you!" A short, skinny tourist stood glaring murderously down at him, arms straining to keep the trunk from falling. The young man's whiskered face had gone ashen under the lights overhead. "Grab this trunk! I can't hold the weight!" The kid's voice was light, breathless, furious.

His whole knee ached where he'd landed on it, but Skeeter staggered back his feet and leaned over the piles of trunks and cases to secure a wet-handed grip on the corner that had already gone over the end of the platform. Hauling together, Skeeter and the tourist pulled the heavy trunk back onto the platform. The tourist was actually shaking, whether with fright or rage, Skeeter wasn't certain.

But he wasn't so shaken he didn't blow up in Skeeter's face. "What the hell did you think you were doing? Were you trying to shove that trunk over the

edge? Goddammit, do you have any idea what would've happened if that trunk had gone over? If you've been drinking, I'll make sure you never work on this station again!" The young man's face was deathly pale, eyes blazing against the unnatural pallor of his skin and the dark, heavy whiskers of his mutton-chop sideburns and mustache, which he must've acquired from Paula Booker's cosmetology salon, because up-time men didn't grow facial hair in that quantity or shape any more. The furious tourist, fists balled up and white-knuckled, shrilled out, "My God, do you realize what you almost caused?"

"Well, it didn't fall, did it?" Skeeter snapped, halting the tirade mid-stream. "And if you stand there cursing much longer, you're gonna miss your stinking gate!" Skeeter shouldered the trunk himself, having to carry it across his back, the thing was so heavy. The short and brutish little tourist, white-lipped and silent now, stalked through the open gate on Skeeter's heels, evidently intent on following to make sure Skeeter didn't drop it again. So much for my new job. After this guy gets done complaining, I'll be lucky if I still have the job scrubbing toilets.

It was, of course, still raining furiously in the Spaldergate House garden. Skeeter did slip again, the muddy ground was so churned up beside the crowded flagstone walkway. The furious man on his heels grabbed at the trunk again as Skeeter lurched and slid sideways. "Listen, you drunken idiot!" he shouted above steady pouring of the rain. "Lay off the booze or the pills before you show up for work!"

"Stuff it," Skeeter said crudely. He regained his feet and finally gained the house, where he gratefully lowered his burden to the floor.

"Where are you going?" the irate young man demanded when Skeeter headed back into the downpour.

He flung the answer over one aching shoulder. "Back to the station!"

"But who's going to cart this out to the carriage? Take it to the hotel?"

"Carry it yourself!"

The skinny, whiskered little tourist was still sputtering at the back door when Skeeter re-entered the now-visibly shrunken Britannia Gate. He passed several other porters bent double under heavy loads, trying to get the last of the pile through, then was back on the metal gridwork platform. All that remained of the departing tour was a harried Time Tours guide who plunged through as Skeeter reappeared. Then he was alone with the mud and a single uniformed Time Tours employee who swung shut the big metal safety gate as the Britannia shrank rapidly back in on itself and vanished for another eight days.

Skeeter-wet, shivering, exhausted-slowly descended the stairs once again and slid his timecard through the reader at the bottom, "clocking out" so his brief stay in the London timestream would be recorded properly. The baggage manager was waiting, predictably irate. Skeeter listened in total, sodden silence, taking the upbraiding he'd expected. This evidently puzzled the furious Enyo, because she finally snapped, "Well? Aren't you going to protest your innocence?"

"Why bother?" Skeeter said tiredly. "You've already decided I'm guilty. So just fire me and get it over with so I can put on some dry clothes and start looking for my friends again."

Thirty seconds later, he was on his way, metaphoric pink slip in hand. Well, that was probably the shortest job on record. Sixty-nine minutes from hired to fired. He never had liked the idea of hauling luggage for a bunch of jackass tourists, anyway. Scrubbing toilets was dirtier, but at least more dignified than bowing and scraping and apologizing for being alive. And when the job was over, something, at least, was clean.

Which was more than he could say of himself at the moment. Mud covered his trousers, squelched from his wet shoes, and dripped with the trickling rainwater down one whole sleeve where he'd caught himself from a nasty fall,

that last time through. Wonder what was in that lousy trunk, anyway? The way he acted, you'd've thought it was his heirloom china. God, tourists!

Maybe that idiot would do them all a favor and get himself nice and permanently lost in London? But that thought only brought the pain surging back. Skeeter blinked away wetness that had nothing to do with the rainwater dripping out of his hair, then speeded up. He had to get out of these wet, filthy clothes and hook up with the search teams again. Very few people knew this station the way Skeeter did. If he couldn't find her . . .

He clenched his jaw muscles.

He had to find her.

Nothing else mattered at all.

Chapter Seven

Rain had stopped falling over the slate rooftops and crockery chimney pots of London by the time the arriving tour sorted itself out at the Time Tours Gatehouse and departed via carriages to hotels, boarding houses, and rented flats—a British word for apartment that one of the guides had needed to explain to her. Jenna Nicole Caddrick sat hunched now in a rattling carriage, listening to the sharp clop as the horses, a teamed pair of them in harness, struck the cobblestoned street with iron-shod hooves in a steady rhythm.

She shivered and hugged her gentleman's frock coat more tightly around her, grateful for the first time that she was less well endowed than she'd have liked through the chest, and grateful, too, for the simple bulkiness of Victorian men's clothing, which helped disguise bulges that shouldn't have been there. Jenna huddled into her coat, miserable and scared and wishing like anything that Noah had come through with her. She hadn't expected London to be so cold or so wet. It was only the end of August here, after all; but the guides back at the gatehouse had told them London's entire summer had been cold and wet, so there wasn't any use complaining to them about the miserable weather.

Miserable was right. The ride jounced her sufficiently to shake her teeth loose, if she hadn't been clenching them so tightly. The air stank, not like New York, which smelt of car exhaust fumes and smog, but rather a dank, bleak sort of stench compounded of whatever was rotting in the River Thames and coal smoke from hundreds of thousands of chimneys and horse dung scattered like shapeless anthills across the streets and a miasma of other stinks she couldn't identify and wasn't sure she wanted to, either. Everything was strange, even the lights. Gaslight didn't look like electric light, which was a phenomenon all those period-piece movies hadn't been able to capture on film. It was softer and yellower, adding a warm and yet alien color to everything where it spilled out across window sills or past half-closed shutters.

What the jouncing, jarring ride was doing to Ianira Cassondra, folded up like last week's laundry and nestled inside an enormous steamer trunk, Jenna didn't even want to consider. They'd cushioned her with blankets and fitted her with a mask for the oxygen canisters supplied in every hotel room in Shangri-La, in case of a station fire. Every hotel room stocked them, since TT-86 stood high in the Himalayas' rarified air. Ianira had clung briefly to Marcus, both their faces white with terror, had kissed her little girls and whispered to them in Greek, then she'd climbed into the trunk, folded herself down into the makeshift nest, and slipped on the oxygen mask.

Noah had been the one to close and latch the lid.

Jenna couldn't bring herself to do it, to lock her in, like that.

She'd wanted to call in a doctor, to look at the nasty bruise and swelling along Ianira's brow where the Prophetess had struck her head on the concrete floor. But risking even a doctor's visit, where questions would be asked, meant risking Ianira's life, as well as risking her whole family. And Noah and

Jenna's lives, too . . . She clenched down her eyelids. Please, Goddess, there's been enough killing, let it stop. . . .

Jenna refused to let herself recall too acutely those ghastly seconds on the platform high above the Commons floor, when Ianira's trunk had teetered and nearly fallen straight off the edge. Jenna's insides still shook, just remembering. She'd have blamed the baggage handler for being a member of the death squad on their trail if the man hadn't obviously been a long-time station resident. And the guy had gone back to the station, too, in a state of churlish rage, which he wouldn't have done, if he'd been sent to murder Jenna and Ianira. No, it'd just been one of those nightmarish, freakish near-accidents that probably happened every time a gate opened and too many people with too much luggage tried to cram themselves through a hole of finite dimensions and duration.

Don't think about it, Jenna, she didn't fall, so don't think about it. There's about a million other things to worry about, instead. Like, where to find refuge in this sprawling, sooty, foul-smelling city on the Thames. She was supposed to stay at the Piccadilly Hotel tonight, in her persona as Mr. Benny Catlin, up-time student doing post-doctoral work in sociology. "Benny" was supposed to be filming his graduate work, as part of the plan she and Carl had come up with, a lifetime ago, when the worst terror she'd had to face was having her infamous father find out she planned to go time touring.

Carl should've been the one playing "Benny Catlin," not Jenna. If Noah'd been able to go with her, the detective would've played the role of the non-existent Mr. Catlin. But they had to split up, so Jenna had exchanged identification with Noah. That way, the female "tourist" using the persona she and Carl had bought from that underworld identity seller in New York would cash in her Britannia Gate ticket, then buy one for Denver, instead, leading the Ansar Majlis on a merry chase down the wrong gate from the one Jenna and Ianira had really gone through. With any luck, Jenna and the Prophetess would reach the Piccadilly Hotel without incident.

But they wouldn't be staying in the Piccadilly Hotel for long, not with the probability that they'd been followed through the Britannia Gate by someone topping out somewhere around a hundred ten percent. Jenna knew she'd have to come up with some other place to stay, to keep them both safe. Maybe she should check into the Piccadilly Hotel as scheduled, then simply leave in the middle of the night? Haul their luggage down the back stairs to the hotel livery stable and take off with a wagon. Maybe vanish into the East End somewhere for a while. It was the least likely place any searchers would think to look for them, not with Jack the Ripper stalking those dismal streets.

Jenna finally came up out of her dark and miserable thoughts to realize that the carriage driver—a long-term Time Tours employee—was talking steadily to someone who hadn't been listening. The man was pattering on about the city having taken out a whole triangular-shaped city block three years previously. "Demolished the entire length of Glasshouse Street, to cut Shaftesbury Avenue from Bloomsbury to Piccadilly Circus. Piccadilly hasn't been a true circus since, y'see, left it mighty ugly, most folks are saying, but that new Shaftesbury Avenue, now, it's right convenient, so it is . . ."

Not that Jenna cared a damn what streets were brand new, but she tried to pay more attention, because she was going to have to get used to living here, maybe for a long time. Longer than she wanted to think about, anyway. The carriage with its heavy load of luggage passed through the apparently blighted Piccadilly Circus, which looked perfectly fine to Jenna, then jolted at last to a halt in front of the Piccadilly Hotel, with its ornate wrought-iron dome rising like the bare ribs of Cinderella's pumpkin coach. The whole open-work affair was topped by a rampant team of horses drawing a chariot. Wet streets stood puddled with the recent rain. As Jenna climbed cautiously down, not wanting to fall and break a bone, for God's sake, thunder rumbled overhead, an

ominous warning of more rain squalls to come.

The driver started hauling trunks and cases off the luggage shelf at the back of the carriage while Jenna trudged into the hotel's typically fussy Victorian lobby. The room was dark with heavy, ornately carved wood and busy, dark-hued wallpaper, crowded with breakables and ornate ornamentation in wrought iron. Jenna went through the motions of signing the guest register, acquiring her key, and climbing the stairs to her room, all in a daze of exhaustion. She'd been running ever since Luigi's in New York, didn't even want to think about how many people had died between then and now. The driver arrived on Jenna's heels and waited with a heavy load of luggage while Jenna unlocked her stuffy, overly-warm room. A coal fire blazed in a hearth along one wall. The driver, puffing from his exertions, was followed in by a bellman who'd assisted the driver in lugging up the immense trunk where Ianira Cassandra lay safely hidden. At least, Jenna hoped she was safe inside that horrible cocoon of leather and brass fittings. When the bellman nearly dropped one end, Jenna's ragged temper exploded again.

"Careful with that!" It came out far more sharply than she'd meant it to, sharp and raggedly frightened. So she gulped and tried to explain her entirely-too-forceful concern. "It has valuable equipment inside. Photographic equipment."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," the uniformed bellman huffed, gingerly setting down his end, "no wonder it's so heavy, cameras are big things, and all those glass plates and suchlike."

"Yes, well, I don't want anything in that trunk damaged."

The Time Tours driver gave Jenna a sour look. Clearly he'd been on the receiving end of too many tourists' cutting tongues. Driver and bellman vanished downstairs to fetch up the rest of the baggage, making short work of it. Jenna tipped the hotel employee, who left with a polite bow, closing the door after himself. The driver showed her how the gas lights worked, lighting them, then turning one of them out again, the proper way. "If you just blow it out, gas'll still come flooding out of the open valve. They haven't started putting in the smelly stuff yet, so you'd never even notice it. Just asphyxiate yourself in your sleep, if you didn't accidentally strike a spark and blow yourself out of this room."

Jenna was too tired for lectures on how the whole Victorian world operated, but she made a valiant effort to pay attention. The Time Tours driver was explaining how to summon a servant and how to find "Benny Catlin's" rented flat in Cheapside, across the Holborn Viaduct-whatever that was. Jenna didn't know enough about London and hadn't been given a chance to finish her library research for the trip she and Carl had planned to make. "We'll send an express wagon round in the morning, Mr. Catlin, help you shift to your permanent lodgings. Couldn't have you arriving at the flat this late in the evening, of course, the landlady would have a cultured fit of apoplexy, having us clatter about and disturb her seances or whatever she'll have there tonight, it's always something new . . ."

A polite tap at the door interrupted. "Mr. Catlin?" a man's voice inquired.

"Yes, come in, it isn't locked." Yet . . . The moment the driver was gone, Jenna intended locking the door and putting a small army of little up-time burglar alarms she'd brought with her on every windowsill and even under the doorknob. The door swung open and Jenna caught one glimpse of the two men in the hallway. Jenna registered the guns they held faster than with the driver. Jenna dove sideways with a startled scream as the pop and clack of modern, silenced semi-autos brought the driver down with a terrible, choked sound. Jenna sprawled to the floor behind the bed, dragging frantically at the Remington Beale's revolver concealed in her coat pocket. The driver was screaming in pain on the far side of the bed. Then Jenna was firing back, bracing her wrists on the feather-ticking of the mattress to steady her hands.

Recoil kicked her palms, jarred the bones of her wrists. The shattering noise of the report left Jenna's ears ringing. But one of the bastards went down with a surprised grunt and cry of pain.

Jenna kept shooting, trying to hit the other one. The second shooter had danced into the corridor again, cursing hideously. Smoke from her pistol hung like fog, obscuring her view of the doorway. The wounded driver, gasping with the effort, managed to grab the leg of a nearby washstand. He brought the whole thing crashing down across the wounded gunman's head. The crockery basin shattered, leaving a spreading pool of blood in its wake. Then bullets slammed into the wallpaper beside Jenna's head. She ducked, doing some swearing of her own, wet and shaky with raw terror. Jenna fired and the pistol merely clicked. Hands trembling, she fumbled for her other pre-loaded revolver.

The driver, grey-faced and grunting with the effort, was dragging himself across the floor. He left a sickening trail of blood, as though a mortally wounded garden snail had crawled across the carpets. Jenna fired above the man's head, driving the gunman in the doorway back into the corridor again, away from the open door. Then the driver was close enough. He kicked the door shut with his feet, hooked an ankle around a chair and gave a grunting heave, dragged it in front of the door. Then collapsed with a desperate groan.

Jenna lunged over the top of the bed, scrambled across the floor on hands and knees to avoid the bullets punching through the wooden door at head height, and managed to snap shut the lock. Then she grunted and heaved and shoved an entire bureau across the door, toppling it to form a makeshift barricade. The door secured, Jenna dragged the driver's coat aside. What she found left her shaking and swearing under her breath. She didn't have time, dammit . . . but she couldn't just let the man lie there and bleed to death, could she? It was all Jenna's fault the man had been shot at all. She stripped a coverlet off the bed, managed to tear it into enough strips and pieces to form a tight compress. She had to yank off her gentleman's gloves to tie knots in the makeshift bandages.

"What in hell's going on, Catlin?" the driver gasped out, breathing shallowly against the pain.

"Long story," Jenna gasped. "And I'm really sorry you got dragged into it." She ran a distracted hand through her cropped and Macassar-oiled hair, felt the blood on her hands, wiped them on the remnants of the coverlet. A pause in the shooting outside indicated the gunman's need to change magazines or maybe even guns, temporarily stopping him from turning the solid wooden door into a block of swiss cheese. Jenna bit one lip, then scrambled across the floor on hands and knees. "Look, I can't do much for you. I've got to get the hell out of here. I'm really sorry." She handed the driver a pistol scavenged from the dead gunman. Then Jenna retrieved the Remington she'd emptied at their attackers and wished there was time to reload it, but the gun was so slow and difficult to load, she just shoved it into the waistband of her trousers beside the partially loaded one.

Then she wrenched up the nearest window sash and let in a flood of relatively fresh, wet air. It stank, but coal smoke smelled better than the coppery stench of blood and burnt gunpowder in the room's close confines. Jenna glanced down, judged the drop. Even with Ianira, she ought to be able to manage it without injury. Maybe ten feet. She opened the trunk, barely able to control her fingers. Holding the trunk lid open with one hand, she dragged Ianira up out of the protected cocoon in which she'd traveled. The Prophetess was fumbling with the oxygen mask and bottle, clumsy and slow from the cramped confines of the trunk. Jenna tore them loose and dropped them back in. "Trouble," she said tersely. "They hit us faster than I expected."

Ianira was taking in the blood, the corpse on the carpet, the wounded driver. Her eyes had gone wide, dark and terrified. She had to lean against Jenna just to remain on her feet, which terrified Jenna.

"What the hell-?" The driver was staring. "Who's that?"

Jenna gave him a sharp stare. "You don't know?"

"Should I? Been living in London for the past eight years. Haven't been back on the station in at least seven . . ."

If this guy didn't know who Ianira Cassondra was, Jenna wasn't about to tell him.

"I'm going to lower you out the window," Jenna whispered tersely, so her voice wouldn't carry beyond the door. "Hold onto my wrists tight." Ianira climbed over the sill and held onto Jenna's wrists with enough force to leave bruises. Jenna grunted and shifted her weight, swinging Ianira out, lowering her as far down along the wall as she could reach. "Now! Jump!"

Ianira plunged downward, staggered, landed. "Hurry!" the prophetess called up.

Jenna climbed cautiously across the windowsill, carefully balancing herself, and inched around until she was facing the hotel room. Bullets had started punching through the stout wooden door again. The gunman was shoving at it, too, trying to break it down or splinter the lock out of the doorframe. Thank God for solid Victorian construction, plaster and lathe walls and genuine wooden doors, not that hollow-core modern crap.

"Sorry, really," Jenna gasped, meeting the driver's bewildered, grey-faced gaze. "If he gets through that door, shoot him, will you? If you don't, he'll kill you." Then she scraped her way down until she was just hanging by her fingertips and let go her hold on the window. Jenna shoved outward slightly to keep her face from bashing against the wall on the way down. The drop was longer than she expected, but she landed well. Only went to one knee, jarring the soles of her feet up through her ankles. When she straightened with a pained gasp, her legs even condescended to work. Ianira grabbed her hand and they stumbled toward the carriage.

And the gunman charged out of the hotel's entryway. Gun in hand, he was heading for the window they'd just jumped from. But he hadn't seen them yet . . . Jenna dragged her loaded gun out of her waistband again, cursing herself for not holding onto it, and shoved Ianira behind her. The gunman saw them just as Jenna fired. She managed to loose off a couple of shots that drove their pursuer back into the hotel while smoke bellied up from her pistol and hung in the air like wet fog.

Jenna didn't wait for a second opportunity. She turned and ran, dragging Ianira with her, unable to reach the carriage without exposing them both to fatal fire. Ianira couldn't run very fast at first, but found her stride as they whipped through an alleyway, dodged into the street beyond, and gained speed. "Is he still back there?" Jenna gasped, not wanting to risk a wrenched ankle despite a driving terror that she would feel a bullet through her back at any second.

"Yes . . . I cannot see him . . . but he still comes, not far behind . . ."

Jenna decided she didn't want to know how Ianira knew that. She cut down side streets, running flat out, then heard a bullet ricochet off the wall beside her. Jenna shoved Ianira ahead, whirled and snapped off a couple of wild shots, then ducked down another street with one hand around Ianira's wrist. They wove in and out between horse-drawn phaetons and heavier carriages, running flat out. Drivers and passengers shouted after them, stared open-mouthed and hurled curses as horses reared in surprised protest. Then they were running down yet another street, dodging past the biggest greenhouse Jenna had ever seen.

They were nearly to a columned portico beyond, which offered better cover, when something slammed against her hips. Jenna screamed in pain and fright. She crashed to the ground, trying to roll onto her back. Jenna jerked the gun around, fired point-blank into the gunman's belly-

And the pistol clicked over an empty chamber.

She'd shot it dry.

"Run!" Jenna kicked and punched whatever she could reach, scrambled to hands and knees, saw Ianira racing for the shelter of the portico. Shadowy movement behind the columns suggested someone watching. Please God, let it be someone who can help. Jenna gained her feet, staggered forward a single stride. A hand around her ankle brought her down again. The glint of a knife caught her peripheral vision. Jenna kicked hard, felt bone crunch under the toe of her boot. The gunman screamed. Jenna rolled frantically, tried to free herself as the bastard swung the knife in a smashing blow toward her unprotected belly-

A gunshot exploded right above Jenna. She screamed, convinced she'd just been shot. Then she realized she wasn't hit. A stranger had appeared from the darkness. The newcomer had fired that shot, not the man trying to murder her. The bullet had plowed straight through the back of the paid assassin's head. The hit-man who'd hunted them through the Britannia was dead. Messily dead. The explosive aftermath left Jenna shuddering, eyes clenched shut. Blood and bits of human brain had splattered across her face and neck and coat. She lay on her side, panting and shaking and fighting back nausea. Then she looked up, so slowly it might've taken a week just to lift her gaze from the wet street to the stranger's face. She expected to find a constable, recalled a snatch of memory that suggested London constables had not carried firearms in 1888, and found herself looking up into the face of a man in a dark evening coat and silk top hat.

"Are you unharmed, sir? And the lady?"

Ianira had fallen to her knees beside Jenna, weeping and touching her shoulder, her arm, her blood-smearred face. "I . . ." Jenna had to gulp back nausea. "I think I'm okay."

The stranger offered a hand, calmly putting away his pistol in a capacious coat pocket. Jenna levered herself up with help. Once on her feet, she gently lifted Ianira and checked her pulse. Jenna didn't like the look of shock in the Cassandra's eyes or the desperate pallor of her skin, which was clammy and cold under her touch.

The stranger's brows rose. "Are you a doctor, sir?"

Jenna shook her head. "No. But I know enough to test a pulse point."

"Ah . . . As it happens, I am a medical doctor. Allow me."

The down-timer physician took Ianira's wrist to test her pulse, himself. And the Prophetess snapped rigid, eyes wide with shock. The Cassandra of Ephesus uttered a single choked sound that defied interpretation. She lifted both hands-gasped out something in Greek. The doctor stared sharply at Ianira and spoke even more sharply-also in Greek. While Jenna was struggling to recall a snatch of history lesson, that wealthy men of society had learned Greek and Latin as part of a gentleman's education, the physician snarled out something that sounded ugly. Naked shock had detonated through his eyes and twisted his face.

The next moment, Jenna found herself staring down the wrong end of his gun barrel. "Sorry, old chap. Nothing personal, you know."

He's going to kill me!

Jenna flung herself sideways just as the gun discharged. Pain caught her head brutally and slammed her to the street. As the world went dark, she heard shouts and running footsteps, saw Ianira's knees buckle in a dead faint, saw the stranger simply scoop her up and walk off with her, disappearing into the yellow drizzle.

Then darkness crashed down with a fist of brutal, black terror.

Chapter Eight

Malcolm Moore had done a great deal of hard work during his career as freelance time guide. But nothing had come even remotely close to the bruising

hours he'd put in setting up a base camp in a rented hovel in Whitechapel Road, guiding scholars and criminologists through the East End from well before sunup until the early morning hours, sleeping in two and three-hour snatches, assisting them in the task of learning everything the scholars and Scotland Yard Inspectors wanted to know before the terror broke wide open on the final day of August.

The last thing Malcolm expected when the Britannia cycled near dusk, just nine hours before the first Ripper murder was what he found in the Spaldergate parlour. Having rushed upstairs from his work with the scholars ensconced in the cellar, he stood blinking in stupid shock at the sight of her. "Margo?"

"Malcolm!" His fiancée flung herself toward him, arms outstretched, eyes sparkling. "Oh, Malcolm! I missed you!"

The kiss left his head spinning. Giddy as a schoolboy and grinning like a fool, Malcolm drew back at last, reluctant to break away from the vibrant warmth of her, and stared, amazed, into her eyes. "But Margo, whatever are you doing here?"

"Reporting for duty, sir!" she laughed, giving him a mock salute. "Kit worked it out with Bax," she said in a rush, eyes sparkling. "I'll be guiding for the rest of the Ripper Watch tour, whatever you think I can handle, and Doug Tanglewood came through to help out, too, your message asking for assistance came through loud and clear!"

Malcolm grinned. "Bloody marvelous! It's about time those dratted johnnies at Time Tours listened to me. How many additions to the Team did you bring through?"

Margo grimaced expressively.

"Oh, dear God," he muttered, "that many?"

"Well, it's not too bad," Margo said guardedly. "Dr. Shahdi Feroz finally made it in. Mostly, it's those reporters. Guy Pendergast and Dominica Nosette. I don't know which is worse, honestly, the scholars or the newsies. Or the tourists," she added, rolling her eyes at the flood of Ripperoons crowding into Spaldergate's parlour.

"That, I can believe," Malcolm muttered. "We haven't much time to get them settled. Polly Nichols is scheduled to die at about five o'clock tomorrow morning, which means we'll have to put our surveillance gear up sometime after two A.M. or so, when the pubs close and the streets grow a little more quiet. Daren't put up the equipment sooner, someone might notice it. It's not likely, since the wireless transmitters and miniaturized cameras and microphones we'll be setting up are so small. Still and all . . . Let's get them settled quickly, shall we, and take them downstairs to the vault. We've a base camp out in Whitechapel, but the main equipment is here, beneath Spaldergate, where we've the power for computers and recording equipment."

Margo nodded. "Okay. Let's get them moving. And the sooner we get those reporters under wraps, the better I'll feel. They don't listen at all and don't follow rules very well, either."

Malcolm grunted. "No surprise, there. The tourists the past few weeks have been bad enough, trying to duck out on their tour guides so they can cheat and stay long enough to see one of the murders. I expect the reporters will be even more delightful. Now, let's find Mrs. Gilbert, shall we, and assign everyone sleeping quarters . . ."

An hour later, Malcolm and his fiancée escorted the newly arrived team members down into the vault beneath the house, where a perfectly ordinary wooden door halfway across a perfectly standard Victorian cellar opened to reveal a massive steel door that slid open on pneumatics. Beyond this lay a brightly lit computer center and modern infirmary. The scholars greeted one another excitedly, then immediately fell to squabbling over theories as well as practical approaches to research, while the newly arrived reporters busied

themselves testing their equipment. Technicians nodded satisfactorily at the quality of the images and sound transmitted by cable from the carefully disguised receiving equipment on the roof of the house above this bubble of ultra-modern technology.

While the scholars and journalists worked, Margo quietly brought Malcolm up to date about events on the station. The news left Malcolm fretting, not just because the station was in danger if the riots continued, but because there was literally nothing he could do to help search for Ianira or her family while trapped on this side of the Britannia Gate. "I've heard about the Ansar Majlis," Malcolm said tiredly, rubbing his eyes and the bridge of his nose. "Too much, in fact."

"You had friends on TT-66, didn't you?" Margo asked quietly, laying one gentle hand on his sleeve.

Malcolm sighed. "Yes. I'm afraid I did."

"Anyone . . ." she hesitated, looking quite abruptly very young and unsure of herself.

Malcolm stroked her cheek. "No, Margo. No one like that." He drew her close for a moment, blessing Kit for sending her here. He'd have to turn around and send her into danger out on the streets, he knew that, it was part of the dream which burned inside her and made her the young woman he loved so much; but for the moment, he was content merely to have her close. "Just very good friends, guides I'd known for years."

She nodded, cheek rubbing against the fine lawn of the expensive gentleman's shirt he'd put on to greet the new team members. "I'm sorry, Malcolm."

"So," he sighed, "am I. How much of the station had they managed to search before you had to leave?"

Margo's description of search efforts on station was interrupted by the shrill of the telephone on the computer console behind them. Hooked into a much more antique-looking telephone in the house above, it was a direct link between the outside world and the vault. Malcolm pulled reluctantly away and snagged the receiver. "Yes?"

It was Hetty Gilbert, co-gatekeeper of the Time Tours Gatehouse. The news she had was even worse than Margo's. All color drained from Malcolm's cheeks as he listened. "Oh, dear God. Yes, of course. We'll come up straight away."

"What is it?" Margo asked breathlessly as he hung up again.

"Trouble. Very serious trouble." He glanced at the monitor where, a few hours from now, they hoped to record the identity of Jack the Ripper. Weeks, he'd put in, preparing for that moment. And now it would have to wait. Reluctantly, Malcolm met Margo's gaze again.

"What is it?" Margo demanded, as if half-afraid to hear the answer.

"We have a tourist missing," he said quietly. "A male tourist."

"Oh, my God."

"Yes. His name is Benny Catlin. The Gilberts are asking for our help with the search teams. Evidently, he has already killed someone in a brutal shooting at the Piccadilly Hotel. A Time Tours driver is in critical condition, should be arriving within minutes for surgery. He managed to telephone from the hotel before he collapsed."

The animated excitement of the anticipated search for the Ripper's identity drained from Margo's face. Malcolm hated seeing the dread and fear which replaced it. Missing tourist . . . any time guide's worst nightmare. And not just any tourist, either, but one who'd already committed murder in a quiet Victorian hotel. A missing and homicidal tourist, search teams combing London at the beginning of the Ripper's reign of terror . . . and back on the station, riots and murders and kidnappings . . . Malcolm met Margo's frightened gaze, read the same bleak assessment in her eyes which coursed through his entire being. Margo's budding career as a time scout, her dreams, were as much on the line as his own. Malcolm hadn't seen Margo look so

frightened since that horrible little prison cell in Portuguese Africa.

Wordlessly, he took her hand, squeezed her fingers. "We'd better get up there."

They headed upstairs at a dead run.

John Lachley hadn't planned to walk down past the Royal Opera, tonight.

But he'd emerged from his lecture at the Egyptian Hall to find the street blocked by an overturned carriage, which had collided with a team of drays, spilling the contents of a freight wagon and several screaming, hysterical ladies into the street, more frightened than injured. Glancing impatiently at his pocket watch, he'd determined that there was time, after all, before meeting Maybrick at his surgery in Cleveland Street, and rendered medical assistance, then pushed his way through the crowd and snarled traffic in search of a hansom he might hire.

It was sheer, blind chance which sent him down toward the Opera, where a rank of cabs could normally be found waiting for patrons. Sheer, bloody chance that had sent him straight into the path of a young woman who appeared from the murk of the wet night, gabbling out a plea for help. John Lachley had been at the wrong end of many an attack from vicious footpads, growing up in the East End, a target for nearly everyone's scorn and hatred. Rage had detonated through him, watching an innocent young man struggle with a knife-wielding assailant, fighting for his life.

So Lachley drew the pistol he'd concealed for the night's work with Maybrick and strode forward, ridding the street of this particular vermin with a single shot to the back of the skull. He expected the young man's shock, of course, no one reacted well to having blood and bits of brain spattered across his face, and he even expected the young woman's distraught reaction, nearly fainting under the strain of their close call.

But he did not expect what happened when he sounded the beautiful young woman's pulse. The words came pouring out of her, in flawless Greek, ancient Greek, even as she snapped rigid, straining away from him: Death hangs on the tree beneath the vault . . . down beneath the bricks where the boy's sightless skull rests . . . and six shall die for his letters and his pride . . .

This girl could not possibly know about the letters, about Tibor, about Morgan's skull, sitting as a trophy atop the flame-ringed altar, or the massive oak on which the little bastard had died. But she did. And more, she had prophesied that five others should die for the sake of Eddy's accursed letters . . .

Who?

He couldn't even hazard an educated guess. But he intended to find out. Oh, yes, he most certainly intended to find out. He reacted with the swiftness a childhood in the East End had taught him, brought up the pistol to eliminate the young man whose life he'd just saved. "Sorry, old chap. Nothing personal . . ."

He discharged the gun at the same instant the shaken young man realized Lachley's intent. The blood-spattered man flung himself violently sideways, trying to save himself. The bullet grazed the side of his skull, sending him reeling, wounded, to the ground. Lachley snarled out an oath and brought the pistol up to fire again, while the girl screamed and fainted-

"Jenna!"

The shout was from almost directly in front of him. Lachley jerked his gaze up and found a wild-eyed woman in a shabby dress racing toward him, twenty yards away and closing fast. She had an enormous revolver in one hand and was pointing it right at Lachley. With only a split-second to decide, Lachley loosed off a wild shot at the approaching woman to delay her and snatched up the unconscious girl at his feet. A gunshot ripped through the damp night and a bullet whipped past his ear, knocking his top hat to the street. Lachley swore

and bolted with his prize, flung her across one shoulder and ran down toward Drury Lane and SoHo's maze of mean, narrow streets.

He fully expected to hear the hue and cry sounded as constables were summoned; but no cry came, nor did any footsteps chase after him. Lachley slowed to a more decorous pace, discovering he was halfway down Drury Lane, and allowed his pulse to drop from its thunderous roar in his ears. With the panic of flight receding, rational thought returned. He paused for a moment in a narrow alley, shaking violently, then mastered himself and drew deep, gulping lungfuls of wet air to calm the tremors still ripping through him. Dear God . . . What was he to make of this?

He shifted the unconscious girl, cradled her in both arms, now, as though he were merely assisting a young lady in distress, and stared down at her pallid features. She was a tiny little thing, delicate of stature. Her face was exquisite and her rich black hair and olive cast of skin bespoke Mediterranean heritage. She'd gabbled out her plea for help in English, but the words spoken in shock-almost, he frowned, in a trance-had been the purest Greek he'd ever heard. But not modern Greek. Ancient Greek, the language of Aristotle and Aristophanes . . . yet with a distinctive dialectic difference he couldn't quite pin down.

He'd studied a great deal, since his charity school days, educated as a scholarship pupil at a school where the other boys had tormented him endlessly. He'd learned everything he could lay hands on, had drunk in languages and history the way East End whores downed gin and rum, had discovered a carton of books in the back of the school's dingy, mouldering library, books donated by a wealthy and eccentric patroness who had dabbled in the occult. John Lachley's knowledge of ancient languages and occult practices had grown steadily over the years, earning him a hard-earned reputation as a renowned SoHo scholar of antiquities and magical practices. Lachley could read three major ancient dialects of Greek, alone, and knew several other ancient languages, including Aramaic.

But he couldn't quite place the source of this girl's phrasing and inflections.

Her half-choked words spilled through his memory again and again, brilliant as an iron welder's torch. Who was this insignificant slip of a girl? As he peered at her face, stepping back out into Drury Lane to find a gaslight by which to study her, he realized she couldn't be more than twenty years of age, if that. Where had she learned to speak ancient Greek? Ladies were not routinely taught such things, particularly in the Mediterranean countries. And where in the names of the unholy ancient gods which Lachley worshiped had she acquired the clairvoyant talent he'd witnessed outside the Opera House? A talent of that magnitude would cause shockwaves through the circles in which Lachley travelled.

He frowned at the thought. Revealing her might prove dangerous at this juncture. Surely someone would miss the girl? Would search for her? No matter. He could keep her quite well hidden from any search and he intended to exploit her raw talent in every possible way he could contrive. His frown deepened as he considered the problem. It would be best to drug her for a bit, keep her quietly hidden at the top of the house, locked into a bedroom, until he could determine more precisely who she was, where she'd come from, and what efforts would be made to locate her by the young man and the poorly dressed woman with the revolver.

Beyond that, however . . .

Lachley smiled slowly to himself. Beyond that, the future beckoned, with this girl as the instrument by which he viewed it and Prince Albert Victor as the key to controlling it. John Lachley had searched for years, seeking a true mystic with such a gift. He'd read accounts in the ancient texts, written in as many languages as he had been able to master. His fondest dream had been to

find such a gifted person somewhere in the sprawling metropolis that was capitol city to the greatest empire on earth, to bring them under his mesmeric control, to use their powers for his own purposes. In all his years of searching, he had found only charlatans, like himself, tricksters and knaves and a few pathetic old women mumbling over tea leaves and cut crystal spheres in the backs of Romany wagons. He had all but lost hope of finding a real talent, such as the ancient texts had described. Yet here she was, not only vibrantly alive, she'd quite literally run straight into his arms, begging his help.

His smile deepened. Not such a bad beginning to the evening, after all. And by morning, Eddy's letters would be safely in his hands.

Really, the evening was turning out to be most delightful, an adventure truly worthy of his skills and intellect. But before he quite dared celebrate, he had to make certain his prize did not succumb to shock and die before he could make use of her.

Lachley's hands were all but trembling as he carried her through increasingly poorer streets, down wretched alleyways, until he emerged, finally, with many an uneasy glance over his shoulder, onto the broad thoroughfare of the Strand, where wealth once again flaunted its presence in the houses of the rich and the fine shops they patronized. He had no trouble, there, flagging down a hansom cab at last.

"Cleveland Street," he ordered curtly. "The young lady's quite ill. I must get her to my surgery at once."

"Right, guv," the cabbie nodded.

The cab lurched forward at an acceptably rapid pace and Lachley settled himself to sound his prize's pulse and listen to the quality of her breathing. She was in deep shock, pulse fast and thready, skin clammy and chill. He cradled her head almost tenderly, wondering who the young man with her had been and who had attacked them. A Nichol footpad, most likely. They prowled the area near the Opera, targeting the wealthy gentlemen who frequented the neighborhood, so close to the slums of SoHo. That particular footpad's fatal loss, however, was his immense gain.

The cab made excellent time, bringing him to his doorstep before she'd even regained consciousness from her dead faint. Charles answered the bell, since fumbling for his key was too awkward while carrying her. His manservant's calm facade cracked slightly at the sight of his unconscious prize. "Whatever has happened, sir?"

"The young lady was attacked by footpads on the street. I must get her to the surgery at once."

"Of course, sir. Your scheduled patient has arrived a little early. Mr. Maybrick is waiting in the study."

"Very good, Charles," Lachley nodded, leaving the butler to close and lock the door. James Maybrick could jolly well wait a bit longer. He had to secure this girl, quickly. He carried her back through the house and set her gently onto the examining table, where he retrieved his stethoscope and sounded her heartbeat. Yes, shock, right enough. He found blankets, elevated her feet, covered her warmly, then managed to rouse the girl from her stupor by chafing her wrists and placing warm compresses along her neck. She stirred, moaned softly. Lachley smiled quietly, then poured out a draught of his potent aperitif. He was lifting the girl's head, trying to bring her round sufficiently to swallow it, when Charles appeared at the door to the surgery.

"Dr. Lachley, I beg pardon, sir, but Mr. Maybrick is growing quite agitated. He insists on seeing you immediately, sir."

Lachley tightened his hands around the vial of medicine and forcibly fought back an unreasoning wave of rage. Ill-timed bastard! I'll bloody well shoot him through the balls when this night's business is done! "Very well!" he snapped. "Tell him I'll be there directly."

The girl was only half conscious, but more than awake enough to swallow the drug. He forced it past her teeth, then held her mouth closed when she struggled, weak and trembling in his grasp. A faint sound of terror escaped from between ashen lips before she swallowed involuntarily. He got more of the drug down her throat, then gave curt instructions to the waiting manservant. "Watch her, Charles. She's quite ill. The medicine should help her sleep."

"Of course, sir."

"Move her to the guest room as soon as the medicine takes hold. I'll check on her again after I've seen Mr. Maybrick."

Charles nodded and stepped aside to let him pass. Lachley stormed past, vowing to take a suitable vengeance for the interruption. Then he drew multiple calming breaths, fixed in place a freezing smile, and steeled himself to suffer the slings and arrows of a fortune so outrageous, even the bloody Bard would've been driven to murder, taking up arms against it. One day, he promised himself, I shall laugh about this.

Preferably, on the day James Maybrick dropped off a gallows.

Meanwhile . . .

He opened the door briskly and greeted the madman waiting beyond. "My dear Mr. Maybrick! So delighted to see you, sir! Now, then, what seems to be the trouble this evening . . ."

Beyond James Maybrick's pasty features, beyond the windows and their heavy drapes and thick panes of wavy glass, lightning flickered, promising another storm to match the one in Lachley's infuriated soul.

Kit Carson knew he was a hopelessly doting grandfather when, twenty-four hours after Margo's departure for London, he was seriously considering going through the Britannia the next time it opened, just to be near her. He missed the exasperating little minx more than he'd have believed possible. The apartment they shared was echoingly empty. Dinner was a depressingly silent affair. And not even the endless paperwork waiting for him at the Neo Edo's office could distract him from his gloom. Worse, they'd found no trace of Ianira Cassondra, her husband Marcus, or the cassondra's beautiful children, despite the largest manhunt in station history. Station security hadn't been any more successful finding the two people who'd shot three men on station, either, despite their being described in detail by a full two-dozen eyewitnesses.

By the next day, when the Wild West Gate cycled into Denver's, summer of 1885, tempers amongst the security squads were running ragged. Ianira's up-time acolytes-many of them injured during the rioting-were staging protests that threatened to bring commerce in Little Agora to a screeching halt. And Kit Carson-who'd spent a fair percentage of his night working with search teams, combing the rocky bowels of the station for some trace of the missing down-timers-needed a drink as badly as a dehydrated cactus needed a desert rainstorm in the spring.

Unshaven and tired, with a lonely ache in his chest, Kit found himself wandering into Frontier Town during the pre-gate ruckus, looking for company and something wet to drown his sorrows. He couldn't even rely on Malcolm to jolly him out of his mood-Malcolm was down the Britannia with Margo, lucky stiff. A sardonic smile twisted Kit's mouth. Why he'd ever thought retirement would be any fun was beyond him. Nothing but massive doses of boredom mingled with thieving tourists who stripped the Neo Edo's rooms of everything from towels to plumbing fixtures, and endless gossip about who was doing what, with or to whom, and why. Maybe I ought to start guiding, just for something to do? Something that didn't involve filling out the endless government paperwork required for running a time-terminal hotel . . .

"Hey, Kit!" a familiar voice jolted him out of his gloomy maunderings. "You look sorrier than a wet cat that's just lost a dogfight."

Robert Li, station antiquarian and good friend, was seated at a cafe table outside Bronco Billy's, next to the Arabian Nights construction crew foreman. Li's dark eyes glinted with sympathetic good humor as he waved Kit over.

"Nah," Kit shook his head, angling over to grab one of the empty chairs at Robert's table, "didn't lose a dogfight. Just missing an Imp."

"Ah," Robert nodded sagely, trying to look his inscrutable best. A maternal Scandinavian heritage had given the antiquarian his fair-skinned coloring, but a paternal Hong Kong Chinese grandfather had bequeathed Li his name, the slight almond shape of his eyes, and the self-ascribed duty to go inscrutable on command. "The nest empties and the father bird chirps woefully."

Kit smiled, despite himself. "Robert?"

"Yeah?"

"Save it for the tourists, huh?"

The antiquarian grinned, unrepentant, and introduced him to the foreman.

"Kit, meet Ammar Kalil Ben Mahir Riyad, foreman of the Arabian Nights construction team. We've just been discussing pre-Islamic Arabian artwork. He's worried about the Arabian Nights tourists, because they're going to try smuggling antiquities out through the gate and he wanted to know if I could help spot the thefts."

"Of course," Kit nodded, shaking hands across the table and greeting him in Arabic, of which he knew only a few words. The foreman smiled and returned the greeting, then his eyes turned serious. "I will stay only a moment longer, Mr. Carson, our work shift begins again soon." He hesitated, then said, "I wish to apologize for the problems some of my workers have caused. I was not given any choice in the men I brought into TT-86. Others did the hiring. Most of us are Suni, we have no quarrel with anyone, and even most up-time Shi'ia do not agree with this terrible Brotherhood. I did not know some of the men were members, or I would have refused to take them. If I could afford to send away those who started the fighting, I would. But it is not in my power to fire them and we are already behind schedule. I have docked their wages and written letters of protest to my superiors, which I will send through Primary when it opens. I have asked for them to be replaced with reliable workers who will not start riots. Perhaps," he hesitated again, looking very worried, "you could speak with your station manager? If the station deports them, I cannot be held responsible and my superiors will have to send reliable men to replace them, men who are not in the Ansar Majlis."

"I'll talk to Bull Morgan," Kit promised.

Relief touched his dark eyes. "Thank you, Mr. Carson. Your word means a great deal." He glanced at Robert and a hint of his smile returned. "I enjoyed very much discussing my country's ancient art with you, Mr. Li."

"The pleasure was mine," Robert smiled. "Let's meet again, when you have more time."

They shook hands, then the foreman took his leave and disappeared into the crowds thronging Frontier Town. Robert said, "Riyad's a good man. This trouble's really got him upset."

"Believe me, I'll take it up with Bull. If we don't stop this trouble, there won't be a station left for Riyad to finish working on."

Robert nodded, expression grim, then waved over a barmaid. "Name your poison, Kit. You look like you could use a dose. I know I could."

"Firewater," Kit told the barmaid. "A double, would you?"

"Sure, Kit." She winked. "One double firewater, coming right up. And another scotch?" she added, glancing at Robert's half-empty glass.

"No, make mine a firewater, too."

Distilled on station from God alone knew what, firewater was a favorite with residents. Tourists who'd made the mistake of indulging had occasionally been known to need resuscitation in the station infirmary. As they waited for their drinks to arrive, a slender young man in black, sporting a badly stained, red

silk bandana, reeled toward them in what appeared to be the terminal stages of inebriation. His deeply roweled silver spurs jangled unevenly as he staggered along and his Mexican sombrero lay canted crookedly down over his face, adding to his air of disconsolate drunkenness.

"I'd say that kid's been tipping a little too much firewater, himself," Li chuckled.

The kid in question promptly staggered against their table. Robert's drink toppled and sloshed across the table. A lit candle dumped melted wax into Robert's plate and silverware scattered all over the concrete floor. The caballero rebounded in a reeling jig-step that barely kept him on his feet, and kept going, trailing a stench of whiskey and garlic that set both Kit and Robert Li coughing. A baggage porter, bent nearly double under a load of luggage, trailed gamely after him, trying to keep his own course reasonably straight despite his employer's drunken meanderings through the crowd.

"Good God," Kit muttered, picking up scattered silverware as Robert mopped up the spill on the table, "is that idiot still drunk?"

"Still?" Robert Li asked as the waitress brought their drinks and whisked away the mess on the table.

"Yeah," Kit said, sipping gingerly at his firewater, "we saw him yesterday. Kid was bragging about winning some shooting competition down the Wild West Gate."

"Oh, that." Robert nodded as the drunken tourist attempted to navigate thick crowds around the Denver Gate's departures lounge. He stumbled into more people than he avoided, leaving a trail of profanity in his wake and more than a few ladies who made gagging noises when he passed too close. "Yes, there's a group of black-powder enthusiasts from up time going through this trip, mostly college kids, some veteran shooters. Plan to spend several weeks at one of the old mined-out ghost towns. They're running a horseback, black-powder competition, one that's not bound by Single Action Shooting Society rules and regulations. Paula Booker, of all people, came in the other day, told me all about it. She's taking a vacation, believe it or not, plans to compete for the trophy. Bax told the tour organizers they had to take a surgeon with 'em, in case of accidents, so Paula made a deal to trade her skills in exchange for the entry fee and a free gate ticket."

Kit chuckled. "Paula always was a smart lady. Good for her. She hasn't taken a vacation in years."

"She was all excited about the competition. They can't use anything but single-action pistols in up-time sanctioned competitions any more, which kind of takes the variety out of a shooting match that's supposed to be based on actual historical fact."

Kit snorted. "I'd say it would. Well, if that idiot," he nodded toward the wake of destruction the drunken tourist was leaving behind him, "would sober up, maybe he'd have a chance of hitting something. Like, say, the side of a building. But he's going to waste a ton of money if he keeps pouring down the whiskey."

Li chuckled. "If he wants to waste his money, I guess it's his business. I feel sorry for his porter, though. Poor guy. His boss already needs a bath and they haven't even left yet."

"Maybe," Kit said drily, "they'll dump him in the ghost town's gold-mining flume and scrub him off?"

Robert Li lifted his glass in a salute. "Here's to a good dunking, which I'd say he deserves if any tourist ever did."

Kit clinked his glass against his friend's and sipped, realizing as he did that he felt less lonely and out of sorts already. "Amen to that."

Bronco Billy's cafe was popular during a cycling of the Wild West Gate because its "outdoor" tables stood close enough to the departures lounge, they commanded a grand view of any and all shenanigans at the gate. Which was why

Robert Li had commandeered this particular table, the best of the lot available. They spotted Paula in the departures lounge and waved, then Kit noticed Skeeter Jackson working the crowd. "Now, there's a kid I feel for."

Robert followed his gaze curiously. "Skeeter? For God's sake, why? Looks like he's up to his old tricks is all."

Kit shook his head. "Look again. He's hunting, all right. For Ianira and Marcus and their kids."

Robert glanced sidelong at Kit for a moment. "You may just be right about that."

Skeeter was studying arrivals intently, peering from face to face, even the baggage handlers. The expression of intense concentration, of waning hope, of fear and determination, were visible even from this distance. Kit understood how Skeeter felt. He'd had friends go missing without a trace, before. Scouts, mostly, with whom the odds had finally caught up, who'd stepped through a gate and failed to return, or had failed to reach the other side, Shadowing themselves by inadvertently entering a time where they already existed. It must be worse for Skeeter, since no one expected resident down-timers to go missing in the middle of a crowded station.

Kit sat back, wondering how long Skeeter would push himself, like this, before giving up. Station security already had. The wannabe gunslinger approached the ticket counter to present his ticket and identification. He had to fish through several pockets to find it.

"Joey Tyrolin!" he bellowed at a volume loud enough to carry clear across the babble of voices to their table. "Sharpshooter! Gonna win me tha' shootin' match. Git me that gold medal!"

The unfortunate ticket agent flinched back, doubtless at the blast of garlic and whiskey fired point-blank into her face. Kit, who'd been able to read lips for several decades, made out the pained reply, spoken rapidly and to all appearances on one held breath: "Good-evening-Mr.-Tyrolin-let-me-check-you-in-sir-yes-this-seems-to-be-in-perfect-order-go-right-on-through-sir . . ."

Kit had never seen any Time Tours employee check any tourist through any gate with such speed and efficiency, not in the history of Shangri-La Station. Across the table, Robert Li was sputtering with laughter. The infamous Mr. Tyrolin, weaving on his cowboy-booted feet, turned unsteadily and peered out from under his cockeyed sombrero. He hollered full blast at the unfortunate porter right behind him. "Hey! Henry or Sam or whoever y'are! Get m'luggage over here! Li'l gal here's gotta tag it or somethin' . . ."

The poor baggage handler, dressed in a working man's dungarees and faded check shirt, staggered back under the blast, then ducked his head, coughing. His own hat had already slid down his brow, from walking bent double. The brim banged his nose, completely hiding his face as the unlucky porter staggered up to the counter and fumbled through pockets for his own identification. He presented it to the ticket agent along with Mr. Tyrolin's baggage tags and managed, in the process, to drop half his heavy load. Cases and leather bags scattered in a rain of destruction. Tourists in line behind him leaped out of the way, swearing loudly. The woman directly behind the hapless porter howled in outrage and hopped awkwardly on one foot.

"You idiot! You nearly broke my foot!" She hiked up a calico skirt and peered at her shoe, a high-topped, multi-buttoned affair with a scuff visible across the top where a case had crashed down on top of it. Tears were visible on her face beneath the brim of her calico sunbonnet. "Watch what you're doing, you fumble-fingered moron!"

The porter, mouthing abject apologies, was scrambling for the luggage while the ticket clerk, visibly appalled, was rushing around the counter to assist the injured tourist.

"Ma'am, I'm so dreadfully sorry--"

"You ought to be! For God's sake, can't you get him out of the way?" The

unfortunate porter had lost his balance again and nearly crashed into her a second time. "I paid six thousand dollars for this ticket! And that clumsy jackass just dropped a trunk on my foot!"

The harried ticket agent was thrusting the porter's validated ticket into the nearest pocket she could reach on his dungarees, while waving frantically for baggage assistance and apologizing profusely. "I'm terribly sorry, we'll get this taken care of immediately, ma'am, would you like for me to call a doctor to the gate to see your foot?"

"And have them put me in a cast and miss the gate? My God, what a lot of idiots you are! I ought to hire a lawyer! I'm sorry I ever signed that stupid hold harmless waiver. Well don't just stand there, here's my ticket! I want to sit down and get off my poor foot! It's swelling up and hurts like hell!"

Time Tours baggage handlers scrambled to the porter's assistance, hauling scattered luggage out of the way so the irate, foot-sore tourist could complete her check-in procedure and hobble over to the nearest chair. She sent endless black and glowering glares at the drunken Joey Tyrolin and his porter, who was now holding his employer's head while that worthy was thoroughly sick into a decorative planter. Another Time Tours employee, visibly horrified, was fetching a wet cloth and basin. Paula Booker and the other Denver-bound tourists crowded as far as possible from Joey Tyrolin's corner of the departures lounge. Even Skeeter Jackson was steering clear of the mess and its accompanying stench.

"Oh, Kit," Robert Li was wiping tears, he was laughing so hard. "I feel sorry for Joey Tyrolin when he sobers up! That lady is gonna make his life one miserable, living nightmare for the next two weeks!"

Kit chuckled. "Serves him right. But I feel sorrier for the porter, poor sap. He's going to catch it from both of 'em."

"Too true. I hope he's being well paid, whoever he is. Say, Kit, I haven't had a chance to ask, who do you think the Ripper's going to turn out to be?"

"Oh, God, Robert, not you, too?" Kit rolled his eyes and downed another gulp of firewater.

"C'mon, Kit, 'fess up. Bets are running hot and heavy it turns out to be some up-timer. But I know you. I'm betting you won't fall for that. Who is it? A deranged American actor appearing in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Mary Kelly's lesbian lover? Francis Tumblety, that American doctor who kept women's wombs pickled in jars? Aaron Kosminski or Michael Ostrog, the petty thief and con artist? Maybe Frederick Bailey Deeming, or Thomas Neil Cream, the doctor whose last words on the gallows were 'I am Jack-'? Or maybe a member of a Satanic cult, sacrificing victims to his Dark Lord? Like Robert Donston Stephenson or Aleister Crowley?"

Kit held up a hand, begging for mercy. "Please, enough! I've heard all the theories! I'd as soon believe it was Lewis Carroll or the queen's personal physician. The evidence is no better for them than for anybody else you've just named. Personally? If it wasn't James Maybrick, and the case against him is a pretty good one, if you don't discount the diary as a forgery-and the forensic and psychological evidence in favor of the diary are pretty strong-then I think it was a complete stranger, someone none of our Ripperologists has identified or even suspected."

"Or the Ripperoons who think they're Ripperologists," Li added with a mischievous glint in his eye. Every resident on station had already had a bellyful of the self-annointed "experts" who arrived on station to endlessly argue the merits of their own pet theories. "Well," Robert drawled, a smile hovering around the corners of his mouth, "you may just be right, Kit. Guess we'll find out next week, won't we?"

"Maybe," Kit chuckled. "I'd like to see the faces of the Ripper Watch Team if it does turn out to be somebody they've never heard of."

Robert laughed. "Lucky Margo. Maybe she'll take pictures?"

Kit gave his friend a scowl. "She'd better do more than take a few snapshots!"

"Relax, Grandpa, Margo's a bright girl. She'll do you proud."

"That," Kit sighed, "is exactly what I'm afraid of."

Robert Li's chuckle was as unsympathetic as the wicked twinkle in his eyes.

When, Kit wondered forlornly, did he get to start enjoying the role of grandpa? The day she gives up the notion of scouting, his inner voice said sourly. Trouble was, the day Margo gave up the dream of scouting, both their hearts would break. Sometimes—and Kit Carson was more aware of the fact than most people—life was no fair at all. And, deep down, he knew he wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Neither would Margo. And that, Kit sighed, was one reason he loved her so much.

She was too much like him.

God help them both.

Ianira Cassondra did not know where she was.

Her mind was strangely lethargic, her thoughts slow and disjointed. She lay still, head aching, and knew only cold fear and a sickening sense of dislocation behind her eyelids. The smells and distant sounds coming through the fog in her mind were strange, unfamiliar. A harsh, acrid stink, like black dust in the back of her throat . . . a rhythmic ticking that might have been an old-fashioned clock like the ones in Connie Logan's shop or perhaps the patter of rain against a roof . . . That wasn't possible, of course, they couldn't hear rain in the station.

Memory stirred, sharp and terrible despite the lassitude holding her captive, whispered that she might not be in the station. She'd been smuggled out of TT-86 in Jenna Caddrick's steamer trunk. And something had gone terribly wrong at the hotel, men had come after them with silenced, up-time guns, forcing them to flee through the window and down the streets. She was in London, then. But where in London? Who had brought her to this place? One of the men trying to kill them? And why did she feel so very strange, unable to move or think clearly? Other memories came sluggishly through the murk. The attack in the street. Running toward the stranger in a top hat and coat, begging his help. The belch of flame and shattering roar of his pistol, shooting the assassin. The touch of his hand against her wrist—

Ianira stiffened as shock poured through her, weak and disoriented as she was. Goddess! The images slammed again through her mind, stark and terrible, filled with blood and destruction. And with that memory came another, far more terrible: their benefactor's pistol raised straight at Jenna's face, the nightmare of the gun's discharge, Jenna's long and terrible fall to the pavement, blood gushing from her skull . . .

Ianira was alone in London with a madman.

She began to tremble and struggled to open her eyes, at least.

Light confused her for a moment, soft and dim and strange. She cleared her vision slowly. He had brought her to an unknown house. A fire burned brightly in a polished grate across from the bed where she lay. The room spoke of wealth, at least, with tasteful furniture and expensive paper on the walls, ornate decorations carved into the woodwork in the corners of the open, arched doorway leading to another room, she had no idea what, beyond the foot of her bed. Gaslight burned low in a frosted glass globe set into a wall bracket of polished, gleaming brass. The covers pulled up across her were thick and warm, quilted and expensive with embroidery.

The man who had brought her to this place, Ianira recalled slowly, had been dressed exceedingly well. A gentleman, then, of some means, even if a total madman. She shuddered beneath the expensive covers and struggled to sit up, discovering with the effort that she could not move her head without the room spinning dizzily. Drugged . . . she realized dimly. I've been drugged. . . .

Fear tightened down another degree.

Voices came to her, distantly, male voices, speaking somewhere below her prettily decorated prison. What does he want of me? She struggled to recall those last, horrifying moments on the street with Jenna, recalled him snarling out something in her own native language, the ancient Greek of her childhood, realized it had been a curse of shock and rage. How did a British gentleman come to know the language of ancient Athens and Ephesus? Her mind was too slow and confused to remember what she had learned on station of Londoners beyond the Britannia Gate.

The voices were closer, she realized with a start of terror. Climbing toward her. And heavy footfalls thudded hollowly against the sound of stairs. Then a low, grating, metallic sound came to her ears and the door swung slowly open. "--see to Mr. Maybrick, Charles. The medication I gave him will keep him quiet for the next several hours. I'll come down and tend to him again in a bit, after I've finished here."

"Very good, sir."

Their voices sounded like the Time Tours Britannia guides, like the movies she and Marcus had watched about London. About--and her mind whirled, recalling the name this man had spoken, the name of Maybrick, a name she recognized with a chill of terror--about Jack the Ripper . . .

Then the door finished opening and he was there in the doorway, the man who had shot Jenna Caddrick and brought Ianira to this place. He stood unsmiling in the doorway for a long moment, just looking down into her open eyes, then entered her bedroom quietly and closed the door with a soft click. He turned an iron key in the lock and pocketed it. She watched him come with a welling sense of slow horror, could see the terrible blackness which hovered about him like a bottomless hunger . . .

"Well, then, my dear," he spoke softly, and pulled a chair close to sit down at her side. "I really didn't expect you to awaken so soon."

She would have cowered from the hand he rested against her temple, had she been able to move. The rage surrounding this man slammed into her senses. She cried aloud, as though from a physical blow.

"No need to be afraid, my dear. I certainly won't be harming you." He laughed softly, at some joke she could not fathom. "Tell me your name."

Her tongue moved with a will of its own. "Ianira . . ." The drugs in her veins roared through her mind, implacable and terrifying.

"Ianira? Where are you from? What last name have you?"

They called her Cassondra, after her title as priestess of Artemis. She whispered it out, felt as well as saw the surprise that rippled through him. "Cassondra? Deuced odd surname. Where the devil did you come from?"

Confusion tore through her. "The station--" she began.

"No, not the bloody train station, woman! Where were you born?"

"Ephesus . . ."

"Ephesus?" Shock tore through his eyes again. "You mean from the region of Turkey where that ancient place used to be? But why, then, do you speak Greek, when Turkestani is the language of that part of the world? And how is it you speak the Greek of Pericles and Homer?"

Too many questions, blurring together too quickly . . . He leaned across, seizing her wrist in a brutal grip. "Answer me!"

She cried out in mortal terror, struggled to pull away from the swamping horror of what she sensed in his soul. "Artemis, help me . . ." The plea was instinctive, choked out through the blackness flooding across her mind. His face swam into focus, very close to hers.

"Artemis?" he whispered, shock blazing through his eyes once more. "What do you know of Artemis, the Many-Breasted Goddess of Ephesus?"

The pain of his nearness was unendurable. She lapsed into the language of her childhood, pled with him not to hurt her, so . . .

He left her side, allowing relief to flood into her senses, but was gone only for a moment. He returned with a leather case, which he opened, removing a heavy, metal tube with a needle protruding from one end. "If you are unable to speak with what I've given you already," he muttered, "no power of hell itself will keep you silent with this in your veins."

He injected something into her arm, tore the sleeve of her dress to expose the crook of her elbow and slid the needle in. New dizziness flared as the drug went in, hurting with a burning pain. The room swooped and swung in agonizing circles.

"Now then, Miss Cassandra," the voice of her jailor came through a blur, "you will please tell me who you are and where you come from and who the man was with you . . ."

Ianira plunged into a spinning well of horror from which there was no possible escape. She heard her voice answer questions as though in a dream, repeated answers even she could not make sense of, found herself slipping deep into prophetic trance as the images streamed into her mind, a boy hanging naked from a tree, dying slowly under this man's knife, and a pitiful young man with royal blood in his veins, whose need for love was the most tragic thing about him, a need which had propelled him into the clutches of the man crouched above her now. Time reeled and spun inside her mind and she saw the terrified face of a woman, held struggling against a wooden fence, and other women, hacked to pieces under a madman's knife . . .

She discovered she was screaming only when he slapped her hard enough to jolt her from the trance. She lay trembling, dizzy and ill, and focused slowly on his eyes. He sat staring down at her, eyes wide and shocked and blazing with an unholy sort of triumph. "By God," he whispered, "what else can you do?"

When she was unable to speak, he leaned close. "Concentrate! Tell me where Eddy is now!"

The tragic, lonely young man flashed into her mind, surrounded by splendour such as Ianira had never dreamed might exist. He was seated at a long table, covered with gleaming silver and crystal and china edged in gold. An elderly woman in black Ianira recognized from photographs presided over the head of the table, her severe gaze directed toward the frightened young man.

"You are not to go wandering about in the East End again, Eddy, is that understood? It is a disgrace, shameful, such conduct. I'm sending you to Sandringham soon, I won't stand for such behavior . . ."

"Yes, Grandmama," he whispered, confused and miserable and frightened to be the object of her displeasure.

Ianira did not realize she had spoken aloud, describing what she saw until her jailor's voice shocked her back into the little room with the expensive coverlets and the gas lights and the drugs in her veins. "Sandringham?" he gasped. "The queen is sending him to Scotland? Bloody hell . . ." Then the look in his eyes changed. "Might be just as well. Get the boy out of the road for a bit, until this miserable business is finished. God knows, I won't risk having him connected with it."

Ianira lay trembling, too exhausted and overwhelmed by horror to guess at her fate, trapped in this madman's hands. He actually smiled down at her, brushing the hair back from her brow. "Your friends," he whispered intimately. "Will they search for you?"

Terror exploded. She flinched back, gabbled out the fear of pursuit, the gunmen in the hotel, the threat to her life from faceless men she had never met . . . Fear drained away at the sound breaking from him. Laughter. He was staring down into her eyes and laughing with sheer, unadulterated delight. "Dear God," he wheezed, leaning back in his chair, "they daren't search for you! Such a bloody piece of luck! No doubt," he smiled, "someone influential was disquieted by what you can do, my dear lady. Never fear, I shall protect

you from all harm. You are much too precious, too valuable a creature to allow anyone to find you and bring you to grief." He leaned close and stroked the back of her hand. "Mayhap," he chuckled, "I'll even take you to wife, as an added precaution."

She closed her eyes against horror at such a fate.

He leaned down and brushed his lips to hers, then murmured, "I've work to do, this evening, my lovely pet, very serious work, which must take me from your side. And you must rest, recover from the shocks to your system. Tomorrow, however . . ." He chuckled then stroked her brow, the chill of her wet cheek. "Tomorrow should prove most entertaining, indeed."

He left her, drugged and helpless, in the center of the bed and carefully locked the door behind him. Ianira lay weeping silently until the medication he had given her dragged her down into darkness.

They didn't intend to stay long.

In fact, they hadn't intended to take the train to Colorado Springs with the rest of the tour group, or ride all the way out to the derelict mining camp in the mountains far to the west of the train station, not at all. Not with Artemisia and Gelasia asleep in a big, awkward trunk, sedated and breathing bottled oxygen from the same type of canisters they'd sent with Ianira into London. Marcus, terrified for his children's safety, had packed away a spare oxygen bottle for each of the girls, just in case something went wrong. And it had. Badly wrong.

They'd been followed through the Wild West Gate.

Just as Noah had predicted.

"His name's Sarnoff," Noah Armstrong muttered, pointing him out with a slight nod of the head. "Chief of security for a real bad sort named Gideon Guthrie. And Guthrie's specialty is making people disappear when they're too much of a threat. Real sweet company, Jenna's Daddy keeps. We can't do a damned thing yet. If we bolt now, he's just going to follow us. Then he'll choose the time and place, when there aren't a truckful of witnesses nearby. But if we head for that mining camp with the rest of the shooting competition tour, he'll have to follow us, with all those up-time witnesses lurking everywhere. Then we can choose the time and place, jump him when he's not expecting it."

"I can stick a knife through his ribs," Julius offered, glaring out from under the calico bonnet he'd donned in his role doubling for Jenna.

The detective said sharply, "No, not here!" When Julius looked like arguing, Noah shot a quelling look at the down-time teenager. "Too many witnesses. If we have to explain why murder is really self-defense, it'll just give the next death squad they send after us the chance they need to hit us while we're cooling our heels in the station's jail. So we wait until we're up in the mountains. Marcus, you'll be riding with the baggage mules when we leave the train station. Keep the trunk with the girls at the very back of the mule train. It's a long ride out there, so we'll have to switch out the oxygen canisters partway. Tell the other porters the mule's thrown a shoe or something, just get that trunk open and switch out the bottles. They'll both sleep until sometime tonight, but they'll need air in a few hours."

So that was what they did, Marcus trembling at the thought of the danger to his little girls. And he had no assurance that Ianira was safe, either, that no one had followed her to London. He bit one lip, wishing desperately they had all been able to go through one gate together as a family. But Jenna Caddrick and Noah Armstrong had argued the point forcefully.

Unfortunately, they hadn't brought anything like enough supplies to take his precious children all the way out to the rugged mining camp where the shooting competition was to be held. They'd planned for Marcus and the girls to bolt out of Denver, to ditch the tour and take a train east into the Great Plains

which he had seen in so many cowboy movies. They would hide in one of the big cities like Chicago or St. Louis for three or four cycles of the Wild West Gate, just long enough for Noah to eliminate any threat which might come through from up time on the next cycle of the gate.

Then they could slip back onto the station, after Noah had gone back up time, taking to the legal authorities the proof which the detective had brought onto the station. Only when the men responsible for the murderous attacks had been jailed, would Marcus and his little family be safe again. And Julius, too. The teenage leader of Shangri-La's Lost and Found Gang had come through the Porta Romae, same as Marcus had. Julius was playing his part as Jenna's double with superb skill, laying a false trail for their pursuers to follow. His act at the departures lounge, dressed as an aggrieved lady tourist bawling about her injured foot had convinced onlookers, while Noah, acting the role of the drunken Joey Tyrolin, had drawn all attention away from Marcus, who'd needed to remain anonymous until safely on the other side of the gate.

Marcus had taken Julius' own station identification, so he could act as "Joey Tyrolin's" baggage porter to disguise his own identity. Julius had used a fake ID produced by the ever-resourceful Noah Armstrong. Jenna Caddrick had furnished it, as well as the money for the Denver Gate tickets. Marcus' throat closed, just thinking of the risk Noah and Jenna and young Julius were running to keep his family safe. Ianira and his children had never seemed so fragile to Marcus, never more precious to him. They had agreed to the charade, because they'd had no other choice.

But Marcus had never ridden a horse in his life. And while he had once been accustomed to the burning brilliance of a Mediterranean sun, he'd lived for several years in the sunless world of TT-86. Despite the broad-brimmed hat which shaded his face, by the time they were an hour out on the trail, Marcus was sunburnt, sore in more places than he'd realized his body possessed, and miserably homesick for the station and his wife and his many 'eighty-sixer friends.

"We'll go through with the itinerary we set up," Noah Armstrong told them on the trail. "That way, the bastard following us will think we haven't twigged to who he is. Any edge we can find, we need." Dressed in a cowboy's gear, Noah Armstrong was more difficult than ever to pigeonhole as a man or a woman. Each time Marcus thought he'd gathered enough clues to decide, the up-time detective did or said something which threw all his theories into chaos again.

Marcus had seen individuals like Noah Armstrong before, in the slave markets of Rome. Ambiguous in the way their bodies grew into adulthood, developing into neither man nor woman, such people were exceedingly rare in nature. But they were pitifully common on auction blocks. Boys in Roman slave markets were routinely castrated as children to preserve a child's sexless features and mannerisms, so they would grow into eunuchs. Neither male nor female, such artificially created eunuchs were valuable slaves. But those born that way fetched astronomical prices in Roman slave pens. Marcus had seen one such slave fetch half-a-million sesterces at auction-ten times the going rate for a highly educated scribe or Greek tutor. Romans, Marcus had learned over the years, were avaricious collectors. And the more unusual the item, or the individual, the greater the status in claiming its ownership. Whoever Noah was, the detective was luckier than he or she knew, to've been born up time, not down the Porta Romae.

As they rode out of Colorado Springs with dust from the horses' hooves hanging on the hot air, Julius frowned slightly under his calico bonnet brim. "Do you want me to go ahead and enter the shooting contest, then? I've watched a lot of movies, but I don't really know how to shoot a black-powder pistol."

"Don't worry about that," Armstrong reassured Marcus' young friend. "I'll show you how to load and operate the pistols tonight at camp, and I'll teach you to fire them. You don't have to shoot well enough to win or even qualify."

Just make it look good, that's all we need. Long before the competition's over, we'll have nailed this bastard Sarnoff, so we can go back to Denver. When we've eliminated him, I'll want you to go with Marcus and the girls to the nearest train station. As soon as the men responsible for this have been arrested, I'll send word and we can bring everyone home again."

It sounded so simple . . .

But Marcus had learned the hardest way possible that nothing in life was ever simple, least of all a high-stakes game in which religion, political power, and human life were the stakes. During the long hours it took them to reach the mining camp, refurbish the ghost town to a livable state, and set up the shooting course, with Marcus periodically checking on his precious little girls to be sure they still slept and breathed comfortably in their snug cocoon, Marcus couldn't help glancing over his shoulder every few minutes, expecting disaster to strike them down at any moment.

He searched the faces of the others on the tour, the eager college-age kids who had gathered for a try at the medal, the older shooters who'd clearly been at this sport longer than the kids had been alive; he studied the guides supplied by Time Tours, the baggage handlers and mule drovers who tended the line of stubborn, slack-eared mules which had toted the equipment and personal baggage of the entire competition; and wondered what it must be like to be free to come and go as one pleased through the up-time world, through any gate, so long as the money was there to pay for a ticket. And each time the silent, hired killer who'd come through the gate with them glanced sidelong at Julius and himself, Marcus sweat into his dungarees and swallowed back sour fright.

Some of the tourists were talkative, laughing and bragging or sharing stories about other competitions they'd participated in. Some of them talked about re-enactments of historical battles involving thousands of people and weapons ranging from pistols to full-sized cannons. Marcus had seen cannons only in photographs and movies. Other tour members were loners, keeping to themselves, cleaning and oiling their guns regularly, working hard at tasks assigned to get the competition's complex course of fire laid out and the buildings refurbished, speaking little and wolfing down their supper in silence at mealtime. Impromptu sing-alongs and amateur musicians provided entertainment for those with the desire to socialize.

There was even-and their happiness left Marcus feeling more lonely and isolated than ever-a young couple who planned to marry during the competition. They had brought along a wedding dress, a bridesmaid, a best man, an officiant, and photographer for the happy occasion. The photographer snapped pictures of everything and everyone in sight with a digital camera, much to the irritation of Noah Armstrong. The one person in the tour Marcus avoided like plague was Paula Booker, the station's cosmetic surgeon. She was preoccupied, at least, by the fun of her vacation, and paid little attention to the baggage handlers where they sat in the shadows, eating their meal in silence.

But when Artemisia and Gelasia woke up from their long, drugged sleep, all hell broke loose-and Paula Booker recognized him. Her eyes widened in shock and she opened her mouth to speak . . . then closed it again, looking abruptly frightened. She understands, he realized with a jolt of hope, she understands we are in danger, even if she is not sure of the cause.

Meanwhile, the whole camp had erupted and the baggage manager, who was not an 'eighty-sixer, but an up-timer hired by the tour organizers, demanded to know what insanity had prompted him to bring two toddlers off the station. The uproar echoed off the black-shadowed mountains hemming them in.

Nearly stammering under the close scrutiny of Sarnoff, aware that Noah Armstrong's hand was poised on the grip of a pistol at the detective's side, Marcus offered the only explanation he could: "I am a down-timer and we are

never allowed off the station, sir. My little girls have never seen the sun . . ."

It was true enough and more than a plausible reason. In fact, several women burst into tears and offered the sleepy girls candy and ribbons for their hair while other tourists, irate at such a notion, vented their wrath on the head baggage handler, protesting the cruelty of enforcing a law that didn't even permit down-timers' children to leave the station.

"It's not healthy!" one woman glared at the hapless Time Tours guides, men who lived full time down the Denver Gate, rarely returning to the station. They did not recognize him, thank all the gods. One woman in particular, the wedding photographer, was thoroughly incensed. "I've never heard of such an awful thing in all my life! Not letting little children go through a gate for some real sunshine! When I get home, you can believe I'm writing my congresswoman a nasty letter about this!"

Julius, playing the part of Cassie Coventina, added, "You certainly can't expect two little girls to sleep in that disgusting, filthy livery stable!" The disguised down-timer boy glanced at him, giving him and the children a winning smile, "They can stay in my cabin tonight. Every night, in fact. I've got plenty of room."

"Thank you," Marcus said with an exhausted, grateful smile.

So the girls moved into Julius' protective custody and Marcus and Noah watched the killer sent to stalk them, tracking him during their every waking moment, and Paula Booker followed them silently with her gaze, biting her lip now and again, clearly wanting to approach him and fearing to jeopardize his life, or perhaps her own, by doing so, while all of them, killer included, waited for the chance to strike. The man stalking them was too clever to wander off alone, where one or more of them could have sent him back to whatever gods had created him. They couldn't strike in front of witnesses any more than he could, but the chance everyone was waiting for came all too soon, during the endurance phase of the shooting games.

Marcus, burned to lobster red by the sun, was assigned the job of riding shadow on Julius' heels for this portion of the competition. The "endurance round" involved riding a looping, multiple-mile trail through the sun-baked mountains around the dusty gold-mining camp. The competitors were to pause at predetermined intervals to fire at pop-up targets placed along the trail like ambushes. Noah, deeply wary of Julius riding alone through the wild countryside, told Marcus quietly, "I want you to trail him, just far enough behind to stay in earshot. I'll trail you, same way."

Marcus, heart in his throat, just nodded. He couldn't keep his hands from trembling as he mounted his stolid plug of a horse and urged the animal into a shambling trot. He set a course that took him away from camp on a tangent, allowing him to loop back around and pick up Julius' trail just beyond the first ridge outside camp.

The sun blazed down despite the earliness of the hour. At least Julius' persona, Cassie Coventina, had drawn one of the early slots for riding the endurance course, so it wasn't too unbearably hot, yet. Dust rose in puffs where Marcus' horse plodded along the narrow, twisting trail. He urged the nag to a slightly faster shamble until he caught sight of "Miss Coventina" ahead, riding awkwardly in a high-pommeled side saddle. Marcus eased back, cocking his head to listen, reassured when Julius began to whistle, leaving him an audible trail to follow. Marcus glanced back several times and thought he caught a glimpse of "Joey Tyrolin" once or twice through the heat haze behind him.

Saddle leather squeaked and groaned under his thighs. Marcus began to sweat into his cotton shirt. He worried about the girls, back at camp, even though they were surrounded by fifteen adoring women who weren't riding the endurance trail until later in the afternoon, or who were part of the wedding and

weren't competing at all. The mingled scent of dust and sweating horse rose like a cloud, enveloping his senses and drawing his mind inexorably back to the years he'd spent as a slave working for the master of the chariot races and gladiatorial games and bestiaries at the great Circus Maximus. The scent of excited, sweating race horses and dust clogged his memory as thoroughly as the scream of dying animals and men-

The sharp animal scream that ripped through the hot morning was no memory.

Marcus jerked in his saddle. Blood drained from his face as the scream came again, a horse in mortal agony. Then a high, ragged shriek of pain, a human shriek, tore the air . . . and the booming report of a gun firing shook the dusty air . . .

Marcus kicked his horse into a startled canter. He wrenched at the gun on his hip. From behind him, a clatter of hooves rattled in a sudden burst of speed. Noah Armstrong swept past as though Marcus' horse were plodding along at a sedate walk. Another gunshot split the morning air. Then Marcus was around the bend in the trail and the disaster spread out in front of him.

Julius was down.

His horse was down, mortally wounded.

Dust rose in a cloud along the trail, where Noah pursued whoever had shot down Marcus' friend. He hauled his own horse to a slithering halt and slid out of the saddle, then flung himself to the young Roman's side. Julius was still alive, ashen and grey-lipped, but thank the gods, still alive . . .

"Don't move!" Marcus was tearing at the boy's clothing, ripping open the dress he wore as disguise. The calico cotton was drenched with dark stains that weren't sweat. The bullet had gone in low, missing the heart, plowing instead through the gut. The boy moaned, gritted his teeth, whimpered. Marcus was already stripping off his own shirt, tearing it into strips, placing compresses to staunch the bleeding. In the distance, a sharp report floated back over the rocky hills, followed by three more cracking gunshots. Then hoofbeats crashed back toward them. Marcus snatched up his pistol again. Noah Armstrong appeared, riding hell for leather toward them. Marcus dropped the gun from shaking hands and tied the compresses tighter.

The detective slithered out of a sweaty saddle and crouched beside the fallen teenager. "Hold on, Julius, do you hear me? We'll get you back to camp. To that surgeon, Paula Booker."

"No . . ." The boy was clawing at Noah's arm. "They'll just kill you . . . and Marcus . . . the girls . . . he'll kill you . . ."

"Not that one," Noah said roughly. "He's dead. Shot the bastard out of his saddle. Left him for the buzzards."

"Then they'll send someone else!"

If they hadn't already . . .

The unspoken words hung in the air, as hot and terrifying as the coppery smell of Julius' blood. "Please . . ." Julius was choking out the words, "you can't afford to take me back. I'll only slow you down. Just get the girls and run, please. . . ." Marcus tried to hush the frantic boy. Guilt ripped through him. He'd allowed Julius to help-this was his fault. "Please, Julius, do not speak! You have not the strength. Here, can you swallow a little water?" He held his canteen to the boy's lips.

"Just a sip," Noah cautioned. "There, that's enough. Here, help me get him up. No, Julius, we have to go back to camp anyway, to rescue the kids. You're coming with us, so don't argue. Marcus, we'll put him on your horse." The detective glanced up, met Marcus' gaze. "He's right, you know. They will send someone else. And someone after that."

"What can we do?" Marcus felt helpless, bitterly afraid, furious with himself for bringing his young friend into this.

"We leave Julius with the camp surgeon, that's what. As soon as we get back to camp, you get the girls and take them back to the livery stable with you.

During the confusion, you and I will leave camp with the kids. Take our horses and our gear and ride out. By the time they figure out we're gone, we'll be far enough away to catch a train out of the territory."

Marcus swallowed exactly once. "And go where?" he whispered.

"East. Way East. To New York." Noah held Marcus's gaze carefully, reluctance and regret brilliant in those enigmatic eyes. "And eventually," the detective added softly, "to London. Jenna and your wife will be there. We'll meet them."

Three years from now . . .

Marcus looked down into his young friend's ashen face, his pain-racked eyes, and knew they didn't have any choice. Three years in hiding . . . or this. When next Ianira saw their children, just hours after dropping them off at daycare, from her perspective, Artemisia would be nearly seven, Gelasia almost four. Gelasia might not even remember her mother. Ianira might well never forgive him. But he had no choice. They couldn't risk going back to the station, not even long enough to crash through the Britannia Gate. And crashing it was the only way they could get through the Britannia, because there wasn't a single ticket available for months, not until after the Ripper Season closed. Marcus bowed his head, squeezed shut his eyes. Then nodded, scarcely recognizing his own voice. "Yes. We will go to London. And wait." Three entire years. . .

Wordlessly, he helped the detective lift Julius to Marcus' saddle. Wordlessly, he climbed on behind his dying friend, steadied him and kept the boy from falling. Then turned his horse on the dusty, blood-spattered trail and left Julius' groaning, gut-shot mount sprawled obscenely across the path. A sharp report behind him, from Noah's gun, sent his pulse shuddering; but the agonized sounds tearing from the wounded horse cut off with that brief act of mercy. He tightened his hands around the sweaty wet leather of his reins.

And swore vengeance.

* * *

Jenna woke to the sensation of movement and the deep shock that she was still alive to waken at all. For a moment, the only thing in her mind was euphoria that she was still among the breathing. Then the pain hit, sharp and throbbing all along the side of her skull, and the nausea struck an instant later. She moaned and clenched her teeth against the pain-which only tightened the muscles of her scalp and sent the pain mushrooming off the scale. Jenna choked down bile, felt herself swoop and fall . . .

Then she lay propped across something hard, while she was thoroughly sick onto the street. Someone was holding her up, kept her from falling while she vomited. Memory struck hard, of the gun aimed at her face, of the roar and gout of flame, the agony of the gunshot striking her. She struggled, convinced she was in the hands of that madman, that he'd carried her off to finish her or interrogate her . . .

"Easy, there."

Whoever held her was far stronger than Jenna; hard hands kept her from moving away. Jenna shuddered and got the heavens under control, then gulped down terror and slowly raised her gaze from the filthy cobblestones. She lay propped across someone's thigh, resting against rough woolen cloth and a slim torso. Then she met the eyes of a woman whose face was shadowed by a broad-brimmed bonnet which nearly obscured her face in the darkness. Through the nausea and pain and terror, Jenna realized the woman was exceedingly poor. Her dress and coat were raggedy, patched things, the bonnet bedraggled by the night's rain. Gaslight from a nearby street lamp caught a glint of the woman's eyes, then she spoke, in a voice that sounded as poor and ragged as she was.

"Cor, luv," the woman said softly, "if you ain't just a sight, now. I've 'ad me quite a jolly time, so I 'ave, tryin' t' foller you all the way 'ere, an' you bent on getting yourself that lost and killed."

Jenna stared, wondering whether or not the woman had lost her mind, or if

perhaps Jenna might be losing hers. Mad, merry eyes twinkled in the gaslight as a sharp wind picked up and pelted them with debris from the street. The shabby woman glanced at the clouds, where lightning flared, threatening more rain, then frowned. "Goin' t' catch yer death, wivout no coat on, and I gots t' find a bloody surgeon what can see to that head of yours. It's bled a fright, but in't as bad as it seems or likely feels. Just a scrape along above the ear. Bloody lucky, you are, bloody lucky." When Jenna stared at her, torn by nausea and pain and the conviction that she was in the hands of yet another down-time lunatic, the madwoman leaned closer still and said in a totally different voice, "Good God, kid, you really don't know me, do you?"

Jenna's mouth fell open. "Noah?"

The detective's low chuckle shocked her. Jenna had never heard Noah Armstrong laugh. They hadn't found much to laugh about, since their brutal introduction three days previously. Then she blinked slowly through the fog in her mind. Three days? But Noah and Marcus had gone down Denver's Wild West Gate. Or rather, would be going down the Wild West Gate. Tomorrow morning, on the station's timeline. Noah Armstrong shouldn't be here at all, on the night of Jenna's arrival. The night before Noah and Marcus were due to leave the station for Denver . . .

Mind whirling, Jenna asked blankly, "Where did you come from? How did you get here?"

The detective was pulling off a shabby black coat, which served to protect Jenna's head from the cold, damp wind. When Jenna touched gingerly, she found rough, torn cloth tied as makeshift bandages. They were wet and sticky. Noah said, "Let me carry you again, kid. You're just about done in from exhaustion and shock. I'll get you someplace safe and warm as soon as I can."

Jenna lay in a daze as Noah gently lifted her and started walking steadily eastward. "But-how-?"

"We came across from New York, of course. Hopped a train in Colorado and lost ourselves nice and thoroughly in Chicago and points east." The detective's voice darkened. "That down-timer kid from the station, Julius? He was disguised as you, Jenna, dressed in a calico skirt, wearing a wig." Noah paused, eyes stricken in the light streaming from a nearby house window. "They shot him. My fault, dammit, I shouldn't have let that kid out of my sight! I knew Sarnoff would follow us, I just didn't figure he'd slip ahead and ambush the kid so fast. We got him back to the camp surgeon, but . . ."

"No . . ." Jenna whimpered, not wanting to hear.

"I'm sorry, Jenna. He didn't make it. Poor bastard died before we could slip out of camp. I had a helluva time getting us out in the middle of the uproar, with Time Tours guides and the surgeon demanding to know exactly what had happened."

Jenna's vision wavered. "Oh, God . . ." She didn't want to accept the truth. Not that nice kid, the down-timer she'd met in the basement under the Neo Edo hotel. Julius was younger than she was. . . . Her eyes burned and she nearly brought up more acid from her stomach as she fought not to sob aloud. How many people were going to die, trying to keep her alive?

Then she remembered Ianira. "Oh, God! Ianira!"

Noah's stride faltered for just a moment. "I know." The detective's voice was rough. "I tried to follow him, the instant I knew you weren't critically wounded. But he disappeared into that rat's maze of streets down in SoHo. Which, coincidentally, is exactly the same thing we did. I had to get us out of there fast, after all the shooting left that hit-man dead in front of the Opera House. The door man and some people in a passing carriage went shouting for a constable."

"But-but Noah, he's got her--"

"Do you have any idea who he was?"

She gulped down terror, tried to think past the memory of that gun levelled

at her face, that mad, calm voice telling her it was nothing personal. "He said he was a doctor. Ianira found him, while I was struggling with that killer. I think he was down by those columns."

Noah nodded. "That'd be the Opera House, it's just down the way from where you were attacked."

"He took Ianira's pulse and she . . . she went into shock. Tried to get away from him, starting ranting something that sounded awful. In ancient Greek. Whatever she said, he understood it and his face . . . he snarled at her. I've never seen such hatred, such murderous fury . . ."

Noah's quiet voice intruded. "That's damned odd, don't you think?"

Jenna just shivered and huddled closer to the detective's warmth. "He looked at me. Just looked at me and said, 'Sorry, old chap, nothing personal,' and shot me."

"Damned odd," Noah muttered. "Doesn't sound like an up-time hit at all."

"No." Then, voice breaking, "We have to find her! I let him . . . let him take her away . . ."

"No, you didn't. Don't argue! For Christ sake, Jenna, you've been on the run for three solid days, in shock from the murders in New York, and the shock of being pregnant and shooting a man to death in TT-86, and you damned near got shot at the Picadilly Hotel, then almost knifed to death in front of the Opera, then some lunatic down-timer shot you in the head, and you blame yourself? After all that? Kid, you did one helluva job. And you're not even a pro. I am. And I screwed up royally. I didn't manage to grab you aside at Spaldergate House, damn near got caught stealing a horse to follow the carriage you took, and still arrived at the Picadilly Hotel too damned late to do you any good. And by the time the shooting started outside the hotel, I'd tied that damned horse up a block down the street and had to chase after you on foot, in these heavy, damned wet skirts. Kid, I fucked up, plain and simple, and ended up letting that guy shoot you and kidnap Ianira. Don't you dare blame yourself, Jenna Caddrick. You did one helluva job getting her out of that hotel in one piece."

Very quietly and very messily, Jenna began to cry down the front of Noah's rough woolen dress.

"Aw, shit . . ." Noah muttered, then speeded up. "I gotta get you out of this raw air." Noah braced her head against a solid shoulder, easing the coat to protect her face from the cold, and hurried through the darkened city. Occasional carriages rattled past, a greyed-out blur to Jenna's overtaxed senses. Pain, dull and endless, throbbed through her head. Nausea bit the back of her throat, without letup. God, if I really am pregnant, please let the baby be all right . . .

At least half-an-hour later, Noah Armstrong carried Jenna into a snug little house near Christ Church, Spitalfields. Marcus, who seemed to have aged terribly since the last time she'd seen him, greeted them with a cry of fear. "What has happened? Where is Ianira?"

Noah spoke curtly. "Jenna ran into bad trouble, getting away from the gatehouse. I've got to carry her upstairs to bed. Heat a water bottle and bring up some extra blankets, then go out and ask Dr. Mindel to come. Jenna's been shot, not seriously, but she needs medical attention and she's in shock."

"Ianira?" Marcus whispered again.

The detective paused. "She's alive. Somewhere. It's complicated. A man helped them, shot one of the hit-men. But when he touched her, she went into prophetic trance and whatever she said, it really upset him. He shot Jenna without warning and was about to finish her off when I finally caught up. He took a potshot at me and I fired back, but missed, dammit, and he grabbed Ianira and took off down Drury Lane. I'm sorry, Marcus. We'll find her. I swear it, we will find her."

The ex-slave had gone ashen, stood trembling in the shabby house they'd

rented, eyes wet and lips unsteady. At a slight sound behind him, he turned his shaken gaze downward.

"Daddy?" A beautiful little girl of about seven had appeared in the doorway from the back of the house. "Daddy, did Noah bring Mama?"

Jenna had to grasp Noah's shoulders as the whole room spun. Ianira's little girl, Artemisia . . . only she was too old, much too old, and Marcus had aged, as well, there was grey in his hair and she didn't understand . . .

"No, Misia," Marcus choked out, going to his knees to hug the little girl close. "Noah and Jenna tried, honey, but something went wrong and a bad man took Mama away. We'll find her, sweetheart, we'll look all through London and find her. But Jenna's been hurt, trying to protect your mother, and we have to help her, now. I need to go for a doctor, Misia, and Noah has to watch Jenna until the doctor comes, so we all need you to help us out, tonight, okay? Can you watch Gelasia for us, make sure she's had her milk and biscuits?"

The little girl nodded, wide eyes wet and scared as she stared up at Jenna.

"This is Jenna," Noah said gently. "She helped me save your mommy's life tonight. The bad men we ran away from a long time ago chased her, honey, then another man hurt her and took your mother. I'm sorry, honey. We'll get her back."

No child of seven should possess eyes like Artemisia's, dark as mahogany and too wise and haunted for her age, eyes which had, like her mother's, seen far too much at far too early a point in life. She disappeared into the back of the house. Marcus said raggedly, "I will bring the hot water bottle, then go for Dr. Mindel."

"Good. And take my Colt Thunderer with you. Put it up, when you get back, someplace where the girls can't reach it."

Marcus took Noah's revolver and disappeared into the kitchen.

Noah carried Jenna up a narrow, dark staircase that smelled of dampness and recent, harsh soap. "Noah?" she whispered, still badly shaken.

"Yeah?" The detective carried her into a neat, heartlessly plain bedroom and settled her gently into a deep feather bed.

"Why . . . why is Artemisia so much older? I don't understand . . ."

Noah dragged off the wet, bedraggled bonnet which hid the detective's face, pulled blankets up across her, then gently removed Jenna's makeshift bandages and peered anxiously at the side of her head before pouring out a basin of water and wetting a cloth to sponge away dried blood, all without answering. Jenna found herself staring into Noah's eyes, which had gone dark with an even deeper sorrow Jenna didn't want to know the reasons for. Noah met her frightened stare, paused, then told her.

"You're too foggy to work it out, aren't you? The Denver Gate opens into 1885. The Britannia opens into 1888. It's been three years for us, kid. There wasn't any other way."

The whole bed came adrift under Jenna's back. She found herself a foggy stretch of time later floating in a grey haze while Noah very gently removed her clothing and eased her into a nightshirt, then replaced the blankets. Jenna slowly focused on the detective's haunted eyes. "Three years?" she finally whispered, her foggy mind catching up at last. "My God . . . Even if we find her . . . Ianira's little girls won't even know their own mother. And poor Ianira . . . God, three years of their lives, gone . . ."

"I know." Quiet, that voice, filled with regret and hushed pain. "Believe me, we wanted there to be some other way. There wasn't." The detective kept talking, voice low, giving Jenna a lifeline to cling to while her world swung in unpredictable circles all over again. "We've been in London for nearly two-and-a-half years, now. Waiting for you. I showed up at Spaldergate tonight, hoping to catch your attention, but . . . You know how that ended."

The shock, the misery of what Jenna had caused, was too much. She squeezed shut her eyes over hot tears. What else could I have done? Could any of us

have done? They could've brought the girls through with Ianira, at least. But Noah'd been right to guess hit men would be sent through both gates after them. If they had brought the little girls through with Ianira, none of them would have escaped the Picadilly Hotel alive. There really hadn't been any other choice. Knowing that didn't help much, though, with Ianira missing somewhere in this immense city, in the hands of God alone knew what kind of madman, and those beautiful little girls downstairs, unable to remember the mother they'd waited three years to meet again and deprived of her once more by violence and death. None of them had expected Marcus and the children to have to stay down time in Denver long enough to catch up to the Britannia Gate.

The knowledge that none of them were safe, yet, after everything they'd already been through, was a pain too deep to express. So Jenna just lay there, staring blankly at the stained ceiling, waiting for the doctor to arrive while Noah slipped a hot water bottle under the blankets to warm her and brought a basin full of hot, steaming water that smelled strongly of disinfectant to wash the gash in her head. She was grateful that Noah Armstrong had managed, at least, to set up a hiding place in London, ready and waiting for her. Outside, lightning flared and thunder rumbled through the dismal streets of Spitalfields as rain poured from leaden skies.

Their safe haven was at least well hidden by grinding poverty. It was probably the last place on earth her father's hired killers would think to look for them. London's violent and poverty-stricken East End during the middle of the Ripper horror . . .

When Dr. Mindel finally arrived, he praised Noah's "nursing" and sutured up Jenna's scalp, then fed her some foul-tasting medicine that left her drifting in darkness. The final awareness to impinge on her exhausted mind was the sound of Marcus in the hallway, talking quietly with Noah, with the cold and granite sound of murder in his voice as they made plans to find his missing wife.

Then she drifted into pain-free oblivion and knew no more.

Malcolm tilted his pocketwatch toward the light of a gas lamp on the street corner, putting the time at half-past eight when he alighted from his hansom cab at the corner of Bow and Hart Streets. Clouds, shot through with lightning, swirled in thick drifts and eddies above the rooftops, muting the sounds of a boisterous Thursday evening with the imminent threat of more rain. Although they were past the official end of the annual London social season, cut short yearly when Parliament adjourned each August 12th, not everyone was fortunate enough to escape London immediately for their country homes or the rural estates of friends. Business matters had to be wound up and some gentlemen remained trapped in London year-round, particularly those of the aspiring middle classes, who had acquired the tastes and pursuits of the wealthy without the means of fleeing London at the end of the social season.

As a result, cultured male voices the length of Bow Street could be heard discussing theater and dinner plans, birds they planned to shoot on favorite grouse moors up in Scotland now that grouse season had opened, or the ladies who inhabited the country houses they would visit during the fall's leisurely hunting seasons, beginning with grouse, graduating to partridge and pheasant, and ending lastly-but perhaps most importantly-with the noble fox.

Also drifting through the damp night came the light laughter of women Malcolm could not actually see, whose carriages rattled invisibly past in the murk that was not quite rain but not quite fog, either. The jingle of harness and the sharp clapping of horse's hooves struck the lime-rock gravel bed of the street with a thick, thumping sound, carrying the hidden ladies off to bright dinner parties. Carefully orchestrated affairs, such dinners were designed to bring together eligible young ladies and equally eligible

gentlemen for the deadly serious purpose of finding suitable spouses for the unmarried daughters of the house.

It being a Thursday evening, many such dinner parties throughout the ultra-fashionable west end would be followed by musical and other soirees, theater or the opera, and after that, the final, few elegant balls of the year, at which silk-clad young ladies still unmarried and desperate would swirl across dance floors and sip wine with smartly dressed young gentlemen until three in the morning, with a fair number of those young gentlemen equally desperate to find an heiress, even from a fortune made in trade, God help them all for having to stoop to such measures, just to bolster the finances of blue-blooded but cash-poor noble houses.

Above the jingle of harness as carriages rattled past, filtering through the sounds of gay laughter and merrymaking, came other, more plaintive cries, the calls of flower girls and eel-pie vendors hawking their wares to the genteel folk who frequented this fashionable district on such evenings. Malcolm could just make out one such girl, stationed beneath the nearest street lamp where she would be most visible in the drizzle and murk. She held a heavy tray of carnations and pinks suspended from cords around her neck. Her dress, damp in patches from the raw night, was made of cheap, dark cotton, much mended and several years out of fashion. The toes of the shoes peeping out from beneath her skirts had been cut open to accommodate the growth of her feet.

As Malcolm watched, three gentlemen emerged from the darkness and paused briefly to purchase boutonnieres for their lapels. They strolled on toward Malcolm, nodding and smiling as they passed, locked deep in conversation about the best methods of cubbing the young foxes and adolescent fox hounds once cub season opened. Malcolm nodded in return, wishing them a pleasant, "Good evening" as they crossed Bow Street and moved past the looming edifice of the Royal Opera House down Hart Street in the direction of Covent Garden Theater.

Then he was alone again on the pavement, turning over in his mind everything the Spaldergate staff had learned about Mr. Benny Catlin's disappearance. Foul play was now the major fear consuming everyone at Spaldergate. Catlin's abandoned luggage, the corpse in Catlin's hotel room, and the wounded Time Tours carriage driver had led police constables straight to Spaldergate House, asking about the body at the Picadilly Hotel and a second grisly corpse found outside the Royal Opera. The police, comparing witness descriptions, had concluded that the Picadilly Hotel shooting and the Opera House shooting had been committed by the same desperate individual.

The Time Tours driver injured at the Piccadilly Hotel had, thank God, arrived at the gatehouse unconscious but still alive, driven by one of the gatehouse's footmen dispatched to fetch him back. Catlin's luggage had been impounded, but the footman had managed to secure Catlin's bloodstained gloves from the room before police could arrive, giving the Spaldergate staff at least some chance of tracing Catlin with bloodhounds. Weak from shock and blood loss, the wounded driver had barely been alive by the time he'd been rushed downstairs to surgery.

A massive police manhunt was now on for the missing Mr. Catlin and for anyone who might have been involved in the fatal shootings. Marshall Gilbert, gatehousekeeper, was faced with the worst crisis of his career, trying to assist the police while keeping the secrets of Spaldergate House very much under wraps.

Malcolm dreaded the coming night's work and the lack of sleep this search would mean. At least—and he consoled himself with the prospect—he wouldn't be searching alone. For good or ill, Margo would be assisting him. He needed her close, tired and soul-sore as he was from weeks spent plunged into the misery of the East End, preparing for the coming horror.

When two hansom cabs traveling close behind one another pulled up and halted at the corner of Bow and Hart, Malcolm pocketed his watch and moved rapidly

forward to greet the occupants alighting on the pavement. "Ah, Stoddard, very good, I've been awaiting your arrival. Miss Smith, I'm so dreadfully sorry about this trouble, I do wish you had reconsidered coming along this evening. Madame Feroz, frightfully decent of you to accompany her, I know the demands upon your time are keen. And this must be Mr. Shannon?"

The man who had jumped to the pavement behind Spaldergate's stable master, hanging slightly back as Malcolm greeted Margo and Shahdi Feroz in turn, was a temporal native, a stringy, tough old Irishman in an ill-cut suit. He was assisting another passenger to alight, a striking young woman in very plain garments. The girl's skirt was worn but had been made of good quality cloth when new, and her coat, also faded, was neat and clean. Her hair was a glorious copper in the gaslight, her face sprinkled with far too many freckles for her to be considered a beauty by Victorian standards. But she had a memorable face and a quiet air of utter and unshakable self-confidence. She'd wrapped one hand around the leash of a magnificent Alsatian or-had Malcolm been in America-a beautiful black-and-tan German Shepherd dog with bright, intelligent eyes.

The grizzled Irishman, who was doubtless far stronger than his slight frame suggested, shook Malcolm's hand. "That's me, sir, Auley Shannon. This is me granddaughter, Maeve Shannon, Alfie's 'er dog, trained 'im she did, 'er own self, won't find a better tracker in London."

"Malcolm Moore," he smiled in return, offering his hand. "My pleasure, Mr. Shannon, Miss Shannon."

The inquiry agents whom Stoddard had been sent to fetch shook Malcolm's hand firmly. Miss Shannon kept her dog on a short leash, even though the animal was immaculately behaved, sitting on his haunches and watching the humans with keen eyes, tongue lolling slightly in the damp air.

Malcolm turned to Spaldergate's stable master. "Stoddard, you have the gloves that were found when poor Mr. Catlin disappeared from his hotel?"

"I do, sir." He produced a small cloth bag, inside which nestled a gentleman's pair of kid gloves. Relatively fresh blood stains indicated that they had, in fact, been on Catlin's person when the shootout at the Piccadilly Hotel had occurred and Catlin had rendered life-saving first aid, just as the wounded driver had described via telephone before losing consciousness.

Malcolm nodded briskly. "Very good. Shall we give the dog the scent, then? I'm anxious to begin. Poor Miss Smith," and he bowed to Margo before returning his attention to the Shannons, "is understandably distraught over her fiancé's absence and who can blame the dear child?"

Margo was doing a very creditable job, in fact, of imitating someone in deep distress, shredding her own gloves with jerking, nervous movements and summoning tears through God-alone knew what agency. "Please, can't you find him?" Margo gasped out, voice shaking, one hand clutching at Mr. Shannon's ill-fitting jacket sleeve.

His granddaughter spoke, not unkindly. "Now, then, get 'old of yourself, miss, wailin' and suchlike won't do 'im a bit o' good an' you're like t'give yourself a fit of brain fever."

"Maeve," her grandfather said sharply, "the lady 'as a right to be upset, so you just give Alfie the scent an' mind your tongue! Or I'll give yer me German across yer Hampsteads, so I will."

"You an' what army, I'm wonderin'?" she shot right back, not cowed in the slightest by her grandfather's uplifted hand. "Give Alfie a sniff o' them gloves, now," she instructed Stoddard briskly.

"Where were the chap last spotted?" the elder Shannon wanted to know as the dog thrust an eager nose into the gloves held out to him.

Malcolm nodded toward the opera house across the road. "There, between the Opera and the Floral Hall. The doorman caught a glimpse of him engaged in what he described as a desperate fight with another man and ran to fetch the

constables he'd just seen pass by. This other man was evidently shot dead and abandoned by Mr. Catlin in his terror to escape. Probably one of those desperate, criminal youths in one of those wretched, notorious Nichol gangs. Their depredations have all London in an uproar. God help us, what are we coming to when young boys no older than fourteen or fifteen roam the streets as armed thugs and break into homes, stealing property and dishonoring women—" he lifted his hat apologetically to the ladies "-and attacking a man in front of the Floral Hall, for God's sake? The last time anyone saw Mr. Catlin, he was down Bow Street that way, just past the Floral Hall, fighting for his life."

"Let's cross, then," Maeve Shannon said briskly, "an' we'll give Alfie the scent off them gloves again when we've got right up to where 'e were at the time."

They dodged carriages and ghostly, looming shapes of horses across the road, carriage lamps and horses' eyes gleaming in the raw night. Clouds of white vapour streamed from the horses' distended nostrils, then they were across and the copper-haired girl held the gloves to her dog's nose again while her grandfather tapped one impatient foot. The shepherd sniffed intently, then at a command from his trainer began casting along the pavement. A sharp whine reached them, then Alfie strained out into the road, following the scent. The dog paused at a dark stain on the cobbles, which, when the elder Shannon crouched down and tested it, proved to be blood.

Margo let out an astonishing sound and clutched at Malcolm's arm. "Oh, God, poor Benjamin . . ."

"There, there," Mr. Shannon soothed, wiping his sticky hand on a kerchief, "it's most like the blagger wot attacked 'im, 'oo bled on these 'ere cobbles. Police took 'is body away to the morgue, so it's not like as to be Mr. Catlin's blood. Not to fret, Miss, we'll find 'im."

Miss Shannon said, "Alfie, seek!" and the dog bounded across the road and headed down a drizzle-shrouded walk which passed beneath the graceful colonnaded facade of the Royal Opera House. The dog led the way at a brisk walk. Malcolm and Philip Stoddard, escorting Margo and Shahdi Feroz solicitously, hastened after them. The darkened glass panes of the Floral Hall loomed up from the damp night. The high, domed roof of the magnificent glasshouse glinted distantly in the gaslights from the street, its high, curved panes visible in snatches between drifting eddies of low-blown cloud.

The eager Alsatian, nose casting along the pavement as the dog traced a scent mingled with thousands of other traces where gentlemen, ladies, horses, dogs, carters, and Lord knew what all else had passed this way today, drew them eagerly to Russell Street, where Alfie cast sharp left and headed rapidly away from Covent Garden. They moved down toward the massive Drury Theater, which took up the better part of the entire city block between Catherine Street and Drury Lane. The drizzling fog swirled and drifted across the heavy stone portico along the front, with its statue at the top dimly lit by gaslight from hanging lamps that blazed along the entrance. Malcolm worried about the scent in weather like this. If the drizzle turned to serious rain, which rumbled and threatened again overhead, no dog born could follow the scent. The deluge would wash it straight into the nearest storm sewer. Which, upon reflection, might be why the dog was able to follow Catlin's trail so easily-most of the competing scents had been washed away, by the night's earlier rainstorm.

God alone knew, they needed a piece of luck, just now.

More carriages rattled past in the darkness, carrying merry parties of well-to-do middle class theater goers to the Drury's bright-lit entrance. Voices and laughter reached across the busy thoroughfare as London prepared for yet another evening of sparkling gaiety. The straining shepherd, however, ignored Catherine Street altogether and guided the way down Russell Street along the

huge theater's left-hand side, where a portico of Ionic columns loomed like a forest of stone trees in the darkness. Malcolm felt his hopes rise at the dog's sharp eagerness and ability to discern Catlin's trail. Good idea, Margo, he approved silently, grateful to her for thinking of a bloodhound when the rest of them had been struck stupid with shock.

Their footsteps echoed eerily off tall buildings when the dog led them straight down Drury Lane. The fact that Benny Catlin had come this way suggested to Malcolm he had been forced away by someone with a weapon. The Royal Opera House, Drury Lane Theater, and the Covent Garden district stood squarely in a well-to-do, middle-class neighborhood, eclipsed in finery only by the wealthiest of the upper-class districts to the west. But once into Drury Lane itself, wealth and even comfort dropped away entirely. As the eager shepherd drew them down the length of that famous street, poverty's raw bones began to show. These were the houses and shops of London's hard-working poor, where some managed to eke out moderate comfort while others descended steeply into want and hunger.

Piles of wooden crates stood on the pavements outside lower-class shops, where wagons had made daytime deliveries. The deeper they pressed into the recesses of Drury Lane, which dwindled gradually in width as well as respectability, the meaner and shabbier grew the houses and the residents walking the pavements. Pubs spilled piano music and alcoholic fumes into the streets, where roughly clad working men and women gathered in knots to talk and laugh harshly and stare with bristling suspicion at the well-dressed ladies and frock-coated gentleman passing in the company of a liveried servant, with an older man and younger woman of their own class controlling a leashed dog.

Malcolm made mental note of where the pubs lay, to locate potential witnesses for later questioning, and pressed his arm surreptitiously against the lump of his concealed pistol, making certain of it. Margo, he knew, also carried a pistol in her pocket, as did Philip Stoddard. He wished he'd thought to ask Shahdi Feroz whether or not she was armed, but this was neither the time nor the place to remedy that lack. Preternaturally aware of the shabby men and women watching them from shadows and from the lighted doorways of mean houses and rough pubs, Malcolm followed the eager dog and his mistress, listening to the click of their footfalls on the pavement and the scrape and scratch of the dog's claws.

Whatever Benny Catlin's motive, whether flight from trouble or the threat of deadly force taking him deeper into danger, it had carried him the length of Drury Lane. The dog paused briefly and sniffed again at a dark spot on the pavement. This time, Mr. Shannon was not able to explain away the spots of blood so glibly. Margo clutched at Malcolm, weeping and gulping back evident terror. Malcolm watched Shannon wipe blood from his hand again, knowing, this time, it must be Benny Catlin's blood, and was able to console himself only with the fact that not enough had been spilled here to prove immediately fatal. But untended, with wounds of unknown severity . . . and perhaps in the grip of footpads who would kill him when they had obtained what they'd forced him here for . . .

Grimly, Malcolm signalled to continue the hunt. Even Shahdi Feroz's eyes had taken on a strained, hopeless look. The Ripper scholar clearly knew Catlin's odds as well as Malcolm did.

They reached the final, narrow stretches of Drury Lane where Wych Street snaked off to the left, along a route that would eventually be demolished to create Aldwych. That upscale urban renewal was destined to gobble up an entire twenty-eight acres of this mean district. They kept to the right, avoiding the narrow trap of Wych Street, but even this route was a dangerous one. The buildings closed in, ill-lit along this echoing, drizzle-shrouded stretch, and still the Alsatian shepherd strained eagerly forward, nose to the pavement.

When they emerged at last into the famous Strand, another juxtaposition of wealth in the midst of slums, their first sight was St. Mary le Strand church, which stood as an island in the middle of the broad street.

Philip Stoddard muttered, "What the devil was after him, to send him walking down this way in the middle of the night?"

Malcolm glanced sharply at the stable master and nodded warningly toward the Shannons, then said, "I fear Miss Smith is greatly distressed."

Margo was emitting little sounds of horror as she took in their surroundings. She had transferred her act to the Ripper scholar and clung to Shahdi Feroz' arm as though to a lifeline, tottering at the end of her strength and wits. "Where can he be?" Margo was murmuring over and over. "Oh, God, what's happened to him? This is a terrible place, dreadful . . ."

Auley Shannon glanced over his shoulder. "Could be another answer, guv, if 'e never got clean away from th' blokes wot attacked 'im outside the opera. Alfie's 'eadin' straight for 'olywell Street. Might've been brought down 'ere for reasons I'd as soon not say in front o' the ladies."

A chill touched Malcolm's spine. Dear God, not that. . . . The dog was dragging them past Newcastle Street directly toward the cramped, dark little lane known as Holywell, which ran to the left of the narrow St. Mary le Strand church on a course parallel to the Strand. On the Strand itself, Malcolm could just see the glass awning of the Opera Comique, a theater sandwiched between Wych and Holywell Streets, reachable only through a tunnel that opened out beneath that glass canopy on the Strand. The neighborhood was cramped and seemingly picturesque, with exceedingly aged houses dating to the Tudor and Stuart periods crowding the appallingly narrow way.

But darkened shop windows advertising book sellers' establishments the length of Holywell were infamous throughout London. In the shops of "Booksellers' Row" as Holywell was sometimes known, a man could obtain lewd prints, obscene books, and a pornographic education for a mere handful of shillings. And for a few shillings more, a man could obtain a young girl-or a young boy, come to that, despite harsh laws against it. The girls and young men who worked in the back rooms and attics of these nasty, crumbling old shops had often as not been drugged into captivity and put to work as whores, photographed nude and raped by customers and jailors alike. If some wealthy gentleman, with or without a title, had requested a proprietor on Holywell Street to procure a young man of a specific build and coloring, Benny Catlin might well have been plunged into a Victorian hell somewhere nearby.

Although the shops were closed for the night and certainly would have been closed when Benny Catlin had passed this way earlier in the evening, women in dark skirts were busy carrying out hasty negotiations with men in rough workingmen's garments. Several of the women cast appraising glances at Malcolm, who looked-to them-like a potential wealthy customer passing by in the close darkness, despite the presence of ladies with him.

"What does Mr. Shannon mean?" Margo whispered sotto voce. "What is it about Holywell Street that's so awful he won't say?"

Malcolm cleared his throat. "Ah . . . perhaps some other time might be better for explanations, Miss Smith? I rather doubt that what Mr. Shannon referred to is what has actually happened." Malcolm wished he could be as certain as he sounded, but he had no intention of requiring Margo to play out her role by displaying complete hysterics over the notion of her fiancé having been sold to someone to be photographed and raped by a dealer in pornographic literature.

The rough-clad women watching them so narrowly were clearly trying to judge whether or not to risk openly approaching him with their business propositions. Had Malcolm been quite alone, he suspected he would have been propositioned no fewer than a dozen times within fifty paces. And had he been quite alone, Malcolm's hand would never have left the pocket concealing his

pistol. A man dressed as Malcolm was, venturing unaccompanied into the deep, semi-criminal poverty of Holywell, would be considered fair game by any footpad who saw him. There was more safety in numbers, but even so, Malcolm's hand never strayed far from the entrance to his pocket.

When Malcolm spotted a woman lounging by herself against a bookshop wall, standing directly beneath a large, projecting clock that stuck out perpendicularly from the building, Malcolm paused, carefully gesturing the ladies on ahead with Mr. Stoddard. A gas street lamp nearby shed enough light to see her worn dress, work-roughened hands, and tired face beneath a bedraggled bonnet.

"Good evening, ma'am."

She stood up straighter, calculation jumping into her eyes. "Evenin', luv. Whatcher' wantin', then?"

"I was wondering if you might have seen someone pass this way earlier this evening? A gentleman dressed much the same way I am? My cousin's gone missing, you see," he added at the sharp look of distrust in her face. "I'm quite concerned over my cousin's safety and his fiancée, there, is in deep distress over it." He gestured toward Margo, who was clinging to Shahdi Feroz and biting her lip, eyes red and swollen. He must remember to ask her how she managed to conjure tears on command.

"Yer cousin, eh? Well, that's diff'rent, innit?" She shrugged. "Right about when might 'e 'ave gone by, luv?"

"Half-eight or shortly thereafter."

"I weren't 'ere at 'alf-eight, tonight nor any other. I got a job at the Black Eagle Brewery, I 'ave, what I gets up at six o'clock of a morning for, t' earn shilling an' sixpence a week, an' I don't leave brewery 'ouse til nigh on 'alf-nine of a night. Weren't 'ere at 'alf-eight, luv."

A shilling and sixpence. Eighteen cents a week, for a job that started at six A.M. and ran fifteen hours or more a shift. It was little wonder she was out here on the street after dark, trying to earn a few extra pence however she could. He sighed, then met her narrow-eyed gaze. "I see, madame. Well, thank you, anyway." He held up a shining silver florin. "If you could think of anyone who might have been hereabouts at that hour?"

She snatched the coin-nearly two weeks' wages-from his fingers. "G'wan down to Davy's, ask round there. Pub's open til all hours, anybody could've seen 'im. Ain't like we see gents every night o' th' week, these parts."

"Indeed? Thank you, ma'am, and good evening."

He was aware of her stare as he rejoined the ladies and followed the straining Alfie at the end of his leash. By dawn, the story of the missing gent and his grieving fiancée would be news from one end of the district to the other. With any luck, word of Benny Catlin might yet shake loose-particularly in the hopes of a cash "donation" for information given. Meanwhile, Alfie was whining and straining in the direction of Davy's Pub at the end of Holywell Street where it rejoined the Strand once more. Music and laughter reached up the narrow lane as they approached the busy public house, brightly lit by a multitude of gas lamps. Its windows and placard-plastered walls advertised Scotch and Irish Whiskeys . . . Wainey, Comb, and Reid fine ales . . . favorite brands of stout . . . and, of course, Walker's.

Malcolm wasn't dressed for mingling in such a crowd, but Auley Shannon was. He nodded slightly at Malcolm, then disappeared into the packed pub. Malcolm waited patiently with Margo and Shahdi Feroz and the others, noting the location of another pub, The Rising Sun, across the road where Wych Street emerged just the other side of Davy's. Beyond, in the wide avenue that lay beyond the conjunction of the two narrow, old streets, lay the ancient facade of St. Clement Danes Church, another island church built in the center of the Strand. Its high steeple was topped with what appeared to be a miniature, columned Greek temple, barely visible now between drizzle-laden clouds and

streaks of jagged lightning.

And in another of London's abrupt transitions, where glittering wealth shared a line of fenceposts with criminal poverty, where the narrow Wych and Holywell Streets intersected the Strand, a sharp line of demarcation divided the dark poverty-stricken regions behind them, separating it from the expensive, well-to-do houses and shops right in front of Malcolm, shops and houses that stood in a stately double row to either side of the street, lining the Strand, itself. Such abrupt changes from deepest poverty to startling wealth, within half-a-block of one another, placed destitute men and women with no hope at all side-by-side with socially ambitious businessmen and their ladies, ensconced in fine houses, with servants and carriages and luxuries their neighbors could never aspire to owning through any means except thievery.

And thievery was exactly how many a denizen of SoHo obtained such items.

Studying the intersection and judging the lay of the land and the inhabitants of the various buildings within view, Malcolm realized they'd need to field a good-sized search party through this area just to question all the potential witnesses. Five minutes later, Shannon emerged from Davy's, looking hopeful. "Blokes are suspicious o' strangers," he said quietly, "an' rightly so, what wiv coppers lookin' t'nick 'alf the blokes in there, I'd reckon, but I pointed out Miss Smith, 'ere, give 'em the bare bones of what's 'appened. Got a few of 'em t'thaw a bit, seein' the lady cryin' and all. Must be 'alf a dozen blokes said they saw a bloke wot might've been 'im." He paused, with a glance toward Margo, then cleared his throat. "Wot they saw was a woman walk past, Mr. Moore, carryin' a wounded gentleman. Walkin' quick-like, as if to find a surgeon. Blokes remembered, on account of that poor streetwalker, Martha Tabram, 'oo got 'erself stabbed to death August Bank 'oliday, an' on account of it were so queer, seein' a woman in a patched dress and ragged bonnet, carryin' a gentleman in a fine suit wiv a shabby old coat wrapped round 'is head."

Malcolm paled, even as Margo blanched and clutched at Shahdi Feroz. "Odd," Malcolm muttered, "How deuced odd."

"You've the right o' that, sir."

"It's unlikely a woman would have attacked Mr. Catlin. Perhaps she found him lying on the street, injured, and was, indeed, carrying him to safety with a surgeon. Mr. Catlin was a slightly built young man, after all, and wouldn't have proved difficult to lift and carry, for a stout woman." Margo nodded, wiping tears from her face with the back of one gloved hand. "Mr. Shannon, Miss Shannon, lead on, please. Let's see how much farther this trail will take us."

As it happened, that was not much farther at all. Alfie crossed the Strand right along the front of the old Danish church, where the street curved around to the south. Tailors' establishments and boot sellers' shops advertised their wares to wealthy families able to afford their trade. But where Millford Lane cut off to the south near the rear corner of St. Clement Danes, the skies cut loose with a stinging downpour of rain and Alfie lost the trail. The dog hesitated, cast about the wet pavement in confusion and ever-widening circles, and finally sat back on its haunches, whining unhappily while runoff poured, ankle deep, past their feet in the gutters. Maeve pulled her coat collar up around her neck, then bent and patted the dog's shoulder and ruffled its wet, clamped back ears, speaking gently to it.

Malcolm noted the presence of a few hansom cabs along the Strand, waiting hopefully for customers from amongst the wealthier gentlemen Malcolm could see here and there along the street, some of them escorting well-dressed ladies out to carriages under cover of taut umbrellas, and said, "Well, perhaps Mr. Catlin's benefactress hired a cab?"

It was, at least, worth the asking, although he doubted a woman as shabbily

clad as the one the men in Davey's pub had described would've been able to afford the cost of a hansom cab fare.

Miss Shannon patted her dog's wet side and glanced around. "Pr'aps, sir. I'm that sorry, I am, 'bout the rain. 'E's a good tracker, Alfie is, but no dog born wot'll trace a man through a downpour like this."

"I fear not. Very well," Malcolm said briskly, "we shall simply have to proceed along different lines. Mr. Shannon, I believe the terms of our agreement include pressing inquiries amongst potential witnesses at whatever point your fine Alsatian lost the trail? If you and your granddaughter would be so good as to assist us, I feel we might yet make good progress this evening. Try the cabbies, there, if you please. Stoddard, if you'll broach the denizens of the Rising Sun Pub, I'll endeavor to strike up a conversation with some of the gentlemen out for the evening's merriment and dinner parties. Ladies, if you would be so good as to secure a hansom cab? I hope we may need one shortly."

"Yes, sir."

"Of course, Mr. Moore."

"Right, sir. Let's give 'er a go, then, Maeve."

Over the course of the next half-hour, Malcolm spoke with dozens of gentlemen and their stout, respectable wives, the latter dressed in satins and bonnets with drooping feathers under widespread umbrellas, inquiring politely about an ill-dressed woman assisting a wounded gentleman of their class. The answers he received were civil, concerned, and entirely negative, which left Malcolm increasingly frustrated as well as thoroughly soaked. Lightning flared overhead, sizzled down to strike chimney pots and church steeples with crashes of thunder that sent the well-dressed citizenry scrambling for doorways and covered carriages.

They couldn't stay out in this kind of weather any longer, searching.

London was a vast maze of streets and lanes. The number of places an unwary time tourist could go fatally astray would have sobered the most optimistic of searchers. Malcolm hurried back down the Strand, calling for Stoddard and the Shannons. They rejoined Margo and Shahdi Feroz, who had secured the services of the nearest hansom cab and were huddled inside it, out of the downpour. None of the others had found so much as a trace, either.

"There's nothing more to be done, here, in this weather," Malcolm shouted above the crash of thunder.

Margo's performance inside the hansom cab, weeping distraughtly and leaning against Shahdi Feroz, left Mr. Shannon clearing his throat in sympathy. Maeve Shannon stepped up onto the running board and leaned in to put a comforting hand on Margo's shoulder, said something too low for Malcolm to hear, at which Margo nodded and replied, "Thank you, Miss Shannon. Thank you . . ."

"I'm that sorry, I am, miss, but I'm sure it'll come right." Maeve smiled at Margo, then stepped back down to the pavement and called her dog to heel. Malcolm handed over Mr. Shannon's fee for the night's work and a bonus for Maeve's unexpected sympathy to Margo, which he felt deserved recognition of some kind. The Shannons might be accustomed to the harshness of life in Whitechapel, where they kept their inquiry agency, but they were good and decent people, nonetheless. The inquiry agent and his granddaughter wished him luck and hurried off into the downpour with Alfie trotting between them, seeking shelter from the rising storm. Malcolm sighed heavily, then secured a cab of his own to follow Margo and Shahdi Feroz back to Spaldergate, and settled down for a clattering ride through night-shrouded streets. Stoddard, riding silently beside him, was grim in the actinic glare of lightning bolts streaking through London's night sky.

Somewhere out there, Benny Catlin was known, to someone.

Malcolm intended finding that someone. All it required was a bit of luck added to the hard work ahead. In the swaying darkness of the hansom, Malcolm

grimaced. This was not a good time for reminding himself that before Margo had come into his life, Malcolm's luck had run to the notoriously bad. Malcolm Moore was not a superstitious man by nature, but he couldn't quite shake the feeling that on this particular hunt, luck just might not be with him.

He could only pray that it had been with Benny Catlin.

If not, they might yet locate him in a morgue.

Chapter Nine

Gideon Guthrie poured a drink from an expensive cut-crystal decanter and moved quietly to the window. Night had fallen across the city, turning the filthy sprawl of New York into a fairy-land jewel at his feet. Behind him, the television flickered silently, sound muted. Gideon frowned slowly, then sipped at his scotch. John Caddrick had given quite a performance for the press today. How the sociopathic bastard was able to summon tears for the cameras, Gideon didn't know. But the press had eaten it up, delighted with the ratings points Caddrick's grief gave them. Which played quite nicely into Gideon's plans. What worried Gideon, however, and it worried his boss, as well, was Caddrick's tendency to explosive fits of temper. They played a very delicate game, Gideon and Cyril Barris and the senator, a damned delicate game. Caddrick's notorious temperament was just as likely to prove a liability as an asset.

It was too bad about the girl, in a sense, although Caddrick didn't seem to give a damn that Gideon had ordered a fatal hit on the Senator's own daughter. Of course, Caddrick wasn't stupid and there'd never been any love lost between those two. If Gideon and his political ally played it right, Cassie Tyrol's impulsive decision to tell her niece would play into Cyril Barris' long-range plans brilliantly. All Gideon had to do was keep Caddrick's temper from screwing things up. A man like John Caddrick was priceless in Congress, where that temper and his ruthless ability to play the filthy game of politics made him a devastating enemy and a cunning advocate. But Caddrick's flair for playing the press could easily backfire, if they weren't incredibly careful. The senator's call for investigating the Ansar Majlis, claiming they'd kidnapped his daughter, worked wonders for television ratings. And it would doubtless fire up a world-wide demand for the destruction of the very terrorists Gideon had chosen to further his employer's plans. Which was, ultimately, the precise outcome both Cyril Barris and Gideon, himself, wanted.

But too close an investigation into the Ansar Majlis could prove risky.

Very risky.

He'd have to keep a close watch on John Caddrick, all right. Their timetable was moving along right on schedule, with only one minor hitch, which ought to've been effectively eliminated, by now. He'd sent a good team onto TT-86 to destroy Ianira and her whole family, not to mention finishing up the job with Jenna Caddrick and that miserable, meddling detective, Noah Armstrong. Gideon scowled and poured himself another scotch. That was one complication he hadn't anticipated. Cassie Tyrol, actress, six-time divorcee, and scatter-brained Templar, was the last person Gideon had expected to hire a detective, for God's sake, to investigate her own brother-in-law's business practices. And who'd have guessed she would come so damned unglued over the seemingly accidental death of that little bastard, Alston Corliss, who'd taped all the evidence on Caddrick? How, in fact, had she even known about it, so soon? She'd bolted hours before the FBI had leaked word to the press. Armstrong again, no doubt.

Alston Corliss was yet another reason to worry about the senator. If a goddamned actor could ferret out that kind of evidence on the senator's activities. . . .When this was over and done with, maybe it would be a good idea to bring about Caddrick's political downfall. Do it subtly, so Caddrick would never suspect Gideon had orchestrated it. Yes, he'd have to look into

that. Suggest it to Cyril Barris as a potential course of action for the future, after they'd culled everything useful they could from Caddrick's position in government. Meanwhile, Noah Armstrong had somehow absconded with a copy of that goddamned, incriminating tape, the original of which they'd found and destroyed. Maybe Corliss had used the stinking Internet to send it, with streaming video technology. However he'd gotten the tape to Armstrong, out in California, it spelled certain disaster for their plans if they didn't get it back before Armstrong found a way to contact the authorities.

Gideon knocked back the scotch and swore under his breath. Complications like this, he did not need. But he had the situation under control again, thank God, so all he had to do now was keep an eye on John Caddrick and make sure nothing else went wrong. If anything else did . . . Heads would by God roll. Gideon scowled. The senator had believed for years he was calling the shots. Fine. Let him. If Caddrick screwed up one more time, he'd find out the bitter truth, fast. It would almost be worth the trouble, to see the shock on his face.

Gideon switched off the television and settled himself to set in motion the events necessary to bring about the end of a powerful politician's career.

Chapter Ten

It was a vastly subdued Margo who returned to Spaldergate House in a driving downpour, with lightning sizzling in the night skies and Benny Catlin missing and wounded somewhere beyond their reach. After the preoccupation of their abortive search, it was actually a shock to return to the warmth and brightness of Spaldergate and the lively discussion amongst the Ripper scholars, who cared absolutely nothing about a missing time tourist. All except Shahdi Feroz. Margo still wondered why she'd volunteered to accompany them.

An argument broke out the moment they returned, as to which scholars would go into the East End to help place the final surveillance equipment at the first murder scene. Not to be outdone, Dominica Nosette and Guy Pendergast joined the fray.

"We're coming along, as well."

Pavel Kostenka said, "You are not qualified--"

"I've been on more undercover photoshoots than you have credentials strung out behind your name!"

"And you are a two-bit, muckraking--"

"Two-bit my arse! I'll have you know--"

"Enough!" Malcolm's stern voice cut through the babble and silenced the entire lot of them. "I'll make the decision as to who goes and who stays! Is that clear?"

Even Margo gulped, staring wide-eyed at her infuriated fiancé.

"Now. Miss Nosette, Mr. Pendergast, the terms of the Ripper Watch contract include you as the only journalists. It would be remiss of us if you did not accompany the team members placing the equipment, tonight, to record the attempt for posterity. I presume you've brought low-light, miniaturized cameras?"

"I know my trade," the blond reporter said with an icy chill in her voice, glaring at Kostenka. "And my equipment."

Kostenka just shrugged and pretended to find the carpet utterly absorbing.

"Very well. I would suggest you go and get that equipment ready. We'll leave the house at two A.M. If you're not dressed for the East End and waiting in the carriage drive, we'll leave without you. Now then, Margo, please be good enough to help them select costumes. They haven't been into the East End. Assist Dr. Feroz with that as well. I'll want you along, Inspector," he glanced at Conroy Melvyn, the Scotland Yard chief inspector who'd been named

head of the Ripper Watch team, "and the others can prepare the relay and recording equipment on the roof and down in the vault."

There were grumbles, but clearly, the Ripper Watch team had grown accustomed to taking Malcolm's orders when it came to his decisions as head guide.

"Very good. I expect you all have someplace better to be than standing about in the parlour, with your mouths hanging open."

The assembled scholars and journalists dispersed quickly. Only Conroy Melvyn seemed to find the situation humorous. The police inspector winked at Malcolm as he strolled out in the wake of the disgruntled scholars. Then Margo was alone with Malcolm, at last.

"Margo, I'm afraid you're not going to like what I have to say next."

"Oh, no, Malcolm, please let me come with you!"

He grimaced. "That isn't it. Quite the opposite, in fact." He rubbed the back of his neck distractedly. "It's this blasted business with Catlin. Thank God you've come. I've got to work with the Gilberts, organize some plan of attack to search for him. We'll try the hospitals, the workhouse infirmaries, anywhere Catlin might have gone seeking medical attention."

Margo gulped, seeing abruptly where this was leading. "Malcolm . . . I-I'm not ready to guide that bunch by myself--"

Malcolm grinned. "Good. I'm glad you've the sense to admit it. I didn't intend sending you alone. Tanglewood's a good man, an experienced guide, and he's been in the East End a fair bit."

Margo frowned. "Isn't that kind of an odd place for tourists to go?"

Malcolm merely cleared his throat. "Zipper jockey tours."

Oh. "That's disgusting!"

"It isn't his fault, Margo. He's a Time Tours employee. If he wants to keep his job, he goes where the paying customers want to visit. Even if it's some back-alley brothel in Wapping."

"Huh. I hope they catch a good dose of something nasty!"

"Occasionally," Malcolm said drily, "they do. Spaldergate's resident surgeon keeps rather a generous supply of penicillin on hand. There is a reason London's courtesans wore death's-head rings, even as early as the eighteenth century."

Margo shivered. Poor women, reduced to such poverty they'd no choice but to risk syphillis and its slow, certain deterioration toward madness and death in an era predating antibiotics.

"Very well," Malcolm said tiredly, "that's settled, then. I would suggest you go in costume as a girl, rather than a street ruffian. You'll be less apt to run into serious trouble, particularly in company with the members of the Ripper Watch team. But go armed, love. It's no busman's holiday I'm sending you into, out there."

She nodded. "Believe me, I will be. I'll watch over them, get them back here safe again, as soon as their equipment is in place."

Malcolm held out his arms and she walked into his embrace, just holding onto him tightly for a long moment. He kissed her with such hunger, it left her head swimming. Then he broke the contact and leaned his brow against hers and sighed. "I would give anything . . . But I must get on with the search for Benny Catlin."

"I know."

He kissed her one last time, then went in search of the Spaldergate House gatekeepers. Margo found her way upstairs and helped the new arrivals pick out costumes ragged enough for the East End, then showed Dominica Nosette how to get into the costume. Shahdi Feroz had, at least, been down the Britannia before.

"In the West End, mostly" she said with a slight smile, glancing at the garments Margo had authorized. "But I do know how the underthings, at least, go on."

Dominica Nosette expected Margo to assist her as lady's maid, a task she did not relish. Three months of this? Margo groused silently, yanking at the strings on Miss Nosette's stays. I'll lop off her pretty blond hair and put her in a boy's tog's, first!

By the time the mantle clocks throughout Spaldergate chimed two A.M. and they were ready to leave in one of the Time Tours carriages, which would take them as far as the Tower of London, Malcolm had been gone for hours, out combing the hospitals and workhouse infirmaries for some trace of their missing tourist. Douglas Tanglewood ushered them all into a stylish Calash Coach, which possessed a hard, covered roof and curtains to screen them from outside scrutiny, since they were dressed as roughly as any dockhand out of Stepney. They rode in a silence electric with anticipation. Even Margo, who fretted over Malcolm's safety, searching for a man who had already been involved in two fatal shootings, found herself caught up in the air of excitement.

In three hours, they would know.

After more than a century and a half of mystery, they would finally know.

If nothing went wrong. If she did her job right. If the equipment didn't fail . . .

When they finally alighted at the Tower, which stood at the very gateway to the East End, dividing it from more prosperous areas to the west, Dominica Nosette gasped in astonishment and pointed through the darkness toward a misshapen silhouette outlined now and again by flashes of lightning.

"The Bridge!" she gasped. "What's wrong with the Bridge? Who's destroyed it?"

Douglas Tanglewood chuckled softly. "Miss Nosette, Tower Bridge hasn't suffered any damage. They simply haven't finished building it, yet." Flickers of lightning revealed naked iron girders which only partly spanned the River Thames in the darkness. The famous stone covering had not yet been put into place. "There's been quite a controversy raging about the Bridge, you know. Stone over iron, unheard of, risky."

"Controversy?" the blonde sniffed, clearly thinking Tanglewood was feeding her a line. "Absurd. Tower Bridge is a national monument!"

"Will be," Margo put in. "Right now, it's just another bridge. Convenient for trans-shipping cargo from the docks on this bank to the docks on the South Side, since it'll cut five miles out of the draymen's one-way journey, but just a bridge, for all its convenience."

"Nonsense!"

Margo shrugged. "Suit yourself. This isn't the London you left a couple of days ago, Miss Nosette. I'd advise you to keep that in mind. Let's get moving, all right? We don't have any time to waste, standing around arguing about a stupid bridge that isn't even finished, yet."

They set out, Doug Tanglewood in the lead, Margo and Shahdi Feroz bringing up the rear, while Dominica Nosette and Guy Pendergast, voices low, deadlocked in a debate with Conroy Melvyn of Scotland Yard as they walked through the dark, rainy streets. Pubs had just closed down and houses were mostly dark, gas lights turned out while the working poor found what sleep they could before dawn sent them reeling out once more to earn a living however they could manage.

"There's a lot of evidence against Frederick Bailey Deeming, isn't there?" Pendergast asked softly.

"A small-time swindler with brain fever," Conroy Melvyn said with a dismissive air. "Killed his wife and children, slashed their throats. They hanged him in '92."

"Didn't the press dub him the official Ripper, though?" Dominica Nosette pressed the argument. "And Scotland Yard, as well? For years, the Yard exhibited his death mask as the Ripper's."

Conroy Melvyn shrugged. "Well, he was a right popular chap at the time, so he was, violent and known t'be in Whitechapel during the murders. Carried knives, so witnesses told police. Not," the up-time Scotland Yard inspector added drily, "that anybody had any real evidence against him. Prob'ly just an epileptic, drunken lout of a sailor with a violent temper and a nasty habit of killing off family when they got inconveniently expensive to support."

"Nice guy," Margo muttered, earning a sardonic glance from Shahdi Feroz.

Dominica Nosette, who had secreted a miniature video camera system under her clothing and bonnet, turned to glance at the Scotland Yard inspector—thus adroitly filming the "interview" as well.

"Who do you think did it, then?"

"I dunno, ma'am, and that's what we're doin' tonight, innit? Taking a bit of a look-see for ourselves, eh?"

Dominica Nosette, clearly not one to be dismissed so easily, dropped back to where Margo and Shahdi Feroz walked behind the chief inspector and Guy Pendergast. "Who do you think did it, Dr. Feroz? You never did name your top suspect, back on the station, despite all those marvelous theories about Satanists and mad lesbian midwives. Come, now, Dr. Feroz, who's your favorite suspect?"

Neither Shahdi Feroz nor Dominica Nosette noticed the sharp stare from a roughly dressed man nearly invisible in the shadows of a dark alleyway. A man who abruptly changed course to follow them. But Margo did. And she noticed the heavy sap in his hand and the covetous look he cast at Shahdi Feroz and her carpet bag. He'd clearly heard Dominica Nosette call Shahdi Feroz "doctor" and doubtless figured there was something valuable in her satchel. Medicines, maybe, which could be sold for cash. Margo rounded on him in scalding language that brought the ill-dressed villain—and the entire Ripper Watch Team—to a screeching halt in the middle of Whitechapel Road.

"Cor, 'ave a nice butcher's, will you?" Margo shrilled, fists clenched as she advanced menacingly on him. "Ain't you never clapped yer bleedin' minces on no missionary doctor before, you gob-smacked lager lout? Takin' 'er to London Horse Piddle, so I am, an' you lay a German on 'er, I'll clout you upside yer pink an' shell-like, so I will! I ain't no gormless git, I ain't, I know wot a blagger like you is up to, when 'e follows a lady, so g'wan, then, 'ave it away on yer buttons! Before I smack you in the 'ampsteads wiv a bleedin' sap! C'mon, get yer finger out!"

Margo was, in fact, gripping a lead-filled leather sap of her own, so hard her knuckles stood out white. The shabbily dressed man following them had halted, mouth dropping open as he stared. Then he let out a bark of laughter past blackened teeth.

"Grotty-mouthed bit, ain't yer? Don't want no bovver, not 'at bad, I don't. Sooner go back to me cat an' face me ruddy knife, so I would, after she's copped an elephant."

The man faded back into the darkness, his harsh laughter still floating back to them. Margo relaxed her grip on the lead-filled sap one finger joint at a time, then glanced up to discover Douglas Tanglewood hovering at her side, pistol concealed behind one hip. "Well done," he said quietly, "if a bit theatrical. Ladies, gentlemen, we have a schedule to keep. Move along, please."

It was only then, as Margo herded the Ripper Watch team members down the street, casting uneasy glances over her shoulder, that she noticed the open-mouthed stares from Guy Pendergast, Dominica Nosette, and—of all people—Shahdi Feroz, who broke the stunned silence first. "I am amazed! Whatever did you say to that man? It wasn't even in English! Was it?" she added uncertainly.

Margo cleared her throat self-consciously. "Well, no, it wasn't. That was Cockney dialect. Which isn't exactly English, no."

"But what did you say?" the Ripper scholar insisted. "And what did he say?"

"Well . . ." Margo tried to recall, exactly, what it was she'd actually said. "I asked him if he'd had a good look, hadn't he ever laid eyes on a missionary doctor, and I was taking you to London Hospital. So if he laid a hand on you, I'd hit him across the ear with a sap. Told him to go away, or I'd smack him in the teeth, and told him to hurry it up. Then he said I had a dirty mouth and told me he didn't want any trouble. Said he'd rather go home and face his wife after she'd been drinking than mix it up with me." Margo smiled a little lamely. "Actually, he was right about the dirty mouth. Some of what I said was really awful. Bad enough, a proper lady would've fainted from the shock, if she'd understood half of it."

Dominica Nosette laughed in open delight. "My dear, you are a treasure! Really, you've a splendid career ahead. What made you want to scout? Following in your grandfather's footsteps, no doubt?"

Margo didn't really want to talk about her family. Too much of it was painful. So she said, "We really shouldn't discuss anything from up time while we're here, Miss Nosette. That jerk started following us because he overheard what we were saying. You called Madame Feroz, there, by her professional title, which left him dangerously curious about us and the contents of her bag. There are very few women doctors in 1888 and it caught his attention. If you want to talk about scouting later, at the gatehouse, we can talk about it then, but not now. And please don't ask so many questions about the suspects while we're out on the streets. You-know-who hasn't even struck yet, despite the deaths on Easter Monday and August Bank Holiday, both of which will be attributed to him by morning. And since the nickname isn't made public in the newspapers until after September 30th, with the Dear Boss letter that's published after the double murders, conversation on that subject should be confined strictly to the gatehouse."

Dominica gave her one rebellious glance, then smiled sweetly. "Oh, all right. I'm sure you're only trying to watch out for our safety, after all. But I will get that interview, Miss Smith!"

Margo didn't know whether to feel flattered or alarmed.

Then they reached the turn-off for Buck's Row and all conversation came to a halt as the Ripper Watch team went to work. They set up their surveillance equipment efficiently, putting in place miniature cameras, low-light systems, tiny but powerful microphones, miniaturized transmitters that would relay video and audio signals up to the rooftops and across London. They worked in silent haste, as the factory cottages terraced along the road were occupied by families who slept in the shadow of the factories where they worked such long and gruelling shifts. Conroy Melvyn had just finished putting the last connection in place when the constable assigned to this beat appeared at the narrow street's end, sauntering their way with a suspicious glance.

"Wot's this, then?" the policeman demanded.

"Don't want no barney, guv," Doug Tanglewood said quickly, "just 'aving a bit of a bobble, ain't we? C'mon, mates, let's 'ave a pint down to boozer, eh?"

"Oh, aye," Margo grumbled, "an' you'll end pissed as a newt again, like as not!"

"Shut yer gob, eh? Bottle's goin' t'think you ain't got no manners!"

The constable watched narrowly as Douglas Tanglewood and Margo herded the others out of Buck's Row and back toward Whitechapel Road. But he didn't follow, just continued along his assigned beat. Margo breathed a sigh of relief. "Whew . . ."

And did her dead-level best to keep the scholars and journalists out of trouble the whole way back to Spaldergate House, where Margo grew massively absorbed in the unfolding drama in the East End. They did a test recording, which captured a disturbance underway in one of the terraced cottages. The screaming fight which erupted on the heels of a drunken man's return home was

not in English. Or Cockney, either. Bulgarian, maybe . . . Lots of immigrants lived in the East End, so many it was hard to distinguish languages, sometimes. The fight flared to violence and breaking crockery, then subsided with a woman sobbing in despair.

The street and the houses lining it grew quiet again. The constable walked his beat past the cameras several times during the next three hours, virtually alone on the dark stretch of road where no public gas lights burned anywhere within reach of the camera pickups. The silence in the street was mirrored by a thick silence in the vault, as they waited, downing cupfuls of coffee, fidgeting with the equipment, occasionally muttering and adjusting connections. As the clock ticked steadily toward Zero-Hour, the excitement, the electric tension in the vault beneath Spaldergate House was thick enough to cut with the Ripper's knife. Ten minutes before the earliest estimated time of death, they switched on the recording equipment, videotaping the empty stretch of cobbled street.

"Check those backup recordings," Conroy Melvyn muttered. "Be bloody sure we're getting multiple copies of this."

"Number two recording."

"Number three's a go."

"Four's copying just fine."

"Got a sound-feed problem on number five. I'm on it."

Margo, who had nothing to do but watch the others huddle tensely over consoles, fiddling with computer controls and adjusting sound mixers, wondered with a lonely pang what Malcolm was doing and why he hadn't returned, yet. Hours, it'd been, since he'd left on the search of London's hospitals. How many were there in London? She didn't know. After all the work he'd put in during the past weeks, setting up the base camp and helping the scholars learn their way around the East End, he was missing the historical moment when they would finally discover who Jack the Ripper really was. Lousy idiot of a tourist! Why Benny Catlin had chosen tonight, of all nights, to get himself into a gunfight at the Piccadilly Hotel . . .

"Oh, my God!" Pavel Koskenka's voice sliced through the tense silence. "There they are!"

Margo's breath caught involuntarily.

Then Jack the Ripper walked calmly into view, escorting Polly Nichols, all unknowing, to her death.

The night resembled the entire, waning summer: wet and cold. Rain slashed down frequently in sharp gusting showers which would end abruptly, leaving the streets puddled and chilly, only to pour again without warning. Thunder rumbled through the narrow cobbled streets like heavy wagon wheels laboring under a vast tonnage of transport goods. Savage flares of lightning pulsed through low-lying clouds above the wet slate rooftops of London. For the second time that night, a hellish red glow bathed the underbellies of those clouds as another dock fire raged through the East End. It was nearly two-thirty in the morning of a wet, soggy Friday, the last day of August.

James Maybrick paused in the puddled shadows along Whitechapel Road, where he watched the exceedingly erratic progress of the woman he had been following all evening, now. His hands, thrust deep into the pockets of his dark overcoat against the chill of the wet night, ached for the coming pleasure. His right hand curled gently around the hard wooden handle of the knife concealed in his coat's deep pocket. He smiled and tugged down his dark felt cap, one of many caps and hats he had purchased recently in differing parts of the city, preparing for this work.

The woman he followed at a discreet distance staggered frequently against the wall as she made her way east down Whitechapel Road ahead of him. She was a small woman, barely five feet two inches in height, with small and delicate

features gone blowzy and red from the alcohol she had consumed tonight. High cheekbones, dark skin, and grey eyes, framed by brown hair beginning to show the signs of age . . . She might have been anywhere from thirty to thirty-five, to look at her, but Maybrick knew her history, knew everything it was possible to discover about this small, alcoholic woman he stalked so patiently. John Lachley had told Maybrick all about Polly Nichols. About her years of living as a common whore on the streets of Whitechapel.

She was forty-four years old, this "Hooker" as the Americans in Norfolk would have called her, after the general who had supplied such women in the camps during the Civil War. Not a handsome woman, either. She must have a dreadful time luring customers to pay for the goods she offered up for sale. Polly's teeth were slightly discolored when she smiled and just above her eyes, Polly's dark complexion was marred by a scar on her brow. She was married, was "Polly" Nichols, married and a mother of five miserable children, God help them, to have such a mother. Mary Ann Walker, as Lachley had told him was her maiden name, had married William Nichols, subsequently left him five or six times (by William Nichols' own disgusted admission), and had finally left him for good, abandoning her children to take up a life of itinerant work "in service" between stints in workhouses and prostitution. William, poor sod, had convinced the courts to discontinue her maintenance money by proving that she was, in fact, living as a common whore.

Not even her father, Edward Walker, a respectable blacksmith in Camberwell, had been able to live with her during her slide into the miserable creature James Maybrick stalked through this rainy and unseasonably chilly August night. Her own father had quarreled violently with her over her drunkenness, precipitating her departure from his doorstep. Her most recent home-and Maybrick curled his lip at the thought of calling such lodgings home-had been the cold, unheated rooms she'd paid for in various "doss" houses along the infamous Flower and Dean Street and the equally notorious Thrawl Street, establishments which catered primarily to destitute whores. Hundreds of such lodging houses existed in Whitechapel, some of them even permitting men and women to share a bed for the night, as scandalous a notion as that was. The "evil quarter mile" as the stretch of Commercial Road from Thrawl Street to Flower and Dean was known, had for years been vilified as the most dangerous, foul street in London.

James Maybrick knew this only too well, for he had lived, briefly, in Whitechapel during the earliest years of his career as a cotton merchant's clerk, had met and married a pretty working girl named Sarah here, where she had still lived, unknown to the wealthy and faithless bitch he'd married many years later and settled in a fine mansion in Liverpool. Florie, the whore, had discovered Sarah's existence not so many weeks ago, had dared demand a divorce, after what she, herself, had done with Brierly! James had laughed at her, told her to consider her own future carefully before taking such a step, to consider the massive debts she'd run up at dressmakers' shops, debts she could not pay. If she hoped to avoid disgrace, to avoid bringing shame upon herself and her innocent children, she would jolly well indulge his appetites, leave poor Sarah in peace, and keep her mouth shut.

James had visited Sarah tonight, before arriving at Dr. Lachley's. He had enjoyed the conjugal visit with his precious first wife, who bore his need for Florie's money and social position stoically and lived frugally on the money Maybrick provided for her. Sarah was a good, God-fearing girl who had refused to leave Whitechapel and her only living relatives and ruin his social chances. Sarah, at least, would never have to walk these streets. Even the local Spitalfields clergy despaired of the region and its violent, criminal-minded denizens.

James Maybrick smiled into the wet night. They would not despair over one particular denizen much longer. Three and a half hours previously, he had

quietly followed Polly Nichols down Whitechapel Road as she set out searching for her evening's doss money, the four-pence needed to secure a place to sleep, and had watched from the shadows as his guide, his mentor, Dr. John Lachley, had accosted her. The disguise his marvelous teacher wore had changed his appearance remarkably, delighting James to no end, as much as the secret retreat beneath the streets had delighted him. The false theatrical beard Maybrick had obtained for him from a cheap shop in SoHo and the dye used to color it left Lachley as anonymous as the thousands of other shabbily dressed working men wandering Whitechapel, wending their way from one gin palace to the next on a drunken pub crawl.

Lachley, stepping out into Polly Nichols' path, had smiled into her eyes. "Hello, my dear. It's a raw evening, isn't it?"

The doctor, whose medical treatments had left Maybrick feeling more powerful, more vigorous and invincible than he'd felt in years, glanced briefly past the whore's shoulder to where Maybrick stood in concealment, nodding slightly to indicate that this was Polly Nichols, herself, the woman he had brought James here to help murder. Dressed in a brown linsey frock, Polly Nichols had smiled up at John Lachley with a whore's calculating smile of greeting.

"Evening. Is a bit wet, innit?"

"A bit," Lachley allowed. "A lady such as yourself shouldn't be out with a bare head in such weather."

"Ooh, now aren't you the polite one!" She walked her fingers coyly up his arm. "Now, if I were to 'ave the coin, I might buy me a noice, fancy bonnet and keep the rain off."

"It just so happens," Lachley smiled down into her brown eyes, "that I have a few coins to spare."

She laughed lightly. "An' what might a lady need t'do to share that wealth, eh?"

"Consider it a gift." The physician pressed a silver florin into her palm.

She glanced down at the coin, then stared, open-mouthed, down at her grubby hand. "A florin?" This pitiful alcoholic little trollop now held in her hand a coin worth twenty-four pence: the equivalent of six times the going rate for what she was selling tonight. Or, marketed differently, six glasses of gin. Polly stared up at Lachley in sudden suspicion. "What you want t'give me an whole, entire florin for?" Greed warred with alarm in her once delicate little face.

John Lachley gave her a warm smile. "It's a small token of appreciation. From a mutual friend. Eddy sends his regards, madam." He doffed his rough cloth cap. "It has come to his attention that another mutual friend, a young man by the name of Morgan, loaned you a few of his personal letters. Eddy is desirous of re-reading them, you see, and asked me if I might not do him the favor of speaking with you about obtaining them this evening."

"Eddy?" she gasped. "Oh, my! Oh, blimey, the letters!"

Deep in his pocket, Maybrick gripped the handle of his knife and smiled.

John Lachley gave the filthy little trollop a mocking little bow. "Consider the florin a promise of greater rewards to come, in appreciation of your discretion in a certain, ah, delicate matter."

"Oh, I'm most delicate, I am, and it's most generous of Mr. Eddy to send a token of 'is good faith. But you see, I don't exactly 'ave those letters on me person, y'see. I'd 'ave to go an' fetch them. From the safe place I've been keepin' 'em 'idden, y'see, for Morgan," she added hastily.

"Of course, madam. Shall we meet again when you have obtained them? Name the time and place and I will bring a far better reward than that paltry florin, there."

"Oh, yes, certainly! Give me the night, say? Maybe we could meet in the morning?"

Maybrick tightened his hand on the knife handle again, in anger this time. No! He would not wait a whole day! The bitch must be punished now! Tonight! Visions of his wife, naked in her lover's arms, tormented James Maybrick, drove him to a frenzy of hatred, instilled in him the burning desire to kill this filthy prostitute posturing in front of them as though she were someone worthy of breathing the same air they did. Polly Nichols was nothing but a blackmailing, dirty little whore . . .

"You must understand," John Lachley was saying to her, "Eddy is most anxious to re-read his letters. I will meet you again here, later tonight, no later than, say, three-thirty in the morning. That should give you more than adequate time to fetch the letters, buy yourself something to drink at a public house and get a little something to eat, perhaps even buy yourself a nice new bonnet to keep this miserable rain off your lovely hair."

She bobbed her head in excitement, now. "Oh, yes, that'd be fine, three-thirty in the morning, no later. I'll be 'ere, I will, with them letters."

"Very good, madam." Lachley gave her another mocking bow. "Be sure, now, to find yourself a nice bonnet, to keep out the wet. We don't want you catching your death on a raw night like this." Lachley's lips twitched at the silent joke.

The doomed whore laughed brightly. "Oh, no, that would never do, would it? Did you want to go someplace dry and comfy, then?" She was caressing Lachley's groin vulgarly.

The thought tickled Maybrick's sense of humor, that this dirty little trollop would sell herself to the very man who was bringing about her murder. The thought excited him, almost as much as the thought of killing her did. He hoped Lachley dragged her to the nearest private spot and commenced banging her as hard as possible, toothless blackmailing bitch that she was.

John Lachley gave her a wry little smile. "Indeed, madam," he lifted his cap again, "little would give me greater pleasure, but duty recalls me to Eddy's side, I fear."

"Oh! Well, then, tell Mr. Eddy I'm that grateful for the money and I'll buy a proper bonnet before we meet again."

Maybrick reined in his seething frustration and disappointment with barely restrained violence. He gripped the wicked new knife inside his pocket until his whole hand ached. He wanted to strike now, curse it! But he had to wait until the tart found Lachley's letters, had hours to wait, yet. I will rip her apart, he thought savagely, rip her wide open and let the rain wash the filth from the bleeding womb she sells so freely . . .

Lachley gave her a courteous bow she did not merit and left her walking down Whitechapel Road. Maybrick's clever mentor had carefully instructed him in the exact method he must use to murder this bitch, to keep the blood from splashing across his clothes when he struck. The brilliant physician and occultist had guided him to the worst of the slatterns walking these streets—deserving targets of the monumental rage he carried against the bitch who lay with her lover, tonight, in Liverpool. Maybrick almost loved his mentor, in that moment, as he thought of what delights lay ahead. As Polly wobbled drunkenly off into the night, Lachley circled around silently, sent a secretive little smile in Maybrick's direction, and followed Polly Nichols once again.

Maybrick trailed at a leisurely distance, smiling to himself, now, and caressed the handle of his concealed knife with loving fingertips. Polly Nichols, stumbling ahead of them, first visited an establishment that sold clothing of dubious origins. There she acquired a reddish brown ulster to keep off the rain, which fastened up with seven large brass buttons, and a fetching little black straw bonnet with black velvet trim and lining. She giggled as she put it on, then paraded down the wet streets to pub after pub, steadily drinking the remaining change from the silver florin.

Twice, both he and Lachley paused in dense, wet shadows while she disappeared into a secluded spot with a customer to earn three or four pence "for my doss money" she explained each time. And twice, after she had earned a few more pence, they followed along behind again as she found yet another pub in which to spend the money on gin. Well past midnight, she staggered out of the locally famous Frying Pan Public House, just one more in a long series of pubs, and found herself another customer with whom to earn another fourpence. She spent this money just as quickly as she had the rest, pouring it down her alcoholic gullet.

And so the night waned into the small hours. At nearly one-thirty in the morning, she returned to a lodging house at 18 Thrawl Street and remained inside its kitchen for several minutes, until the lodging house deputy escorted her to the door and said, "Get your doss money, ducks, an' don't come back 'til you 'ave it."

"Won't you save a bed for me?" she asked the man. "Never mind! I'll soon get my doss money. See what a jolly bonnet I've got now?" And she touched the black, velvet-lined straw hat with caressing fingers. "I've 'ad money tonight and I'll get more just as easy, I will, an' I'll be back wiv my doss money soon enough."

And so out onto the streets she wandered again, clearly searching for another customer to procure more gin to while away the time before their three-thirty appointment-presumably having retrieved the letters Lachley sought from the room she was not yet able to pay for and would not be needing, ever again. Maybrick followed her silently, as did the all-but-invisible John Lachley, a mere shadow of a shape in the darkness ahead, the paler blur of Lachley's skin lit now and again by the lightning flaring across the sky. The rumble of thunder threatened more rain. It would need rain, to wash away the blood James would spill into these streets . . .

Polly Nichols stumbled and staggered her way through the better part of an hour, approaching and being turned down by one prospect after another, leading James and his mentor eventually toward the corner of Whitechapel Road and Osborn Street. There, she put out a hand to brace herself and greeted a woman coming up Osborn. "Well, if it in't Emily 'olland," she slurred, "where you been?"

Emily Holland was a woman considerably older than Polly Nichols, closer to Maybrick's own age, he suspected, although she looked considerably older than Maybrick's fifty years. Emily greeted the drunken prostitute with considerable surprise. "Polly? I didn't expect to find you at this hour! Whatever are you doing wandering around so late? Me, I've been down to Shadwell Dry Dock. To see the fire." Emily gestured toward the distant docks, where the sky glowed a sullen red from the dockside disaster. It was the second fire that night which had reddened the clouds scudding so low above Whitechapel's broken and dilapidated rooftops. "What are you doing out at this hour, Polly? I thought you were coming back down to Flower and Dean Street, with Annie and Elizabeth and me. You were at the White House with us last night."

" 'At's right," Polly nodded, slurring the words. "But I've got to get me doss money, yet. Bastard wouldn't let me stay 'til I've got it."

"Polly, it's two-thirty in the morning!" Almost as an echo, a nearby church clock struck the time. "Hear that? Why don't you have your doss money by now?"

"Oh, I 'ad it. Three times today, I've 'ad it." She touched her pretty new bonnet in an absent little gesture. But she didn't explain about the florin and the letters, which was just as well, since that would have required Maybrick to murder this new trollop, Holland, also. Lachley had made it clear that none of these filthy whores must be allowed to know about such important letters. Truly, Maybrick was doing all England a great service, ridding the streets of the kind of filth Polly Nichols represented.

Polly was saying in a deeply slurred voice, "Three times, Emily, I've 'ad me

doss money, but I've drunk it all. Every las' penny of it. Three times. Never you fret, though. I'll 'ave my doss money before long, I will, and I'll be back wiv you and the girls." She patted her pocket and let out a drunken giggle. "Won't be long at all, now."

Whereupon Polly took her leave of Emily Holland and staggered away on a new course, down Osborn Street in the direction of the Shadwell dock fire, where she might presumably find paying customers in abundance. The other woman called a low-voiced "Good night!" after her and watched Polly for a moment longer, shaking her head sadly, then shrugged and pulled her shawl more tightly about her shoulders and continued on her way, down Osborn Street in the opposite direction. James Maybrick waited impatiently until Emily Holland had disappeared into the wet night before moving down Whitechapel Road in pursuit, once more. John Lachley also broke from hiding.

Polly's voice, badly slurred, drifted back to Maybrick. "Be nice, 'aving an 'ot fire to warm me cold fingers by." She laughed drunkenly and reached the edge of the crowd which had gathered at Shadwell to watch the docks burn. Utter chaos reigned. Firemen swept continuous streams of water back and forth across the blazing dry dock and several doomed warehouses. Fire boats in the river added their drenching spray, trying to contain the inferno before it spread to any other warehouses with valuable contents.

More than two centuries might have passed since the Great Fire, but London had never forgotten the devastation which had destroyed all but one tiny corner of Britain's capital city. The only good to come of that fire, which had forced thousands to flee, only to watch their homes and livelihoods burn to ashes, had been the complete eradication of the Black Death. Afterwards, plague had never broken out in London again.

Not a plague of that sort, in any case. A plague of whores and prostitutes and bitches, however, had swelled to number in the thousands. Tonight, Maybrick would begin his campaign to eradicate this latest deadly plague to strike the greatest city in the greatest Empire on the earth. He smiled, marshaled his patience, and kept watch on Polly Nichols as she trolled for customers.

Despite the late hour, thousands of spectators jammed the narrow streets to watch this latest London fire. The electric thrill of danger was a tangible presence in the wet night. Maybrick hung well back, as did Lachley, losing sight of the drunken Polly Nichols in the crowd. The atmosphere in Shadwell was a carnival madness. Alcohol flowed in prodigious quantities. Maybrick, seething like the jagged lightning overhead, downed pint after pint of dark ale, himself, feeding his rage, nursing the hunger in his soul. John Lachley, too, had vanished through the crowd, leaving Maybrick to wait. He wanted to shout obscenities, he was so weary of walking and endlessly waiting. He gripped the handle of his knife so tightly he was sure there would be bruises across his palm by morning.

Nearly an hour later, with the fire still blazing furiously, Maybrick finally caught another glimpse of Polly Nichols' black, velvet-trimmed bonnet. She was just emerging through the door of a jam-packed public house which had thrown open its doors in all defiance of the closing-hour laws. She staggered mightily under the influence of God-only-knew how much more alcohol. She passed Maybrick without even seeing him, stumbled straight past a doorway from which John Lachley subsequently emerged, and headed down Osborn Street toward Whitechapel Road.

It was time for her to keep her rendezvous with murder.

The game was in Maybrick's blood, now, the stop and start of shadowing his prey down wet streets with the growl of thunder snarling overhead like a savage beast loose in the night. They waited, strolling quietly along, until they were well away from the crowd at the fire. Polly reached the now-deserted Whitechapel Road and turned east, moving unsteadily toward the spot they'd

agreed to meet. John Lachley started out into the open, making his move to retrieve the letters. Then halted abruptly. So did Maybrick, cursing their foul luck. A rough man dressed like a dockhand, also coming from the direction of the Shadwell Dry Dock fire, had appeared at the end of the block and accosted her first.

Maybrick and his mentor melted back into the shadows of dark overhanging doorways, on opposite sides of the narrow street. The dockhand and the drunken whore bent their heads together and spoke quietly. A low laugh broke from the man and Maybrick heard Polly say, "Yes." A moment later, the two of them sought deeper shadows, so close to James Maybrick's hiding place, he could literally smell them from where he stood.

Maybrick's pulse flared like the lightning overhead as he stood there in the darkness, listening to the rustle of skirts and clothing hastily switched about, the sharp sounds of the dockhand shifting his hobnailed boots on the pavement as he pressed the cheap trollop back into a convenient corner, the heavy breaths and meaty sounds of flesh coming together, slow and rhythmic and hard. Maybrick's nostrils flared. He gripped the wooden handle of his knife, listened eagerly to the gasp of breath as the whore ground her hips against her customer's. He could all but see the clutch of the dock worker's hands against a straining breast, a naked thigh, skirts and petticoats lifted high to either side to accommodate him. He imagined his wife's face where the strumpet's was, saw his wife's glorious, strawberry blond hair falling down across her naked breasts as the unwashed dockhand shoved into her, took her right here on the street like the slut she was, heard his wife's voice gasping in the close darkness . . .

Low, breathy obscenities drifted on the night air, his voice, then hers, encouraging him. Hurry, she must be thinking, hurry up and finish, I'm drunk and need a bed for the night and they'll be along with the money for the letters soon, so get on with it and spend your spunk, you great ugly lout of a dockhand . . .

Maybrick clutched his knife, hand thrust deep in his pocket, and breathed hard as she whispered to the man using her. "'At's right, lovey, 'at's good, Friar me right good, you do, 'at's grand . . ."

Friar Tuck . . . the rhyming slang of the streets . . .

A low, masculine grunt finally drifted past Maybrick's hiding place.

He waited for their breaths to slow from the frantic rush.

Waited for the sounds of clothing going back down, the jingle of coins in a pocket, the whisper of, "'Ere's three-pence, pet, and a shiny penny besides." The sound of a wet kiss came, followed by the muffled smack of a hand against a cloth-covered backside. "An' a right nice trembler it was, too."

Maybrick waited, pulse pounding like the thunder overhead, as the dockhand's hobnailed boots clattered away down the pavement in the direction of the docks and the still-burning fire. As his footfalls died away, Polly's low, slurred voice drifted to Maybrick. "Eh, then, got my doss money, just like I told Emily I would. I've 'ad a lovely new bonnet tonight and a warm new ulster and thirty-eleven pints and still got my doss money. And there's still the money for the letters to collect, too!" A low laugh reached Maybrick's hiding place.

He waited in a fever of impatience while she staggered out into the open again, heading down Whitechapel Road with the money she'd just earned in her pocket. Across the street, Lachley, silent on the rubberized overshoes they'd both bought, the same shoes worn by several million ordinary domestic servants to silence their footfalls, stole after her down Whitechapel Road. They crept up behind . . .

"Hello, love," Lachley whispered.

She gave a tiny, indrawn shriek and whirled, with semi-disastrous results.

Lachley steadied the small woman easily. "There, now, I didn't mean to terrify you. Steady."

She peered up at him, face pinched from the shock. "Oh, it's you," she breathed out, "you give me such a fright!" She smiled happily, then, and touched her bonnet. "See? I got me that bonnet, just like you said. Innit a fine one?"

"Very fine. Very becoming. Velvet-trim, isn't it? A lovely bonnet. I trust you have the letters we discussed earlier?"

A crafty smile stole across the woman's face. "I've got one of 'em, so I 'ave."

Only Maybrick saw the flicker of murderous wrath cross Lachley's face. Then he was smiling down at her again. "One of them? But, my dear, there were four! Mr. Eddy really is most anxious to obtain the full set."

"Course 'e is, an' I don't blame 'im none, I don't, but y'see, I only 'ad the one letter. An' I've looked for my friend, looked an' looked everywhere, what 'as the other three--"

"Friend?" Lachley's voice came to Maybrick as a flat, blank sound of astonishment. "Friend?"

The stupid whore didn't even notice the cold rage in her murderer's voice.

"I 'adn't so much as a single 'apenny to me name and it were ever so cold an' raining ever so 'ard. An' I 'adn't drunk no gin in an whole day, y'see, so I give three of the letters to Annie an' she give me a shilling, so I could pay for a doss 'ouse an' not be caught by some constable sleepin' rough and get sent back to Lambeth Work'ouse. She's only 'olding 'em for me, like, 'til I get the shilling back to repay 'er the loan . . ."

Lachley touched her gently, tipping up her chin. "Who is this friend, Polly? What is her name?"

"Annie. I said that, Annie Chapman, what lives in the doss 'ouses over to Flower and Dean Street, same as me. She's 'oldin' the other three letters for me, but I'll 'ave 'em back by tomorrow morning, swear I will."

"Of course you will." Lachley was smiling again.

Maybrick's hand was sweaty where he gripped his knife.

Polly blinked anxiously up into Lachley's face. "Say, you finish up your business with Mr. Eddy for the night?" She leaned against Lachley, still reeking of the dockworker's sweat. "Maybe we could go someplace b'fore I go back to me doss 'ouse an' find Annie?"

"No, my business tonight is not quite finished," Lachley said with fine irony. Maybrick admired the man more and more. He gestured Maybrick forward with a motion of his head. "But I've a friend here with me who has a little time in hand."

Polly turned, so drunk on the gin she'd guzzled that Lachley had to keep her from falling. "Well, then, 'ello, luv."

"Good evening, ma'am." Maybrick tipped his hat.

"Polly," John Lachley said with a faint smile, "this is James. He is a dear friend of mine. James will take care of you this evening. Now. Here is the money for the letter you have with you." Lachley held out a palmful of glittering sovereigns.

Polly gasped. Then fumbled through her pocket and produced a crumpled letter.

Lachley took it gently from her, swept his gaze across what had been written on the grubby sheets of foolscap, and put the money in her hand, then glanced up at Maybrick with a quirk of his lips. Polly wouldn't be keeping her money long.

"There, now. First payment, in good faith. Payment in full very soon. Shall Mr. James, here, escort you someplace quiet?"

Polly smiled up at Maybrick in turn and moved her hand downward along the shapeless workmen's trousers he wore. "Grand."

Maybrick's breaths came faster. He smiled down into her eyes, pulse beating a savage rhythm at his temples. He said to his whore, "This way, my dear."

They had timed the rounds of the constables of the H Division all through this area, he and Lachley. Maybrick knew very well that the next few minutes would provide him with exactly the opportunity he needed. Lachley doffed his cap and bid Polly goodnight and disappeared down Whitechapel Road at a brisk walk, whistling merrily to himself. James knew, of course, that his mentor would circle around to Buck's Row by way of quiet little Baker's Row and meet him again soon . . . very soon.

Maybrick took Polly's arm and gave her a brilliant smile, then guided her off the main road, down Thomas Street, a narrow bridge road which led across the rail line of the London and Northern Railway, twenty feet below. Beyond the railway line lay the exceedingly narrow street known as Buck's Row, lined by high brick warehouses, a board school, and several terrace houses, which served as cottages for the tradesmen who worked in Schneiders Cap Factory and several high, dark warehouses: the Eagle Wool Warehouse, which supplied fabric for the cap factory, and the massive warehouse called Essex Wharf.

James knew Schneider of old, a dirty little foreigner, which in this dismal region meant only one thing: Jew. James had chosen his killing ground carefully, most carefully, indeed. It was the filthy foreigners flooding into London who were destroying the moral fibre of the English Empire, bringing in their foreign ways and unholy religious practices and speaking every tongue heard at the Tower of Babel except the Queen's good English. Yes, James had chosen this spot with great care, to leave a message on the very doorstep of the bastards destroying all that was English.

The place he wanted was an old stableyard which stood between the school and the workers' cottages. The only street lamp was at the far end of Buck's Row, where it met Baker's Row to the west. As they entered the cramped, cobbled street, which was no more than twenty feet wide from housewalls on the one hand to warehouse walls opposite, Maybrick slipped his right hand into his coat pocket again. He closed his hand around the handle of the beautiful, shining knife and gripped it tightly. His pulse raced. His breath came in short, unsteady gasps. The smell of cheap gin and sex and greed was a poison in his brain. Her whispered obscenities to the dockworker rang in his ears. His hand sweat against the wood. Here, his mind shrieked. Quick, before the bloody constables come back! He drew another breath, seeing in his mind his beautiful, faithless wife, naked and writhing under the lover who impaled her in that hotel he'd seen them coming out of together, the one in Liverpool's fashionable Whitechapel Street.

Maybrick glanced toward Baker's Row. Saw Lachley appear from the blackness at the end of Buck's Row. Saw him nod, giving the signal that all was clear. Maybrick's breath whipsawed, harsh and urgent. He tightened his left hand on the whore's arm. Moving her almost gently, Maybrick pressed her back against the stableyard gate. It was solid as iron. She smiled up at him, fumbling with her skirts. He slid his hand up her arm, toyed with a breast, slipped his fingers upwards, toward her neck-

Then smashed a fist into her face.

Bone crunched. Several of her teeth broke loose. She sagged back against the fence, stunned motionless. Maybrick tightened a savage grip around her throat. Her eyes bulged. Her abruptly toothless mouth worked. Shock and terror twisted across her once-delicate face. High cheekbones flushed dark as he cut off her air. His wife's face swam before his eyes, gaping and toothless and terror stricken. He dug his thumb into dear, faithless Florie's jaw, bruising the right side of her face. The bitch struggled feebly as he tightened down. He dented and bruised the flesh of her throat, the left side of her face with his fingers, ruthless and drunk with the terror he inflicted. She was so drunk, she wasn't able to do more than claw weakly at his coat sleeve with one hand.

James Maybrick smiled down into his whore's dying eyes . . .

. . . and brought out his shining knife.

Skeeter Jackson pushed his heavy maintenance cart toward the men's room in Little Agora, bottles rattling and mops threatening to crash against the protestors who screamed and carried signs and picketed fifteen feet deep around Ianira's vacant booth, threatening to shut down commerce with their disruptive presence and threatening to shut down the station with the violence that broke out between them and the Arabian Nights construction workers at least once every couple of hours.

Nuts, he groused, maneuvering with difficulty through the packed crowd, we are neck deep in nutcases. He finally gained the bathroom, which he was already fifteen minutes overdue to scrub, slowed down on his schedule by the crowds of protestors and uneasy tourists, and turned on the hot water to fill his mop bucket. He'd just added soap when the trouble broke loose.

A sudden scuffle and a meaty smack and thump shook the whole bank of stalls behind him. Skeeter came around fast, mop gripped in both hands like a quarterstaff. A pained cry, high-pitched and frightened, accompanied another thud and violent slap. Then a stall door burst open and a burly guy with Middle Eastern features, who wore jeans and a work shirt and a burnoose-style headdress, strode out. He looked smug and self-satisfied. He was still zipping his fly. A muffled, startlingly feminine sob came from the now-open stall.

Skeeter narrowed his eyes at the construction worker, who wore a wicked linoleum knife in a sheathe on his belt. These creeps had been involved in the attacks on Ianira and her family. He was convinced they might yet know where she was, despite their protests of innocence to station security. They were trouble, wherever they went on station and it looked very much like more trouble was breaking loose right in front of him.

"You want to tell me what that was all about?" Skeeter asked quietly, placing himself carefully between the heavily muscled worker and the exit.

The dark-eyed man smirked down at Skeeter, measuring his shorter height and lighter frame contemptuously. "Little girls should not demand more money than they are worth."

"Is that a fact?" Skeeter balanced lightly on the balls of his feet, aware that he played a potentially lethal game. These guys carried tools that doubled as deadly weapons. But he wasn't going to let this creep just walk out of here, not with somebody back there crying in that stall like a hurt child. "Hey, you okay in there?" he called out to the pair of grubby tennis shoes visible under the partially open door. "I'll call the station infirmary if you need help."

"S-Skeeter?" The voice was familiar, quavering, terrified.

When the voice clicked in Skeeter's memory, the anger that burst through him was as cold and deadly as the winter winds howling down off the mountains onto the plains of the Gobi. "Bergitta?" The girl huddled in the back of the stall was younger than Skeeter. She'd helped search for Ianira, that first terrible day, had searched along with the other down-timers long after station security had given up the job. The Found Ones had been teaching her modern technical skills so she could make a living doing something besides selling herself.

"Skeeter, please . . . he . . . he will hurt you . . ."

Skeeter had no intention of abandoning a member of his adopted down-timer family to the likes of this smirking lout. "How much did he agree to give you, Bergitta?" he asked, carefully keeping his gaze on the construction worker who now eyed him narrowly.

"T-twenty-but it is okay, please . . ."

Skeeter gave the angry construction worker a disgusted glare. "Twenty? Geez, last of the big spenders, aren't we? You can't hardly buy a burger around here for that. Listen, asshole, you pay my friend, there, what you promised and get the hell out of here, maybe I won't get nasty."

Incredulous black eyes widened. "Pay her?" His laugh was ugly, contemptuous.

"Out of my way, you stupid little cockerel!"

Skeeter stood his ground. The other man's eyes slitted angrily. Then the construction worker started forward, moving fast, one fist cocked, the other reaching for his belt. Skeeter caught a glint of light off that wicked linoleum knife-

He whirled the mop handle in a blurred, sweeping arc.

It connected solidly with a solar plexus that came to an abrupt halt.

A sharp, ugly grunt tore loose. The knife clattered to the tiled floor. The would-be knife-fighter folded up around the end of Skeeter's mop, eyes bugged out. Skeeter kicked the knife away with one foot. It clattered across the floor and skidded into a puddle under a distant urinal, then Skeeter assisted the gagging construction worker face-first into the steaming mop bucket at his feet. He landed with a skloosh! While he was upended, Skeeter lifted his wallet with light-fingered skill and extracted its contents. Curses gurgling underwater blew the most interesting soap bubbles Skeeter had ever seen.

As soon as he'd secured Bergitta's money, Skeeter hauled the former customer up by the shirt collar. "Now," he said gently, "you want to tell me about Ianira Cassandra?"

The reply was in Arabic and doubtless obscene.

Skeeter fed him more soap bubbles.

By the fourth dunking, the man was swearing he'd never laid eyes on Ianira Cassandra and would've strewn petals at her feet, if it would've helped keep his head above water. Reluctantly, Skeeter decided the bastard must be telling the truth. He shoved the guy's wallet between soapy teeth and said, "Twenty for services rendered and the rest for damages wrought. Now get the hell out of here before I break ribs. Or call security."

One twist of the mop handle and the dripping construction worker found it necessary to launch himself across the tiled floor, out the doorway, and past the "Slippery When Wet" sign just beyond. From the startled shrieks and angry shouts outside, he cannoned straight into a group of protestors. A moment later, security whistles sounded and a woman's voice drifted in, shrill with indignation. "He knocked me down! Yes, he ran that way . . ."

Skeeter crossed the bathroom, flexing a slightly strained shoulder, and peered into the open stall. Bergitta had clutched one side of her face, which was already swollen and turning purple. The simple dress she wore was torn. Anger started a slow burn as he gazed down at his terrified friend. "Are you okay?" he asked gently.

She nodded. Then burst into tears and slid to the tiled floor, trembling so violently he could hear the scrape of her identification bracelet-a gift from the Found Ones-against the wall. Skeeter bit his lip. Then sighed and waded in to try and pick up the shattered pieces. He crouched beside her, gently brushed back Bergitta's hair, a glorious, platinum blond, thick and shining where the lights overhead touched it.

"Shh," he whispered, "he's gone now. You're safe, shh . . ." When she'd stopped crying, he said gently, "Bergitta, let's take you down to the infirmary."

She shook her head. "No, Skeeter, there is no money . . ."

Skeeter held out the cash he'd liberated. "Yes, there is. And I've got some money put aside, too, so don't you worry about that, okay?" He'd been saving that cash for his rent, but what the hell, he could always sleep in the Found Ones' council chamber down in the station's sub-basement until he could afford to rent another apartment.

Bergitta was crying again, very quietly and very messily down her bruised face. Skeeter retrieved a towel from his push cart and dried her cheeks, then helped her to her feet. When she wobbled, shaking violently, Skeeter simply picked her up and carried her. She clung to his shoulders and hid her face from the curious onlookers they passed. When he carried her into the

infirmary, Rachel Eisenstein was just stepping out of her office.

"Skeeter! What's happened? Not another riot?" she asked worriedly.

"No. Some asshole construction worker blacked Bergitta's face and God knows what else before I interrupted. Tried to disembowel me with a linoleum knife when I protested."

Rachel's lips thinned. "Bring her into the back, Skeeter, let's see how badly hurt she is. And we'd better file an official complaint with security. The more complaints we log, the more likely Bull is to push the issue and toss the men responsible for all this trouble through Primary, schedule or no schedule. Kit's already been after Bull to do just that."

So Rachel took charge of Bergitta, and Skeeter found himself giving a statement to security. He identified the man from a file of employment photos. "That's him. Yeah, the creep came at me with a linoleum knife."

"You realize we can't press charges for what he did to Bergitta?" the security officer said as he jotted down notes. "She's a down-timer. No legal rights."

"Yeah," Skeeter muttered darkly, "I know." They'd search for Ianira Cassondra, move heaven and earth to find her, because of the Templars and the phenomenal popularity and power of the Lady of Heaven Temples, but Bergitta was just another down-timer without rights, trapped on the station with no way off and no protection from the people who ran her new world. Worse, she was a known prostitute. Security didn't give a damn when a girl like Bergitta got hurt.

The guard said, "If you want this creep charged with assault and battery with a deadly weapon, plus anything else I can think up, you got it, but that's all we can nail him for, Skeeter."

"Yes, I want him charged," Skeeter growled. "And tossed off station, if you can swing it. Along with his pals."

"Don't hold your breath. That crew's already running behind schedule and the first tour's slated for next month. We might be able to work out a trial up time after the new section of Commons is finished, but getting him tossed off station before that job's done is flogging a dead horse. Not my idea, but that's how it is. Just figured you'd want to know up front."

Skeeter muttered under his breath. "Thanks. I know you're doing your best."

Rachel put in appearance just then, returning from the exam room where Bergitta rested. "She's badly shaken up and her face is going to be sore for a while, along with some other nasty bruises he left, but she's basically all right. No internal hemorrhaging, no broken bones."

Skeeter relaxed marginally. "Thank God."

Rachel eyed him curiously. "You fought a man with a knife, protecting her?"

Skeeter shrugged. "Wasn't much of a contest, really. I had a mop, he never got close to me with it."

"Well, whatever you think, it was still a risky thing to do, Skeeter."

He realized she was trying to thank him. Skeeter felt his cheeks burn. "Listen, about the bill, I've got some money--"

"We'll talk about that later, all right? Oh-oh . . ."

Skeeter glanced around and blanched.

His boss was in-bound and the head of station maintenance did not look happy.

"Is it true?" Charlie Ryan demanded.

"Is what true?" Skeeter asked, wary and on his guard.

"That you beat up a construction worker over a goddamned down-timer whore? Then brought her up here while you're still clocked in officially on my dime?"

Skeeter clenched his fists. "Yes, it's true! He was beating the shit out of her--"

"I don't pay you to rescue your down-timer pals, Jackson! I looked the other way when it was Ianira Cassondra, but this by God tears it! And I sure as hell

don't pay you to put hard-working construction professionals in the brig!"

Rachel tried to intervene. "Charlie, everyone on station's had trouble with those guys and you know it."

"Stay out of this, Rachel! Jackson, I pay you to mop bathrooms. Right now, there's a bathroom in Little Agora that's not getting mopped."

"I'll clean the stinking bathroom!" Skeeter growled.

Charlie Ryan look him up and down. "No, you won't. You're fired, Jackson."

"Charlie—" Rachel protested.

"Let it go, Rachel," Skeeter bit out. "If I'd known I was working for a stinking bigot, I'd've quit weeks ago."

He stalked out of the infirmary and let the crowds on Commons swallow him up.

What he was going to do now, he honestly did not know.

He walked aimlessly for ages, hands thrust deep into his pockets, watching the tourists practice walking in their rented costumes and laughing at one another's antics and buying each other expensive lunches and souvenirs, and wondered if any of them had the slightest notion what it was like for the down-time populations stranded on these stations?

He was sitting on the marble edging of a fountain in Victoria Station, head literally in hands, when Kynan Rhys Gower appeared from out of the crowd, expression grim. "Skeeter, we have trouble."

He glanced up, startled to hear the Welshman's voice. "Trouble? Oh, man, now what?"

"It is Julius," Kynan said quietly. "He is missing."

Skeeter just shut his eyes for a long moment. "Oh, no . . ." Not another friend, missing. The teenager from Rome had organized the down-timer kids into a sort of club known affectionately as the Lost and Found Gang. Under Ianira's guidance, the "gang" had turned its attention to earning money guiding lost tourists back to their hotel rooms, serving as the Found Ones' eyes and ears in places where adults would have roused suspicion, running errands and proving their value time and again. The children's work had allowed the Found Ones to learn rather a good bit more about the cults active on station than Mike Benson or anyone in security had managed to discover.

"How long has he been missing?" Skeeter asked tiredly.

"We are not sure," Kynan sighed. "No one has seen him since . . ." The Welshman hesitated. "He was supposed to be running an errand for the Found Ones, just before the riot broke out, the one Ianira disappeared in. No one has seen him, since."

"Oh, God. What's going on around this station?"

Kynan clenched his fists in visible frustration. "I do not know! But if I find out, Skeeter, I will take apart whoever is responsible!"

Of that, Skeeter had no doubt whatsoever. Skeeter intended to help. "Okay, we've got to get another search organized. For Julius, this time."

"The Lost and Found Gang are already searching."

"I want them to get as close to those creeps on the Arabian Nights construction crew as they can. And those crazy Jack the Ripper cults, too. Any group of nuts on this station who might have a reason to want Ianira to disappear, to stir up trouble, is on the suspect list."

Kynan nodded. "I will get word to the children. They are angry, Skeeter, and afraid."

"Huh. So am I, Kynan Rhys Gower. So am I."

The Welshman nodded slowly. "Yes. A brave man is one who admits his fear. Only a fool believes himself invincible. The Council of Seven has called an emergency meeting. Another one."

"That's no surprise. What time?"

"An hour from now."

Skeeter nodded. At least he wouldn't have to worry about losing his job,

sneaking off to attend it. Kynan Rhys Gower hesitated. "I have heard what happened, Skeeter. Bergitta is all right?"

"Yeah. Bruised, scared. But Rachel said she's okay."

"Good." The one-time longbow-man's jaw muscles bunched. "Charlie Ryan is a pig. He hires us because he does not have to pay, what is the up-time word? Union wages."

"Yeah. Tell me about it."

"Skeeter . . ."

He glanced up at the ominous growl in the other man's voice.

"Accidents happen."

"No." Skeeter shoved himself to his feet, looked the Welshman straight in the eyes. "No, it's his right to fire me. And I was doing a lousy job, spending all my time looking for Ianira and Marcus instead of working. I happen to think he's got his priorities screwed up, but I won't hear of anything like that. I appreciate it, but it'd just be a waste of effort. Guys like Charlie Ryan are like mushrooms. Squash one, five more pop up. Besides, if anybody's going to loosen his teeth, it's gonna be me, okay?"

Kynan Rhys Gower clearly considered arguing, then let it go. "That is your right," he said quietly. "But you have earned more this day than you have lost."

Skeeter didn't know what to say.

"I will see you at the Council meeting," the Welshman told him quietly, then left him standing in the glare and noise of Commons, wondering why his eyes stung so harshly. "I'll be there," Skeeter swore to empty air.

How many more of his friends would simply vanish into thin air before this ugly business was done? What had Julius seen or overheard, to cause someone to snatch him, too? When Skeeter got his hands on whoever was responsible for this . . . That someone would learn what it meant to suffer the summary justice of a Yakka Mongol clansman. Meanwhile, he had another friend missing.

Skeeter had far too few friends to risk losing any more of them.

Margo craned forward, so excited and repelled at the same time, she felt queasy. Then she saw the face and gasped as she recognized him. "James Maybrick!" she cried. "It's James Maybrick! The cotton merchant from Liverpool!"

"Shh!" The scholars motioned frantically for silence, trying to hear anything the murderer and his victim might say, even though everything was being recorded, including Polly Nichols' final footfalls. Margo gulped back nausea, watched in rising horror as Maybrick escorted his victim down to the gate where he would strangle and butcher her. When he struck with his fist, Margo hid her face in her hands, unable to watch. The sounds were bad enough .

. . .

Then Conroy Melvyn burst out, "Who the bloody hell is that?"

Margo jerked her gaze up to the television screen . . . and found herself staring, right along with the rest of the shocked Ripper Watch Team. A man had crept up behind Jack the Ripper, who was still hacking away at his dead victim.

"James . . . enough." Just the barest thread of a whisper. Then, when Maybrick continued to hack at the dead woman's neck, as though trying to cut loose her entire head, "She's dead, James. Enough!"

Whoever this man was, he clearly knew James Maybrick. More importantly, Maybrick clearly knew him. The maniacal rage in Maybrick's eyes faded as he glanced around. Maybrick's lips worked wetly. "But I wanted the head . . ." Plaintive, utterly mad.

"There's no time. Fetch me the money from her pockets. Be quick about it, the constable will be arriving momentarily."

The Buck's Row cameras, fitted with low-light equipment, picked up the lean,

saturnine face, the drooping mustaches of a total stranger who stepped up to peer at Polly Nichols. As Maybrick stooped to crouch over the dead woman, the newcomer closed a hand around Jack the Ripper's shoulder, a casual gesture which revealed a depth of meaning to anyone who knew the stiff etiquette of Victorian Britain. These men knew each other well enough for casual familiarities. Maybrick was wiping his knife on Polly's underskirts.

"Very good, James. You've done well. Strangled her first, as instructed. Not more than a wineglass of blood. Very good." Voice pitched to a low whisper, the tones and words were clearly those of an educated man, but with hints of the East End in the vowels, hints even Margo's untrained ear could pick out. Then, more sharply, "The money, James!"

"Yes, doctor!" Maybrick's voice, thick with sexual ecstasy, trembled in the audio pickup. The arsenic-addicted cotton merchant from Liverpool bent over the prone remains of his victim and searched her pockets, retrieving several large coins that glinted gold like sovereigns. "No other letters, doctor," he whispered.

"Letters?" Pavel Kostenka muttered, leaning closer to the television monitor to stare at the stranger's face. "What letters? And Dr. Who?"

Across the room, the British police inspector Conroy Melvyn choked with sudden, silent laughter for some completely unfathomable reason. Margo resolved to ask him what he could possibly find funny, once this macabre little meeting in Bucks Row had ended.

On the video monitor, the stranger muttered impatiently, "No, of course there won't be any other letters. She said she'd sold them, drunken bitch, and I believed her when she said it. Come, James, the H Division Constables will be along momentarily. Wipe your shoes clean, they're bloody. Then come with me. You've done well, James, but we have to hurry."

Maybrick straightened up. "I want my medicine," he said urgently.

"Yes, I'll be sure and give you more of the medicine you need, before you catch your train for home. After we've reached Tibor."

Maybrick's eyes glittered in the low-light pickup. He gripped the other man's arm. "Thank you, doctor! Ripping the bitch like that . . . she opened like a ripe peach . . . so bloody wonderful . . ."

"Yes, yes," the narrow-faced man said impatiently. "You can write it all down in your precious diary. Later. Now, you must come with me, we haven't much time. This way . . ."

The two men moved away from the camera's lens, walking quickly but not so fast as to arouse suspicion should anyone happen to glance out a window. The crumpled body of Polly Nichols lay beside the gate where she'd died, her disarranged skirts hiding the ghastly mutilations Maybrick's knife had inflicted. Margo stared after the two men who—clearly—were conspirators in some hideous game that involved unknown letters, payments made to prostitutes, and murder. The game made no rational sense to Margo, any more than it did to the openly stunned Ripper scholars. Who was this mysterious doctor and why was Maybrick involved with him? And why hadn't Maybrick's diary even once hinted at such a turn of events? That diary, explicit as to detail, with its open, candid mention of the many people in Maybrick's life—his unfaithful American wife, their young children and the little American girl staying with the Maybrick family, his brothers, employees, murder victims, friends—that diary had never even once hinted at a co-conspirator in the murder of the five Whitechapel prostitutes Maybrick had taken credit for killing.

Who, then, was this dark-skinned, foreign-looking man? A man who, Margo realized abruptly, fit perfectly some of the Ripper eyewitness descriptions. And Maybrick, with his fair skin and light hair and thick gold watch chain, fit other eyewitness descriptions to the last detail. The many witnesses questioned by London police had described two very different-appearing men—for the perfectly simple reason that there'd been two killers. "The eyewitness

accounts," Margo gasped, "no wonder they differed, yet were so consistent. There were two of them! A dark-haired, foreign-looking man and a fair-haired one. And Israel Schwartz, the Jewish merchant who'll see Elizabeth Stride attacked, he saw both of them! Working together!"

She grew aware of startled stares from the Ripper Watch scholars. Shahdi Feroz, in particular, was frowning; but not, Margo sensed, in disapproval. She looked merely thoughtful. "Yes," Dr. Feroz nodded, "that would certainly account for much of the confusion. It is not so unheard of, after all."

Margo gulped. "What's not so unheard of?"

Shahdi Feroz glanced up again. "Hmm? Oh. It is not unheard of, this collusion between psychopaths. A weaker psychopathic serial killer will sometimes attach himself to a mentor, a personal god, if you will. He worships the more powerful killer, does his bidding, learns from him." She was frowning, dark eyes agitated. "This is very unexpected, very serious. It is, indeed, possible that more of the murders during this time period should be attributed to the Ripper, if the Ripper was, in fact, two men. Two very disturbed men, working as a team, master and worshiper. They might well have struck in different modus operandi, which would explain the confusion over which women were killed by the Ripper."

"Yes," Inspector Melvyn broke in, "but what about these letters? What letters? And just who is this bloke? Doesn't fit any of the known profiles. Not a bloody, damned one of 'em!"

Dr. Kostenka shook his head, however. "Not one of the named profiles, no; but a profile, yes. He is a doctor. A man with medical knowledge. It is this doctor, clearly, who warned James Maybrick to strangle his victims first, to avoid drenching his clothing with blood from arterial spurts. If Maybrick's victim had been alive when he slashed her neck and throat, he would have ended covered in the 'red stuff' of which he writes in his diary."

The passages to which Kostenka referred had been labeled as damning Americanisms, which had caused some experts to call the diary a hoax. Of course, Maybrick had lived for years in Norfolk, Virginia and married an American girl, so he would've been intimately familiar with American slang from the late Victorian period. Sometimes, so-called experts could be as blind as an eyeless cave shrimp.

Kostenka was frowning thoughtfully at the TV monitor. "Whoever he is, the man is foreign-looking and of genteel appearance, just as the witnesses described. A man of education."

Margo heard herself say, "And he's spent time in the East End. You can hear it in his voice."

Once again, she was the abrupt focus of startled stares from the Ripper Watch experts. Then Guy Pendergast grinned. "She's right, y'know, Melvyn. Rerun the tape. Heard it, meself. Just didn't twig to it quite so fast. Used to hearing that sound, hear it every day, just about, on a job."

Shahdi Feroz was nodding. "Yes, whereas Miss Smith has needed to listen very carefully to East End accents, to pick up the vowel sounds and the rhythms of the speech. Very well done, Margo."

A warm glow ignited in her middle and spread deliciously through her entire being. She smiled at the famous scholar, so proud of herself, she felt like she must be floating a couple of inches above the floor.

Dominica Nosette said abruptly, "Well, I intend to find out who our mystery doctor is! Anybody else game to give it a go?"

Guy Pendergast lunged for cameras and recorders.

"Oh, no you don't!" Margo darted squarely in front of the exit to Spaldergate House's main cellar. "I'm sorry," she said firmly, "but there will be an official police investigation getting underway in Bucks Row a few minutes from now. And no one, not one member of this tour, is going to be anywhere near that spot when the police arrive. We have remote cameras and

microphones in place and every second of this is being recorded."

"Listen," Guy Pendergast began, "you can't just keep us locked up in this cellar!"

"I have no intention of locking anybody in this cellar!" Margo shot back, trying to sound reasonable as well as authoritative, when she felt neither. "But there's no point in leaving Spaldergate for the East End right now. Maybrick has been positively identified. His companion has remained a mystery for nearly a hundred fifty years. We'll certainly begin working to identify him. Carefully. Discreetly. Word of this murder is going to send shockwaves through Whitechapel. Especially the mutilations, when the workhouse paupers who clean the body tomorrow finally remove Mrs. Nichols' clothing and discover them. It's been less than a month, after all, since Martha Tabram was savagely slashed to death in the East End."

"August seventh," Shahdi Feroz put in, "August Bank Holiday. And don't forget Emma Smith, stabbed to death Easter Monday. To the residents of the East End, April fourth wasn't all that long ago. Not when women are being cut to pieces and nobody feels safe walking the streets."

"Yes," Margo said forcefully. "So everyone out there will assume this is the third murder, not the first. We are not going to go charging into the East End asking, 'Say, have you seen a foreign-looking doctor hereabouts, friend of James Maybrick's?' The investigators of the day had no inkling that James Maybrick was involved, let alone this other guy, whoever he turns out to be. So we'll use extreme caution in proceeding with this investigation. Do I make myself perfectly clear on that point?"

Dominica Nosette looked petulant, but nodded. Slowly, her partner agreed, as well, grumbling and visibly irritated, but compliant. At least for the moment.

"Good. I'd suggest we analyze the tapes we've got for further clues. Inspector Melvyn, if you would rewind one of the backup copies while the master tape and other backups continue running?"

As they viewed the footage again, Shahdi Feroz pursed her lips thoughtfully. "He is familiar to me. The face is not quite right, but the voice . . . I have heard it somewhere. I would swear that I have." She shook her head, visibly impatient with her own memory. "It will come to me, I am certain. There are so many I have studied in so many different places and time, over the past few years. I spent several weeks in London, alone, looking into occult groups such as the Theosophical Society and various Druidic orders. And if he is a friend to James Maybrick, he, too, may be a Liverpudlian, not a Londoner. But I know that I have seen or heard him before. Of that, I am completely certain."

What Shahdi Feroz might or might not have remembered at that moment would never be known, however, because the telephone rang with the news that Malcolm and the search teams had returned for the night. There was no news of Benny Catlin, although from the sound of Malcolm's voice, there was something worse which he wasn't telling her. Margo narrowed her eyes and frowned at the monitors where the Ripperologists were studying their tapes. At least Benny Catlin didn't look anything like their unknown Ripper, thank God. And an American graduate student wouldn't sound like an East End Londoner, particularly not one who'd taken pains to train poverty from his voice. The notion that they were facing two wrenching murder mysteries, an up-time shootout and the Ripper slayings, left Margo deeply disturbed as she quietly left the vault to meet her fiancé in the house upstairs.

"What's wrong, Malcolm?" Margo whispered after he'd hugged her close and buried his face in her hair.

"Oh, God, Margo . . . we are in a great deal of trouble with Catlin."

She peered up into his eyes, alarmed by the exhaustion she found there. "What now?"

"The men who were killed? At the hotel and the opera? They're not down-timers, as we'd all assumed. Not Nichol gang members or any other native

footpads."

Margo swallowed hard. "They're not?"

He shook his head. "No. The constables of the Metropolitan police asked Mr. Gilbert and me to come to the police morgue, to see if we might be able to identify either man, since Mr. Catlin had been a guest in Spaldergate for a brief time." He paused fractionally. "Margo, they're up-timers. Baggage handlers from TT-86. Gilbert recognized them, said they came through with your group, he saw them earlier in the evening hauling steamer trunks out to carriages for the newly arrived tour group. Then they vanished, abandoned a wagonload of luggage and half-a-dozen tourists at Paddington Station and went haring off on their own. The Spaldergate footman in charge of the wagon thought perhaps they were reporters who'd slipped through as baggage handlers and tried to follow, but lost them within minutes and returned to help the stranded tourists."

Margo rubbed her eyes with the heels of her hands. "I don't get it, Malcolm," she moaned softly, "why would a couple of baggage handlers ditch their jobs to chase halfway across London and try to murder a graduate student at the Picadilly Hotel?"

"And failing that, chase him all the way to the Royal Opera?" Malcolm added. "I don't know, Margo. I haven't the faintest bloody idea. It simply makes no rational sense."

"Maybe Catlin's involved somehow with organized crime?" Margo wondered with a shiver.

"God knows, it could be anything. I don't want to think about it for a while. What's the news from the Ripper Watch?" he added quietly, drawing her closer to him and burying his lips in her hair once again.

"You're not gonna believe it," Margo muttered against his coat.

Malcolm's face, wet from the rain that had been falling again, drew down into a whole ladder of exhausted lines and gullies. "That bad?"

"Bad enough." She told him what they'd just discovered, down in the vault.

Malcolm let out a low whistle. "My God. A ruddy pair of them? And you're sure the other chap isn't Catlin?"

"Not unless he brought a plastic surgeon with him. And knows how to walk on stilts. This guy's a lot taller than Benny Catlin."

"Well, that's one breath of good news, anyway. Whatever's up with Catlin, he's not a psychopathic serial murderer."

"No," Margo said quietly. "Given what's happened on station, though, and what you just found out about the guys he killed tonight, quite frankly, I'd feel better if Catlin had turned out to be the Ripper."

"My dear," Malcolm sighed, "I wish it weren't so distressing when you're right."

To that, Margo said nothing at all. She simply guided her weary fiancé up to bed and did what she could to help them both forget the night's horrors.

Chapter Eleven

Kit Carson was in the back room of the Down Time Bar & Grill, doing his best to beat Goldie Morran at pool-and losing his shirt, as usual-when Robert Li appeared, dark eyes dancing with an unholy glee.

"What's up?" Kit asked warily as Goldie sank another ball in the corner pocket with a rattle like doom.

The antiquarian grinned. "Oh, goodie! You haven't heard yet!"

"Heard what?" Goldie glanced up before pocketing another fifty bucks of Kit's money. "We didn't get a riot when Primary opened, did we?"

"No," Robert allowed, eyes twinkling. "But you're not gonna believe the news from up time!"

Kit scowled. "Oh? Don't tell me. Some up-time group of nuts sent an official protest delegation to the station?"

Li's eyes glinted briefly. "As a matter of fact, they did, but not about Jack the Ripper or his victims."

Kit grunted. A vocal group calling themselves S.O.S.-Save Our Sisters-had been lobbying for the right to intervene and save the London prostitutes the Ripper would kill, despite the fact that it wasn't possible to alter important historical events. Their argument went that since these women were nobodies, the effort ought to at least be made, but Kit didn't see how, since Jack the Ripper was one of the most important murder cases in the past couple of centuries.

"Well," Kit said as Goldie lined up another shot, "if it's not the S.O.S. or some group like Jack is Lord, what is it?"

Robert grinned. "Those Ansar Majlis Brothers involved in the riot, the ones Mike Benson threw in the brig? Their up-time brothers have been raising holy hell. Attacks on the Lady of Heaven Temples and important Templars, riots in the streets, you name it. And a whole bunch of somebodies figured out trouble was likely to break out here, because of Ianira Cassandra. The first group through is already demanding the release of the creeps Mike Benson jailed. Seems it's a violation of their human rights to throw in jail a pack of down-time terrorists who left their home station illegally and came to another station to commit murder."

Kit just grimaced. "Why am I not surprised?" Behind him, another fifty bucks of his hard-earned cash dropped into a little round hole. He winced. "But," he added hopefully, "that's not what you came to tell us, is it?"

Li's glance was sympathetic as Goldie dropped yet another ball with a fateful clunk, into a side pocket this time. "Well, no, actually. That news is even better."

Goldie glanced up from lining up her next shot. "Oh, my. Something even better than a bunch of nuts who want to protect the non-existent rights of down-time terrorists?"

Li nodded. "Yep. Better, even, than the arrival of an Angels of Grace Militia Squadron. First thing they did was pick a fight with the idiots agitating for the release of the Brothers in jail. A big fight. Wrecked three kiosks, a lunch stand, and the costume Connie Logan was modeling. She's suing for damages. The costume was a custom order, worth eight grand."

Kit just groaned.

Goldie muttered, "Lovely, this is all we need. What could possibly be worse than a pack of militant feminists whose sole aim in life is to ram their religion down other people's throats at the point of a bayonet?"

Li let the bombshell drop just as Goldie lined up another shot. "You remember Senator John Caddrick, don't you? That nut who outlaws everything he doesn't agree with? The one who's been agitating about the dangers to modern society from time tourism? Well, it seems the Ansar Majlis have kidnapped his only kid. After killing his sister-in-law and about sixty other people in a New York restaurant. He's threatening to shut down every time terminal in the business unless his little girl's returned to him alive and well."

Goldie's shot went wild. So wild, in fact, the five ball jumped off the table and smacked into the floor with a thud. Goldie's curse peeled paint off the ceiling.

"Ooh, Goldie," Robert looked about as contrite as a well-fed cat, "sorry about that, Duchess."

The hated nickname which Skeeter Jackson had given La-La Land's most infamous money changer, combined with the ruin of her game, sent Goldie into a rage so profound, she couldn't even squeeze sound past the purple-hued knot of distended veins in her throat. She just stood there glaring at the antiquities dealer, cue in hand, sputtering like a dying sparkler.

Kit threw back his head and crowed. "Robert, you are a prince among men!" He snatched up his pool cue, replaced the five ball on the felt, and calmly ran

the table while Goldie stood flexing the narrow end of her pool cue until Kit feared the wood would crack. When the final ball rattled into the far corner pocket, Kit bowed, sweeping his arm around in a courtly flourish. "Goldie, thank you for a lovely game."

He stuck out a hand to collect his winnings.

She paid up with a seething glare and stalked stiff-legged out of the pool room, a wounded battle destroyer running under the gun for home port. Her deflated reputation trailed after her like the tail of a broken kite. Kit pocketed Goldie's money with a broad grin, then danced a jig around the pool table, whooping for sheer joy. "I did it! Damn, I finally did it! I beat Goldie at pool!"

Robert chuckled. "Congratulations. How many decades have you been waiting to do that?"

Kit refused to be baited. "Noneya, pal. Buy you a drink?"

"Sure!"

They ambled out into the main room of the bar, where an astonishing amount of money was changing hands in the aftermath of Kit's unexpected victory. Excited laughter echoed through the Down Time Bar & Grill as 'eighty-sixers celebrated, relishing the victory almost as much as Kit. La-La legend held that Goldie Morran had never lost a game of pool in the entire millennium or so she'd been on station.

As they fought their way through the crowd toward the bar, Kit had to raise his voice to be heard. "Listen, were you serious about Caddrick threatening to shut down the time terminals?"

Robert Li's smile vanished. "As a heart attack, unfortunately."

"Damn. That man is the most dangerous politician of this century. If he's declared war on us, we're all in trouble. Big trouble."

Li nodded. "Yeah, that's how I've got it figured. And the riots on station won't play in our favor, either. We're going to look like a war zone, with the whole station out of control. Every news crew on station sent video footage up time with couriers."

Kit scowled. "Once the newsies get done with us, Caddrick won't need to shut us down. The tourists will just stay home and do it for him."

Robert Li's worried gaze matched Kit's own. They both had too much to lose, to risk letting anyone shut down Shangri-La Station. Shangri-La was Robert's life as much as it was Kit's. For one thing, they both owned priceless objects which neither could take up time, not legally, anyway. And what was legal to take with them, would break them financially with the taxes BATF would impose. Never mind that Shangri-La was home, where they had built dreams and brought something good and beautiful to life, where Kit's only grandchild was building her own dreams and trying to build something good for herself.

"Molly," Kit muttered, sinking into a seat at the bar, "we need a drink. Make it a double. Two doubles. Apiece."

The down-timer barmaid, who had come into Shangri-La Station through the Britannia Gate, gave them a sympathetic smile and poured. Despite the impromptu party roaring all around them, somehow Molly knew they were no longer celebrating Kit's victory over Goldie Morran. Kit watched her pour the drinks with a sinking sensation inside his middle. If the station were closed, where Molly would go? Molly and the other down-timer residents? Kit didn't know. "Those idiots demanding human rights for the Ansar Majlis are defending the wrong down-timers. Doesn't anybody up time give a damn about folks like Molly and Kynan Rhys Gower?"

Robert Li muttered into his glass, "Not unless it makes for good press, no."

That was so depressingly true, Kit ordered another double.

And wondered when somebody would figure out that the down-timer problem facing every time terminal in the business would have to be solved one of these days. He just hoped Shangri-La Station was still open for business when

it happened.

When Skeeter heard that Charlie Ryan had hired Bergitta to take his place on the station maintenance crew, his first thought was that maybe Ryan had a soul, after all. Then he wondered if maybe Kynan Rhys Gower hadn't paid him a little visit anyway? Whatever the case, Bergitta finally had a job that would give her enough income to pay for her closet-sized apartment and food and station taxes.

But when she learned that she'd been hired only because he'd been fired, she showed up on his doorstep in tears, vowing to quit.

"No," he insisted, "don't even think such a thing. It is not your fault I lost my job."

"But Skeeter . . ."

"Shh." He placed a fingertip across her lips. Her face was still bruised where that creep had hit her, but the swelling along her eye had gone down, at least. "No, I won't hear it. You need the job, Bergitta. I can get work doing anything. I only took the maintenance job because it was the first one they offered me."

Her stricken expression told Skeeter she knew full well it had been the only job anyone had offered him. What he was going to do to earn enough money to pay rent, buy food, keep the power turned on, and pay his own station taxes, Skeeter had no idea. But that wasn't important. Taking care of the few friends he had left was. So he locked up his dreary little apartment and placed Bergitta's hand through his arm. "Let's go someplace and celebrate your new job!"

Commons was still Skeeter's favorite place in the world, despite the loneliness of knowing that Marcus and Ianira weren't anywhere to be found on station. The bustle of excited tourists, the vibrant colors of costumes and bright lights and glittering merchandise from around the world and from Shangri-La's many down-time gates, the myriad, mouth-watering scents wafting out of restaurants and cafes and lunch stands, all washed across them like a tidal wave from heaven as soon as Bergitta and Skeeter emerged from Residential.

"How about sushi?" Skeeter asked teasingly, since Bergitta adored fish but could not comprehend the desire to eat it raw.

"Skeeter!"

"Okay," he laughed, "how about yakitori, instead?"

The little bamboo skewers of marinated chicken had become one of the Swedish girl's all-time favorite up-timer foods. "Yes! That would be a real celebration!"

So they headed up toward Edo Castletown, where the Japanese lunch stands were concentrated. Skeeter paused as they shouldered their way through Victoria Station and bought a single rose from a flower girl, another down-timer who had sewn her own street-vendor costume and grew her flowers in the station's lower levels. The Found Ones had set up hydroponics tanks to supplement their diets with fresh vegetables, and to grow flowers as a cash crop. They kept the crops healthy with special grow lights Ianira had purchased with money made at her kiosk.

Skeeter's throat tightened at the thought of Ianira and everything she'd done for these people, but he made himself smile and handed the rose to Bergitta. She dimpled brightly, then hugged him on impulse. Skeeter swallowed hard, then managed, "Hey, I'm starved. Let's go find that yakitori."

They were halfway through Victoria Station, with Bergitta sniffing at her flower's heady perfume every few moments—the down-time varieties of roses the Found Ones grew had been carefully chosen for scent, as well as beauty—when they came upon Molly, the London down-time barmaid, surrounded by an improbable hoard of reporters.

"I dunno 'oo 'e is," Molly was protesting, "an' I don't want ter know! G'wan, now, I got a job to get back to, don't want t'be late or they'll dock me wages . . ."

"But you're a down-timer from the East End!" a reporter shouted, shoving a microphone into Molly's face.

"And didn't you earn your living as a streetwalker?" another newsie demanded. "What's your opinion on prostitution in the East End?"

"How would you feel if you were back in London now?"

"Did any of your customers ever rough you up? Were you ever attacked?"

At Skeeter's side, Bergitta began to tremble. She clutched at Skeeter's arm, holding on so tight, blood stopped flowing down to his hand. "Do something, Skeeter! How can they ask her such things? Have they no heart?"

Molly, sack lunch in hand and clearly on break from her job at the Down Time Bar & Grill, glared at the reporters hemming her in. "Blimey, 'ark at the lot of you! Arse about face, y'are, if you Adam I'll give it some chat! Don't give me none of your verbals, I'll clout you round the ear'ole, I will, you pack o' bloody wind-up merchants! Clear off, the rabbitin' lot of you!"

When Molly plowed straight through the pack of gaping newsies, not one of whom had understood a single word in five, given their round eyes and stunned silence, Skeeter burst into laughter. "I think Molly can fend for herself," he chuckled, patting Bergitta's hand. "I'll wager she's the stroppiest bit they've seen in a while. Come on, let's go find that lunch stand."

Bergitta waved at Molly as the other woman sailed past, trailing uncertain reporters after her, then she turned a smile up at Skeeter. "Yes, I feel sorry now for the newsies!"

Skeeter bought yakitori skewers for both of them and brimming cups of hot green tea, which they carried with them, sipping and munching as they strolled Commons, just taking in the sights. Frontier Town was quiet, but Camelot was gearing up for an impending invasion by re-enactors of the Society for Creative Anachronism, since the Anachronism Gate was scheduled to cycle in a few days. Floods of tournament-bound pseudo-medievalists would pour through the station, complete with horses, hooded hunting falcons, and all the attendant chaos of two separate month-long tournaments trying to flood through one gate, moving in opposite directions.

"I heard BATF plans to start watching the Mongolian Gate more closely," Skeeter said as they passed a shop where a Camelot vendor was putting up advertisements for falconry equipment. "Word is, that pair who went through last time are bird smugglers. Mongolian falcons are worth a fortune up time, especially to Arab princes. Some of the species have gone extinct, up time. Monty Wilkes wants to make sure those two don't try to smuggle out a suitcase load of rare falcons or viable eggs."

"Skeeter," Bergitta frowned, dabbing at her mouth with a paper napkin to wipe sauce off her lips, "why do they worry so about it? If there are no such birds on the other side of Primary, would it not be good to bring them through?"

Skeeter snorted. "You'd think so. Actually, if you get the special permits, you can bring extinct birds and animals back through a gate. What's illegal is smuggling them through to sell them to rich collectors, without paying taxes on them. First law of time travel: Though Shalt Not Profit from the Gates."

Bergitta shook her head, clearly baffled by the up-time world. "My brother is a trader," she said, eyes dark with sorrow. Bergitta would never again be able to see her family. "He would say such a law is not sane. If no one is to profit, how can the world do business?"

"My dear Bergitta," Skeeter chuckled, "you just asked the sixty-four-million-dollar question. Me, I think it's crazy. But I'm just an ex-thief, so who's going to listen to me?"

"I would," Bergitta said softly.

A sudden lump blocked Skeeter's throat. He gulped tea just to hide the burning in his eyes, and nearly strangled, because his throat was still too constricted to swallow. He ended up coughing while Bergitta thumped his shoulder blades. "Sorry about that," he finally wheezed. "Thanks."

Their wandering had brought them down into Little Agora, where Skeeter and Bergitta ran into total chaos. The news-hungry reporters up in Victoria Station were small potatoes compared with Little Agora's cult lunatics and militant groups like-God help them all-the Angels of Grace Militia, which had so recently arrived amid a flurry of violence. The Angels were determined to protect the station's down-timers and Lady of Heaven Templars, whether they wanted protection or not.

Everywhere Skeeter glanced, Templars were picketing and shouting, many of them reading from scriptural compilations of Ianira's recorded "words of wisdom." Angels of Grace strutted in black uniforms, their red emblems resembling a running Mirror of Venus which had mated with a swastika, prowling like rabid wolves, moving in packs. Some of them resembled female linebackers or maybe animated refrigerators in jackboots; others were lithe and deadly as ferrets. The psychological effect of all those black uniforms was undeniable. Even Skeeter shivered in their presence. Monty Wilkes had ordered his BATF agents to break out their "dress uniforms"-the red ones with black chevrons on the sleeves-to keep BATF agents from being mistaken for Angel Squads.

Nutcases in sympathy with the Ansar Majlis Brotherhood picketed the picketing Templars, chanting for the release of their oppressed Brothers. Other up-time protesters who didn't agree with terrorism in any form, but wanted the Temples shut down for reasons of their own, stalked through Little Agora with hand-lettered signs that read, "MY GOD'S A FATHER-YOURS IS A WHORE!" and "DRIVE OUT THE MONEYCHANGERS IN THE TEMPLE! THE LADY OF HEAVEN IS A FRAUD AND A FRONT FOR ORGANIZED CRIME!"

And seated on the floor by the dozens, locked in human protest chains around the shops and kiosks of Little Agora, blocking exits to Residential and public bathrooms, were shocking droves of keening, disconsolate acolytes. Everywhere Skeeter turned his glance, security was running ragged, trying to keep fights from exploding out of control every half hour or so.

"I wonder," Skeeter muttered, "how soon the violence on this station is going to close Shangri-La down for good?"

Bergitta's rosy cheeks lost color. "Would they really do this, Skeeter? Everyone says it could happen, but there are so many people here, so much business and money . . . and where could we go? They will not let us walk through Primary and it is not legal for us to go to live down another gate, either. And my gate will never open again. It was unstable."

"I know," Skeeter said quietly, trying to hide his own worry. The thought of living somewhere else-anywhere else-stirred panic deep in his soul. And the thought of what might become of his friends, his adopted family, left him scared spitless. He'd heard rumors that Senator Caddrick was talking internment camps, run like prisons . . .

Bergitta peered toward the ceiling, where immense chronometers hanging from the ceiling tracked date and time on station, down each of the station's multiple active gates, and up time through Primary. "Oh," she exclaimed in disappointment, "it is time for me to go to work!" She hugged Skeeter again, warm and vibrant against him for a brief moment. "Thank you, Skeeter, for the yakitori and the beautiful rose. I . . . I am still sorry about the job."

"Don't be." He smiled, hoping she couldn't sense his worry, wondering where he was going to line up another job, when his search for that job had broken world records for the shortest job interview category. "You'd better scoot. Don't want you to be late."

When she reached up and kissed his cheek, Skeeter reddened to his toes. But the warmth of the gesture left him blinking too rapidly as she hurried away

through the crowds, still clutching her single rose. He shoved hands into pockets, so abruptly lonely, he could've stood there and cried from the sheer misery of it. He was turning over possibilities for job applications when a seething whirlwind of shrieking up-timer kids engulfed him. Clearly dumped by touring parents, the ankle-biters, as Molly called them, were once again playing hooky from the station school. Screaming eight- through eleven-year-olds swirled and foamed around Skeeter like pounding surf, yelling and zooming around, maddened hornets swarming out of a dropped hive. Skeeter found himself tangled up in the coils of a lasso made from thin nylon twine. He nearly fell, the coils wound so tightly around his body and upper legs. Skeeter muttered under his breath and yanked himself free.

"Hey! Gimme that back!" A snot-mouthed nine-year-old boy glared up at him as Skeeter wound the lasso into a tight coil and stuffed it into his pocket. Skeeter just grabbed the kid by the collar and dragged him toward the nearest Security officer in sight, Wally Klontz, whose claim to fame was a schnoz the size of Cyrano de Bergerac's. "Hey! Lemme go!" The kid wriggled and twisted, but Skeeter had hung onto far slipperier quarries than this brat.

"Got a delinquent here," Skeeter said through clenched teeth, hauling the kid over to Wally, whose eyes widened at the sight of a screeching nine-year-old dangling from Skeeter's grasp. "Something tells me this one is supposed to be in school."

Wally's lips twitched just once, then he schooled his expression into a stern scowl. "What did you catch him doing, Skeeter?"

"Lassoing tourists."

Wally's eyes glinted. "Assault with a deadly weapon, huh? Okay, short stuff. Let's go. Maybe you'd prefer a night in jail, if you don't want to sit through your classes."

"Jail? You can't put me in jail! Do you have any idea who my daddy is? When he finds out--"

"Oh, shut up, kid," Wally said shortly. "I've hauled crown princes off to the brig, so you might as well give it up. Thanks, Skeeter."

Skeeter handed the wailing brat over with satisfaction and watched as Wally dragged the kid away, trailing protests at the top of his young lungs. Then Skeeter shoved hands into pockets once again, feeling more isolated and lonely than ever. For just a moment, he'd felt a connection, as though Wally Klontz had recognized him as an equal. Now, he was just Skeeter the unemployed mop man again, Skeeter the ex-thief, the man no one trusted. Unhappiness and bitter loneliness returned, in a surge of bilious dissatisfaction with his life, his circumstances, and his complete lack of power to do the one thing he needed to do most: find Ianira Cassondra and her little family.

So he started walking again, heading up through Urbs Romae into Valhalla, past the big dragon-prowed longship that housed the Langskip Cafe. Skeeter tightened his fingers through the coils of the plastic lasso in his pocket and blinked rapidly against a burning behind his eyelids. Where is she? God, what could have happened, to snatch them all away without so much as a trace? And if they slipped out through a gate opening, how'd they do it? Skeeter had worked or attended every single opening of every single gate on station since Ianira and Marcus' disappearance, yet he'd seen and heard nothing. If they'd gone out in disguise, then that disguise had been good enough to fool even him.

He cut crosswise down the edge of Valhalla and shouldered past the crowd thronging around Sue Fritchey's prize Pteranodon sternbergi. Its enormous cage could be hoisted up from the basement level-where it spent most of its noisy life-to the Commons "feeding station" which had been built to Sue's specifications. The flying reptile's wing span equaled that of a small aircraft, which meant the cage was a big one. Expensive, too. And that enormous pteranodon had literally been eating Pest Control's entire operations

budget. So the creative head of Pest Control had devised a method whereby the tourists paid to feed the enormous animal. Every few hours, tourists lined up to plunk down their money and climb a high ramp to dump bucketloads of fish into the giant flying reptile's beak. The sound of the sternbergi's beak clacking shut over a bucketload of fish echoed like a monstrous gunshot above the muted roar on Commons, two-by-fours cracking together under force.

Ianira had brought the girls to watch the first time the ingenious platform cage had been hoisted up hydraulically through the new hole in the Commons floor. Skeeter had personally paid for a couple of bucketloads of fish and had hoisted the girls by turns, helping them dump the smelly contents into the huge pteranodon's maw. They'd giggled and clapped gleefully, pointing at the baleful scarlet eye that rolled to glare at them as the gigantic reptile tried to extend its wings and shrieked at them in tones capable of bending steel girders. Skeeter, juggling Artemisia and a bucketful of fish, had sloshed fish slime down his shirt, much to his chagrin. Ianira had laughed like a little girl at his dismayed outburst . . .

Throat tight, Skeeter clenched his fists inside his jeans pockets, the plastic lasso digging into his palm, and stared emptily at the crowd thronging into Valhalla from El Dorado's nearby gold-tinted paving stones. And that was when he saw it happen. A well-timed stumble against a modestly dressed, middle-aged woman . . . a deft move of nimble fingers into her handbag . . . apologies given and accepted . . .

You rat-faced little-

Something inside Skeeter Jackson snapped. He found himself striding furiously forward, approached close enough to hear, "-apologize again, ma'am."

"It is nothing," she was saying as Skeeter closed in. Spanish, Skeeter pegged the woman, who was doubtless here for the next Conquistadores Gate tour. Doesn't look rich enough to afford losing whatever's in that wallet, either. Probably spent the last five or six years saving enough money for this tour and that fumble-fingered little amateur thinks he's going to get away with every centavo she's scraped up! Skeeter closed his fingers around the loops of plastic lasso in his pocket and came to an abrupt decision.

"Hello there," Skeeter said with a friendly smile dredged up from his days as a deceitful confidence artist. This screaming little neophyte didn't know the first thing about the business-and Skeeter intended to impart a harsh lesson. He offered his hand to the pickpocket. Startled eyes met his own as the guy shook Skeeter's hand automatically.

"Do I know you?"

"Nah," Skeeter said, still smiling, looping the plastic lasso deftly through the pickpocket's nearest belt loop with his other hand, "but you will in a minute. Care to explain what you're doing with the lady's wallet in your back pocket?"

He bolted, of course.

Then jerked to a halt with a startled "Oof!" as the lasso snapped taut at his waist. Skeeter grabbed him and trussed him up, wrists behind his back, in less time than it took the man to regain his balance. The pickpocket stood there sputtering in shock, completely inarticulate for long seconds; then a flood of invective broke loose, crude and predictable.

Skeeter cut him off with a ruthless jerk on his bound wrists. "That's about enough, buddy. We're going to go find the nearest Security officer and explain to him why you've got this lady's property in your pocket. Your technique stinks, by the way. Am-a-teur. Oh, and by the way? You're gonna love the isolation cells in this place. Give you plenty of time to consider a career change." Skeeter turned toward the astonished tourist. "Ma'am, if you'd be good enough to come with us? Your testimony will see this rat behind bars and, of course, you'll have your property returned. I'm real sorry this happened, ma'am."

Her mouth worked for a moment, then tears sprang to her eyes and a torrent of Spanish flooded loose, the gist being that Skeeter was the kindest soul in the world and how could she ever repay him and it had taken her ten years to save the money for this trip, gracias, muchas, muchas gracias, señor . . .

The stunned disbelief in Mike Benson's eyes when Skeeter handed over his prisoner and eyewitness at the Security office was worth almost as much as the woman's flood of gratitude. Skeeter swore out his deposition and made certain the lady's property was safely returned, then turned down the reward she tried to give him. Broke he might be, but he hadn't done it for the money and did not want to start accepting cash rewards for one of the few decent things he'd ever done in his life. Mike Benson's eyes nearly popped out of his skull when Skeeter simply smiled, kissed the lady's hand gallantly, leaving the proffered money in her fingers, and strode out of Security HQ feeling nine feet tall. For the first time since Ianira's disappearance, he didn't feel helpless. He might never be able to find Ianira Cassondra or Marcus and their children; but there was something he could do, something he knew she'd have been proud of him for doing.

His throat tightened again. It was probably the least likely occupation he could have stumbled across. And the station wasn't likely to give him a salary for it. But Skeeter Jackson had just discovered a new purpose and a whole new calling. Who better to spot and trip up pickpockets, thieves, and con artists than a guy who knew the business inside out? Okay, Ianira, he promised silently, I won't give up hope. And if there's the slightest chance I can find you, I'll jump down an unstable gate to do it. Meanwhile, maybe I can do some good around here for a change. Make this a better place for the Found Ones to raise their kids . . .

Skeeter Jackson found himself smiling. La-La Land's population of petty crooks had no idea what was about to hit them. For the first time in days, he felt good, really and truly good. Old skills twitching at his senses, Skeeter headed off to start the unlikeliest hunt of his life.

Margo Smith had spent her share of rough weeks down temporal gates. Lost in Rome with a concussion, that had been a bad one. Lost in sixteenth-century Portuguese Africa had been far worse, stranded on the flood-swollen Limpopo with a man dying of fever hundreds of miles from the gate, followed by capture and rape at the hands of Portuguese traders . . . At seventeen, Margo had certainly lived through her fair share of rough weeks down a gate.

But the first week after their arrival in London was right up there with the best of them. The Ripper Watch team's second foray into the East End, the morning after Polly Nichols' brutal murder, put Margo in charge of security and guide services for the up-time reporters Guy Pendergast and Dominica Nosette, as well as Ripper scholars Shahdi Feroz and Pavel Kostenka. Doug Tanglewood was going along, as well, but Malcolm, swamped with the search for Benny Catlin, not to mention demands from the rest of the Ripper Watch team, couldn't come with them.

So Malcolm, eyes glinting, told Margo, "They're all yours, Imp. Handle them, you can handle anything."

Margo rolled her eyes. "Oh, thanks. I'll remember to send you invitations to the funeral."

"Huh. Theirs or yours?"

Margo laughed. "With your shield or on it, isn't that what the Roman matron told her son? You know, as he went off to die gloriously in battle? The way I figure it, any run-in with that crew is gonna be one heck of a battle."

"My dear girl, you just said a bloody mouthful. Give 'em hell for me, too, would you? Just get them back in one piece. Even," he added with a telling grimace, "those reporters. Those two are a potential nightmare, snooping around for the story of the century, with the East End set up blow like a

powder keg on a burning ship of the line. Doug's good in a routine tour and he's taken a lot of zipper jockeys into the East End, but frankly, he hasn't the martial arts training you do. Remember that, if it comes to a scrap."

"Right." It was both flattering and a little unsettling to realize she possessed skills that outranked a professional guide's. Doug Tanglewood, one of those nondescript sort of brown fellows nobody looks at twice, or even once, and who occasionally shock their neighbors by dismembering small dogs and children, was delighted that he wouldn't have to shepherd the Ripper Watch Team through the East End by himself.

"You handle the reporters," Margo told him as they left the gatehouse to climb into the carriage that would take them to the East End. "I'll tackle the eggheads."

Hitching up her long, tattered skirts, Margo clambered awkwardly up into the carriage in predawn darkness, just an hour after Polly Nichols' murder, then assisted Shahdi Feroz up into the seat. Pavel Kostenka and Conroy Melvyn climbed up and found seats, as well. As soon as everyone was aboard, the driver shook out his whip and they pulled away from the dark kerb and headed east.

Margo still couldn't quite believe that she was herding world-class scholars into the East End on such an important guiding job. She'd ordered the whole crew dressed in Petticoat Lane castoffs, once again. They looked as bedraggled as last year's mudhens. Margo, as disreputable as the rest in a streetwalker's multiple layers and fifth-hand rags, complete with strategic mud smears, carried a moth-eaten haversack which concealed her time scout's computerized log. A tiny camera disguised as one of several mismatched coat buttons transmitted data which her log converted to digitized and compressed video, allowing her to record every moment of their excursion. By popping out and replacing the google-byte disks, Margo could extend her recording capacity almost infinitely, limited only by the number of google disks she could carry.

And, of course, limited by the simple opportunity to switch them out without being caught at it. The Ripper scholars and newsies also carried scout's logs and a large supply of spare googles, as did Doug Tanglewood, who remained typically reserved and quiet during the ride. Dominica chatted endlessly as the carriage rattled eastward through London, navigating in the near darkness of predawn, asking questions that Doug answered in monosyllables whenever possible. Clearly, the Time Tours guide didn't think much of up-time newsies, either. Margo sighed inwardly. It's going to be a long day.

By the time they reached the dismal environs of Whitechapel and Wapping, the sun was just climbing above the slate and broken tar-paper rooftops, all but invisible through a haze compounded of fog, drizzle, and acrid, throat-biting coal smoke. As the carriage rattled to a halt in the stinking docklands, the black smoke they were all breathing had already dulled Margo's shapeless white bodice to a smudged and dirty grey. She apologized to her lungs, wriggled her toes inside her grubby boots to warm them, and said, "All right, first stop, Houndsditch and Aldgate. Everybody out, please."

Watching the Spaldergate carriage vanish back through the murk toward the west, leaving them bereft as orphans, Margo's pulse lurched slightly. Her long, entangling skirts hampered her as they started walking, but not as much as they might've had she chosen a more current fashion. She'd opted, instead, for a dress ten years out of style, one that gave her leg room. And if need be, running and fighting room.

The reporters were eager, eyes shining, manner alert. The scholars were no less eager, they were simply more restrained, or maybe just more conscious of their stature as dignitaries. Margo had long since lost any idea that dignity was anything important while down a gate. What mattered was getting the job done with the least amount of damage to her person, not what her person looked like. Dignity, like vanity, did not rank as a survival trait for a wannabe

time scout.

As they set out through the early dawn murk, the clatter and groaning of heavy wagons rumbled down Commercial Road, only a couple of blocks farther east. Margo couldn't even guess at the raw tonnage of finished goods, coal, grain, brick, lumber, and God knew what else, transported from the docks through these streets on any given day. Shops were already throwing back their shutters and smoke belched from factory chimneys.

The roar of smelting furnaces could be heard and the scent of molten metal, rotting vegetables, and dung from thousands of horses hung thick on the air. Human voices drifted through the murk as well. Dim shapes resolved occasionally into workmen and flower girls and idle ruffians lurking in dark alleyways. The East End was getting itself busily up and at its business, right along with the chickens cackling and clucking and crowing mournfully on their way to the big poultry markets further west or scratching for whatever scraps might've been left from breakfast in many a lightless, barren kitchen yard.

Dogs slunk past, intent on canine business as muddy daylight slowly gathered strength. Cats' eyes gleamed from alleyways, their shivery whiskers atwilt in the cold air, paws flicking in distaste as they navigated foul puddles of filthy rainwater from the previous night's storm. Along those same alleyways, ragged children sat huddled in open doorways. Most of the children clustered together for warmth, faces dirty and pinched with hunger, eyes dull and suspicious. Their mothers could be heard inside the dilapidated cribs they called home, often as not shouting in ear-bending tones at someone too drunk to respond. "Get a finger out, y' lager lout, or there'll be no supper in this cat an' mouse, not tonight nor any other . . ."

Margo glanced at her charges and found a study in contrasts. The reporters were taking it all in stride, studying the streets and the people in them with a detached sort of eagerness. Conroy Melvyn looked like the police inspector he was: alert, intelligent, dangerous, eyes taking in minute details of the world unfolding around him. Pavel Kostenka was not so much oblivious as simply unmoved by the shocking poverty spreading out in every direction. He was clearly intent on objective observation without the filter of human emotion coloring his judgements.

Dr. Feroz, on the other hand, was as quietly alert as the chief inspector from Scotland Yard, her dark eyes drinking in the details as rapidly as her miniature, concealed camera, but there was a distinctive shadow of grief far back in her eyes as she recorded the same details: children toting coal in wheelbarrows, tinkers with their donkey carts crying their trade, knife grinders carrying their sharpening wheels on harnesses strapped to their shoulders, little boys with leashed terriers and caged ferrets heading west to the neatly kept squares and tree-lined streets of the wealthy to offer their services as rat catchers.

Margo said quietly, "We'll want to be outside the police mortuary when the news breaks. When the workhouse paupers clean her body, they'll tell half of London's reporters what they found. We'll have to walk fast to make it in time--"

"In time?" Dominica Nosette interrupted, eyes smouldering as she rounded on Margo like a prizefighter coming in for the kill. "If we're likely to be late, why didn't the carriage take us directly there? What if we miss this important event because you want us to walk?"

Margo had no intention of standing on a Whitechapel street corner locked in argument with Dominica Nosette, so she kept walking at a brisk clip, ushering the others ahead of her. Doug Tanglewood took Miss Nosette's arm to prevent her being separated from the group. The photographer took several startled, mincing steps, then jerked her arm loose with a snarl, "Take your hand off me!" She favored Margo with a cool stare. "Answer my question!"

"We did not take the carriage," Margo kept her voice low, "because the last thing we want to do is attract attention to ourselves. Nobody in this part of London arrives in a chauffeured carriage. So unless you enjoy being mugged the instant you set foot on the pavement, I'd suggest you resign yourself to hoofing it for the next three months."

As the poisonous glare died away to mere hellfire, Margo reminded herself that Dominica Nosette's work in clandestine photography had been done in the comfortable up-time world of air-conditioned automobiles and houses with central heating. Margo told herself to be charitable. Dominica Nosette's first daylight glimpse of London's East End was probably going to leave her in deep culture shock-she just didn't know it, yet.

When they reached the corner of Whitechapel and Commercial Roads, one of the busiest intersections in all London, they ran afoul of one of the East End's most famous hallmarks: the street meeting. Idle men thrown out of work by the previous night's dock fire had joined loafing gangs of the unemployed who roamed the streets in loose-knit packs, forming and breaking and reforming in random patterns to hash through whatever the day's hot topic might be, at a volume designed to deafen even the hardest of hearing at five hundred paces. From the sound of it, not one man-or woman-in the crowd had ever heard of Roberts' Rules of Order. Or of taking turns, for that matter.

"-why should I vote for 'im, I wants t'know? Wot's 'e goin' t'do for me an' mine--"

"-bloody radicals! Go an' do good to somebody wot might appreciate it, over to Africa or India, where them savages need civilizing, an' leave us decent folk alone--"

"-let the bloke 'ave 'is say, might be good for a laugh, eh, mate--"

"-give me a job wot'll put food in me Limehouse Cut, I'd vote for 'im if 'e were wearin' a devil's 'orns--"

"-say, wot you radical Johnnies in this 'ere London County Council goin' to do about them murders, eh? Way I 'eard it, another lady got her throat cut last night, second one inside a month, third one since Easter Monday, an' me sister's that scared to walk out of a night--"

Near the edge of the crowd, which wasn't quite a mob, a thin girl of about fifteen, hair lank under her broken straw bonnet, leaned close against a man in his fifties. He'd wrapped his hand firmly around her left breast. As Margo brushed past, she heard the man whisper, "Right, luv, fourpence it is. Know of anyplace quiet?"

The girl whispered something in his ear and giggled, then gave the older man a sloppy kiss and another giggle. Margo glanced back and watched them head for a narrow gate that led, presumably, to one of the thousands of sunless yards huddled under brick walls and overlooked by windows with broken glass in their panes and bedsheets hung to keep the drafts out. As the girl and her customer vanished through the gate, a sudden, unexpected memory surged, broke, and spilled into her awareness. Her mother's voice . . . and ragged screams . . . a flash of bruised cheek and bleeding lips . . . the stink of burnt toast on the kitchen counter and the thump of her father's fists . . .

Margo forcibly thrust away the memory, concentrating on the raucous street corner with its shouting voices and rumbling wagons and the sharp cllop of horses' hooves on the limerock and cobbled roads-and her charges in the Ripper Watch Team. Furious with herself, Margo gulped down air that reeked of fresh dung and last week's refuse and the tidal mud of the river and realized that no more than a split second had passed. Dominica Nosette was stalking down Whitechapel Road, oblivious to everything and Doug Tanglewood was hot on her trail so she wouldn't step straight in front of an express wagon loaded with casks from St. Katharine's Docks. Guy Pendergast was still talking to people at the edge of the crowd, asking questions he probably shouldn't have been asking. Dr. Kostenka was intent on recording the political rally, a

historic one, Margo knew. The speaker at the center of the crowd was supporting the first London County Council elections, a race hotly contested by the radicals for control of London's East End. Conroy Melvyn was staring, fascinated, at the man speaking.

Only Shahdi Feroz had noticed Margo's brief distress. Her dark-eyed gaze rested squarely on Margo. Her brows had drawn down in visible concern. "Are you all right?" she asked softly, moving closer to touch Margo's arm.

"Yes," Margo lied, "I'm fine. Just cold. Come on, we'd better get moving."

She genuinely didn't have time to deal with that; certainly not here and now. She had a job to do. Remembering her mother—anything at all about her mother—was worse than useless. It was old news, ancient history. She didn't have time to shed any more tears or even to hate her parents for being what they'd been or doing what they'd done. If she hoped to work as an independent time scout one day, she had to keep herself focused on tomorrow. Not to mention today . . .

"Come on," she said roughly, all but dragging Guy Pendergast and Conroy Melvyn down the street. "We got a schedule, mates, let's 'ave it away on our buttons, eh? Got a job waitin', so we 'ave, time an' tide don't wait for nobody."

They were amenable to being dragged off, at least, clearly eager to get the story they'd come here for, rather than intriguing side stories. They reached the police mortuary in time, thank God, and contrived to position themselves outside where a whole bevy of London's native down-time reporters had gathered. Several of them added foul black cigar smoke to the stench wafting out of the mortuary. Margo took up a watchful stance where she could record the events across the street, yet keep a cautious eye on her charges, not to mention everyone else who'd joined the macabre vigil, waiting for word about the third woman hideously hacked to death in these streets since spring.

The native reporters, every one of them male, of course, were speculating about the dead woman, her origins, potential witnesses they'd already tracked down and plied with gin—"talked to fifty women, I tell you, fifty, and they all described the same man, big foreign looking bastard in a leather apron." Everyone wondered whether or not the killer might be caught soon, based on those so-called witness accounts. The man known as "Leather Apron," Margo knew, had been one of the early top suspects. The unfortunate John Pizer, a Polish boot finisher who also happened to be Jewish, and a genuinely innocent target of East End hatred and prejudice, would find himself in jail shortly.

Of course, he would soon afterward collect damages from the newspapers who had libeled him, since he'd been seen by several witnesses including a police constable, at the Shadwell dock fire during the time Polly Nichols had been so brutally killed. But this morning, nobody knew that yet—

A male scream of horror erupted from the mortuary across the road. "Dear God, oh, dear God, constable, come quick!"

Reporters broke and ran for the door, which slammed abruptly back against the sooty bricks. A shaken man in a shabby workhouse uniform appeared, stumbling as he reached the street. His face had washed a sickly grey. He gulped down air, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand in a visible effort not to lose the meager contents of his stomach. Questions erupted from every side. The workhouse inmate shuddered, trying to find the words to describe what he'd just witnessed.

"Was 'orrible," he said in a hoarse voice, "ripped 'er open like a . . . a butchered side of beef . . . from 'ere to 'ere . . . dunno 'ow many cuts, was 'orrible, I tell you, couldn't stay an' look at 'er poor belly all cut open . . ."

Word of the mutilations spread in a racing shockwave down the street. Women clutched at their throats, exclaiming in horror. Men stomped angrily across the pavement, cursing the news and demanding that something be done. A roar of

angry voices surged from down the street. Then Margo and Doug Tanglewood and their mutual charges were buried alive by the mob which had, just minutes previously, been heckling the radical politicians running for council office. Angry teenage boys flung mud and rocks at the police mortuary. Older men shouted threats at the police officials inside. Margo was shoved and jostled by men taller and heavier than she was, all of them fighting for the best vantage points along the street. The sheer force of numbers thrust Margo and her charges apart.

"Hold onto one another!" Margo shouted at Shahdi Feroz. "Grab Dominica's arm-and I don't care what she says when you do it! Where's Doug?"

"Over there!" The wide-eyed scholar pointed.

Margo found the Time Tours guide trying to keep Guy Pendergast and Conroy Melvyn from being separated. Margo snagged the police inspector's coat sleeve, getting his shocked attention. "Hold onto Guy! Grab Doug Tanglewood's arm! We can't get separated in this mob! Follow me back!" She was already fighting her way back to the women and searching for Dr. Kostenka, who remained missing in the explosive crowd. She'd just reached Shahdi Feroz when new shouts erupted not four feet distant.

"Dirty little foreigner! It's one o' your kind done 'er! That's wot they're sayin', a dirty little Jew wiv a leather apron!"

Margo thrust Shahdi Feroz at the Time Tours guide. "Get them out of here, Tanglewood! I've got a bad feeling that's Dr. Kostenka!"

She then shoved her way through the angry mob and found her final charge, just as she'd feared she would. Pavel Kostenka clutched at a bleeding lip and streaming nose, scholarly eyes wide and shocked. Angry men were shouting obscenities at him, most of them in Cockney the scholar clearly couldn't even comprehend.

Oh, God, here we go. . . . "Wot's this, then?" Margo shouted, facing down a thickset, ugly lout with blood on his knuckles. "You givin' me old man wot for, eh? I'll give you me Germans, I will, you touch 'im again!" She lifted her own fist, threatening him as brazenly as she dared.

Laughter erupted, defusing the worst of the fury around them at the sight of a girl who barely topped five feet in her stockings squaring off with a man four times her size. Voices washed across her awareness, while she kept her wary attention on the man who'd punched Kostenka once already.

"Cheeky little begger, in't she?"

"Don't sound like no foreigner, neither."

"Let 'er be, Ned, you might break 'er back, just pokin' at 'er!" This last to the giant who'd smashed his fist into Pavel Kostenka's face.

Ned, however, had his blood up, or maybe his gin, because he swung at Margo anyway. The blow didn't connect, of course. Which infuriated the burly Ned. He let out a roar like an enraged Kodiak grizzly and tried to close with her. Margo slid to one side in a swift Aikido move and assisted him on his way. Whereupon Ned was obliged to momentarily mimic the lowly fruit bat, flying airborne into the nearest belfry, that being the brick wall of the church across the street. Ned howled in outraged pain when he connected with a brutal thud. A roar of angry voices surged. So did the mob. A filthy lout in a ragged coat and battered cap took a swing at her. Margo ducked and sent him on his way. Then somebody else took offense at having his neighbor come careening head first into the crowd. Margo dodged and wove as fists swung like crazed axes in the hands of drunken lumberjacks. Then she grabbed Kostenka by the wrist and yelled, "Run, you bloody idiot!"

She had to drag him for two yards. Then he was running beside her, while Margo put to use every Aikido move Kit and Sven had ever drilled into her. Her wrists and arms ached, but she did clear a path out. The riot erupting behind them engulfed the entire street. Margo steered a course toward the spot where she'd last seen the other members of her little team. She found them, wide-

eyed in naked shock, near the edge of the crowd. Doug Tanglewood had wisely dragged them clear as soon as she'd yelled at him to do so.

"Dr. Kostenka!" Shahdi Feroz cried. "You're injured!"

He was snuffling blood back into his sinuses. Margo hauled a handkerchief out of one pocket and thrust it into his hand. "Come on, let's clear out of here. We got what we came for. Pack this into your nostrils, hold it tight. Come on!" That, to Guy Pendergast, who was still intent on filming the riot with his hidden camera. "If we get to the Whitechapel Working Lads' Institute now, we can scramble for the best seats at the inquest."

That got the reporter's attention. He turned, belatedly, to help steer Dr. Pavel Kostenka down the street and away from the mortuary riot. Margo escorted her shaken charges several blocks away before pausing at a coffee stall to buy hot coffee for everyone. "Here, drink this," she said, handing Dr. Kostenka a chipped earthenware mug. "You're fighting shock. It'll warm you up."

Dominica Nosette too, was battling shock, although hers was emotional rather than from physical injuries sustained. Margo got a mugful of coffee down her, as well, and Doug bought crumpets for everyone. "Here you go. Carbs and hot coffee will set you to rights, mates." Pavel Kostenka had seated himself on the chilly stone kerb, elbows propped on knees, shabby boots in the gutter. He was trembling so violently, he had trouble holding Margo's now-stained handkerchief against his battered nose. Margo crouched beside him.

"You okay?" she asked quietly.

He shuddered once, then nodded, slowly. When he lowered the handkerchief to his lap, he left a smear of blood down his chin. "I do believe you saved my life, back there."

She shrugged, trying to make light of her own role in the near-disaster. "It's possible. That flared up a lot faster than I expected it to. Which means you got hurt and you shouldn't have. I knew people would be in a mean mood. And I knew about the anti-Semitism. But I didn't figure on a full-blown riot that fast."

He stared for a long moment into the cup Margo handed him, where dark and bitter coffee steamed in the cold morning air. "I have seen much anger in the world," he said quietly. "But nothing like this. Such murderous hatred, simply because I am different . . ."

"This isn't the twenty-first century," she said in a low voice. "Not that people are perfect in our time, they're not. But down a gate, you can't expect people to behave the way up-timers do. Social norms do change over a century and a half, you know, more than you realize, just reading about it. Me? I'm just glad I was able to pull you out of there in one piece. Next time we come out here, we're gonna be a whole lot more careful about getting boxed into potential riots."

He finally met her gaze. "Yes. Thank you."

She managed a wan smile. "You're welcome. Ready to tackle that inquest?"

His effort to return the smile was genuine, even if the twist of his lips was a dismal failure in the smile department. "Yes. But this time, I think I shall not say anything at all, even if my foot is trod on hard enough to break the bones."

"Smart choice. Through with that coffee yet?"

The shaken scholar drained the bitter stuff-what did the British do to coffee, to produce such a ghastly flavor?-then climbed to his feet. "Thank you. From now on, whatever you suggest, I will do it without question."

"Okay. Let's find the Working Lads' Institute, shall we? I want us to keep a low profile." She glanced at the reporters. "No interviewing potential mobs, okay? You want this story, you get it by keeping your mouth shut and your cameras rolling."

This time, none of her charges argued with her. Even Guy Pendergast and Dominica Nosette, whose dress was torn, were momentarily subdued by the flash-

point riot. For once, Margo actually felt in charge.

She wondered how long it would last.

Chapter Twelve

The smell of tension was thick in Kit's nostrils as he threaded his way through Edo Castletown, answering a call from Robert Li to meet him for the antics at Primary and to ask his expert opinion on a recent acquisition he'd made. So Kit abandoned several stacks of bills and government forms in his office at the Neo Edo Hotel and set out, curious about what the antiquities dealer might have stumbled across this time and wondering what new horror Primary's cycle might bring onto the station.

Kit had never seen a bigger crowd for a gate opening and that was saying a lot, after being caught in the jam-packed mass of humanity which had come to see the last cycling of the Britannia. Kiosks that hadn't existed just a week previously cluttered the once-wide thoroughfares of Commons, overflowing into Edo Castletown from its border with Victoria Station. Their owners hawked crimson-spattered t-shirts and tote bags, Ripper-suspect profiles, biographies and recent photos of the victims, anything and everything enterprising vendors thought might sell.

Humanity, he thought darkly-watching a giggling woman in her fifties plunking down a wad of twenties for a set of commemorative china plates with hand-painted portraits of victims, suspects, police investigators, and crime scenes-humanity is a sick species.

"Is she honestly going to display those hideous things in her house?"

Kit glanced around at the sound of a familiar voice at his elbow. Ann Vinh Mulhaney was gazing in disgust at the woman buying the plates.

"Hello, Ann. And I think the answer's yes. I'm betting she'll not only display them, she'll put them right out in the middle of her china hutch."

Ann gave a mock shudder. "God, Ripperoons . . . You wouldn't believe the last class of them I had to cope with." She glanced up at Kit, who gave her a sardonic smile. Kit had seen it all-and then some. "On second thought, you probably would believe it. Have you seen Sven yet? He came up before I did."

"No, I just got here. Robert said something about finding a spot to watch Primary go and said he wanted my opinion on something."

"Really?" Ann's eyes glinted with sudden interest. "That something wouldn't have anything to do with Peg Ames, would it?"

Kit blinked. "Good God. Have I missed something?"

Ann laughed, pulling loose the elastic band holding her long dark hair, and shrugged the gleaming tresses over one shoulder. She'd clearly just come from class, since she still wore a twin-holster rig with a beautiful pair of Royal Irish Constabulary Webley revolvers. Unlike the big military Webleys, which came open on a top-break hinge for reloading and were massive in size, the little RIC Webley was a solid-frame double-action that loaded like the American single-action Army revolver through a gate in the side, and came in a short-barrelled, concealable version popular with many time tourists heading to London. At .442 caliber, they packed a decent punch and were easier to hide than the much larger standard Webleys. Kit had shot them several times during his down-time escapades-and had cut his finger more than once on the second trigger, a needle-type spur projecting down behind the main trigger.

As she pocketed her hair band, Ann glanced side-long at Kit. "You really have been moping with Margo gone, haven't you? Honestly, Kit, they've been thick as mosquitoes in a swamp for days. Rumor has it," and she winked, "that Peg had a line on a Greek bronze that was going up for auction in London and Robert was just about nuts, trying to find somebody to snitch it quietly for him the night the auction warehouse goes up in smoke. Or rather, went up in smoke. It burned the night of Polly Nichols' murder, in a Shadwell dry-dock

fire."

Kit grinned as he escorted Ann through the crowds. Robert Li was engaged in an ongoing, passionate love affair with any and all Greek bronzes. "I hope he gets it. Peg Ames will make him the happiest man in La-La Land if he can lay hands on another one for his collection."

The IFARTS agent and resident antiquarian had personally rescued from destruction a collection of ancient bronzes that most up-time museum directors would've gnashed their teeth over, had they known about them. Rescuing artwork from destruction was perfectly legal, of course, and constituted one of the major exceptions to the first law of time travel. Collectors who salvaged such art could even sell it on the open market, if they were willing to pay the astronomical taxes levied by the Bureau of Access Time Functions. Many an antiquarian and art dealer made a good living doing just that.

But Robert Li would sooner have sold his own teeth than part with an original Greek bronze, even one acquired through perfectly legitimate means. Of course, snitching one from a down-time auction warehouse before it burned did not qualify as a "legitimate" method of acquisition. To rescue a doomed piece of art, one had to rescue it during the very disaster destined to destroy it. Li was a very honest and honorable man. But when it came to any man's abiding passion, honesty occasionally went straight out the nearest available window. Certainly, many another antiquarian had tried smuggling out artwork that was not destined for down-time destruction. Hence the existence of the International Federation for Art Temporally Stolen, which tried to rescue such purloined work and return it to its proper time and place of origin. Robert Li was the station's designated IFARTS agent, a very good one. But if he had a line on a Greek bronze that was scheduled to be destroyed by some method it couldn't easily be rescued from, or one that had just disappeared mysteriously, he wouldn't be above trying to acquire it for his personal collection, whatever the means.

"Wonder which bronze?" Kit mused as they threaded their way toward Primary.

"Proserpina, actually," Robert Li's voice said from behind him.

Kit turned, startled, then grinned. "Proserpina, huh?"

"Yeah, beautiful little thing, about three feet high. Holding a pomegranate."

"Is that what you wanted to ask me about?"

The antiquities dealer chuckled and fell into step beside them. "Actually, no." He held up a cloth sack. "I wondered if you might know more about these than I do. A customer came into the shop, asked me to verify whether or not they were genuine or reproduction. He'd bought 'em from a Templar who came through with a suitcase full of 'em and is selling them down in Little Agora to anyone who'll pony up the bucks."

Curious, Kit opened the sack and found a pair of late twentieth-century, Desert Storm-era Israeli gas masks, capable of filtering out a variety of chemical and nerve agents.

"Somebody," Kit muttered, "has a sick sense of humor."

"Or maybe just a psychic premonition," Ann put in, eyeing the masks curiously. "It's illegal to discharge chemical agents inside a time terminal, but nothing would surprise me around here, these days."

As Kit studied the gas masks, looking for telltale signs of recent manufacture, he could hear, in the distance, the sound of live music and chanting. Startled, Kit glanced up at the chronometers. "What's going on, over toward Urbs Romae?"

"Oh, that's the Festival of Mars," Ann answered, just as Kit located the section of the overhead chronometers reserved for displaying the religious festivals scheduled in the station's timeline.

Kit smacked his forehead, belatedly recalling his promise to Ianira that he'd participate in the festival. "Damn! I was supposed to be there!"

"All the down-timers on station are participating," Robert said with a curious glance at Kit.

Ann's voice wobbled a little as she added, "Ianira was supposed to officiate, you know. They're holding the festival anyway. The way I hear it, they plan on asking the gods of war to strike down whoever's responsible for kidnapping Ianira and her family."

A chill touched Kit's spine. "With all the crazies we've got on station, that could get ugly, fast." Before he'd even finished voicing the thought, shouts and the unmistakable sounds of a scuffle broke out close by. Startled tourists in front of them scrambled in every direction. A corridor of uninhabited space opened up. Two angry groups abruptly faced one another down. Kit recognized trouble when he saw it--and this was Trouble.

Capital "T" that rhymed with "C" and that stood for Crazies.

Ann gasped. A group of women in black uniforms and honest-to-God jackboots formed an impenetrable wall along one flank, blocking any escape in that direction. Angels of Grace Militia . . . And opposing the Angels ranged a line of burly construction workers, the very same construction workers who'd been involved in the last station riot.

"Unchaste whores!"

"Medieval monsters!"

"Feminazis!"

"Get out of our station, bitches!"

"You're not my goddamned brothers!"

"Go back to the desert and beat up your own women, you rag-headed bastards! Leave ours alone!"

Kit had just enough time to say, "Oh, my God . . ."

Then the riot exploded around them.

To Margo's relief, they found the Working Lads' Institute without further incident. When the doors were finally opened for the inquest into Polly Nichols' brutal demise, the Ripper scholars and up-time reporters in her charge surged inside with the rest of the crowd. The room was so jam-packed with human bodies, not even a church mouse could have forced its way into the meeting hall. The coroner was a dandified and stylish man named Wynne Edwin Baxter, who arrived with typical flair, straight from a tour of Scandinavia, dressed to the nines in black-and-white checked trousers, a fancy white waistcoat, and a blood-red scarf. Baxter presided over the inquest with a theatrical mien, asking the police surgeon, Dr. Llewellyn, to report on his findings. The Welsh doctor, who had been dragged from his Whitechapel surgery to examine the remains at the police mortuary, cleared his throat with a nervous glance at the crowded hall, where reporters hung expectantly on every word spoken.

"Yes. Well. Five teeth were missing from the victim's jaw and I found a slight, ah, laceration on the tongue. A bruise ran along the lower part of the lady's jaw, down the right side of her face. This might have been caused by a fist striking her face or, ah, perhaps a thumb digging into the face. I found another bruise, circular in nature, on the left side of her face, perhaps caused by fingers pressing into her skin. On the left side of her neck, about an inch below the jaw, there was an, ah, incision." The surgeon paused and cleared his throat, a trifle pale. "An, ah, an incision, yes, below the jaw, about four inches in length, which ran from a point immediately below the ear. Another incision on this same side was, ah, circular in design, severing tissues right down to the vertebrae."

A concerted gasp rose from the eager spectators. Reporters scribbled furiously with pencils, those being far more practical for field work than the cumbersome dip pens which required an inkwell to resupply them every few lines.

Dr. Llewellyn cleared his throat. "The large vessels of the neck, both sides, were all severed by this incision, at a length of eight inches. These cuts most certainly were inflicted by a large knife, a long-bladed weapon, moderately sharp. It was used with considerable violence . . ." The doctor shuddered slightly. "Yes. Well. Ah, there was no blood on the breast, either her own or the clothes, and I found no further injuries until I reached the lower portion of the poor lady's abdomen." A shocked buzz ran through the room. Victorian gentlemen did not speak about ladies' abdomens, not in public places, not anywhere else, for that matter. Dr. Llewellyn shifted uncomfortably. "Some two to three inches from the left side of the belly, I discovered a jagged wound, very deep, the tissues of the abdomen completely cut through. Several other, ah, incisions ran across the abdomen as well, and three or four more which ran vertically down the right side. These were inflicted, as I said, by a knife used violently and thrust downward. The injuries were from left to right and may possibly have been done by an, ah, left-handed person, yes, and all were without doubt committed with the same instrument."

A reporter near the front of the packed room shouted, "Dr. Llewellyn! Then you believe the killer must have stood in front of his victim, held her by the jaw with his right hand, struck with the knife in his left?"

"Ah, yes, that would seem to be indicated."

Having watched the brutal attack in Buck's Row via video camera, Margo knew that was wrong. James Maybrick had strangled his victim, then shoved her to the ground and ripped her open with the knife gripped in his right hand. Criminologists had long suspected that would be the case, just from the coroners' descriptions of wound placement and surviving crime scene and mortuary photos. But in London of 1888, the entire science of forensics was in its infancy and criminal psychology hadn't even been invented yet, never mind profiling of serial killers.

"Dr. Llewellyn . . ."

The inquest erupted into a fury of shouted questions and demands for further information, witness names, descriptions, anything. It came out that a coffee-stall keeper named John Morgan had actually seen Polly Nichols shortly before her death, a mere three minutes' walk from Buck's Row where she'd died. Morgan said, "She were in the company of a man she called Jim, sir."

Whether or not this "Jim" had been James Maybrick, Margo didn't know and neither did anybody else, since they hadn't rigged a camera at Morgan's coffee stall. But the description Morgan gave didn't match Maybrick's features, so it might well have been another "Jim" who'd bought what poor Polly had been selling, as well as her final cup of bitter, early-morning coffee. If, in fact, Morgan wasn't making up the whole story, just to gain the momentary glory of police and reporters fawning over him for details.

Margo sighed. People don't change much, do they?

Once the inquest meeting broke up, Margo and Doug Tanglewood parted company. Tanglewood and the reporters, accompanied by Pavel Kostenka and Conroy Melvyn, set out in pursuit of the mysterious doctor they'd captured on video working with James Maybrick. Margo and her remaining charge, Shahdi Feroz, plunged into the shadowy world inhabited by London's twelve-hundred prostitutes.

"I want to walk the entire murder area," Shahdi said quietly as they set out alone. Most of this lay in the heart of Whitechapel, straying only once into the district of London known as The City. Margo glanced at the older woman, curious.

"Why the whole area now? We'll be rigging surveillance on each site."

Shahdi Feroz gave Margo a wan smile. "It will be important to my work to get a feel for the spatial relationships, the geography of the killing zone. What stands where, how the pattern of traffic flows through or past the murder sites. Where Maybrick and his unknown accomplice might meet their victims.

Where the prostitutes troll for their customers."

When Margo gave her a puzzled stare, she said, "I want to learn as much as I can about the world the prostitutes live in. To me, that is the important question, the conditions and geography of their social setting, how they lived and worked as well as where and why they died. This is more important than the forensics of the evidence. The basic forensics were known then; what is not known is how these women were treated by the police sent undercover to protect them, or how these women coped with the terror and the stress of having to continue working with such a monstrous killer loose among them. We have studied such things in the modern world, of course; but never in Victorian England. The social rules were so very different, here, where even the chair legs are covered with draperies and referred to as limbs, even by women who sell their bodies for money. It is this world I need to understand. I have worked in middle class London and in areas of wealth, but never in the East End."

Margo nodded. That made sense. "All right. Buck's Row, we've seen already. You want to do the murder sites in numerical order, by the pattern of the actual attacks? Or take them as we come to them, geographically? And what about the murder sites on the question list? The ones we're not sure whether they were Jack's or not? Like the Whitehall torso," she added with a shudder. The armless, legless, headless woman's body, hacked to pieces and left in the cellar of the partially constructed New Scotland Yard building on Whitehall, would be discovered in October, during the month-long lull between confirmed Ripper strikes.

"Yes," Shahdi Feroz said slowly, narrowing her eyes slightly as she considered the question. "With two men working in tandem, it would be good, I think, to check all the murder sites, not just the five traditionally ascribed to the Ripper. And I believe we should take the sites in order of the murders, as well. We will follow the killer's movements through the territory he staked out for himself. Perhaps we might come to understand more of his mind, doing this, as well as how he might have met his victims. Or rather, how they met their victims, since there are two of them working together." Her smile was rueful. "I did not expect to have the chance to study such a dynamic in this particular case. It complicates matters immensely."

Even Margo, with no training in psychology or criminal social dynamics, could understand that. "Okay, next stop, Hanbury Street." Margo intended to get a good look at the yard behind number twenty-nine Hanbury. Seven days from now, she'd be slipping into that yard under cover of darkness, to set up the Ripper Watch team's surveillance equipment.

Number twenty-nine Hanbury proved to be a broken-down tenement in sooty brick. It housed seventeen souls, several of whom were employed in a nearby cigar factory. It was a working-man's tenement, not a doss house where the homeless flopped for the night. Two doors led in from the street. One took residents into the house proper and another led directly to the yard behind the squat brick structure. Margo and Shahdi Feroz chose this second door, opening it with a creaking groan of rusting hinges. The noise startled Margo.

And brought instant attention from an older woman who leaned out a second-story window. "Where d'you think you're going, eh?" the irate resident shouted down. "I know your kind, missies! How many times I got to tell your kind o' girls, keep out me yard! Don't want nuffink to do wiv the likes o' you round me very own 'ouse! Go on wiv you, now, get on!"

Caught red-handed trying to sneak into the yard, Margo did the only thing she could do, the one thing any East End hussy would've been expected to do. She let the door close with a bang and shouted back up, "It's me gormless father I'm after, nuffink else! Lager lout's said 'e 'ad a job, workin' down to Lime'ouse docks, an' where do I see 'im, but coming out the Blue Boy public 'ouse, 'at's where! Followed 'im I did, wiv me ma, 'ere. Sore 'im climb over

the fence into this 'ere yard. You seen 'im, lady? You do, an' you shout for a bottle an' stopper, y'hear?"

"Don't you go tellin' an old woman any of your bloody Jackanories! Off wiv you, or I'll call for that copper me own self!"

"Ah, come on, ma," Margo said loudly to Shahdi Feroz, taking her arm, "senile owd git ain't no use. We'll catch 'im, 'e gots to come 'ome sometime, ain't 'e?"

As soon as they had gained enough distance, Shahdi Feroz cast a curious glance over her shoulder. "How in the world will Annie Chapman slip through that door with seventeen people asleep in the house and nobody hear a thing?"

Margo shot the scholar an intent glance. "Good question. Maybe one of the working girls got tired of having that busybody interfere with using a perfectly suitable business location? One of them could've poured lamp oil on the hinges?"

"It's entirely possible," Dr. Feroz said thoughtfully. "Pity we haven't the resources to put twenty-four hour surveillance on that door for the next week. That was quick thinking, by the way," she added with a brief smile. "When she shouted like that, I very nearly lost my footing. I had no idea what to say. All I could imagine was being placed in jail." She shivered, leaving Margo to wonder if she'd ever seen the inside of a down-time gaol, or if she just had a vivid imagination. Margo, for one, had no intention of discovering what a Victorian jail cell looked like, certainly not from the inside. She had far too vivid a memory of sixteenth-century Portuguese ones.

"Huh," she muttered. "When you're caught stealing the cookies, the only defense is a counterattack with a healthy dose of misdirection."

Shahdi Feroz smiled. "And were you caught stealing the cookies often, my dear Miss Smith?"

Margo thrust away memory of too many beatings and didn't answer.

"Miss Smith?"

Margo knew that tone. That was the Something's wrong, can I help? tone people used when they'd inadvertently bumped too close to something Margo didn't want bumped. So she said briskly, "Let's see, next stop is Dorset Street, where Elizabeth Stride was killed in Dutfield's Yard. We shouldn't have any trouble getting in there, at least. Mr. Dutfield has moved his construction yard, so the whole place has been deserted for months." She very carefully did not look at Shahdi Feroz.

The older woman studied her for a long, dangerous moment more, then sighed.

Margo relaxed. She'd let it go, thank God. Margo didn't want to share those particular memories with anyone, not even Malcolm or Kit. Especially Malcolm or Kit. She realized that Shahdi Feroz, like so many others since it had happened, meant well; but raking it all up again wouldn't help anyone or solve anything. So she kept up a steady stream of chatter about nothing whatsoever as her most useful barrier to well-intentioned prying. She talked all the way down Brick Lane and Osborn Street, across Whitechapel Road, down Plumber Street, past jammed wagon traffic on Commercial Road, clear down to Berner Street, which left her badly out of breath, since Berner Street was all the way across the depth of Whitechapel parish from number twenty-nine Hanbury.

Dutfield's Yard was a deserted, open square which could be reached only by an eighteen-foot alleyway leading in from Berner Street. A double gate between wooden posts boasted a wooden gate to the right and a wicker gate to the left, to be used when the main gate was closed. White lettering on the wooden gate proclaimed the yard as the property of W. Hindley, Sack Manufacturer and A. Dutfield, Van and Cart Builder. The wicker gate creaked when Margo pushed it open and stepped through. She held it for Shahdi Feroz, who lifted her skirts clear of the rubbish blown against the base by wind from the previous night's storm.

The alleyway, a dreary, dim passage even in daylight, was bordered on the

north by the International Workers' Educational Club and to the south by three artisans' houses, remodeled from older, existing structures. Once into the yard proper, Margo found herself surrounded by decaying old buildings. To the west lay the sack factory, where men and teenaged boys could be seen at work through dull, soot-grimed windows. Beside the abandoned cart factory stood a dusty, dilapidated stable which clearly hadn't been used since Arthur Dutfield had moved his business to Pinchin Street. Terraced cottages to the south closed in the yard completely. The odor of tobacco wafted into the yard from these cottages, where cigarettes were being assembled by hand, using sweatshop labor. The whir of sewing machines, operated by foot treadles, floated through a couple of open windows in one of the cottages; a small sign announced that this establishment was home to two separate tailors. The rear windows of the two-story, barn-like International Workers' Educational Club overlooked the yard, looming above it as the major feature closing in this tiny, isolated bit of real estate. The club, a hotbed of radical political activity and renowned for its Jewish ownership, also served as a major community center for educational and cultural events.

Standing in the center of the empty construction yard, Margo gazed thoughtfully at the rear windows of the popular hall. "Bold as brass, wasn't he?" she muttered.

Shahdi Feroz was studying the yard's only access, the eighteen-foot blind alley. She glanced up, first at Margo, then at the windows Margo was gazing at. "Yes," the scholar agreed. "The hall was-will be-filled with people that night."

It would be the Association's secretary, in fact, jeweler Louis Diemshutz, who would discover Elizabeth Stride's body some four weeks hence. Margo frowned slowly as she gazed, narrow-eyed, at the ranks of windows in the popular meeting hall. "Doesn't it strike you as odd that he chose this particular spot to kill Long Liz Stride?"

Shahdi frowned. "Odd? But it is a perfectly natural spot for him to choose. It is completely isolated from the street. And it will be utterly dark, that night. What more natural place for a prostitute to take her customer than a deserted stable in an abandoned yard?"

"Yes . . ." Margo was trying to put a more concrete reason to the niggling feeling that this was still an odd place for Jack to have killed his victim. "But she didn't want to come back here. She was struggling to escape when Israel Schwartz saw her. Given the descriptions he gave of the two men, I'm betting it's our mystery doctor who knocked her to the ground and Maybrick who ran Schwartz off."

Shahdi turned her full attention to Margo. "You know, that has always puzzled me about Elizabeth Stride," the Ripper scholar mused. "Why she struggled. As a working prostitute, this is not in character. And she had turned down a customer earlier that evening."

Margo stared. "She had?"

Shahdi nodded. "One of the witnesses who remembered seeing her said this. That a man had approached her and she said, 'No, not tonight.' And yet we know she needed money. She had quarreled with the man she lived with, had been seen in a doss house, admitted to a friend that she needed money. Why would she have refused one customer, then struggled when a second propositioned her? What did they discuss, that he attacked her?"

"Maybe," Margo said slowly, narrowing her eyes slightly, "she didn't need the money as much as we thought she did."

Shahdi's eyes widened. "The letters," she whispered, abruptly excited. Her eyes gleamed with quick speculation. "Perhaps these mysterious letters are worth a great deal of money, yes? Clearly, our friend the doctor is most anxious to retrieve them. And he recovered several gold sovereigns from Polly Nichols' pockets, which she must have been given by him earlier in the

evening, as payment for these letters."

"Blackmail?" Margo breathed. "But blackmail against who? Whom, I mean. And if all these penniless women are being systematically hunted down because they've got somebody's valuable letters, why didn't they cash in on them? Every one of Jack's victims was drunk and soliciting just to get enough money for a four penny bed for the night."

Shahdi Feroz shook her, visibly frustrated. "I do not know. But I intend to find out!"

Margo grinned. "Me, too. Come on, let's go. My feet are freezing and it's a long walk to Mitre Square and Goulston Street."

To reach Mitre Square, they traced one of the possible routes the Ripper might have taken from Berner Street where his bloody work with Elizabeth Stride had been-would be-interrupted by Louis Diemshutz. "One thing I find interesting," Margo said as they followed Back Church Lane up to Commercial Road and from there hiked down to Aldgate High Street and Aldgate proper, further west. "He knew the area. Knew it well enough to pull a stunt like switching police jurisdictions after getting away from Dutfield's Yard. He knew he was going to kill again. So he deliberately left Whitechapel and Metropolitan Police jurisdiction and hunted his second victim over in The City proper, where The City police didn't get on with Scotland Yard at all."

The "City of London" was a tiny district of government buildings in the very heart of London. Fiercely independent, The City maintained its own Lord Mayor and its own police force, its own laws and jurisdictions, separate from the rest of London proper, and was exceedingly jealous about maintaining its autonomy. It was confusing from the get-go, particularly to up-time visitors. In the case of Jack the Ripper's murder spree on the night of September 30th, it would confuse the devil out of London's two rival constabularies, as well. And it would lead to destruction of vital evidence by bickering police officials trying to keep the East End from exploding into anti-Semitic riots.

"That," Shahdi mused, "or he simply didn't meet Catharine Eddowes until he'd reached The City's jurisdiction. She had just been released from jail and was heading east, while Jack was presumably heading west."

"Well, even if he did just happen to meet her in The City, he doubled back into Whitechapel again, so it'd be the Metropolitan Police who found the apron he left for them under his chalked message, not constables from The City police. Somehow, Maybrick doesn't strike me as quite that clever."

"Perhaps, perhaps not," Shahdi said thoughtfully. "But one thing is quite clear. Our doctor is very clever. How has he managed, I wonder, to work so closely with Mr. Maybrick, yet keep all mention of himself out of Maybrick's incriminating diary?"

"Yeah. And why did Maybrick write a diary like that at all? I mean, that's tempting fate just a little too much, isn't it? His wife knew he was married to another woman, that he was a bigamist and having other affairs, probably with his own maidservants. At Florie's trial, everybody commented on how gorgeous all the Maybrick maids were. Florie might have gone looking for clues to who the other women were and found the diary. Or one of those nosy maids might have. They certainly helped themselves to Mrs. Maybrick's clothes and jewelry."

Shahdi Feroz was shaking her head in disagreement. "Yes, they did, but you may not realize that Maybrick kept his study locked at all times with a padlock. He kept the only key and straightened the room himself. Very peculiar for a businessman of the time. And he threatened to kill a clerk who nearly discovered something incriminating. Presumably the diary, itself. As to why he wrote the diary, many serial killers have a profound need to confess their crimes. A compulsion to be caught. It is why they play taunting games with the police, with letters and clues. A serial killer is under terrible pressure to murder his victims. By writing down his deeds, he can relieve some of this

pressure, as well as relive the terrible thrill and excitement of the crime. Maybrick is not alone, in this. The risk of being caught, either through the diary or at the crime scene, is as addictive to the serial killer as the murder itself, is."

"God, that's really sick!" Margo gulped back nausea.

Shahdi nodded, eyes grim. "Maybrick's diary has always rung with authenticity on many levels. To forge such a thing, a person would have needed to comprehend a vast array of information, technical and scientific skills ranging from psychopathic serial killer psychology to the forensics of ink and handwriting and linguistic styles. No, I never believed the diary to be a forgery, even before we taped Mr. Maybrick killing Polly Nichols, although many of my colleagues have believed it to be, ever since it was discovered in the twentieth century. The thing I find most intriguing, however, is his silence in the diary about this doctor who works with him. Through the whole diary, he names people quite freely, including doctors he has consulted, both in Liverpool and London. Why, then, no mention of this doctor?"

"He mentions a doctor in London?" Margo said eagerly. "That's the guy, then!"

"No," Shahdi shook her head. "There are records of this doctor. He does not fit the age or physical description profile of the man on our video. I had already thought of this, of course, but we brought with us downloaded copies of everything known on this case. It is not the same man."

"Oh." Margo couldn't hide the disappointment in her voice.

Shahdi smiled. "It was a good thought, my dear. Ah, this is where we turn for Mitre Square."

They had to dodge heavy freight wagon traffic across Aldgate to reach Mitre Street, from which they could take one of the two access routes into the Square. This was a rectangle of buildings almost entirely closed in on four sides by tall warehouses, private residences, and a Jewish Synagogue. The only ways in and out lay along a narrow inlet off Mitre Street and through a covered alleyway called Church Passage, which ran from Duke Street directly beneath a building, as so many odd little streets and narrow lanes in London did. Empty working men's cottages rose several stories along one side of the square. School children's voices could be heard in one corner, reciting lessons through the open windows of a small boarding school for working families with enough income to give their children a chance at a better future.

As they studied the layout of the narrow square, a door to one of the private houses opened. A policeman in uniform paused to kiss a woman in a plain morning dress. "Good day, m'dearie, an' keep the doors locked up, what with that maniac running about loose, cutting ladies' throats. I'll be back in time for supper."

"Do take care, won't you?"

"Ah, Mrs. Pearse, I always take care on a beat, you know that."

"Mr. Pearse," his wife touched his face, "I worry about you out there, say what you will. I'll have supper waiting."

Margo stared, not so much because Mr. and Mrs. Pearse had addressed one another so formally. That was standard Victorian practice, using the formal address rather than first names in public. The reason Margo stared was because Mr. Pearse was a police constable. "My God," Margo whispered. "Right across the street from a constable's house!"

Shahdi Feroz was also studying the policeman's house with great interest. "Yes. Most interesting, isn't it? Playing cat and mouse with the constables on the very night he was nearly caught at Dutfield's Yard. Giving the police a calculated insult. I am willing to bet on this. Maybrick hated Inspector Abberline already, by the night of the double murder."

"And one of them had already started sending those taunting letters to the

press, too," Margo muttered. "No wonder the handwriting on the Dear Boss letters and note didn't match Maybrick's. This mysterious doctor of ours must have written them."

Shahdi Feroz gave Margo a startled stare. "Yes, of course! Which raises very intriguing questions, Miss Smith, most intriguing questions. Such letters are almost always sent by the killer to taunt police with his power. Yet the letters do not match Maybrick's handwriting, even though they use the American phrases Maybrick certainly would have known."

"Like the word boss," Margo nodded. "Or the term 'red stuff' which isn't any kind of Britishism. But Maybrick didn't need to disguise his handwriting, because Maybrick didn't send them, the doctor did. But why?" Margo wondered. "I mean, why would he write letters taunting the police using language deliberately couched to sound like an American had written them? Or somebody who'd been to America?"

Shahdi's eyes widened. "Because," she said in an excited whisper, "he meant to betray James Maybrick!"

Margo's mouth came open. "My God! He sent them to frame his partner? To make sure Maybrick was hanged? But . . . surely Maybrick would've turned him in, if he'd been arrested? Which he wasn't, of course. Maybrick dies of arsenic poisoning next spring." Margo blinked, thoughts racing. "Does this mean something happens to the partner? To stop him from turning Maybrick over to the police?"

Shahdi Feroz was staring at Margo. "A very good question, my dear. We must find out who this mysterious doctor is!"

"You're telling me! The sooner the better. We've only got a week before he kills Annie Chapman." Margo was staring absently at the building across the square, while something niggled the back of her mind, some little detail she was missing. "If he knew the East End as well as I'm guessing—" She broke off as it hit her, what she was seeing. "Oh, my God! Look at that! The Great Synagogue! Another Jewish connection! First the Jewish Workingmen's Educational Club, then he kills Catharine Eddowes practically on the doorstep of a synagogue. And then he chalks anti-Semitic graffiti on a tenement wall on Goulston Street!"

Shahdi stared at the synagogue across Mitre Square. "Do you realize, this has never been noticed before? That a synagogue stood in Mitre Square? I am impressed, Miss Smith. Very much impressed. A double message, with one killing, leaving her between a policeman's home and a Jewish holy place of worship. A triple message, if one considers the taunt to police represented in his crossing police jurisdictions to chalk his message of hatred."

Margo shivered. "Yeah. All this gives me the screaming willies. He's smart. And that's scary as hell."

"My dear," Shahdi said very softly, "all psychopathic serial murderers are terrifying. If only we could only eliminate the abuse and poverty and social sickness that create such creatures . . ." She shook her head. "But that would leave the ones we cannot explain, except through biology or a willful choice to pursue evil pleasure at the expense of others' lives."

"No matter how you look at it," Margo muttered, "when you get down to it, human beings aren't really much better than killer plains apes, are they? Just a thin sugar-coating of civilization to make 'em look prettier." Margo couldn't disguise the bitterness in her voice. She'd had enough experience with human savagery to last a lifetime. And she wasn't even eighteen years old yet.

Shahdi's eyes had gone round. "Whatever has happened to you, my dear, to make you say such things at so young an age?"

Margo opened her mouth to bite out a sharp reply; then managed to bite her tongue at the last instant. "I've been to New York," she said, instead, voice rough. "It stinks. Almost worse than this." She waved a hand at the poorly

dressed, hard-working people bustling past, at the women loitering in Church Passage, women eyeing the men who passed, at the ragged children playing in the gutter outside the Sir John Cass School, children whose parents couldn't afford to send them for an education, children who couldn't even manage to be accepted as charity pupils, as Catharine Eddowes had been many years previously, whose parents kept them out of compulsory public-sector schools in defiance of the new laws, to earn a little extra cash. How many of those dirty-faced little girls tossing a ball to one another would be walking the streets in just a few years, selling themselves for enough money to buy a loaf of bread and a cupful of gin?

They left Mitre Square and headed east once more, crossing back into Metropolitan Police jurisdiction, and made their way up Middlesex Street, jammed with the clothing stalls which had given the street its nickname of Petticoat Lane. Margo and Shahdi pushed their way through the crowd, recording the whole scene on their scout logs. Women bargained prices lower on used petticoats, mended bodices and skirts, on dresses and shawls and woolen undergarments called combinations, while men poked through piles of trousers, work shirts, and sturdy boots. Children shouted and begged for cheap tin toys their mothers usually couldn't afford. And men loitered in clusters, muttering in angry tones that "somefink ought to be done, is wot I says. We got no gas lamps in the streets, it's dark as pitch, so's anybody might be murdered by a cutthroat. And them constables, now, over to H Division, wot they care about us, eh? Me own shop was robbed three times last week in broad daylight by them little bastards from the Nichol, and where was a constable, I ask you? Don't care a fig for us, they don't. Ain't nobody gives a fig for us, down 'ere in the East End . . ."

And further along, "Goin' to be riots in the streets again, that's wot, mate, goin' to be riots in the streets again, an' they don't give us a decent livin' wage down to docks. I got a brother in a factory, puts in twelve hours a day, six days a week, an' don't bring 'ome but hog an' sixpence a week, t' feed a wife an' five children. God 'elp if 'e comes down ill, God 'elp, I say. Me own sister-in-law might 'ave to walk the streets like that poor Polly Nichols, corse I can't feed 'er, neither, nor 'er starvin' dustpan lids, I got seven o' me own an' the shipyard don't pay me much over a groat more'n me brother brings 'ome . . ."

Margo cut across to Bell Lane, just to get away from the press of unwashed bodies and the miasma of sweat and dirt and despair rising from them, then led the way north along Crispin to Dorset Street, one of London's most infamous thoroughfares, lined with shabby, unheated doss houses. It was even money that every second or third woman they saw on the street was up for sale at the right price. "Dorset Street," as it was nicknamed by the locals, was still half asleep despite the fact that the sun had been high over London's rooftops for hours. Many of the women who used these doss houses worked their trade until the early hours of the morning, five and six A.M., then collapsed into the first available bed and slept as late as the caretakers would let them.

Miller's Court, site of the fifth known Ripper murder, lay just off Dorset Street, through an archway just shy of Commercial Road. Directly across the street from the entrance to Miller's Court lay Crossingham's Lodging House, where Annie Chapman stayed by preference when she possessed the means. The killer had chosen his victims from a very small neighborhood, indeed.

Margo and Shahdi Feroz ducked beneath the archway, passing the chandler shop at number twenty-seven Dorset Street. This shop was owned by Mary Kelly's landlord, John McCarthy. Six little houses, each whitewashed in a vain attempt to make them look respectable, stood in the enclosed court where the final Ripper murder would take place, some three months from now. McCarthy's shop on the corner did a brisk business, it being a Friday. The younger McCarthys' voices were audible through the open windows, squabbling in a boisterous

fashion.

At one of the cottage windows, a strikingly beautiful young woman with glorious strawberry blond hair leaned out the window to number thirteen. "Joseph! Come in for breakfast, love!"

Margo started violently. Then stared as a thickset man hurried across the narrow court to open the door to number thirteen. He gave the beautiful blonde girl a hearty kiss. My God! It's Mary Kelly! And her unemployed lover, the fish-porter, Joseph Barnett! Mary Kelly's laughter floated out through the open window, followed by her light, sweet voice singing a popular tune. "Only a Violet I Plucked From My Mother's Grave . . ." Margo shuddered. It was the same song she'd be heard singing the night of her brutal murder.

"Let's get out of here!" Margo choked out roughly. She headed for the narrow doorway that led back to Dorset Street. She had barely reached the chandler's shop when Shahdi Feroz caught up to her.

"Margo, what is it?"

Margo found dark eyes peering intently into her own. Shadows of worry darkened their depths even further. "Nothing," Margo said brusquely. "Just a little shook up, that's all. Thinking about what's going to happen to that poor girl . . ."

Mary Kelly had been the most savagely mutilated of all, pieces of her strewn all over the room. And nothing Margo could do, no warning Margo could give, would save her from that. She understood, in a terrible flash of understanding, how that ancient propheticess of myth, Cassandra of Troy, for whom Ianira Cassondra was named, must have felt, looking into the future and glimpsing nothing but death-with no way to change any of it. The feeling was far worse than during Margo's other down-time trips, worse, even, than she'd expected, knowing it was bound to strike at some point, during her Ripper Watch duties.

Margo met Shahdi Feroz's gaze again and forced a shrug. "It just hit me a lot harder than I expected, seeing her like that. She's so pretty and everything . . ."

The look Shahdi Feroz gave her left Margo's face flaming. You're young, that look said. Young and inexperienced, for all the down-time work you've done . . .

Well, it was true enough. She might be young, but she wasn't a shrinking violet and she wasn't a quitter, either. Memory of her parents had not and would not screw up the rest of her life! She shoved herself away from the sooty bricks of McCarthy's chandler shop. "Where did you want to go, now? Whitehall? That's where the torso will be found in October." The decapitated woman's torso, discovered between the double-event murders of Elizabeth Stride and Catharine Eddowes and the final murder of Mary Kelly, generally wasn't thought to be a Ripper victim. The modus operandi simply wasn't the same. But with two killers working together, who knew? And of course, the rest of London would firmly believe it to be Jack's work, which would complicate their task enormously as hysteria and terror deepened throughout the city.

Shahdi Feroz, however, was shaking her head. "No, not just yet. To reach Whitehall, we must leave the East End. I have other work to do, first. I believe we should go to the doss houses along Dorset Street, listen to what the women are saying."

Margo winced at the idea of sitting in a room full of street walkers who would remind her of what she'd fought so hard to escape. "Sure," she said gamely, having to force it out through clenched teeth. "There's only about a million of 'em to choose from."

They set out in mutual silence, walking quickly to keep warm. Margo would've faced the prospect of viewing piles of people left dead by the Black Death with less distaste than the coming interview with doss-house prostitutes. But there literally wasn't a thing she could do to get out of it. Chalk it up to

the price of your training, she told herself grimly. After all, it wasn't nearly as awful as being raped by those filthy Portuguese traders and soldiers had been. She'd survived Africa. She'd survive this. Her life-and Shahdi Feroz's-might well depend on it. So she clenched her jaw and did her best to stay prepared for whatever might come next.

Chapter Thirteen

Cold and rainy weather inflicts enormous suffering on those with lung ailments. The dampness and the chill seep down into the chest, worsening congestion until each breath drawn is a struggle to lift the weight of a boulder which has settled atop the ribcage, crushing the lungs down against the spine. Worse than the aching heaviness, however, are the prolonged coughing spells which leave devastating weakness in their wake, transforming a simple stroll across six feet of floor space into a marathon-distance struggle.

Cold, wet weather is bad enough when the air is clean. Add to it the smoke of multiple millions of coal-burning fireplaces and stoves, the industrial spewage of factory smokestacks, smelting plants, and iron works, and the rot and mold of anything organic left lying on the ground or in the streets or stacked along water-logged, dockside marshes, and the resulting putrid filth will irritate already-burdened lungs into a state of chronic misery. Toss in the systemic, wasting effects of tuberculosis and the slow deterioration of organs, brain tissues, and mental clarity brought on by advanced syphilis and the result is a slow, pain-riddled slide toward death.

Eliza Anne Chapman had been sliding down that fatal slope for a long time.

The summer and early autumn of 1888 had broken records for chilly temperatures and heavy rainfall. By the first week of September, Annie was so ill, she was unable to pay for her room at Crossingham's lodging house on Dorset Street with anything approaching regularity. Most of what she earned or was given by Edward Stanley-a bricklayer's mate with whom she had established a long-term relationship after the death of her husband-went to pay for medicines. A serious fight with Eliza Cooper, whom Annie had caught trying to palm a florin belonging to a mutual acquaintance, substituting a penny for the more valuable coin, had left Annie bruised and aching, with a swollen temple, blackened eye, and bruised breast where the other woman had punched her.

She had confidently expected to receive money soon for the letters she'd bought from Polly Nichols, to pay for the medicines she desperately needed. But no money was forthcoming from Polly or from the anonymous writer of the letters she carried in her pocket. Then, to Annie's intense shock, Polly was brutally murdered, more hideously stabbed and mutilated than poor Martha Tabram had been, back on August Bank Holiday. Even if Annie had wanted to ask Polly who the letter writer had been, it was now impossible. So Annie had dug out the letters to look at them more closely-and realized immediately there would be no money coming, either, not anytime soon. Had Annie been able to read Welsh, she might have been able to turn the letters into a substantial amount of cash very quickly. But Annie couldn't read Welsh. Nor did she know anyone who could.

Which left her with a commodity worth a great deal of money and no way to realize the fortune it represented. So she did the only thing she could. She sold the letters, just as Polly had sold them to her. One went to a long-time acquaintance from the lodging houses along Dorset Street. Long Liz Stride was a kind-hearted soul born in Sweden, who bought the first letter for sixpence, which was enough for Annie to go to Spitalfields workhouse infirmary and buy one of the medications she needed.

The second letter went to Catharine Eddowes for a groat, and the third Annie sold to Mr. Joseph Barnett, a fish-porter who'd lost his job and was living in Miller's Court with the beautiful young Mary Kelly. Mr. Barnett paid Annie a

shilling for the last letter, giving her a wink and a kiss. "My Mary lived in Cardiff, y'know, speaks Welsh like a native, for all she was born in Ireland. Mary'll read it out for me, so she will. And if it's as good as you say, I'll come back and give you a bonus from the payout!"

The goat, worth four pence, and the shilling, worth twelve, bought Annie the rest of the medicine she needed from Whitechapel workhouse infirmary, plus a steady supply of beer and rum for the next couple of days. Alcohol was the only form of pain medication Annie could afford to buy and she was in pain constantly. She felt too ill most of the time to walk the streets, particularly all the way down to Stratford, where she normally plied her trade; but the medicine helped. If only the weather would clear, she might be able to breathe more easily again.

Annie regretted the sale of the letters. But a woman had to live, hadn't she? And blackmail was such a distasteful trade, no matter how a body looked at it. Polly had dazzled her with fanciful dreams of real comfort and proper medicines, but in Annie's world, such dreams were only for the foolish, people who didn't realize they couldn't afford to indulge their fancies when there was food to be gotten into the stomach and medicine to be obtained and a roof and bed to be paid for, somehow . . .

Being a practical woman, Annie put those brief, glittering dreams firmly behind her and got back to the business of staying alive as long as humanly possible in a world which did not care about the fate of one aging and consumptive widow driven to prostitution by sheer poverty. It wasn't much of a life, perhaps. But it was all she had. So, like countless thousands before her, "Dark Annie" Chapman made the best of it she could and kept on living—without the faintest premonition that utter disaster hung over her head like the executioner's sword.

Skeeter Jackson had an uncanny nose for trouble.

And this time, he landed right in the middle of it. One moment, he was intent on reaching Urbs Romae to join the Festival of Mars procession, having been delayed by a man moving suspiciously behind a woman gowned in expensive Japanese silk. The next, Skeeter found himself stranded between a solid wall of Angels of Grace Militia on his left and a whole pack of Ansar Majlis sympathizers and construction workers to his right.

He tried to backpedal, but it was far too late. Somebody's fist connected with an Ansar Majlis sympathizer's nose. Blood spurted. A roar went up from both sides, Ansar Majlis Brotherhood and Angels of Grace Militia. The crowd surged, fists swinging. A kiosk full of t-shirts and Ripper photo books toppled. Someone yelled obscenities as merchandise was trampled underfoot. A reek of sweat abused Skeeter's nostrils. Combatants plunged, dripping, into Edo Castletown's goldfish ponds, sending prehistoric birds flapping and screeching in protest from the trampled shrubbery. Then a ham-handed fist clouted his shoulder and the riot engulfed him.

Skeeter spun away from the blow. He tripped and teetered over the edge of the overturned kiosk, trying to keep his balance. Somebody hit him from the side. Skeeter yelled and slammed face first into a total stranger. He found himself tangled up with a viciously swearing woman, who sported a bleeding nose and a black uniform. Her eyes narrowed savagely. Angels of Grace hated all men, unless they worshipped the Lady of Heaven, and even then, they were suspicious of treason. Skeeter swore—and ducked a thick-knuckled fist aimed at his nose. He twisted, using moves he'd learned scrapping in the camp of the Yakka Mongols, trying to stay alive when the camp's other boys had decided to test the fighting skills and agility of their newly arrived bogdo.

Skeeter's lightning move sent the screeching woman into the waiting arms of a roaring Ansar Majlis construction worker. The collision was spectacular. Skeeter winced. Then yelped and ducked behind the toppled kiosk, dodging

another pair of locked, grappling combatants. He stared wildly around for a way out and didn't find anything remotely resembling an escape route. Not four feet away, Kit Carson stood calmly at the center of the riot, casually tossing bodies this way and that, regardless of size, mass, onrushing speed, or religious and political affiliations. The retired scout's expression wavered between disgust and boredom. A whole pile of bodies had accumulated at his feet, growing steadily even as Skeeter watched, awestruck.

Then a crash of drums and a screaming wail from a piper jerked Skeeter's attention around. The Festival of Mars processional had arrived. Just in time to be engulfed in battle. Skeeter caught a confused glimpse of misshapen, shaggy shapes like hirsute kodiak bears. Women in ring-mail armor who resembled a cartoonist's vision of ancient valkyries staggered into view, complete with shields, spears, and swords. Mixed in were several keen-eyed old women in ragged skins, whose screeches in Old Norse lifted the hair on Skeeter's nape.

Kynan Rhys Gower appeared from out of the melee, dressed in the uniform he'd been wearing when the Welsh bowman had stumbled through that unstable gate into the Battle of Orleans, fighting the French army under the command of Joan of Arc. Several other down-timers sported Roman-style armor, hand-made for this very festival out of metal cans and other scraps salvaged from the station's refuse bins. There was even a Spaniard clutching a blunderbuss, wild-eyed and shouting in medieval Spanish as the procession slammed headlong into the riot.

The shock of collision drove tourists scattering for their very lives.

Shangri-La's down-timers fought a pitched battle—and they fought dirty.

A wild-eyed construction worker reeled back from a sword blow, blood streaming down his face from the gash in his scalp. A black-uniformed ferret staggered past, locked in mortal combat with a six-foot bearskin draped over the head and down the back of a six-foot-eight Viking berserker. Skeeter dimly recognized the man under the bearskin as Eigil Bjarneson, a down-timer who'd stumbled through Valhalla's Thor's Gate several months previously. A sushi lunch stand swayed and crashed to the floor, spilling water and live fish underfoot. Several combatants slipped on the wriggling, slippery contents of the broken aquarium and fell. Skeeter caught a glimpse of onrushing motion from the corner of one eye and jumped back instinctively. A spear missed his midriff by inches, whistling past to embed itself in the wooden slats of a bench behind him.

The spear's intended victim, a roaring Ansar Majlis sympathizer, pulled a mortar trowel from his tool belt and launched himself at the ring-mail clad woman who'd thrown the spear. Then a giant Angel in black, screaming obscenities in tones to bend metal, lunged right at Skeeter. Obliging, Skeeter grasped the woman's outstretched arms and assisted her on her way, planting one foot and turning his hip in an effortless Aikido move he'd been practicing for months, now. For just an instant, the startled Militia Angel was airborne. Then the park bench behind Skeeter, complete with protruding spear, splintered under the Angel's landing. If Skeeter hadn't been practicing—and teaching his down-time friends-martial arts moves like that one, he'd have been under that mountain of curse-spitting Angel.

Then a man in a red shirt and burnoose, eyes wild and distorted, came in from Skeeter's off-side, and caught him while he still teetered off balance. Skeeter went down hard. He knew, at least, how to fall without doing himself injury, another legacy of scrapping fights with Yakka Mongol youngsters heavier and stronger than he was. Unfortunately, the man in red was heavy, too. A great deal heavier than Skeeter. And he landed right on top of Skeeter's chest, fists pounding everything within reach. Which mainly constituted Skeeter. A blow caught his ribs. Skeeter grunted, half-stunned. His own jab at the man's eyes narrowly missed the mark, but he raked the

bastard's nose with a fist and popped his Adam's apple with the side of his arm. Blood welled from both nostrils. The man roared, even as Skeeter twisted under him, trying to wriggle free. Another smashing blow landed against Skeeter's ribs. He gasped, trying to breathe against blossoming pain-

And somebody snatched the bastard up by his red shirt and dragged him off. Skeeter heard a meaty blow and a howl of pain, a curse in Arabic . . . Skeeter rolled to his hands and knees, gasping and cursing a little, himself. His ribs ached, but nothing felt broken. He staggered to his feet, aware of his exposed vulnerability on the floor. Then he blinked. The roar of battle had died away, almost to a whimper. Security had arrived in force. Several dozen uniformed officers were tossing weighted nets and swinging honest-to-God lassos, bringing down combatants five and six at a time. And the Arabian Nights construction foreman was directing more of his crew to help Security, throwing nets across enraged construction workers and dragging them out none too gently, holding them for security to handcuff. In seconds, the fight was effectively over.

Skeeter caught his breath as uniformed bodies waded in, yanking combatants off balance and cuffing them with rough efficiency. Weapons clattered to the cobblestones and lay where they'd fallen, abandoned by owners who found themselves abruptly under arrest. As Skeeter stood swaying, his shirt in shreds where he'd tried to wriggle away from the guy in the red shirt, he realized who'd helped him out. None other than Kit Carson was standing over the fallen Ansar Majlis sympathizer, breathing easily, gripping a cotton rag mop in both hands like a quarterstaff. An overturned mop bucket spread a puddle of dirty water behind the retired time scout, where someone on the maintenance crew had been caught up in the riot, as well. At least it wasn't Bergitta-she wasn't anywhere in sight. Judging from the trail of bruised, groaning figures behind Kit, leading from the jumbled pile of combatants Kit had already put down, the retired time scout knew how to use a quarterstaff effectively, too. The jerk in red on the floor was moaning and not moving much.

Then Kit glanced up, caught Skeeter's gaze, and relaxed fractionally. "You okay, Skeeter?"

He nodded, then winced at the bruising along his ribs. "Yeah. Thanks."

"My pleasure." He said it like he meant it. Literally. A feral grin had begun to stretch his lips. "Whoops, here comes Mike Benson. Him, you don't need breathing down your neck. Scoot, Skeeter. I'll catch you later."

Skeeter blinked, then made tracks. Kit was right about one thing. The last person Skeeter wanted to tangle with was Mike Benson cleaning up a riot. Skeeter disappeared into the stunned crowd as Rachel Eisenstein's medical team arrived, setting broken bones and sewing up gashes. Fortunately, from the look of things, they wouldn't be dealing with anything fatal. How, he wasn't sure. Spears, swords, knives, construction tools of half-a-dozen shapes and lethal potentialities . . . He shook his head in amazement. One member of the Angels of Grace Militia sported gashes down her face from a fistful of bear claws, where she'd made the mistake of taking a swing at Eigil Bjarneson.

And right at the edge of the riot zone, down at the border between Edo Castletown and Victoria Station, Skeeter found Ann Vinh Mulhaney, totally unscathed despite her tiny size. The petite firearms instructor was sitting calmly atop a wrought iron lamp post, with a small, lethal-looking revolver clutched in each hand. It was clear from the path of wreckage that no one had cared to challenge either her position or her person. Skeeter grinned and waved. Ann smiled and nodded, then holstered her pistols and slithered down the lamp post, lithe and agile as a sleek hunting cat. She landed lightly on the cobbles and headed Skeeter's way.

"Good God, Ann," he said, eying the guns she'd used to defend her perch, "you could've held off an army from up there. Those pistols of yours are cute

little things. What are they?"

The petite instructor chuckled. "Webleys, of course. The Royal Irish Constabulary Webley, a different animal altogether from your later military Webley. Pack quite a punch for their size, too, in a delightfully concealable package. Lots of Britannia tourists have been renting them for the Ripper tours."

"No wonder nobody challenged you up there."

She laughed easily. "Occasionally, we get a tourist or two with brains. I don't know about anybody else, but after all that excitement, I could use a drink to cool my throat. Come with us, why don't you, Skeeter?"

He flushed crimson, aware that what little money he had left wouldn't even cover the cost of a beer. "Uh, thanks, but I've got work to do. I'll, uh, take a raincheck, okay?" She probably knew he'd been fired, the whole station knew that, by now, but a guy had his pride, after all.

"Well, all right," she said slowly, studying him with her head tilted to one side. "See you around, then, Skeeter. Hey, Kit! Over here! I saw Robert headed toward Urbs Romae. What say we stop at the Down Time for a quick drink before Primary cycles? We'll probably catch up to Robert there and I heard they had a cask of Falernian . . ."

Skeeter edged his way deeper into the crowd as Kit exclaimed, "Falernian? When did they bring in a cask of heaven?"

Even Skeeter knew that Falernian was the Dom Perignon of ancient Roman wines. And Kit Carson was a connoisseur of fine wines and other potent potables. Skeeter sighed, wondering how marvellous it really tasted, aware that he wouldn't have been able to afford a glass of Falernian even if he had still been employed. But since he wasn't . . .

He cut around the damaged riot zone the long way, heading for Primary again. Skeeter dodged around one corner of the Shinto Shrine which had been built in the heart of Edo Castletown, and wheeled full-tilt into a short, stout woman. The collision rocked her back on her heels. Skeeter shot out a steadying hand to keep her from falling. Familiar blue eyes flashed indignantly up at him. "Cor, blimey, put a butcher's out, won't you, luv? Right near squashed me thrip'nny bits, you 'ave!"

That patter identified her faster than Skeeter could focus on her features. Molly, the down-timer Cockney barmaid who worked at the Down Time Bar & Grill, favorite haunt of station residents, was rubbing her substantial chest with one arm and grimacing. "Molly! What are you doing halfway to Primary Precinct?" Skeeter had to shout above the roar of voices as she tugged her dress to rights and glared sourly up at him. "I thought you were working late today? Did you get caught up in the Festival of Mars procession after all?"

Molly's expressive grimace encapsulated a wealth of disdain, loathing, and irritated anger into one twist of her mobile face. "Nah. Bleedin' newsies invaded, bad as any whirlin' dervishes, they are, wot broke a British square. Devil tyke 'em! I'd like t'see 'em done up like kippers, so I would. Got the manners of a gutter snipe, won't let a lady put 'er past be'ind 'er, not for all the quid in the Owd Lady of Threadneedle Street." When Skeeter drew a blank on that reference, as he often did with Molly's colorful Cockney, she chuckled and patted his arm. "Bank of England, me owd china, that's wot we called 'er, Owd Lady of Threadneedle Street."

"Oh." Skeeter grinned. "Me owd china, is it? I'm honored, Molly." She didn't admit friendship to many, not even among the down-timers. He wondered what he'd done to earn her good opinion. Her next words gave him the answer.

"I come up 'ere t'find Bergitta. Needs a place t'stay, is afraid o' that blagger wot blacked 'er face, livin' alone an' all, an' I got room in me flat, so I 'ave. It'd be cheaper, too, wiv two of us sharin' the bills."

Skeeter didn't know what to say. He found himself swallowing hard.

"You ain't seen 'er, then?"

He shook his head. "No. I was heading for Primary, when that riot broke out."

"Might come along, me own self," Molly mused. "Got nuffink better to do, 'til I finds Bergitta, anyway."

Skeeter grinned. "I'd be honored to escort you, Molly."

She fell into step beside him.

"I've never seen this many people at an opening of Primary." Skeeter had to shout above the roar of voices. Using elbows and a few underhanded moves, Skeeter shoved his way through the mob until he found a good vantage point where he and Molly could settle themselves to wait.

Gaudy splashes of color marked long lines of departing tourists and the hundreds of spectators arriving just to watch the show. Montgomery Wilkes, ruling head of BATF on station, wasn't in sight yet. Security officers were scarce, too, in the wake of the riot.

BATF carels, manned by tax-collection agents of the Bureau of Access Time Functions, carefully clad in dress-uniform red, lined the route into and out of Primary Precinct. Once past the BATF carels, inbound tourists and visitors arriving at TT-86 had to run a gauntlet of medical stations, a whole double row of them, which formed the entryway into the time terminal.

Tourists inbound had to scan their medical records into the station's database files before entering Shangri-La. This gave station medical baseline data to compare the tourists' health with, once they returned from their time tours. All departing tourists were required to undergo an intensive physical before leaving the station, as a quarantine procedure against exporting anything nasty up time. The system had stopped an outbreak of black death a couple of years back on TT-13, keeping the deadly plague from reaching the up-time world. The medical screening system wasn't foolproof, of course-nothing in life was-but it kept time tourism operational, which was the lifeblood of a station like Shangri-La.

Skeeter just hoped, with a superstitious shiver, that the irate up-time senator whose daughter had been kidnapped failed to swing enough votes to shut down the time terminals. If station violence on TT-86 continued much longer, he just might get those votes. If BATF was worried about it, however, that worry didn't show in the attitudes of its agents. They were as rude as ever, from what Skeeter could see of the check-out procedures underway. BATF agents ignored the increasing crush of onlookers, busy valuing souvenirs brought back from down-time gates. The agents' main job on station was to establish taxes due on whatever was brought up time from the gates and to levy fines for anyone caught smuggling out contraband. They searched luggage-and occasionally, the tourists and the couriers who ran supplies and mail back and forth through Primary-for anything undeclared that might be considered taxable. At one tax kiosk, a middle-aged lady with diamonds on every finger was protesting loudly that she hadn't any idea how those granulated Etruscan gold earrings and necklaces had come to be sewn into her Victorian corset. She hadn't put them in her suitcase, why, they must have been planted in her luggage by some ruffian . . .

"Tell it to the judge," the red-clad BATF agent said in a bored tone, "or pay the taxes."

"But I tell you--"

"Lady, you can either pay the five-thousand-dollar tax fine due on this jewelry, or you can turn it over to a representative of the International Federation of Art Temporally Stolen, to see that it's returned to its proper place of origin, or you can go to prison for violating the Prime Rule of time travel. You can't profit illegally from a time gate. Robert Li is the designated IFARTS agent for Shangri-La Station. His studio is in Little Agora. You have exactly a quarter of an hour to dispose of it there or pay the taxes due here."

The woman sputtered indignantly for a long moment, then snapped, "Oh, all right! Will you take a check?"

"Yes, ma'am, if you have three forms of identification with a permanent address that matches the information you gave in your records when you entered Shangri-La Station. Make it payable to the Bureau of Access Time Functions."

"Fine!" She was digging into a large, exquisitely wrought handbag. That bag had walked out of some designer's studio in Paris, or Skeeter didn't know high fashion. And since Skeeter had made it a lifelong practice to keep tabs on haute couture as well as cheap knock-offs, as a way of distinguishing rich, potential marks from wannabe pretenders, he was pretty sure it was the real McCoy. She dragged out a checkbook cover made from genuine ostrich leather with a diamond insignia in one corner and scribbled out a check. Five thousand was probably what she dropped on restaurant tables as tips in the course of an average month. Skeeter shook his head. The richer they were, the more they tried to pull, sneaking out contraband past customs.

The BATF agent verified her identification and accepted the check.

The lady stuffed her Etruscan gold back into her corset with wounded dignity and snapped shut the case, moving deeper into the departures area with an autocratic sniff.

"Next!"

Gate announcements sounded every ten minutes until the five-minute mark, after which the loudspeaker warnings began coming every minute, reminding stragglers they were running out of time. At the three-minute warning, a familiar voice from somewhere behind him startled Skeeter into glancing around.

"Skeeter!"

He caught a glimpse of Rachel Eisenstein pushing through the crowd. She was panting hard, clearly having run most of the way from the infirmary.

"Rachel? What's wrong?" He entertained momentary, panic-stricken visions of Bergitta having thrown a blood clot from that beating or something else equally life threatening. As Shangri-La's Station's chief of medicine pushed her way through to Skeeter and Molly, he grasped her hand. "What is it? What's wrong?"

Rachel blinked in startled surprise. "Wrong? Oh, Skeeter, I'm sorry, of course you'd think something's happened to Bergitta. Nothing's wrong at all, other than I just finished triage from that riot and decided I'd better work Primary, too, just in case." She patted a heavy hip pack. "Brought all the essentials. I was just trying to get here before the gate opened, hoping I might find someone I recognized who already had a good spot. Hi, Molly!"

Skeeter drew a long, deep breath and slowly relaxed. "Well, we've got a decent spot. You're welcome to share."

"Thanks, this is a great spot." Rachel pushed back damp hair from her brow. "God, I hope we don't have another riot on the heels of that mess."

"Me, either," Skeeter muttered. "Because now I've got two ladies to look out for, if the fists start flying."

The slim surgeon smiled, dark eyes sparkling. "Skeeter, I'm touched, really. I didn't know you cared. What brings you out here in all this madness?"

"Me?" Skeeter shrugged, wondering if she'd believe the truth. "I, uh, was wondering how many pickpockets and con artists I might spot on their way in."

Rachel Eisenstein shot him a surprisingly intent stare. "I have been paying attention, you know, Skeeter. I'm not sure, exactly, what triggered it, although I suspect it had something to do with Ianira."

He flushed. "You could say that." Skeeter shrugged. "I'm just trying to make things better around here. For the down-timers." He glanced at Molly, whose eyes reflected a quiet pride that closed his throat. "Folks like Molly, here, they've got a rough enough time as it is, trying to survive, without some jerk stealing them blind." Skeeter shrugged again and changed the subject. "I've

been keeping count of outgoing departures. I was up to nearly a hundred before you got here. Want to bet we get more inbound than we send back outbound?"

Rachel chuckled. "No bets!"

Skeeter grinned. "Wise woman."

The klaxon sounded again, blasting away at Skeeter's eardrums. "Your attention please. Gate One is due to open in one minute. All departures, be advised that if you have not cleared Station Medical, you will not be permitted to pass Primary. Please have your baggage ready for customs . . ."

The departures in line hastily gathered up their luggage. Those still at the customs tables scrambled to pay the astronomical taxes demanded as a condition of departure. Then the savage lash of subharmonics which heralded the opening of a major temporal gate struck Skeeter square in the skull bones. A fierce headache comprised of equal parts low blood sugar, stress, and gate subharmonics blossomed, causing him to wince. Skeeter resisted the urge to cover his ears, knowing it wouldn't shut out the painful noise that wasn't a noise, and simply waited.

The sight was always impressive as Primary opened up out of thin air. A point of darkness appeared five feet above the Commons floor. It grew rapidly, amoeba-like, its black, widening center an oil stain spreading across the air. The outer edges of the dark hole in reality dopplered through the whole visible spectrum, with the spreading fringes shimmering like a runaway rainbow. A stir ran through the spectators. Every person in the station had seen temporal gates open before, of course, but the phenomenon never failed to raise chill bumps or the fine hairs along the back of the neck as the fabric of reality shifted and split itself wide open . . .

A flurry of startled grunts and a rising flood of profanities sounded behind them. Skeeter turned to crane his head above the crowd. "Aw, nuts . . ."

Literally.

The Angels of Grace Militia, at least the portion that had escaped arrest during the riot, was on a crash-course drive for Primary, shoving their way through by brute force.

"What is it?" Rachel asked, trying to see.

"Angel Squad, inbound."

Molly's comment was in obscure Cockney, defying translation.

Rachel rolled her eyes. "Oh, God. Please don't tell me they're expecting reinforcements from up time, too?"

"Well," Skeeter scratched his ear, "scuttlebutt has it their captain was seen buying a ticket for some general of theirs who's coming in for a Philosopher's Gate tour. Wants to see the city where Ianira lived in subjugation to an evil male of the species."

"Oh, God, Skeeter, I told you not to tell me they were bringing in reinforcements!"

"Sorry," he grinned sheepishly.

Rachel scowled up at him and stood on tiptoe, trying to spot the onrushing Angels. Molly just thinned her lips and moved into a slightly aggressive stance, waiting for whatever might come next. Moving in a close-packed wedge, the Angel Squad drove through the waiting crowd on an unstoppable course, shoving and bullying their way through. One brief altercation ended with a tourist clutching at a bloodied nose while Angels burst past him on a course that would bring them out right about where Skeeter stood with Molly and Rachel. He braced for bad trouble for the second time in a quarter hour, wondering whether it might not be wiser to simply cut and run, taking himself, Molly, and Rachel out of their path, or whether he ought to stand his ground on general principles.

At that instant, an ear-splitting klaxon shattered the air.

Skeeter jerked his gaze around just in time to see it. Primary had opened wide enough to begin the transfer of out-bound tourists. Only they hadn't

gotten very far. A writhing, entangled mass of humanity crashed straight through Primary, inbound.

Rachel gasped. "What in the world-? Nobody crashes Primary!"

But a howling swarm of people had done just that, shoving through into Shangri-La Station before the outgoing departures could get off to a good start. Klaxons blared insanely. The mad, hooting rhythm all but deafened. Nearly a hundred shouting people stormed into Shangri-La Station in a seething mass, rushing past medical stations, past screaming tourists and howling BATF agents, past everything in their path, as though they owned the entire universe.

"Has every nut in the universe decided to converge on Primary today?"

"I don't know!" Rachel shook her head. "But this could get ugly, whoever they are."

Skeeter agreed. Whoever the new arrivals were, they were headed right this way. And where were those damned Angels? He tried to peer back through the crowd where the Angels of Grace still plowed toward them, a juggernaut at full steam. At that moment, Montgomery Wilkes shot from his office at a dead run, driving forward like a hurtled war spear straight into the boiling knot of close-packed humanity crashing through Primary. The head of BATF wielded his authority like a machete. "HALT! Every one of you! Stop right now! And I mean-

Monty never finished.

Someone in that on-rushing maelstrom shoved him. Hard.

The seething head of BATF slammed sideways, completely out of the swarm inbound through Primary. Wilkes careened headlong into the chaos of the departure line. Windmilling wildly, he inadvertently knocked down a woman, three kids, and a crate of sixteenth-century Japanese porcelain which had just been valued and taxed by Monty's agents. Its owner, a departing businessman, teetered for an instant, as well. Monty, staggering and stumbling in a half circle, caromed off the businessman and continued on through the line into the concrete wall beyond. They connected-Monty's face and the wall-with a sickening SPLAT!

Wilkes slid, visibly dazed, to the floor just as the Japanese businessman went down. He landed as badly as his irreplaceable porcelain. That didn't fare nearly as well when it hit the concrete. Japanese curses-which followed the confirmation of utter ruin-poured out above the noise of yelling voices and screaming klaxons. Monty Wilkes simply sat on the floor blinking wet eyes. His agents gaped, open-mouthed, for a long instant, motionless with shock. Then they scattered, antlike. Some broke toward the gate crashers and others raced to their employer's rescue. Sirens and klaxons wailed like storm winds on the Gobi-

Skeeter abruptly found himself tangled up in the outer edges of a churning cyclone of vid-cam crews, remote-lighting technicians, and shouting newsies. Skeeter staggered. A long boom microphone attached to a human being slammed violently sideways. It very nearly knocked him off his feet. Pain blossomed down the side of his head and through his shoulder. Skeeter spat curses and tried to protect Rachel's head when a heavy camera swung straight toward her skull. Molly went spinning under a body slam from someone twice her height.

Then another jostling, shouting mob slammed into them from behind.

The Angels of Grace had arrived.

The seething chaos crashing Primary staggered as the juggernaut of black-clad Angels crashed into it, full speed. Skeeter heard shouts and threats and screeches of protest. A fist connected with someone's nose. An ugly exchange of profanity exploded into the supercharged air . . .

"Armstrong!"

Hard, grasping hands forcibly jerked Skeeter around. A tall, powerful stranger yanked him forward. "Armstrong, you son-of-a-bitch! Where's my

daughter?"

Over the shoulder of the gorilla breaking his arm, Skeeter glimpsed a living wall of newsies and camera operators. They stared right at him, eyes and mouths rounded. Skeeter blinked stupidly into a dimly familiar face . . .

One that darkened as sudden shock and anger registered. "You're not Noah Armstrong! Who the hell are you?"

"Who am I?" Skeeter's brain finally caught up. He dislodged the man's grip with a violent jerk of his arm. "Who the hell are you?"

Before anybody could utter a single syllable, the embattled Angels exploded.

"Death to tyrants!"

"Get him!"

For just an instant, Skeeter saw a look of stupefied surprise cross the stranger's face. The man's mouth sagged open. Then his whole face drained absolutely white. Not in fear. In fury. The explosion went off straight into Skeeter's face. "What in hell is going on in this God-cursed station?"

Skeeter's mouth worked, but no sound emerged.

"What are those lunatics"--he jabbed a finger at the Angels--"doing brawling with my staff? Answer me! Where's your station security? You!" The man who'd mistaken him for somebody named Noah Armstrong grabbed Skeeter's arm again, yanked him off balance. "Take me to your station manager's office! Now!"

"Hey! Take your hands off me!" Skeeter wrenched free. "Didn't anybody teach you assault's illegal?"

The stranger's eyes widened fractionally, then narrowed into angry grey slits. "Just who do you think you're talking to? I'd better get some cooperation out of this station, starting with you, whoever you are, or this station's jail is going to be full of petty officials charged with obstruction of justice!"

Skeeter opened his mouth again, not really sure what might come out of it, but at that moment, Bull Morgan, himself, strode through the chaos at Primary. The station manager moved with jerky strides as he maneuvered his fireplug-shaped self on a collision course with Skeeter and the irate stranger.

"Out of the way," Bull growled, shouldering aside newsie crews and BATF agents with equal disregard for their status. He puffed his way up like a tugboat and stuck out one ham-sized hand. "Bull Morgan, Station Manager, Time Terminal Eighty-Six. I understand you wanted to see me?"

Skeeter glanced from Bull's closed and wary expression to the stranger's flushed jowls and seething grey eyes and decided other climes were doubtless healthier places to take himself . . .

"Marshal!" the stranger snapped.

A red-faced bull moose in a federal marshal's uniform detached itself from the chaos boiling around them. Said moose produced a set of handcuffs, which he promptly snapped around Bull Morgan's wrists.

Skeeter's jaw dropped.

So did Bull's. His unlit cigar hit the floor with an inaudible thud.

"Mr. Clarence Morgan, you are hereby placed under arrest on charges of kidnapping, misuse of public office, willful disregard of public safety, violation of the prime directive of temporal travel--"

"What?"

--and tax evasion. You are hereby remanded to federal custody. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law--"

From somewhere directly behind Skeeter, a woman in a black uniform let out a strangled bellow. "You slimy little dictator! Take your trumped up charges and your Stalinist terror tactics off our station!"

Somebody threw a punch . . .

The riot erupted in every direction. A camera smashed to the concrete floor. Somebody sprawled into Skeeter's line of vision, clutching at a bloody nose

and loosened teeth. Another black-clad Angel loomed out of the crowd, fists cocked. Molly's gutter Cockney scalded someone's ears. A newsie went flying and somebody screamed-

The tear gas hit them all at the same instant.

Riot turned abruptly to rout.

Skeeter coughed violently, eyes burning. Rachel Eisenstein staggered into him, bent almost double. A ring of uniformed federal officers materialized out of the spreading cloud, masked against the gas, spewing chemical spray from cannisters in a three-sixty degree swath. They surrounded Bull Morgan and the infuriated, cursing stranger, making sure the latter didn't collapse onto the floor. Moving with neat, deadly calm, more than a dozen federal agents took charge. Snub-nosed riot guns flashed into a bristling circle, muzzles pointed outward.

Newsies fell over one another as they tried to evade armed feds, livid BATF officers, residents trying to get away through the chaos, Shangri-La Security arriving too late to prevent disaster, screaming Angels, and panic-stricken tourists. As the tear gas spread, the inbound traffic arriving through Primary disintegrated into a shambles.

Skeeter grabbed Rachel's wrist and hauled her bodily toward Edo Castletown. They had to get clear of this insanity. Weird, distorted shouts and cries rose on all sides. He couldn't see Molly anywhere. He could barely see, at all. They slithered feet-first into a goldfish pond and nearly fell, then splashed through knee-deep water and ran into screaming, wailing tourists and floating timbers where one of the Edo Castletown bridge railings had collapsed. Skeeter scrambled up the other side of the pond, pulling Rachel up behind him, and half-fell through a screen of shrubbery, then they stumbled into a miraculous pocket of clear air. Skeeter dragged down a double lungful of it, coughing violently. He tried to keep Rachel on her feet, but was hardly able to keep his own.

"Let me help!"

The familiar voice rang practically in his ear. Someone got an arm around Rachel and drew her forward, then somebody grasped Skeeter's elbow and hauled him out of the chaos on tottering feet. Blinded by the tear gas, Skeeter allowed himself to be propelled along. Noise and confusion faded. Then someone else got an arm around him and a few moments later, he found his face buried in blessedly cool, running water. He coughed again and again, blinked streaming, burning eyes. He managed to choke out, "Rachel?"

"She's all right, Skeeter. Damned good job you did, getting her out of that mess."

He heard her coughing somewhere beside him and wondered with an anxious jolt what had become of Molly. Skeeter rinsed his eyes again, swearing under his breath, furious with himself for failing yet again to protect a friend in the middle of a station riot. He was finally able to blink his eyes and keep them open without burning pain sending new tears streaming down his face.

Skeeter was standing, improbably, in what looked like the bathrooms off the Neo Edo Hotel lobby. The mirror showed him a sodden mess that had once been his face. He shook his head, spraying water, and started to scrub his face with both hands. Someone grabbed his wrists and said hastily, "Wash them off, first. They're covered with CS." Slippery liquid soap cascaded across his fingers.

That voice sounded so familiar, Skeeter glanced up, startled. And found himself staring eyeball to reddened eyeball with Kit Carson.

Skeeter's mouth fell open. The lean and grizzled former time scout smiled, a trifle grimly. "Wash your hands, Skeeter. Before you rub tear gas into your eyes again." Behind Kit's shoulder, Robert Li, the station's resident antiquarian, bent over another sink, helping Rachel rinse tear gas out of her eyes. Belatedly, Skeeter noticed the floppy rubber gas mask dangling from

Kit's neck. Where the devil had Kit Carson found a gas mask? Surely he hadn't bought one from that Templar selling them down in Little Agora? Wherever he'd stashed it—probably that fabled safe of his, up in the Neo Edo Hotel's office—there'd been two of 'em, because Robert Li wore one, too. Well, maybe Kit had bought them from that Templar, after all. He was smart enough to prepare for any kind of trouble. Wordlessly, Skeeter washed his hands.

When he'd completed the ritual, which helped him regain his composure and some measure of his equilibrium, he straightened up and met Kit's gaze again. He was startled by the respect he found there. "Thanks," Skeeter mumbled, embarrassed.

Kit merely nodded. "Better strip off those clothes. The Neo Edo's laundry staff can clean the tear gas out of them."

Well, why not? Skeeter had done stranger things in his life than strip naked in front of Kit Carson and the station's leading antiquities expert in the middle of the most expensive bathroom in Shangri-La Station while a riot raged outside. He was down to his skivvies when Hashim Ibn Fahd, a down-time teenager who'd stumbled, shocked, through the new Arabian Nights gate, arrived. Dressed in Neo Edo Hotel bellhop livery, which startled Skeeter, since Hashim hadn't been employed two days previously, the boy carried a bundle of clothing under one arm and a large plastic sack.

"Here," Hashim said, holding out the sack. "Put everything inside, Skeeter."

"Have you seen Molly?"

"No, Skeeter. But I will search, if Mr. Carson allows?"

Kit nodded. "I didn't realize she was caught in that mess, too, or I'd have pulled her out along with Skeeter and Rachel."

The down-timer boy handed over his plastic sack and ran for the door. Skeeter dumped in his dress slacks and his shirt, the one the irate construction worker had ripped not thirty minutes previously. The jingle of important things rattled in his pockets. "Uh, my stuff's in there."

"We'll salvage everything, Skeeter," Kit assured him. "There's an emergency shower in that last stall, back there. Sluice off and get dressed. This is going to get mighty ugly, mighty fast. I don't want you anyplace where that asshole out there," he nodded toward the riot still underway outside the Neo Edo, "can lay hands on you. Not without witnesses."

That sounded even more ominous than the riot.

"Uh, Kit?" he asked uncertainly.

The retired time scout glanced around. "Yes?"

Skeeter swallowed nervously. "Just who was that guy, anyway? He looked sorta familiar . . ."

Kit's eyes widened. "You didn't recognize him? Good God. And here I thought you had a set the size of Everest. That was Senator John Caddrick."

Skeeter's knees jellied.

Kit gripped his shoulder. "Buck up, man. I don't think you'll be going to jail anytime in next ten minutes, anyway, so shower that stuff off. We'll convene a council of war, after, shall we?"

There being nothing of intelligence Skeeter could say in response to that, he simply padded off barefooted across the marble floor of the Neo Edo's luxurious bathroom, wondering how in hell Kit Carson proposed to get Skeeter out of this one. He groaned. Oh, God, this was all they needed, with Ianira Cassondra's suspicious disappearance, fatal shootings on station during two major station riots, not counting today's multiple disasters . . .

Why Senator Caddrick, of all people? And why now? If Caddrick was here, did that mean his missing, kidnapped kid had been brought here, too? By the Ansar Majlis? Skeeter held back a groan. He had an awful feeling Shangri-La Station was in fatal trouble.

Where that left Skeeter's adopted, down-timer family . . .

Skeeter ground his molars and turned on the emergency shower. Shangri-La

Station wasn't going down without a fight! If Senator Caddrick meant to shut them down, he was in for the biggest battle of his life. Skeeter Jackson was fighting for the very survival of his adopted clan, for everything he held sacred and decent in the world.

Yakka Mongols, even adopted ones, were notoriously dirty fighters. And they did not like to lose.

Chief Inspector Conroy Melvyn, as head of the Ripper Watch Team, had the right to tell Malcolm what he wanted to try when it came to searching for the Ripper's identity, and what Conroy Melvyn wanted was to know who this mysterious doctor was, assisting James Maybrick. Malcolm, exhausted by days of searching for Benny Catlin, didn't think Melvyn's latest scheme was going to work. But he was, as they said in the States, the boss, and what the boss wanted . . .

Nor could Margo tackle this particular guiding job. Not even Douglas Tanglewood was properly qualified. But Malcolm was. So Malcolm Moore dressed to the nines and ordered the best carriage Time Tours' Gatehouse maintained, and set his teeth against weariness as they jolted through the evening toward Pall Mall and the gentlemen's clubs for some trace of a doctor answering their mystery Ripper's description.

Conroy Melvyn, Guy Pendergast, and Pavel Kostenka rode with him, the latter agreeing to remain silent throughout the evening, since men of foreign birth were not welcomed in such clubs unless they were widely known as prominent international celebrities, which Pavel Kostenka was not—at least, not in 1888. And he was still very much shaken by the riot which had endangered his life in Whitechapel earlier in the week. Conroy Melvyn would also have to remain close-mouthed in these elite environs, given his working-class accent; if pressed, Malcolm would explain that he was with the police, investigating a case, but hoped to avoid any such scene, which would irretrievably damage his own reputation. No gentleman would be forgiven for bringing a low and vulgar creature like a policeman into an establishment such as the Carlton Club, their first destination for the evening.

Of the three men Malcolm would be guiding this evening, Guy Pendergast would be the least restrained by circumstances. And he remained the most ebulliently convinced of his own immortality, as well, constantly suggesting mad "research" schemes which Malcolm and Douglas and Margo had to veto, sometimes forcefully. Undaunted, Pendergast chatted amiably the whole ride, trying to draw out the Ripper scholars on the subject of the evening's search and chuckling at their close-mouthed irritation.

They finally reached Robert Smirke's famous clubhouse of 1836, which was fated for destruction by Nazi bombs in 1940, and Malcolm told the carriage driver to wait for an hour, then entered the ornately popular Carlton Club, which lay situated beautifully between ultra-fashionable St. James's Square—with its statue of William III and the minaret-steeped church of St. James's Piccadilly visible above the tall, stately buildings—and Carlton House Terrace on the opposite side. The lovely Carlton Gardens ran along Carlton Club's open, easterly facing side, completing the stately club's picturesque, fashionable setting.

Malcolm was known here, as he was in all of the gentlemen's clubs of Pall Mall and Waterloo Place, having procured memberships in each for business purposes as a temporal guide. He greeted the doorman with a nod and introduced his guests, anglicizing Dr. Kostenka's name, then ushered them into the familiar, tobacco-scented halls of the gentleman's private domain. Massive mahogany furniture and dark, rich colors dominated. There was no trace of feminine frills, of the crowding of bric-a-brac, or the typical housewifely clutter which dominated most gentlemen's private homes. Malcolm and his guests checked their tall evening hats, canes, and gloves, but Malcolm declined to

check his valise, which held his log and ATLS, pleading business matters.

"I would suggest, gentlemen," he told his charges, "that we begin in one of the gaming rooms where card tables have been set up."

Conversation flowed thick as the brandy and the heavy port wines in evidence at every elbow. Voices raised in laughter swirled around others engaged in conversation which was not deemed socially proper for mixed company, accompanied by blue-grey clouds of tobacco smoke. Copies of infamous publications such as *The Pearl*, a short-lived but popular pornographic magazine, could be seen in a few hands where gentlemen lounged beneath gas lights, reading and trading jokes.

"-meeting of the Theosophists, this evening?" a passing gentleman asked his companion.

"Where, here? No, I hadn't realized. What an intriguing set of gentlemen, although I daresay they would do well to be rid of that horrid Madame Blavatsky!"

Both gentlemen laughed and climbed an ornate staircase for the second floor of the club. Malcolm paused, wondering if he ought not follow his instincts.

"What is it?" Pendergast asked.

"Those gentlemen just spoke of a Theosophical meeting here this evening."

Pendergast frowned. "A what meeting?"

"Theosophical Society. One of London's foremost occult research organizations."

Pendergast chuckled. "Bunch of lunatics, no doubt. Too bad Dr. Feroz couldn't accompany us, eh?"

Conroy Melvyn, keeping his voice carefully low, said, "You thinkin' what I am, Moore? Our man might be a member, eh? Respected doctor, what? Any number of medical men were attracted to such groups."

"Precisely. I believe it might be worth our while to attend this evening's meeting."

They fell in behind a group of gentlemen heading for the same staircase, following a snatch of conversation which marked them as probable Theosophists.

"-spoke to an American fellow once, from some cotton-mill town in South Carolina. Claimed he'd spoken to an elderly gentlemen who raised the dead."

"Oh, come now, what guff! It's one thing to debate the existence of an ability to converse with the departed. I've seen what a spiritualist medium can do, in seances and with automatic writing and what have you, but raise the dead? Stuff and falderol! I suppose next you'll be claiming this Yank thought himself Christ Jesus?"

Malcolm moved his hand unobtrusively, very carefully switching on the scout's log concealed in the valise he carried, with its tiny digital camera disguised as the stickpin in his cravat. He followed the gentlemen, listening curiously as they crossed a grand lounge and neared the staircase.

"No, no," the first gentleman was protesting, "not literally raise the dead, raise the spirit of the dead, to converse with it, you know. Without a medium or a mysteriously thumping table tapping out inscrutable messages. To accomplish the feat, one had to procure the rope used to hang a man, stake it out around the grave of the chap you wished to raise and repeat some gibberish in Latin, I don't recall what, now, then the poor sod's spirit would appear inside the rope and voila! You're able to converse at your leisure until cock crow. Of course, the spirit couldn't leave the confines of the roped-off ground . . ."

"And you didn't tumble to the fact that this Yank was having you on?"

A low rumbling chuckle reached through the pall of smoke. "No, I assure you, he was not. Senile as they come, I daresay, the chap was ninety if he was a day, but perfectly sincere in his beliefs."

Malcolm was about to take his first step toward the second floor when a voice hailed him by name. "I say, it's Moore, isn't it!"

The unexpected voice startled him into swinging around. Malcolm found himself looking into the bemused and vivid blue eyes of a gentleman he vaguely thought he was supposed to know. He was a young man, barely past his early twenties, handsome in a Beau Brummel sort of fashion, with wavy dark hair, the brilliant blue eyes and fair skin of an Irishman, and the same elegant, almost effete fastidiousness of the trend setter whose name had been synonymous with fashion during the Regency period some sixty-eight years previously.

"It is Malcolm Moore, isn't it?" the young man added with a wry smile. A trace of Dubliner Irish in the man's voice echoed in familiar ways, telling Malcolm he was, indeed, supposed to know this friendly faced young man.

"Yes, I am, but I fear you've the advantage of me, sir."

"O'Downett's the name, Bevin O'Downett. We met, let me see, it would have been nearly a year ago, I believe, at last summer's Ascot Races." Eyes twinkling merrily, Mr. O'Downett chuckled, a good-natured sound. "I recall it quite distinctly, you see. We bet on the same rotten nag, came in dead last."

The face and name clicked in Malcolm's memory. "Of course! Mr. O'Downett, how good to see you again!" They shook hands cordially as Malcolm grimaced in rueful remembrance. He, too, had excellent cause to recall that race. He'd placed that losing bet on behalf of a client who'd hired him as guide, a millionaire who considered himself an expert on sport, particularly on the subject of horse racing. Malcolm had warned the fool not to bet on that particular horse, aware as he was of its record in past races, but the client is, as they say, always right . . . Both Malcolm and this young Irishman, Mr. O'Downett, here, had lost spectacularly.

Malcolm introduced his unexpected acquaintance to his guests. "Mr. O'Downett, may I present Mr. Conroy Melvyn and Mr. Guy Pendergast, of London, and Dr. Kosten, of America."

"Pleasure to meet you," O'Downett smiled, shaking hands all around. "I say," he added, "where've you been keeping yourself, Moore? Oh, wait, I recall now, you're from the West Indies, knock about the world a good bit. Envy you that, you know."

Malcolm was trying for the life of him to recall anything about Mr. O'Downett, other than one ill-placed bet. "And you?" he asked a bit lamely.

"Ah, well, fortune smiles and then she frowns, as they say. But I did manage to publish a volume of poetry. A slim one, true, but published, nonetheless." His eyes twinkled again, laughing at himself, this time. "Druidic rubbish, nothing like the serious verse I prefer, but it sells, God knows, it does sell. This Celtic renaissance will make gentlemen of us Dubliners, yet." He winked solemnly.

Malcolm smiled. "It does seem to be rather popular. Have you been to the Eisteddfod, then, since Druidic verse appeals to the book-buying masses?"

"Hmm, that Welsh bardic thing they put together over in Llangollen? No, I haven't, although I suppose if I'm to represent the Celtic pen, I had probably ought to go, eh? Have you attended one?"

"As a matter of fact, no, although I intend to do so when they hold another." Malcolm laughed easily. "Moore's a French name, you know, originally, anyway. It's whispered that the back of our family closet might have contained a Gaulish Celt or two rattling round as skeletons."

O'Downett clapped him heartily on the shoulder. "Well said, Moore! Well said! It is, indeed, the day of the Celtic Fringe, is it not? I've spoken to gentlemen whose grandsires were Prussian generals who were 'Celts' and pure London Saxons who were 'Celts' and, God forbid, a half-caste Indian fellow in service as a footman who was a 'Celt' at least on his father's side!"

Malcolm shared the chuckle, finding it doubly humorous, since there was a wealth of evidence-linguistic, literary, musical, legal, and archaeological-to suggest that the Celtic laws, languages, customs and arts of Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, and Gaulish France bore direct and striking ties to Vedic

India.

"And speaking of grand and glorious Celts," Mr. O'Downett said, eyes twinkling wickedly, "here comes the grandest of all us Celtic poets. I say, Willie, have you come for our little meeting this evening? I'd thought you would be haunting Madame Blavatsky's parlour tonight."

Malcolm Moore turned . . . and had to catch his breath to keep from exclaiming out loud. His chance acquaintance had just greeted the most profoundly gifted poet ever born in Ireland, the soon-to-be world-famous William Butler Yeats.

"Willie" Yeats smiled at O'Downett, his own eyes glowing with a fire-eaten look that spoke of a massively restless intellect. "No, not tonight, Bevin. The good lady had other plans. Occasionally, even our peripatetic madame pursues other interests." Yeats was clearly laughing at himself. The Dubliner Irish was far more pronounced in the newcomer's voice. Yeats was still in his twenties, having arrived with his parents from Dublin only the previous year, 1887.

Bevin O'Downett smiled and made introductions. "Willie, I say, have you met Mr. Malcolm Moore? West Indian gentleman, travels about a good bit, met him at Ascot last year. Mr. Moore, my dear friend, Mr. William Butler Yeats."

Malcolm found himself shaking the hand of one of the greatest poets ever to set pen to paper in the English language. "I'm honored, sir."

"Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Moore," Yeats smiled easily.

Malcolm felt almost like the air was fizzing. Yeats was already considered an occult authority, despite his relative youth. Malcolm thanked that unknown American ghost-summoner for inducing him to turn on the scout's log in his valise. He managed to retain enough presence of mind to introduce his own companions, who shook Yeats' hand in turn. Guy Pendergast didn't appear to have the faintest notion who Yeats was-or would be-but Conroy Melvyn's face had taken on a thunderstruck look and even Pavel Kostenka was staring, round-eyed, at the young poet who would legitimize Irish folk lore as a serious art form and subject of scholarly interest, as no other Irishman had managed in the stormy history of Irish-Anglo relations, and would be branded the most gifted mystic writer since William Blake.

Bevin O'Downett winked at his fellow Irishman. "Mr. Moore, here, was just sharing a piece of his family history," he chuckled. "A Gaulic Celt or two, he says, rattled about in earlier branches of the family's gnarled old tree."

Yeats broke out into an enthusiastic smile. "Are you a Celtic scholar, then, Mr. Moore?" he asked, eyes alight with interest.

"No, not really." Malcolm smiled, although he probably knew more about Celtic and Druidic history than any expert alive in Great Britain tonight. "My real interest is antiquity of another sort. Roman, mostly."

O'Downett grinned, bending a fond look on his friend. "Willie is quite the antiquarian, himself."

Yeats flushed, acutely embarrassed. "Hardly, old bean, hardly. I dabble in Celtic studies, really, is all."

"Stuff and nonsense, Willie here is a most serious scholar. Helped co-found the Dublin Hermetic Society, didn't you? And Madame Blavatsky finds your scholarship most serious, indeed."

Malcolm, anxious to put the young poet at ease, gave Yeats a warm, encouraging smile. "You're interested in Theosophy, then, Mr. Yeats?" He knew, of course, that Yeats pursued a profound interest in Theosophy and any other studies which touched on the occult. The new and wildly popular organization established by Madame Blavatsky devoted itself to psychical and occult studies along the lines of the "Esoteric Buddhism" which she and so many other practitioners were popularizing.

Clearly uncertain where Malcolm stood on the issue, the young Irish poet cleared his throat nervously. "Well, sir, yes, I am, sir. Most interested in

Theosophy and, ah, many such studies."

Malcolm nodded, endeavoring to keep his expression friendly, rather than awestruck. "You've read Wise's new History of Paganism in Caledonia? Intriguing ideas on the development of religion and philosophy."

The young poet brightened. "Yes, sir, I have, indeed, read it! Borrowed a copy as soon as I arrived in London last year, as it had just been published. And I've read Edward Davies, of course, and D.W. Nash on Taliesin."

"Ah, the British druid who was said to have met Pythagoras. Yes, I've read that, as well."

Malcolm did not share his opinion on Nash's theories about the so-called British druid, whose existence had been fabricated whole cloth. Probably not by Nash, for the myth was widespread and persistent, but it was myth, nonetheless. "And have you read Charles Graves' latest work?"

"The Royal Commission's study of ancient Irish Brehon laws? Absolutely, sir!"

And the young poet's smile was brilliant, filled with understandable pride in the accomplishments of his forebears, who had been recognized throughout the western world in past centuries as the finest physicians, poets, musicians, and religious scholars of medieval Europe. The Brehon legal system of medieval Ireland had included such "modern" concepts as universal health care and even workman's compensation laws.

"Excellent!" Malcolm enthused. "Marvellous scholarship in that work. Graves is expanding the knowledge of ancient Britain tremendously. And do you, Mr. Yeats, hold that the Druids built Stonehenge?"

Yeats flushed again, although his eyes glowed with delighted interest. "Well, sir, I'm not an archaeologist, but it strikes me that the standing stones must be of considerable antiquity. At least centuries old, I should think?"

Malcolm smiled again. "Indeed. Millennia, to be more precise. Definitely pre-Roman, most definitely. Even the greatest Egyptologist of our day, Mr. W.M. Flinders Petrie, agrees on that point. Keep up the scholarship, Mr. Yeats. We need good, strong research into our own islands' histories, eh? By God, ancient Britain has a history to be proud of! This Celtic revival is a fine thing, a very fine thing, indeed!"

Bevin O'Downett nodded vehement agreement. "Quite so, sir! I say, have you heard that fellow speak down at the Egyptian Hall? That Lithuanian-looking chap, although he's as British as a gold sovereign, what's he calling himself? I heard some reporter say he used to go by some Egyptian sounding moniker, back in his younger days over in SoHo, before he studied medicine and the occult and became a respectable mesmeric physician."

Malcolm hadn't the faintest idea who O'Downett might mean, although he did notice Guy Pendergast lean forward, sudden interest sharp in his eyes. Once a reporter, always a reporter, although Malcolm couldn't imagine why Guy Pendergast would be so acutely interested in a SoHo occultist.

Yeats, however, nodded at once, clearly familiar with the fellow Bevin O'Downett had mentioned. "Yes, I have seen him speak. Intriguing fellow, although he hasn't actually gone by the name of Johnny Anubis in several years. Oh, I know it's an absurd name," Yeats said, noticing the amused tilt of Bevin O'Downett's brows, "but a man must have some way to attract the attention of the public when he's come up from that sort of background. And despite the theatrics of his early career, his scholarship really is sound, astonishing for a self-made man from Middlesex Street, Whitechapel."

Malcolm paused, caught as much by the edge of bitterness in the young poet's voice as by the niggling suspicion that he was missing something important, here. He glanced into Yeats' brilliant, fire-eaten eyes-and was struck motionless by the pain, the anger and pride that burned in this young Irishman's soul. Forthright fury blazed in those eyes for every slight ever

made by an Englishman against the Irish race, fury and pain that the achievements of the Celtic peoples were only now, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, being hailed as genius by overbearing English scholars—and then, only by some scholars, in a decade when Welshmen, descendants of the original Celtic settlers of Britain, were still belittled as savage subhumans and advised to give up their barbarous tongue if they would ever redeem themselves into the human race, while the Irishman was kicked and maltreated as the mangiest dog of Europe. Yet despite the kicks and slurs, there blazed in Yeats' brilliant, volcanic eyes a fierce, soul-igniting pride, lightning through stormclouds, a shining pride for the history of a nation which for centuries had carried the torch of civilization in Europe.

Malcolm stood transfixed, caught up in the power of the young poet's presence, aware with a chill of awe that he was witnessing the birth of an extraordinary religious and literary blaze, one which would sweep into its path the ancient lore, the mysterious rite and religious philosophy of the entire world, a blaze which would burn that extraordinary learning in the crucible of the poet's fiery and far-reaching intellect, until what burst forth was not so much resounding music as rolling, thunderous prophecy:

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity . . .
Now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come
 round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

Malcolm's favorite Yeats poem, "The Second Coming," could easily have been written in prophecy of Malcolm's own time, when mad cults multiplied like malignant mushrooms and insanity seemed to be the rule of the day. To be standing here, speaking with Yeats, before the poem had even been written . . .

"I say, Mr. Moore," Bevin O'Downett chuckled, shattering with a shock like icewater the spell of Yeats' as-yet-embryonic power, "you might want to close your mouth before a bird seizes the chance to perch on your teeth!"

Malcolm blinked guiltily. Then gathered his wits and composure with profound difficulty. "Sorry. I've just been trying to recall whether I'd read anything by this fellow you were just mentioning. Er, what's his name, did you say? Anubis?"

Yeats nodded. "Yes, but he doesn't use that name any longer. The man's a physician, actually, an accomplished mesmerist, Dr. John Lachley. Holds public lectures and spiritualist seances at places like the Egyptian Hall, but he keeps a perfectly ordinary medical surgery in his rooms in Cleveland Street, calls his house Tibor, I believe, after some ancient holy place out of East European myth. He's quite a serious scholar, you know. An acquaintance of mine, Mr. Waite, invited him to join an organization he's recently founded, and was absolutely delighted when Dr. Lachley agreed. He's been awarded Druidic orders, at the Gorsedd, carries the Druidic wand, the slat an draoichta. Lachley's been called the most learned scholar of antiquities ever to come out of SoHo."

Malcolm's gaze sharpened. Waite? The famous co-founder of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn? Waite had helped develop the most famous Tarot deck in existence. This mesmeristic scholar moved in most intriguing circles. "John

Lachley, you say? No, I'm afraid I haven't heard of him. Of course," Malcolm gave the intense young Irishman a rueful smile, "I travel so widely, I often find myself having to catch up on months of scholarly as well as social activities which have transpired in my absence. I shall certainly keep his name in mind. Thank you for bringing his work to my attention."

"Well, that's grand," Bevin O'Downett smiled, visibly delighted at having introduced Malcolm to his scholarly young friend. "I say, Moore, you were just on your way up when I detained you. Have I interrupted any plans?"

Malcolm smiled. "Actually, we'd heard there was to be a meeting here this evening, of Theosophists, and wanted to learn a bit more."

Yeats brightened. "Splendid! We'll be meeting upstairs, sir, in a quarter of an hour."

Malcolm glanced at Conroy Melvyn, who nodded slightly. "Excellent! I believe I'll tell my carriage driver to return rather later than I'd anticipated. We'll join you shortly, I hope?"

The two Irish poets took their leave, heading upstairs, and Malcolm turned towards the entrance, intent on letting the driver know they'd be longer than an hour-and paused, startled. Their party was one short. "Where the devil is Mr. Pendergast?"

Conroy Melvyn, who had been peering up the staircase after the poets, started slightly. The police inspector looked around with a sheepish expression. "Eh?"

"Pendergast," Malcolm repeated, "where the deuce has he gone?"

Pavel Kostenka swallowed nervously and said in a whisper that wouldn't carry very far, "I cannot imagine. He was here just a moment ago."

"Yes," Malcolm said irritably, "he was. And now he isn't. Bloody reporters! We'd better search for him at once."

Within ten minutes, it was clear that Guy Pendergast was no longer anywhere inside the Carlton Club, because he had been seen retrieving his hat, cane, and gloves. The doorman said, "Why, yes, Mr. Moore, he left in a tearing hurry, caught a hansom cab."

"Did you hear him give the driver directions?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid I didn't."

Malcolm swore under his breath. "Damn that idiot journalist! Gentlemen, I'm afraid our mission on your behalf will simply have to wait for another evening. Dr. Kostenka, Mr. Melvyn, we must return to Spaldergate immediately. This is very serious. Bloody damned serious. A reporter on his own without a guide, poking about London and asking questions at a time like this . . . He'll have to be found immediately and brought back, before he gets himself into fatal trouble."

The Ripper scholars were visibly furious at having their evening's mission cut short, particularly with the meeting getting underway upstairs, but even they realized the crisis another missing up-timer represented. The Scotland Yard inspector at least had the good grace to be embarrassed that he'd allowed the reporter to give them the slip so easily. The driver of the Time Tours carriage which had brought them to the Carlton Club hadn't noticed Pendergast leave, either, and berated himself all the way back to Spaldergate House for his careless inattention. "Might've followed the bloody fool," the driver muttered under his breath every few moments. "Dammit, why'd the idiot go and hire a hansom cab? I'd have taken him anywhere he wanted to go!"

Malcolm had his own ideas about that, which were confirmed less than half an hour later, when they re-entered Time Tours' London gatehouse. Guy Pendergast had returned to Spaldergate, very briefly. Then he and Dominica Nosette had left again, taking with them all their luggage and one of Spaldergate's carriages-without obtaining the Gilberts' permission first.

Fresh disaster was literally staring them square in the face.

Not only had they lost the tourist Benny Catlin, they had now lost two

members of the Ripper Watch team, who clearly had defected to pursue the case on their own. Malcolm, operating on less than three hours' sleep a night for several weeks straight, tried to think what Guy Pendergast might possibly have seen or heard tonight to send him haring off on his own, defying all rules set for members of the Ripper Watch tour. Malcolm had been so focused on Yeats, he hadn't been doing his job. And that was inexcusable. Only once before had Malcolm lost a tourist: Margo, that ghastly day in Rome, in the middle of the Hilaria celebrations. It did not improve his temper to recall that both times, he'd been focused on his own desires, rather than the job at hand.

Without the faintest idea where to begin searching for the renegade reporters, Malcolm did the only thing he could do and still remain calm. He stalked into the parlour, poured himself a stiff scotch, and started reviewing potential alternative career options.

Crossingham's doss house smelled of mildew and unwashed clothes, of sweat and stale food and despair. When Margo and Shahdi Feroz stepped into the kitchen, it was well after dark and bitterly cold. They found a sullen, smoking coal fire burning low in the hearth and nearly twenty people crowded nearby, most of them women. There were no chairs available. Most of the room's chairs had been dragged over to the hearth by those lucky enough to have arrived early. The rest of the exhausted, grubby occupants of Crossingham's kitchen sat on the floor as close to the fire as they could manage. The floor was at least neat and well-swept despite its worn, plain boards and deep scuffs from thousands of booted feet which had passed across it.

Margo paid the lodging house's caretaker, Timothy Donovan, for a cuppa and handed it over to Shahdi, then paid for another for herself. " 'ere, luv," Margo said quietly to the Ripper scholar, using her best Cockney voice, "got a cuppa tea for you, this'll warm you up nice."

The tea was weak and bitter, with neither sugar nor milk to alter the nasty flavor. Margo pulled a face and sipped again. Recycled tea leaves, no doubt-if there was even any real tea in this stuff. The demand for tea was so high and the price of new leaves so steep, an enormous market existed for recycled tea. Used leaves, carefully collected by housewives and servants, were sold to the tea men who came door-to-door, buying them up in bulk. The tea men, in turn, redried them, dyed them dark again, pressed them into "new" bricks, and resold them to cheaper chandlers' shops scattered throughout the East End. There was even a black market in counterfeit tea, with leaves of God-alone knew what and even bits of paper dyed to look like tea, sold in carefully pressed little bricks to those unable to afford real tea often enough to know the difference in taste.

Margo tucked up her skirts and found a spot as close to the fire as she could manage, then balanced Shahdi's teacup for her so the scholar could sit down. Both of them carefully adjusted their frayed carpet bags with the irreplaceable scout logs inside, so they lay across their laps and out of reach of anybody with lighter-than-average fingers. Margo noticed curious-and-covetous-glances from several nearby women and most of the men. Very few of the people in Crossingham's owned enough goods in this world to put into a carpet bag.

"Wotcher got in the bag, eh, lovie?" The woman beside Margo was a thin, elderly woman, somewhere in her mid-sixties, Margo guessed. She stank of gin and spilt ale and clothes too many months-or years-unlaundered.

Margo made herself smile, despite the stench. "Me owd clothes, wot I'm aimin' to pawn, soon's I got a place to sleep. That an' me lovin' father's shirts, may God send 'im to burn, drunken bastard as 'e is. Was, I mean. They 'anged 'im last week, for 'is tea leafin' ways."

"Never easy, is it," another woman muttered, "when the owd bastard thieves 'is way through life 'til 'e's caught an' 'anged, leavin' a body to make 'er

own way or starve. Better a live blagger, I says, than a dead 'usband or father wot ain't no use to anybody. Nobody save the grave digger an' the bleedin' worms."

"Least 'e won't black me face never again," Margo muttered, "nor drink me wages down to boozer. Good riddance, I says, good riddance to the owd bastard. Could've 'anged 'im years ago, they could, an' I'd 'ave been that 'appy, I would, that I would 'ave."

"You got a job, then?" a girl no older than Margo asked, eyes curious despite the fear lurking in their depths. She reminded Margo of a rabbit hit once too often by a butcher's practice blows.

"Me?" Margo shrugged. "Got nuffink but me own self, that an' me mother, 'ere." She nodded to Shahdi Feroz. "But we'll find something, we will, trust in that. Ain't afraid t' work 'ard, I ain't. I'll do wot a body 'as t' do, to keep a roof over an' bread in me Limehouse an' a bite or two in me ma's, so I will."

A timid looking girl of fourteen swallowed hard. "You mean, you'd walk the streets?"

Margo glanced at her, then at Shahdi Feroz, who-as her "mother"-cast a distressed look at her "daughter." Margo shrugged. "Done it before, so I 'ave. Won't be surprised if it comes to the day I 'as to do it again. Me ma ain't well, after all, gets all tired out, quick like, an' feels the winter's cowl more every year. Me, I'd sleep rough, but me ma's got to 'ave a bed, don't she?"

Over in the corner, a woman in her forties who wore a dress and bonnet shabby as last summer's grubby canvas shoes, started to rock back and forth, arms clenched around her knees. "Going to die out there," she moaned, eyes clenched shut, "going to die out there and who'd care if we did, eh? Not them constables, they don't give a fig, for all they say as how they're here to protect us. We'll end like poor Polly Nichols, we will." Several women, presumably Irish Catholics, crossed themselves and muttered fearfully. Another produced a bottle from her pocket and upended it, swallowing rapidly. "Poor Polly . . ." the woman in the corner was still rocking, eyes shut over wetness. Her voice was rough, although she'd clearly had more education than the other women in the room. Margo wondered what had driven her to such desperate circumstances. "Oh, God, poor Polly . . . Bloody constable saw me on the street this morning, told me to move on or he'd black my eye for me. Or I could pay him to stay on my territory. And if I hadn't any money, I'd just have to give him a four-penny knee-trembler, for free. Stinking bastards! They don't care, not so long as they get theirs. As for us, it's walk or starve, with that murdering maniac out there . . ." She'd begun to cry messily, silently, rocking like a madwoman in her corner beside the hearth.

Margo couldn't say anything, could scarcely swallow. She clenched her teeth over the memories welling up from her own past. No, they didn't care, damn them . . . The cops never cared when it was a prostitute lying dead on the street. Or the kitchen floor. They didn't give a damn what they did or said or how young the children listening might be . . .

"I knew Polly," a new voice said quietly, grief etched in every word. "Kinder, nicer woman I never knew."

The speaker was a woman in her fifties, faded and probably never pretty, but she had a solemn, honest face and her eyes were stricken puddles, leaking wetness down her cheeks.

"Saw her that morning, that very morning. She'd been drinking again, poor thing, the bells of St. Mary Matfellow had just struck the hour, two-thirty it was, and she hadn't her doss money yet. She'd drunk it, every last penny of it. How many's the time I've told her, 'Polly, it's drink will be the ruin of you'?" A single sob broke loose and the woman covered her face with both hands. "I had fourpence! I could've loaned it to her! Why didn't I just give

her the money, and her so drunk and needing a bed?"

A nearby woman put an arm around her shoulders. "Hush, Emily, she'd just have drunk it, too, you know how she was when she'd been on the gin."

"But she'd be alive!" Emily cried, refusing to be comforted. "She'd be alive, not hacked to pieces . . ."

This was Emily Holland, then, Margo realized with a slow chill of shock. One of the last people to see Polly Nichols alive. The two women had been friends, often sharing a room in one of the area's hundreds of doss houses. How many of these women knew the five Ripper victims well enough to cry for them? Twelve hundred prostitutes walking the East End had sounded like a lot of people, but there'd been more students than twelve hundred in Margo's high school and she'd known all of them at least by sight. Certainly well enough to've been deeply upset if some maniac had carved them into little bits of acquaintance.

Margo gulped down acrid tea, wishing it were still hot enough to drive away the chill inside. At least they were gathering valuable data. She hadn't read anywhere, for instance, about London's constables shaking down the very women they were supposed to be protecting. So much for the image of British police as gentlemen. Margo snorted silently. From what she'd seen, most men walking the streets of Great Britain tonight viewed any woman of lower status not decently married as sexually available. And in the East End and in many a so-called "respectable" house, where young girls from streets like these went into service as scullery maids, the gentlemen weren't overly fussy about taking to bed girls far too young to be married. It hadn't been that long since laws had been passed raising the age of consent from twelve.

No, the fact that corrupt police constables were forcing London's prostitutes to sleep with them didn't surprise Margo at all. Maybe that explained why Jack had been able to strike without the women raising a cry for help? Not even Elizabeth Stride had screamed out loudly enough to attract the attention of a meeting hall full of people. A woman in trouble couldn't count on the police to be anything but worse trouble than the customer.

Shahdi Feroz, with her keen eye for detail, asked quietly, "Are you cold, my dear?"

Margo shook her head, not quite willing to trust her voice.

"Nonsense, you are shaking. Here, can you scoot closer to the fire?"

Margo gave up and scooted. It was easier than admitting the real reason she was trembling. Sitting here surrounded by women who reminded her, with every word spoken, exactly how her entire world had shattered was more difficult than she'd expected it would be, back on station studying these murders. And she'd known, even then, it wouldn't be easy. Get used to it, she told herself angrily. Because later tonight, Annie Chapman was going to walk into this kitchen and then she was going to walk out of it again and end up butchered all over the yard at number twenty-nine Hanbury Street. And Margo would just have to cope, because it was going to be a long, long night. Somehow, between now and five-thirty tomorrow morning, she would have to slip into that pitch-dark yard and set up the team's low-light surveillance equipment.

Maybe she'd climb the fence? She certainly didn't want to risk that creaking door again. Yes, that was what she'd better do, go over the wall like a common thief, which meant she'd need to ditch the skirts and dress as a boy. Climbing fences in this getup was out of the question. She wondered bleakly what Malcolm was doing, on his search for their unknown co-killer, and sighed, resting her chin on her knees. She'd a thousand times rather have gone with Malcolm, whatever he was doing, than end up stuck on the kitchen floor in Crossingham's, trying vainly to ignore how her own mother had died.

As she blinked back unshed tears, Margo realized she had one more excellent reason she couldn't risk falling apart, out here. Kit might-just might-forgive her for screwing up on a job, might chalk it up to field experience she had to get some time. But if she came completely unglued out here, Malcolm would know

the reason why or have her skin, one or the other. And if she was forced to tell Malcolm that she'd messed up because she couldn't stop thinking about how her mother had died, he was going to discover the truth about that, too.

Try as she might, Margo simply could not imagine that Malcolm Moore would be willing to marry a girl whose drunken father had died in prison while serving a life sentence for murder, after beating to death his wife in front of his little girl because he'd discovered she was a whore. Far worse than losing Malcolm, though—and Margo loved Malcolm so much, the thought of losing him left her cold and bleak and empty—would be the look in her grandfather's eyes if Kit Carson ever found out how and why his only daughter had really died.

For the first time in her young life, Margo Smith discovered that hurting the people you loved was even worse than being hurt, yourself. Which was why, perhaps, in the final analysis, her mother and so many of the women in this room and out on these streets had sunk to the level of common prostitute. They were trying to support families any way they could. Margo's mouth trembled violently. Then she simply squeezed shut her eyes and cried, no longer caring who saw the tears. She'd think up a good reason to give Shahdi Feroz later.

Just now, she needed to cry.

She wasn't even sure who she was crying for.

When Shahdi Feroz slipped an arm around her shoulder and pulled her close, just holding her, Margo realized it wasn't important at all, knowing who her tears were for. In the end, it didn't matter. The only thing that really mattered was protecting the people you cared about. In that moment, Margo forgave her mother everything. And cried harder than she had since those terrible moments in a blood-spattered Minnesota kitchen, with the toast burnt on the counter and the stink of death in her nostrils and her father's rage pursuing her out the door into the snow.

I'm sorry, Mom, I'm sorry . . .

I'm sorry I couldn't stop him.

I'm sorry I hated you . . .

Did Annie Georgina Chapman, Dark Annie Chapman's daughter, who'd run away from her poverty-stricken, prostituted mother to join a French touring circus, hate her mother, too? Margo hoped not. She blinked burning salt from her eyes and offered up one last apology. And I'm sorry I can't stop him from killing you, Annie Chapman . . .

Margo understood at last.

Kit had warned her that time scouting was the toughest job in the world.

Now she knew why.

Chapter Fourteen

Skeeter Jackson was just climbing into the clothes Kit had loaned him, in the Neo Edo bathrooms, when a slim, wraith-like little girl named Cocheta, a mixed-blood Amer-Indian who'd stumbled through the Conquistadores Gate and joined the Lost and Found Gang of down-timer children, skidded into the Neo Edo men's room, out of breath and ashen. Her dark eyes had gone wide, glinting with terror. "Skeeter! Hashim sent me for you! There is bad trouble! Please hurry!"

"What's wrong?"

"It is Bergitta! They have taken her away—the men from the construction site!"

The roar of insanity outside the Neo Edo, where the riot was still spreading, faded to a whisper. Skeeter narrowed his eyes over a surge of murderous rage. "Show me!"

Cocheta snatched his hand, led him through the craziness running amok in Edo Castletown. "The Lost and Found Gang is following them! Hurry, Skeeter! They took her from the bathroom they just finished building in the new part of the

station, when she went to clean the floor."

"How many?" Dammit, he didn't have any weapons with him, not even a pocket knife, and those construction workers would all be carrying heavy tools. Any one of which could cut a man's throat or spill his intestines with a single swiping blow.

"Twenty! They knocked unconscious the foreman and several of the other men who did not agree with them, locked them into a supply room. We sent word to the Council for help. I was told to find you, Skeeter, and Hashim said where you were."

As soon as they cleared the mob in Edo Castletown, Skeeter and the girl tugging at his hand broke into a dead run. Cocheta led him through Victoria Station and Urbs Romae, through Valhalla, down toward the construction site, which was ominously silent. There should've been an ear-splitting roar of saws, drills, and pneumatic hammers echoing off the distant ceiling, but they found only silence and a deserted construction zone, tasks left abandoned on every side. The timing of the attack on Bergitta left Skeeter scowling. With the antics at Primary to preoccupy station security and most of the tourists, nobody was likely to notice the work stoppage. Or the disappearance of one down-timer from her job scrubbing bathroom floor tiles.

"Hurry, Skeeter!"

Cocheta didn't need to urge him again. He'd seen enough to leave his whole throat dry with fear. "Which way did they take her?"

"Through there!" Cocheta pointed to a corridor that led into a portion of the station where new Residential apartments were being assembled, back in another of the caverns in which the station had been built. Clearly, they were taking her where nobody could hear the screams. He was just about to ask Cocheta to get word to someone in Security, preferably Wally Klontz, when someone shouted his name.

"Skeeter! Wait!"

A whole group of down-timers pounded his way, with Kynan Rhys Gower in the lead. The Welsh soldier carried his war mallet. Molly was hot on his heels. Where she'd obtained that lethal little top-break revolver, Skeeter wasn't sure. Maybe she'd brought it with her from London. Or liberated it from Ann Vinh Mulhaney's firing range-or some tourist's pocket. Eigil Bjarneson towered over the whole onrushing contingent of angry Found Ones. He'd managed to reclaim his sword from Security after getting out of jail. Or quite possibly he'd just broken out and reconfiscated it? Skeeter wouldn't have wanted to argue with Eigil in this mood, if he'd been working the Security desk, which was probably in chaos anyway, after Bull's arrest . . .

"Cocheta says they took her through there," Skeeter pointed the way.

"Let's go," Kynan nodded, voice tight, eyes crackling with murderous fury.

Skeeter turned to the girl who'd brought him here. He said tersely, "Cocheta, stay here and wait for other Found Ones who might be coming. Send them in after us. Give us twenty minutes to get in there and get into position, then start yelling for station security. By then, the mess at Primary should've settled down enough, Security might actually listen and send someone."

"Yes, Skeeter. The Lost and Found Gang has followed the men who took her. They will tell you which way to go. Hurry!"

He signaled for silence, gratified when his impromptu posse obeyed instantly, and led the way back into the incomplete section of Commons at a flat-out run. They entered the tunnel which led to the new area of Residential and Skeeter slowed to a more cautious pace, silent as shadows chased by a hunter's moon. The concrete floors had already been poured and drywall had gone up in many places. Work lights rigged high overhead cast unnatural pools of light and shadow through the incomplete Residential section, where bare two-by-fours marked out rooms and corridors not yet closed in with wallboard.

Skeeter listened intently, but heard nothing. This section of station snaked back into the heart of the mountain, twisting and turning unpredictably.

They found a teenager at a major junction where two Residential corridors would intersect when completed. The boy was dancing with impatience, but remained silent when Skeeter raised a finger to his lips in warning. That way, the boy pointed. Skeeter nodded, jerked a thumb over his shoulder to indicate that more hunters were on the way, and motioned for the boy to wait for reinforcements. The boy nodded and settled in to wait. Skeeter stole forward, leading his war party down the indicated corridor. Dust from the construction lay thick on every surface, wood dust and debris from particle board. The chalky scent of gypsum drywall clogged his nostrils as they pushed forward.

Skeeter paused to retrieve an abandoned claw hammer. It wasn't his weapon of choice, but offered lethal potentialities he could certainly make use of, and was better than bare fingernails. When they came to a door marking a stairwell, they found another member of the Lost and Found Gang, a girl of thirteen who stood watch with tears streaming down her face.

"They went down," she whispered, pointing to the stairs. "They had hit her, Skeeter, were laughing about raping her and killing her when they were done . . ."

"We'll stop them," Skeeter promised. "Stay here. More are coming." He glanced at the grim men and women of his posse. "I'd prefer live witnesses to testify against their up-time cronies in the Ansar Majlis. Maybe we can crack their terrorist gang wide open. But if we have to spill blood to get Bergitta out of there alive, we'll hit 'em hard and worry about the body count and station management's reaction later. The main thing is, we get her out of there."

Kynan Rhys Gower and the others nodded silently, understanding exactly what he meant and accepting whatever happened. Pride in Ianira's achievement, building this community, flared hot in Skeeter's awareness, pride and a determination not to let anything happen to a single one of his new-found friends.

The girl guarding the stairwell held the door open for them.

Skeeter's pulse thundered as he eased silently down the dim concrete steps. Naked light bulbs glared where ceiling panels had not yet been installed. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, another member of the Lost and Found Gang waited silently. The boy stationed here was only eleven, but had the quick presence of mind to signal for silence. He pointed to the left, mimed following the tunnel around to the right. Skeeter nodded and made sure his entire posse was out of the stairwell before continuing. The rear guard had swelled by three new arrivals, easing so silently down the stairs after them, Skeeter hadn't even heard them join up.

Chenzira Umi, the ancient Egyptian who sat on the Council of Seven, must have been in his apartment when the call went out, because he carried the hunting-dart thrower he'd made for himself. Shaped something like an atl-atl, it could throw a lethal projectile with enough penetrating force to bring down a hippo or a Nile croc. The Egyptian had brought with him the Spaniard Alfonzo Menendez, who'd liberated a steel-tipped pike from the decorative wall of the restaurant where he worked. Young Corydon, a Greek hoplite of twenty-three who excelled at the sling as a weapon of war, had joined them as well. Corydon clutched an entire handful of rounded stones, still dripping from the goldfish pond he'd stolen them from, and was busy unwinding his sling from under his shirt, where he'd doubtless worn it in honor of the Festival of Mars.

Skeeter acknowledged the newcomers with a brisk nod, then motioned the way and set out in pursuit. And this time, he heard the quarry. Rough male voices drifted through the subterranean corridors, punctuated by distant, feminine cries of pain. He tightened his grip around the lethal claw hammer and eased forward, stealing softly across the concrete floor toward the inhuman sport

underway somewhere ahead. Before this business was done, Skeeter vowed, these construction workers would bitterly rue their decision to indulge an appetite for revenge on a member of his adopted family.

As a boy, he'd never been allowed to join a Yakka war party bent on vengeance.

Now he led the raid.

Guide me, Yesukai . . .

The corridor they followed twisted and turned through a maze of partially completed Residential apartments, storage warehouses for equipment, pumping stations to bring water into the new section of station, stacks of dusty lumber, drywall, and cement bags, and tangles of electrical wiring and cables. Skeeter's little band of rescuers, seven strong, now, crept closer to the distorted sounds of merriment from twenty burly construction workers somewhere ahead. God, seven against twenty . . .

They rounded a final corner and found two more Lost and Found members crouched in the corridor, peering anxiously their way. One of the boys, eight-year-old Tevel Gottlieb, had been born on station. Hashim Ibn Fahd, a cunning little wolf of thirteen, still wearing Neo Edo livery, beckoned Skeeter forward, then placed his lips directly against Skeeter's ear and breathed out, "They are in the warehouse just beyond this corner. They have posted no guards."

Skeeter risked a quick look, ducking low to the floor to minimize the chances of being seen by anyone who cast a casual glance their way. The warehouse where they'd dragged their victim was an open bay some fifty feet across, piled high with lumber and construction supplies, coils of copper wire and crates of plumbing and electrical fixtures, preformed plastic sink basins, miniature mountains of PVC pipe. Two walls were solid concrete, marking the boundary with the cavern walls just beyond. The other two were gypsum board tacked to wooden two-by-fours. One of these gypsum walls, which Skeeter crouched behind, had been completed already, awaiting only the installation of electrical outlet covers. The other was only partially complete, with drywall up along half its length. Bare wooden uprights comprised the balance of its span.

Bergitta lay on the concrete floor along this stretch of wall, wrists wired to thick two-by-fours. Another cruel twist of wire, tightened down around her throat, prevented her from lifting her head. They'd ripped her shirt open, had cut away her bra. They hadn't bothered to tie a gag. Her skirt lay in twists around her waist. One of them was busy raping her while others waited their turn, speaking tensely amongst themselves in what looked almost like an argument. Hashim Ibn Fahd, who'd stumbled through the Arabian Nights gate in the middle of a howling sandstorm, having become separated from the caravan he'd been traveling with, pressed his lips against Skeeter's ear once again.

"They argue about bringing the woman here. Some say their brothers in the Ansar Majlis will reward them when they have killed this one. Others say raping a prostitute has nothing to do with the cause and the leaders of the Ansar Majlis will be angry, for that and for attacking the foreman and others of the faith. They say the leaders came through Primary today and will punish those who take such chances at being caught. The others say it does not matter, because now that their brothers have come to the station, Mike Benson and all who run the jail will die. Soon their brothers will be free again to hunt the Templars who flock to the whore's shrine in Little Agora. Their leader says to hurry with the woman, his balls ache and he wants his turn on her before she is dead from too many men inside her."

The freezing hatred in young Hashim's eyes sent a chill down Skeeter's back. He beckoned the two boys away from the corner, then led his band several yards back further still, well out of earshot. Speaking in the barest whisper, Skeeter outlined his plan, such as it was. "There's too many of them to rush

in there the way we are. We'll just get Bergitta killed and maybe us, too. We've got to lure some of them out here, away from the others, split them up. We've got reinforcements coming, but we don't know how many or when. All we can count on is ourselves."

Seven adults and two kids . . .

Not the best odds he'd ever faced.

But it would have to do. God help them all, it would have to do, because they were out of time—and so was poor Bergitta.

They met in a dingy, drab little pub called the Horn of Plenty on the corner of Dorset Street and Chrispin. As he had been the night of Polly Nichols' murder, John Lachley was once again in deep disguise. James Maybrick was proving most useful in procuring theatrical disguises for him, at the same shops patronized by one of Lachley's new clients, a popular actor at the Lyceum Theater where the infamous American play *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was packing in sellout crowds bent on vicarious thrills.

The thrills Lachley and James Maybrick sought tonight were anything but vicarious. Lachley made eye contact with Maybrick across the smoke-filled pub, making certain his disciple recognized him through the false beard, sideburns, and scar, then nodded toward the door. Maybrick, eyes glittering with intense excitement, paid for his pint of bitters and exited. Lachley finished his stout leisurely, then sauntered out into the night. Maybrick waited silently across the street, leaning one shoulder against the brick wall of a doss house opposite the pub.

Lachley's pulse quickened when Maybrick glanced into his eyes. Maybrick's excitement was contagious. The cotton merchant's color was high, even though he didn't know, yet, the identity of the woman they were to kill tonight. The knowledge that Lachley meant to guide him to his next victim was clearly sufficient to excite the man beyond the bounds of reason. The telegram which had summoned Maybrick back to London from Liverpool had read: "Friday appointment. Arrange as before."

That telegram, which had triggered this meeting, would—at long last—culminate in the final episode of Lachley's quest for Prince Albert Victor's eight indiscreet letters. Four obtained from Morgan . . . one from Polly Nichols . . . and the final three would be in his hands by night's end, obtained from Annie Chapman. Three murders—Morgan, Polly Nichols, and Annie Chapman—were already two more than he'd anticipated needing to wind up this sordid little affair. He very carefully did not think about the prophetic words his lovely prisoner had choked out: and six shall die for his letters and his pride . . .

He could not afford to indulge doubt on a job of this magnitude, whatever its source. James Maybrick, at least, was a good deal more than satisfactory as a tool to accomplish Lachley's goals. In fact, Maybrick was proving to be a most delightful tool in John Lachley's capable hands. Completely mad, of course, behind those merry eyes and mild smile, but quite an effective madman when it came to dispatching witnesses and blackmailers. What he'd done to Polly Nichols after choking her death with his bare hands inspired awe. The newspapers were still bleating about "The Whitechapel Murderer" and speculation was running wild through the East End's sordid streets. The terror visible in the eyes of every dirty whore walking these streets was music in Lachley's soul. He had more than good reason to wish a calamitous end on such women. Tormenting, small-minded trollops that they were, pointing at him and laughing through their rotting teeth, calling out filthy names when he passed them on the kerb . . .

Lachley wished he'd taken the satisfaction of punishing that blackmailing little bitch, Polly Nichols, himself. He'd enjoyed Morgan's final hours, had enjoyed them immensely, and regretted having allowed Maybrick all the fun in

killing the loathsome Polly Nichols. He wondered what it had felt like, ripping her open with that shining, wicked knife, and found that his pulse was pounding raggedly. This time, he promised himself, I'll do the killing myself this time, I'm damned if Maybrick shall have all the fun, curse him for the maniac he is.

Lachley's lethal little merchant with the unfaithful wife might be dull as a butter knife when it came to social matters, but give him a belly full of hatred, an eight-inch steel gutting blade, and a hapless target upon which to vent that explosive rage, and James Maybrick was a man transformed. A true artiste . . . It was almost a pity Lachley had to ensure the man's execution by hanging. Controlling a mind like James Maybrick's was intoxicating, far more satisfying than controlling a dullard like Eddy—even if Albert Victor Christian Edward did have prospects far beyond anything the Liverpudlian social climber could ever hope to achieve.

Men in the baggy clothes of the common factory laborer and women in the shabby dresses of cheap kerb crawlers prowled up and down Dorset Street, intent on enacting mutually attractive financial transactions. Maybrick, Lachley noted, followed the prostitutes with a hungry, predatory gaze that boded ill for Annie Chapman once Lachley turned his killer loose on the owner of Eddy's final letters.

But to do that, they first must find Dark Annie.

And that, Lachley had discovered over the course of the previous week, was no easy task. Annie Chapman did not normally travel from doss house to doss house, as many another destitute street walker did, but she had not been seen in Crossingham's—the house she had made her more-or-less permanent home—in well over a week. Lachley had seen her during that week, but only twice. And both times she had looked alarmingly ill. During the past two days, he had not seen her at all. Rumor held that she had been injured in a fight with another whore over the attentions of the man who paid a fair number of Annie's bills. He suspected she had spent the two days in the casual ward of Spitalfields workhouse infirmary, since the last time he'd spotted her, near Spitalfields Church, she had been telling a friend that she was seriously ill and wanted to spend a couple of days in the casual ward, resting and getting the medical help she needed.

Her friend had given her a little money and warned her not to spend it on rum.

John Lachley had not seen Dark Annie since.

So he set out down Dorset Street, casting about like a hound seeking the fox, and led James Maybrick into the opening steps of the hunt. And on this night, after many dark and frustrating hours, luck finally returned to John Lachley. He and Maybrick, on edge and all but screaming their tense frustration, returned to Dorset Street shortly after one-thirty in the morning and caught sight of her at long, bloody last.

Annie Chapman was just entering Crossingham's lodging house by the kitchen entrance, badly the worse for drink. John Lachley halted, breathing hard as excitement shot through his belly and groin. He glanced across the street at Maybrick, then nodded toward the short, stout woman descending the area steps to the kitchen entrance of her favorite doss house.

Maybrick slipped his hand into his coat pocket, where he kept his knife, and smiled slowly. Mr. James Maybrick had seen the face of his new victim. Maybrick's face flushed with sexual excitement in the light from the gas lamp on the street corner. Lachley restrained a slow smile. Soon . . . They waited patiently across from Crossingham's and within minutes, their quarry came out again, evidently not not in possession of enough money to pay for the room. They heard her say, "I won't be long, Brummy. See that Tim keeps the bed for me." Whereupon she left Crossingham's and turned down Little Paternoster Row, toward Brushfield Street, where she headed out towards Spitalfields Market.

They followed her quietly on the same rubberized servants' shoes they'd worn the night they'd stalked Polly Nichols to her death. It was clear to Dr. John Lachley that Annie Chapman was seriously ill and in a great deal of pain. She moved slowly, but was still successful in collaring a customer outside the darkened hulk of Spitalfields Market, frustrating them in their intention to waylay her, themselves. The man disappeared with her into some refuse-riddled yard full of shadows. Lachley stood in his hiding place, breathing rapidly. Tension tightened down through him until he needed to shout out his impatience. Soon-very soon, now-poor little Dark Annie Chapman would earn a greater notoriety in death than she had ever earned in life. She was about to become the third mutilated victim of John Lachley's ambition. And the second dead London whore in a week. The anticipation of the terror that would explode through the East End was nearly as potent a delight as controlling the fates of his chosen victims.

Playing God was a sweetly addictive game.

John Lachley was well on his way to becoming a sweetly addicted player.

From where he stood in a grimy doorway, John Lachley couldn't hear anything of Annie's encounter with her customer, but twenty minutes later, they emerged, the man breathing heavily and Annie Chapman flushed, her skirts disarranged. They went together to the nearest pub. Lachley and Maybrick entered the pub, as well, finding separate places at the bar, where they drank a pint and watched the woman they had come to kill.

Annie's customer bought her a hearty meal and several glasses of rum, which she downed quickly, like medicine. John Lachley suspected she was using the rum in precisely that fashion, to kill the pain he could see in her eyes and her every slow, awkward movement. From the cough she tried to suppress while in her customer's company, he suspected consumption, which meant she would be suffering considerable pain in her lungs, as well as difficulty breathing. Clearly she hadn't the means to buy proper medications. Doubtless why she had resorted to blackmail, buying Eddy's letters from Polly Nichols. Lachley hid a smile behind his carefully disguised face and wondered how much terror Dark Annie had felt upon learning of poor Polly's violent end?

She remained with her customer from Spitalfields Market for the whole frustrating night, drinking and eating at his expense, disappearing with him once for nearly half an hour, presumably to renew their intimate acquaintance. Then she and her customer sat down to another round of rum, listening to the piano and the pub songs sung by drunken patrons, watching other prostitutes enter the place and find customers of their own and disappear outside again to conduct their sordid business, until the pub closed its doors. When Annie Chapman and her customer left the public house, he took her through the dark streets to what was presumably his own house, a miserable little factory cottage on Hanbury Street, which she entered and did not leave again until very nearly five-thirty in the morning, at which time her customer emerged dressed for work.

He gave her a rough caress and said, "You ought to see a doctor about that cough, luv. I'd give you sixpence if I 'ad it, but I spent all me ready cash on your supper."

"Oh, that's all right, and thank you for the food and the rum."

"Well, I've got to be off or they'll lock the factory yard gates and dock me wages."

They separated, the man hurrying away down Hanbury Street while Annie Chapman lingered at his doorstep, visibly exhausted.

"Well," she muttered to herself, "you've had a good supper and the rum's been a great help with the pain, but you've still got no money for your bed, Annie Chapman."

She sighed and set out very slowly, moving in the general direction of Dorset Street once more. John Lachley glanced quickly along the street and saw

no sign of anyone, so he stepped out of the doorway he'd been leaning against and crossed the street toward her. Since he didn't want to startle her into crying out and waking anyone, he began whistling very softly. She turned at the sound and sent a hopeful smile his way.

"Good morning," John said quietly.

"Good morning, sir."

"You seem to be in something of a bind, madam."

She glanced quizzically into his eyes.

"I couldn't help but overhear you, just now. You need money for your lodging house, then?"

She nodded slowly. "I do, indeed, sir. You realize, I wouldn't ask, if I weren't desperate, but . . . well, sir, I can be very agreeable to a gentleman in need of companionship."

John Lachley smiled, darting a quick glance at Maybrick's place of concealment.

"I'm certain you can, madam. But surely you have in your possession something of value which you might sell, instead of yourself?"

Her cheeks flushed, the right one bruised from the first fight she'd been in with the other whore earlier in the week. "I've already sold everything of value I own," she said softly.

"Everything?" He stepped closer. Dropped his voice to a mere whisper. "Even the letters?"

Annie's blue eyes widened. "The letters?" she breathed. "How-how did you know about the letters?"

"Never mind that, just tell me one thing. Will you sell them to me?"

Her mouth opened, closed again. From the distant tower of the Black Eagle Brewery, the clock struck five-thirty A.M. "I can't," she finally said. "I haven't got them any longer."

"Haven't got them?" he asked sharply. "Where are they?"

Misery pinched her face, turned her complexion sallow. "I've been ill, you see, with a cough. I needed money for medicine. So I sold them, but I could get them back or tell you who bought them, only . . . could you give me a few pence for a bed, if I do? I need to sleep, I'm so unwell."

"You could maybe get them for me?" he repeated. "Will you?"

"Yes," she answered at once. "Yes," she whispered, leaning against the brick wall in visible weariness, "I will."

He dropped his voice to a whisper and asked, "Who's got them?"

"I sold them to Elizabeth Stride and Catharine Eddowes . . ."

Footsteps behind him told Lachley they were not alone. He swore under his breath, careful not to turn his head, and listened with a trip-hammering pulse until whoever it was continued on their way, rather than interrupt what must look to any observer like a whore and her customer in serious negotiations. When the footsteps had died away again in the distance, Lachley took Annie Chapman by the arm, pressed her back against the shutters of the house they stood in front of, bent down to whisper, "All right, Annie, I'll give you the money you need for your bed . . . and enough to re-acquire the letters."

He dug into his pocket and pulled out two shining shillings, which he handed over.

She smiled tremulously. "Thank you, sir. I'll get the letters back with this, I promise you."

The passing of the money between them was the signal James Maybrick had been waiting for all through the long night. He appeared from the darkness and walked toward them as Lachley caressed Annie's breast through her worn, faded bodice and murmured, "Shall we go someplace quiet, then? You do seem a most agreeable lady on a cold night like this." He smiled down into her eyes. "A mutually delightful few moments of pleasure now, then I'll meet you this evening at Crossingham's," Lachley lied. "And I'll buy the letters from you,

then."

"I'll have them," she said earnestly. "There's a nice, quiet yard at number twenty-nine," she added softly, nodding down the street toward a dilapidated tenement. "One of the girls I know oiled the hinges," she added with a wink, "so there's no chance of waking anybody. The second door, there, leads through the house to the yard."

"Lovely," Lachley smiled down at her. "Perfect. Shall we?"

Lachley eased open the door, aware that Maybrick trailed behind, silent as a shadow. Lachley escorted Annie through the black and stinking passage, then down the steps to the reeking yard behind. Very gently, he pressed her up against the high fence. Very gently, he bent, caressed her throat . . . nuzzled her ear. "Annie," he murmured. "You really shouldn't have sold those letters, pet. Give my love to Polly, won't you?"

She had just enough time to gasp out one faint protest. "No . . ."

Then his hands were around her throat and she fell against the fence with a thud, all sound cut off as he crushed her trachea. Her terrified struggles spiraled through his entire being, a giddy elixir, more potent than raw, sweating sex. When it was over, the shock of disappointment was so keen he almost protested the end of the pleasure. Morgan had lasted much longer, struggled much harder, giving him hours of intense pleasure. But they couldn't afford the risk out here in the open, where all of London might hear at any moment. So Lachley drew several deep, rasping breaths to calm himself, then lowered her lifeless corpse to the filthy ground beside the fence. He stepped back, giving her to the impatient Maybrick, who gripped his knife in eager anticipation. The sound of that knife ripping her open was the sweetest sound John Lachley had heard all day.

He bent low and breathed into Maybrick's ear, "Return to Lower Tibor when you've finished. Use the sewers, as I showed you. I'll be waiting in the secret room."

Then he slipped from the yard, leaving the maniacal Maybrick to vent his rage on the lifeless corpse of Annie Chapman. He was not pleased that he must track down and kill two more dirty whores, two more potential blackmailers in a position to destroy his future. In fact, as the trembling delight of stalk and strike and murder gradually waned in his blood, he cursed the foul luck that had prompted Annie to sell her precious letters to raise money for medicine, cursed it with every stride he took, cursed Prince Albert Victor for writing Morgan's goddamned letters in the first place, and cursed brainless whores who acquired them only to sell them off for ready cash. Two more women to locate and silence! Dear God, would this nightmare never end? Two!

His beautiful Greek prisoner had known, somehow; had seen clairvoyantly into his future and known he would not succeed tonight. Curse it! He would have to question Ianira more closely about what she had seen in that vision of hers. Clearly, he could do nothing further today. It would be getting light soon and Maybrick had to return to Liverpool today, to meet social and family obligations.

Lachley was tempted to find these women himself, to end their miserable lives with his own hands, without waiting for Maybrick's return. But that was far too risky. Maybrick must be involved; that was critical to his plans. He must have a scapegoat on which to pin blame for these murders. All of them, including the next two. He narrowed his eyes. Elizabeth Stride and Catharine Eddowes . . . He'd never heard of either woman, but he was willing to bet they were common prostitutes, same as the recently departed Polly Nichols and the even more recently departed Annie Chapman. Which meant they ought to be quite easy to trace and just as easy to silence. Provided the bitches didn't tumble to the truth of what they possessed and run, bleating, with it to the constables or-worse-the press.

It was even possible that someone would connect "Eddy" and Prince Albert

Victor Christian Edward. Lachley shuddered at such a monstrous vision of the future. These filthy whores must be silenced, whatever the cost. He made for his own little hovel in Wapping, beneath which was the entrance to the sewers which led to his underground sanctuary. James Maybrick knew the way there, already. Lachley had shown him the route shortly before Polly Nichols' murder, introducing him to Garm, to help him escape detection. Since Maybrick couldn't very well walk around with blood on his sleeves, he'd needed an escape route that was certain. The sewers were the most sure escape route possible.

So he'd showed Maybrick how to find his hideaway where Morgan had passed his last hours screaming out his miserable little life, and had arranged to meet Maybrick there again, after Annie Chapman's murder. Maybrick ought to be arriving there shortly to change his clothes and rid himself of any physical evidence connecting him with the murders, including the knife. He'd left the long-bladed weapon at Lower Tibor after Polly's death and collected again this evening, before setting out in pursuit of Annie. Lachley had planned to drug Maybrick after this latest murder, to use his mesmeric skills to erase the merchant's memory of Lachley's involvement, then send the knife and an anonymous tip to the Metropolitan Police's H Division with the instructions that a search of Battlecrease House in Liverpool would yield written evidence of the identity of the Whitechapel Murderer.

Putting that plan into action was clearly out of the question, now, at least until he had obtained the letters from Stride and Eddowes, curse them. It was now September the 8th, nearly two weeks since he'd first determined to kill Morgan and finish up this sordid business. Yet he was no closer to ending this miserable affair than he'd been the day Eddy had arrived at his house with the unpalatable news in the first place. He wanted this over with! Finished once and for all!

When James Maybrick finally arrived in his underground sanctuary, only to break the news that he couldn't possibly return to London until the end of the month, due to business and social commitments, it was all John Lachley could do not to shoot the maniac on the spot. He stood there breathing hard, with the gnarled oak limbs of his sacrificial tree spreading toward the brick vault of the underground chamber's ceiling and the smell of gas flames and fresh blood thick in the air, and clenched his fists while James Maybrick changed his clothes, burned the coat and shirt and trousers he'd been wearing, and secreted some hideous package that reeked of blood in an oilcloth sack.

"Took away her womb," Maybrick explained with a drunken giggle. "Threw her intestines over her shoulder, cut out her womb and her vagina." He giggled again, hoisting the grotesque oilcloth sack. "Thought I'd fry them up for my supper, eh? Took her wedding rings, too," he added, eyes gleaming in total madness. He displayed his trophies proudly, two cheap brass rings, a wedding band and a keeper. "Had to wrench them off, didn't want to leave holy rings on a dirty whore's hand, eh? Went back for a second helping of her, took part of the bladder, when I realized I'd forgotten my chalk. Wanted to chalk a message on the wall," he added mournfully. "To taunt the police. That fool, Abberline, thinks he's so very clever . . . not nearly so clever as Sir Jim, ha ha ha!"

Lachley thinned his lips into a narrow line, wishing to hell the maniac would simply shut up. God, the man was sick . . .

"Can't be here next week," Maybrick added, pulling on clean clothes Lachley had laid out for him. "But we will kill the other dirty whores, won't we? You'll let me rip them?"

"Yes, yes!" Lachley snapped. "When can you be back, dammit? I'm tired of waiting for you! This business is urgent, Maybrick, dammed urgent! You'd bloody well better be here the first day you can get away!"

Maybrick drew on his overcoat, left behind earlier. "Saturday the 29th," Maybrick replied easily. "You have my medicine ready?"

Lachley thrust the stoppered bottle into Maybrick's hand and watched

narrowly as he drank it down. The potent mixture which allowed Lachley to place his patients into such a deep trance was even more critical with this patient, giving Lachley the means by which to accomplish his murderous ends without being mentioned in Maybrick's written record of his deeds. "Lie down on that bench," Lachley said impatiently when Maybrick had finished it all.

The cotton merchant slid up onto Lachley's long work bench and lay back with a smile, clearly pleased with the night's work and equally clearly looking forward to another two repeat performances of the evening's fun. Lachley stared down at the insane insect and loathed him so intensely, he had to clench his fists to keep from closing his hands around the man's throat and crushing the life from him, as he'd crushed it from Annie Chapman. Maybrick's eyelids gradually grew heavy and sank closed.

Lachley took Maybrick through the standard routine to bring about trance, went through the litany designed to abate his physical complaints, then repeated his injunction against ever mentioning or even hinting that Lachley existed when he wrote out his diary entries. "You will wake naturally in several hours, feeling refreshed and strong," Lachley told the drugged murderer. "You will leave this place and go to Liverpool Street Station and take the train for home. You will remember nothing of your visits to Dr. John Lachley, nothing except that he is helping you with your illness. You will not mention Dr. Lachley to anyone you know, not even members of your family. You will remember nothing about this room until the twenty-ninth of September, when you will receive a telegram from your physician informing you of an appointment. You will then come here and meet me in this room and we will kill more whores and you will enjoy it immensely. You will write of your enjoyment in your diary, but you will mention nothing about your London physician or the help I give you. In your diary, you will write of how pleasurable it was to rip your whores, how much you look forward to ripping more of them . . ."

Maybrick, lying there in a drugged stupor, smiled.

Maniacal bastard.

Lachley flexed his hands, clenching them into fists and glared down at the pathetic creature on his work table. I'll personally certify your death after they've hung you on the gallows. It can't be too soon, either, damn your eyes.

Two bloody weeks . . . and two more dirty whores to be killed. Preferably, in one night. If he didn't destroy them both on the same night, God alone knew how long it would be before Maybrick could tear himself away from business and family in Liverpool and return to finish this up. Yes, they would have to die on the same night, next time. Bloody hell . . . and they would have constables crawling like roaches through these streets, by then.

But it had got to be done, regardless, too much depended on it. All told, it was enough to drive a sane man into an asylum.

The message arrived on Gideon Guthrie's computer via e-mail.

Trouble brewing, TT-86. Targets have escaped via two separate gates, Denver and London. Senator Caddrick has departed via terminal with entourage, vowing to close station. Please advise your intentions.

It had been relayed through so many servers, rerouted across so many continents, tracing it back to the original sender would have stymied the efforts even of the CIA and Interpol. When Gideon read Cyril Barris' message, he swore explosively. That goddamned, grandstanding idiot! He'd told Caddrick, dammit, to stay out of this! Did the jackass really want to end up in prison?

He sent a reply: Will handle personally. Do nothing. Timetable still on schedule.

Then he deleted the original message from his hard drive and blistered the air with another savage curse. Goddammit! With Caddrick on the warpath, Gideon would have to go there, himself, clean up this whole God-cursed mess the hard way. Time Terminal Eighty-Six . . .

Gideon Guthrie swore viciously and tapped keys on his computer, opening the program which allowed him to make airline reservations. Just as with the e-mail message and its multitude of rerouting server connections, his request for airline tickets hopped the globe before reaching the airlines reservations computer. He typed in the requisite identification information, then calmly assumed the identity of Mr. Sid Kaederman, the name he'd given Caddrick to use as the "detective" hired to trace his missing kid.

Damn that girl! She was a twenty-year-old, wet-behind-the-ears rich man's brat, with her head stuck in a bunch of history books. Even her boyfriend had played dress-up cowboy, for God's sake, when he hadn't been coying up to Jenna's film-making friends. But the little bitch had slipped right through their fingers, thanks to Noah Armstrong, and now Caddrick had gone ballistic. The suicidal idiot! Trying to play to the press and gain voter sympathy, when the very last thing they needed was Caddrick on any warpath.

Once again, Caddrick had failed to use the few brains God had given him, leaving Gideon no choice but to wade in and try to salvage the mess. Therefore, Mr. Sid Kaederman, detective with the world-famous, globe-spanning Wardmann Wolfe agency, would be taking an unplanned time tour. Gideon's lips twisted in a sardonic smile at the notion of posing as a detective from Noah Armstrong's own agency. But he did not find the idea of taking a time tour amusing. He was a fastidious man by nature, fond of his creature comforts, of up-time luxuries. He hadn't done real fieldwork in fifteen years and had vowed never to set foot down a time touring gate, where filth and disease and accident could rob him of everything he'd built over his career.

God, time touring!

The only question was, which of Shangri-La Station's gates would Mr. Sid Kaederman be touring? Which one, exactly, had Jenna Caddrick disappeared down, and which had Ianira Cassondra and her family gone through? Denver? Or London?

He intended to find out.

With that promise to himself foremost in his mind, Gideon Guthrie started reviewing methods by which he would slowly dismember Ms. Jenna Nicole Caddrick, and began packing his luggage. He was still reviewing delightfully bloodthirsty methods, up to the ninety-ninth and counting, when he snatched up a pre-prepared portfolio with Sid Kaederman's identification, medical records, and credit cards, and headed grimly out the door.

Chapter Fifteen

Skeeter knew they didn't have much time. The men who'd kidnapped Bergitta would kill her if they weren't stopped, and stopped fast. Making use of what he had ready at hand, Skeeter deployed part of his forces-the closest thing he possessed to shock troops-in an ambush where the corridor turned, forming a blind corner with a partially constructed apartment along one approach and a storage room along the other, providing two doorways strategically positioned for attack.

Skeeter then led his light, mobile infantry-such as it was-back toward the preoccupied construction crew, in what he hoped would be a maneuver worthy of Yesukai the Valiant himself, or maybe Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox. Having selected the least threatening of his troops to accompany him, Skeeter jogged straight into the big open bay warehouse, with Molly and the two kids from the Lost and Found gang hard on his heels.

"There they are!" Skeeter yelled. "Molly, quick! Go call Security!"

Eight-year-old Tevel, playing his role with enthusiasm, taunted, "Boy, are you gonna get yours! They'll throw away the key! Drop you down an unstable gate! Nyah-nyah, you're all going to jail! Come on, Molly, let's tell on 'em!"

Hashim, not to be outdone, was shouting something that sounded scurrilous. Whether it was the teenager's Arabic taunts or Tevel's threats or Skeeter's shout for Molly to call Security, six of the burliest, nastiest, angriest

members of the construction crew charged right at them. Screwdrivers and wicked knives glinted in the work lights dangling from the unfinished ceiling. The man in the lead was shouting, "Don't let them get away! Kill them all!"

Skeeter whipped around, bolting back the way they'd come. "Run!"

Hashim was still yelling taunts in Arabic as they pounded through a series of twists and turns in the corridor. Molly passed Skeeter, as planned, while eight-year-old Tevel shot into the lead, on a mission of his own. When they plunged through the blind corner, Skeeter turned on his heel and waited, claw hammer clutched in one hand. He could hear the pounding of their feet, could smell the stench of their sweat-

All six of them piled into the blind corner, running full tilt.

"NOW!"

Kynan Rhys Gower lunged through an open doorway, war hammer gripped over his head for a striking blow. The heavy wooden mallet whistled in a short arc. The lead man ran full tilt into it. His skull caved in with a sickening crunch. The man behind him screamed and tripped over the body, trying to dig a heavy Egyptian hunting dart out of his left kidney. A rock whizzed from the doorway nearest Skeeter. It stuck the throat of the man next to the pincushion. The man gave out a gurgling scream and went down, clutching his crushed trachea. Eigil Bjarneson's screaming war cry sent one man racing in retreat-straight onto Alfonzo's pike. Another man screamed and fell to his knees when Eigil severed his hand with a single blow of his sword. A sharpened screwdriver clattered to the floor from the twitching, disconnected fingers. The final man was hit with double blows in the chest, once from a spinning rock, once when a heavy hunting dart embedded itself between ribs.

When Eigil would have finished off the man whose hand lay beside him on the concrete, Skeeter rushed in. "Wait! I want one of 'em alive!"

The man on the floor was pleading for mercy, promising anything, if only they would let him live, if only they'd bring medical help to reattach his hand . . . Rushing footfalls from behind brought Skeeter around in a crouch. But it wasn't an enemy, it was more down-timers, six of them, and the enraged construction foreman, whose face was bruised and scabbed with dried blood.

"How can I help?" Riyad snarled.

"Find out what that bastard knows about the Ansar Majlis. Their leaders arrived through Primary today. I want to know everything he knows about the Ansar Majlis and their plans to invade the station!"

"With pleasure! Get a tourniquet on that arm!" Then he switched to Arabic and Skeeter switched his attention to the rest of his war party.

"Kynan, Eigil, Alfonzo, get moving! Frontal assault. Corydon, Molly, Chenzira, back them up! And somebody get Security down here! Hashim, you're with me!" He scooped up a heavy concrete trowel from one of the dead men. With a blade like a hoe, one which stuck straight out from the handle, rather than bending down at an angle, its edge had been sharpened wickedly. It made a conveniently lethal weapon to back up his claw hammer.

Skeeter sent his troops into the open bay warehouse. He put Molly in the lead, since she had the only pistol, with Corydon and Chenzira Umi backing her up with the other two projectile weapons. Skeeter charged past the open bay's door and raced down the corridor toward the unfinished section of wall where Bergitta lay bound to the uprights. Hashim, too, had confiscated an abandoned weapon: a sharpened screwdriver. They crept past the last of the drywall, then crouched low to peer into the warehouse beyond.

About half of the fourteen remaining men had run toward the doorway, shouting obscenities at Skeeter's attacking troops and charging to the attack. Several others had taken refuge behind stacked supplies, wailing-or so Hashim whispered-that they should never have attacked the crew foreman and brought the woman down here, that they hadn't counted on killing so many people, couldn't they just abandon the whore and run? Only two men had been left

behind to guard Bergitta. She was barely conscious, face swollen and bruised, mouth and nose bleeding where they'd hit her repeatedly. Neither guard was paying any attention to her, which meant they weren't looking at the open "wall" behind her, either.

Hashim slipped through first, easing past the two-by-fours on Bergitta's left, while Skeeter edged past on her right. When Molly started shooting, the guards left with Bergitta moved even further away. That gave Skeeter and Hashim the chance they needed. The down-time boy struck first. He drove the sharpened screwdriver into the nearest guard's back with a snarl of hatred. The man screamed. The other guard whirled, bringing up a knife-

Skeeter slashed with the sharpened trowel. The blow severed fingers. The man screamed and fell to his knees beside the clattering knife. A kick to the man's head sent him sprawling. "Wire his hands!" he yelled to Hashim, who was already crouching low over Bergitta. A twist of Skeeter's claw hammer served to break the wires around her wrists and throat. Skeeter picked her up, then shouted at the embattled construction workers, "I've got your hostage! You might as well give it up and surrender! Security's on the way and there's no way off this station! Surrender now and maybe these down-timers won't kill you like they did your pals just now!"

Hashim translated into Arabic for good measure.

Moments later, it was over. Security did, in fact, arrive in force, led by Wally Klontz and the crew foreman, Riyad, along with several of his enraged crew who'd been jumped and knocked out. They started cleaning up the mess. Skeeter carried Bergitta up to the infirmary, himself, not trusting the job to anyone else. He ran the whole way, while Bergitta lapsed into unconsciousness. He skidded, out of breath, into the infirmary, where battered tourists and the irate Senator Caddrick were being treated for injuries from the riot at Primary.

Rachel Eisenstein, who was busy rinsing tear gas out of Caddrick's reddened eyes, took one look at Bergitta, blanched, and abandoned Caddrick. "What's happened?"

"Some of the Arabian Nights crew dragged her down to the basement, beat her nearly to death, gang-raped her . . ."

"I need a trauma team, stat!" Rachel shoved past the shocked and red-faced senator, who sputtered an outraged protest at being abandoned.

Skeeter carried Bergitta in Rachel's wake, shoving his own way past the angry senator, and followed the station's chief of medicine into a treatment room. Skeeter turned Bergitta over to Rachel's care, gratified by the swiftness of the trauma team's arrival, and found himself abruptly trembling from head to toes with the aftershock of battle. He dragged his hands across his face, decided he'd better find someplace to sit down, and stumbled back toward the front of the infirmary.

And ran slap into Mike Benson.

"Jackson!"

He glanced up just in time to see the handcuffs. He was so off-balance and exhausted from the fight, from the desperate rush to get Bergitta to a doctor, he didn't even have the strength or presence of mind to slip out of the way. Benson slapped the cuffs around his wrists, cold and terrifying, and tightened them down with a savage twist. "We've got a basement full of bodies, Jackson! And for once, you're not gonna wriggle out of it! Not with Caddrick on station, threatening to shut us down!"

Too badly shaken to do more than stumble, Skeeter followed numbly when Benson hauled him past gaping orderlies, nurses, newsies, and injured tourists. Ten minutes later, Skeeter was in the aerie high above Commons, facing down Ronisha Azzan, Shangri-La's tall deputy station manager. She'd clearly taken over when the feds had dragged Bull Morgan away to jail. Like Time Tours CEO Granville Baxter, Ronisha Azzan claimed Masai heritage and wore

richly patterned African textiles done up in expensive suits. At the moment, she towered over Skeeter, glowering down at him from the other side of Bull's desk, while Benson blocked the exit, standing between Skeeter and the elevator doors. Skeeter stood swaying, wrists aching where the too-tight cuffs were cutting the skin, badly shaken and beginning to despair.

Ronisha Azzan said coldly, "We've taken into custody half-a-dozen down-timers on murder charges, Skeeter. What I want to know is--"

The elevator doors slid open with a soft ping! and Kit Carson crashed the party.

"Move it, Mike," Kit growled, facing down Benson when the head of security thought twice about letting him into the aerie. Kit brought one arm up to keep the elevator doors from closing again. "I'm in no mood to play games with anybody."

Benson locked eyes with the retired scout, then grunted once and wisely stepped aside. Skeeter sank, shaking, into the nearest chair, having been on the receiving end of Kit's rage once before, but after a moment's utter panic, he realized what Kit's presence here meant.

Kynan Rhys Gower had sworn an oath of fealty to Kit, several months back. The retired time scout had rescued him from Portuguese traders intent on burning the Welshman and Margo as witches on a beach in sixteenth-century East Africa. Kit was therefore obligated to speak on his behalf as the Welshman's liege lord. Kit Carson might, yet, take Skeeter apart for involving his vassal in something as serious as murder, but for the moment, his attention was rivetted on Ronisha Azzan.

Then he spoke, voice flat with anger, and darted a glance at Skeeter's manacled wrists. "Was it really necessary to cuff him?"

Benson snapped, "I thought so! There's half a dozen dead men down there--"

"And damned near a dead little girl!" Kit's lean face ran white with barely controlled fury. "That poor kid's been raped and beaten unconscious! Rachel's staff said they're not even sure she'll come out of surgery alive!"

Skeeter blanched.

"Take the cuffs off, Mike! Skeeter's not going to attack one of us. And even if he did, I could throw him through the nearest window without batting an eyelash, which he knows!"

Skeeter knew, all right.

He had no intention of going one-on-one with Kit Carson under any circumstances. But thanks to Kit, Mike Benson grudgingly unlocked the handcuffs, freeing Skeeter's wrists. He flexed them gingerly and rubbed the chafed skin.

"Thanks."

Benson just glowered at him and retreated to a watchful stance between Skeeter and the elevator door. Ronisha slowly seated herself in Bull Morgan's chair, studying Skeeter intently. "All right, Kit. He's uncuffed. Now. You want to explain this mess, Skeeter? If I didn't have my phones forwarded down to the war room, I'd have every reporter on station demanding to know why half-a-dozen construction workers were just murdered on a station totally out of control. Not to mention Senator Caddrick, who's demanded to see me the minute he's released from the infirmary, and I think we can all guess what he wants. This isn't going to play well in the press, Skeeter. The station's in very serious trouble, even without Caddrick on the warpath down in station medical."

"Yeah," Skeeter muttered, "that's old news, around here." Kit's unexpected support gave him the courage to say it right out. "Look, I'm not in any mood for games, either. Those bastards timed their hit perfectly, snatching Bergitta during the chaos at Primary. They knew Security would be run ragged, trying to control that mess, and frankly, they were counting on the fact that Bergitta's only a down-timer. She's not Ianira Cassondra, not somebody we'd

tear the station apart to find, she's just a worthless, down-timer ex-prostitute, a kid nobody'd miss. If you sit there and tell me you'd have pulled a single security officer off riot duty at Primary to hunt down those bastards or even mount a search for her, right in the middle of this mess, I'll call you a liar, Ronisha Azzan."

Ronisha's brows arched, but the deputy station manager said nothing, merely tapped long, elegant fingernails against the desktop and waited for Skeeter to finish.

Skeeter shrugged. "I figured the only chance she had was the down-timers. It was the little ones, the Lost and Found Gang, who saw them snatch her out of the bathroom she was cleaning. They came for me, ran to warn the others. The kids heard those creeps boasting, talking about how they were going to beat her and rape her and then kill her in cold blood when they'd had their fun. When we went in, down there, it was twenty to seven. Twenty, dammit, all of them intent on committing murder. They'd already jumped their own foreman, knocked him out and locked him up along with anybody who disagreed with their idea of fun. And the minute they laid eyes on us, their ringleader started yelling at his men to kill all of us. You tell me what we should've done, under the circumstances. Let them rape to death an innocent girl? Let 'em butcher those kids who led us down there? Tevel Gottlieb is only eight, for Chrissake. Folks around here may not think a helluva lot of me, but goddammit, if you think I was going to stand by with a finger in my ear and do nothing, you're as crazy as those idiots out there worshiping Jack the Ripper!"

Before Ronisha Azzan could do more than draw a single breath, Kit Carson said quietly, "I'd have done the same thing, Ronnie. In a second. And I've talked to Mr. Riyad. He supports Skeeter fully."

She glanced sharply at Shangri-La's most famous, influential resident, then sighed and rapped her knuckles agitatedly against the desktop. "Huh. Frankly, if I'd been in Skeeter's place, I might have done what he did, too. Mike, as far as I'm concerned, every one of these people acted in self-defense, saving the life of a station resident. And don't quote up-time law at me, either! I know most of them are down-timers without rights. On this station," she jabbed a finger downward for emphasis, "a resident is a resident. At least they are on my watch and I'm pretty sure Bull would back me up, if he weren't in jail with those damned feds holding the keys. So . . . The question is, what to tell those vultures in the press, or that maniac, Caddrick?"

Skeeter's jaw dropped, trying to take in the fact that he wasn't going to jail, after all. Then Skeeter realized he had another ace up his sleeve, one he knew for sure Ronisha Azzan would be interested in. "Well, you might try giving them the story of the week. We've got the key to destroying the Ansar Majlis, after all."

"What?" The word echoed in triplicate.

Skeeter indulged a brief, satisfied grin. It wasn't every day a guy could shock the likes of that trio. Skeeter leaned forward. "The guy who lost his hand? He offered to sing like a caged canary. And according to Hashim, part of what he's offered to sing about is the Ansar Majlis. Namely, their plans to invade this station, break their riot-happy Brothers out of jail, and kill off every Security officer in their way and every Templar they can lay hands on, doing it. Their leaders came through Primary today."

Ronisha snatched up the telephone. "Azzan, here. Release every down-timer involved in that fight down in Arabian Nights. Yes, dammit, now. And ask that kid, Hashim, and Mr. Riyad to translate for us. Interrogate those construction workers Wally Klontz and Mr. Riyad brought in. I want to know everything they do about the Ansar Majlis." Then, to Skeeter, "With a little luck, we may yet blow that terrorist group wide open. Good work, Skeeter. Damned good work, in fact. The station owes you. Go on, get out of here. Get over to the infirmary and see how she's doing."

Skeeter was in such a state of shock, he could scarcely mumble out his thanks. He bolted for the elevator, gratified when Mike Benson merely stepped aside, his own jaw scraping the floor. The head of station security sent an unhappy scowl after him, but that was all. Good God, he thought on the way down to Commons, I'm not going to jail! None of us is going to jail! Because of Kit Carson. Or was it only that Ronisha Azzan was, in the final analysis, a fair woman, interested in justice? Even though she had to be tough, doing a job like hers, particularly with a whole new stack of corpses to explain to Senator John Caddrick? Skeeter wasn't sure, but he certainly wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

When he reached the infirmary, he found Wally Klontz there ahead of him, along with Mr. Riyad and Hashim, taking statements from the injured construction workers. Wally glanced up when Skeeter came in. "Hey, Skeeter! Rachel said to tell you, Bergitta's in surgery, but it looks like she'll make it, after all. You got her up here just in time." Skeeter had to lean against the nearest wall, the relief was so profound. "And these birds," Wally nodded at the construction workers he was questioning, "are giving us enough information to arrest the whole up-time Ansar Majlis operation. We've already identified their ringleaders and sent out teams to arrest them at their hotels. Seems the leadership decided to come here and supervise the search for Ianira in person, after their underlings screwed up the mission. Once they're in custody, it'll just be a matter of mopping up the cells scattered in various up-time cities. Good work, Jackson."

He couldn't quite believe his ears. Two 'eighty-sixers in a row, thanking him!

But the jubilant mood was short-lived. When Bergitta came out of surgery, and Rachel allowed him to step into the recovery room, Skeeter's warm glow of accomplishment drained away so fast, he had to grip the door frame to steady himself. Bergitta was awake, but only just. Rachel had sedated her heavily for the emergency surgery and she was just coming out from under the anesthesia. The injuries looked even worse against the stark white of hospital bed and bandages than they had down in that nasty, half-finished warehouse in the basement. When Skeeter paused, stricken, beside her bed, Bergitta's bruised and swollen eyes focused slowly on his face. "Skeeter . . ." Tears trickled down her blackened cheeks.

"Shh, don't try to talk. You're safe, now. You've just come out of surgery, Bergitta. Rachel says you're going to be all right, but you need to rest, save your strength." Moving gingerly, he took her hand. Heavy bandages covered raw cuts from the wire. Her elbow trailed IV lines.

"Thank you," she whispered anyway, throat working to swallow past hideous bruises from more of their damned wire.

"Don't thank me," he insisted quietly. "Thank the kids. They spotted you, when those animals dragged you out of the bathroom. If it hadn't been for the kids . . ." He forced a smile. "But they did see you, didn't they? And sounded the alarm. So we got you out of there, thanks to the little ones. And some who aren't so little," he added with a watery smile. "Eigil Bjarneson sent a few to the gods, today."

Her fingers tightened around Skeeter's.

"Listen, you get some rest, okay? Nobody's going to hurt you again, I promise. The ones who aren't dead are under arrest. They'll be kicked off station in handcuffs and tried for attempted murder and ties to the Ansar Majlis. You're safe, Bergitta, I promise you are. And Molly wants you to move in with her, when you're stronger, so you won't have to live alone any more." Over at the doorway, a nurse high-signed him. "I have to go now, the nurse says you need to sleep. Close your eyes, I'll come back and see you when you're feeling a little better."

By the time Skeeter extricated his fingers from hers, tucked her hand

beneath the blankets, and reached the door, she was sound asleep. He stood in the doorway for a long moment, just watching her, then turned on his heel and headed out into the Commons once again. Bergitta was alive, thank all the Yakka gods of the upper air, and with a little luck, the Ansar Majlis wouldn't ever threaten anybody again.

But he still had to find a job, doing something to pay for his apartment and groceries, and he still intended to spot and turn in every pickpocket and confidence artist he could find. And somewhere, down one of the station's gates, his dearest friends in the world were hiding for their very lives. Marcus and Ianira and their beautiful little girls . . .

He didn't yet know how, exactly.

But Skeeter intended to find them.

And bring them safely home once more.

Jenna Caddrick sat beside the window of her bedroom in the little house in Spitalfields, listening to the angry shouts in the streets outside, as word of the latest murder in Whitechapel spread through the East End. She'd sat in almost this same spot for a whole week, now, exhausted and trying to recover from the gunshot to her skull. Jenna could no longer doubt Ianira's pronouncement that she was carrying a baby, either. Even with the stress of the past few days, she should've started her period by now and hadn't. And she'd never felt so monstrously queasy in all her life, had been feeling nauseated for days, right through the pain medication Dr. Mendel had prescribed. She hadn't wanted anything more than dry toast in days, had been forcing herself to eat, terrified that she'd lose the baby if she didn't choke food down.

Below her window, angry working men shouted at a police constable, demanding better patrols through the area, and frightened women huddled in doorways, clutching shawls about their shoulders and crying while they talked endlessly of the madman stalking these streets. Jenna brought her eyelids clenching down over wetness. What am I going to do? She was in disguise as a man, with fake mutton chops and moustaches which the time terminal's cosmetologist had implanted. That false hair would require a cosmetic surgeon to remove. Not a single doctor anywhere in this city would begin to understand if a seemingly male individual showed up ready to deliver a baby, for God's sake. Talk about attracting unwanted attention . . .

And she couldn't go home to deliver her baby, either, might never be able to go home. That was something else she'd been running away from, these last few days, sitting in this chair and staring out this window while her scalp wound healed. She didn't want to face the knowledge that the faceless men her father worked with might never stop trying to kill her, even if Noah managed to destroy her father's career and bring down the men paying him.

None of them might ever be able to go home again, not Jenna or Noah Armstrong or Ianira's beautiful, precious family . . . And they didn't even know where Ianira was, or what had become of her in the hands of the lunatic who'd shot Jenna down in cold blood. Jenna's lips trembled and tears came again, a flood of them as bitter anger threatened to choke her. Somehow, her father was going to pay for this. All of this . . . She didn't hear the first knock at her door and only looked up when someone cleared a throat and said, "Hey, mind if I come in?"

Jenna, eyes streaming, looked around. It was Noah Armstrong. The detective, still playing the role of Marcus' sister, was dressed in a plain cotton skirt and worn bodice, leaving Armstrong's gender even more a mystery than ever. Jenna couldn't even bring herself to care. Noah lifted a tray with several slices of dried toast, a hot meat pie, and a steaming mug of tea. "I bought you something to eat."

Jenna swallowed against the nausea any smell of food brought. She wasn't

hungry, hadn't been hungry in so long, she'd forgotten what hunger felt like. "Thanks," she made herself say.

Noah set the lunch tray on the table at Jenna's elbow. As she choked down the first bites, the detective rested a hand on her brow. The gesture was so caring, Jenna's eyes stung and the tears came again. She set down her fork and covered her face with her hands.

"Hey," Noah hunkered down beside her, grey eyes revealing a surprising depth of concern, "what's this? I won't let anyone hurt you, kid. Surely you know that?"

Jenna bit her lip, then managed to choke out, "I . . . I know that. It's why . . . I mean . . . everybody who ever cared about me died," she gulped. "Noah, I'm so scared . . ."

"Sure you are, kid," Noah said quietly. "And you've got every right to be. But look at this another way, Jenna." Noah traced the line of fake whiskers down her jaw, brushed limp hair back from her brow, the gesture curiously gentle. "As long as you're alive, as long as your baby's alive, then at least a part of Carl's still alive, too. And that means they've lost. They've failed to destroy the witnesses, failed to destroy quite everything you love." Noah took her hand, rubbed her fingers and palm with warm fingertips. "You're not alone, hear? We're all with you in this. And we'll need your help, Jenna. To find Ianira."

Jenna looked up at that, met Noah Armstrong's gaze. The concern, the steely determination to keep her alive gave Jenna a renewed sense of strength. She found herself drying her wet cheeks. "All right," she said, voice low. "All right, Noah. I'll do whatever it takes. Maybe we can try hunting the gentlemen's clubs over in Pall Mall, find some trace of him that way. We have to find her."

"And we will."

"Noah . . ." She bit her lip, half afraid to broach the subject they'd all been avoiding.

"What?" the detective asked gently.

"When you go back up time with that evidence? I want you to do me a favor, will you?" The bitterness in her voice would have shocked her, once, long ago, at least a week previously, before her father had destroyed her entire world. "Don't put a bullet between my father's eyes for me."

Noah's grey eyes showed surprise.

She grated out harshly, "I want to do it, myself."

The lunch Noah had brought, forgotten on the table at her elbow, slowly cooled while Noah gathered her in and let her cry. One day, she didn't yet know how, she would make her father pay. She had never been more certain of anything in her life.

to be continued in:

The House That Jack Built