



Start Wearing Purple



WRITTEN AS A 'NOVEL IN A DAY'
ON OCTOBER 28th 2017

Start Wearing Purple

written as a
Novel-in-a-Day



START WEARING PURPLE

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In Memoriam

I was incredibly saddened to learn recently that our good friend Montrée Whiles passed away earlier this year, after her car was struck by a drunk driver.

Montrée was one of the most enthusiastic members of the NiaD family, and her passion (and chasing) certainly helped keep the event running this long! The more I've learnt over the past few weeks about this remarkable woman, the more and more respect I have for her. I won't share specific details here since she deliberately chose to use a pen name for her writing, but trust me — she was one of the good ones.

Taken far too young. We'll miss you.

Also by Novel-in-a-Day:

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Time is no substitute for talent

There is a well-known saying that if you give a monkey a typewriter and an infinite amount of time then it will eventually produce the complete works of Shakespeare. In 2003, the staff at Paignton Zoo gave a computer to six crested macaques and categorically proved that what you actually get is five pages of the letter 'S' and a broken keyboard. Time, it seems, is no substitute for talent. But can talent substitute for time...?

The book you are about to read was written over the course of a single day in October 2017. For those unfamiliar with the concept of Novel-in-a-Day, it's simple:

- A skeleton of a plot is worked out in advance of the day
- That plot is broken into sections, which are divided amongst the participants randomly
- The writers have most of the rest of the day to write and return their chapters, working with no knowledge of the wider story or their place in it.

I hope you enjoy reading the book as much as we loved putting it together.

Tim

October 28, 2017

Start Wearing Purple

chapter one

Patrick Edmonds

AUGUST 2005

Alcatraz Island. The formidable military installation turned penitentiary that had imprisoned the most notorious villains of our time. Terrordon gazed on it without wonder. There was no surprise why the Sleepwalker had chosen to take it hostage. It was the perfect hideaway sprawled in the middle of the San Francisco Bay with practically no means of ambush, no means of escape. Practically.

Everyone knew the island's infamous escape artists Frank Morris and the Anglin Brothers. But few knew of the other failed attempts that ended with the bodies of convicts frozen by the icy waters being washed up on the shores of the bay. Some were carried away to sea by the current, only to be accidentally recovered by fishermen a hundred miles away. Even the strongest swimmers would succumb before reaching the shore less than a mile and a half away. A few escapees—while never found—were believed to have been dragged to the depths of the ocean and devoured by sharks—though there

were no man-eating sharks in the bay. Yes, people knew of the escape artists and would be escapees; the island thrived on such tales which garnered the city millions of dollars in annual tourist revenue.

No one really knew of attempts to infiltrate Alcatraz, though. There was that once rumored time in 1996, back when he was just a boy, but no one remembers. Some megalomaniac had taken Alcatraz hostage then, too, but the subsequent siege had been led by a crack military outfit and ex-Alcatraz inmate. Terrordon was on his own. He would have to be careful, yet quick. The bombs were ticking.

Terrordon put on his slim magnifying goggles and surveyed the circumference of the 3-story prison, which looked, ironically, more like a summer house. Henchmen were stationed along the perimeter and in the lighthouse, the guard tower, even on the defunct water tower. Over two dozen, paired in twos and sometimes threes, not a lone gunman among them. Sleepwalker, for all his diabolism, was smart. Hell, were megalomaniacs ever *not* smart? The easiest criminals to apprehend were always the ones who were passionate about their crimes, led by uncontrolled anger, greed, or insanity; the kind that cackled at others distress and made longwinded speeches because their purpose was not to be free, but to be remembered. Their emotions were a detriment and caused needless mistakes, like sending all their henchmen at once to take out Terrordon—or gathering them all in once convenient location—only to have those minions obliterated with one swell swoop.

This is why I must stop you, Terrordon mused. *You are a threat because you have no emotions.*

Of course, this detachment, while perhaps a strength for Sleepwalker, was also his Achilles heel. The lunatics, while

easier to apprehend, were infinitely more unpredictable. They would just as soon toss their hostage off a building in a tantrum without realizing they'd just tossed away any bargaining power. Or they'd detonate every bomb at once just for the hell of it, even if it killed them, too. And they were notoriously difficult to find, never hiding in the one place you assumed they would.

Sleepwalker, on the other hand, was no average maniac. His lunacy had logic. He didn't just want to cause havoc, he wanted to cause suffering. He wanted not only to be remembered, but free as well. Which meant he would predictably hide himself in an area of Alcatraz that was both easy to escape and easy to defend from all angles, no corners, no blind spots.

The warden's house. Or, at least, what was left of it. The ruins were perfect a perfect command station to see everything and everyone coming from above, from ahead, from beyond, so long as you had enough eyes to cover you.

Terrordon trained his gaze north again to the lighthouse, where three armed guards formed a triangle in the booth. He shifted his view down to the adjacent mansion, gutted by fire and time, but its large windows still solid and overlooking the bay and, nearby, the . . . heliport.

You gave yourself a front row seat to the carnage! Not today, my friend. Not ever.

A flash of purple skirted across his vision as other guards on the ground walked into view, clustered around something or someone as they entered the ruins of the warden's house. Terrordon slipped off the goggles and started the Jet Ski he'd stolen from the harbor. There was no other way to confront Sleepwalker but head-on: no stealth maneuvers, no element of surprise except the surprise of an open ambush. There was no

time for strategic planning; the clocks were ticking. He'd have to expose himself as he came up the flank and entered at the Dock Tower.

Terrordon gunned the ski and shot off across the bay, his cape waving behind him as both a beacon of hope and a shield against the water sprayed by the powerful machine slicing the rough currents. As he neared the island he raised a miniature gun and shot it towards the lighthouse in quick succession. Two guards were hit and fell moments later. The third turned and started shooting rounds from a machine gun as Terrordon raced up the path the short distance towards the ruins.

Henchmen lined the road like centurions, and as he passed through, they, too, opened fire. He could do little more than duck as the bullets flailed, hitting other henchmen and whizzing past his ears. He stopped short and dropped to his knees as guards assailed him from ahead. Throwing the cape around his body, he activated the electromagnetic bulletproof shield on his utility belt. The force of the bullets pushed him back and he dug his heels into the ground with spiked cleats. In moments, if he didn't move, the barrage of bullets would deactivate the field and he'd be a dead man. He could think of only one thing to do.

Daringly, Terrordon snatched a grenade from his belt as he plugged his ears with one swift motion and with the next threw off the cape and tossed the grenade in front of him. It detonated immediately, and, though it didn't kill his adversaries, the sonic blast deafened and immobilized them. He raced up the path, slowing slightly as the steep climb beat his lungs, and finally burst into the open square of the warden's ruins.

A sudden blast hit him from behind and fell to the ground, his vision blurred, and his arms weak. Terrordon pulled the

safety plugs from his ears and heard before he saw, the slow, sarcastic clapping of his nemesis, Sleepwalker.

“Bravo, bravo,” said Sleepwalker. “Took you longer than expected, but indeed, I was expecting you.”

Terrordon groaned as he raised himself to his knees. His vision began to stabilize as Sleepwalker came into focus, his garish purple suit mere feet away, his arm extended with a pistol pointed at Terrordon. There was no smile on Sleepwalker’s face.

“Why? Why are you doing this? Those people inside, the people of San Francisco—what have they done to you?”

Sleepwalker sighed. “Do you really think you will buy time with this charade of empathy? You don’t care about these people. You only care about yourself, your image, your legacy. You are no different from me. Just a vigilante fighting because you have nothing else in this world. No one to love and no one to love you.”

Terrordon glanced around and saw no one else. He gazed at his nemesis with true confusion. “Where are your henchmen?”

“Oh, the ones you didn’t kill or maim? They are in the fortress, awaiting my command. You see, I wanted you here alone, just you and I. We have unfinished business.” Sleepwalker waved his gun. “Go on, stand up. I want to see you fall when I shoot you.”

“With pleas—” Terrordon reached for his utility belt only to discover his waist naked.

Sleepwalker chuckled. “Gone.”

“How? When?”

“You disappoint me,” said Sleepwalker. “Why do they call me the Sleepwalker? That blast that knocked you out—you lost time. Enough for me to remove all your little gadgets. All

your guns. Well, for *you* to remove them.”

“What? I didn’t—”

“You did. You did many things, actually. How much time do you think you lost?”

Terrordon blinked. He realized suddenly that the shadows he saw were not because his vision was yet unclear; the sun had begun to descend. “Why haven’t the bombs gone off?”

“Oh, they will. Patience. First, I want to tell you a little story.”

“No!” Terrordon brushed dirt from his sleeves. He moved slowly, not from the pain that prickled his side, but out of caution. He didn’t want to spook Sleepwalker. And he didn’t want to suffer another bomb attack—whatever those bombs did. “This ends now. Shoot me.”

“Very well.” The force of the blast rocked Terrordon, knocking him back to the ground. He immediately grabbed his abdomen to staunch the blood, but felt no warm trickles through his fingers. Nothing.

“Amazing, isn’t it? I could shoot you again, if you like. There will be no blood but your organs will be damaged just the same. If I want, I could kill you with a higher frequency and no one would know how. Just another little toy I’ve been working on. Now, where was I?”

Terrordon stood again. “You were going to tell me why you planted bombs all over the city. Why you want to destroy us all.”

“No, no, I wasn’t. Suffice to say I have some issues with our great city, some abandonment issues.”

“Abandonment issues?” echoed Terrordon. “I agree, you have issues. But destroying a city won’t fix them. You need help. Someone to talk to, to help you unearth whatever emotions you buried deep inside. If you won’t get professional

help, let me help you.”

Sleepwalker fairly barked out his disdain. He laughed humorlessly, waving his gun at empty targets. “I need help? I need help? Have you looked in the mirror lately? Parading around in Halloween costume, trying to save a world that doesn’t want your help! Searching for some identity. Which of us is more pathetic, more needy? At least I know who I am.”

Terrordon lowered his head and whispered, “You don’t know who you are. You don’t know why I am trying to help you.”

Something about Terrordon’s voice caused Sleepwalker to hesitate. He lowered the gun and stepped closer to his nemesis, so close if Terrordon had wanted he could have snatched the gun and put an end to it all. But he didn’t. He stood his ground and held Sleepwalker’s gaze.

“Why did you take Alcatraz hostage?”

Sleepwalker stepped back. “What?”

“Why Alcatraz?” repeated Terrordon.

Sleepwalker raised the gun. “It doesn’t matter!”

Terrordon moved forward, hands splayed as if to show he had nothing up his sleeves, as if to surrender. “It does. You don’t do anything without a purpose. You don’t leave anything to chance. So it stands to reason it was not chance that brought you to Alcatraz. What brought you here—John?”

“What did you call me?”

Terrordon lowered his hands. “I know who you are. I know about your connection to Alcatraz. I know why you feel abandoned, why you blame Alcatraz. It wasn’t just you. It was me, too. You and I are alike, Sleepwalker.”

Sleepwalker raised the gun. “You are nothing like me!”

Terrordon stepped closer and put his hands on the gun. He pulled the muzzle into his stomach.

“I was abandoned, too. After the escape, they tried to go clean, didn’t they? But they couldn’t because they were being hunted like villains, and you—we-slowed them down. They couldn’t run with us. They had to leave us behind. They had no idea what would happen to us—any more than we know what happened to them.”

Sleepwalker shook his head angrily. “No! You don’t know what you are taking about. You don’t know me!”

“I do,” said Terrordon. “I’m your—”

The blast knocked him backward and stung his ears. Everything was dark, buzzing, and hot. Terrordon crawled to a purple blob a few feet away, and placed his ear to what he assumed was Sleepwalker’s chest. The thumping in his was audible, but weak. Then the purple blob coughed.

“You are nothing like me,” he whispered.

Terrordon removed the belt from his pants and tied it firmly around Sleepwalker’s wrists.

“Of course not,” he said. “I’m free.”

chapter two

Mark Rothwell

AUGUST 2017

Pete took Jacob's arm. "Come on, let's have something to eat here; the food's good! And the bookshop isn't expecting us for another hour."

Pete pushed Jacob through the door into the café. Jacob looked around. The café was eclectic. It was floored with paving-slabs, the tables had recycled wood tops on industrial iron supporting frameworks and were accompanied by rush-seated chairs with their woodwork painted in various vibrant colours. Along the left as they entered was a wide bar with a black granite top, with tall distressed wooden barstools in a line along it. All the paraphernalia of the baristas was ranged along a matching black granite surface behind, with cupboards beneath and shelves above. The front of the bar and the wall behind the bar were tiled with a patchwork of encaustic tiles. The rest of the walls were painted mid-brown but mostly hidden behind photos and posters depicting icons of the gay community. There was a mirror on part of the wall behind

the bar to allow the baristas to keep an eye on the customers while they were making the coffees. A number of tables were free.

“Let’s sit here,” said Pete, choosing a table under a photo of Harvey Milk.

“You would choose this one, wouldn’t you! Harvey Milk is in the past. I finished with him years ago, but you keep bringing him up. I’m sick of it.” Jacob sat down grumpily.

A waiter shimmied across. “What can I do for you?” he asked, ogling Jacob’s trim figure.

Before Jacob could react, Pete said, “I’ll have an all-day breakfast, and a large latte with added caramel syrup.”

“And you, Sir?” with a smirk.

“Oh, avocado on wholemeal toast, and a regular black americano!”

“Thank you!” He shimmied off with a *moue*.

“And I’m sick of Lance Armstrong and bicycles!” Jacob continued ill-temperedly. “And what has that brought in the last couple of stores on this tour? A handful of people looking like aliens in lycra leotards and weirdly-shaped helmets queueing for my signature on a book that is history for me. And who was Lance Armstrong? Someone who built himself a reputation for being a miracle of human endeavour, the man who recovered from cancer to win the Tour-de-France through taking banned substances ... a man who got people, organisations, the government to fund him to the tune of millions of dollars, all on the basis of lies. I’ve had Lance Armstrong and I’ve had bicycles. They’re history as far as I’m concerned ... just like Harvey Milk. And I can’t wait for this tour to end. My work, my life is writing, not sucking up to people I can’t stomach.”

At that moment the waiter brought their food.

“And look at you; look at what you’re eating! A heart attack on a plate ... fried bacon, fried eggs, fried potatoes, fried tomatoes ... ketchup loaded with sugar and salt and more butter! And then a latte with syrup to which you’re in the process of adding more sugar! And yet you lecture me on looking after myself better ...”

Jacob started to pick at his avocado on toast. Pete started to eat his plate of food while he wondered how to respond to this diatribe. At that moment a new customer entered the coffee shop. He was tall and tanned, with long, wavy blond hair and a moustache and eyebrows of a much browner shade. His eyes, which looked somewhat tired were pale blue, but were icy cold. His shoulders were broad and his well-honed torso was clear from his open, tight-fitting shirt in a violent geometric pattern of clashing pink, red and violet. He was wearing extremely tight pink velvet trousers with a silver belt revealing a narrow waist and tight buttocks. His feet were shod in silver trainers.

He went and sat at one of the stools at the bar. “My usual, Pedro please!”

“One chai latte with added sprinkles coming up!” smiled Pedro behind the bar.

Pete had turned in his chair to enable him to look this new customer up and down. He liked what he saw and it showed. The man at the bar picked up his mug to take a sip, and as he did so, he glanced in the mirror. His eyes met Pete’s and he registered the interest. He sat for a few moments sipping his drink thoughtfully and then, making up his mind, he picked up the mug and walked over.

“You’re new here, aren’t you? I haven’t seen you before. Have you just moved into the area?”

Pete had turned slightly pink; Jacob looked furious.

“No,” said Pete, “We’re just passing time before we go round the corner to Eureka Books. We’re going there for a meet-and-greet and book signing for Jacob here’s new book.”

Hearing the name, the newcomer turned to look at Jacob, who was sitting there with a face like thunder. “Jacob, book ... you’re not Jacob Heath by any chance?”

“Yes, he is,” Pete replied. “He’s just written a biography of Lance Armstrong”.

“Jacob, I didn’t recognise you, you’ve changed so much! I’m Travis! You remember me. What happened? We had such a good thing going together!”

Pete’s eyebrows rose; he had never even thought Jacob might be bisexual.

Jacob looked up, his dark eyes flaming redly. This was Travis with whom he’d flirted for a month or so while trying to get background for his biography of Harvey Milk. That Travis had been a bit flabby, with mousy hair and irregular teeth and no suntan. This suntan looked fake; he had obviously spent a lot, or conned someone into spending a lot on having his teeth straightened and whitened and on working out in a gym. Well, he hadn’t been for Jacob then, and this was certainly not for Jacob now.

“Jacob, why did you walk out and disappear? We must get together again. You look gorgeous, so fit and slim. You’ve really been looking after yourself” intoned Travis.

“Travis? We never had anything going, Travis, just get that straight. I was writing a biography of Harvey Milk; I needed inside information on the LGBT community; you supplied it. That’s all. We never ‘consummated’ ... we talked about sex, because I needed to know more from the gay point of view, but that was it.” He raised his voice, “What was then was nothing; ‘now’ for you and me simply doesn’t exist. Just get

that straight in your mind. I'm not gay, I've never been gay; you didn't attract me then and you certainly don't attract me now!" he almost shouted.

"Jacob, that's not true; I did mean something to you, you told me I did!" Travis said on a wail.

"What you meant to me was a source of information. Nothing more, *nil, nada*. OK?"

"You made me think you loved me and all the time you were just using me! That's just like you people. You only want to know us when you can make use of us as I hate you, I hate you!" he screamed.

Pedro the barista came across. Though not tall, he was muscular and strong. "OK, you two, out. Pay your tab and get out. And never bother to come back; we don't need your sort here!"

Jacob flung out of the bar and began striding up the street. Pete went to the bar leaving Travis head down at the table. He got out his credit card and paid. He apologised to Pedro, but Pedro was adamant, "You two have been creating a bad atmosphere ever since you got here. You're banned!"

Out in the street, Pete saw Jacob striding away, and ran after him. When he finally caught him up, he was out of breath and could hardly speak. "Stop, Jacob," he said, "that's not the way." He turned him to lead him back down to walk the two blocks to where Eureka Books was located.

"Anyway, now look what you've done. Your bad temper has got us, got me, banned from one of the best coffee shops in this area!"

"What I've done! What you did! If you hadn't started ogling that freak, he wouldn't have come across and started trying to hit on me!"

“But he knew you! You had had a relationship!”

“Did you not hear what I said. We never had a relationship; I just egged him on to get information about the LGBT community! You know how I work, my “method writing” of getting involved in the subject, the circumstances, the society of the people I’m writing about. It’s the same with fucking Lance Armstrong and the competitive cycling community. I only took up cycling to get in with them to see what makes them tick, what drives them and what drove Lance Armstrong. No more than that. I did not have a relationship with that creature; I am never going to have a relationship with him. And I want no more of cycling and cyclists. Got it!”

“How was I to know you two knew each other! It was just an ordinary encounter in that part of town as far as I was concerned. It was you who over-reacted.”

“Oh yeah? Shall I tell Jon ...?”

“Now you’ve gone too far! But we’re here at the bookstore, so calm your temper and try to put on a smile for the people.”

Eureka Books occupied an attractive old building on the corner of Eureka Street and 21st Street. The store was lined with bays made of dark oak shelf-units surrounding an area in the centre with a wide oak table with a couple of comfortable chairs. Its stock combined a wide range of titles including many modern works on a wide variety of subjects as well as second-hand and rare books. At the back of the store, a wooden staircase led to an upper floor specialising in artist’s materials and books on art. In the corner near the door was a cash-desk, occupied by a young woman concentrating busily on her nail polish.

The other speciality of the store was author readings, which is why Pete had honed in on this as one of the

bookshops for the tour. As they entered, a small, but well-groomed man came up, smiled at Pete and said, "What can I do for you? Are you looking for anything in particular?"

"I'm Pete Schlamme. We're here for the meet-and-greet and book-signing of Jacob's new book on Lance Armstrong ..."

"Ooh yes! I've heard of you. Well, there's no-one here yet, but if you'd like to come over here with me, we can be cosy and work out the best way to go about it!"

"Jacob, I'm just going with ..."

"Marvin," with a big smile.

"... with Marvin to sort out how we're going to do this. Do you mind looking around by yourself for a few minutes?" and he and Marvin disappeared into the book-stacks.

Left to himself, Jacob glanced at what was on offer on a couple of shelves, but he wasn't really interested, not in other people's books. What interested him was the thrill of writing his own, of being in the zone, of being totally involved in his subject and in the act of creation. When that was finished, the results invariably bored him and he was simply restless. He wasn't married and currently had no girlfriend.

The girl behind the till had long titian-red hair, a creamy skin and warm brown eyes. He went over.

"Hello, I'm Jacob Heath."

"Oh yeah?"

"We're here for me to sign copies of my new book on Lance Armstrong."

"Oh yeah?" She carried on scrutinising her nails.

"Do you think many people will come?"

"Probably not."

"Why not?"

"None of our regulars is into cycling."

“Oh. Do you have many regulars?”

“What’s it to you?” Still concentrating on her nails.

“Just an innocent query to pass the time.”

“Oh yeah? Well, before you think up any more innocent queries, just push off. I’m not interested.”

“What do you mean?”

“Tits are more interesting than testicles! Get me?” And she jabbed at her nails with her nail-file.

As Jacob turned away, Marvin came across with Pete following behind. “Well, hello! The famous Jacob Heath! I loved your book on Harvey Milk; you really got into the skin of our community.”

Jacob turned back to see the smirk on the girl’s face. “That’s it, Pete,” he shouted. “I’m absolutely sick of this farce. Brunhild behind the till here tells me we’re unlikely to find any interest here, anymore than we did at those other deadbeat places. This tour has been nothing but a chance for you to scout out for yourself. I’ve had it with the whole tour, I’ve had it with you, I’ve had the people I’ve had to deal with through your agency up to here, and I’m out. No more. You can fucking well sign the books yourself as far as I’m concerned.”

He turned, strode the one step to the door and heaved it open just as an elderly lady was about to push it open. He burst out, trying to slam the door but was foiled by the automatic closing mechanism. On the way out he nearly knocked the old lady over, paused for a second to take a breath then set off, just hearing, but not registering, a plaintive elderly voice saying, “What an incredibly rude young man! But am I in the right place for the book-signing ...”

chapter three

Elizabeth Mead

THE FUNNY THING ABOUT San Francisco weather in August is that you never knew what to expect. It could be frigid and windy one day and two days later, you'd be basking in the park in lovely 75 degree sunny weather at noon. And late that afternoon, you'd be back to sweaters because of frigid bone chilling wind and fog spilling in through the channel that separated the Marin headlands from the City shores. And that fog could drill right into your very being. Mark Twain was right when he quipped, "The coldest winter I ever spent was summer in San Francisco." You just never knew what you were going to get. So, when you woke up and saw the sun streaming solid and bright into your window on a summer morning, you jumped out of bed, got dressed, and did your best to take advantage of a good day of sunshine.

That Tuesday broke sunny with blue skies and a forecast of 78 degrees. This was a perfect opportunity for a brisk walk to clear his mind and figure out his next steps, so Jacob set out for one of his favorite restaurants. Golden Era, was an easy fifteen minute Uber ride from his North Beach flat, but the

forty-five minute power walk. The amped up adrenaline and endorphin rush, combined with a clear sky and almost balmy weather was almost too much to bear.

The Golden Era was crowded, as usual, with a waiting line spilling over to the sidewalk. But luckily, the bar counter usually had a free space and Jacob was able to find a spot at the far corner inside.

While Jacob waited for his order of Curry Okra to arrive, he glanced around the packed restaurant and then out through the large picture window to the people milling around outside of the restaurant.

A woman in a deep plum jacket and impossibly high stiletto heels was deep in conversation on her cell phone. Her purse dangled off of her opposite shoulder via a narrow strap. Before Jacob could even formulate the observation to his brain – Gee, you are just asking for someone to swipe that purse off of your shoulder – two hooded figures swept by on a small motorbike. The one riding in the back reached out with two arms towards the woman, snatching the purse with one arm and shoving the woman's shoulder with the other, sending her sideways careening into a large metal trash receptacle.

The motorbike picked up speed but just before it turned left at the opposite corner, a young, athletic looking guy cocked his hand back and snapped what looked like a football in a perfectly executed spiral that drilled right into the motorbike's front wheel. The driver lost control and both men toppled over.

“Whoa. Sweet pass. Stanford could have used him last week against Arizona State.” Two younger, techy looking fellows at the table behind where Jacob sat continued their meal and matter of factly discussed what was happening outside their window. “Look at those two scramble away and,

heh heh, they even forgot to take the gal's purse. What a fail day they are having."

"Wow. Look at those two Japanese chicks taking selfies of themselves in front of the gal that just got creamed." "Yup. They're going to be able to tell their friends back home about the big heist they witnessed on their vacation."

"Look! The boy of the hour just picked up his ball and the purse and is going over to the gal. He pulled a great Terrordon today. Let's get back to work."

Terrordon. Jacob remembered a few stories that had surfaced well over fifteen years ago. The Terrordon – some guy who wore a caped crusader outfit that appeared off and on for a hand full of years back around 2000. What had happened to him? Did anybody ever find out who he was?

Jacob did a quick Google search on his phone and saw a few hits for Terrordon, but they were mostly hits for some hip hop dude or a Pokemon type of character. But then, several links down he saw an item dated in 2005 that described a mysterious costumed man who had helped rescue a litter of puppies from a basement fire. And then another link a year before that about someone who had beat up a guy who was pushing drugs near a high school in the Richmond.

Was it just those two incidents? There had to be more, but Jacob's memory was a little foggy. Jacob pulled up the San Francisco Chronicle's website and tried a few searches there but came up blank. Who would remember? Who would know?

All of the folks he'd worked with at the San Francisco Chronicle had retired, moved away or died, so that was a dead end. But he was having dinner Saturday night with his good friends, the Hunters. They were both in the news business and had been around for a while. Maybe he could get some good intel from them.

Taking San Francisco's BART train over to Oakland, Jacob landed at the Rockridge station and walked the three short blocks to the Hunter's home. For all the bad stories about Oakland being a continual crime scene, the Rockridge area felt like a comfortable and calm slice of suburbia. Neat lawns fronted somewhat charming homes with deep lots and an array of late model cars, either SUV's or small Prius sedans, parked on the curbs or in driveways suggested families and people who worked.

"Hey! It's the Jimmy-man! Still drinking the same blue bullet Coors? Think I will have one too. How's the world of television news? And where's Joyce? It's been a while since I've seen either of you."

"Well, you know the news business. It keeps happening. I'm on call right now, so I hope nothing big happens or I am going to have to make this a short party night." Just then Joyce, tall and lanky, came out from the kitchen with a drink in one hand and a plate of bruschetta in the other. "Jacob! It's been ages! It's going to be so much fun catching up! Here, have one of these. It's my new recipe."

As they settled in to talk, Jacob wasted no time in bringing up his subject. "Do either of you remember any news stories from about 2000 to 2005 about a guy who called himself the Terrordon? He went around doing good deeds and stopping bad guys. Or at least, that's what he said he did."

"Oh my God! That's so funny that you brought him up! I was just about to put together a special about vigilantes. You know, there's a guy who rides BART all over the city and he seems to be waiting for something to happen so he can be a hero. But this guy doesn't wear a costume. Jimmy, what was that guy's name? Do you remember?"

“Yeah. I remember vaguely something about that. I think he was into Parkour. You know, that crazy French sport that Raymond Belle and his son, David did. The Yamakasi was David’s group. They’d plot out courses in the City and then race through and go up and over whatever was in your path. You just conquered everything in your way. Intense sport. That was real big in the late ‘90s as an extreme sport.”

“Didn’t this guy have a costume that made him look like a Pokemon character? And *nun chucks*, didn’t he carry those?”

“Nah,” Jimmy interjected, “he used those ninja stars and throwing knives, Joyce. Except I don’t think he ever used them – he just showed a few people that he had them. What he used a lot was his grappling gun. Guess he got a little tire of the Parkour rules.”

Something nudged Jacob’s memory. “And he had an armored car of sorts. And a utility belt.”

“What a Batman rip off! I don’t even know if he actually did any real saving. Think he just beat up a few bad guys and claimed he was cleaning up the City,” Jimmy offered.

“But what happened to him? I mean he would pop up every so often but then went completely dark after about 2005. Did anybody ever find out who he was?”

Joyce placed a large platter of roasted chicken and root vegetables, a spinach and feta salad, and a bowl of curried rice on the nearby dinner table and she and Jacob settled into their seats as Jim opened a bottle of Tribunal red. “The problem is that 2000 was an election year. And remember how crazy that was, especially at the end. We were all concentrating on learning about hanging chads and butterfly ballots from Florida. Nobody was really paying attention to local stuff. And then, just when things were settling down, we get September 11th and then all the news went national news again, nothing

local unless it was related to terrorism.

“We are bringing in some shrinks for our special on vigilantism to discuss the psychological profile of vigilantes. And what drives them,” Joyce said. “Did you know that the largest vigilance committee was here in San Francisco during the Gold Rush times? The city was overrun by bad guys and it really was the wild west here. Almost eight thousand members worked together to get rid of people they thought were terrorizing the townspeople. They hung four people, but they drove out scores of gamblers and people who they suspected were thieves. Gosh, I wonder where those people are now. We could sure use them in Oakland!”

“Joyce, only you would pull this type of information out of your ass,” Jim added.

Joyce continued, “But, since I am doing this special, I think we should include this Terrordon guy. I mean, yes, vigilantism is supposed to be a mob action, but isn’t that what these hero types do? They take the law into their own hands because they think the police aren’t doing the job right.”

“But, Jacob wondered out loud, “what happened to this Terrordon? He never got caught. We never knew his name. I want to know more. Did he take on the wrong dude and end up as a dead John Doe in the morgue? Is he still around somewhere in the City – heck, he’d be about 60 now, practically a geezer getting ready to retire. I want to find him.”

“Well, you know, Jacob, Facebook and Twitter didn’t go really main stream until ten years ago. Before that it was MySpace and just the kids were into it. But now, practically everyone understands social media and you have so much more access to information. I think, Jacob, that you ought to dig around and find out who this guy was and where he is now. Wouldn’t that be a fantastic hook for my special, Jimmy?”

“Joyce, what, are you signaling to me that this is now a closed subject for me because you’ve scooped me again? It’s a good thing that you do news specials and I do actual news. But I think I liked it better when we both worked at the same station.”

By the time he was on BART and headed back into the City to his flat, Jacob was furiously taking down notes and making a rough outline. He was feeling that familiar and distinct BUZZ that he got when he was about to dive into an interesting project. Another book. About the Terrordon. He could do it. He WOULD do it. He NEEDED to do it. And this wouldn’t just be a biography like his last two books. This would be a mystery case too. That he would solve.

And maybe the Jimmy man was right on target - that this Terrordon was into Parkour. He’d track those local players down and they might be able to provide a lead. That was it! That’s where he’d find him.

While Jacob was coming up the escalator from his BART stop, he pulled out his cell phone and hit his agent’s speed dial number, but it went straight to voicemail. “Pete. I know you had to clean up a lot of mess for me. But you already know all of my reasons. Now listen to this. I have a new biography that I am going to begin. You’re going to love this... Do you remember anything about The Terrordon?”

chapter four

Kaide Li

JACOB, WITH HIS RIGHT arm folded behind his back, slowly extended his left arm holding onto the pull-up bar, relaxing his muscles slightly. Taking a deep breath, he clenched his right fist and pulled himself up again, beads of perspiration rolling down the side of his face onto the ground. It was quiet in the 24-hours gym at 2 A.M., and there was no one else besides him and another middle-aged man over by the weights - perfect for when he needed to sort out his thoughts, even more so for carrying out deeds in the dark cover of the night.

He pulled himself up again and looked at his reflection in the mirror in front, his tensed muscles vibrating slightly under the strain. He had already swiftly improved from what he could do in the past, all that he needed was some discipline. Watching himself lift his entire weight up with his left arm, he considered that physically, he did not look that much different from the Terrordon. They are not that much different in terms of physique. Strength and agility-wise, he was confident about his frequent work-outs and if he were to rate himself, the score would not be too bad. To know how well he would really

do against the Terrordon, he would have to come face-to-face with him but just where had he gone?

Lowering himself onto the ground, Jacob walked over to where the glass ceiling to floor windows would have typically given him a birds' eye view of the streets below during the day. However, it was too dark outside and he could only see himself staring back at him. Even if a crime were to occur right beneath his nose in those darkened alley streets, he would not be able to know it. He took a quick glance at the clock. It was just a few hours more before his appointment with the Police Commissioner. The Police was the most obvious candidate he could think of to get further information on the Terrordon. The front-line officers were ultimately the ones who were right where the action occurred. Even for people in the back-line support, they would have encountered people with direct exchanges with the Terrordon. So, a few weeks earlier, he had gotten in touch with his old contact at the Police Department from his journalist days and was surprised to hear that the Commissioner would like to meet him. Initially, he was furious that his contact actually sold him out to the Commissioner. Such betrayal would not be tolerated back in those days but he remembered that he was no longer a journalist and had probably long since lost his privilege with the Police. Then, calming down and giving it more thought, he realised it might not be too bad a situation to be in after all. Through the Commissioner, if he was lucky, he might be able to get access to more police files on the Terrordon than he could ever imagine and such official records would give his book the credibility it is currently lacking with only theories and no evidence to support who the man behind the Terrordon was. The next person he must find would be Amy Kennedy from San Francisco Chronicle where he used to

work. She had been responsible for most of the paper's coverage of the Terrordon since the time she joined.

"I must find an opportunity to talk to her but now, I must start getting ready," he thought. "First impressions count especially for such an important deal I have to negotiate, hopefully not to wrangle, my way though."

Jacob had chosen his outfit carefully that morning and took extra effort to style his hair. While his hands worked quickly, his mind was deep in thought, playing out a mental game of the prospective exchange he would have with the Commissioner later. Things would go well if he played his cards right. He arrived at the Police Headquarters about 30 minutes early, sufficient time to allow him to mingle with the staff with a valid reason without arousing suspicions. The receptionist politely told him to have a seat while she informs the Commissioner of his arrival. He was just starting to make small talk with the receptionist, charming her into girly giggles when the Commissioner himself appeared at the hallway to receive him personally, much to his dismay. "Mr. Jacob Heath, I hope you did not have to wait long," the Commissioner said and extended his hand. "He seemed as eager to meet me as I am to meet him," Jacob wondered to himself as he took his hand into a firm handshake.

He followed several steps behind the Commissioner as he led him briskly into a room down the corridor. He hardly had any time to take a good look of his surroundings and lost his bearings after several turns. The room was small and had a clinical feel about it. He wondered if it was one of those rooms where they held their interviews and whether there was anyone watching them from behind the darkened glass windows.

"Please sit down Mr. Heath and make yourself comfortable. Would you like to have some coffee or tea?" The Commissioner gestured to the two pots of steaming beverages on the table and poured himself a cup of coffee. "I'll have some coffee please," Jacob stood up to help himself but the Commissioner was one step ahead of him, his left hand grabbing another mug and pouring him a share too. It did not take too long into their discussion before he realised that the Commissioner was in more ways than one already several steps in front of him. When he left the building moments later, Jacob felt frustrated. It seemed that the Commissioner had simply wanted to fish information from him regarding the Terrordon. The Commissioner was tactful with his words but his intention was clear to him - he had met enough people like him to know, especially the ones in positions like his. It was precisely for this reason that he had built up his network of liaisons from people in the lower rungs of the ladder, people who are perhaps more gullible and unreliable but less scheming and less selfish. It was not difficult to get people like them to talk. He could use money or invest some well-calculated time and emotions. It was people like the Commissioner that he had barely anything to offer up for a trade. The Commissioner had assumed Jacob would have some details that had not reached his ears yet. For the entire length of the exchange, Jacob maintained his composure, putting up an agreeable yet firm front but could not glean any new information from him as well. All that resulted as an impasse, a stalemate of information exchange. The meeting ended up as nothing more than a courtesy call. It was a lousy set of cards played on both their parts. However, the Commissioner did share that the Mayor may have some insights if he could get him to talk, a heavy emphasis on the

word "if".

"It is most certain the Commissioner must have tried and failed, so now he is expecting me to try and do it" Jacob muttered to himself, "and why not."

He stopped and took out the name card the Commissioner passed him earlier from his pocket. He flipped it to the back where the Commissioner's handwriting was strong and clear and dialled the number written behind.

It had been days since the Mayor's Office said they would call Jacob back but it would appear that his luck in that direction had run dry too. "It is only to be expected," he grumbled. While he surmised that would happen, he still held within his heart a slight hope that things would change but once again was sorely disappointed. Fortunately though, during the time of futile waiting, Jacob had managed to contact Amy Kennedy. He had already failed once, no, twice. At this point, besides Amy, he could not think of anyone else he could approach. If he were to fail again, no - he could not, or rather would not try to imagine it. Since the last conversation he had with Pete, Jacob had already started blocking his calls for a while until he could keep his thoughts straight without Pete's constant pestering about the progress of his research.

Jacob and Amy were not close when he was still working with the paper so she only came to mind when he was collecting articles about the Terrordon where he noticed her name coming up several times. It seemed that the Terrordon had almost become a pet project of hers since she joined so there could be something she could tell him. Sensing her passion for the Terrordon, he approached her upfront and told her about the biography of the Terrordon that he was working on. She had immediately agreed to grant him her

assistance.

Jacob could not recall if she was married so he opted for a safe, risk-free ensemble that night for their first meeting after so many years. He decided it was best not to put her off right at the beginning and burst his own chances of getting new information about the Terrordon. They had arranged to catch up over dinner at a quaint cafe not too far from the San Francisco Chronicle so that Amy could come right over after her work was done. The food was not great but it had its old-school charms. However, the best thing about the place was that there would be no crazy, rowdy millennials and their constant self-gratification. Sometimes, he really hated how the new media was destroying the world's interpretation of what was considered news and what was not.

As usual, Jacob reached his venue early and being early had its advantages. From where he sat by the window, he had a vantage view of all the passer-bys. In his mind, he pictured the image of Amy from what little he remembered, filling in bits of her appearances with memories of their brief encounters, her voice reading out loud in his head the articles she had written on the Terrordon in the past as he pored over them again, flipping through them sorted out chronologically in a file in front of him. Absentmindedly, he fiddled with his fountain pen and turned to look outside, running his eyes through the faces for one that struck a sense of familiarity. From the distance, he spotted an elegant blonde that looked like the Amy in his mind's eye. Clearing the table to make some space, he called out to the waiter and ordered a coffee while patiently waiting for Amy to make her way over. She was at the door when the waiter brought him his coffee and he looked up just in time to see her enter, take a quick sweeping glance through the cafe and finally met his eyes. She waved at

him and came over with a bag load of documents and papers.

"How have you been?" Amy asked. "It's been a while, hasn't it?" she said as she tugged her hair behind her ear and reached out to shake Jacob's hand as he stood up.

"Yes, it's been a while indeed. I've been fine, how about you?" Jacob asked in return and helped her with her bag. It was actually quite heavy, especially for someone of her size and stature.

"I'm good too. I hope you hadn't been waiting long. Shall we get something to eat? I'm famished. We'll talk as we eat if you're okay with it." Before Jacob could answer, she was already picking up the menu and flipping through it. Although Jacob did not know Amy well enough, she had a respectable reputation for being serious about her work. Jacob prayed hard that it would not be yet another wasted trip banging at the wall.

"Aren't you hungry?" she glanced up to see him still watching her. "There is only one way going forward," he thought to himself and called the waiter over for a second time.

"So what are your thoughts on the Terrordon?" Amy suddenly asked between mouthfuls of her pasta. "Who do you think he is?" Jacob was caught by surprise and chewed his steak thoughtfully.

"Aren't we here to talk about him?" Amy prompted him again, slightly impatient. "I saw you running through the articles I wrote, I suppose you don't know much then..." Her face almost appeared downcast as she said that.

"Well... I'm after all here to ask you about him but I did hear some rumours..." Jacob began slowly.

"Really?" Amy's face lit up as she said it but Jacob thought he could have imagined it as her bright-eyed look disappeared

when he gave it quick check as he cut another piece of his steak and put it into his mouth. "Why you go first then, tell me what you know," Amy continued.

Inwardly, Jacob weighed the pros and cons of sharing what he knew with Amy. Sharing something with her would be crucial to earning her trust at this point. Yet, a part of him was unwilling to disclose his hard-earned secrets so easily. "It must be a fair trade," he thought.

"Well... I heard sources that the Terrordon could be a Senator." Jacob made a great show of drawing out his words.

"No way! Who...?" Amy gasped and covered her mouth. Jacob thought her reaction was exaggerated and wondered if she was putting up an act with him. In any case, if she already knew that, it meant that he hardly lost anything so he actually felt rather relieved.

"Think about it, Amy," Jacob carried on, ignoring the shocked look on her face, "who else had the motivation, the power and the money? It couldn't have been just anybody and how many billionaires do we have anyway that could afford the time researching into the technology? It has to be someone with influence and military links."

"Or it could be just a thief that did it," Amy interjected. "Have you forgotten the case where there was a huge leak of military information? Although it was not revealed that anything was lost, my personal sources told me that some technical blueprints were released due to the hacking. As a result, the military had to ditch their original plans and come up with new ones in order to cover up and avoid public outrage."

"So he was just a hacker?"

"Not just any hacker - a brilliant one at that too."

"And the money-?"

"He could have hacked it too. And did you realise how he was always able to reach the crime scene in such a short time? He must have the police's communication system bugged."

"I'm sure not everything could be obtained by simply hacking alone. We are still missing an important point. So let's say he got the blueprints, how did he get anyone to manufacture the gadgets he got? Did he make them himself? Shouldn't those require some connections at the least? Wait... don't tell me, let me guess. He hacked an online Batman merchandise store? Even then, it would have been possible to trace anyone through the Internet."

Amy rolled her eyes and Jacob regretted what he said almost immediately. "Not if he was really skilful, he could easily cover his tracks. Have you actually tried buying anything from the Internet? Products? Services? Have you at least heard of Craigslist? There is almost nothing you can't buy online. As long as there is a demand, there is a supply. You just need to know which door to knock, no questions asked. That's the power of anonymity on the Internet."

"Well... if you put it that way..." Jacob's voice dropped and he conceded that Amy could be right about it too.

"You know what? Listening to us arguing like this, it was almost as if each of us knew in our hearts who the Terrordon really is." Amy switched to a light-hearted tone, as if she sensed Jacob's dispiritedness. "But what if we're both wrong, that will be really ironic. Like if he was actually a robot or something, that will be funny. Or..."

"OR HE COULD ACTUALLY BE MORE THAN ONE PERSON!" They called out in unison and Amy slapped her palm against the table. The two of them broke out in laughter at the absurdity of what they just said, drawing several turned heads and stares from the other cafe patrons.

"Actually," Amy began again, sounding suddenly serious, "there could perhaps be some truth to that." She dug into her huge bag and started pulling out some folders. "These are some photos people managed to capture, purportedly of the Terrordon. Most of them were of too poor a quality to be used in the newsprint but I did notice something strange about them." She shoved the photo albums in his direction, flipping through them quickly and pointed a few ones out. "Notice anything?"

Jacob picked up the photos and examined them under the warm fluorescent light of the cafe. The photos were either blur or really grainy due to the poor resolution. At first glance, they did not seem very helpful at all. Then, it suddenly dawned onto him. "He was holding his gun with his left hand and here, in this photo he had the gun in his right. Not only that, you can also see him holding his spiked throwing stars in his left hand here and then his right hand in this other photo..."

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Exactly! There was something else I wasn't able to figure out previously as well but things might be clearer now." Digging into her bag yet again, she pulled out a rolled document and gently unfurled it on the table as Jacob hastily pushed their plates aside. He saw that it was a map with several clusters of coloured stickers. "I had always wondered about these," she muttered softly, almost to herself. Each coloured sticker represented a sighted appearance of the Terrordon. "I will need to go right back and see what else I can find."

For the rest of their meal, Jacob and Amy ate in thoughtful silence in view of their new-found insights. It seemed like a far-fetched idea but it was absolutely plausible, not entirely impossible.

"Thank you for the dinner and for everything else

tonight. I must admit, I had an enjoyable time. It was fun to find someone who shares the same amount of passion and dedication." Amy said as they walked out to the street. Before Jacob could venture a reply, Amy turned to face him and gave him a quick peck on the cheek before hurrying out into the night, in the direction of the San Francisco Chronicle.

chapter five

Michael Bywater

"HEAVEN'S SAKE, PETE, GET off my back. You're harassing me. You're supposed to be my agent. You're supposed to be on my side."

"I *am* your agent," said Schlamme. "That means I am *not* on your side. I am on *my* side, which is what you need in an agent. I am also something much rarer. I am an *honest* agent. And I am telling you you are getting nowhere. The Iguanadon or Pterodactyl--"

"The *Terrordon*," said Jacob, "and I say that tetchily."

"Okay. But you're stalled, I know it. You know it. Nobody will speak to you. The guys he put away won't talk. Law-enforcement won't talk. Nobody will talk. You need to call in favours here."

"Such as?"

"Such as that cute shrink you nailed after 9/11. Okay, it's not like you boned Clarice Starling, but for mercy's sake, sweetcakes, Laura may be a fish but she's *our* fish and--"

"Lisa. Not Laura. Lisa. How did you know about her? I never--"

"You always. After the fourth black rum mojito. 'HeyIvertellyaboutthacutesweet' yadda yadda *Puppy Love* on the 45RPM and kiss me quick I'm Carmen."

"Pete. Dial back the Market Street Cykes on Bikes talk."

"Okay. Plainly: there's one of the bad guys in her care. She works as a psychiatrist at Rampworth. Dr Lisa Warne, yes?"

"Yes."

"The, excuse me, Sleepwalker is in her tender care. He's the bad guy who couldn't stand trial because there were too many of him."

"Multiple Personality Disease or something. I remember. How do--"

"I'm your agent. I am, actually, on your side. A little bird told me. Call her."

"After all these years--"

"--as they say in the cheap romances. Jake. Poppet. Please. For your lovely Uncle Schlamme. Call her. Don't be shy. She's got one of the bad guys. Yours. Maybe lead you to the Peckersaurus, no?"

"Lisa?"

"This is Dr Warne, yes."

"It's Jacob."

"I'm sorry?"

"Jacob Warne. You remember? From the *Chronicle*? We met in Cambridge in--"

"My God. Jacob. It must be--"

"Yes. I've thought about you often. But listen..."

Lisa checked the kit, as always. Thank heavens for the transcripts. Used to be a shorthand writer, apparently, which must have been the job from hell -- writing down the

ventilations of mental patients and the often clueless and increasingly irritable questioning of the psychiatrists and the raft of ancillaries -- but which didn't touch them, perhaps because, like an experienced psych or a priest in the confessional, they didn't actually *listen*.

Now it was different. They had the Transcription Lady.

The Transcription Lady was of unknown age and unknown address. She drove an unknown car, lived in an unknown house, with (allegedly; someone had once heard call out "Oh, *honey*...?" in the background of a telephone call) an unknown husband.

But the files, the DSS files and the video files and the annotation records and *everything*, flew to her down the secure end-to-end high speed federal broadband, and came back tabulate, commented, time-codes extracted, text transcribed and tagged and logged, down to every *coughs* and [nervous laugh] and Qualitative Analysis coding to the nth level {{sleep\disturbed\nightmare\physical_crushing\succubus\waking\second_level_waking}} of detail.

The Transcription Lady knew all this.

The Transcription Lady knew everything.

She listened with more attention than most human beings would ever receive in their lives.

But the people she listened to never asked what she knew.

They never would.

She was just the Transcription Lady.

Which was a pity, because she was the only one who was in the picture.

When Jacob arrived at Rampworth he knew what to expect and he got it. The ID checks and state-your-business and show-your-authorization and please-open-the-bag-is-there-

anything-there-which-can-harm-me-Sir... all the things once the stuff of midnight border exchanges on Berlin bridges, now commonplace for all citizens who travelled or visited others in their offices and anywhere else where security theatre was rapidly becoming the longest-running show in town.

"Please take a seat," said the slit-mouthed goon, clearly disapproving, though of what, it was hard to tell; "Dr Warne will be with you as soon as she can."

He took out his tiny digital voice recorder, his pen, his legal pad: the badges of his profession. Ruffled his choppy, relaxed-but-distinguished hair, wondering whether he had used too much Imperial Matte Pomade, the *cool* stuff in the cool tub but maybe he was too old to be cool. Looked at his Montblanc pen: it was supposed to say good things about him, but wasn't what it said was that he was the sort of dork who paid \$350 for a plastic ballpoint pen because it said "Montblanc" on it? He fretted about his shoes. He fretted about fretting about his shoes on an HD security camera setup: Rampworth SuperMax Forensic Psychiatric Containment Unit, Produly Sponsored by GoPro.

He was, he realised, nervous about seeing Lisa.

Then the door opened and he saw Lisa.

"The thing you have to realise," she said, "is that everyone here is crazy, including most of the staff and the UPS guy, but this sweetie-pie is simply a world-class bugshit crazy lunatic asshole whose disorder, excuse me if I laugh because I have read every edition of the DSM and you have not, is just a convenient resource for a one-man clusterfuck whose sexual, social and financial *mores* make Weinstein look like a... a..."

"Producer?"

"Almost, yes."

"You say 'sweetie-pie'. Which sweetie-pie?"

"You don't know much about Dissociative Identity Disorder."

"No."

"Do you want to?"

"What? Here?" he said. "Do *you* want to?"

She blushed. "Were we the only people who--"

--really enjoyed the 9/11 aftermath?"

"No," she said. "Threat of imminent... dissolution, it's a natural thing. You look for the first feasible mate to pass on your genes. It's why people get horny at airports. Fear of obliteration is a great aphrodisiac."

"You weren't the first feasible mate, Lisa. You were..."

"I was twenty five years old. My first proper job and in a world-class hospital in a world-class university town. Then a world-class catastrophe. Boom."

"Boom. We met."

"Boom. Assholes flew aeroplanes into buildings, your story goes bung, we make out, end."

"Not end."

"End. You go back to the *Chronicle*, I go back to the booby hatch, life goes on."

"I always thought it would be great to be with a shrink. Somebody who whatever you say doesn't think you're peculiar."

"Somebody who doesn't need to think you're peculiar because they already decided you were, on account of you're a human being. You hack."

"Hack? You--"

"So don't call me a shrink. Hack."

He caught her eye. Laughed.

"Don't do that round here," she said.

"What?"

"Laugh. Only the manic kind, which brings me to Dissociative Identity Disorder. The guy we are about to see sums up the pain-in-the-ass-ness of psychiatry, not because he is a batshit cackling headbanger, but because of what he has. See, it's my specialty that has Dissociative Identity Disorder, and has done since the very beginning. It keeps renaming itself. It keeps changing its mind. First psychoanalysis then analytic psychology. One moment we have neurotics, who wear fur coats and pay one time, and psychotics, who gibber in oubliettes at the state's expense. Then neurotics go out of style and psychoses get downgraded. You think we have sociopaths? We don't. Megalomaniacs? Nope. We have antisocial personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorders. Just when we've pinned something down -- as, back in the day, people used to point and shout "loony" and clap the poor sod in irons, we say "acute psychotic episode" and break out the haloperidol. In my first job, on emergency intake, we had triage, but not as you know it. *Our* triage was to walk down the line of those poor bastards whose cheese had slipped off their cracker and call out "Diazepam. Diazepam. Security. Big nurse. Security. Big nurse" and just... kept the lid on. Little has changed.

"you want to see personality disorders, check out the staff room. We've got one guy, sits most of the day in his basement man-cave, singing Wagner to his collection of taxidermy animals. Doesn't stuff them himself but buys them in, already stuffed. Pre-stuffed. Don't know whether that's more or less disturbing than if he sat there with his funnel and his pestle and a sack of kapok, but either way it's disturbing. We've another guy who is psychiatric adviser to the Episcopalian Exorcism Consistory and in the next office is what you'd take

to be a completely *normal* guy who in fact *is* completely normal, a position he maintains by simply not taking any notice of anything anyone says to him.

"Next to *him* is a guy who thinks C G Jung is still alive, in the Collective Unconscious of All Humanity, and another one who has invented a religion in which he is trying very hard to believe, because he thinks it will give him insight into his own speciality, Religious Mania, which isn't called that any more but is certainly not in short supply round these parts.

"And that's just the staff. The patients, you lose track of. But Mister Sleepwalker... he's lost track of himself. He's... Jesus, he's a sort of core, an actual operating, acting *thing*, the Sleepwalker, and then all these backup things. Cowboys. Construction workers. Police Officers. He's like the fucking Village People and then there's the others. They're his alters, his alter egos. They don't know of each others' existence. It's like a sort of amnesia, except most of the time whichever one you're talking to has not only forgotten the last time he was 'onstage', but he's forgotten he's forgotten. And of course DSM doesn't help. They used to be schizophrenics but even *schizophrenics* aren't schizophrenics any more. Then these guys, *our* guy, had Multiple Personality Disorder but that was no good and now they're... look, you don't want to sit here listening to me all day."

"Believe me, I would like nothing more than--"

"Come on. Come and see the beast in the cage. A bad guy. Bring a banana."

"A banana?"

"A joke. Come on."

TRANSCRIPT 111.A.LW.26

CONVERSATION B/T PT ID #446

"SLEEPWALKER" (S)

DR LISA WARNE

MR JACOB HEATH

Dx MID

NON-RESOLVING

INPT STATUS: UNLIMITED

PERS. CYCLE (ALTERS)

LW: How are you today?

S: Charlotte is good. Look! New drawing. [laughs]. It's you! Am I good? Am I the bet at drawing?

LW: You are very good. You are an artist.

S: The best! I am the best!

[changes voice]

Dabbling oh look at you that FROCK. [titters, v exagg. camp diction] and oh my GOD your HAIR who HAVE you COME as? Poor dear Judy dependent on the kindness of strangers

[changes voice] [English, exagg.]

If there were to be by any chance possibly a cup of what what tea, China tea--

JH: I'm sure that could be arranged Mr er...

S: Joe, my deah fellow, call me Joe, a cup of pu-erb tea, washed twice, that would be extraordinarily--

JH: May I ask a question?

S: Ask away my dear chap.

JH: Does the term "Terroron" mean anything?

S: Some sort of blasted lizard? They had a huge one at the Natural History Museum, apsley vast buggab

[changes voice]

Charlotte drowed in Museum! They said it was the BEST! Who was that man?

JH: Which man, Charlotte?

S: I forget. I try to be good but sometimes...

[changes voice]

Hey listen buddy who the hell are you? I mean coming in here y'know? You're talking to Doug now, not some idiot, they may have ruined Jersey but Newark still a fine place to, to, y'know [laughs] say, you got a cigarette hub?

LW: You know you can't smoke in here, Doug.

S: Who the fuck d'you think... oh, sorry, hi Doc, yeah, the old cough's still there but

[changes voice]

Jeez, mate, I'm as dry as a dingo's arsehole here and twice as flamin' nasty, Y'know what they say about Tim, the bastard could murder a cold stubby, a nice VB, pop the cap, you've no idea, [laughs] gotcha there! Barry Humphries! Spot it? Nah, course ya didn't, great Australian, d'ye ever see his Edna Everage, Jeez that was

[changes voice]

I though I heard that Australian, am I imagining him? Just leave me be. The ocean...

JH: Who--?

LW: Rog. Californian

S: I am. Probably the last native. [laughs quietly] I have seen such things...

JH: Rog, does the name "Terrordon" mean anything?

S: Sounds like some mobster. Terry Don. Don Terry. I keep away from such things.

[changes voice]

Y'all ever git to Alabam', look me up, show you my Leica

collection. Photograph everything.

JH: You ever photograph the Terrorordon?

*S: Don't think I heard o' that fella. Nope. Clinton, yup.
Terrorordon, nope. Sorry.*

[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

Lisa closed the door of the interview room. "It's always like that. Swings from one to the other quick as a flash. There are God knows how many others, locked inside, waiting. No wonder the judges don't like the defence of insanity when it's this kind of insanity. I don't like it, and I'm a professional."

"If you should hear--"

"I'm bound by professional confidentiality, Jacob."

He looked at his feet. "Pillow talk...?"

"That's unworthy, Jake."

"No. That's honest."

"Think about it. Maybe give me a call. I have to go now. Madness calls."

She kissed him lightly and impersonally on the cheek and walked away into the maelstrom.

chapter six

Eric Christiansen

“BITCH!”

“Faggot, don’t you dare call me that!”

Jacob’s head pivoted to hopefully triangulate on the *Sound of Trouble*. He’d built up himself enough to consider the words worthy of capitalization. The book may even take it as a title - lord knows that everything else about writing a novel was hard, the title coming so quickly must be a sign he was finally in the groove.

The Castro district may have mellowed in recent years, but violence against the gays, well, anyone not straight, was rising. America was not given permission to be made great again, it’s people had been simply given approval to act out the festering hate of anything not “normal”. The Others were the bad guys. And that was unfortunate, since most of the people here simply wanted to find love just like any other straight citizen.

His dalliance with Travis allowed him to realize firstly that he was only interested in women, and more importantly, that this area was a prime spot to try to understand what made The ’Don start helping those under attack.

The Sound of garbage cans being upended as weapons and defensive objects led him to an alley next to Aunt Charlie's bar. He'd only been here once before, but the memory of the dark grungy interior and the older grizzled clients made a lasting impression. Slow death lurking in their cups and veins. These people remembered the mid-80s intimately.

Muffled words and meaty thuds welcomed Jacob into the alley where it looked to be a couple of larger men terrorizing a very thin asian.

"Nigger!" a white man in lumberjack flannel - in this heat? - spit the word towards the thin man.

"That's bullshit!" yelled back the asian. "We're above that kind of talk!"

"Johnny, man, he's right?" The second attacker chimed in.

Jacob slowed his approach, this didn't seem like normal shit-talking.

Lumberjack Johnny turned towards his partner in crime, "Are you fucking him too, Bruce?"

"Fuck you fag, Cory has a point! I don't fuck where have the neighborhood has been - no offense man, Cory's beautiful, of course, but it's not right what you said. You know I was a civil rights lawyer."

Johnny whipped around and threw the trashcan at the asian that Jacob took to be named Cory. The man easily dodged it.

Jacob took the distraction to run up to Cory, he'd waited long enough, it was time to help save the day...or at least diffuse the situation enough for no one to get hurt.

"You need some help, man?"

Cory reacted in disgust, "The fuck you calling me a man? Bitch, who are you?"

He turned to Johnny, "This asshole called me a man!"

Johnny turned towards Jacob, lumbering forward, “You go balls deep in him, too?”

Jacob became confused - Cory rushed to hide behind Johnny.

“Wha-?” Jacob started before a trashcan lid hit him mid-pelvis.

“How many you doing at once, Cory?” Johnny cried in anguish, but his face was in a rage as his fist swung out to Jacob, missing him completely which made the bigger man stumble.

Cory caught his partner, and Bruce picked up another lid, winding up to throw it with as much force as his inebriated mind could muster.

“I may be a twink, but I sure as shit can play some disc golf!” the lid flew from his hands and grazed Jacob’s shoulder.

“You needed help!” Jacob yelled.

“I didn’t need anything from you! Johnny, take his head off!” Cory gave his possibly not-ex-boyfriend a little push towards Jacob.

Bruce rushed up and kicked at Jacob’s crotch. The hit wasn’t powerful, but they never need to be in that area. Jacob crumpled, and he heard Cory laugh.

“Fight!” The little man yelled, rushing into the bar, “It’s a fight!”

Men and women started streaming out as Jacob took a heavy foot to his ribs.

The hits weren’t doing much damage, bodily that is, but his ego was simply hanging by a thread. To add to the psyche of insults, the smell of rotting fruit and stale beer was making him gag.

“Who the fuck dumped my trash?” A dark man in a smock yelled in outrage.

“That ass right there, Dean.” Cory pointed to Jacob.

Jacob swung his head side to side, mouthing the word “no”, but bile was in his throat.

Johnny foot connected with Jacob’s sternum and acidic food remnants spewed out, splashing the shoes of a half-dozen on-lookers.

A chorus of swearing aimed at Jacob rose and swelled as others started gagging themselves. These weak stomached patrons rushed back into the bar, while those with more fortitude started gathering around Jacob’s retching form.

The *Sound of Trouble* rose again, and Jacob’s fear rose with it. He’d be lucky to get away with only the minor bruises he’d already taken.

“No one dumps my shit in my alley!” Dean the bartender said as he loosened his tight shirt, “Or fucks up my shoes!”

He pulled back with a fist that had dished out it’s allotment of punishment in its day.

But the strike never struck.

“Dean, stop.” Jacob’s teary eyes saw a form slip between him and the bartender. Between himself and the mob of drunks. “Stop, he’ll pick this shit up, let it be.”

“No, I-“

“The fucking cops are on their way. Hear them?”

The siren was faint, but the sound was growing.

“I’ll make sure he takes care of it. Go back in, serve some drinks, make some cash. You know your yoga teacher would be disappointed if you hit him.”

The bartender deflated, and took a deep breath.

“Yeah. Yeah, I know. Okay.” Dean, turned around and silently strode back to the bar.

Jacob hoped that he’d call the crowd with him, but it seemed that his generosity ended with him not taking Jacob’s

head off.

“All you, too! Unless you want trash duty.”

“Only trash I see is puke-boy there, Travis.” One of them men said with a disgusted look.

“Get the fuck back inside.”

“Travis?” Jacob whispered.

He was able to stand and wiped the tears and puke from his face.

“Hey Jacob, how you doing?” Travis turned, “You asshole, what is this all about? Decide you were going to play gay again? I should beat you myself for this stunt!”

“What’re you doing here?”

“I this is my neighborhood, dummy!”

“But - “

The siren turned out to be an ambulance passing by. Travis used that to drive home his point.

“And it seems I’m saving you from a horrible ass-beating. These guys don’t fuck around.”

“But - “

“You need to stay to yourself, keep out of other people’s business, dumb-ass.”

“They were going to kill that guy.”

“Who? John and Bruce? Those two couldn’t lay a hand on Cory if he fucked their mother!”

“But - “

“It’s a domestic dispute, Jacob. A little case of Cory being a bit too loose with his affections, and Johnny getting more upset than normal. Bruce would have talked him down.”

“They were getting ready to beat him down with the trash cans, Travis!”

“This happens almost every couple of weeks. If you went inside - which you won’t! - you’ll see them at a table, probably

on the same chair, as Cory cuddles into Johnny.”

“That’s not a healthy relationship.” Jacob replied, helping Travis pick up the trash.

“Said the guy that faked gay for a month.”

“It was an experiment.”

“You were method acting, and it’s stupid. What’re you doing down here? Need a reminder - “

“I’m sorry!” Jacob interrupted, and sighed. “I’m sorry. I know I probably insulted you, your way of life. I didn’t mean to do that. And...I, I don’t know why I’m here.” He wasn’t about to bring up the fact that he was trying to understand why someone would be come a vigilante. It would bring up his “homo-month” as Travis had originally put it, and Jacob really wanted to deflect away from that part of his methods.

“Get that can over here.” Travis said, “We’re almost done. I don’t believe I’m actually picking up trash for you. Me and my big mouth!”

Travis looked critically at Jacob, “Are you hurt?”

“My balls ache, and my ego is crushed, but other than that I’m okay. Maybe some bruising tomorrow.”

“And count yourself lucky at that! They’d have broken some bones, the way Cory was getting them whipped up. The puke didn’t really help, either.”

“I know. I know.” Jacob met Travis’s gaze, “Thank you. I definitely needed you tonight.”

“Don’t you forget it.” Travis smiled. “I’d let you buy me a drink, but you should probably head out. These guys don’t give up a grudge easy, and you did puke on their shoes.”

Jacob reached his hand over.

Travis shook it.

Jacob knew he was going to have the shakes when he got home. Hopefully a shower and a whiskey would put him

right, but at the moment, the adrenaline rush was ebbing and the fright was growing. He'd narrowly missed being seriously hurt, and that experience wouldn't soon leave his memories.

How had The Terrordon dealt with this fear? Did he grow accustomed to it? Did it eat him up, and that was why he disappeared?

The fear added aspects to this that Jacob wasn't quite prepared for yet.

chapter seven

Sam Pynes

“PLEASE STAY OUT OF trouble.” Pete gave him a measured look.

“What, Schlamme wants to stay out of the Schlammer?” Jacob joked.

“I’m not talking about me, though between you and me, getting called to the stand for one of my clients wouldn’t be good for business. I’m talking about you and your impulsive research habits. Things have changed a lot over the years, but I don’t think judges are any more tolerant of, uh, even socially-beneficial, ‘extra-legal’ activity, regardless of whether said practitioner is retired or,” his slightly greying eyebrows raised meaningfully, “just setting up practice.”

Pete Schlamme was a good agent; he could read people. He knew what folks wanted and what they were capable of. That, or he had noticed the mask poking out of Jacob’s jacket pocket. Jacob shoved it back down as he glanced around at the other occupants of the quiet coffee shop where he and his agent often met. Pete was a friend, but he was also in the business of getting books finished.

They came to this cafe because it was sunny and quiet, but it suddenly felt quieter than normal.

Pete leaned in and lowered his voice, "I don't know exactly what you've been up to, but vigilantism is against the law." Jacob tried to protest, but Pete waved it aside as he continued. "Look, it wouldn't be entirely out of keeping with your last projects. You're a good writer, you don't have to go in so deep. What you're not, is a super-hero. You're capable, just not cape-able, if you get my meaning." Even in earnest, Pete was not one to let slip the opportunity for a pun. "Besides," his tone became more relaxed, "prison memoirs are simply not 'in' at the moment."

Jacob smiled. "Truth is, you're right, 'research,'" here he mocked Pete's knowing expression, "hasn't been going over so well." He winced from a sudden soreness. "Not that it invalidates the process." He shook his head and sat back in his chair, folding his arms. "Even if it was going well, there just isn't that much out there to find that isn't common knowledge already. The news stories, the gadgets, the outfit - everyone knows about that. I can't seem to find a single person who knew the guy, or even had a single clue as to who he might have been and if he is still around. He had to have been rich, athletic, and tall, but you can't write a whole book based on that. There is simply not enough information out there to form a plausible theory, and I'm not going to stake my reputation on making stuff up."

"You can usually count on even a fluff-bio to sell somewhat," Pete mused, while Jacob snorted derisively across the table, "but the public is off vigilantes, especially ones that have been gone more than a decade. They get more than enough of that in the movies now." Pete saw his opening, and went for it. "Why is this one so important? I've got plenty of

other books that you'd be a good fit for. Alex Honnold is due for a biography.”

“What, the rock-climber?”

“Yeah, you could go swinging off rock-ledges to your heart's content. With the proper harnesses, of course,” he added, hoping he hadn't traded a snake for a scorpion. A win for Jacob was a win for Pete, but a dead biographer was a win for no-one.

“Nah, he's accomplished, but he's too young.”

“Damien Chazelle, Beyonce?” Hollywood might be safer than rocks, come to think of it.

“Same problem. There is way too much of their story that they haven't written yet. How can you distill a life that hasn't been lived? Besides, there are enough bios of musicians, writers, and actors. I want to write about people who have really lived out their ideals, lived for something great! A full story with a beginning, middle, and end that readers can be inspired by and learn from. The Terrordon was truly living his own story. He WAS a story!” Jacob smacked the table, making a little hot coffee leap out of his cup and on to the table. He mopped it up with a napkin. “I just can't find most of it.”

They each took a quiet sip, Jacob from his black coffee, Pete from his heavy-cream latte. Pete thought about how he'd be switching to black coffee himself if he didn't get a deal through soon.

“Look, Jacob, I sympathize, the Terrordon would be a great story, but you're right, you'd need a new angle. I just don't see how you get any more info on the guy, or unusually tall, muscular girl, short of our crime-fighting dinosaur literally coming out of retirement, or more likely, back from the dead.”

Jacob's eyes sparked with a sudden intuition. “Pete, everyone assumes that something happened to the Terrordon,

right? But, hear me out on this, what if he left just because he felt he was no longer needed?”

“Well, that sounds like wishful thinking to me. It’s not as if San Fran has been completely free of crime in his absence...”

“No, maybe not, but you have to agree that it’s nothing like it was before he disappeared. Can you think of a single threat big enough to call for someone like the Terrordon?” Jacob was starting to get excited now, which made Pete even more agitated.

“I suppose that’s true. So you think he’d come back if he was needed, assuming that he is actually alive?”

“Hey, if they don’t show the body in the movie there is always a chance they’ll come back.”

“You’ve got that right, even showing the body is no guarantee. Movie characters just can’t stay dead anymore!” Pete bit his tongue. Now he was encouraging him? He deserved everything that happened to him from this point forward.

“I’d bet you a stack of boring celebrity bio contracts that the Terrordon isn’t dead either. He just needs a reason to come back. I think if HE thinks there is a new threat to the city, then he will pick up the mantle right where he dropped it!”

“So what are you gonna do?”

Jacob took a deep breath and smiled. “I think it’s high time to introduce a new Super Villain to San Francisco.” Jacob veritably flew out of the cafe, leaving his still-warm coffee behind him on the table.

Pete picked up the dark mask off the floor, where it had fallen in Jacob’s theatrical rush to the nearest phone booth, or whatever was the villain equivalent. This was not how he expected the morning to go, but he knew from prior

experience that there was simply no stopping Jacob now that he had an idea. Pete sighed into his coffee. At this rate he would be brewing his own black coffee at home.

“I wonder what the coffee down at the courthouse tastes like? Bet it’s still better than whatever they have at the morgue.”

chapter eight

B. Morris Allen

IT COULD HAVE BEEN an art installation – a dark sphere atop City Hall, a spray of scarlet thread, five hundred people frozen in place, eyes wide with pain and disbelief. That hadn't been the start, of course. Only moments earlier, there'd been bustling, cheery chaos – marchers, vendors, dancers, celebrants of all kinds, from babes in papooses to nonagenarians in gaily decorated wheelchairs. And a bright sparkly ball on City Hall's short spire. He'd noticed it himself, and made his way up the front steps to ask someone what it was all about. A cheerful representation of the Earth, maybe – marking the promise of San Francisco's new ban on human-driven cars.

And then it had burst. He'd had his back to it, hadn't seen it. But he'd heard the surprise and anguish of a hundred throats crying as one. By the time he'd turned, those who would fall had fallen, and the soft billow of scarlet had begun to reel in, turning a fairy dance of crimson into a wireframe of hell.

He hadn't grasped it at first. No one had. They'd felt the pain, those out in the open, had felt the stab in their back, or

their thigh, or their cheek, had swatted at it, had turned to a friend or neighbour to complain. Only then, perhaps, had they seen it – felt the horror sink in. They'd looked for horseflies or errant children. They'd found a thin steel needle, its barbs sunk deep in their flesh, its strand of bright coral nylon already starting to tighten.

They'd pulled them out, some of them, ripping through skin and muscle to reveal jagged spines that caught at flesh with the tenacity of a hookworm. The rest had stared in horror, at themselves, at their friends, their children, their parents, at the bodies on the ground – the ones who hadn't been so lucky, who'd been pinned in the eye, the throat, the heart. The ones who'd already died.

And then the announcement in the friendly, bubbly tone of an automated prompt: "One move and... *boom!*" The sphere atop City hall, once so bright and shiny, had erupted in red, drawing all eyes as the last lines tightened and they all saw that the threads converged on the sphere like the ribbons of some sick maypole.

Five hundred people frozen in place, just then realizing that they'd been made the triggers for their own destruction, that the hooks and lines that tugged their bodies at one end tugged a bomb on the other. Wide eyed and terrified, they'd watched as those who hadn't been hooked, who'd been somehow sheltered, searched desperately for knives or scissors or nail files, or just mumbled apologies and scuttled away to hide behind cars or food carts or just ran.

It was a scene that haunted his sleep every night, and possibly always would. He'd just started down the steps, thinking of the edge on his house key that always caught on everything, wondering whether it would cut the blood-red lines as well as it had cut his finger that one time. There was a

little girl just out in the square, her father lying beside her with his head in a pool of blood. The spine was in her calf, and she was just starting to cry, and he was sure he get her loose, get her away.

Inevitably, someone had moved.

“It’s probably the AEL,” said the voice on the phone.

Jacob rolled his eyes. “Pete, the AEL is not a real thing.” He looked around at the cafe’s other patrons. Just his luck to be eating falafel when his agent got on his discrimination kick.

“You telling me there’s no prejudice against Arabs in this country?” Pete didn’t wait. “Of course there is. And atheists, too.”

“Sure, fine, yes. But there’s no Elimination League, Pete. Not for either group. And anyway, why would they target San Francisco? I mean, why not...” Where were there lots of Arabs in the US? Or atheists, for that matter?

“Well it’s probably some animal rights group, then.”

“Again, why?” How had the conversation gotten so far off track?

“You know, spearing people like fish on a hook.” Pete had been an aspiring writer himself, once. He’d never quite mastered the art of metaphor. “Show us humans what it’s like.”

“And then blow them up? That’s not really how animal rights people think. Listen,” he hastened before Pete could get in another alternative, “the point is, where’s the Terrordon in all this? This was terror, right? Why didn’t he fly in and defuse the thing? Or shoot line-clipping stars out of his arms or something? Where *was he*?”

“Talk about obsession,” Pete muttered. “I mean, good, that’s good. What’s the Terrordon angle on all this? How

would he have thought about it? How about a little essay on that? I can get it in some local rag, build a little long-term interest in your book.”

“Yeah, fine,” he barely listened to himself. He could see it clearly – the sleek dark form of the Terrordon, swooping in on his black cape, flinging throwing stars left and right, saving the day.

“I mean, the Terrordon was kind of more locally focused, you know. Bad guys and gangs, not international anti-ethnic conspiracies. But still, can’t hurt. Send me the article when you’ve got it. Today, tomorrow, anytime. Before the weekend anyway. After that, people will have forgotten.”

“Sure, whatever. Talk to you later.” A bad guy, he thought, absent-mindedly hanging up and taking another bite of his pita. That’s what the Terrordon needed. A reason to come out of retirement. A cause. A villain bad enough to make a superhero shake a decade of dust off his cape and get back into the game.

“No villains anymore,” he said to his sandwich. “That’s what we need – one good super-villain.” He swallowed the last of the pita – the lemon wedges were the key to good falafel. “And I know just where to find one.”

‘The Artist’ had been his first choice. But it had proven hard to come up with an appropriate meme. A palette? A brush? Not threatening, and not exactly iconic. There was no hook. The thought had brought him back to his conversation with Pete. A hook. Fishing. Why not? It was cruel, bloodthirsty, barbaric – just like the terror attack itself. And it came with its own symbol. Who could miss the symbolism of the hook? The web had been plastered with images of the brutal steel barbs that the doctors had cut out of the flesh of survivors and

corpses alike. Not a few had made a point of the irony that similar barbs were sold in tackle shops all over the country without anyone batting an eye.

He'd thought about an internet campaign to publicize his invented super-villain, but it was too easy to get caught that way. Old-school physical action was the way to go. And when he recalled the ad for free block and tackle on a freecycling list, he'd known just how to do it.

He'd arranged a porch pickup for the gear, and dropped all of it around the corner except for the dull steel hook that came with it. A couple of hours with a file, and he'd managed a decent point on the thing, and even the suggestion of a barb, though the steel had been tough enough that a suggestion was as far as he got.

He'd spent the night with a home-made stencil and a bag of red spray paint. Not much – just the rough image of a fishing hook above the word FISHERMAN. But he'd sprayed it on enough sidewalks and walls in enough neighbourhoods that people would notice.

The hard part had been the inciting event – the thing that grabbed people's attention. The steel hook, of course, but attached to what? He realized then that he'd been too quick in throwing away the block and tackle, and had to go out to buy a long red nylon rope. He'd paid cash and worn his hoody, but surely the clerk would remember. It didn't matter, he decided. If anything, it could add to the legend of the Fisherman.

He hadn't been able to get near the Civic Center lawns by City Hall. They were still roped off and watched, the blood still not all washed off. Instead, he'd taken the rope and tied it to a tree at the end of Fulton. The hook he'd tied around the neck of the Simon Bolivar statute. A slightly muddled image perhaps, but he was a writer, not an artist. Or a super-villain,

for that matter. They'd get the point.

He'd kicked things off with an anonymous web post asking "Is this the Fisherman's lair?" It had a picture of Fisherman's Wharf, of course; some fish shop, just to drive the point home. A few other comments on local news sites, all taking the view that of course the Fisherman was responsible for one atrocity or another.

Then, with his clothes in the washer, and all the red washed off his hands, he'd gone to bed happy. Tomorrow, there's be a new villain. Tomorrow, perhaps, the Terrordon would re-emerge.

"I saw your article, son. Fine job. Really fine."

"Thanks, Mom." As a piece of journalism, it had been borderline at best.

"I liked the bits about the Terrordon," his father said, taking another sip of tea. "Your book sounds very promising."

"Thanks." Not that there was much point in writing it if he couldn't bring its subject out of hiding for an interview, at least.

"I'm not so sure about that criminal, though. The... Hunter, I think you called him?"

"Fisherman."

"Yes, the Fisher King," his father agreed. "So clever, all those religious allusions."

He sighed. He'd made no such allusions – just straightforward mention of the evil Fisherman and how Terrordon owed it to the city to come catch him.

"Though I understand that the Alliance for Native Rights has claimed credit for the attack," his mother said. "Or the Anti-Arts Coalition."

"Oh, they're bad ones, alright," his father agreed. "Aren't

they the ones who broke into SFMOMA and painted faces on all those ‘modern’ canvases?”

“Looked better, if you ask me,” his mother replied.

And that was the way the morning went. No public outcry about the Fisherman, no calls for the Terrordon to re-appear. There was panic, right enough, but about terrorist groups. The press had covered his his stunt with the statue as well, but tied it to some group protesting autocracy in Venezuela. The most coverage the Fisherman had gotten was a dismissive note in the Bay Guardian claiming that someone was trying to scare people as a prank. It had struck uncomfortably close to home.

“But your article was good, I thought. We *could* use the Terrordon back.” His father, his one unfailing booster. “Just last week, I saw *two* cars go through the stop sign at the bottom of our hill. And one of them was the shuttle from the Facebook, I’m sure. I’ve got half a mind to call Mort Zuckerberg and give him a piece of my mind. Maybe sic that Fisher King on him.”

“Mark,” Jacob muttered, disgusted. “Mark Zuckerberg.”

“Mark my words, indeed. I don’t care if you are a millionaire. You break the law, you face the consequences, that’s what I say. That’s what the Terrordon would say.”

If only he could be bothered to speak. And at this rate, that didn’t seem likely to happen. The Fisherman’s river was running dry, and he hadn’t caught so much as a spare tire.

chapter nine

Mathieu Nicolas

8 00 AM, THE alarm clock goes off. Jacob jumps off the bed, feverish. It's been three days since he sent this message to the police, three days since his marks give him the same information: no investigation is launched, the declaration of The Fisherman is not seriously taken. This morning, he wakes up with a certainty: if there is nothing new from the police, he will change strategy. Not a minute to waste, he gets dressed hurriedly with almost clean clothes and stops a few minutes in front of the mirror to tidy up his hair. He quickly goes to the front door of his hotel room, catching along the way his briefcase of the left hand, his keys and his telephone of the right hand, then get out in the corridor. He presses the button which calls the elevator, waits for a few seconds. He taps his foot nervously. Too long. He rushes down the stairs then hears the bell of the elevator. Too bad, he continues after a second of hesitation. When he arrives in the hall, he slows down the step to appear peaceful, then leaves the hotel after a brief greeting to the employees.

When he arrived on the pavement, Jacob saw his mark

which waited for him on the other side of the street. He took a big inspiration then crossed to join him, avoiding in the passage narrowly a car which failed crushed him. He did not take time to greet his interlocutor and put hands on his shoulders. “Well then? Answer! Did the cops finish to open an inquiry?”

“Woh woh ! Peace ! They’re still waiting for the pigs that fly. My cover jumped moreover, I stop there. Bye.”

The nark went away, leaving Jacob planted in the middle of the street, looking off into the distance, the tight fists and the wrinkled jaw. It was necessary to bypass the police by talking to the press, it was the only way. He already knew what he had to do and went to the newsdealer of the street corner, bought the newspapers of the day then got into the Starbucks close by.

“Amy! I put your mail on your office, I’ve got to go!”

“Thank you Travis, good day!” answered Amy with a big smile.

A coffee in the hand, the stack of files in the other one, Amy skipped between the offices of the open-space with agility up to its desktop where she put down her load in bulk and hurried to open envelopes put on her office. Since the Terrordon did not give any sign of life anymore, its everyday life was much less exciting and she sometimes had the sensation to have been pushed aside. She liked her work as much as the San Francisco Chronicles, but it is complicated to sort out archives when she knew the adrenalin of a big subject to be covered. The first letters - some boring requests of diverse corrections that she would study later - were not very interesting, but the last one drew his attention. It had not been passed on by the mail service, but put down in the mailbox of

the Chronicle, and she was the addressed. The most surprising was the way the address was written: with letters cut one by one from diverse newspapers. She was not able to refrain from smiling because this method was not anymore used for years, since the democratization of the computing. The set was so surprising and original so that she takes time to sit down to her office to open the envelope the most cleanly possible. She started read, and frowned.

*“Madam Kennedy,
The police services do not care about it but the population has
already undergone an attack the author of which I am. Beware
Amy, because I planned to lead other assaults against the
population of San Francisco.
District after district, I shall come to fish for souls to fill my net...
Tremble, population of San Francisco, and take cover if you do
not want to die! In three days, the fisherman will be alongside the
wharf.
The Fisherman.”*

The Fisherman. It was maybe one of the most absurd names that she had the opportunity of discover. The Chronicle received about ten these letters every month, they finished generally in a big shoe box which acted as archives – just in case. She felt however a small push of adrenalin, her heart accelerated. This letter reminded her years Terrordon, when she walked across San Fran to collect testimonies and photos with his inhabitants. Unfortunately, this period was ended from now on and she had made the mourning of this exciting period of its life. Amy took the precaution to put down the letter on the office of her boss, because it was him who accommodated the shoe box, but she was convinced that the

information would not be published. *The fisherman will be alongside the wharf...*

She decided anyway to highlight the information for her boss. She checked the clock. 11: 50 am, it was time to lunch.

Jacob drank his third coffee in the terrace of the Gary Danko. The first part of its strategy had quickly been executed, he bet from now on some human behavior. He remembered years when he had worked for the Chronicle. He remembered this journalist who got involved so much into the cover of the interventions of the Terrordon. When he worked on Harvey Milk's bio, he enjoyed observing the habits of others and had been surprised by the application with which this Amy seemed to live her life. Every day, steadfastly, she left the office in 11: 50 am to go in this restaurant. Always the same. He had followed her several times, curious to see to what extent the journalist had pushed the habit and he had not been disappointed. 11: 55 am, he drank the last sip then raised eyes, and a smile took shape on his face: today either, he will not be disappointed.

"Amy come on, does not muse you, the fisherman is not some serious stuff."

The letter, it's contents, the cut newspapers, maybe it was even possible a colleague it as a joke. Amy tried however to reassure herself. The "Terrordon years" had left some aftermath, and she felt that she was about to fall again into this spiral where collection of scoop and report had urged her to put herself in danger, and all this for that? To sort out the archives of the Chronicle a few years later. She has to protect herself, she has to be reasonable. "Come on Amy, calm down. Hoop, forget that! At least the time to eat, to avoid being

nauseous all afternoon long! Danko. Inspiration, smile, we calm down."

Her gaze settled on Jacob. She hesitated.

His face ringed a bell but she couldn't quite place it. She smiled discretely, then moved back, surprised, when he jumped up with his chair to rush at her, all smiles.

"Amy! Amy Kennedy! You remember me. Don't you?"

Jacob felt his heart pounding. She did not recognize him. It did not surprise him, she had never showed him interest. He decided to get another shot.

"It is me! Jacob! Harvey Milk's bio! The Chronicle! The Terrordon years ! It is funny to meet you here. Are you meeting somebody?"

Amy made a big effort to assimilate the information because her interlocutor spoke very quickly. She remembered the cheap reporter. He had led a beautiful investigation in the environment LGBT of San Fran, and his bio of Milk had been informed really well there. Badly written, but informed well. He was kind. She hadn't planned to join anybody...

"Jacob!" She exclaimed with a big smile. "It is indeed funny to find you here! I was going to eat alone, you come with me?"

The two journalists entered the Danko together. Jacob was so obliging as he became chivalrous there. They offered themselves a glass of wine and settled down in an a little more quiet corner to be able to speak quietly. Jacob, more enthusiastic than he really was, bombarded Amy of questions concerning what had become his work since the Terrordon years by taking care of avoiding the subject of the fisherman. He showed itself extremely comprehensive and compassionate, and his interlocutor relaxed little by little, lowering the defenses which she had instinctively placed when they had met. It is necessary to say that she had not much

consideration for him when they had been colleagues and she felt bad about it today, while his career is not really on the roll anymore.

“I’ve spoken enough about me and about my career which seems to be turning in slow motion! Tell me what happened to you since you left the Chronicle!”

Jacob relaxed. The most sensitive step was behind him, Amy seemed comfortable, almost seduced.

“Well, I began to have doubts on the journalistic work which I exercised since a few years when I discovered the pleasure that I had to prepare Harvey Milk's biography,” he explained while mechanically grinding his fingers.

“Yes I remember it! I read this book with a lot of pleasure and I was impressed! What an investigation, congratulations! You are a good writer.”

“Thank you! Your compliment affects me,” answered Jacob, while realizing that the uncomfortable sensation he felt at the end of his fingers came from residues of glue. He noticed that he was establishing a small heap of residues of glue on the table.

Amy also noticed the condition of Jacob's fingers and teased him.

“Ah, the gentleman does odd jobs!”

Jacob suddenly felt uncomfortable. Amy should not make the link with... No, she could not make the link. Inspiration. Expiration. Smile.

“Yes! I shall go to wash my hands later, he answered with a small forced laughter. Thus, I told you... I decided to leave the Chronicle when the bio was published, and since then I’ve fully dedicated myself to biography writing! It’s fascinating.”

Amy didn’t appear to have noticed his discomfort.

“It is great! You are lucky to have found something that

drives you! What's your current work about?"

"I'd rather keep it secret for now..."

Come on. Coup de grace.

"... but I am pretty excited at the idea of spending few days at a friend's place who owns a big loft in Fisherman Wharf's district. I'm staying there for a big series of interviews!"

Amy froze.

She made the link instantly. *The fisherman will be alongside the wharf... Fisherman Wharf's district will be the next one attacked by this madman!*

"Amy? Is everything ok?"

"J... I... I think I will have to go back to the Chronicle earlier than planned. I can't tell you anything at the moment, I just want you to move your interviews for a few days? Maybe one week?"

"It is certainly possible, but you have to explain why!"

"Erm ... There is this guy who sent me a letter in which he says he will attack some people in San Fran in days. I thought it was a joke but I think he's planning something in Fisherman's Wharf. I think I better write a paper in the Chronicle, but I don't know if the boss will agree."

"Oh my! If you're right you have to inform people, it's your duty as a reporter. I think I will follow your advice and call my friend."

"Ok. It was great to see you. Here's my phone number, call me if you still want to share a lunch! I've got to go."

"Yes, I'm sure you'll write an awesome story. I enjoyed catching up too. Cheers!"

Amy got up and left the coffee hurriedly, worried. In the Danko, a man was alone and at a table in a quiet place.

He was smiling.

chapter ten

Adela Torres

HE WENT TO THE store. Usually his shopping was hit and run: go to the corner convenience store, get what he wanted and a couple of impulse items, get out. But this time he took his time, trying to catch conversations among the patrons, or any hint that the Fisherman was starting to catch people's attention.

While he was there he browsed the newspapers. It was getting rarer for stores to carry them, but this one did. Jacob bought the San Francisco Chronicle, making sure there was an A. Kennedy byline there.

"Bad stuff, this attack, eh?," he tried on the store manager as he was paying. He received a blank stare as an answer.

"This guy, the Fisherman," he tried again, pointing at Amy's article in the paper he'd just bought. "Seems like a really crazy guy." He made a bit of a show of muttering some choice sentences written in the article, and shook his head sadly.

"It's all crazy guys out there lately, man," the manager shrugged. "Do you want anything else?"

"No, thank you."

Undaunted by this glimpse into the man-on-the-street mind, he went home with his purchases, got online, and googled 'Fisherman'. 79 million results. Yeah, maybe not the most distinctive name for his supervillain. Then he googled 'Fisherman attack'. Eleven million hits, mostly about fishermen attacked by sharks. Then he googled 'Fisherman terror attack'. Jackpot. There was the Kennedy article and also a smattering of articles, either op-eds and starkly informative, in a number of online media. There was also some chatter on social networks, not a lot, but satisfying enough.

He spent about an hour browsing through social media sites and comments sections. It was predictably depressing, and also failed to produce any hint that he had sparked Terrordon's interest. Maybe it was too soon, maybe it was too unclear. What would draw him out?

He tried to think like the Fisherman: his fake villain would not *really* want to attract Terrordon's attention, of course, so he couldn't be too blatant. But he also would want to carry out his 'mission', and do so garnering better media attention than he was getting right now. Strike now, when the iron is hot, is what his gut told him. The Fisherman would need to feed his ego, his need for attention.

A bomb threat would really hit the mark, he thought. These days there weren't enough of them to be fashionable as a kid's prank, it would be taken seriously, and it would get a lot of attention.

He jotted down the essentials:

BOMB THREAT. NEXT TUESDAY. 1 pm (this was crossed over) 3PM. LOCATION? MAKE SURE ALL PAPERS GET IT, BE PUBLIC. DIRECT CALL (crossed over). EMAIL? RECORDED MESSAGE

BETTER.

He refined the details, got the numbers for all major newspapers in the city and spent a busy half hour drafting a script. He had to sound unhinged but intelligent, credible and also just enough over-the-top to be a believable supervillain. A lone wolf with a bit of flair, not so mundane to make Terrordon think that this would be a matter best left to the police, but not so crazy to be dismissed as a prank.

It took him some tries to record the message correctly because he kept cracking up, mostly because he was so nervous. When he was done he left it alone and went for a workout; he needed to unwind a bit.

It did him good; as soon as he got back he re-played the message and edited it to distort his voice. Once distorted and edited, the message worked even better than he had thought: he sounded menacing, believable, and with just the right amount of style to be the Fisherman.

Then he took the burner phone he had bought earlier and started making calls.

It was much later and Jacob was still at the computer. The reaction to his message had been rather quick and, to his mind, mixed. He was currently in Twitter, reading with a mixture of chagrin and fascinated horror:

@IllPatriot692

*Another Islam threat on American soil!!! When will we wake up and destroy the a**holes!!! #MAGA #terrorthreat #PatriotsforJesus*

@Blndgrrlx:xoo

Whys nobody saying THE TRUTH! Real threat are the white domestic terrorists stop blowing smoak into our eyes

@JacelynMrsBumbi

Open you'r eyes this is a FALSE FLAG operation to keep the people scared and not think about how Congress is DESTROYING AMERICA!!!!!!!

@AryyaStarrk

That someone would believe this is actually the work of a lone wolf is SO ridiculous is laughable! #BombThreat #AmericaUnderSiege

He had also seen a number of quick-fire articles on his bomb threat; the reaction and tone was generally right, but the analysis was—disappointing. They'd all gone with the international terrorism angle, some even going so far as to dedicate some time pointing out how the terrorists seemed to be 'changing their tactics'. He googled 'Fisherman' again and the relevant articles had dropped to page 4. Also, the Kennedy piece in the Chronicle had suffered a rash of comments, all of which were basically laughing at her angle:

Anonymous:

In this day and age where the world has turned into a hotbed for radicals this naive talk about supervillains is dated and counter-productive. I'm disappointed in the Chronicle's coverage and would recommend that you reporter gets her facts straight before committing her wild theories to paper.

K. Johnson:

YEAH RIGHT! So we now have what, a supervillain in our

midst? Call Spiderman! Or whatever fourteen-year-old power fantasy the writer thinks should save us from this threat. With this kind of journalism is no wonder the country's in the dumps.

Stalker99666:

*You dumb b*tch you cant write to save you're life and your ugly as f*ck why dont you die and stop writing dumb sh*t theres no*

Fisherman its the illuminati

[EDITOR'S NOTE: please be advised that this user has been flagged by our readers and the comment is being reviewed for content and abusive language]

Babs H. Newton:

If this is the best that the Chronicle can produce in a matter as serious as terrorism I'm canceling my subscription. This frivolous take on the issue only helps terrorists and keep us from adopting the real and bold measures that we need to take as a country and as a society.

Jacob pinched the bridge of his nose. This was *not* going in the direction he had hoped. Most of the articles dealing with the bomb threat had been either dismissive or openly ridiculing the Chronicle's take and Amy herself. There was a short op-ed called 'This is not a story of heroes and villains' that directly cited Amy's article and called it 'silly' and 'childish', and a famous journalist had published a post in her Facebook account in which she called the Chronicle's coverage 'shameful'. The post had received more than 5,000 likes and upwards of a hundred comments, most of them supportive.

He felt a little bad for Amy; after all what she'd been doing was only what he had wanted her to do and now she was receiving quite a lot of heat for it. On the other hand, what if

it had worked? He knew the pitfalls of journalism and he told himself that Amy would survive. Besides, he could always vindicate her, make the Fisherman real despite this setback. The question was, of course, how.

Maybe he had rushed things a bit—or maybe not? This would be exactly how the Fisherman would act, and if answered with the same level of derision he would—what?

Quit?

He, Jacob, would. What he'd been doing was dangerous enough, no matter how interesting or useful for his project. He was weaving through the red line, in and out, putting himself in some rather compromising situations for the sake of drawing out someone who most likely would not reappear.

But the Fisherman wouldn't quit. He would feel enraged and insulted and he would definitely step up his game at this point. If a bomb threat would not set him up as the credible villain he needed to be for Terrordon to come back, then he'd have to do something else. Something more radical.

He opened a new browser window and fired up the VPN and the secure link he'd learned to set a few months ago. He'd been nervous about the Dark Net at the beginning, but after some intensive—and intense—research he found he could navigate it with some confidence. Most of it was surprisingly practical and very trade-oriented and he could skirt the places he really didn't want to go into. He valued the insight into this underside of the internet, and although his only aim at getting access had been research for his book (he thought Terrordon would use it even if he was retired), now he was finding he could really use it some other, hitherto unexpected ways.

He started looking for information on how to make a bomb.

chapter eleven

Keith Blount

THE FISHERMAN.

In his head, it had sounded predatory, malevolent. The sobriquet of a serial killer. Something Stan Lee himself might have come up with.

It had sounded clever, too: the irony of the fisherman being the bait.

But now? Now it just sounded stupid.

The doubts had begun to rain down on Jacob as soon as he had creaked and squeaked into his costume at the top of the stairwell. By the time he had shuffled out onto the rooftop overlooking the Moscone Center, the doubts had become torrential.

He had prepared meticulously: all those days spent scouring sites on the dark web, researching explosives, hiding his trail; being careful to buy ingredients—each seemingly harmless on its own—at different shops in different parts of town. (Even now, after scrubbing his kitchen clean, his fingers still smelled of potassium nitrate and baking powder.) But what he hadn't been able to prepare for was this feeling of

utter ridiculousness.

Because there was no getting around the fact that he was a 40-year old man dressed up as a comic-book supervillain.

A long-suppressed memory rose to the surface of his consciousness like a bloated cadaver rising to the surface of the sea: the look of confusion and concern on his mother's face that time she had found him dressed in her leotard. She had looked relieved—if not entirely convinced—when he had explained that he was pretending to be a superhero. His cheeks burned at the memory. At least then he'd had the excuse of being in third grade.

Doubts weren't the only thing raining down on Jacob—precipitation of the watery variety was also raining down on him. Heavy San Francisco splats thudded out a plasticky rhythm on his head and shoulders. That was at least one thing his costume had going for it—it was waterproof. He was decked out in a buttercup-yellow knee-length raincoat, a black souwester (which he now realised was two sizes too small and was compressing his skull), red waders and yellow rubber boots. The final touch to this ensemble was a rough green net that he had wrapped twice around his head, through which he could see and breathe but could not be recognised.

He was so well-wrapped, in fact, that he had begun to worry a little about his mobility: how fast would he be able to move if the Terrordon showed up? To reassure himself, he wriggled in the garden chair he had brought with him, but the movement just jangled all of those doubts inside him so that they crested in a sudden wave of terror. His bowels jiggled like a water balloon. What was he doing?

He took a deep breath.

Then another.

These vacillations were not the Fisherman's thoughts. These were Jacob Heath's thoughts.

Breathe in. Jacob Heath's parents were teachers, retired and happy.

Breathe out. But this man sitting on the rooftop was not Jacob Heath.

He was the Fisherman.

And this was not a ridiculous costume. These were the clothes his father, an honest trawlerman, had worn. His father, who had been held at gunpoint by drug smugglers but who had died thanks to the vigilante actions of the Terrordon. (A pat backstory was just as important to the method writer as it was to the comic writer.)

The Fisherman felt a swell of rage. It was time to smoke out the Terrordon.

He had spent a day criss-crossing the streets below, scanning for the perfect lookout. The rooftop he had chosen not only gave him a clear view of the entrance to the Moscone Center, but also had a fire escape that provided a quick exit to an alley at the back. The concrete walls of taller buildings either side blocked him from the view of surrounding office towers with their glass windows and bored occupants. All he had to do now was hunker down in his chair, keeping hidden behind the low wall overlooking the street and wait for his moment.

On the wet concrete slabs next his chair, Jacob—the Fisherman—had laid out his tools next to the holdall containing his own clothes: a tackle box and a fishing rod. Now he pulled the tackle box into his lap and flipped the latch. Inside were two metal tins. Each was about the size of a cigar box, with a red plastic button cut into the side and a strip of masking tape on top.

Home-made remote detonators.

They were identical aside from the numbers written on the masking tape in felt tip: “1” and “2”.

Satisfied that the detonators hadn’t magically disappeared on his tram ride here, the Fisherman laid the tackle box down, unscrewed two tubes from the end of the fishing rod, and snapped them together to form a pair of binoculars. Somewhere at the back of his mind, Jacob’s voice wondered at the pointlessness of this gadget, but the Fisherman ignored it. He rested the binoculars on top of the wall and surveyed his target below.

The letters of the “MOSCONE CENTER” sign glowed through the gloom. It was only noon, but the squally skies were already dusk-dark. Tourists in brightly-coloured anoraks and windbreakers milled around the entrances beneath the sign.

Guileless guppies.

A banner ran along the top of one of the entrances. It read: DINOSAURS OF AMERICA. Was there a more fitting way of teasing out the Terrordon than at a paleontology exhibition? The Fisherman allowed himself a satisfied smile.

He swung the binoculars to check that the explosives were still in place. Sitting on a low wall near the central entrance doors was a large plastic dinosaur (a pteranodon, of course). He had placed it there himself last night. It was the only way of planting anything near the entrances, but it had been a risk: he’d had to bet on everyone assuming it was part of the exhibition, even the staff. The risk had paid off. Explosive Number One was still in place. Right now a little blonde girl of about seven in a polka-dot parka and green leggings was pointing at it and gesticulating to her mother. The mother was

young, also blonde, wearing a bright pink raincoat. The little girl stretched out her arms and ran around in a circle before head-butting her mother in the stomach. Her mother laughed, picked her up briefly, and then they disappeared inside, hand-in-hand, the girl hopping on one leg and apparently talking non-stop.

The sight of that little girl near the explosive would have given Jacob pause, but the Fisherman was unerring in his task.

Explosive Number Two was buried inside one of the black globular plant-pots that lined the pedestrian bridge directly opposite the Fisherman's lookout.

Everything was in place.

All he had to do was wait for an opportunity—until he could be sure that no one would be hurt.

Press two buttons.

And hope.

It was the rain that gave him his chance.

Another squall blew in from the bay and the skies dimmed. The buildings around him suddenly seemed small and unreal, as though he had zoomed in on some scale model built for special effects in a film. Explosions. All he could hear was the drumming of the rain on his hat and coat and the slushing of wet car tyres below.

The rapid thud of his own heart.

This was it.

The lenses of the binoculars were distorted with droplets of rain, but he could see that the area in front of the entrances was clear now. Everyone was taking shelter from the downpour and there was a good ten-metre radius around the toy dinosaur, which was all this first explosive needed. It was barely an explosive, really—more a smoke bomb. Explosive

Number One was just for show and would hurt nobody. Explosive Number Two would do the damage when the area was clear.

With sweaty fingers, the Fisherman reached into his tackle box—and panicked. He’d somehow left the lid open and the tins were wet. He’d sealed them well so they should—*should*—still work, but that wasn’t what terrified him.

What terrified him was that the felt-tip numerals had bled in the rain and were now unreadable. Why had he written the “1” with a serif and a horizontal bar at the bottom? Each tin seemed to have a smudged number “2” written on it now.

He took another deep breath.

He had put the tackle box down such that Detonator Number One was on his left and Detonator Number Two was on his right. He was sure of it.

But was he really sure?

Jacob’s voice said: Go home. Don’t risk it. Give up. Write about a baseball player instead.

The Fisherman took out the left detonator and cast a glance across the street. The area was still clear.

The Fisherman didn’t hesitate.

He pressed the button.

Another thing he hadn’t been prepared for: this feeling of power. One moment his thumb caressed smooth plastic. Applied a modicum of pressure. And then the air was rent as the toy pteranodon became a thunder clap that ricocheted off the walls of the surrounding buildings and changed everything.

For a moment it felt as though even the rain hung suspended in the air. In that split second of perfect still, the Fisherman could see individual shards of glass sparkling as the

windows of the central entrance doors shattered.

It was beautiful.

And then everything sped up.

Car alarms went off.

People were screaming.

Smoke billowed out from the source of the blast, and it was everything the Fisherman could have hoped for. For such a tiny—harmless, really—device, the sound and smoke were something to behold. It was working.

Crowds surged from the other doors of the Moscone Center, pouring into the streets. Blind panic reined below. Prefrontal cortexes ceased their chatter as primal survival instincts kicked in and took over: escape death.

The Fisherman nervously glanced around him, double-checking his concealment. He was safe. He was out of his chair now, crouched beneath the wall, taking the occasional glance over the top at the mayhem below.

His every nerve-ending felt alive with electricity. His whole body thrummed like a tapped tuning fork.

This was it. It was happening. But it was the next part that was the real test. If he got the next part wrong, the Fisherman would no longer be a fake supervillain. No, if he got the next part wrong, Jacob Heath would be a very real murderer. He felt watery bile gather on his tongue, choked it back down.

It was all about the Method now.

He was the Fisherman. And the Fisherman would stop at nothing until the Terrordon was in his grasp.

That was when he heard it.

Sirens.

He'd expected it, of course—you could hardly set off an explosion in the middle of San Francisco and not expect the

emergency services to show up. But something about hearing them rather than imagining them—the mundanity of their wail on the wet city streets—brought back the doubts. It seemed obvious now, the reality of it: the police were going to arrive; the Terrordon would not.

Like a chink of light in a cave, he caught a glimpse of the insanity of his plan. Twelve years the Terrordon had been gone. Did he really expect him to turn up now?

He fumbled for the second tin and peered over the wall. The pedestrian bridge looked clear. No cars or people below it, either. The area was empty; everyone had fled.

The sirens were still some way off. There was still time.

He clenched his jaw so hard he could feel the surface of his back teeth crumble.

Jacob's thumb trembled.

But the Fisherman pressed the second button nonetheless.

The crack of the second explosion reverberated for blocks.

For a moment, nothing of the pedestrian bridge could be seen except for a plume of concrete and masonry. It reminded Jacob of a dirty wave breaking against rocks in a storm. This time, even the building beneath him shuddered. For seconds afterwards, his ears buzzed and the world became muffled cotton wool.

As the dust cleared, he saw the twisted ironwork ribs of the bridge now exposed.

There was a lull, and then the middle of the bridge gave way completely, collapsing onto the cars below. A huge slab of concrete crushed a blue Chevy as if it were nothing more than an old tin can. But there had been no one in it. He was sure of that. He told himself: he was sure of that.

He squatted behind the wall, staring at the swirls of dust,

pieces of bridge still falling away, for who knows how long. He was paralysed. What now?

Sirens started up again.

More screams, more urgent now.

Beyond that, the city seemed strangely quiet and calm.

His phone vibrated. Pulling it out of his raincoat pocket, he glanced at the message on the screen:

EMMY

you ok?

He thrust the phone back in his pocket, unable to process the juxtaposition of what he had just done and his sister's simple act of caring. All around San Francisco right now, people were sending similar texts—because of him. But he was okay and everyone else was okay. He had been so careful of that.

Except everyone else wasn't okay.

More of the smoke and dust had cleared and now he saw where those fresh screams were coming from.

There was someone on the bridge.

She was young, blonde. Her raincoat was dusty with powdered masonry, but Jacob could still make out its colour.

Bright pink.

Jacob became nothing but pure, liquid terror. He couldn't move. He couldn't do anything but watch the floundering young woman on the bridge in mute horror.

The woman was screaming for help.

She was laid flat out on the remains of the chequered slabs of the bridge, right at the jagged edge where the centre had given way. Her left hand gripped a shaft of ironwork, and her right hand was doing exactly what it had been doing the last time Jacob had seen her—holding her daughter's hand.

The little girl in the polka-dot parka was dangling in mid-air, hanging over the edge of the bridge with her mother's hand her only connection to life. She was kicking her little feet furiously, as though she might be able to swim upwards through the air to her mother. Screaming and crying in great gulps.

In the rubble far below her lay a fluffy green stegosaurus.

The rain was merciless, and Jacob was aware of how slick with water his own hands were. How long could the mother hold on?

Every cell of Jacob's body told him to look away from the inevitable, to run away and never look back, and yet not a single cell could move. So transfixed was he that at first he barely registered the flicker of black in the upper right of his field of vision.

And then everything happened at once.

The mother's hands were as slippery as Jacob had feared.

The little girl fell.

Her mother let out a shriek that would keep Jacob awake at night until the day he died.

A blur of black swept out of the sky in a graceful curve.

Huge, angular wings.

Icarus, thought Jacob.

The black blur swooped beneath the bridge and then arced upwards again.

And even though this was everything that Jacob had hoped for, it seemed to take his brain an age to catch up and register what it was seeing.

The Terrordon.

When the Terrordon landed on the bridge—not quite as gracefully as in his prime, noted Jacob—Jacob nearly let out a whoop of joy. He would always be too scared to analyse the

cause of his elation in this moment, whether it had been because his plan had worked and he had drawn the Terrordon out of retirement, or because of what the Terrordon held in his arms—a terrified, but alive, polka-dotted little blonde girl.

The Terrordon handed the girl to her mother, and mother and daughter clung to each other and cried. The mother kissed her daughter’s head over and over again and kept saying something to the Terrordon. Jacob couldn’t hear the words but he could recognise the gratitude. He wondered if that was a sort of power, too. Did the Terrordon get the same thrill of control from the dependency of those he helped as Jacob had briefly felt upon pressing the button?

He made a mental note to write that down later.

Jacob got a good look at the Terrordon now and tried to memorise every detail for when he got back to his laptop. The Terrordon stood in classic superhero A-stance. He was perhaps a little paunchier than he had been before his disappearance, but he was still powerfully built. The famous pteranodon silhouette stretched across impressive pectorals. His hang-glider wings folded up slowly and slightly creakily around him. The costume perhaps looked a little dated, and the Terrordon’s chin beneath his eye mask was all salt-and-pepper stubble. The head crest of the helmet looked a little bent. But it was him.

And then Jacob realised that the Terrordon was getting a good look at *him*, too.

He couldn’t remember doing it, but at some point Jacob had stood up. The Fisherman and the Terrordon stood face to face across the devastation below.

But that was fine. Jacob had prepared for this. This was the moment he had been planning for, the moment that he had imagined every night before sleep for the past few weeks: the

supervillain revealed; the game begun. Good hack that he was, Jacob had even prepared the perfect line for this encounter:

“They said you were extinct, Terrordon,” he would say, “but I, the Fisherman, have reeled you in.” With maniacal laughter for dessert.

This was what Jacob had planned to say, at least. But in the event, he froze. Stage fright.

The Terrordon was unfurling his wings and stepping back now, ready to take a running jump. Could he make the top of this building from there? And if so, how quickly?

Jacob didn’t wait to find out. He grabbed his holdall and bolted for the fire escape, squeaking and creaking the entire way—it turned out that rubber boots and waders weren’t the choicest of getaway gear. By the time he jumped from the bottom level of the fire escape, the Fisherman was nothing but detritus strewn down the steel steps, Jacob having discarded his waterproofs along the way. At the bottom, he threw off the rubber boots and shuffled out of the waders before sprinting in stockinged feet, looking for somewhere to hide, catch his breath, and put his own shoes and jacket back on.

On the tram home, trembling with adrenaline, something began to nag at him through the hysterical euphoria that had embraced him since his escape.

He couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something familiar about the build and demeanour of the Terrordon. Something *very* familiar. And yet it remained maddeningly out of his mental reach, like a word stuck on the tip of the tongue.

chapter twelve

Owen Garner

“GIMME THE REMOTE, YOU ass. Nobody cares about “Say Yes to The Dress”. Andy sat across from the old lady who clutched her remote like a prized toy on Black Friday.

Maryann sneered, waving the remote between arthritic fingers. “My granddaughter loves this show, and I’m going to find her the perfect dress for her wedding...”. She smiled, eyes glued to the box as some pretty and irritating blonde tried on yet another identical gown. The remote fell from her fingers, skittering across the floor, clacking against tile and over a nondescript puddle in the middle of the room.

Bodies dove for the device, the most power they had at their disposal in years. Bodies pushed and prodded, limbs grabbed and mouths bit. The TV shifted and the screen jerked between images, trying in vain to appease a multitude of masters. Rog just hoped the batteries would die quickly, there was too much noise here.

Rog...why did they call him Rog when it felt so wrong? Sat and watched the show before him on the floor, thinking somewhere in the back of his mind that it was more

entertaining to watch this than whatever else could be found on TV.

A victorious hand jutted out of the pile with remote in hand, and the TV settled onto a local news channel. A man sat behind the desk, papers held in front like they held the secrets of the universe. His smile belied a sense of urgent fear and excitement, suddenly aware again for the first time that he was in front of a camera, speaking to millions. The reporter leaned forward in his seat, aggressively describing a scene like a promotion depended on it.

“We’ve just received confirmation from exclusive sources that Terrordon has returned! He has stated he will make an announcement soon...we have live video feed...”

The man trailed off. The rest didn’t matter, though the man temporarily named Rog didn’t know why, not yet. His head hurt, more than usual, the hum driving him up and out of his chair and away from the commotion the orderlies were just now starting to break up.

He stumbled back toward the drinking fountain, the distance from the noise only making things worse. Something told him he should find Judd. None of that made any sense, but agreeing with the thought made his headache lessen, if slightly. He relaxed without the throbbing pain, and remembered Judd was one of the guards posted past the main rec room. The voice grew stronger in Rog’s mind. Mention Martha and he’ll fold like a chair.

Rog felt strange, his head full, too full as he walked toward Judd, his shorts pulled down by a gut that dared the buttons on his shirt to hold in his belly for one more day.

Judd stared down, his frown and posture exuding confidence and power. “What you need?”

Rog, or someone else, pulled his head up from staring at

his shoes. A smile crept across his lips, though he didn't think much was funny, except for the man's build. God, that was funny how fat he was. Rog felt sleepy, even though standing up and sleeping wasn't a good idea. He could feel, in his soul, that relaxing right now was a good idea.

The Sleepwalker came forward. Pushing through the remaining bits of Rog's control, he cracked his neck, his neck - for the first time in years - and stared up at the fat fuck.

"Remember Martha? I do. If that still means anything to you, I think I need to be taken to medical." His smile grew, fully back under his control.

The man's smug, unearned smile dropped like his gut, and he keyed his shoulder radio. "Got a patient here who needs direct medical care, escorting him myself to bay 7."

The Sleepwalker balled his hands into fists to prevent his excitement from carrying over into the air as a proud shout. There was no Bay 7, the dumb bastard had done his part. He swiped his keycard, and pushed open the hallway door for the prisoner now free.

He stretched, feeling his limbs and senses for the first time in what felt like a lifetime. Each finger felt rusty as he flexed. Light and sound assaulted him, threatening to drive him back inside the prison of his own mind, but he knew he could not be thrown into that prison, or any prison, any longer. He was free now. And his revenge fueled him.

The Sleepwalker tore down the hall, laughing at other inmates behind steel doors and laying on tables. The lights flickered in classic sanitarium fashion. Some were dead, he hoped. That would make for an even better scene when the papers got ahold of it. He ran faster, bare feet padding quiet thwaps along the tile. The light over the far hallway door remained red. He rushed it faster.

Just as his hand hit the latch, it snapped to green, and he was out, onto harder, colder concrete and into a storage area. He let his feet take him, didn't dare question it since they seemed to know more than he could by thinking.

A single guard, this one armed more than Judd could ever dream, walked past the escaped prisoner. "Halt!" he screamed, trying to reach for a gun he never had to use.

The sleepwalker laughed as he ran, sliding into a kick that dropped the man just as his gun came free. The handgun went off, lighting up the room with a flash and report so loud the Sleepwalker was afraid he'd be driven from control of his own mind, back into the dregs of whatever other voice his fractured head could churn up.

He felt the other voices, cold and scared, one or two mildly brave. Accents and attitudes that weren't his own tried in vain to claw at his attention, but they were weak. They had always been weak. The only way they had held sway for so long was those damn medications. Rog took most of them, he knew. Rog would pay dearly for that.

The guard fought hard, swinging his arms and squeaking his boots on the sterile tile floor. It all seemed so distant, as he held control over him, that anything could remotely interrupt this moment. The way it felt to kill, the pure focus of it, was more than he could ever hope to feel in any other mundane interaction. It was perfection to steal a life. It was the one thing that could never be given back, even if he was caught.

He focused, and held, squeezing the life out of the guard's throat as he pushed back the influence of all the other voices in his head that fought for attention. The guard's breath jerked, then stopped, as did the voices. He smiled, grabbed the gun, and hurried on.

A duffel bag waited next to the only light in the room. A

cargo bay door, lifted just a foot or two from the ground, opened for the only light in the entire place. His gown flapped in the breeze, and irritated him, so he tore it off, shedding the last of his shackles of this place that held him for so long. He ripped the patient bracelet with his teeth.

The duffle was heavier than he remembered it should have been, so he ripped it open and dumped it out on the floor. The purple jumpsuit caught his attention first, and he slipped it on fast. No alarms yet, Judd did his part. He made a mental note to make it quick for Martha, when he found her again. It all came back to him, the address, the security code on her door...5774...a fantastic return to glory this would be. And just in time to show Terrordon how far he could fail.

Donning his equipment took little time, but a radio sat in the bottom of the pile, not a part of his usual attire. He smiled, remembering who would invariably sit at the other end. The one who had set up this entire drop, this entire plan.

He keyed the button and waited, knowing these first words in ten years would be so cherished. “My dear, have you missed me?”

At first there was nothing. Just static answered him, the first free response he had in years to any interaction with the outside world. Eventually, there was a spike in the receiver. Gentle sobs cut through a stammering voice as he relished the Mynx’ reply, “more than you know, baby. Now go get that bastard. And have some fun for me, would you?”

The Sleepwalker smiled, dropped the radio and slipped under the cargo bay door. Stepping out into the world for the first time in years, he laughed, free and loudly. Punctuating his mirth, an alarm sounded, blaring and obnoxious and welcome. The ruse was over, the villain was back, and he would never, ever be trapped inside his own damn body again.

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chapter thirteen

Aiden Dunfield

ROG SNAPPED AWAKE, THE monitor dimly lighting the dark room. The screen lock display was a brooding picture all flat green tones, a point of view between tracks on a lonely railroad bed that slashed a cut through an overgrown cliff on one side and trees on the other, curving away to disappear in a dark mist. He was glad to see it partially because he liked the picture -- the lonely feel of the picture touched something in him — but mostly because it was a tripwire, a flag that told him that the hacker hadn't been into his machine today.

The hacker always changed the lock screen. Infrequently, but still too often, Rog had dozed off in front of the computer only to find horrific things splayed and flayed across the screen on awaking. He'd never caught the screen changing — sometimes the hacker took advantage of his habit of dozing at the machine, sometimes he'd find the pictures lazily rotating through a slide-show display after a day or two of not using the computer at all. The hacker took the time to edit and arrange these bloody displays before presenting them, often decorating them with garish purple highlights piping the

borders of the pictures and tinging the occasional horror-show movie.

He'd done everything he knew to do — antivirus, antihacker, system reloads — some years ago, he'd actually thrown his computer into a landfill and bought another new. Yet still the hacker would periodically take control and leave these nauseating little gobbets for him to dispose of. He often recognized the pictures from descriptions he'd seen in online newspapers and the evening news. Missing people. Found people. Random crimes.

The police, growing tired of the barrage of calls to their overworked detectives telling them that an unknown hacker was pushing evidence of his crimes to his desktop, sent an officer to see for himself. He brought a tech from the City's IT department. Of course, everything was gone by then. After a half hour, the tech declared he could find nothing. The machine appeared as interesting as Aunt Millie's venerable and rarely-used HP tower on which she kept family pictures and a constantly expanding collection of never-tried recipes.

The officer mouthed platitudes about how to secure the machine, and how much they appreciated citizens keeping an eye out and calling in tips, and told him that they'd let him know if anything came of the investigation. He'd seen the slightly annoyed, condescending look on the officer's face before — on co-workers, on computer-repair techs — and it told him he was being mentally classified either as a harmless paranoid crank or as a con-man trying to cash in on Crime-Stoppers money. Mostly that he wasn't believed.

He'd long since given up wondering why the hacker had picked him, chosen him, from the ocean of victims. Sometimes he wondered if he were the only one. He doubted that was possible — but he'd never heard even a rumor of

another. He shook himself free of the reverie, jiggled the mouse to wake the machine and carefully typed his 32-character password into the box it presented.

He found he was still logged into his anonymous email account, and was pleasantly surprised to find that Lucy had accepted his invitation to meet for coffee. They'd been "talking" online for weeks. He glanced at his watch. He needed to be there in a little over an hour — he was going to have to get humping.

Lucy DeGale was his favorite type of correspondent, in that she was endlessly interested in making sure she was understood, that all her complexities were aired and displayed. This essentially meant that she carried the bulk of the "conversations", and more importantly, that she spent very little time on any but the most basic information from Rog, which suited his essential shyness. In fact, his constant use of virtual networks, anonymous accounts, and various other arcane methods he'd been using for years to try to beat the hacker essentially made him invisible to her or, for that matter, anyone else.

They disagreed on practically everything, but had become friends in spite of it, largely because she really was an excellent writer and in any discussion she would expand rapturously on her opinions and on how the subject under discussion made her feel. He loved arguing with her.

Her life was an open book, as they say. She was aggressively open in fact, viewing any conscious or subconscious attempt to not express her every thought online as "concealing the truth". She, curiously enough, either didn't notice or didn't care that on this point, as well as practically all others, Rog disagreed with her entirely. He felt that some degree of intimacy should be established before one made a

point of discussing bathroom habits, sexual proclivities, deeply-held religious beliefs or thorny moralities, never mind a running online internal monologue as to whether trimming or shaving pubic hair before an upcoming date was "caving in" to the "beauty norms" of a defective society with even one person, much less the entire world.

He knew that she was single, being unable to establish a long-term relationship with men, not least because of her "take me as I am, I don't modify anything for anyone" attitude and her penchant for talking about them endlessly online, albeit in terms of her reactions to them.

Rog chuckled to himself. She was pretty. She was smart. She was a pain in the ass. And as a child of the internet, she would tell everyone who would read her about her view of any given ex's failings. "The Taylor Swift of Tumblr," someone once called her, although she probably wrote with less malicious intent than Taylor.

She was an online social warrior who claimed to live in poverty among "her people" out in Oakland for all that her parents were very well-off. They lived in a top-floor Spanish/Mediterranean condo in Pacific Heights. She'd occasionally go "home" to borrow their pool and relax for a few days, or up-country to their primitive summer-home in the forest to play gardener.

She'd married for a for a few years, living in a small town upstate, had a child, divorced, moved back to the Bay area and lived for a time in the Acorn Projects in Oakland, or "The Cornfield" as the locals called it. She was probably the only single white woman living within a couple of miles, and she picked it deliberately in order to raise her child in a more "diverse" environment than Lucy had come up in. After a particularly harrowing encounter with a couple of members of

one of the vicious street gangs that infested the complex, she was mortified and distressed that she'd mentally called them "chimps" in the adrenaline-fueled aftermath of reaction. This was duly documented online as a personal failure, and in a fit of remorse she moved, and eventually settled into a four-plex in an area marginally less likely to get her killed, and still practically in sight of her parents' condo.

Once Rog actually laughed at one of her more extravagant flights of what he called "kumbaya fantasy", and she got angry and stopped talking to him. After a couple of tries to re-establish the contact, Rog moved on, assuming she was gone for good. A full day later she re-appeared in his online feed.

"You shouldn't have laughed at me," she said without preamble.

"OK," he replied. There was silence for a few minutes.

"So, are you going to apologize?"

"No." More silence.

"Why, did you mean to hurt my feelings? That's not acceptable."

"No, that's not it at all. I'm sorry you think it is, if that's what you mean."

There was nothing for over an hour.

"Why did you laugh at me?" she asked.

"Because what you said was funny," replied Rog.

"It wasn't supposed to be. I was serious."

"Yeah, I know. Didn't keep it from being funny."

"Oh, fuck you," she said, and the "blocked" icon appeared.

And with that she was gone again.

Two days later, she was back, with a breezy "Hi! So how are you doing?" and they resumed, with it never being mentioned again.

She seemed intrigued with the fact that Rog was clearly

interested in her in more than a platonic sense, but would not back down or modify his opinions to advance that interest. She'd had to come to him, or at least meet him halfway, which in her experience had never happened. Most of the men would suddenly have a conversion when it was clear there was no more "naughty talk" or risqué pictures forthcoming without their mending fences with her. Roj simply wouldn't play the game — which she naturally assigned to being "more honest" which attracted her intensely.

So, when he mentioned he was going to be in downtown San Francisco that afternoon and was wondering if she was free to meet him for coffee somewhere, she readily agreed.

She didn't even know his real name, Roj thought bemusedly.

He was idly considering whether he ought to even mention that ordinary people, including himself, didn't have call on rich parents — that any "experience" she had out in the "real world" was in the full knowledge that she wasn't at real risk. Or whether he ought to just concentrate on the fact that she seemed interested in him in a rather more immediate sense. She'd been clear that she hoped they'd have sex one day — just the idea that she'd say that was a shock on a lot of levels for Rog, although it was almost a defining point for her.

Still, he bet that her parents could come up with — what, \$100,000 on a whim if the banks were open? He snorted laughter at himself, and left for the coffee shop.

We'll see how she does after she inherits all that, he thought. It would be an interesting experiment — he hoped he'd be around to see it.

He drove carefully downtown, not speeding or doing anything else that would draw attention. He was humming to himself. He was actually going to enjoy meeting her, he thought, even aside from the fact that she really was a good-

looking woman.

He parked two blocks away from the coffee shop, the first place he could find that wasn't surrounded by surveillance cameras. His experience with the hacker had convinced him that he — everyone really — had too much information out there, waiting to be plucked, used, misused... he had become a strong privacy advocate. He avoided showing up on "the grid" as he laughingly called it as much as possible. It just wasn't anyone else's business what he was doing all day, every day. It was becoming a matter of principle.

He walked into the coffee shop and instantly saw her at a table toward the back. She glanced up and saw him, and a pleased smile broke across her like sunrise.

"Hi, I'm Rog," Rog said.

"And I'm Lucy," she replied.

"I hope you don't mind me saying so, but you look spectacular," Rog said, and it was true. Her dark hair hung to her shoulders, and she was wearing a light summer dress, and unexpected, shocking crimson high heels, which should have seemed too much but weren't, somehow. She was wearing no makeup, an affectation of hers, but with her wide brown eyes and ready smile, she didn't need any.

She blushed.

"Well, I was going to just wear sweatpants and a tshirt, to be honest. But this struck me as a special day for some reason." She smiled. "Truth is, these shoes are killing me — I can't believe I'm wearing them."

"It is a special day," said Rog. And that too was true. He could feel the immediate comfort, the congruence, and he could see she felt it, too. He knew that he could stand and say "Come with me," and she would. But not yet. First, coffee.

"It's a bit of a walk to my car," Rog said, "If I'd known you

were going to wear heels, I'd have parked right here in the room for you."

She laughed.

"Who said I'm going to your car?"

"Yours then."

"Nope, I Uber-ed." She considered him seriously for a moment, and he could see the decision click into place. "But, honestly, I'll be perfectly OK. Your car will do just fine."

He stood in front of the bathroom sink staring at himself in the mirror. He had a ferocious headache, and was having trouble concentrating.

He turned the hot water up high and soaped his hands and arms, scrubbing hard, the lather turning maroon-inflected pink.

He'd just been out back finishing that porch swing he'd sanded to bare wood the other day, and the stain got into everything. He hoped this wasn't going to be the color it dried to. His clothes were covered and already in plastic bags. He wasn't even going to be able to wash them. He'd probably just throw them into an incinerator later. He hated waste like that, but there was no helping it. It was a messy job. But today? He stopped and thought. Hadn't he done it last week? No, that makes no sense. It was today. The headache was just making it hard to think.

He glanced at the briefcase standing open next to the sink. He should have closed it before he started brushing the stain across the wooden slats — why had he had it out there at all? Stupid. There were sticky spots and globs all over the money. He could take a little of that and replace his shirt and pants at least...? No. It wasn't his. He'd found it, and lucky as that was for whoever owned it, it didn't mean any belonged to him, and

tomorrow he was going to take it to the police. Someone would be looking for it. He figured there was about \$100,000 in there.

No, he thought, *less*.

But not much less. He was mildly curious about what kind of story they'd concoct to explain how their briefcase full of money wound up sitting there next to that dumpster for all the world like it was waiting for him. Behind him, the TV newscasters were droning on, war, and politics, and local disasters, a kidnapping, a ransom paid, and a body found in a gang-infested neighborhood across the Bay.

Rog wasn't listening. He had a brush and was washing the money, getting as much of the staining out as he could.

In the mirror, his computer flickered in the darkness of the bedroom, unnoticed, cycling through the purple-framed slide show of bloody legs and a summer dress and crimson high-heels in a small drainpipe under the seagulls of the bay.

chapter fourteen

Sue Cowling

JACOB DROPPED THE PHONE, barely noticing the crack as it hit the wood flooring. He was too busy trying to get his head around the news he had just received. The Sleepwalker was free, earlier today he had broken out of Rampworth State Hospital, although how the hell that happened he had no idea, Rampworth was meant to be a secure mental hospital, holding some of the worst villains in society. It was not meant to be like a hotel, somewhere you can just go open a door and walk out. The scary part, the really scary part was depending which of the seven core personalities the Sleepwalker was using would depend very much on how much danger the citizens of San Francisco were in, and even worse if he was using a new core personality that no one yet knew about, what extra terrors that could bring. The Sleepwalker was not only one of the most famous super villains but he was also the arch-enemy of the Terrordon, the Terrordon who was out of retirement trying to capture a false villain, Jacobs false villain, the Fisherman.

Jacob knew he had to get rid of the Fisherman, the

Terrordon had a real villain now to catch. He walked over to his laptop, and searched all his files for any Fisherman related ones and deleted them, he deleted any social media accounts related to the Fisherman, and only when he was sure he had covered everything he could think of did he stop, and allow himself to think clearly.

Jacob paced trying to think what to do next, the most important thing to him was writing the biography of the Terrordon and now he had this great opportunity to really understand the mindset of the famous masked vigilante, chasing down his arch-enemy. Thing was how best to do that, how to really understand how the mind of the Terrordon worked, he was a super hero. He walked over to the coffee machine and poured himself a coffee, sipping as he walked back across the room, glancing at the television, taking up most of the space on one wall, he could see that the top story now was the Sleepwalker, how he escaped, where he might be, what he might be doing.

It hit Jacob then, of course he should try and capture the Sleepwalker, become his own super hero, try to think like the Terrordon, how he would go about capturing him. He would need help though, he could not do this alone, but who would be best, or perhaps more importantly, who would be willing to help him. He was not stupid he knew there had to be something in it for whoever did help him, it was not going to happen for love. He smiled, yes he knew exactly who to ask.

Jacob walked over to the phone laying on the floor, cracked and broken. “Bugger” he fumed, he moved around the room until he found his cell phone, hidden under a pile of cushions. He searched through his contacts stopping at a name, Amy Kennedy, staring at it in thought for a few moments before he decided to ring her.

Ten minutes later he was ready to leave, he had made two calls and was sure that they were the right calls. He checked the news before leaving to make sure the Sleepwalker was still at large, nothing had changed, although sightings had come in from the public. Jacob made note of those sightings and then he turned off the television and walked out the front door.

Jacob walked into the reception area of the San Francisco Chronicle and looked around before walking over to the reception desk. The young girl sitting behind a computer screen seemed to be in another world, totally absorbed in the screen she was looking at. Jacob coughed, no reaction, impatient to get on with his meeting he brought his fist down hard on the desk. The girl jumped, and Jacob felt guilty, but time was short, so he smiled and said, "Amy Kennedy, is expecting me."

The girl checked her screen, looked up scowling, "take lift, or stairs up to the fourth floor and her office is second on right." She then looked back at her screen dismissing him.

Jacob walked across to the lifts, saw all were in use so he took the stairs two at a time until he reached the fourth floor, and following instructions found Amy's office. Looking through the glass door Jacob could see Amy sitting behind her desk, and also Pete Schlamme, pacing in front of her, they both turned as he opened the door and walked in.

"Great," Jacob smiled at them both, and walking across the room sat down on the empty chair. Pete looked at him, muttered and perched on the edge of the desk. While Amy looking irritated said, "Yes make yourselves at home, and please can someone explain what this is about." She looked from one to the other of them and before anyone could speak says, "You do realise how busy I am, especially with the

headlines today, the Sleepwalker is getting a lot of interest.”

Jacob smiled. “That is why I am here, I know you have background knowledge Amy concerning the Terrordon, and we are all aware of the current problem with the Sleepwalker.”

Amy spoke up. “Yes not only is the Fisherman on the loose, we now have the Sleepwalker loose, and where is Terrordon when we need him?”

“Well, about the Fisherman,” Jacob coughed. Both Amy and Mike turned to stare at him.

“Yes?” Mike asked.

Jacob cleared his throat. “Okay guys just bare with me, and let me speak. Firstly there is no Fisherman, he is a myth, I made him up to try and get Terrordon to show himself.” He held up his hands to quiet them as they both started to both talk at once.

“Just listen please, this could be good for all of our careers, just listen.”

Jacob stood up and started pacing, and Mike slid onto the seat he had vacated, making himself more comfortable.

“The Fisherman, I made him up because I needed Terrordon to think there was a real risk to life, and to encourage him to come out of retirement to hunt him down. It worked before you say anything, it worked, we have Terrordon, don’t we?”

“You bastard.” Amy screamed at him. “I spent hours and days and weeks researching and getting to understand the Fisherman. You think its funny? Creating a monster and letting him loose on the world?”

Amy was standing, she stormed around the desk and stood in front of Jacob. “Do you?”

Jacob shrugged. “I did what I felt was needed to try and bring Terrordon out of retirement.”

Looking at both Amy and Mike he shrugged again.

“Neither of you can deny you benefitted from the Fisherman, in terms of getting publicity?”

Mike stood and walked over to Jacob and Amy. “So tell me is that why we are here so you can confess? Or is there more to this you have not told us?”

Jacob could see this was not going to be as easy as he thought.

“I need your help guys, I think we could all benefit from the Sleepwalker being caught”. He paused hoping for a reaction, but nothing just a coldness was settling over the office.

“I was thinking that maybe we, as in the three of us could catch the Sleepwalker, we would all benefit from this.” He stopped as both Mike and Amy burst out laughing, and waited until they stopped, and were just staring at him incredulously.

“Your serious?” Mike said.

“Well yes I am actually, we could be our own super hero league, it would give us an opportunity to get into the mindset of how Terrordon works, and we would be doing the world a favour, well San Francisco a favour.”

He stopped and looked at Amy and Mike, and knew that it was not going to happen, he could see the look in their eyes, that he was mad, had lost it, and he could see something else too, a distrust that made him feel uncomfortable.

Amy turned and walked over to the phone. “I am phoning the police you are mad, for all we know you helped the Sleepwalker to escape?” Mike rushed over put his hand over the phone, Don’t do that Amy, we all become guilty, whats to stop them from thinking we were involved as well?”

“We can’t let him just walk away, he’s bloody mad.” Amy was fuming.

Mike turned and walked back over to the door, turning he looked at Jacob with pity.

“Mate you have lost it totally, not only have you lied to us all, you now think you have super hero abilities and can take on the Sleepwalker. You really think you can catch him don’t you?” he sighed.

“I feel for you I do but I am not getting involved in this, and I think you seriously need to go talk to someone professional. I agree with Amy, you are unstable, not sure why I never noticed it before.”

“Well all the signs were there.” Amy screamed. “You have totally lost it Jacob, you need locking up with Sleepwalker.”

Opening the door he beckoned Amy over. “Lets go get a drink and leave Jacob to think over what we have said.” Amy joined him and without even looking at Jacob walked out.

Mike followed turning to Jacob again to say, “Get help Jacob, you bloody well need it.”

He followed Amy closing the door, leaving Jacob alone with his thoughts.

chapter fifteen

LG Red

THE RADIO WAS BLASTING out Ability Ghana OFM when the neighbour knocked on the door.

The Sleepwalker was running his Doug personality, doing a little renovation, and the music covered the noise of the drilling. When the neighbour knocked, though, Doug was taking a refreshing break, shouting along with the lyrics of Sarkodie's azonto anthem *U Go Kill Me* as remixed by Wizkid, EL, Ice Prince and Navio, jerking his hips left and right and pumping the air.

He stopped in mid fist-bump, swivelled his head round to look at the door. Sleepwalker came back on the scene with a crash. He thought about switching in another personality — no time; normally, it took time for each of the boys to mould the body's features and voice. He sent Doug to the door.

Doug clicked and dragged all the locks and pulled the door open a crack. The neighbour from below his penthouse suite, that irritating woman he sometimes met — not met, saw — in the lift, stood smiling, a cake on a plate in her hands and a bag of stuff on her feet.

How the fuck had she got up here? He'd fixed the lift so it responded only to his code: 666 and a six-second pause, then HH88.

Sleepwalker pasted a kindly smile to Doug's face, and the woman stepped back a pace and responded with a nervous grin.

"Mr Doug, isn't it?"

Doug's smile widened and his green eyes crinkled. He was wearing a check shirt in a matching green, and deep green chinos.

"Oh, you've done the place all in purple?" she babbled. "That's... special!"

"Yeah." Sleepwalker Doug waited.

"Can I come in? No? It's just... I'm going away for a few weeks and I wondered if you would be so kind..." — clearly a rehearsed speech — "as to take care of my place? I've brought you up my..." she waved at the bag, backing.

"Yeah." Doug reached out and took the cake, pulled the bag in and shut the door. Faintly from outside he heard her squeaks of thanks.

He thought about the cake. Sure smelled good. He put out his tongue to lick it. Could be poison. He left it there. Then he went back and looked at it. Very fancy. Cut a slice. Eggy yellow inside, dark chocolate outside. No.

He opened the black plastic bag. A television. What the... Her most precious possession? He opened his mouth and laughed.

She was knocking again. He hurled the door open, and the bitch marched straight in. "You can plug it in, use it for the few days — here, I'll show you — the cable is here" — and she plugged in the TV, connected it to the cable —

"Cable?" His eyes were standing in their sockets. He didn't

know there was cable here. They could be using cable to watch him.

"Oh yes, cable was installed for every apartment before you moved in, Doug."

He got her out of there — "I'll just take a teeny bite of your cake, mmm, good" — and she went, licking her fingers, and he slammed the door, locked all the locks, sat down and calmed himself for a few minutes by planning to take the drill, drill out all her teeth one by one. He found he was eating a slice of the cake.

He jumped: the TV had come to life. But as he went to turn it off, he saw the face on the screen. He knew that face.

He kicked the radio to turn it off. Grabbed the remote, turned the TV up full.

"...the noted biographer Jacob Heath," the TV shouted.

That was him all right.

The Sleepwalker kicked Doug out, dragged over a chair and watched the interview. So that was his real name. He was really a writer. When he was with the Sleepwalker in Rampworth State Hospital, he said he was a writer. Everyone said they were writers in the hospital. Gave him the nostalgias for the old days when everyone was God or Napoleon. Now they were —

Wait, what?

"I'm writing a biography of a supervillain," said Heath from the TV, with his shit-eating grin. That suit must have cost... stop, listen, listen. "The Fisherman. Ace opponent of the Terrordon."

"Say what?" said the interviewer, "You say these are real?"

"The Fisherman is real, yes."

"But getting back to your biography of Harvey Milk..."

The Sleepwalker saw a twitch of irritation cross Heath's

face at the mention of his first book. Yeah, he was a writer all right. The Sleepwalker would like to talk to him. He'd like that a lot. In fact, he was going to make it happen. He sat down and listened to the interview all the way through. Then he played it back.

People say a lot more than they mean. They give clues.

The Sleepwalker never took notes. His mind was a steel razor. He needed no notes. He opened his mouth wide and laughed and laughed.

The room was full and the speeches were over. Jacob was backed against the marble fireplace with a line of people waiting for him to sign his new book.

"I loved your book about Harvey Milk," the woman said, and he felt his cheek twitch. He looked over her head to get his equilibrium back, and then he saw — no. It couldn't have been.

"James!" the guy said, pushing past the line, hand out to shake. He engulfed Jacob's hand in a clammy, icy two-handed clasp. "Darling, don't you remember?" The guy sparkled with diamante, from his running shoes to his shades to the faux pearly king cap tipped over one eye, but as he pulled the shades down to give Jacob a flirty glance, a chill of terror ran down Jacob's back. The eyes were green. The green the Bedouin call Satan's Eyes. He remembered that green. He had scars that remembered those eyes.

Jacob froze there. He finished the signing, trying frantically to call over Schlamme, his agent, whispering to fans to get him over to talk to him. But Schlamme was oblivious. He waved to Jacob — a "keep it going" wave — and remained deep in conversation with obvious publishers: seedy people with shifty eyes, all of them holding free copies of the new book, not a

penny in royalties out of any of them.

Jacob had to keep signing. Then one of the fans said, "You haven't even had a glass of wine!" And he drank it. Fool.

He'd heard of girls being roofied. In fact, his research had included the use of Rohypnol in gay bars. But at book launches?

He came to with a headache lifting the top of his head off. He raised his hand to cover his face against the light. The gesture stopped after a couple of inches. He couldn't see, his vision was blurred, the light was too bright. He was stiff from sitting. He tried to shift his position. He heard someone moaning.

"Oh, poor man," said a voice, a child's voice.

Jacob blinked his eyes hard, opened them again. A bit clearer. Again.

The Sleepwalker was sitting there, a sugary smile on his stubbled face. He was wearing a tiny pink top sparkling with sequins outlining the slogan "Love U Mommy" and a thigh-length frou-frou skirt with black-and-white stripes, strappy gold sandals on his hairy feet. His toenails were varnished shell-pink, matching the shell-pink slides in his hair and the pink sparkly heart-shaped sunglasses.

Jacob turned his head slowly to look at the light pouring in — he was handcuffed by one hand to a steel window frame. The other hand was free! He slammed his fist on the window. But it was no use. They were in an empty room in a penthouse apartment at the top of a building high above San Francisco. Far, far below, the windows of automobiles flashed as they waited to cross the bridge. Tiny ships steamed through a toy ocean.

"You're wasting your breath," said the Sleepwalker, in a deep, grating voice with a waft of an Australian accent. The

child's voice was gone.

He turned back to the Sleepwalker. "What do you want?"

The Sleepwalker shook his head. "Don't be naughty! Mommy will have to put you on the naughty step." Kid was back.

"What the fuck do you want?"

"Mommy!" the Sleepwalker squeaked, "Mommy! He's a bad rude man."

"Don't you get testy with me." It was a new voice, some kind of standard educated American accent.

Jacob lunged at the Sleepwalker and got a handful of the pink top. The Sleepwalker teetered back, squealing, and tore away. "I'm going to get my mommy. She'll fix you!" He ran out of the room, frou-frou skirt rustling as he wiggled on his high gold heels.

Jacob heard clangs and then the low scream of a whistling kettle building to a screech, and the sound of quarrelling. Thank God — there were more people here! He shouted for help, pounded on the window with his free hand, and his heart rose as he heard the quarrelling voices come closer. But no... the Sleepwalker came back alone — but, well, not alone.

"Mommy! Stop being such a *bitch!*"

"Don't you dare talk to your mother like that. You just wait till your father gets home."

"Fuck you!"

The Sleepwalker slammed down the tray he was carrying and hit himself a ferocious blow on the ear, and instantly howled — "I'm telling Daddy what you did, you nasty man."

A calm upper-class voice intervened. "I say, steady on, old chaps. Let's stick to the agenda here."

Jacob relaxed a fraction where he cringed against the steel window frame. He remembered this voice from Rampworth:

the voice of reason. The Sleepwalker picked up the teapot from the tray, and poured a stream of tea from a height into one of the two flowered china cups. "Milk and sugar, doll?" he asked.

"Just milk, thanks." Jacob reached for the cup.

"You'll take sugar and like it." This was the camp, oh-la-laduckie voice again, with an edge of flirtation. The Sleepwalker took the lid from the sugar bowl and poured half the sugar from it into the cup. "Makes it stick. I like the pain," and he licked his lips. He threw the boiling tea straight into Jacob's face.

Jacob roared in shock as the boiling tea hit him. The skin felt as if it had been stripped from his face. The pain was incredible. His heartbeat raced to a pounding crescendo in his throat. He was afraid to open his eyes — but terrified to keep them shut. There would be more coming.

He heard the thin child's giggle, and arched his body out of the way as the next cupful came straight for his groin.

It missed him and landed on the wall, and actually melted a patch of paint.

"Strewth! Landlady's not going to like that."

"Stop! We have to talk!" Jacob said. "Isn't there something you want from me?"

"Very good," confided the upper-crust accent. "He's gone through fear and anger and now he's at bargaining. Death will follow soon, inevitably."

"Inevitably," mocked the ooh-duckie voice. "Aren't we fancy today?"

"Oh!" — Jacob couldn't identify this one. "The pot's empty. Put the kettle on again."

"You do it. I'm tired."

"Oh go on, it's fun! Make him squeal again, Mommy."

They — he — went out again. Jacob pulled hard on the handcuff and almost fainted. In the agony from his face he had not felt some of the tea splashing onto his wrist.

He fell back against the window, groping in the empty air. He heard himself moaning.

And a memory came to him.

Last year he had interviewed an old woman, Mrs Rubenstein, a Quaker survivor of the German death camps. He had been eager to hear what techniques she used to survive. Simple friendship, mostly, she said. There is that of God in everyone, she said. Though with some people — she sighed — it was hard to find that spark. He had pressed her. What did you do if they were coming at you with the batons. She fell silent. Well, she did that a lot during the interview. It must have been five minutes. Then she leaned over and traced her finger along the mother-of-pearl on the hexagonal Indian table in front of her, some remnant of her childhood that still remained. "Well," she said, "traditionally, the first thing to do is to draw them into a meeting, and then, then to speak truth to power." A meeting, he'd said, baffled though he had attended meetings for worship with her as research, and she said yes, centre down, go into the silence together. Perhaps for five minutes if you can make it last that long. Then speak truth. "And that worked? In the camps?" Worked, she asked, and gave a dry laugh. Well, a lot of people died, you know.

Something about the memory calmed him, and he waited for the Sleepwalker to come back in.

When he minced in with a new tray of tea, the voices quarrelling again, Jacob really looked at him. The green eyes. He remembered a saying of his mother's: nature breaks out through the eyes of the cat. Where would you see some spark of good in those eyes?

"Let's go! Can I do it, Mommy?" The child's voice, there was something particularly nasty about it. This was a personality that would like to catch little animals and hurt them.

Jacob pushed away the knowledge. Centre down. He took a deep breath, looked into the green eyes.

"What? What does this cobber mean, centre down?" The Australian voice.

He hadn't known he spoke out loud.

"Shut up. Pour the flaming tea. Give me the billy."

Jacob kept breathing deeply, trying to pull the Sleepwalker into the same breathing pattern. The tea came at him. He jumped out of the way, but kept breathing.

"He's put something in the tea, Mommy! It's making me sleepy!"

"No worries! Beaut!" He was pouring again. Then he sighed.

The cup of tea went down on the tray. The Sleepwalker's eyes closed. The two of them stood breathing in concert.

Outside, far below, a boat hooted. The roar of traffic came up here as a faint purr. They breathed on.

The spoon overbalanced and fell out of the sugar bowl, with a clink and a spray of sugar. Jacob opened his eyes, and reached out his hand as at the end of the meeting Mrs Rubenstein had brought him to, and taking the Sleepwalker's hand, said "Good morning, friend."

The Sleepwalker's eyes opened wide and green, and he snorted with laughter. "Thought he'd vibe me out, did he? At least that was refreshing." He took up the teapot and again poured out the stream of tea into the cup.

"What is it you want from me?" Jacob asked.

"Your pain, darling, just pure pain." It was the

Sleepwalker's own voice, none of his inhabitants were here now. But this could be worse.

"You want more than that."

"Yes I do." The Sleepwalker absently mixed two spoons of sugar into the tea and added milk, and picked it up and sipped it. "I want to know who your new subject is. Your new biography."

"Why do you want to know that?" It was a mistake. He saw the eyes begin to kindle. He added, fast, "It's not a biography. It's a work of research."

"Into me?" The Sleepwalker preened.

"Not you." Jacob prepared to dodge, watching the Sleepwalker's gaze to see which way he would throw. "But someone you know."

"Oh, let me guess. Oh, let me... What? You mean... you couldn't mean...?"

"The Terrordon."

The Sleepwalker thrust the cup at Jacob. "Oh, you darling! Biscuit? Cake?" He sliced into the cake — yellow, coated with dark chocolate — did he bake it, wondered Jacob — and tried to give Jacob the plate, with an adorable silver cake fork sitting beside the slice. "Oh, wait, silly me." He pulled a key from his pocket and tenderly unlocked the handcuff. "Come — sit!"

Jacob followed him out of the empty room into a comfortable book-lined living room, and joined him on a low black leather couch facing a freestanding stove with flames playing behind a glass door.

"Eat! It's good!"

Jacob tried to open his mouth enough for a piece of cake. The burned skin stretched horribly.

"Oh, dear me, how inconsiderate of me. This will take the smart away."

Jacob took the cream and tried to apply it, but he could not bear to touch the scalded skin.

"We'll get you to a hospital. But do go on. Tell me about the 'Terrordon' —" a moue of scorn — "What is this research? Sounds exciting!"

Jacob managed a cautious sip, and slipped a morsel of the cake between his lips. Painful. But delicious. "I'm working to find out who he is."

The Sleepwalker gave a squeal of delight, and for a horrified moment Jacob thought the others were back. But no. "My dear, how perfectly wonderful! I'm definitely on your team. Such fun! Many hands make light work."

"On my... team?"

"Oh yes. We're working together now."

An hour later, Jacob rolled out of the moving car as it passed the doors of the hospital. He staggered in, took a porter by the sleeve and whispered, "Burns unit."

He lay on the stretcher as it rolled through the corridors, and felt the salt tears squeezing between his eyelids and burning their way down his temples into his hair.

chapter sixteen

Lee Powell

SHREDDING A MAN ALIVE was something that the Sleepwalker was looking forward to. He was a ruthless man, his life and success depended on it, but even he had a code; unlike the Jew.

The Sleepwalker was crouched outside an old barn scanning for heat signatures across the Sacramento Valley. His disposition and barbed-wire-hair blinked hurt in the moonlight with each passing cloud. Satisfied, he stood and yanked at the barn door with a purple gloved hand; its hinges groaned as wind raced inside the barn throwing straw and debris into his face. His thick arms wrestled it closed. He spat out a fragment of straw, brushed himself off, and inhaled the smell of a past summer.

Abel Rivkin, lay bound and naked in the jaws of a tractor shovel. He was surrounded by the Sleepmaker's henchmen. The Jew's doughy body was shivering against the cold steel. The gag in his mouth bursting in and out as his dilated eyes darted from side-to-side. The Sleepwalker nodded his head and smiled.

“Boss, I don't get it.”

“Get what Jimmy?” said the Sleepmaker.

“You said we’d be ruffing up rich, connected and healthy types. Not fat fucks like this. Bloody near crippled us carrying doughnut-boy across the field.”

One of the henchmen sniggered, then went silent with the sudden twitch of the Sleepmaker’s head...the lead henchman piped up.

“What Jimmy meant was, Richards is booked at Saison in South Beach in a hour. He’s one of the last on our list and, as you know, a hard man to isolate alone. He dines for about an hour and a half and we’re two-hour drive from there.”

The Sleepmaker nodded continuously as he walked across to a work bench, swallowed and checked his watch. Eight minutes. He pulled on a set of abattoir-like-overalls and boots - taking his time to make sure his clothing and skin were not exposed.

“Pick him up and dangle him over the edge.” said the Sleepmaker pointing to the animal grinding machine.

The Sleepwalker made his way to the base of the machine and checked the two large buckets were still centred beneath the pipes at the base. He began pouring five litres of hydrochloric acid into the bucket designated for blood. The one for minced flesh and bone he’d leave untainted for the pigs he’d been starving for two days outside. He took a step back and thought through the remaining tasks. Then he pushed a large red button.

Rivkin began to thrash about as two dozen thick metals claws moiled about their axis. His sweaty body heaved with terror as his eyes hunted out and begged the Sleepwalker’s for mercy. The Sleepwalker climbed into the tractor and turned the ignition key - his eyes never leaving Rivkin’s.

Plumes of blue smoke jettisoned from the upright tractor

exhaust and began to meander about the cobwebs and wooden beams of the barn's roof. He yanked leftward on a rusted lever protruding beneath the steering wheel and the tractor's arm lurched up. He pulled another lever and the tractor shovel slammed onto the floor.

"Put him back in the tractor shovel."

The henchman did as they were told.

Rivkin rolled himself out of the shovel and towards a large bank of shelves filled with tools. The gag over his mouth came loose, he spat out the ball of cloth and he began to yell.

"Please. No!"

The Sleepwalker jumped from the tractor and moved purposely towards Rivkin and kicked him at the base of the spine, then dragged him back into the tractor shovel. Rivkin yelped in pain, vomited and began to weep.

"Please!"

The Sleepwalker scanned the dusty shelving for something more convincing. He had to be sure. He found what he was looking for. He grabbed an air compressor cable and plugged it into a power point. The compressor began to rattle and hiss as flakes of rust shook from its metal body. He connected the air hose and picked up a greasy nail gun and cocked it with the remaining four-inch nails in the magazine. He turned and stood over Rivkin.

"Shut up!"

Rivkin soiled himself and let out another groan. The Sleepwalker considered Rivkin's knee, but he needed him conscious. He pressed the cold muzzle against Rivkin's thigh, just above his femoral artery, and pulled the trigger.

Rivkin's pupils went to pinpricks before his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Saliva drooled from cracked lips as he gulped the diesel filled air. The Sleepwalker pushed a finger to

Rivkin's lips.

"Another sound and I'll pin the head of your cock to your stomach."

The Sleepwalker glanced at his watch. Less than five minutes. He waited another thirty seconds for Rivkin to catch his breath.

"I'm only going to ask once. Lie to me, and... " the Sleepwalker waved the nail gun toward the grinding machine.

"Who is the Terrordon?"

Rivkin's forehead creased as the rest of his face contorted in agony. He went to open his mouth then closed it.

"I don't..."

The Sleepwalker fired the last rusty nail into Rivkin's groin then strode back to the tractor as Rivkin writhed. When Rivkin came back to his senses he was aloft the grinding machine.

"Karma's a bitch!" said the Sleepwalker in Hebrew as he tilted the tray and dropped Rivkin into the jaws of the machine.

Seventy-eight seconds later, the Sleepwalker poured the blood bucket into a foetid drain, then hauled the other bucket outside. On his return, he emptied acid into the machine then saturated it with gasoline. He stripped off his protective gear and watched the claws devour them too. He brushed a hand across his hair then heard the distant sound of a helicopter. Next, he tossed a match.

"Jimmy, you drive the car back to the safe-house. The rest come with me in the chopper."

Outside, the commercial Sikorsky S-76B helicopter was coming in low and fast. the Sleepwalker squinted and pulled his collar tight to his neck in preparation for the onslaught of air. His lips pulled upwards on the left side of his face - *piles of pig shit in a field seemed a befitting tombstone*. He took a deep breath

and moved towards the aircraft door. He'd barely pulled himself inside before he and his crew were airborne staring down at the burning barn in the distance. He checked his watch: three, two, one; the barn exploded.

Four pairs of eyes starred transfixed at the Sleepmaker, all knew better to speak when the man was in the zone.

“Strewth! Life can be such a grind,” said the Sleepmaker beaming behind an Aussie twang and opening his palms in a peaceful gesture.

“Been thinking about that fuck-wit Rivkin at Rampworth. Did my nut in. A personal matter from way back finally nailed down. Had his hands in many pies: - drugs, child-prostitution and paedophilia provisioning mostly, but connected like fuck. It was worth a shot!”

The Sleepmaker stared out the window expectantly. A small ball of flame in the distance billowed silently as the car Jimmy was driving exploded. *Never trust a loose mouth* he thought, he had liked the kid, to his better judgement even given him a couple of warnings. Then he let it go.

Two hours later, the Sleepmaker was parked and behind the wheel of a black SUV. In front of him, his three-remaining crew in a police car dressed in full uniform.

“Looks like he’s asking for the check.”

“To re-iterate, I need you all on high alert. We’re almost through our list of candidates, it’s highly likely Richards is the Terrordon. Remember, stay back and don’t put your lights on until he turns off the 101 onto March road. Keep him busy until I get there. If shit goes wild and he gets the better of me hit him with the tranquillizers. If I’m in the way, shoot us both. Got it?”

“Roger that.”

Jason Richards pulled his Aston Martin 777 over just after the Chevron at Menlo Park. He'd just switched off the engine when an officer tapped a torch on his window.

“Drivers license and registration please.”

Richards gave the officer what he needed with a forced smile. He recalled the journey home to determine if he'd been speeding at any point. He had not.

“One moment.” said the officer as he headed back to his car.

Richards tapped his right forefinger into the steering wheel as he wiped his dash with a micro-fibre cloth with his other hand. Once satisfied, he adjusted his cuff-links. When fixing his Windsor knot in the rear-view mirror he noticed a dark SUV without lights on coming down the street, slowly. He looked towards the police car as the SUV passed. The SUV stopped abruptly in front of his car, blocking his exit. His temples began to throb.

A large man wearing a purple suit exited the SUV and strode towards his Aston Martin. Richards heart smacked-repeatedly against his chest bones as he glanced back to the police car. *Nothing!* What the hell was happening. Richards knew he should start his car, lock the doors and close his window, but his hands were frosted in panic. A moment later the large man had opened his door, cut through his seat belt and was dragging him by his tie onto the side-walk. Richards glimpsed three police officers exit the police car, but it was the ominous face in front of him that held him. Richards waited, but there was no word from the policemen.

“What the hell is going on?” Richards shouted looking again to the police for help.

“They are of no use to you...I am the Sleepmaker!”

Richards lurched forward and kicked for the Sleepmaker's knee. He missed but gained himself enough distance in the process to get under the Sleepmaker's guard and land an uppercut. The Sleepmaker tumbled and rolled backwards back onto his feet. To Richards surprise the man was now smiling. The police officers had surrounded them at a distance with their guns pulled.

“What the...” Richards screamed.

The Sleepmaker, threw his knife to the floor so Richards could see him do it and slowly moved forward and head-butted Richards. Dazed, Richards tried to punch the Sleepmaker, swinging his arms wildly hoping for a connection. Then his stomach was ablaze with agony - he fell gasping for air.

The Sleepmaker stood over Richards, conscious he was exposed and open to attack, but Richards stayed down. Then the Sleepmaker looked away into the distance and waited, but nothing.

“This isn't him, get him in the SUV and let's get out of here.”

chapter seventeen

Waleed Ovase

WHEN RUNNING FOR THE State Senate, his friends had joked that he was lowering his chances of being kidnapped. That, being a playboy was a more attractive ransom opportunity, rather than a low level public servant. It had been a sense of comfort, in a way, that he was turning towards a safer life. And hopefully a more contented one.

But the Sleepwalker's piercing green eyes had changed all that, and now he was laying on his side in a trunk, listening to the car's back tires rumble over the uneven road. He made mental notes to himself, trying to remember where all the potholes and especially rough patches might be, so that he could find someone to yell at to fix them. The City's infrastructure might be his next pet project. If he lived through all this.

He moved his head side to side against the trunk's rough inner lining, trying to scratch his forehead. There was something strange about the Terrordon and Sleepwalker showing up after all this time. Sure, he'd heard the rumors, that only someone of his wealth could afford to be the Terrordon,

and while he hadn't necessarily denied the rumors, he didn't think anyone really thought they were true. It had been an easy way to get laid on more than one occasion. But all those lies and endless parties had just caught up with him. The car slowed down, but not before hitting one last deep pothole, forcing his head to crash against the trunk's floor. If he lived through this, he decided he needed a spa day.

The trunk swung open, revealing the crisp cool San Francisco air. He could tell by the angle of the road, the few letters he could make out on the street sign, and the silly German car that his neighbor always parked on the street, that the Sleepwalker had taken him home.

"You awake in there?" the Sleepwalker asked, his brilliant green eyes more visible in the dark than the rest of him. He stood above Jason, his hands buried in the deep pockets of his coat. His henchmen milled around behind him, unsure of what to do with themselves. The Sleepwalker never gave them more information than they could handle.

"You won't find anything here," asked Jason, trying to shift to a more comfortable position.

"That's what someone who had something to hide would say," laughed the Sleepwalker. "But there's only one way to find out, you know? There's only one thing we can do."

"What's that?"

"Try our best with the options at hand!"

The Sleepwalker grabbed Jason, and in one swift movement, pulled him from the car and onto his feet. "I see you've had some practice with this," mumbled Jason, trying to get his left leg to wake up.

"There was a time, before I was put away, that I was quite good at what I did," the Sleepwalker replied, guiding them towards the house. He reached into Jason's pockets and found

his keys.

"If you were so good, why'd they put you away?"

"Well, I guess you were better, Terrordon." The Sleepwalker put the key in the door, and let it swing open, hoping to himself that it could be just that easy to find out that Jason was the Terrordon. Perhaps his mask was just sitting on the kitchen table. Perhaps his old uniform was draped over a living room chair. Perhaps his entire house was his Terrordon Cave.

Jason stepped ahead into the foyer of the house. He had designed the foyer to be especially grand: a testament and taste to what the rest of the house would hold. A regal chandelier hung from a molded ceiling, while the walls were simpler and more modern with mostly glass and clean lines. The house had been expensive, but a beautiful reminder that the old world and the new could live in harmony. "So this is my foyer, and as you can see, there's nothing here but things that belong in a foyer," said Jason.

The Sleepwalker paced around the room, not letting himself go into the rest of the house yet. There had to be something here too, something small, that could play well into Heath's book. He imagined a clue lying on a random table, that would lead him to the stash: The Terrordon Cave.

But there was nothing. He opened every drawer, and threw them aside. "How big is this place?" he asked.

"About 15,000 square feet," laughed Jason.

"A grand birdcage," mumbled the Sleepwalker.

"You really think I'm the Terrordon, don't you? It's not apart of some larger plan of yours?"

"Your identity is close to being revealed Terrordon. I've cleared one room, and now we move onto the next one."

Jason sighed, his hands still tied behind his back. "Alright,

let me at least show you around. I have to be a good host in my house." He put his shoulder into a side door and it slowly creaked open. Heavy doors, he reminded himself, were apart of his design too. They always felt more substantial.

The Sleepwalker motioned to his men to stay behind him and keep a lookout for anything, anything at all that they could bring back to Heath. They followed Jason through the myriad of living rooms and side rooms, the main kitchen and the smaller offshoot ones, and finally to what Jason had always described as the Grand View: the largest living room in the house, with a full glass wall overlooking Golden Gate Park.

"My my what money can buy," said the Sleepwalker. He stared at the view for a moment, and then turned around. "Alright boys, split up into teams and let's see what we can find."

They rushed off in different directions, deciding quickly which part of the large house they would be searching. The Sleepwalker turned back to Jason. "Why'd you quit?"

"Partying? I wanted to grow up," replied Jason, still staring at the view. The Golden Gate Bridge was always beautiful. "Everyone has to realize that there's something more that can be done with their lives."

"Throwing me off with your little nonsense about being a young playboy would have worked if I didn't already know who you were," replied the Sleepwalker. "I know it's you. Everyone does. They've all known for years."

"Then why can't you find anything?"

"Because you've spent your money well."

"Or maybe I'm not the Terrordon."

The Sleepwalker sighed. "You have been my nemesis for longer than I can be comfortable with, and to see you here now, like this, it would so easy to kill you. It would be so easy

to just," he trailed off, his fingers motioning towards Jason's neck.

"Perhaps it would be too easy," whispered Jason.

"What?"

"The Terrordon would have put up more of a fight."

"No," said the Sleepwalker. "No no, your games won't work this time. You said you've matured. So have I. Everyone kept telling me I'm crazy, especially in Rampworth. But in there, I met the actual crazy ones. And I matured too. I know what I know."

"Then why have your henchmen come back with nothing?" said Jason, leaning against the glass wall.

The Sleepwalker turned around and looked over his men. They had brought nothing back with them. "Boys, what did you find?"

They all shook their heads. "It's a very large house, and we couldn't find anything that might lead us to the Terrordon Cave," said one.

The Sleepwalker glanced at Jason. "Ya know what they say, if you want the work done right, you have to do it yourself."

"Or you're wrong," mumbled Jason. He didn't understand why he felt so courageous in this moment, but he was getting annoyed that the Sleepwalker had a personal grudge against him, when he wasn't even the Terrordon! He was all for helping people, but this blame was too great.

The Sleepwalker's green eyes had darkened as his brows furrowed. "I will not play your games anymore Terrordon. I won't do it." He shoved his men aside and he went to search the house.

Each room held more knick knacks and random furniture than the previous. It was a well designed house, with more than a couple pianos strewn about, but there was nothing

interesting laying around, no clues that he could find.

And then it occurred to him there might be a switch, or a button, something that might lead to an underground room, or a hidden part of the house. "Boys, start moving things, start figuring out if there might be something else. A hidden room, a button, a mechanism, something. Anything. We won't let this masked vigilante win this round."

But as they moved through the house, knocking books off shelves, pressing piano keys, moving every painting and every object in every curio cabinet, he realized how futile and desperate the situation was becoming. He had been certain that Jason Richards was the Terrordon. The logic and clues had added up, and yet this man was going to beat him again, if he couldn't find any proof.

And that was something he could not abide by. There was an anger, brutal and raw, that he knew Doug felt. It was guttural. He threw a bookcase to the ground, checking the wall for any signs of a door, anything to make the hunt easier. Doug prided himself on building things, and he would have loved to know the plans to this house. But when Doug became angry, he could morph into something far more dangerous.

"Burn it down," whispered the Sleepwalker. "Burn it down and then we'll see what's inside. And we'll take the Terrordon's crown jewel from him. He can't win. He won't win." His boys looked at each other and nodded. If there was anything that they loved doing, it was burning things.

The Sleepwalker returned to the main living room. The Sun was slowly rising, and the Golden Gate Bridge had begun to take that little light and use it to transform itself into a man made beauty. "If you won't assist me, I will take it from you."

"Aren't you trying to do that?"

"If you don't assist me, I will burn everything."

"There's nothing to assist! All there is what you see. I am not the Terrordon. Never was."

The Sleepwalker nodded as his boys returned with jerry cans of gasoline. They began spraying it around the room and down the hallways, the air quickly filling with its pungent smell. "You won't help me reveal to the world that you're nothing but a rich boy who wanted to get in the way. Now I'm going to burn it all." He took out a match and struck it against his boot. It burned bright, even as the morning sun came up.

"But why?" asked Jason. "I'm not the Terrordon."

"You are, and you will not win this round." He stared at the match for a moment, before letting it drop to the floor. The gasoline ignited immediately and rushed off in every direction. He motioned to his boys. They grabbed Jason, and forcibly tied him to a chair. "And now we will leave you here, so you can watch your beautiful sunrise, as your house burns around you."

"I don't think you understand," said Jason, staring at the flames that engulfed his house. "I don't think you get that I'm not the Terrordon."

The Sleepwalker shrugged. "All will be known."

The flames crawled towards the ceiling, and as the Sleepwalker was turning to leave, the glass wall splintered as a fast moving form crashed through it and landed on the living room floor. "I think you've taken this charade far enough," said the Terrordon, picking himself up and brushing off the larger pieces of glass. He wore a hard rubberized suit and his iconic mask. The only skin Jason could see was the Terrordon's lips and muscular chin.

The Sleepwalker looked at the masked man and then back to Jason. "Did you pay someone to dress up as you?"

"I'm not the Terrordon!" yelled Jason. "Use your damn eyes!"

The Terrordon moved towards the Sleepwalker. "It's just like the old days. I come after you, and you burn things down."

The Sleepwalker looked at the masked and suited man, slowly realizing that he was the real Terrordon. There was something about his arrogant swagger, the way his lips moved in a condescending way, that only he could be the true Terrordon. He glanced at Jason, realizing that he had missed all the little clues. Jason didn't have what it took to be the masked vigilante. "The old days were better. Simpler times," he replied.

"I think it's time to get back to Rampworth, don't you?"

The Sleepwalker looked at the flames that had finally reached the ceiling. He heard cabinets and chairs fall over as they crumbled, and something felt right about it all. "No, I'm not going back there," he replied, retreating slowly into the house. "I'm not going back there, but we will meet again." He grabbed one of his henchmen and threw him towards the Terrordon, as he turned and fled into the house. The henchman looked at the Terrordon, and instead of taking a swing, ran past him into the depths of the flames.

The Terrordon looked towards Jason and then back towards the disappearing form of the Sleepwalker. He knew he would meet his old friend again. He moved quickly and untied the State Senator, the house quickly getting worse. He grabbed his arm, but when he realized that Jason had breathed in too much smoke, he easily threw him over his shoulder and made his way through the burning debris.

From a vantage point across the bay, the Terrordon looked at the burning wreck of a house, and through his binoculars he

could even make out Jason Richards being treated by a paramedic before being loaded into the ambulance for treatment at the hospital.

Retiring in 2005 had been a personal choice, but now the Sleepwalker was back on the streets of San Francisco and had implicated a prominent State Senator. They would all come for him, because they would all want their own kind of revenge.

Was this the right time to show his face?

No, he thought, shaking his head and turning to return to the Terrordon Cave. This time he would need to take down the Sleepwalker. Before he killed someone.

chapter eighteen

Jaysen O'Dell

“DAMN IT PETE! YOU know how this works.”

“Just because I know doesn’t mean I like it. This isn’t Milk you’re talking about.”

Pete Schlamme was talking about Jacob Heath’s biography of Harvey Milk. Jacob went to the extreme of dating other men to understand what Milk and others endured as homosexuals living openly in America.

“Knock that shit off. You know I never f...ed any of those men.”

“Exactly!” Pete saw a chance to make his point. “You were safe. You could say ‘no’ and retreat. This bastard ’s a psychopath.”

“Terrordon is the good guy...” Jacob sounded confused.

“Yeah, but Sleepwalker is the one you will be dating.” Pete really hoped Jacob understood the real likelihood of physical harm. “You know how Jon and I love you, not for the Milk thing, but because you’re like a brother to us.”

“And a paycheck.” Jacob chuckled as he said it.

“There is that.” Pete realized he’d lost the argument.

“Listen, I’m gong to the nut house... Rampworth... again to chat with that Dr and figure out where this guy could be hiding. I’ll check in once I’m done there.”

“If she’s good looking, maybe you should chase her and not the loon...” Pete tried to make a joke.

“I’ve seen you and Jon dressed for a Friday night out, the ladies will have to work hard to beat that.” Jacob hoped the compliment would score him some points with Pete. “I’ve got the best looking gay men working on my team. Right?”

“Shut it and save the compliments for the Dr. Maybe she can talk some sense into you.”

Jacob put his phone in his pants pocket. He grabbed his “working bag” and gave it a shake to make sure his keys were in it. Looking up at his cork-board he reviewed a few notes.

- *Dissociative Identity Disorder: in extreme cases it presents as multiple separate ‘people’ ‘sharing’ the same body, with those personalities exhibiting substantially different behavior, emotional reactions, and a lack of shared memories*
- *Dr Lisa Appleton Warne: Clinical psychiatrist; Rampworth State Hospital; maximum-security; mentally ill convicts committed to psychiatric facilities by California’s courts*
- *Sleepwalker: sadist; diagnosed with DID; under care of DrLAW; nemesis of Terrordon; ESCAPED*

Jacob realized he didn’t really know anything about Sleepwalker for the umpteenth time that morning. He needed to think like Terrordon if he was going to provide his readers the ‘inside thoughts’ of his current subject. To think like Terrordon he would need to know as much as he could about his quarry. He’d read the books, but now he needed to know the details. The details that only the Dr would have. Dr. Lisa.

She was a distraction. A “too easy on the eyes” kind of distraction. Those men had nothing on her. Except for jasmine. Pete and Jon must use the same soap as Dr. Lisa Appleton Warne.

“F... this is going to be a long day.”

“Dr Lisa War...”

“We know who you are here to see. You know your crazy, right?” The orderly stared at Jacob like a teacher looking at the class idiot. “That man was in here for a reason. Leave this alone and let the po-po handle it.”

From over his right shoulder he heard the heels on the floor. Click-tap, click-tap, click-top. The slight rustling of the white coat over her hips as she walked, barely audible over the sound of the facilities noisey air handler. When smell of jasmine reached him he knew she was close.

“Hello Dr. Warne. Thank you for seeing me.”

Her laugh seemed less like bells this time and more like ice tinkling into a heavy high ball glass. “You always seem to know I’m here.”

“And you’re not happy to see me.”

“You are still trying to ‘be’ Terrrordon, aren’t you?”

“If I say yes, will you talk with me? Try to cure me of my ‘affliction’ and remind me who I really am?”

Her sigh reminded him of the sound his mother made when Jacob was in high school and brought home low grades. “First, you know I can’t tell you too many details about ‘Sleepwalker’, he’s my patient which makes nearly all the information privileged. Second, you aren’t sick, just ... annoying. Third, I’d rather convince you how dangerous this man is so you STAY HOME and let law enforcement deal with the subject.”

“That’s just what I was saying Dr L. Just like you requested.” Jacob couldn’t tell if the orderly was trying to excuse his comments to Jacob or get the approval of Lisa.

“Thank you B. I’ll take Mr. Heath into the offices. If you’ve completed the log...”

“Yes ma’am, he’s all set. Here’s the visitor badge.”

“Thanks.” Jacob smiled. Figuring that having B on his side would be good in the long run Jacob extended his hand. The orderly looked at him oddly and shook it.

Lisa started to walk down the hall. As Jacob caught up with her she asked, “was that to ensure access to information on Sleepwalker or me?”

Jacob was startled. “Ummm ... I uh...”

“I’m not sure exactly how you know when I’m coning up behind you, but you’ve clearly observed something about me that tips you off.”

“You wear heals, in a prison. Look at all the other feet here... soft flats.”

“That ruins it for me.”

“How so?”

“What woman wouldn’t be flattered to hear ‘I remember the scent of your soap?’”

Jacob was suddenly angry with himself.

“Is that a blush I see?” Lisa laughed.

“Jasmine.”

“What?!”

“Jasmine. You use a jasmine scented soap or shampoo. The other female doctors use... gasoline.”

“I... I’m... I didn’t mean to... I’m truly flattered.”

The silence that accompanied them to her office could have been named Sleepwalker. She left the door open as they entered her office. As she turned the corner of her desk Jacob

sat in the chair immediately opposite her leather wingback. The cold directness of her question was startling compared to her warm flirting in the hallway.

“Why are you really here?”

“I’m writing a book ...”

“Stop. We have a problem,” she said. “Either we are on the same page about ... my soap... or we aren’t. I don’t want to hear about complications or books or gay men or serial killers. Let’s get it over with. You’re either gay or you aren’t. If you aren’t then you have a girl or you don’t. If you have a girl, why do you know I use jasmine soap and blush when I mention it?”

“I’m not gay. There’s no girl. Complications... just one book with a serial killer in it sits between me and you making it hard to answer about the ... blush.”

“I can live with that. And I could get used to seeing you more often. Let’s make this book go away. Shall we?”

“What about your statement about ‘privilege?’”

“You ask your questions. I’ll tell you when we’ve crossed the line.”

“Where is the Sleepwalker?”

“If I knew that, it would be privileged information. But since I don’t know ...” She smiled.

“When he was here, did he tell you about how he was caught?”

“That’s public record so I can say that he did.”

“Did he tell you of more hideouts, or bases, or anything like that?”

“Privileged.”

“Ok... Did he tell you his favorite places to eat?”

“Privileged.”

Jacob was surprised by that. “Hmmm... Did he tell you

...”

“Privileged” she cut him off.

“I didn’t finish!”

“You need to think of what I can and can’t tell you. If the Sleepwalker ‘tells me’ then it is privileged. I’ll help you a little bit, but I want to you look behind you...”

Jacob turned and looked through the open door.

“Nothing we say in this room is privileged. You are not my patient. I’ll not lose my job for you. Yet.” The flirtatiousness was back in her voice for the last word.

“So I need to not ask you about what he said?”

“I would not be able to answer if you did.”

“Can I ask your opinion about what he said?”

Lisa stopped for a moment. “My opinion is not privileged unless it requires me to disclose privileged information.”

“Does law enforcement have this same ... I don’t want to call it difficulty...”

“They have warrants. But yes. There are things I can not tell them. But you have it much worse.”

Jacob stopped to think for a moment.

“Dr. Warne, in your opinion, is it likely that the Sleepwalker has more than one hideout or base?”

“In my opinion, it is very possible. I would suggest that it is likely based on the number of personalities involved. And may I suggest that you phrased that well Mr. Heath.”

“Why thank you Dr. Warne.”

They both smiled at the sudden formality. Her smile. Suddenly his day was going too quickly.

“I have to rethink my questions.”

“I can wait. Can you?”

“It’s close to lunch. Do you want me to come back after I’ve reworked these?” He was stalling.

“No. You can take me to lunch and work on it there. There’s a nice bistro around the corner. Ask me questions there. I’ll drive.”

Jacob was surprised. “Wait, if you’re driving, how am I taking you to lunch?”

“Because you’ll be paying.”

Lisa’s BMW M5 was a bit of a surprise.

“Listen, I know what you’re trying to do. You realize this guy is messed up? It’s likely to end poorly for you. I don’t think I’ve been too subtle regarding my personal interest in ... well ... you. Why should I help you knowing that I’m endangering something I’m interested in?”

“For a psychiatrist you sure don’t hide your emotions well.”

“Why should I?” Lisa was clearly irritated by his response.

“I guess I just figured ...”

“As a psychiatrist I know what a healthy display of emotion is. I also know when I need to make a move because someone else is to unsure of themselves.”

“Touché”

“Hold on. I like this little stretch of road.”

“When you said ‘around the corner’ I was expecting a few blocks, not 30minutes of high speed curves.”

“Why? You’re entering a world, this world of the Sleepwalker, where every statement means something different than the surface of the statement suggests. Right about now you should be wondering ‘is she serious about me?’ And I’d answer ‘yes I am.’ And then it will hit you ‘it doesn’t matter what Lisa answers because I can never know what is true and what is false.’ And then you begin to understand how much danger you are walking into.”

Jacob realized that there was more to what Lisa was saying than he really understood.

“Please. Please stop this. He is dangerous beyond anything a sane person should approach outside a prison. Do not do this.”

“How did Terrordon find him? How did he catch him? Where do I look? What will I find?”

Lisa looked up from her meal. “Terrordon used a profiler, someone that looked at the crimes and drew some circles on a map, provided some clues where to look and even suggested how to bait an irresistible trap. Terrordon used that information in 2005. I think I might have been the profiler.”

“Wait. What?” Jacob was struggling to comprehend exactly who this woman sitting across from him was. “You know who Terrordon is?”

“No. I was contacted in 2004 and met with 5 different men. Each said that he was not Terrordon. I was paid well and told that I would get the opportunity to understand the Sleepwalker once he was caught. That’s how I made my way to the US and to Rampworth.”

Jacob suddenly felt small. Whoever Terrordon was, he had a large reach and the ability to direct the “machinery of the state” to get one very pretty woman a job and then to get a specific convict into that woman’s care.

“Do you understand just how dangerous this man is?”

“Which man?”

“Exactly.”

“Tell me what I need to know to find the Sleepwalker.”

“Men. You never learn.”

There are at least 8 personalities inhabiting one body. We don't know who that body was before these other personalities emerged.

Normally, in a case of D. I. D. there are clues; a common last name, one that has a cohesive past life that can be confirmed, something. With this case, nothing. We have no place of origin. No family. No age. No missing person report. Nothing. Of the identified personalities the following information has been compiled:

- *Doug : New Jersey native. Contractor or other role in construction of homes and offices. Excellent mechanical dexterity. When added to experience in industry, results in finely crafted and detailed objects. Extreme and rapid hostility as a result of perceived or actual slights.*
- *Rog : California native. Solitary and introspective by nature. Primary interests are philosophy, theology, and psychology. Will read voraciously with extreme recall.*
- *Tim : Australian extrovert. Seeks attention via planned performances or reactions to events. Claims to have performed professionally on stage and television.*
- *Charlotte : 6 year old female for entirety of observation. The only known female personality. Loves to draw and is very good at it. Manual dexterity shows similarity to Doug. Does not know/ recall origin or home.*
- *James : California native. 18 year old homosexual male for entirety of observation. Transition into this personality is clear from the exaggerated stereotype behavior. Behavior is NOT affect but genuine (homosexual intercourse is welcomed by “James” and has been confirmed as consensual).*
- *Billy : Alabama native and commercial farmer. Extensive knowledge of Alabama, the area of the claimed farm, farm equipment, techniques, and agricultural methods. Prefers photography as a hobby with several critics praising “his eye for accentuating detail via textural contrasts”.*
- *Joe : British national. Claims elevated status. Frequently*

appears after conflict showing remorse without full knowledge of the actions preceding the feelings of remorse. Prefers tea over other beverages. Often compares teas to previous samplings from various hotels.

It is important to note that NONE of the above personalities share memories of events.

The other clearly identified personality is unique for the following reasons:

- *The Sleepwalker does not have a proper name. It refers to itself as the Sleepwalker.*
- *There is no origin for the Sleepwalker. Unlike the other mature and time aware personalities, the Sleepwalker has no backstory, time of origin, or other historical context for analysis. It claims to have “always existed”.*
- *The Sleepwalker is fully aware of the actions and memories of ALL other personalities. No other personality has any awareness of other personalities.*

As Jacob finished reading his notes out loud, Lisa sat silently. Jacob looked over all he had written and realized there was nothing there to point him in the right direction. Before he could say anything Lisa reached across the table and placed her hand over his.

“Do you understand? Please tell me you understand and have come to your senses. Drop this. Let it go.”

“How an I? How else can I write this book?”

“Like every other author. Sit at home. Make phone calls. Look up things on the internet. Interview officers and other people. Figure out what they do and do that instead. Just run from this Sleepwalker chase.”

“If I don’t? Will you stop me?”

“No. But I wish I could.” She withdrew her hand from his.

As she stood up from the table she mumbled the waiter, “put it on my tab with 25 for you”, then motioned for Jacob to follow. Sitting in her car, she looked at Jacob and said, “There is some ... help ... I can give you. This is off the record.”

She started the car, rolled up the windows and turned on the radio.

“Paranoid much?” Jacob smirked.

“You still don’t get it do you.”

“I guess not.”

Pulling out of the parking lot, Lisa accelerated quickly. She took a straighter road than previously to she could focus on communicating.

“Sleepwalker is NOT in control. I don’t know who or what is. Unmedicated the transitions from personality to personality are fast and frequent. While Sleepwalker seems to be coordinating I don’t believe he really CONTROLS the other personalities. That’s where Joe may help you. He fancies himself a connoisseur of teas. He has a particular favorite though. He was always talking about the ‘perfect cup’ at Westin on Union Square. Whenever he would get agitated he would become desperate for a cup or tea always requesting one from Westin. Because I ... know things ... I can tell you that a person really determined to find the Sleepwalker would start looking in that area for Joe. Joe is the safe one. Find Joe and you find the rest of them. Kind of obvious since all 8 of them share one body.”

“I’ll be careful” Jacob said.

“No you won’t. Careful would be walking away from this and coming home with me. But you won’t, will you?”

“Not today.”

Lisa parked the BMW in her designated spot. “Dr Lisa Appleton Warne, D. Clin. Psy” the placard read. He was just

invited home with a Dr. His mother would be proud. Why wasn't he going with her.

Jacob climbed out of the passenger side of the BMW, walked over to Lisa and kissed her gently. Without a word he entered his miserable Honda and started to pull away. He opened his phone and hit the speed dial.

Had he looked in the mirror he would have seen Lisa saying, "Good bye Terrordon".

The phone was ringing.

Pete answered.

"Pete, you won't believe this..."

chapter nineteen

R. Dale Guthrie

NO HERO CAN EXIST without a nemesis, and so it is with the figure who calls himself the “Terrordon”. One might be inclined to think that even someone with the nearly fetishistic collection of superhero acouterments would be battling his own, personal demons, that his nemesis is sanity itself. While there is some small merit to that hypothesis, insomuch as his disappearance a decade ago mirrors that of serial killers who seem to go dormant for long periods.

Jacob stopped his typing and stared at the screen, loathing everything. Not just the words, but the computer, and his chair, and the little ache in his neck from hunching over the keyboard. “One might,” he mocked himself with an Ivy League accent, “some small merit.” What a waste of electrons. “At least I don’t have an overflowing wastepaper basket,” he said as he selected the paragraph and hit DELETE.

He pushed the laptop away and got up to stretch. A glance at the TV proved pointless; just the typical early evening local news, the woman with the Betty Page bangs was shoving her microphone into some Joe Everyman on the Street. Definitely

the wrong Joe for Jacob's purposes.

Jacob lay down the knobby rug to do a little mind-clearing exercise, but thought better of it and relocated to a patch of the bamboo 'hardwood' floor. After thirty, everything fell away but the burn in his abs, and the pleasing stretchy feel of well-used lungs, drawing in the last of the warm afternoon air. Exercise always helped him focus, and he'd been neglecting himself a bit this last week.

If only The Sleepwalker would surface. Well, the "Joe" part of him anyway. That part was easy to predict—if The Sleepwalker did something awful, good old Remorseful Joe would surface, and that meant a calming tea at the Westin. With a bit luck and some fast talking on his part, the tea would come with a plate of tell-all confessional. And maybe a gluten-free blueberry scone. He poured on the crunches to earn those future calories. All in the pursuit of his art.

At one hundred crunches, Jacob stopped to catch his breath and cool down. He heaved a big sigh, mind empty of the frustration and many dead-ends he'd already written and discarded.

A new opening to the chapter began to form, but Jacob just let it swim around in his brain, ignoring the low chatter of the TV. If knowing your enemy is to learn about yourself... then there is a treasure trove to glean from the mind of the Terrordon's opposite number.

"Enemy and self..." there was something there. An elusive thought that was immediately interrupted.

"Breaking news!" a deep, masculine voice chimed in.

A blonde woman appeared on screen this time, her face pulled down into a frown that could freeze hot coffee, "Preliminary reports are coming in that the infamous kill who goes by the pseudonym "The Sleepwaliker", a patient who

recently escaped the maximum-security mental health facility Rampworth State Hospital, has struck again.

“What you are about to see may not be suitable for young or otherwise sensitive viewers. Discretion is advised.”

Jacob stared at the screen as they panned from the reporter on the scene, finally getting to the actual crime, as viewed from beyond the police tape. He waited for the inevitable, harrowing phrase. They were not long in coming. “He is still at large, and considered very dangerous...”

But what he felt was not dread, nor even fear. This rush wasn’t anything like fear—it was the thrill of the chase.

“Finally!”

The Westin stood above Union Square like the last giant’s step down from the clouds. It was a strange architectural choice that Jacob filed away for later research. He paid the ride-share guy, who had chatted amiably at Jacob the whole way without requiring any real conversation, and headed through the front entrance.

The two story, green marble columns, dwarfing the huge grandfather clock in one corner, were just a blur as Jacob rushed to... where, exactly? The hotel was huge, and poking about on their website had revealed a bar and two restaurants, but it had failed to convey the scale of the place.

The front desk had an unoccupied staffer, so he slid up to meet the polite smile of rather attractive young woman with wavy blonde hair in a short bob, artful yet subtle makeup, full lips...

Jacob mentally slapped himself. “Down tiger,” he muttered to himself. She’s practically toddler, you dirty old man.

“How can I help you, sir,” the clerk asked. Something about her air spoke to being accustomed to this kind of

reaction, and also told him that she had noticed.

“Tea?” he replied. “I’m looking for a friend who comes here for tea on occasion, but I just realized that I don’t know where to go for that.”

A nod. “You can get tea and coffee from a number of our restaurants, as well as a few small kiosks tucked away...”

“No, I mean *tea-tea*. Like with crumpets and manners and all that. English tea.”

The clerk’s smile almost cracked her polite demeanor, but she refrained from laughing out loud at him. A consummate professional. “Caruso’s is probably where your friend is.”

She produced a small pamphlet and flipped to a simplified map of the building. “You’re here,” she tapped the spot labeled “Lobby”. “If you go down that hall,” she pointed, “take a left, and you’ll see signs leading you the rest of the way. If he’s not there, he may also be in the Clock bar, here, or maybe the Oak Room, here,” she said, tapping on the other two locations within the sprawling hotel complex. Then she folded the pamphlet backward so that the relevant portions of the map were on the outside and handed it to him. “Is there anything else I can help you with, sir?”

“No, I think this is all I need. Thanks!” Jacob said, wondering if he should ask for a phone number, and then remembering that he was chasing a *story*.

“Enjoy your tea, and please come again,” the clerk said.

Jacob waved the pamphlet in farewell. He didn’t remember to even look at the woman’s nametag until he rounded the first corner. Maybe after the interview with “Joe.”

The hostess at Caruso’s was helpful and friendly, but even after he showed her a strategically cropped close-up of The Sleepwalker/Joe’s face, she told him that he hadn’t been there in the last two hours, since she started her shift.

Not surprising. It could be hours before Joe made an appearance. At least it wouldn't be days—Dr. Warne had let slip that the English personality tended to surface the same day that the dominant personality committed some terrible crime that Joe “woke up” in the middle of.

“I think I'll check out the other establishments first. He may not be here for a while yet,” he told the hostess. Jacob wasn't hungry, and this wasn't a bar where he could nurse a drink or two over the course of an evening. There were plenty of chairs and small tables in various nooks, and those might give him a better vantage for spotting The Sleepwalker.

Wandering the building gave him a better sense of the layout of the first floor, where most of the shops, conference rooms, gym, and so-forth were located. He found the famous Clock Bar, and made a mental note to invite his next date there. Unless she worked here, of course.

After an hour, he did start to get a little hungry, and decided to head back to Caruso's for a bit of coffee and maybe some hummus with veggies. This place seemed the most likely place for “Joe” to take his tea.

It wasn't a long wait.

The waiter had just poured his first cup of coffee when The Sleepwalker walked in. Even from across the room, his tall frame and green eyes made him stand out. Jacob leapt from his seat just as the hostess pointed him out to the confused man standing in front of her.

“Joe! I'm so glad you could make it,” Jacob said, pouring on his best schmooze. Before the other man could muster an objection, Jacob wrapped an arm around his shoulders and steered him to the table. “Join me for tea, won't you Joe?” he said, holding out a chair and blocking the most direct escape route between the tables.

“Do I know you?” Joe said, the English accent laid on a little too thick. He seemed drawn in on himself, the very picture of a proper, educated Brit faced with a rude American.

“I’m Jacob Heath,” he said with a tone calculated to imply that he was reminding Joe of a previous introduction. “I just wanted to talk with you about ‘The Sleepwalker.’” Jacob realized that the direct approach had been a terrible mistake just as that moniker had left his lips.

Joe recoiled as if Jacob had just slapped him. “Oh, no. That won’t do. Won’t do at all,” he tried to side-step Jacob, but the tables were a little too close.

Jacob dodged to intercept. “Joe, I just want to talk. Surely, you’d like to unburden yourself over a nice tea.”

“I don’t know you, I’m sure of that now. Let me pass,” Joe whispered, glancing around as if embarrassed to draw attention with a loud declaration.

“Let’s not make a scene,” Jacob said, inching closer into the other man’s personal space. “Have a seat, and we can have a nice chat. I’m not going to hurt you, and I’m not a cop. Cops can’t lie about that. It’s entrapment, right? So what’s the harm in a friendly chat?”

“I’m not here for a chat. Especially not with the likes of you. Good day, sir!” The last, Joe said with enough volume for nearby tables to hear. He turned to go the long way around the table and escape the rude stranger.

Jacob chased the other way around the table, and grabbed the man’s arm. This wasn’t going according to plan. *Should have been more subtle, but fuck subtle!* He pulled in close and whispered, “I know you’re ‘The Sleepwalker.’ I know what you’ve done. If you talk with me, I won’t turn you in.”

Joe’s perplexed expression melted into fear and horror at the mention of his super-personality, and he wrenched

himself out of Jacob's grasp. "Leave me alone," he shouted, drawing stares of alarm from nearby patrons. The hostess was already hunched over a courtesy phone, trying desperately not to draw attention to herself as she called her manager, or maybe even hotel security.

Jacob still blocked the way to the front of the restaurant, flailing about mentally for some way to salvage the situation.

"I just wanted to find a little quiet time for myself," Joe said, beginning to lose focus on Jacob, his gaze turning inward. "Quiet. Too many people talking. Talking-talking-talking all the time!" he grabbed a fistful of his own hair and began to sway. His accent melted away with each word he spoke.

"Look, Joe. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you," Jacob said, all the time a stream of panicked obscenities bouncing around inside his own skull. "Just calm down. We can have a nice, quiet tea. No talking. On me. The tea is on me, with all the biscuits and crumpets you can eat. Wouldn't that be nice?" This was pear-est of pear shaped that anything could possibly go, and he felt the urge to run, just from the embarrassment, let alone from the danger of confronting a known killer.

A stocky man with a walrus moustache planted his hand on the table he was sitting at and began to lever himself out of his chair, "You two gentlemen need to take this outside..."

As quick as a striking cobra, The Sleepwalker grabbed a knife off the table and drove it through the walrus-man's hand and deep into the table.

The restaurant erupted in screams, chairs and tables being knocked over in everyone's haste to get away.

Even knowing that it could happen, the transformation in personalities took Jacob by surprise, so that his feet were rooted to the floor for a heartbeat—or an hour—it was hard to tell in his panic. It was just long enough for The

Sleepwalker to grab a pot of hot tea and smash it over the head of a grandmotherly old woman who unwisely leapt to the walrus-man's defense.

Jacob used the distraction to push his way into the crowd struggling past overturned chairs and tables as they all pressed toward the exit at the same time. He shoved the shamefulness of his retreat, and the reason it was needed, deep down for later. Now was the time for survival.

Another scream from behind them spurred the crowd, and Jacob with it, into the hallway. Everyone was headed toward the lobby. It was the familiar exit, but it was also packed with people. The squawk of hand-held radios heralded the security guards who had to fight their way upstream to the disturbance.

"God help them," Jacob's words were swallowed by the din of the crowd.

Avoiding the throng, Jacob peeled off, headed deeper into the hotel proper. At the first hallway intersection, he glanced back at the mass of people pushing to get away from the restaurant's entrance and locked eyes with the infamous Sleepwalker.

The tang of copper pennies flooded his mouth and he ran faster than he had ever moved in his life. His surroundings were a blur as he slammed his body into a wall rather than slow enough to round a corner and kept going. Running and turning at random, he knocked a housekeeping cart over, but it barely slowed him down.

Jacob ran and turned through the the long halls, passing guest offices with printers and fax machines, a workout room, a cleaning supply closet, but never stopping. Somewhere, there had to be an entrance to a parking garage. Did the Westin have one of those below it? He couldn't remember, so he zig-zagged through the hotel, losing track of direction and time,

until his lungs burned.

He stopped and caught his breath in a quiet alcove with two leather chairs. Heart-beats thudded in his ears for a minute or two, until finally, he began to hear murmurs from down the hall. Voices, low and relatively calm. Safety comes with numbers, or so his lizard brain was telling him, so he headed in that direction.

Somehow, he had ended up near to a hotel bar. “I could really use a drink, or five,” he said to no one. He slipped into the rather crowded room.

This was the “Clock Bar”, according to the sign at the entrance, though it lacked the kitschy clocks that the name implied. Instead, subdued lighting bathed the space in a warm glow. Brown leather chairs and a few tables in conversational groupings made the space seem cozy.

He stepped up to the bar and ordered a drink. He milled around for a bit, too enervated to sit, while catching snippets of conversation about the events that had just transpired.

“I don’t feel safe leaving here until they’ve caught that lunatic...”

“... seven feet tall and flame red hair...”

“... giving a presentation. The company Chair was going to hear my proposal...”

He tipped an empty glass to his lips without remembering taking a second sip, so he ordered another. The adrenaline was beginning to fade, and with the help of alcohol, a wave of fatigue washed over him.

Off to the side of the room, there was an empty couch just short enough to make putting an arm around your date for the evening necessary. He sank into the worn leather with a huge sigh of relief. The earlier exercise, coupled with a mad dash from certain death or dismemberment, had taken its toll.

What an idiot! he thought. *It was like I'd never interviewed someone who didn't want to be interviewed. What a disaster.* Jacob took another sip, trying to savor it, but his mind drifted to the problem at hand.

There are still at least five other personalities. If I'm not as ham-fisted about it next time, maybe I could meet one of them. But which one?

Doug didn't seem promising, unless he wanted to insinuate himself into the local construction industry. But what were the chances that The Sleepwalker was gainfully employed in one of his personalities supposed occupations.

Rog was too quiet, Charlotte... That wasn't going to help. Not many gradeschools allowed six year old personalities in grown men's bodies to attend. Where the Hell would Billy hang out, assuming he even surfaced? There might be some vintage camera shops around that might attract the Southern farmer/photography enthusiast. How did an alternate personality end up with a former occupation, anyway?

Jacob shook his head, smiling at his pointless woolgathering. *Focus, man. Focus. What about Billy?*

Billy was a real possibility. Jacob already knew the LGBT scene pretty well, especially where someone new to it tended to turn up. Running into Travis might get a bit awkward, but no moreso than running into any of his real exes. It wasn't a terrible plan, now that talking to "Joe" was right out. Billy wasn't supposed to remember what Joe had experienced.

Suddenly, a hand grabbed him by the nape of the neck, and a sharp object poked him in the ribs as The Sleep Walker slid in beside him. "Don't struggle, or I'll slip this blade straight into your heart." He had a new brown suit jacket and a purple-checked shirt, swapped out with another victim that hadn't been drenched with blood, no doubt.

"You shouldn't have ambushed Joe like that," he

continued, “very improper, not sporting at all,” he said, mimicking the other personality’s accent. “Now let’s stay quiet for just a moment. I want to savor this place before I drench it in blood. Probably your blood.”

Jacob let his drink slip from insensate hand, but it landed on the rug at his feet, and nobody seemed to notice. Nor did they notice the madman sitting close like a lover, the blade between them hiding in the folds of The Sleepwalker’s borrowed jacket. “I just wanted to talk. I’m... I’m writing a book...”

“Do you know how varied the shades of blood are? I’ve noticed that if I stab someone through a major artery, it’s really bright red. A really festive color really. Reminds me of the holidays.”

“I’m sorry. Really, really sorry,” Jacob said, cold sweat trickling down his back.

“I once sliced up a man, nice and slow, finding all the blue veins to see the difference. It wasn’t blue though. That surprised me the first time. It was just a deep, deep red. Lovely in its own way, I suppose, but it would have been pretty nifty if it came out blue. Hey, maybe I need to kill an upper-crusty type. Maybe that’s where ‘blue-blood’ comes from.”

Jacob turned to his captor, looking into those spooky green eyes, “Look, there’s no need for anybody to get hurt. It’s all just a misunderstanding...”

“No need? Are you insane?” The Sleepwalker chuckled. “There’s a need to hurt... what’s your name? I don’t think we’ve been properly introduced.”

Jacob didn’t want to answer, but he felt the knife begin to work its way through his shirt and pierce his skin skin, wiggling a little in place. The pain made it hard to think, so he blurted out, “Jacob. Jacob Heath. I’m just a writer. That’s all I

am, please don't kill me.”

“Hush now. There, there. No need to beg. It won't do you any good anyway,” the Sleepwalker said, his tone soothing. “I'm going to kill you for what you did. And because I just want to—it's not like I need a reason, of all people. Right? Right. I just haven't decided how.”

chapter twenty

Heather Lovelace-Gilpin

BLOOD SPILLING FROM THE throat of one of the patrons didn't do much to the dark brown colour of the carpet. It pooled in the lines and grooves at his feet, startled eyes wide as his hand went to his throat, dropping the cigar he lit seconds before. Jacob glanced at the Sleepwalker, stumbling back when the image caught up to him. He slit his throat. Slit his throat from ear to ear and for what?

The Sleepwalker crushed the smoldering cigar with his foot, taking a step back when the patron fell to his knees.

“No smoking in a public establishment.”

Patrons uttered sounds of disbelief, a few women cried out, patrons headed towards the door only for the henchmen to shove them back towards their tables. Jacob can hear the gurgling sounds of the man, his eyes dropping to him to see his mouth moving. Blood continued to spurt outward, but Jacob knows it's only a matter of time before he succumbs to death. Minutes to be exact. Especially if he continues to pull his hand away from the gash in his neck.

A couple brave souls moved in to assist, grabbing cocktail

napkins, and held them to the man's throat. A lost cause if you ask him, but silence is in his best interest since the Sleepwalker hasn't acknowledged his existence since their arrival. Jacob's death is imminent and the writer in him is now conjuring up images on how his death is going to play out. A blade across the throat like he did with this poor gentleman right here. Maybe he will stab him in the heart. Quick and somewhat painless. But not really his style. No. Whatever the Sleepwalker has in mind, it will be long, drawn out, and torturous.

Silence except for the occasional snuffles, hushed spoken words of comfort, ice clinking in a glass. Jacob caught sight of a man sitting at the far end of the bar. He's not phased by the events, tossing back one drink after another. Jacob's eyes returned to the Sleepwalker, he's still waiting for the man to die, a sly smile spreading across his lips. It's not the first time Jacob considered lunging at him. He can take him. There's no doubt in his mind. But there's the henchman. Six, maybe seven scouring the bar, gathering what few patrons are here to enjoy a cocktail, and moving them to the center tables. And let's not forget the Sleepwalker. Locked away in the depths of Rampworth State Hospital these last twelve years. Declared insane. He has nothing to lose. Jacob, on the other hand, could lose his life.

No sooner than the thought completed itself, the doors to the small quaint bar flew open, causing everyone's attention to jerk towards it. Filling the doorway, dressed in dark clothing, his face obscured by a mask, the Terrordon stood. Henchmen moved towards him quickly while Jacob remained immobilized. His mind is telling him to move, get somewhere safe, this is your one and only chance, but he can't seem to make his feet work. Something sharp skimmed past his cheek and that set him in motion. He ran for the bar, dove over the

top, crashing to the floor with a grunt. There's something wet on his cheek and he wiped it away, bringing his hand down to see blood on his fingers.

He gripped the edge, pulling himself up to peer over the bar. The Terrordon and the Sleepwalker are tangled up, fists thrown, the henchman he brought with him lying in a pool of their own blood. Patrons are sneaking out the front door, men helping women, others shoving past with no class at all. Jacob moved along the counter, staying on his hands and knees, hearing the grunts from villain and superhero as they continued their assault on each other. He passed one of the henchman, yanking one of the ninja stars from the forehead of one of the men. He groaned softly, shifting his head slowly, and while Jacob waited to see if he attacked, his entire body relaxed.

His eyes drifted towards the fight. He could make a run for it. He should. They aren't anywhere near the door, tossing chairs at each other, blood dripping from one nose, a knot above the right eye on the other. But this is the closest he's been to the Terrordon and Jacob can't deny the excitement. If the Sleepwalker can knock his mask off, reveal the Terrordon's true identity, he can finish the book, and finally get the kind of recognition he deserves.

Jacob only took his eyes off of them for a few seconds to move around the bodies when he heard an angry grunt. The Terrordon shoved his knee into the back of the Sleepwalker's neck. Curse words flew from his mouth, writhing around on the floor in hopes to break his hold.

"You should have stayed at Rampworth." The Terrordon muttered, grabbing his arms and yanked his hands back behind him. "It's where you belong."

The Sleepwalker laughed. A sound that caused a shiver to

creep down Jacob's spine. Kiddish and almost carefree. Something Jacob didn't expect.

"And you should have stayed in hiding." The Sleepwalker repeated, his cheek pressed to the dark carpet. "It's where you belong."

"And let you terrorize this city." The Terrordon tightened his hold. "I don't fucking think so."

Jacob moved closer towards him, acting on pure adrenaline now. The Terrordon's head snapped towards him. He can only see his eyes, he can't make out the colour from here.

"I'm writing a book." Jacob started, flashing him an uneasy smile. "I'm writing about you. Any chance you and I can sit down and..."

"I have nothing to say." He interrupted, slamming the Sleepwalker's head back to the carpet with a thud. "Get out of here. And if you run into a police officer, send them my way."

"No one has seen you since 2005." Jacob said, ignoring his command. "Where did you go?"

The Terrordon stood to his feet, yanking his prisoner with him.

"Get out."

"Did you come back because of him?" Jacob went on. "Because he escaped?"

Jacob pushed himself to his feet.

"The public has a right to know the man who protects the city. They have a right to know who you are."

The Terrordon narrowed his eyes.

"I said to get the fuck out."

"Don't let him push you around." The Sleepwalker said, his eyes resting on the six point ninja star Jacob still held in his hand.

"Shut up." The Terrordon hissed, jerking him towards the

door.

“Throw it.” The Sleepwalker mouthed. “It’s the only way you’re going to know. The only way you’re going to unmask him.”

The Terrordon moved quickly, his cape flowing outward from the sudden movement, slamming the Sleepwalker face first into the wall. Jacob did move towards the door.

“Don’t do it.” The Terrordon said, his head shifting with him.

“Do what?” Jacob asked innocently, feeling his palm sweat as he ran his fingers over it. He didn’t have to look down to see the cold steel is branded with the Pteranodon. He can feel it. The same design the Terrordon wears across his chest.

The Sleepwalker smiled at Jacob before he mouthed “throw it.” The temptation is there. There’s no denying it. This is what he’s been after, what he’s been working towards. The unveiling of a superhero.

“Come on. Throw it.” The Sleepwalker chanted softly, his eyes flashing wildly. “What are you waiting for? Do it. Throw it.”

“Shut your fucking mouth...” The Terrordon’s eyes rested on him. “He gets away, he will kill you.”

Jacob’s grip tightened on the star and without any warning at all, he threw it. He didn’t really think he would hit him. What are the chances. It’s a ninja star and it’s not like Jacob has any kind of experience throwing something like it. Luck is on his side and while the Terrordon made a futile attempt to avoid it, it sank into his chest, blood darkening the color of his suit. Jacob’s breath caught in his throat as he collapsed to his knees, his grip on the Sleepwalker slackened. The Sleepwalker grinned, threw Jacob a wink, and bolted towards the bar. Jacob uttered a soft protest, but it’s too late. The Sleepwalker ducked

out the side door. Jacob took three tentative steps towards the Terrordon, his heart racing in his chest.

“You have any idea what you’ve done.”

Jacob didn’t get a chance to answer. The main door to the bar broke open, several police officers stormed in, guns drawn.

“Hands in the air!” One of the officers hollered and he’s aiming the gun at Jacob.

“Wait. You have the wrong man...”

Two officers grabbed him, shoving him against the wall. They yanked his arms back, the sound of steel cuffs clinking together. If he doesn’t make his move, if he doesn’t unmask the Terrordon, he did this for nothing. He slipped from the officer’s grasp, dropped to his knees where he last saw the Terrordon, only to find him gone.