

Near Relations

By Diana Smith/Pat Dunn

Jonathan MacKensie stared out his office window, periodically glancing at his watch. Where was she? For the last two weeks she'd appeared precisely at 12:15, sat in the same spot beneath the oak tree just outside his office and eaten her lunch while reading a book. Forty minutes later, she would gather up the remains of her lunch and leave. Was her pattern changing?

His impatience dissipated when she appeared and spread out a cloth before sitting on the ground. He snatched up the brown paper lunch sack from his desk just as there was a knock on his door.

"MacKensie, I--"

"Dr. Moorhouse, I don't have time," he began, glancing at the window. "I'm..er..late for an engagement--I'll stop by your office directly after lunch, shall I?" Uncharacteristically, he edged past her, leaving Juliana Moorhouse staring, slack-jawed.

"MacKensie!"

But he was gone. "Well, really," she declared to the empty room. How dare Jonathan treat her in such a disrespectful manner? When she held his research grant in her hands...she wandered over to the window and watched Jonathan approach a young woman sitting under the oak tree. Sighing, she turned away. It **was** spring after all, and a young man's fancy...how could her paranormal research compete with **that**? A smile that would have made Jonathan squirm nervously curved her lips. She wasn't powerless after all...

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"Excuse me." Jonathan stood in front of the young woman. When she looked up, he offered his most charming grin. "I'm Jonathan MacKensie. I teach anthropology--"

"Yes, I know."

"You do?"

"I mean, I know that Jonathan MacKensie is an anthropology professor here at Georgetown, but I didn't know **you** were him." There was a flash of dimples and the green eyes sparkled. "Is there something I can do for you?"

Jonathan stared for a moment, thinking she was already doing something for him. In the sunlight her hair couldn't decide if it was red or blonde, and his fingers itched to stroke the shining silk. "Oh," he said, realizing she was waiting for an answer. "My office is just over there," he pointed, "and I couldn't

help noticing you out here every day for the last two weeks--"

"I'm sorry," she said quickly, making a move to collect her things. "I didn't realize this was off-limits."

"No, please! I didn't mean that," he protested, putting out a hand to stop her. "I just--are you a student here?"

She blinked, sitting back and staring at him. "No, I work in the library--why?"

"Georgetown does have a sort of unwritten policy about faculty not dating students," Jonathan explained.

"I'm not a student, but I'm not dating any teachers either, so--"

"Not yet. Do you mind if I join you?"

Jonathan smiled and pointed to the ground beside her.

She looked at him, then shrugged. "If you want, but you'll get grass stains on your pants."

"For the last year my suits have survived a lot worse than grass stains," he said with a grin as he sat tailor-fashion beside her. "Are you new at Georgetown? I don't recall seeing you before."

"Then you haven't been to the library in the last month," she replied, carefully marking her place and sliding her book into her satchel.

"Ah, you **are** relatively new." Jonathan unwrapped a sandwich he'd removed from his bag. "My research assistant has been doing most of the digging lately. I get called away from the Institute quite a bit. In fact, I've only been back about two weeks."

"I see. I didn't realize anthropology required so much traveling."

Jonathan paused in mid-chew, then hastily swallowed. "I certainly have done a lot more than usual this past year," he admitted finally, deciding to keep mum about the paranormal research. He certainly didn't want to give a bad impression.

"Have you been at Georgetown long?" she asked, after a glance at her watch.

"Forever, it seems. I was a student here, and before that my father was a professor from about the time I was thirteen. We moved here after my mother died." Jonathan paused, staring at the fresh, young, green leaves. "I guess the Institute has been my life."

"How lucky for you."

"Why, yes, I suppose so," he said in surprise, meeting her gaze. "Where are you going?"

She got to her feet, slinging her satchel over her arm. "My lunch break is over, I'm afraid. Nice to have met you, Dr. MacKensie."

"Jonathan," he blurted, scrambling to his feet. "Wait, I don't know your name." He started to hurry after her, stopping when he realized he'd stepped squarely into his lunch.

"That's right," she called over her shoulder. "Goodbye, Dr. MacKensie."

"Jonathan," he murmured, watching as she disappeared around the corner of a building. His frown turned into a grin. He didn't know his mystery lady's name, but he **did** know where she worked. It **had** been too long since he'd visited the library himself.

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"Dr. MacKensie, are you certain I can't help you find something? You've been wandering around here for an hour," the white-haired woman asked. She stood nearly as tall as Jonathan and her white curls were cropped short, her stern demeanor belying her grandmotherly appearance. "This isn't even the anthropology section."

"I just wanted to browse," Jonathan said, plucking a book at random from the shelf. He flipped it open, then slammed it shut, a blush burning his cheeks. He quickly shoved **Our Bodies, Our Selves** back onto the shelf and turned away.

"If you're certain," she said, giving him a skeptical look. "Let us know if we can help."

As she walked away, Jonathan banged his forehead against the bookshelf, whimpering. Of all the people, it had to be Mrs. Berthold. It had taken him years to convince her he was a mature adult, not the teenager she'd caught kissing Mary Jane MacDonald in the boiler room. If she found out he was snooping around now for his mystery lady...she'd tell Dr. Moorhouse.

For the last week, there'd been no sign of his lady. Jonathan had spent several hours at the library, and he'd eaten lunch alone under the oak tree. It was like she'd disappeared...or never existed.

"Jonathan?"

He turned to find his research assistant staring up at him. "Hello, kiddo," he answered, flashing a bright smile.

"What are you doing here?" Randi made careful note of the section and Jonathan gave a mental groan. "Did I forget an assignment?"

"No, I just felt like visiting the library," he replied, pretending an intense fascination in the nearest books.

"In Women's Interests?"

"I was just looking around. You've done such an excellent research job that I don't know my way around here."

"I suppose."

"Uh, Randi, do you know the names of the new staff members?"

"Well, there's Penny Lawlor."

"Penny Lawlor--a strawberry blonde?"

"No. Jonathan, what's the deal?" Randi demanded.

"Nothing. I just wondered." He made a point of looking at his watch. "I have an appointment--see you later, Randi."

Randi watched Jonathan hurry off, then slowly wheeled her chair to the anthropology section. Jonathan had been acting weird all week.

He spotted a familiar face at the check-out desk, so Jonathan randomly grabbed a book off a nearby shelf. "Hello, Gina," he said, offering his book and most charming smile.

"Dr. MacKensie," she replied, melting under his British charm. "It's been a long time--"

"The problem with having an efficient research assistant," Jonathan said, handing her his library card.

Gina took the card, managing to briefly caress his hand. Jonathan blinked and carefully drew his hand back.

"Gina, I was wondering--"

"Yes, Dr. MacKensie?" she practically cooed, leaning across the desk and batting her eyes at him.

Jonathan's tie suddenly felt tight, and he ran a finger under his collar. "There's a new person working here, and I, uh, well, never mind."

Gina frowned and pulled back, glancing down at Jonathan's book. "**Breastfeeding and You?**"

Jonathan turned scarlet. "It's for a friend--I mean, I've changed my mind." He snatched his library card from her hand and shoved it in his breast pocket. "See you later," he mumbled, dashing for the exit.

He stood by the front door, straightening his tie and his dignity. Maybe he had imagined the whole encounter...

But if he had, it was happening again. Coming around the corner of the Mind Sciences Building was his mystery lady. Jonathan flew across the lawn, barely avoiding a close encounter with Dr. Moorhouse.

"MacKensie!"

"Later, Dr. Moorhouse," he called over his shoulder. His quarry was escaping, walking away from the library rather than toward it. His evaluator at the

Fitness Factory would have been impressed with his speed and agility as he leaped over a pair of students studying on the lawn.

"Hello," he called, catching up to his mystery woman. "Remember me?"

She turned and looked up at him, then smiled. "Dr. MacKensie--Jonathan, right?"

"That's right," he agreed with a smile, grasping her hand. "I was beginning to think you were a kelpie."

"A kelpie?"

"A mythical being," Jonathan explained, staring down at the face that had been haunting him. "I don't even know your name."

"Caitlyn Cassidy. I didn't think it mattered."

"Caitlyn," Jonathan repeated, still holding her hand. "Could I buy you a cup of coffee?"

"I don't drink coffee--"

"Tea? Cocoa? Soda?" Jonathan persisted.

"I'm really not up to a lot of noise just now, and the Student Union is always a madhouse," she offered by way of apologetic rejection. "Perhaps another time?"

Disappointment shone in his brown eyes.

"We could go to my office--"

"No! I mean with students coming and going, the ringing phone, it wouldn't be very quiet either, would it?"

Jonathan realized that they'd been walking during their conversation and he tucked her hand into the crook of his arm. "We could go someplace quiet--what's wrong?"

She had stumbled, her free hand pressed to her left temple. "I-it's nothing, just a headache."

"Perhaps I should take you to the clinic."

"No, I just need to lie down for awhile. I'm staying in one of the dorms."

Impulsively Jonathan guided her away from the dorm quadrangle.

"Where--?"

"If you need some peace and quiet, you **won't** get it in the dorm," he said firmly.

"But--"

"My house is nearby. You have my word I'll be a perfect gentleman."

"Oh, but Dr. MacKensie--"

"Jonathan," he corrected with a smile.

"Please, Ms Cassidy, allow me to help. I know how troublesome headaches can be."

She winced again, then nodded and offered no further argument when Jonathan put a supporting arm around her.

By the time he escorted her into his small, but extremely neat house, the pounding in her head

was agony. Cait was vaguely aware of Jonathan pulling the covers back on a bed, and helping her lie down. He removed her shoes and gently tucked a coverlet around her.

"Is there anything I can get for you? Some aspirin?"

"In my purse," Cait murmured and soon Jonathan offered her two large capsules and a glass of water. "Thank you."

After lowering the blinds, Jonathan paused by the bed. Cait's breathing was rapid and shallow, and he thought she looked pale. He'd let her sleep for awhile and see how she was doing, then decide if she needed a doctor. He tiptoed out, pulling the door shut behind him.

Cait awoke with a start, heart hammering until the disorientation passed and she remembered where she was. Probably half the female population of Georgetown would kill to be in her position--in Jonathan MacKensie's bed. She chuckled at the thought.

"You're awake." Jonathan poked his head around the door and she wondered if anyone was immune to that grin. "Feel up to tea?"

"I--"

"It **is** tea time and I've got the kettle on, so it's no bother," he continued, coming into the room to help her find her shoes. Cait blushed and tried to protest when he knelt and slipped them on her feet. He took her elbow and seemed inclined to keep his hold even after it became clear she was steady on her feet. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you. I'm sorry I've been so much trouble, Dr.--Jonathan," she apologized as he led her to the kitchen.

"Rescuing a damsel in distress is never a bother," Jonathan said gallantly. "And you were certainly in distress."

"I wasn't expecting such a severe or sudden attack," she said, sitting at the round white table and



watching as he bustled around the bright yellow kitchen.

"Does it happen often?" he asked, popping a napkin-covered plate into the microwave.

"More often than I'd like. Can I do something to help?"

"Just sit there and smile," Jonathan said, setting a jar of raspberry jam on the table. He quickly added a cream pitcher, cups and saucers, even small china plates and silverware. The kettle whistled and he filled the teapot and set it on the table. The finishing touch was a plate of hot scones from the microwave. "Mrs. Abbott makes these for me," he explained, splitting one open and slathering it with jam. "This is my mother's recipe."

No one seemed immune from the professor's charm. Cait helped herself to a scone while Jonathan filled their teacups.

"So, how did you come to be at Georgetown?" he asked, stirring sugar into his tea. "The term is nearly over and most staff start with the school year."

"There was an opening and I needed the job," said Cait as she added cream and sugar to her tea. The stiffness in her voice told him not to pursue this line of questioning.

"How lucky for me," he replied with the melting grin and saluting her with his teacup.

"With a name like MacKensie I wouldn't guess you were Irish, but you certainly have the gift of blamey," Cait said, her smile belying her stern tone. "I've only been here a short time, but I've been warned about the MacKensie charm."

"Caitlyn! Surely you don't believe campus gossip?" Jonathan protested, looking a bit flustered.

"I understand you've left a trail of broken hearts, professor. And I've never had a man get me into his bed so quickly."

Jonathan's jaw dropped. "But I--we didn't--it wasn't like that! I never intended--"

"I'm just teasing you, Dr. MacKensie," Caitlyn assured him, reaching across the table to pat his hand. "You've been a knight, coming to my aid, and it was mean of me to repay your kindness in such a way. I'm sorry. I should be going." She stood and Jonathan leaped to his feet.

"Are you sure you feel well enough, Ms Cassidy?" he asked, looking worried. "You haven't finished your tea."

Caitlyn had to smile at the way the Britisher made it sound as if her recovery was dependent upon her finishing the cup of tea. "I suppose I can stay long enough for that, but I'll have to leave soon, Dr.

MacKensie. I've imposed on your kindness too much as it is."

"Not kindness, and you're no imposition," Jonathan said firmly, freshening her teacup. "And it's Jonathan."

"You're persistent, I'll give you that," Cait commented with a smile.

"An anthropologist has to be."

They both looked startled when the answering machine whirred and clicked. "I have the ringer turned off," Jonathan explained as they listened to his prerecorded message. He groaned at the voice of another persistent anthropologist. "MacKensie, you know better than to ignore me. I want an explanation for your bizarre behavior. And it had better be a good one, or your next assignment will be in the Himalayas! I want you in my office **now**, MacKensie. Do you hear me? If you're not here in twenty minutes, I'll be at your house in twenty-five. MacKensie?"

Jonathan sighed and looked embarrassed. "I'd--better answer that," he said, going to the phone.

Cait smiled into her teacup as Jonathan picked up the phone and tried to placate his irate superior.

"Dr. Moorhouse, is there a problem?"

Jonathan held the phone away from his ear and cringed, then gingerly brought it closer as he tried to talk into the receiver. "I'm sorry, I wasn't aware--Now? But Dr. Moorhouse--forty-five minutes, please? I'm in the middle of something...yes, it's important! No, I don't want to go to the Himalayas...please, Dr. Moorhouse?" he begged, and Cait covered her mouth with her hand. Apparently there was **one** female who could resist the MacKensie charm. "Thank you, Dr. Moorhouse, I'll be there in an hour. Yes, Ma'am, I will have an explanation. Mrs. Berthold said that? Really? I can't imagine...I was fourteen, Dr. Moorhouse! That's twenty years ago! Well, she's mistaken then, isn't she? No, I'm not calling her a liar, just mistaken. I don't believe it's just a matter of semantics. Yes, Ma'am. No, ma'am. I--one hour, I understand." Jonathan hung up the phone and exhaled heavily before turning an uncertain grin on Cait.

"I'm sorry about that," he began.

"It's all right. I have to be going anyway," she assured him, standing and picking up her dirty dishes. "Let me help you clean up before I go."

"Only if you'll allow me to walk you to wherever you're going and promise that I can call you," Jonathan bargained, determined to salvage something from the evening. "I had wanted to take you to dinner, but--"

"Sounds like Moorhouse plans to have **you** for dinner," Cait said with a laugh. "I don't envy you."

"You know Dr. Moorhouse?" Jonathan asked, taking the dishes from her and placing them in the sink.

"Or at least people like her," said Cait evasively.

"If she leaves me alive, may I call you later?"

"I don't have a private phone; I share with the rest of the floor."

"Would you rather I just show up, asking for you?"

"You can call," Cait agreed, amused and worried by his persistence. "Just don't give your name. It might start rumors."

"My behavior has probably already started a few," Jonathan admitted ruefully. "I've been like a madman, trying to track you down. I even humiliated myself at the library today. Having my own research assistant has meant that I haven't had to face Mrs. Berthold--"

"Until today?"

"She still thinks of me as a randy teenager, I'm afraid."

"And you're not a teenager."

Jonathan swung his head around and caught the glimmer of mischief sparkling in her green eyes. "No, I'm not a teenager."

"That's good." Caitlyn carried the last load of dishes to the sink and after Jonathan took them, he grasped her hand.

"But that's not to say I don't **feel** like a teenager at times," he said, his thumb caressing her palm before letting go.

"Or act like one?" Her voice wasn't as steady as she would have liked, letting Jonathan know of his effect on her. "I'll keep that in mind, professor."

The answering machine whirred and clicked again, saving her from further verbal foreplay. "Yo, Jack! Have I got news for you, buds! I've been checking the unexplained phenom file here at the **Register**, and you won't believe what I've found for us! I'm hopping on the next shuttle outta JFK so check ya later, Jack!"

Jonathan moaned and covered his face with one hand. "Not now, Benedek," he muttered.

Caitlyn watched him, head tilted in curiosity. He smiled and turned his attention to the sink that was rapidly filling with soapy water. "That's a--friend--of mine," he said lamely, sticking his hand in the water and jerking it back when he realized he'd forgotten to turn on the cold. Caitlyn reached over, turned on the cold water and stuck his hand under the soothing spray of water.

"A good friend?" she asked, inspecting his hand for burns.

"Sometimes," he admitted, looking at the head bent over his hand.

"You might want to adjust the temperature on your water heater," she commented, glancing up and finding her gaze locked with his. For the space of several heartbeats they stared at each other before Caitlyn managed to look away. "It's...a very minor burn," she murmured, moving back to a safer distance."

Jonathan lowered his hand and looked at the sink. "Thank you. Why don't I just let this sit and take care of it later? If Moorhouse lets me live, that is."

"Since she doesn't strike me as the kind to resort to murder, I suspect your dishes aren't in danger of staying dirty forever."

Jonathan frowned at her implied personal knowledge of Juliana Moorhouse. "More than likely she'd pack me off to some God-forsaken-hole and let me rot."

"Is this your 'tomorrow-I-die' routine? Pretty weak, professor." Caitlyn quirked an eyebrow. "I've heard it done better in an old John Wayne movie."

"You know, you sound as if you know Dr. Moor--" he staggered backward, catching his arms around her as Caitlyn threw herself at him. Her arms slid up his neck as her mouth covered his.

Jonathan forgot all about Moorhouse, Benedek, his classes--even his name for a moment. He was much larger than the petite Cait, stronger and could have easily escaped. Instead, he tightened his embrace and held her closer.

Finally Cait pulled away, gasping slightly for air. "I--think I'd better go," she said, her voice husky with passion.

"Must you?" Jonathan asked, nuzzling her throat.

"Y-yes," said Cait, reluctantly slipping from his embrace. "I really shouldn't be here." Throwing herself at him as a distraction wasn't the smartest move she could have made, but it was the first thing that had come to mind. She supposed there could have been some other tactic to change the conversation, but the truth was she found herself strongly attracted to the professor, despite her intention not to get involved with him.

"Why not?" Jonathan persisted, grabbing her hand.

"It wouldn't work out between us."

"How do you know if you don't give us a chance?"

"I just do," said Caitlyn, a desperate edge to her voice. "Please, Jonathan, believe me when I say I wish it could be otherwise, but I don't think we should pursue this--attraction."

"This is more than an attraction, believe me," said Jonathan, holding her by the hand. "Ever since that first day I saw you outside my office window I haven't been able to get you out of my mind. Everything has centered around trying to find you. I've made a complete idiot of myself and I don't care! Don't you feel it too, Caitlyn?"

"I have to go," she said, refusing to give him an answer.

"All right, but please say you'll give us a chance. At least spend your lunch hours with me, maybe go to a concert--get to know me better," Jonathan pleaded.

"It's against my better judgment, but--"

"Wonderful! Tomorrow at noon? Under the oak tree?" he persisted. Caitlyn considered, then nodded and he beamed at her. "Later tonight?"

"What about your friend?" she asked, nodding at the phone. "Won't you have to meet him at the airport?"

"Benedek--I forgot about him," Jonathan groaned. "I suppose I'd better find out what he wants and then try to get rid of him."

"After he's gone to all the trouble to fly in, just to see you?"

"Harass me, more like," Jonathan grumbled. "I'd rather spend the evening with you."

She scribbled the dorm phone number on the pad next to his phone. "Let's wait and see what happens. I'd better be going."

"I'll walk you to your dorm on my way to Dr. Moorhouse's office," Jonathan said, tucking her hand in the crook of his arm. When she started to protest, he placed a finger against her lips. "My reward in advance, please? Something to get me through this meeting?"

"You **are** a charmer, professor." Cait stretched up on tiptoe to plant a quick kiss on his mouth. "You do realize that if you're seen with me, tongues will wag?"

"Let them." He covered the hand resting on his arm. "Campus gossip is just that--gossip--and not important."

Cait managed a smile, but she wondered if he would feel the same way once he learned the truth.

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Liz looked up as the door to the Anthropology's Department offices opened. "She wants to see you, Jonathan," she told him as he entered cautiously. "And she's not very happy."

He gulped and glanced at the solid wooden door bearing Juliana Moorhouse's name. "Guess I'd better get it over with, then," he said bravely, adjusting his tie and pasting on a smile before raising his hand to rap on the door.

"Come in, MacKensie," came the response.

It always unnerved him when she did that, and Jonathan wondered fleetingly if she had x-ray vision.

He turned the doorknob and entered her office, his shoulders squared.

"Yes, Dr. Moorhouse," he said, his expression mild and his manner placating. "Ah--I'm sorry, I forgot to stop by earlier--I was going to, but something came up..."

"I'm sure it did," she replied in that dry, sarcastic tone he knew so well. "I hope she's worth risking your career over, MacKensie."

Jonathan gulped and his smile slipped slightly. "I'm afraid I don't understand--"

"I am still chairman of this department. Does that mean anything to you?"

Nervously clearing his throat, Jonathan slipped a finger under his tie. "You're my boss?"

"I'm so glad you remembered. Try not to forget again. Now, would you care to explain your recent actions?" She sat back in her chair, her eyes looking even larger than usual behind her magnifying glasses.

"I...just had other things on my mind."

"I see. And that's why you've been at the library every day for the past week? Why you've suddenly taken to eating lunch al fresco? Why you've been running around the campus like a madman?"

Jonathan took several breaths, fumbled with his tie, then pulled his reading glasses from his breast pocket. "Yes." Realizing he didn't need his glasses, he shoved them back in his pocket.

"MacKensie, I understand."

"You do?"

"You're a young man, and she's a very pretty young woman. It's spring." Jonathan's jaw dropped. "I **was** young once, and not that long ago. But you are still a part of this faculty, representative of this department, so I suggest you monitor your behavior. I was afraid Benedek would be a bad influence."

"Benedek?"

"I would expect **him** to act like a--a caveman," she said in a disgusted tone. "Try to conduct yourself with a little more decorum."

"Yes, of course, Dr. Moorhouse."

"Well? What are you waiting for? I have things to do."

"Yes, of course," he repeated, backing out of her office. Closing the door, he took a deep breath and exhaled.

"I see you're still alive and in one piece," Liz observed from her desk.

"For the moment," he agreed. After a glance at his watch, he grinned. "Benedek can't possibly be in town yet. Bye, Liz!"

The secretary stared after him, then went into her boss's office to answer her call. "Jonathan is--"

"Yes, I'm afraid he's in love," Moorhouse replied with a sigh. "He's pursuing Caitlyn Cassidy."

"Caitlyn--does he know?"

"No. And I've promised her to keep quiet, at least until the testing is complete and we know the extent of her psi abilities. I still believe she's a valuable addition to the Paranormal Unit, but she has requested that MacKensie not be informed. It was also her request that he not know that Edgar Benedek brought her to my attention."

"Oh boy."

"Succinctly put, Liz," the older woman sighed.

* * *

Jonathan arrived at the dorm as Randi propelled her wheelchair out the front door. Her pixie-like face lit up when she spied him.

"Jonathan! Another few seconds and you would have missed me," she announced brightly.

"Really? Well, how--fortunate for me,"

Jonathan said lamely but with a valiant smile. Randi was a sweet kid and he enjoyed her company, but he couldn't help but wish he'd waited those few seconds.

"We were just going out for a burger--"

"We?"

"Oh, you probably haven't met Cait Cassidy, have you?" she asked innocently. "She works in the library."

"Really?" Jonathan's smile faltered as he raked a hand through his hair. "You know, I think I may have seen her once or twice."

"Great," said Randi as Caitlyn came through the glass doors, her head down as she adjusted the strap of her purse over her shoulder. "Cait, I'd like you to meet Dr. Jonathan MacKensie, my favorite anthropology professor." She beamed up from her chair, looking from one to the other.

Cait stopped short, caught off-guard. "Dr. MacKensie, how--nice," she said hesitantly, offering her hand.

Jonathan grasped it, holding on longer than necessary. "Very nice. Randi tells me you work at the library."

"Yes. Randi speaks of you--often. She says you keep her quite busy," Cait replied, trying to tug her hand free.

"Randi is the best assistant I've had since I began teaching," he said, giving her hand a squeeze before releasing it.

"Hey, Jonathan, we were on our way to the pub," Randi put in. "Why don't you join us?"

He made a great show of checking his watch. "I have time before Benedek breezes in--"

"Listen, Randi, I think I'll go back and turn in early," Cait began.

"But you said you were hungry," Randi protested half-heartedly. It had been her idea to go out, but she hadn't known she might have a chance to be with Jonathan. She knew her crush was hopeless, but still...

"Bring me back something, all right? It was nice meeting you, Dr. MacK--"

"Jonathan. And you mustn't let me change your plans," he said, flashing the patented MacKensie smile. "I wouldn't mind joining you, but I couldn't stay long at any rate. I have to meet someone--a business meeting."

"I don't--"

"Come on, Cait, you need to get out of the dorm," Randi spoke up. "Between the library and--"

"All right," Cait agreed, cutting her off. She had to go, if only to make certain Jonathan didn't pump Randi for information that she preferred he not have just yet.

"Wonderful," Jonathan beamed. He started to offer Cait his arm, then hesitated. It would be impolite to escort her and not Randi, but it was also impossible to take the girl's arm.

"I'll lead," Randi said, sensing his dilemma and pushing off down the sidewalk. Jonathan met Cait's gaze, then offered his arm. Silently she placed her hand on his arm and fell into step beside him.

"I see you survived," she murmured softly.

"Yes, it was a rather peculiar meeting but then, they often are with Dr. Moorhouse," he said, bending his head toward hers. "I would have called first, but I didn't want to use her phone and I was anxious to get out of the office."

Cait gave a brief nod. "I can understand that. Being raked over the coals is never fun and she sounded like that was the very least she had planned for you. So, are you going to the Himalayas?"

"Not this week," he said with a disarming grin.

They arrived at the pub, and Cait suggested that she and Randi wait by the door while Jonathan got them a table. As soon as he was out of earshot, Cait leaned down.

"Randi, please, whatever you do, don't mention the tests! Or that I'm here at Moorhouse's invitation. I prefer to keep the psychic testing out of the conversation...I don't want anyone to know."

"Lie to Jonathan? You want me to lie...?"

"No, just keep certain information to yourself. Please," Cait begged. "If he needs to know, I'll tell him, but not now, and certainly not here."

"It'll be about ten minutes," said Jonathan, coming back. His brows drew down at the guilty look on both their faces. "What's up?"

Randi and Cait looked at each other, then at Jonathan.

"I was just telling Cait that normally it takes at least twenty minutes to get a table this time of night," Randi said brightly. "And we were shameless enough to use you to get us one, but professors have pull."

"Do they? I'll have to remember that," said Jonathan, still suspicious.

"Or it could just be the MacKensie charm," Randi continued teasingly.

He colored at that, not totally unaware of the reputation he had around campus and of the reason why his classes averaged sixty percent female students. "Watch it, young lady," he admonished in his best professorial voice. "I haven't graded your term project yet." He softened the comment with a grin, and laughed outright when Randi made a face at him.

Abruptly Cait said, "I need to make a call. I'll be right back." She headed for the pay phones near the restrooms.

Jonathan watched her go, then said confidentially, "Ah, Randi—I wonder if you couldn't do me a favor? Would you please not say anything to Ms. Cassidy about—well, you know, my involvement with the paranormal unit? She seems like a sensible woman and I just don't think she'd be interested in that sort of thing."

Randi studied him curiously. "You want me to lie to Cait?"

"No, no," he said hastily. "Just—don't tell her about my sideline with Benedek, that's all."

"Sure, Jonathan, no problem," she agreed after a moment. At least they weren't at cross purposes, since they were both trying to avoid the same subject.

Cait returned, looking nervous. "What's wrong?" Jonathan asked.

"Oh, I just couldn't reach my cousin," she said uneasily. "I'll try again in a bit." Cait made a point of sticking close to Randi as they followed the waitress who came up to seat them, unaware that Jonathan enjoyed the view as he followed after them.

Randi couldn't help being amused at the way the pair kept dancing around the fact that they'd met before and that they were both involved in Moorhouse's paranormal research.

Jonathan saw the women comfortably settled at their table and volunteered to take their drink orders.

"I'll have a Coke," Randi said.

"Iced tea, please," Cait responded, looking up at Jonathan and offering him a smile. "Thank you, Dr. MacKensie."

"Jonathan, please," he said, his brows drawing down slightly. "I shall return!" He ventured into the crowded bar, patiently waiting his turn.

Eventually he returned, carrying a tray bearing the requested drinks, and a ginger ale for himself. He set it down, surprised to find Randi engrossed in a menu and alone.

"Where did C-Ms. Cassidy go?"

"She's in the restroom," Randi told him.

"Thanks, I'm thirsty." She took the Coke glass and paper-wrapped straw, then inquired, "Aren't you going to sit down, Jonathan?"

"Hmm? No, I think I'm going to call Benedek at the airport—be right back." He left Randi gaping after him.

"Maybe I should have stayed home and worked on my term paper," she muttered, tearing off the straw's wrapper. Thoughtfully she took a sip of her Coke, then shook her head and returned happily to her menu. "Nah, this is too much fun to miss!"

Jonathan approached the pair of pay phones and found both were in use. The woman closest to him hung up the receiver and turned abruptly, nearly crashing into him. Jonathan automatically reached out to steady her. "Cait!"

"Jonathan?" The shock on her face turned to panic as she looked around for escape. How much had he overheard? Did he know she'd been trying to page Benedek at the airport?

"Are you all right? You look positively terrified," he observed, still holding her by the arms.

"Just startled, that's all," she said with a shaky laugh. "Were you looking for me?"

"Well, I--yes," Jonathan stammered. "The waitress will be back for our order and I didn't know what you wanted."

"I told Randi...maybe she forgot." Cait took a step forward but Jonathan didn't move back. In fact,

he still held her by the upper arms and Cait's move only brought her into his embrace. "Jonathan, I--" she said, looking up at him.

Jonathan started to bring his head down to kiss her, then remembered where they were and released her. "I'm sorry," he murmured, stepping back to allow her to pass him. He turned and followed her to the table where Randi sat, playing with her straw.

Any awkwardness was forgotten in the arrival of the waitress who took their orders. Her departure was followed by pleasant small talk, mostly between Randi and Cait, while Jonathan added a comment here and there as he tried to watch Caitlyn without looking as if he was.

Their baskets of burgers and fries arrived and Jonathan was reaching for the catsup bottle when he froze at the sound of a familiar voice.

"Yo, Jack--I didn't know you could even find this place! What's cookin', buds?"

Jonathan glanced apprehensively over his shoulder confirming that Edgar Benedek was bearing down on them. "How on earth did he find me?" he whispered to his companions. "I--ah, Benedek! What a surprise!"

"I bet, Jack." Benny said, grabbing a chair and pulling it up to the table. "Shoulda known I'd find you with the two best looking babes in Georgetown."

Jonathan rolled his eyes and glared at his hamburger, missing the frantic look on Cait's face as she stared at Benny. "But how did you find me? I didn't tell anyone--"

"What can I say, Smilin' Jack? It's a skill like anything else." Benny said, motioning for the waitress. "Anybody else want a brewski?"

Jumping at the excuse, Jonathan got up, grabbing Benny's shoulder. "Yes, Benedek, let's go to the bar. Excuse us, ladies."

"What are you--" Benny asked as Jonathan hustled him off.

"Benedek, **please** don't mention the paranormal research," Jonathan begged, shoving Benny ahead of him through the crowd.

"Huhhh? J.J., what're you talking about?" Benny asked, trying unsuccessfully to crane around and peer into the taller's man's face.

"I don't intend to embarrass myself in front of Ms. Cassidy by acknowledging my connection with--"

"Me?" finished Benedek as they reached the bar. He wheeled to face Jonathan challengingly, hurt flickering in his eyes.

"No!" exclaimed the professor. "No, of course not--I didn't mean--"

"Relaxavision, Jack," Benedek said. "I get the point."

"Let me buy you a beer," Jonathan offered quickly, motioning to the barman.

Benny raised an eyebrow. "Now **there's** a phenom I never thought I'd see."

"It's just that she doesn't seem like the kind of person who would be interested in--er, the paranormal."

The journalist stared at him, then smiled slowly, "Appearances can be deceiving, Jonny. Thanks for the brewski."

"It's just--I've never met anyone quite like her," Jonathan said after giving the bartender his order. "I've made an idiot of myself and even insulted Dr. Moorhouse, and all I can think of is Caitlyn."

"Caitlyn, huh? Nice name," Benny said blandly. "So like, what is she? Besides the babe who has your hormones in an uproar, I mean."

"Benedek," Jonathan protested, digging out his wallet and handing the bartender a bill. He took the two beers and handed one to Benny. "Just promise me you won't say anything."

"Trying to make a good impression, huh? And you don't think our adventures would cut the mustard? But ol' Ramapithecus will," Benny said as he followed Jonathan back to the table. "Never let it be said that Edgar Benedek stood in the way of true love. I'll play it your way, pal."

"Thanks, Benedek." Jonathan gave his partner a grateful smile. "She really is quite special."

Benny let Jonathan get a bit ahead. "More than you know, pal," he muttered under his breath. "So Randi, how'd you ever get this guy into a place like this?" he said aloud as he sat at the table, beer in hand.

"He followed us, Benny," she replied in a stage whisper. "We couldn't get rid of him."

"Just like a puppy," Cait added, drawing Benny's attention.

"I don't think we've met," Benny said, blue eyes twinkling. "I'm Edgar Benedek; you can call me Benny--Edgar's just for the press."

"This is Caitlyn Cassidy." Randi made the introductions.

"And you can call me Cait," she said, offering Benny her hand.

"Small world," Benny mused, rocking back in his chair and slipping his hand into his pocket. "I have a cousin by that name."

"Really? How unusual." Cait said, watching him carefully.

"Excuse me a minute; I gotta make a phone call," Benny said, getting to his feet. "Order me a

burger with lots of onions and sauerkraut, will ya, Jack?" He winked at Cait who chewed nervously on her thumbnail.

He sauntered to the phones where he pulled Cait's note from his pocket. "Hope you kids know what game you're playing," he murmured, wadding up the plea and shoving it back into his pocket. He didn't want to see either one of them hurt, and he was beginning to wonder if his matchmaking had been such a good idea. Maybe he should get Sibyl to do another spell, one guaranteed to do more than attract each other...

Sibyl had warned him that her gypsy spells were limited and she couldn't make a person fall in love with another, merely enhance a natural, mutual attraction and make it difficult to ignore. But maybe she had something else helpful in her little bag of tricks.

Once Jonathan and Cait realized that Benny wasn't going to spill the beans, they both relaxed and the evening passed pleasantly. Jonathan and Benny escorted the women back to their dorm and then walked on to Jonathan's house.

"All right, Benedek," Jonathan said, unlocking his front door and flipping on the light. "What is this vital information you've uncovered that I absolutely **must** hear?"

Benny loosened his already loose tie and flopped down on Jonathan's sofa. "You're not gonna believe this, J.J."

"I'm sure," the professor said dryly.

Ignoring the comment, Benny continued, "Mrs. Potter's pussycat can predict the future. It helped her win the lottery too."

Jonathan stared at him, then shook his head. "You're not serious? I'm not investigating some bizarre old woman's imaginings about her cat! I can't believe you'd even **consider** such a ridiculous notion!"

"Hey, I've tested it, Jack! The cat picked the Daily Double from the racing sheet--I made fifty bucks on its tip." Benny grinned, enjoying the look on Jonathan's face.

"You're kidding!"

"Would I kid about the races?"

"All right--then how does the animal communicate its information?"

"Twitches its tail," Benny said promptly, "One twitch for no, two twitches for yes."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Yeah, I know," the journalist agreed, surprising his friend. "Personally, I think Mrs. Potter's sticking pins in it."

"You do? Then why--?"

"Where's your sense of humor, J.J.?"

"My sense of--it's a joke? This whole thing is a **joke**?!"

"Well, I was outta town for April Fool's Day last month..."

"Get out, Benedek!" Jonathan roared, pointing at the door.

"Sure thing, J.J." the journalist said, obeying with surprising speed. "You'll feel better after a good night's sleep, huh? I'll call you tomorrow!"

"What? You breeze in, disrupt my life and say you'll call tomorrow? You babble some nonsense about a cat's tail, **after** nearly causing me a heart attack and you'll call tomorrow?"

"Relaxavision, buds," Benny cautioned, hands upraised in a defensive gesture. "You need a chill pill."

Jonathan took a deep breath and sat heavily on a chair.

Benny shoved his hands in his pockets and studied his friend thoughtfully. "I'm sorry, Jack. The fact is, I've got a line on some Civil War ghosts that have been spotted in Maryland, and since they're bothering some archeology students who are digging up one of the battlegrounds, I thought it'd be right up your alley. You were so uptight that I thought a little joke would loosen things up. Didn't mean anything by it."

Jonathan took another deep breath. "I'm **sorry**, Benedek. I shouldn't have reacted like that."

With a shrug, Benny said, "It's okay. I can go or stay, whichever you want--?"

The professor stood up and headed for the kitchen. "I'll make us some coffee and you can tell me about these so-called ghosts of yours."

"Sure, okay," Benny said, heaving a sigh and resuming his seat on the sofa. "Can't stay too long though."

"They're probably nothing but products of overactive imaginings," Jonathan went on above the sound of the running water.

"Could be," Benny said. To himself he added, *Cait, you've really got him tied up in knots.* Of course, to be fair, Cait had no idea he'd orchestrated circumstances to bring the pair together and that he'd charmed Sibyl into magnifying their natural charisma to step up the attraction. In fact, if she knew what he'd done, he wouldn't have to worry about what Jonathan would do to him because she'd kill him first.

And from what he'd witnessed at the pub, Jack wasn't the only one in knots.

"So this trip to your ghost-field shouldn't take too long," Jonathan said, bringing Benny a mug of coffee. "No doubt just some locals with a warped

sense of humor, thinking to get a little publicity by haunting a battlefield. Perhaps even students from a rival school..."

Benedek's double-take was instantaneous. "Whoa--Jack, I don't believe what I'm hearing. You **want** to go on this job?!"

Jonathan's brows drew together. "I thought that was why you came down here in the first place, Benedek, to get me to agree to drop everything and go off shadow-chasing with you."

"Well, yeah--but I expected a little more of a struggle from you first, Jonny."

"You're going to get your way sooner or later," Jonathan shrugged, "so I decided to forego the futile protests this time. Besides, the sooner we get this over with, the sooner you'll go back to New York, correct?"

"Maybe," Benny admitted, his eyes narrowing at this evidence of the professor's ability to read him like a book. "I might hang around here, though, and see what's happening at ol' G.I. Maybe help you romance your new friend--"

"No! I don't **need** any help," Jonathan protested, nearly spilling his coffee. "I'm perfectly capable--"

"I get the feeling this is a special case, Don Juan. A little extra nudge can't hurt--"

"Benedek, please! This **is** important and must be handled carefully. Cait has already proven difficult, and I **don't** want to give her any more reasons to be reluctant about a--a friendship with me," Jonathan said, getting up and pacing, leaving his mug on the cocktail table in front of the sofa. "For some reason she's very skittish."

"Must have some deep, dark secret," Benny said, propping his feet on the table. "Like maybe she's really a voodoo priestess and performs bizarre rituals, or suffers from the curse of a werewolf--"

"Be serious, Benedek," Jonathan admonished, glaring at Benny.

"Maybe she has some weird relatives--like the Addams family or something really nifty like that," Benny continued, watching Jonathan carefully.

"Who?" muttered Jonathan distractedly, resuming his pacing. "Benedek, I don't expect you to understand--I hardly understand it myself--but I've never felt this way about a woman before. I can't stop thinking about her, wanting to be with her constantly..." He halted and looked at Benny pleadingly. "**Please** don't do anything to upset my chances with her."

"Hey, not to worry, buds," Benny said with a cheerful reassurance he didn't quite feel. Sibyl **had** tried to warn him about meddling. Maybe he should

have drawn the line at the gypsy spell and just let nature take its course. "Maybe a little ghost-hunting is just what you need. I'll make a few calls and let you know what's up. We'll take your car."

"**My** car?"

"Unless you want to fly, but it's not that long a drive--"

"We'll take my car."

Benny grinned, knowing Jonathan would have agreed even if it had been a cross-country trip, just to avoid flying. "Then I'll check ya later, Jack," he said, standing up and handing Jonathan his empty mug.

"Where are you going?"

"Motel Six," Benedek said, giving his partner a strange look. "It's where I left my bag--unless you want me hanging around here, crowding your time with your honey?" He grinned at Jonathan's expression. "Yeah, didn't think so. Catch you tomorrow, Jon."

He left Jonathan standing in the middle of his living room as he loped down the sidewalk and headed for the dorm quadrangle.

Cait answered her door before he'd finished knocking. "Benny, where have you been?" she demanded, pulling him into her room.

"At Jack's. Care to explain this?" he asked, handing her the note she'd slipped him at the pub.

"Not here," she said, snatching up her jacket. "Let's go for a walk."

"Caity, what have you done?" Benny murmured, following her. "Why are you lying to Jack?" He caught up to her on the sidewalk and grabbed her by the arm. "You'd better have a good explanation--"

"How many times have you told me Jonathan's feelings about your 'bizarre friends?' His feelings about the paranormal? If he knew I was not only your cousin, but here at Georgetown for psychic testing, he'd run so fast his feet wouldn't touch the ground. And you know it," she said, glaring at him. "I didn't want to come here, and I certainly didn't want to--to be attracted to Jonathan MacKensie."

"You can't buck fate, C.C. What's wrong with Jonny?"

"Nothing, and that's the problem. If we'd met under different circumstances it might have been possible. I've lied to him, Benny, and I can't take it back. When he finds out...that's why I'm leaving."

"Leaving?" Benny yelped, looking at his cousin. "You can't--"

"I have to go. Even if he forgives me for being deceitful, he won't be able to accept the fact that I **have** seen ghosts; that I have flashes of

clairvoyance. I'm one of your bizarre associates, Benny." Cait gave him a rueful smile. "I'm the kind of person you'd call in to help out on one of your cases. Jonathan can't even bring himself to admit he's involved in Dr. Moorhouse's paranormal research, so how could he possibly admit an attraction to someone like me?"

"You're not giving Jack enough credit," Benny argued. "Oh sure, he might get mad about the deceit, but he'd also get over it. He might be a little shocked at your special gifts, but he'd also come to accept what you are. I don't think he's as disbelieving as he was. Don't make a hasty decision, Cait. Give it a chance."

"I just don't know, Benny. I want to talk to Dr. Moorhouse, but I promise I won't leave without letting you know first. But I do think it would be for the best, for both of us."

"No way, Katydid," Benny said, shaking his head emphatically. "Look, the only reason Jonny didn't admit he was part of the Paranormal Unit was that he didn't want--"

"Me to know," she finished. "Of course not. He's embarrassed of me, too."

"Caitlyn Cassidy, is this the spunky kid who told Grandma where to get off when the old doll said you were a witch?" Benny demanded, grabbing her by the arms and forcing her to look at him.

"I've lived a lot since then, Benny," she said quietly. "And I've **seen** a lot--things I haven't been able to change, things I've had to live with knowledge I can never forget. Do you remember the day our mothers died? I **saw** the accident, heard our mothers scream when the semi came at them. I begged them not to go..."

"Cait, I'm sorry." Benedek hugged her as she trailed off, fighting against the tears. "I didn't--you never **told** me about that!"

"We were kids, Benny." She pulled away from him. "I didn't want you to find out. I thought you'd blame me--for not stopping it."

"But I wouldn't have--"

"Why not? **I** did."

"Aw, Caity," Benny murmured. "I wish I could say it's nuts to blame yourself, but I feel the same way about Laraine. If only I could have stopped her from getting on that plane. It's easy to tell yourself it's unreasonable, but it's always there, eating away at you."

"Sometimes I still see it, just as clearly as I did then," she said, staring off into the night sky.

"Caity, you were only eight."

"And you were ten," she interrupted. "You tried so hard not to cry. You did card tricks and tied Grandma's cat to the fringe of her tablecloth."

The corner of his mouth lifted in a smile. "Well, yeah--but I wasn't the one who opened the front door and said, 'Here, kitty, kitty', **was** I?"

"**You** told me to do it," Cait laughed.

"Grandma was furious. It **was** her best tablecloth."

"Heck," he shrugged, "It was her best cat."

Cait touched his cheek and gave him a sad smile. "And you're my best cousin. I don't want to jeopardize your friendship with Jonathan--he's been good for you. You're happier than I've seen you in a long time."

He took hold of her hand, and in the light of the street lamp his expression was wholly serious.

"Don't give up **your** chance at happiness, C.C. Jack's crazy about you. Look, think it over, talk to Dr. M., and promise you'll call me before going anywhere. Please?"

"Sure, Benny," she agreed, kissing his cheek.

"I promise. Good night."

Benny frowned as he watched her walk back to the dorm. Things were **not** going according to plan.

* * *

"Quit? Now? Don't be ridiculous, my dear," Juliana Moorhouse protested, looking across her desk at Caitlyn. "Dr. Stafford tells me you've made great progress, that he feels he's on the verge of a breakthrough."

"Progress? The headaches are more frequent and intense and the dreams are--disturbing," Caitlyn said, shifting on the straight-backed chair.

"Have they come true?"

Cait looked at her hands. "I'm afraid they will," she said softly.

"Are they about MacKensie?"

Taking a deep breath, Cait met Juliana's gaze. "Some."

"He's a brilliant man, Caitlyn, and he'll go far in the academic world," Moorhouse stated, unable to completely conceal the pride she felt. "I believe he'll be my successor as head of this department. I don't think his association with Benedek will hurt his chances."

"Or with people like me?"

"Caitlyn, dear, I didn't mean--"

"That's one reason I'm leaving," Caitlyn interrupted, standing up. "I don't want to be responsible for ruining his career."

"Caitlyn, you listen to me. You couldn't possibly hurt Jonathan's career with this Institute--"

"Not only am I one of Benny's associates, I'm his cousin," Cait said as she paced in front of the desk. "I'm quite aware of your opinion of him and his 'bizarre' friends. And I'm sure the president and the Board share your opinion. If Jonathan were to get involved with someone like me, they would change their opinion of his brilliance and suitability to head this department."

"Caitlyn, I think you're quite wrong about that. And I certainly wish you would reconsider your decision." The older woman sighed, and added, "However, you are here as a volunteer, and I cannot force you to stay if you wish to leave us. Shall I tell Dr. Stafford?"

"No." Caitlyn managed a smile. "I guess I'd better do it myself. Thank you, Dr. Moorhouse. I appreciate all you've done for me." She offered her hand and left the office, speaking briefly to Liz on the way out.

"Caitlyn is leaving?" Liz asked as she stepped into the inner office.

"That is her plan," said Moorhouse, still seated at her desk. "Did you know she is more than an associate of Edgar Benedek?"

"More--?"

"Apparently he forgot to mention that she is his cousin," Moorhouse informed her secretary, fingers drumming on the desktop. "A detail she feels is a detriment, at least in my eyes. And to be honest, that is precisely what I would have thought before I got to know her. However, I do believe she is wrong--association with her will not hurt Jonathan."

"Can't we stop her?"

The older woman shook her head, then looked at the phone on her desk. "But there may be someone who can," she said, reaching for the phone.

* * *

"You can't quit now! I won't hear of it!"

"Dr. Stafford, I am sorry, but I really must--"

"Am I pushing you too hard? I know you say the headaches are growing worse." Elias Stafford took her hands and tried a charming smile. "Perhaps we could limit the number of tests on a given day, even the number of days in a row that we test. My dear, we are so close."

"I have--personal reasons, Dr. Stafford," Caitlyn said, meeting the man's bright blue eyes. Stafford was of medium height and build, but at times gave the impression of being a much larger man. This was one of those times. "I know this is a

disappointment, but I'm sure you'll find a better subject--"

"Nonsense! You must reconsider," he insisted, letting go of her hands and standing back. The blue eyes were piercing as he stared down at her.

"I wish I could, but it's for the best if I return to my normal routine and try to forget--"

"Can you? Can you really forget? When you have a vision, can you simply ignore it? Will your dreams become more peaceful? Caitlyn, my dear, this isn't something that will go away if you just ignore it." His voice was oddly compelling.

She shook her head and looked away, not meeting his gaze. "I never asked for this ability."

"But you have it, and you must develop it, use it--"

"No." Her voice was firm. "I'm sorry, Dr. Stafford, but I've made my decision. I'm withdrawing from the volunteer program as of today. It's for the best." She turned toward the doorway. "I'm sorry to have been such a poor subject for you."

He watched as she left his office, then a slow smile curved his lips. "You are the subject I've been waiting for, and I'm not giving up now. We are not finished, Caitlyn Cassidy."

* * *

"I told you there was nothing paranormal about your so-called ghosts," Jonathan said to Benny as he unlocked his front door. He carried in his suitcase and set it down with a thump, then went into the kitchen and put the kettle on. "A few bored kids trying to liven up the community," he continued, pushing the playback button on his answering machine. "No ghosts, no supernatural mumbo-jumbo--"

"Oh yeah, Jack? What about the flying saber that nearly sliced off your hand? You checked it yourself and it was a normal, everyday saber with no hidden remote controls, no wires--" Benny broke off as Jonathan held up his hand.

"--without a trace. She said she was leaving, but she didn't pack a single item. Contact Benedek and call me the moment you get in."

Benny stared at Jonathan. "What's bugging Dr. M.?"

Jonathan rewound the tape and played it again. "Caitlyn," he murmured when the message came to an end. "Why would she leave without so much as a good-bye?"

"Caity wouldn't do that," Benny said firmly.

"Caity?" Jonathan frowned.

"She promised she wouldn't leave without telling me--"

"**She promised you?**"

Benny's gaze met Jonathan's, and he lifted his chin. "My cousin has never broken a promise she's made to me, and I don't think she's gonna start now."

"Caitlyn Cassidy is--your **cousin?**!" Jonathan said, his mouth agape. He sat down on a kitchen chair and stared up at the journalist. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"C.C. asked me not to," Benny explained, hitching up his shoulders. "Said she thought you'd dump her if you knew she was a relative of mine."

"But--"

"Call Dr. M.," Benny cut in, handing Jonathan the telephone. "We've got to get the lowdown on this thing."

"Yes, of course." Jonathan ran an anxious hand through his hair. He picked up the receiver and dialed Moorhouse's number, then stood up and paced nervously, carrying the phone with him.

"Dr. Moorhouse, this is Jonathan--yes, we just got in. No, we were in Maryland. I'm sorry I didn't call--what? No, Benedek says he doesn't believe she just took off. It doesn't make sense...not even her toothbrush? Have you contacted the police? They said what? That's all they're going to do about this? No evidence of foul play? How can they--But it's been nearly two weeks! And no one at her home has heard from her? Listen, Dr. Moorhouse, Benedek and I will be right over. Surely someone on campus remembers seeing her. Yes, we'll be right there. Good-bye."

"Well?" Benny demanded as Jonathan replaced the phone.

"Caitlyn told Dr. Moorhouse she was leaving the project--**what** project?" Jonathan asked, turning on Benny.

"She was a volunteer subject for Dr. Stafford."

"Stafford? From the Mind Sciences Department? What interest did he have in Caitlyn?" Jonathan asked as he led Benny to the car.

"Have you heard about his project?" Benny asked cautiously.

"Some **bizarre** notion about the human brain's latent psi powers...oh no, Benedek, you don't mean she's been letting that mad scientist experiment on her?" Jonathan stared at Benny across the roof of his car, his forearm resting on the edge.

"I know he's been testing the extent of her ESP, but Cait wouldn't let anyone monkey around with her brain," Benny said, getting into the passenger seat.

Jonathan stood still for a moment, then got behind the wheel. "What if she didn't know he was doing it?"

"I think you'd know if someone was playing tiddlywinks with your gray matter," Benny said, snapping on his seatbelt.

"Not necessarily." Jonathan fired up the engine and threw the car into drive. "He's been known to subject test animals to mind-altering lasers without the approval of the Board. He says it's all in the name of progress, the good of mankind, so it's not wrong. I can't believe Dr. Moorhouse let him get his hands on an innocent young woman!"

"He was just supposed to do tests. Caitly asked if I knew of someone who could help her, that she was tired of the dreams and seeing ghosts," Benny said defensively. "I didn't even know how bad the dreams were until she told me just before we left for Maryland. When we were kids, she 'saw' the accident that killed our mothers. She's been carrying that guilt around since she was eight years old, Jack. She said that most of the time she can't change what she has foreseen and just has to live with the knowledge."

Jonathan didn't quite know what to say to that. He didn't believe in psychic mumbo-jumbo, but Benny and his--cousin--did. And so did Dr. Stafford. "Do you know if Caitlyn suffers from extreme headaches?" he asked.

"What?"

"Caitlyn nearly passed out from a headache and carries a prescription pain medication. I wonder if she developed that before or after Stafford began his 'tests.'"

"She'd get headaches, sure, but everyone does," Benny said with a frown. "But not to the point of passing out."

"We've **got** to find her," Benedek," said Jonathan, his hands tightening on the steering wheel.

"Yeah," the journalist mumbled, turning his face toward the window and studying the passing scenery with a bleak gaze.

* * *

Dr. Moorhouse met them at her office door with a worried expression on her face. She was unable to tell them much more than the sketchy account she had already given Jonathan, however.

If she needed any clearer proof of the importance of Caitlyn Cassidy to these two, she had only to look at their uncharacteristic poses: the anthropology professor paced restlessly, while Benedek sat on a chair, his face buried in his hands.

"All right, let's not panic," Jonathan said, raising his hand. "There must be someone who has seen her since she left your office."

"She left here and went to see Dr. Stafford," Dr. Moorhouse reported after a moment's consideration.

"Stafford? I knew it!"

"Calm down, MacKensie," she cut in with a frown. "From there she went to the library and was seen in the dorm that evening. Cait was to meet Randi at the pub but never arrived."

"Cait would never do that," Benny spoke up. "**Something** happened to her."

"What about Stafford? Did you question him? Or his disappearance?"

"What are you babbling about, MacKensie? Stafford has **not** disappeared and he said he was disappointed by her withdrawal, but was most understanding."

"No, there's more to it than that," Jonathan insisted. "There's a connection between Stafford and Cait's disappearance, I'm certain of it. I want to talk to him."

"Now, MacKensie--"

"I'm not going to accuse him of anything--yet. I just want to talk to him, gauge his reaction to my questions. Let's go, Benny."

Benedek got to his feet and the expression on his face made Moorhouse reconsider her opinion of him. Perhaps there was more to him than idiotic practical jokes and a thoroughly irritating manner.

Jonathan gave her a quick nod of farewell and hurried after his partner who had hardly spoken since they had arrived in Dr. Moorhouse's office.

"Let me do the talking, Benedek," Jonathan warned as they stood outside Dr. Stafford's office. "We don't want to tip him off too soon...and he might be innocent."

"Get on with it, Jack," Benedek said curtly.

Jonathan gave his partner a careful look, then knocked on the office door. He led the way in after Stafford answered.

"Ah, MacKensie, what can I do for you? It's rare for the Anthropology Department to darken the doors of Mind Sciences," said Stafford jovially, standing behind his desk. Benny studied him carefully, deciding the man's smile did not reach his bright blue eyes.

He seemed harmless enough as he motioned for his visitors to be seated. Wings of white streaked his temples, giving a distinguished appearance to his auburn hair. Benny pegged his age

at late-forties, not the doddering old fool he had expected.

"Yes, well, I'm hoping you can help us," Jonathan explained, offering a smile of his own. "Benedek and I were out of town when his cousin decided to leave. Unfortunately, she didn't leave a forwarding address and no one has heard from her. Their grandmother is quite ill and naturally asking for her family."

Benny threw Jonathan a startled look--as far as he knew, Gran was on a cruise in the Bahamas and feeling fine.

"I'm sorry to hear it, but what has that to do with me?" Stafford asked, sitting down.

"Caitlyn Cassidy is his cousin and it's my understanding she was participating in some program of yours. I thought she might have said something to you."

"I'm afraid I can't be of any help." Stafford leaned back in his chair and stroked a forefinger along his upper lip. "Caitlyn apologized and asked for my understanding, said she was leaving Georgetown. I understood it to be personal--perhaps the grandmother's illness?"

"No, she took ill quite suddenly."

"I am sorry, but I have no idea where Caitlyn has gone." Stafford leaned forward to flip through his appointment book. "She said nothing of her plans."

"Well, I guess that's it, then. Sorry to have bothered you," said Jonathan, standing up and motioning to Benny. "If you think of anything, or hear from Cait, please let me or Dr. Moorhouse know, won't you?"

"Of course." Stafford's attention was on his appointments and not on his departing visitors.

"What do you think?" Jonathan asked as they descended the front steps of the Mind Sciences building.

"I'll tell you what I think, Jack," said Benedek. "I think he's phonier than a medium with a wire rig and a degree in ventriloquism. He **knows** where Cait is, I'll lay you odds, ten to one!"

Jonathan nodded, but his expression was dubious. "We shouldn't leap to any rash conclusions, Benedek. Maybe he is innocent and we're simply trying to make him into the scapegoat because we're worried about Caitlyn."

"Worried? Jonathan, for once trust your gut feelings," Benny cut in. "Katydid is in danger, pal!"

Jonathan opened his mouth, then snapped it shut and nodded. "Yes, I feel it too. It's more than just a sense of concern. I've had this growing sense of uneasiness, this feeling that she is in pain and

danger. I don't believe in that sort of thing, of course, but I feel it nonetheless."

"So what do we do about it?"

"Stafford knows more than he's admitting. I think we should follow him."

"Now you're talking, Jack!" Benny clapped Jonathan on the back.

"Cancel my appointments for the rest of the day," Stafford ordered his secretary on his way out the door. "A matter of extreme urgency has come up." In the parking lot he glanced around as he got into his car. If MacKensie and his partner were still lurking around, he intended to lead them on a merry chase.

"There he goes!"

"I see him," Jonathan murmured, switching on the ignition.

* * *

Caitlyn lay curled up on a bunk in a tiny, dark room. Shivering, she wondered if she'd ever feel warm again. She'd lost track of time, had no idea if it was day or night, had no idea if anyone had missed her yet. Would Benny remember her promise, or just assume she'd broken it? He was her only hope...everyone else would think she'd just packed up and snuck off.

The metal door slid open and she rolled up on her elbow.

"Get up."

Cait brought her bound wrists up to shield her eyes against the sudden flare of light from the room beyond the door. A large hand clamped on her shoulder, forcing her to her feet.

"We must step up the treatments," Stafford informed her pleasantly. "It seems you have some friends concerned about your disappearance. They'll never find you here, of course. They tried to follow me, but I lost them."

"Benny?" Cait stumbled as Stafford pushed her in front of him.

"What a loving family you have, my dear. Your cousin has Jonathan MacKensie helping him look for you."

"Jonathan?" she whispered.

"Won't do any good, of course." Stafford shoved Cait against the upright table, fastening the leather straps around her ankles and waist before releasing her bound hands. Before she could flex her fingers, her wrists were strapped to the table. "No one will find this abandoned bomb shelter. It makes a perfect laboratory," he continued, stepping on the

foot pump that lowered the table into a horizontal position.

"Please don't do this," Cait begged as he began attaching wires to her forehead.

"But my dear, what progress we've made! We can't stop now. In fact, I intend to increase the electrical stimulation." Stafford showed Cait what looked like the eartips of a stethoscope.

"No--!" She broke off as he shoved a large piece of plastic into her mouth.

"Can't have you biting your tongue, can we?" he said cheerfully, holding the tips of the device to her temples. "Electroshock has been known to produce severe involuntary muscle reaction."

Eyes wide, Cait tried to shake her head, but the vise on the base of the table held her neck still.

"We shall have to use a higher voltage than I planned," he continued, watching the gauges and not his victim. "Fortunately we've already made some progress these past two weeks."

Cait's body arched against the pain as he activated the electroshock. **Jonathan!** her mind screamed as wave after wave of torment swept over her.

* * *

"Did you hear that?" Jonathan asked, pausing, his head tilted to one side.

"Hear what? How could we lose him? We were right on his little pointed tail," Benny complained.

"I heard someone calling my name," Jonathan said, listening. "There--it sounds like Cait!"

Benny frowned and looked at his friend who was peering through the gathering dusk at the run-down street surrounding them. "Uh, Jon-boy, I don't know how to tell you this, but--"

"Come on, Benny!" interrupted Jonathan, thumping the journalist's chest and breaking into a broad grin. "This way!" He took off at a run, leaving his companion gaping after him in utter astonishment.

"Jack!" Benedek sprinted after him. "Where are we going?"

"I told you--Cait is nearby."

"Where?"

Jonathan paused and gestured down the street. "If you were a mad scientist and working secretly, what would be an ideal hideout?"

"A run-down castle up on a cliff," Benny said promptly. "There are no castles in Georgetown, J.J., and I don't think there's a cliff around here--"

"What about an abandoned, underground bomb shelter? It would have its own power source, virtually forgotten--"

"Except by the mad scientists," Benny finished, getting excited. "Okay, so what if he has found--you know of one, don't you? Nearby."

Jonathan smiled and nodded. "When Georgetown had it built for its most important faculty members, this was a good neighborhood and many of the Board members, even the college president, maintained homes here. It's been virtually forgotten, except, perhaps for the Cultural Anthropology staff who see it as an example of 20th century man's near self-destruction. Even though it's kept locked, the key is easily obtainable by G.I. staff members."

"Even by someone in Mind Sciences?"

"Where better to conduct a lab on what it would be like if a small group of people were forced to exist in such conditions?"

"Where better to conduct secret experiments?"

"Exactly. I think we should check it out, see if the generator is functioning, if the shelter looks like it's been recently entered." Jonathan ran a hand through his hair. "I can't explain it, Benedek, but for some reason I have a very clear mental image of Caitlyn in such a place."

"Then let's get gone." Benny didn't question Jonathan's words. "Lead on, Professor!"

He followed his companion, not about to admit that he had a similar, uneasy hunch about C.C.'s whereabouts.

* * *

Cait lay limp on Stafford's table, exhausted by the pain. She felt his hands touching the wires on her forehead, and her skin shuddered with revulsion.

Abruptly, Cait was swept with a strange sensation of disassociation and she seemed to be watching Stafford as he fiddled with the controls on the electroshock machine, and then checked the readings of the electroencephalogram.

She felt light, almost weightless as she moved and peered into Stafford's face.

He gave no sign of seeing her, merely lifted the limp wrist of the woman on the table and took her pulse.

Am I dead? Cait wondered, watching with detachment as Stafford whirled toward the doorway.

Jonathan and Benny burst into the laboratory, and the three men faced each other with determined expressions.

"You're certainly more clever than I gave you credit for, MacKensie," Stafford said as calmly as if conversing at a faculty gathering. "I thought I had a few more days before you remembered this place."

"What have you done to her?!"

"Really, MacKensie, there's no need to be so melodramatic," Stafford protested. "I have been releasing Caitlyn's full potential--"

"Nearly killing her, you mean! Performing unethical experiments on an unwilling subject, tampering with the human brain." Jonathan's anger boiled to the surface.

"Nonsense. I haven't harmed her," Stafford said in self-defense. "Just look at the increased brain wave activity."

Benny had sidled over to the table and taken Caitlyn's hand. "Jonathan, there's no pulse!"

Jonathan grabbed Stafford by his lapels and slammed him up against the wall, holding him so he had to stretch to make his toes touch the ground. "Your career is over, Stafford! How does it feel to murder in the name of science?"

"Let me go, I can help her," Stafford struggled to free himself from Jonathan's steely grip. "Let me go!"

"I need help over here," Benny called and Jonathan glanced over to see Benedek performing CPR.

"I can help."

Jonathan released his grip and rushed to Benny's aid.

From above, Cait watched in bemusement as Stafford spelled Benny, freeing her cousin to begin artificial respiration while Jonathan squeezed in next to him.

"Please, Caity, come back," Jonathan whispered, gaze never leaving her face. "Don't leave me now!" He clutched her hand in both of his as if he could will her back to life. "I love you."

"Jonathan?" She touched his cheek, then felt an incredible pull as everything went black.

"We've got a pulse and she's breathing," Benny announced, his hand on her other wrist. He helped Jonathan unfasten the straps holding her down and he stood ready to catch her if his partner should drop Cait.

Jonathan gathered Cait in his arms, kissing her forehead as her head slumped toward his chest. "We've got to get her to the hospital, Benny."

"I never meant...it was not supposed to be this way," Stafford protested, taking a step toward the limp woman in Jonathan's arms.

"I will see you burn in hell for this," Jonathan promised and Benny's blue eyes widened. He had never seen his mild-mannered partner so vehement.

"It wasn't supposed to be this way," Stafford muttered again, looking around his lab.

"Let's get her out of here, Benny." Jonathan inclined his head toward the door and Benny led the way out.

As they climbed the steps leading to the surface, the sounds of Stafford destroying his lab followed them.

"He can destroy the evidence, but it won't make any difference," Jonathan said to Benny. "We're witnesses and after Caitlyn tells the police what he did to her--"

"I'll call the police from the hospital," Benedek said distractedly, looking up and down the street. "Hang on, Jack, I'll get the car and bring it up here." He dug into the professor's coat pocket as Jonathan shifted Caitlyn slightly to give him better access, and got the car keys.

With a bound, Benny jumped to the ground and ran for the car as if he was back in one of his high school track meets. It occurred to him that the race this time wasn't for a trophy, but for Caitlyn's life.

Jonathan walked the short distance from the bomb shelter, then waited, murmuring to Cait in a soft, reassuring tone. It didn't matter that she probably couldn't hear him.

Benny was back with the car in a surprisingly short time. He screeched to a stop, leaped out and helped Jonathan get Cait into the back seat. He slid behind the steering wheel and fumbled with his seat belt. "How's she doing, Jack?"

"She's still with us," Jonathan replied from the back seat, Caitlyn in his lap. He supported her neck with his left arm as he cradled her. Gently brushing her hair from his face, he exclaimed, "Good God!"

"What's wrong?" Benny demanded, peering in the rearview mirror.

"These bums," Jonathan said, staring at her temples. "What did he do to her?"

"Electroshock, Jack, and at a wattage no legit therapist would ever dream of using," Benny exclaimed angrily. "He was frying her!"

Jonathan stroked her cheek then shifted her in his arms to hold Cait against his chest. His free hand caressed her hair and he kissed the top of her head.

"Give her one for me, pal," said Benny, still watching in the rearview mirror. He laid his arm on the car's horn and floored the gas pedal, throwing

Jonathan back against the seat, Cait securely held in his arms.

* * *

"Surely they must know **something** by now," Jonathan muttered as he paced the waiting room at the hospital.

"She's still alive, Jon, and that's something," Benny replied, taking a sip of cold coffee and making a face. "At least she's alive until they give her some of this coffee."

Jonathan gave him an annoyed look and started pacing again, turning his back on his companion.

"Benny," he said hesitantly after a few minutes, "what about her--her mind? We have no way of knowing how it has been affected by this--"

"She's gonna be **fine**, Jack," Benny insisted, "just fine."

"But if--"

"MacKensie?" Dr. Moorhouse stood in the waiting room doorway. "How is she?"

Wheeling to face her, Jonathan managed a half-smile. "She's with the doctors now. Her heart had stopped, but Stafford and Benny did CPR--"

"**Stafford?**"

"He's had her tucked away for the last two weeks--he couldn't let her quit," Jonathan explained as Moorhouse dropped onto a chair. "He wasn't merely testing her, Dr. Moorhouse. He was conducting experiments to enhance whatever psi abilities she has."

"He was stimulating areas of her brain with electroshock," Benny continued, handing the woman a cup of coffee from the waiting room coffee bar.

"The voltage was far too much and I have no idea how many treatments he'd already given her," Jonathan added, running a hand through his hair. "Her heart did stop, and I don't know the extent of neurological damage he's caused her. Benedek has already called the police."

"Yes, I've spoken with them. Stafford is dead, Jonathan," Moorhouse said, setting her cup of coffee on a nearby table. "The police found him in the bomb shelter, apparently asphyxiated when a short in the electrical equipment started a fire. They found a note under his body...all it said was 'I'm sorry'."

The men looked at each other, but neither spoke. A moment later, the doctor entered the room and all their attention went to her.

"Mr. Benedek, your cousin has been stabilized. Her condition is serious, but I believe she will recover with care."

"Can I see her?" Benny asked.

"She's sleeping, but you may go in briefly," the doctor replied understandingly.

Benny started for the doorway, then looked at Jonathan. "Can Jack come in too?"

"I don't--"

"Please? I won't stay long, and I promise I won't disturb her. Please?" Jonathan pleaded, giving Dr. Tanaka the smile even Moorhouse could not always resist.

"It's okay, doc, he's nearly family," Benny said helpfully, taking Jonathan by the arm. "He's her fiancé."

"Well, in that case--"

"Thank you, Doctor!" Jonathan exclaimed, shaking her hand and hurrying along with Benny. "Fiancé? Isn't that a bit presumptuous?" he demanded outside Cait's door.

Benny shrugged. "Got you in, didn't it? Relaxation, Jack, I'm not going to get my shotgun out." He pushed his way into the private room and halted.

It looked like a million tubes and wires were growing out of Cait's slight body. If Jonathan had thought her fragile-looking before, now she looked positively ethereal. Her hair provided the only color, her complexion nearly as pale as the sheets. Only the slight rise and fall of her chest gave him the reassurance of life.

"Cait? It's me, Benny. You're okay now, kid. The White Knight and his faithful squire came to your rescue," Benny said, taking a limp hand in his. "No one's going to hurt you again, princess."

Jonathan stood behind Benny, staring at Caitlyn with a yearning in his brown eyes. He watched as Benny kissed her hand then carefully laid it by her side on the bed.

"Listen, sweetheart, the doc says we can't stay in here long, but I won't be far. I'll be just a few feet away in the waiting room, so all you have to do is give a shout and I'll be right in here. I can't make any promises for Jack, but I bet he'll be right here with me. I'm gonna run down to the gift shop and buy a deck of cards; see if I can win his watch, maybe his car. I'm feeling kind of lucky right now." Benny patted her hand, then turned to Jonathan. "I'll be outside, talking to the doc, okay?"

Jonathan nodded, and patted Benny's shoulder. "I won't be but a minute," he murmured, his eyes once more on Caitlyn.

He waited until Benedek had exited, then said, "Stafford won't hurt you any more, Cait. He's killed himself." He touched her colorless cheek briefly,

and added, "Caitlyn, I love you very much. Please get well. I need you."

After a while, he blinked to clear his vision, then turned for the doorway. It would be a long struggle, but he didn't doubt that she would make it back to them.

"Jonathan?"

Uncertain whether he'd actually heard the whisper, Jonathan turned back to the bed. "Caitlyn?"

Her hand moved restlessly along the sheet and Jonathan gently took it, engulfing it in both of his. He bent over and smiled when her eyes flickered open. "You gave us quite a fright," he said, still holding her hand in his left and brushing her forehead with his right.

"Benny?"

"He's right outside--do you want me to fetch him?" Jonathan asked, bringing his hand down from her forehead to her cheek, letting his thumb stroke the pale skin.

Cait's eyes drifted shut for a moment, and she gave a barely perceptible shake of her head.

"Don't worry...Gran. Tell him."

"All right. Is there anything else I can do for you?" he asked.

"Don't leave...me. So cold. So afraid."

"The doctor said we can only stay a minute--"

"

Cait shivered and her hand went limp in his grasp. Jonathan turned as the doctor entered, and gave her an apologetic smile.

"I know you said not to stay, but she asked me not to leave," he began, gesturing at Cait. "Would it be all right if I just sit here for a bit? I won't talk to her--"

"I really shouldn't allow it--"

"Please?"

Dr. Tanaka frowned at Jonathan, then looked at Cait. "I'll have the nurses keep an eye on you, and if I find out you've been exhausting my patient not even your smile will save you. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," Jonathan assured her, flashing that smile. He pulled up a chair and promptly sat down, still holding Cait's hand. After Dr. Tanaka checked Caitlyn's vitals, making a few notes on her chart, she left the room with a warning look at the professor.

He settled back in his chair, making certain Cait's hand never left his grasp. Head leaning back, his eyes drifted shut and he began to relax, falling into that state of not-quite-asleep and not-quite awake.

Somewhere in the distance, he heard a childish voice proclaiming, "I don't **want** to be the princess! Why can't I be a knight?"

"Only boys can be knights, Caity. It says so in my book."

Jonathan saw a small dark-haired boy thrust an open picture book under the nose of a golden-haired girl.

"Stupid book. Why doesn't the princess just hit the evil knight? Then she can run away."

"Because it's the white knight's job to rescue her. Then she marries him and he gets to be king."

"Are you sure it says that in the book? I think you're making it all up, Benny."

Jonathan chuckled to himself. He'd always suspected Benny of a heroic streak to match his vivid imagination..."It's all right, Cait," he murmured, "next time **you** get to be the white knight."

The scene faded, replaced by a memory from Jonathan's own childhood. He was sick in bed with the flu and his father was reading to him from **The Adventures of Robin Hood**. "That's what I'm going to do when I'm grown up," his childish voice proclaimed, bringing a smile to the adult's face.

Caitlyn's voice said teasingly, "Now who's being heroic., Professor?"

Startled, Jonathan sat up and turned his head, looking at the woman in the bed. She slept, her eyes closed, chest rising and falling regularly.

"Imagining things," Jonathan told himself under his breath. He gave Cait's hand a brief squeeze and settled back in his chair.

The next time he opened his eyes, Benny was shaking his shoulder. "Come on, Jack, take a break. We'll grab a bite and I'll fill you in on what Tanaka said."

"But I can't leave--I promised Caitlyn," Jonathan protested, looking at Cait.

"You think she'd want you to stay here and starve? Trust me, buds, when she wakes up she'll skin us both if she finds out you've slept on this chair, ignored your job and went without eating."

Jonathan gaped at him, then looked carefully at his watch. "Seven-ten--"

"**A.M.**, J.J.," Benny said. "You've got a ten o'clock class on Tuesdays, don't you?"

Rubbing his face, Jonathan nodded. "Yes, but--"

"Never mind the buts. You've got time to go home and grab a shower and some fresh duds, then I'll take you to breakfast. Come on, Jon-boy." He urged the professor to his feet and guided him to the door.

The door swung shut behind them as Caitlyn murmured drowsily, "Jonathan?" Her hand groped out and touched the chair he had used, then relaxed.

* * *

"You realize I'm only releasing you on the understanding that you will continue as an outpatient," Dr. Tanaka told Cait. "You are not fully recovered and shouldn't be alone. We have to resolve the issue of the headaches; the extent of the neurological damage seems minimal but I want to do a few more tests."

Cait nodded and touched one temple. "I don't enjoy blacking out or having the headaches. I'm just glad Dr. Moorhouse has offered me a place to stay where it will be reasonably quiet. The dorm doesn't exactly have a calming atmosphere."

Tanaka nodded and looked pleased. "Your ride should be here shortly, I believe. Rest until then, hm?"

Obediently, Cait sat in the chair next to her bed and picked up the book Benny had brought her--his latest best seller. Jonathan had been noticeably absent the last couple of days and even though Benny insisted he **had** been there and she'd slept through his visits, she suspected her cousin was only trying to make her feel better. No doubt Jonathan had given serious thought to any involvement with her--

"Hey, good-looking, let's blow this pop stand."

Cait looked up from her book and couldn't resist smiling at Benny's cheerfully grinning face. "I've just been waiting for my chariot," she said, closing the book and standing up.

"I don't know if there's room in my car for this botanical haul." Benny glanced at the several floral gifts.

"I've asked the nurses to distribute them to patients who haven't been as fortunate," Caitlyn said, reaching for the overnight bag that Dr. Moorhouse had brought the day after her admittance.

"Even this one from Jack?"

Caitlyn looked at the enormous vase of yellow roses. "Maybe I'll keep this one," she murmured, fingering one rose.

"You know, J.J. would have been here but he had to give finals today." Benny hefted the vase and took the overnight bag from her.

"You don't have to make excuses, Benny. And neither does Jonathan. I appreciate all he's done,

but I won't make him uncomfortable by expecting a relationship."

"Whoa-ho, Caity! I'll tell you right now that **Jack** is expecting one and you'd better not disappoint him," Benny exclaimed.

"Benny, how can he possibly want anything to do with me? I've lied to him, caused a scandal with one of his peers, and I'm still one of your 'bizarre' associates. He can't afford to get involved with me," Caitlyn said, her voice trembling.

"Don't you think Jack should make that decision?"

They were in the elevator now, and Cait turned to stare at Benny. "Don't **you** think he has?"

"You mean because I'm here instead of him? I told you, he has finals. And he has been here, C.C. I've had to pry him away from your side just to get food into him. You've been too out of it to notice anything. Trust me on this."

"I want to," she said softly, unable to meet Benny's gaze, "but I'm afraid to, Benny."

"I told you girls can't be knights."

Her head swung around and she stared at Benny. "What?"

"You think a knight would give up this easily? You think Jonathan will give up, just because you've turned chicken?" Benny shifted the vase in his arms as the elevator door opened. "You disappoint me, Princess. I thought I'd taught you better."

"But Benny--"

"I've known all along that you and Jack would go together like peanut butter and mustard--maybe a little strange to the rest of the world, but what the heck. So long as the two of you are happy, what does the rest matter?" Benny escorted her to his rental car.

"Peanut butter and mustard?"

"Stranger combinations have worked--why not you and J.J.?"

Cait buckled her seat belt and took the vase of roses from Benny, burying her nose in the heady perfume. "I don't think it's what he wants, but I'll wait and see."

"That's all I'm asking," Benny grinned and gunned the motor. "Wait'll you see what I've got waiting for you."

"You didn't call Gran, did you? I don't want her cutting her cruise short because of me."

"Nah, something better than the old doll." And Benny refused to tell her any more, regaling her instead with the story of his recent ghost hunt in Maryland with Jonathan.

"This is Jonathan's house," Cait said a few minutes later.

"So it is," Benny agreed, opening her door and taking the vase.

"Benny--"

"There's somebody here to see you," he said, taking her arm and escorting her up the walk.

When he opened the front door, Cait paused and stared. Jonathan's neat living room was strewn with streamers and balloons, and Randi sat beaming from her chair. Before Cait could open her mouth, several people seemed to pop up from nowhere, all throwing confetti and shouting, "Surprise!"

"Welcome home." Jonathan said, taking her hands and kissing her cheek. The warmth in his dark eyes was unmistakable and he kept a grip on one hand as he put his other arm around her.

"Home?"

"I hope you don't mind, my dear, but Jonathan has offered to let you stay here--with Benedek, of course," Moorhouse added.

"Yeah, ol' J.J. here has decided I can sleep on his lumpy couch," Benny announced, handing Cait a glass of punch. "That way, if he has to leave, you won't be alone. It'll be just like a sleep-over."

Jonathan's smile never slipped. "I don't have any classes for summer term, so it should be a fairly relaxing time."

"We'll see," Benny promised, blue eyes glinting with mischief. "You'll never know what Dr. M might cook up for us, and Caity here can be our assistant."

Cait looked at Jonathan, fully expecting him to protest, but he merely smiled at her. "I think it will take two of us to keep him in line, don't you?" he asked, tightening his hold on her hand.

"I don't think anyone can do **that**," she said with a laugh. "Even Gran gave up long ago."

"You're just mad because I wouldn't let you be the knight," Benny retorted around a mouthful of canapés. "I told you girls can't."

Jonathan looked startled, and he opened his mouth. Before he could say anything, however, Benny shoved a canapé in his mouth.

"Try this one, Jack--it's an old Benedek family recipe."

"What **is** it? It tastes like peanut butter and...something tangy."

Cait clapped a hand to her mouth and Benny grinned.

"Like it?"

"Well, yes, but what is it?"

"An old family recipe, like I said. Your phone's ringing, Jack, but you stay here. I'll get it." Benny scurried off to snatch up the phone in the kitchen. "Yo, Jack's place. Sib, I've been trying to

reach you!" He lowered his voice and turned his back on the doorway. "You've gotta take the spell off. You were right--I shouldn't have interfered. What do you mean you can't?"

His gypsy friend replied calmly, "I can't take it off, Benny, because I never put one on. I just told you I did so you'd stop pestering me. The only magic has been the natural magic between a man and a woman."

Benny craned his head to look into the living room where he saw Cait and Jonathan sitting side by side on the sofa, Cait's hand firmly clasped in Jonathan's. "That's some pretty strong magic all right. Thanks, Sib."

"Maybe next time you'll listen to your wise old gypsy woman," Sibyl said with a laugh, sounding every bit of her twenty-three years. "Take care, Benny."

"Yeah, you too, sweetheart. Catch ya later." Benny hung up the phone. Maybe she was right about not interfering magically, but even Nature needed a boost. If he hadn't forced circumstances to bring them together, they'd both still be searching for that unnamed part of themselves.

"**Doctor M**, let's dance!" he cried, grabbing Juliana Moorhouse around the waist and sweeping her into a wild dance step.

From the sofa Jonathan and Cait watched the dancers with amusement, then looked at each other. "Did you really mean it, Professor, when you said you loved me?" she asked softly.

"Of course I did," he assented, pausing and frowning a little. "You remember hearing that? But you were--"

"I remember," she interrupted. "And you know what, Jonathan? I love you, too." She smiled at his expression. "The White Knight **and** Robin Hood rolled into one--what more could a girl ask for, Professor?"

Jonathan gaped, blinked and started to ask, then changed his mind. "Well, do you suppose the princess would dance with him?"

"Always," she said, letting him pull her to her feet. His arms held her close and they danced to a tune only they could hear.

* * *

"No! Jonathan!"

The wild desperate scream brought Jonathan MacKensie bolt upright in bed. Stumbling from his bed, he hurried across the minuscule hall to the guest room where Caitlyn was thrashing about and muttering in her sleep.

"Cait? It's all right--it's only a dream," he murmured, sitting on the bed and shaking her shoulder. "Caitlyn, listen to me! You're safe," he continued, repeating the reassurances that had become a nightly necessity. In the month since her ordeal at the hands of Elias Stafford, the dreams and headaches had steadily increased in number and intensity.

"Caitlyn," Jonathan repeated again and her eyes finally opened.

"Jonathan? You're all right?" she demanded, sitting up and cupping his face in her hands. Assured he was alive and in one piece, Cait wrapped her arms around his chest and buried her face against his shoulder. Jonathan embraced her, his large hands stroking her back.

"I'm **fine**," he assured her. "Are you all right, Caitlyn?"

She pulled back from him a little, took a deep breath and looked at his concerned face. "Yes," she said, managing a wavering smile.

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

"No! I don't want to even think about it," Cait exclaimed, one hand shoving her long hair out of her eyes. "Don't go," she said, grabbing his arm as he shifted his weight as if to get up.

"But Caitlyn--"

"Just hold me, please?"

Jonathan hesitated and Caitlyn took his hand and pulled him further into her bed.

"Please, Jonathan? I just need to be held," she said and Jonathan could not refuse the pleading in her eyes. With his back propped against the headboard, he settled her in his embrace.

Cait snuggled against him, her head resting on his chest. He kissed her forehead and brushed a strand of flyaway hair from her eyes.

"Umm," Cait said and Jonathan could feel the tension fading from her body as she relaxed. "Thanks, Professor."

After a moment Jonathan ventured, "I wish you'd reconsider those sleeping tablets, Cait. They're over-the-counter, non-addictive and can't possibly hurt--" He stopped as she squeezed his ribs. "No?"

"**No**," she repeated. "I don't want any pills."

"All right," he conceded. "I just thought--these nightmares are getting out of control, and...Did I ever tell you about this recurring dream I had when I was working on my graduate thesis?"

Cait sounded sleepily amused. "Save the lectures for your classes, Professor. Just be here for me, that's all I want."

His answer was subdued and very soft. "I shall always try to be here for you, Caitlyn."

She smiled and closed her eyes, rubbing her cheek against his chest, sighing in contentment.

* * *

Cait awoke curled on her side and she stretched, encountering a very warm, very solid body pressed against her back. A masculine arm was draped across her, the hand brushing her breasts. She shifted and Jonathan buried his nose in her hair.

"Professor?" she said softly, nudging him.

"Ummmm," he mumbled, pulling her closer.

"Jonathan," she said, a little louder and digging her elbow into his stomach.

"What?" he asked sleepily, snuggling her into the curve of his body so that they were lying spoon-fashion.

"Does this mean we've officially slept together?"

He rested his chin on the top of her head while he considered. "I suppose so. Do you think Benedek will come after me with a shotgun?"

"Just to be safe, let's not tell him," Cait decided.

"Good thing he's in California on some wild goose chase or other," Jonathan said, making no move to release her, and, in fact, clutching her tighter to him.

"Don't you have a class to teach?" Cait asked after a moment, reluctant to leave his comforting embrace, but knowing they couldn't stay this way forever.

Jonathan finally rolled onto his back, one arm across his eyes. "Yes," he sighed. "I should never have agreed to fill in for Dr. Pierce."

"I'll fix some breakfast while you shower," she offered, sitting up and throwing back the covers. She turned and looked down at him. "Jonathan?"

"Yes?" He lowered his arm and met her gaze.

"Thank you." She leaned down and kissed him, then bounced from the bed, snatching up her robe.

Jonathan lay in the bed for a moment, staring after her, his hands behind his head. Then he grinned and rolled out of bed to head for the shower.

When he entered the kitchen, knotting his tie, the table was set with a cosy-covered teapot in the middle. Cait stood at the stove, tipping an omelet from a pan onto warm plates.

He moved behind her, bending and wrapping his arms around her waist, nuzzling her neck and pulling her against him.

"Behave yourself, Professor," she cautioned, setting the pan down and turning in his embrace to

face him. "I think I've found the solution to my sleeping problems. and it doesn't involve any drugs."

"What's that?" He lowered his head and nibbled on her ear.

"You."

"What?" He drew back and stared down at her.

"Now, Jonathan," she said, bringing her hands down to rest on his chest. "Would it be so bad sleeping with me?"

"You know it's not that," he protested, releasing her. "In fact, I can think of nothing I'd like better than to awaken with you in my arms."

"But?"

He dragged a hand through his hair and paced between the table and stove. "You're suggesting we sleep together!"

Head tilted, Cait folded her arms across her chest. "We did last night, and seem to have survived."

"Yes, but we **slept**."

"And that's all I'm suggesting now, unless **you** want more."

Jonathan paced some more, worked his mouth a few times while trying to gather his thoughts. "That's the problem, Caity. I **do** want more, but I don't think we're ready for that step."

"You've never slept with a woman?"

"Not the way you're suggesting." Jonathan rubbed the back of his neck. "I've never **lived** with a woman."

"I've been living here for the last month, Jonathan."

"As a house guest, not as a...lover."

"Oh."

He took her hands, led her to the table where he sat her in a chair. "I have never felt this way before, never loved anyone the way I love you. This is special, Cait, and I don't want to ruin that by moving too quickly. Can you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"You don't want to sleep with me," she said with a careless shrug. "I'm not going to force you." She pulled her hands from his and stood up. "I have to finish dishing up breakfast."

"Caitlyn."

He was behind her, his hands on her shoulders. "It's all right, Jonathan. You don't have to say--"

She broke off as he turned her around to face him and brought his mouth down to cover hers. His arms enfolded her in a hug and he drew her against him. Cait's arms slid around him and she stretched up on tiptoe to get as close as possible.

"Don't ever say I don't want you," he said huskily against her lips.

Cait was trembling when she drew away from him. "Then why--"

"Because you're special--what we have is special, and I don't want to treat it casually. I don't want us to just blindly fall into bed. I want it to be a conscious decision because we're ready to make a commitment to each other. I don't want to lose you, Cait, but I don't want to force a commitment."

"Jonathan--" She touched his cheek, then drew her hand back. "You couldn't force me." A rueful smile crossed her face. "But you're afraid I'll force **you**. I won't do that to you, Professor." She slipped from his arms, turned her back on him. "Your breakfast is getting cold."

"Cait--"

"I've been thinking that it's time I moved out anyway. I was only supposed to be here until the doctor said I could be left alone. And Benny was here, too, but now he's gone back to New York so that leaves us...alone. I'm sure Dr. Moorhouse could arrange a dorm room for me like I had before all this happened. It would be for the best, for both of us." Cait busied herself with serving the omelet and blueberry muffins, avoiding Jonathan's gaze.

"Cait--"

"Besides, I'm afraid the nightmares aren't going to go away and it's not fair that I keep waking you up. You need your sleep."

"Caitlyn--"

"In fact, I've been thinking I should go stay with my grandmother," Cait continued, ignoring Jonathan's attempts to interrupt. "New York's not so far away that we can't see each other...sometime. Maybe we need some distance, Jonathan. I've been practically in your pocket since we met. I think we just need to back off."

Jonathan stared at her back as she returned the skillet to the stovetop. He took a deep breath, opened his mouth, then reconsidered and shut it again. Finally he said, "I'm **not** trying to drive you away, Caitlyn. You've got to believe that." He lifted concerned eyes to her face as she turned and added, "But if you really want to leave here..." He swallowed and confessed, "I wish you'd reconsider staying in town, at any rate. New York's too far away."

"If I can't make other arrangements, I'll have to go where I--can," she said, biting back what she'd started to say. Jonathan seemed relieved, which meant she had made the right decision. Besides, if she wasn't around, then her nightmare couldn't come true. "You'd better hurry," she added, managing a smile. "You'll be late for class."

Jonathan looked at his watch and gave a start. He snatched up a muffin and juggled it along with his coat and briefcase. "I'll see you tonight, Cait," he promised on his way out the door.

Cait stood still and watched the door bang shut behind him, then mechanically began to clear the table. As she scraped the uneaten omelet into the garbage disposal, she decided she would go see Dr. Moorhouse once she'd cleaned up. The sooner she did that, the sooner this situation would be over.

* * *

"Dr. Moorhouse, do you know where--I never saw where Dr. Stafford--I was unconscious," Cait said, sitting in the chair opposite the older woman's desk and twisting her hands nervously in her lap.

"My dear, you needn't worry," Juliana Moorhouse assured her. "The Board has decided to raze the bomb shelter--"

"No! I have to go there," Cait interrupted, putting her palms on the desktop and leaning toward Moorhouse. "There are so many questions, and no one to answer them. I want to see if there's anything he left behind that might help."

"Caitlyn, the police have already done a thorough search--"

"They were looking for criminal evidence." Cait went to the window and stared out at the back of the Mind Sciences building. "Sometimes I 'see' ghosts, Dr. Moorhouse. Did you know that? Since Stafford's 'enhancements', I wonder if I still can, and if I can communicate with them."

"Caitlyn! You're not serious? You want to see if you can contact **Stafford**? After what he did--?" Moorhouse exclaimed, standing next to Cait and placing a hand on her shoulder.

"**Because** of what he did. He's the only one with the answers." Cait's fist clenched and she turned to the other woman. Juliana could clearly see the anguish in Cait's eyes. "I can't leave Georgetown without some answers."

"Leave? But what about MacKensie?"

"We've discussed it and this is for the best," Cait said, turning her back on the window. "He's not ready for a relationship."

"Nonsense! I've known Jonathan MacKensie for a very long time and I've never seen him in love until now."

"If I stay, Jonathan will die."

"What?"

"I've dreamed it, several times, and it's always the same." Cait avoided Moorhouse's gaze. "It's not clear, but I know I'm involved."

"Have you told Jonathan?"

"He wouldn't believe it...you know how skeptical he is. Even if I knew the details, he'd ignore the warnings. So you see, it really **is** for the best that I leave. But before I do, I must go to Stafford's lab. Please, Dr. Moorhouse? Can you help me?"

"My dear, I just don't...it would be fascinating to witness," Juliana interrupted herself. "That would be my condition, Caitlyn. I have to accompany you. I don't think you should go alone, and I doubt that you want MacKensie along. Benedek is still out of town, so that leaves me."

"But Dr. Moorhouse--"

"That's my final word. I accompany you, or you don't go."

Caitlyn now faced the Dragon Lady who ruled Jonathan's professional life, the woman who had blackmailed him into doing her paranormal research and sometimes made his life miserable. She had been the undoing of many a career at Georgetown, but those who survived were the stronger for it.

"Just you and I, Dr. Moorhouse. I don't want Jonathan involved," Cait bargained.

"Of course not," Moorhouse beamed, patting Caitlyn's arm. "Let me see if we can find the key, and we'll be on our way. She stepped into the outer office where she instructed her secretary to send for the key to the old bomb shelter.

As they approached the site, Caitlyn's anxiety increased and she scrubbed the palms of her hands along her jean-clad thighs. Moorhouse, from behind the wheel, noticed but said nothing.

"Here we are," she announced cheerfully, parking her car.

"Yes," Cait agreed, swallowing hard. Moorhouse reached across the seat and touched Cait's hand.

"Are you absolutely sure that you don't want MacKensie here?" she asked softly.

Cait hesitated, then nodded and opened the car door. With a sigh, Juliana followed.

"You--you have the key?" Cait asked when they stood before the door.

"Key and these large flashlights." Moorhouse said, handing one of the lantern-style flashlights to Caitlyn. "The power has been off since the fire. And we'd better prop the door open--the air will be stale without air conditioning."

Cait nodded and looked around until she found a large rock to prop against the door. She tested it, making certain it wouldn't blow shut on them. "Let's go," she said, taking a deep breath and

heading down the stairs. Switching on her own lantern, Moorhouse followed.

The darkness was oppressive, closing in around them despite the glow of the flashlights. Cait, in the lead, paused in the doorway of the lab where she had suffered so much.

She took a deep breath, trying to steady her nerves.

"Cait, we don't have to stay--"

Caitlyn shook off Juliana's hand. "I do. I have to face this, Dr. Moorhouse, or it will haunt me for the rest of my life." She shone the light around the room and cautiously took a step over the threshold. She threw her head back, gasping for air.

"Caitlyn!" Moorhouse grabbed the younger woman's arm and tried to draw her back.

"So much pain," Cait moaned, resisting Juliana's efforts and going further into the room. "Dr. Stafford, are you here?"

Moorhouse's eyes grew even wider than normal when a small eddy of wind began to form in the middle of the floor. "It must be coming from outside," she muttered, clutching her flashlight.

The whirlwind began to surge upward and a face slowly took shape in the midst of its vortex.

"Good heavens!" she breathed, staring in fascination. "Dr. Stafford!"

The whirlwind moved toward Caitlyn, completely engulfing her slight form. However, it didn't ruffle so much as a single hair.

"Why?" Cait cried, head thrown back. "Why did you do this to me?" She dropped her lantern and it rolled across the room, throwing its light along the floor. "Tell me how to undo this!"

Juliana nearly dropped her own flashlight when Elias Stafford's voice sounded from the whirlwind.

"I am sorry," he said, and his face took on a sad appearance. "I never meant to hurt you...please believe that. You have a gift, an undeveloped talent. Developing that kind of ability had been my life's work. You were to be the fulfillment of my dreams..."

"At what cost? I can't sleep. I have these visions...much worse than before," Caitlyn shouted, turning around but still within the vortex. "I see unclear visions of death surrounding people...I don't know how or when it will happen to them. I sometimes feel pain that isn't mine. I wake up screaming every night. You have to tell me how to stop it!"

"There is no end, only control. You must learn how to work with your gift."

"**No!**" Caitlyn screamed as the force of the whirlwind increased, now whipping at her hair and

clothes. She dropped to her knees, her hands pressed to her temples.

Juliana tried to move forward, hoping to pull Cait from the vortex, but the wind grew to gale force, shoving her out of the lab. "Caitlyn!"

* * *

"Hello, Liz; is Dr. Moorhouse in?" Jonathan asked, popping into the office and smiling at the secretary.

"She and Caitlyn left about forty-five minutes ago," Liz said, looking up from the report she was typing.

"Oh, really? I wanted to talk to her about Cait," he said in surprise. "Did they go to see about a dorm room for her?"

"I don't think so. Dr. Moorhouse had the key to the old bomb shelter," Liz informed him.

"What? Why would they go there?" Jonathan shouted, dropping his armload of papers.

"I don't know," Liz began, but Jonathan had already bolted from the room, forgetting all in his haste. She gaped after him, then sighed and got up to pick up the scattered test papers and put them away for safekeeping.

* * *

Jonathan's car braked to a halt outside the bomb shelter, loose gravel skidding under the tires. He snatched the keys from the ignition, flung open his compact's door and got out. "Cait!"

A woman turned and his heart leapt, but then plummeted as he recognized Juliana Moorhouse.

"Dr. Moorhouse--where is Caitlyn? How could you just let her come back **here** of all places?"

"Really, MacKensie," Juliana protested. "She was quite determined and would have come alone. Caitlyn insisted she had to confront this place before she leaves town."

Jonathan pulled on the door handle but it refused to budge. "Leave town? Couldn't you find her a place here? Did you lock her in?"

"She didn't ask me to and of course I didn't," the woman said indignantly. "It slammed behind me when--I was forced out."

"Forced out? By whom?" Jonathan asked, tugging on the door. "Who's in there with her?" When she didn't answer, he paused and looked at her. "Dr. Moorhouse?"

"I'm still not sure what I saw," she said, and Jonathan realized she was quite pale and shaken. "It was Stafford's ghost."

"Ghost? Oh, Dr. Moorhouse, that's--"

"I **saw** it, MacKensie."

He stared at her, then turned and began to pound on the metal door. "**Caitlyn!**"

"It's useless," Moorhouse told him. "I've--" She broke off as the door swung open, causing Jonathan to stagger backward.

"Cait?" he said tentatively, looking at the woman who stood in the doorway. "Are you all right?"

"Of course. What are you doing here?" Cait asked calmly, coming out of the shelter and carefully closing the door behind her.

"What am I--what are **you** doing here? I can't believe you'd want to come to this place!" Jonathan burst out, reaching for her arm.

"It was something I had to do," Cait said with a shrug, pulling out of his reach. "Dr. Moorhouse and I are quite capable of handling ourselves, MacKensie, so you just run along."

"MacKensie?" Jonathan squeaked in protest. "Caitlyn--"

"We're finished here, Dr. Moorhouse," Caitlyn interrupted, moving past Jonathan. "Let's go, please."

"Are you certain you're feeling well, my dear?"

"Never better," Cait said as she walked purposefully toward Moorhouse's car.

"Cait, I don't know what you're playing at, but you're scaring me," Jonathan declared. "Come on, I'll take you home and we'll talk about this."

"We have nothing to talk about, Dr. MacKensie," she said, opening the passenger door of Juliana's car. "You made yourself quite clear this morning. I will need to remove my things from your house once I have made other living arrangements, but that shouldn't take too long. I appreciate everything you've done for me but it's over." She closed the door, leaving Moorhouse to get in behind the wheel.

Juliana Moorhouse darted a look at Jonathan and was struck by the undisguised hurt and shock on his face. "MacKensie, I'm **sorry**," she murmured. "I'll talk to her."

"Watch her," he said hoarsely. "Something's wrong."

She nodded and hurried to her car. Jonathan watched as they drove away, then turned and thoughtfully studied the door behind him. He put a hand out and pushed on the door, but it did not budge.

He struck it angrily and stalked to his own car.

* * *



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"What happened in there?" Moorhouse asked as she drove back to her office.

"Nothing," Cait replied, looking out the window.

"Nothing? I saw--**heard**--Stafford; felt the force of a wind that could not have existed--" Moorhouse protested. "It forced me out and held the door shut!"

"It was just your imagination, Juliana. The wind was just that--wind. Will you be able to find me a place to stay on campus?"

The older woman slanted a quick glance at Caitlyn, then said slowly, "I'll see what's available in the dormitories, if you wish."

"Good."

"Although--you're always welcome to stay with me, my dear."

"I don't think that would be--appropriate," Cait said with an unexpected grin. "I need privacy--freedom."

"And what about Jonathan?"

"Jonathan? I assume he continues teaching and dancing to your tune," Cait shrugged, opening the door as Moorhouse parked the car in her assigned parking slot.

The anthropologist sat at the wheel and watched as Caitlyn Cassidy walked away, then shook her head. "MacKensie's right," she said to herself as she got out and locked the car. "**Something** has happened to that young woman."

* * *

When Edgar Benedek poked his cheerful face around the door to Jonathan's office three days later, he was confronted by his partner's glower.

"Hiya, buds--"

"Where have you been?" Jonathan demanded. "I called your hotel but you'd left already."

Benny entered the room, his hands upraised. "Got done a little earlier than I expected, and Fifi invited me on a flight to Mexico--"

"Never mind," Jonathan cut in. "Cait--broke it off with me. I came home last night and found all of her things gone and the spare key I'd given her in my mailbox. She won't talk to me, let me apologize--I don't even know what I **did**!"

"That's the way it is with women, Jack--"

"We're talking Caitlyn, Benedek," Jonathan interrupted, "not just some woman."

"Whoa--my little cousin **has** done a number on you, Jon-boy," Benny whistled, studying his partner. "You look like you haven't shaved in days, and where's your tie? The Miami Vice look **isn't** you."

"This is no laughing matter! Cait went to the bomb shelter and has been acting bizarre ever since. Just ask Dr. Moorhouse," Jonathan said, running a hand through already disheveled hair.

Benny dropped into a chair; for once abandoning his usual wisecracks. "Tell me about it, Jack."

Jonathan met his friend's gaze and nodded, then took a deep breath and began to recount the whole story: Caitlyn's recurring nightmares, her decision to move out of his house, her insistence on returning to the site of Stafford's death. He hesitated to repeat the rest of it, but finally said, "Dr. Moorhouse says they saw a ghost there--**Stafford's** ghost."

"That's it," Benny said, leaning back in his chair and laughing. "You almost had me, but when the Crown Prince of Skeptics tries to convince me there are ghosts involved...it was a great scam, J.J.--"

"It's not a scam, Benedek. I didn't say I saw the ghost, only that Dr. Moorhouse seems convinced. **Something** happened to Cait in there...her mind was affected."

There was no denying Jonathan's sincerity; his concern over Cait was genuine enough. His appearance supported that, as Benny couldn't recall ever seeing Jonathan MacKensie less than perfectly groomed. His idea of casual dress was to wear a sweater vest under his suit jacket, yet here he sat with no tie or jacket and his shirtsleeves rolled up, looking like he needed an industrial shave.

"Ok, buds, I'll go see Caity and find out what's up. Caitlyn might be mad at you but she'd be more direct about it. Where's she staying?"

"In the dorm she had before," Jonathan told him. "Benny, she's even insulted Randi."

"That doesn't sound like my favorite cousin," Benedek admitted. "I'll check it out and get back to you pronto, Jack." He stood up, then paused, "Uh, J.J., are you **sure** you didn't say anything to tick her off?"

"No, I swear it, Benedek. She said she wanted to move out so we could spend some time alone, and I didn't argue with her about it..." Jonathan trailed off, enlightenment dawning.

Benedek sighed. "Right. So long, Dr. J."

"I just let her go...how could I have been so stupid?"

"Years of practice would be my guess. Hang in there, buds, and I'll be back. Ol' Benny will fix things up."

Jonathan sat at his desk, shoulders slumped in dejection. How could he make it up with Caitlyn if she wouldn't even speak to him?

* * *

"As you can see, I don't need a babysitter or a bodyguard," Caitlyn said, holding the door open for Benny. "I'm just fine, despite what MacKensie says. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do. Thank you for stopping by." And with that she shoved Benny out the door, firmly closing it behind him.

He stood there for a moment, stunned. What had happened to her?

Cait was not herself, there was no doubt about **that**. She was a total stranger, like Jon had been at the burned-out motel where he'd been possessed by seven ghosts...possessed. Moorhouse had claimed Stafford's ghost was present at the bomb shelter, and now Caitly was acting bizarre, alienating friends and loved ones. Well, Stafford would certainly want to keep everyone at a distance, wouldn't he? If no one knew Caitlyn was acting possessed, they wouldn't call in an exorcist, would they?

"You picked the wrong girl, pal," he muttered, staring at Caitlyn's door. "I have friends." He took off in a loping stride, heading for Jon's place. He had a few calls to make...

* * *

Benny replaced the phone receiver and looked around at the council of war he had called in Jonathan's office. "Sibyl said she's between plays and she'll be right down," he reported. "She's bringing a friend who's had a little more experience with this kind of thing."

"This sort of thing' is exorcism," Jonathan objected, pacing before the window.

"Yeah, so? **You** ought to know better than to laugh at that, Jonny."

Randi said, "If Stafford **has** possessed Caitlyn, what do you suppose he wants with her?"

"Whatever it is, he's not going to get it," Benny said firmly.

Moorhouse offered, "The ghost said something about Caitlyn needing to learn to control her new powers--do you suppose he's taken her over to continue his work with her?"

Jonathan turned at that and gaped at the woman.

Benedek uttered a low whistle. "Could be, Dr. M. If so, we're in trouble."

"Dr. Stafford always seemed like such a nice guy," Randi said with a frown. "Why would he go nuts and hurt someone like Cait?"

"He lost sight of reality," replied Moorhouse. "He got so wrapped up in his research that he forgot

Cait was a human being, not merely a laboratory test animal."

"Dr. Moorhouse," Jonathan protested.

"I didn't say I think of Caitlyn that way, only that he did." Moorhouse glared at Jonathan. "Really, MacKensie."

"Dr. M, tell me again just what happened," Benny interrupted, sitting at Jonathan's desk and picking up a pen.

"She said there was a great deal of pain, and then the wind started up. At first it didn't affect her," Juliana recounted. "Then his face appeared and after his speech, the wind increased and Cait began screaming and clutching at her temples. I got shoved out and the door slammed, so I don't know what happened after that."

"Did the pain appear to be her own or was she picking up his?"

"Benedek--"

"It happened so quickly...but I don't think it was hers." Moorhouse said, ignoring Jonathan's protest. "It was like she walked into a wall of pain."

"So this could have been residual pain and not directed at her," Benny said thoughtfully. "He might not have been trying to hurt her--that's good."

"Good? **Good**?! What's good about it?"

"Relaxavision, J.J.," Benny advised as Jonathan spun around and glared at him. "I just mean we may not be dealing with evil so much as misplaced good intentions."

That silenced everyone for a long moment, then Randi asked tentatively, "How can I help?"

Benedek gave her a smile. "Just keep an eye on Cait--and don't let on that you've noticed anything different about her. Same goes for you, Dr. M. Jonny and me'll take care of the details once Sib gets here. But I think we'll have to make our move PDQ."

On that less-than-encouraging note, the meeting broke up.

* * *

Caitlyn sat on her bed, staring at her hands. They **looked** like her hands, yet she felt they were alien, belonging to someone else. She watched her fingers slowly curl into a fist, then flex.

She'd heard herself tell Jonathan good-bye, insult Dr. Moorhouse, and even say nasty things to Randi. Words spilled uncontrollably from her mouth; harsh, cutting words she would never say, yet there they were.

Taking a deep breath, Cait rubbed her temples and walked to pick up the mirror on her

dresser. "Who are you?" she asked, staring at her reflection in the small hand mirror.

An image not her own stared back at her and Cait's lungs seemed to lack oxygen as she gasped for air. She dropped the mirror, watching it shatter.

There was a knock on her door and Cait whirled, a strange expression on her face. The knock sounded again, and she crossed the room and flung the door open.

Edgar Benedek stood there, accompanied by two young women Cait didn't know. "Hiya, C.C.," he said cheerfully. "Can we come in?"

"This isn't a good time--"

"Whoa, what happened here?" Benny asked, pushing his way in and looking at the shards of mirror. "You didn't cut yourself, did you?"

"I don't think--"

"Cait, these are friends of mine--Sibyl and Liara," Benny continued, still poking around.

"How do you do?" Liara said, smiling, but giving Cait an intent look. There was an Irish lilt in her voice and friendliness on her face. "Benny has invited us out to dinner and insisted we stop by and pick you up."

"Yeah, you know me--can't resist being surrounded by beautiful women," Benny said, winking at Cait.

"Thanks, Benny, but I'm not hungry," Cait said, briefly touching one hand to the side of her head.

"Headache, huh?" Benny's shrewd eyes caught the gesture. "Well, at least come on down and see us off. The fresh air'll do you good, cuz."

Cait stared at him, a flicker of recognition in her eyes. "All right, Benny. Maybe you're right."

"Sure I am," he declared, taking her arm and leading her through the doorway. Liara and Sibyl followed, Liara glancing at the broken mirror as she closed the door behind them.

Benny took Cait's hand and managed to tuck her arm through his, her hand on the crook of his arm. He then covered her hand with his as he guided her to the car where Jonathan stood by the driver's door.

"Benny, I--what's this?" she asked, halting as she saw Jonathan.

"Didn't I tell ya? Jack's driving," Benny said innocently, carefully sliding his arm around her waist and clasping his other hand around her arm, effectively holding her to his side.

"No, you didn't," she said emphatically, trying unsuccessfully to pull away.

"Musta slipped my mind," he replied cheerfully, steering her to the car where Jonathan opened the back passenger door.

"What are you doing?!"

Benny was sliding into the back seat, pulling Cait with him. Liara got in, slamming the door so Cait was in the middle. Sibyl got into the front seat as Jonathan slid behind the wheel.

"It's for your own good, princess," Benny said, wrapping his arms around the struggling Cait.

"I'm not sure this is such a good idea--" Jonathan began.

"That's why you're the driver, Smilin' Jack," Benny cut in. "So drive already."

"I really think that would be best, Dr. MacKensie," Sibyl said, as she fastened her seat belt and glanced over the back seat to check on the trio.

Jonathan hesitated, then started the automobile's engine.

Liara tried to assist Benny in controlling the agitated Caitlyn, and they both had their hands full.

"Hang on," Benny said, dragging a chloroform-soaked handkerchief out of a plastic baggie that Sibyl tossed to him. He pressed it to Cait's nose. "Sorry, kid, it's got to be this way."

"Benedek, what are you doing?!"

"Just drive, Jack," Benny growled. "You think I'm enjoying this? I'm trying to keep her from hurting one of us--or herself--and we don't want her screaming for the cops. Even Dr. M couldn't get us out of that soup."

Jonathan glanced in the rearview mirror and winced as Cait sagged against Benny.

"I'm afraid this case calls for extreme measures, Dr. MacKensie," Liara said, putting one palm against Cait's forehead. "This is not easy for me to watch, let alone participate in, but it is necessary. You must trust us, for Caitlyn's sake."

"This is all so bizarre," Jonathan muttered and Sibyl touched a gentle hand to his arm.

"We have to work together on this, Jonathan. If you can't do what is required, now's the time to say so. We can't afford to give Stafford any more power than he already has."

"I'll do whatever I have to do for Caitlyn," Jonathan swore, glancing in the mirror again. Liara had Cait's feet in her lap and Benny wrapped his arms around her as he held her to his chest.

When they arrived at the old bomb shelter, Jonathan carried Cait to the door. "Are you sure this is where we want to do this--this exorcism?"

"What else do you suggest, Jacko? **Your** place, where well-meaning neighbors can hear the screaming and call the cops? Dr. M got us some

high-powered lanterns and the key because she felt it was the best place. The fire only damaged Stafford's lab and didn't touch the rest of the shelter. Besides, this is where he died, where he possessed Katydid."

Jonathan watched as Benny unlocked the heavy door and dragged it open. "This is so bizarre," he muttered, shifting Caitlyn's weight in his arms.

"No argument here, buds," Benny agreed, motioning for the others to enter.

Liana led the way, searching for a suitable room. The bomb shelter was made up of a series of rooms. In the room assigned to the president of Georgetown Institute they found actual furnishings instead of the standard bomb-shelter decor.

"Put her on the bed, Jonathan," Liana instructed as she and Sibyl placed the lanterns so their beams fell across the bed.

Jonathan obeyed and he stared down at Caitlyn who was beginning to stir.

Benny pulled a handful of Jonathan's ties from his jacket pockets. "Tie her wrists to the posts," he instructed. Jonathan hesitated then complied.

"You'll need to either hold her legs down or tie them," Liana said as Cait struggled to buck Benny off where he straddled her knees. The effects of the chloroform was wearing off much more rapidly than they had anticipated.

"Where is she getting her strength?" Jonathan wondered.

"Don't ask stupid questions," Benedek yelled at him. "Help us!" He gasped as she connected with something sensitive, and paled a little. Liana helped him scramble off the bed.

"Here." Sibyl handed Jonathan two more ties.

"I don't believe this," the professor groaned, even as he obediently went to the foot of the bed and grappled with the struggling woman's legs.

Eventually he managed to tie her ankles together, and leaned over to do the same to her knees. He avoided looking at Caitlyn's face, aware of the accusatory expression in her eyes.

At last she was secured and relatively still and Jonathan straightened up. "Now what?"

"Now we remove the gag," Liana said, leaning down to unfasten the scarf, "and talk to Stafford."

"You're all nuts!" Cait declared, voice raspy. "This seems an extreme reaction to rejection, MacKensie. What would Dr. Moorhouse say?"

"She's in agreement," said Jonathan, staring at Caitlyn. "You're **not** Cait, and you have to be--dealt with."

Her face twisted with contempt. "Is that what you call **this**, MacKensie? The police will have other names for it: kidnapping and assault to start with. I'll sue you--**and** your little accomplices." She bucked against her restraints and added cuttingly, "There will be **nothing** left of your reputation, **Doctor** MacKensie, when this is over."

"My reputation means nothing without Caitlyn," Jonathan replied, fists clenched.

"Oh, how noble," Cait sneered.

"Elias Stafford," Liana said in a commanding voice and Cait jerked her head to stare at the Irishwoman. "Yes, we know who you are, so you might as well stop this pretense. Where is Caitlyn Cassidy?"

"She has got nothing to say to **you**, whoever you are."

"My name is Liana Kelloran. Very well, let's you and I have a little talk, Dr. Stafford. Why are you doing this to Caitlyn?"

"She needs my help," came the response, but less certainly than before.

"**Help!**" exclaimed Jonathan and Benedek grabbed his arm in warning. "Like you **helped** her by torturing her with your experiments, Stafford?"

"Dr. MacKensie, **please**," Liana said softly, her gaze not leaving Caitlyn. "No more disturbances, if you please."

"Liana knows what she's doing," Sibyl assured Jonathan, taking his other arm. "You must trust her."

"What kind of help, Dr. Stafford?" Liana continued, her gaze holding the possessed Caitlyn's.

"The pain--she couldn't block the pain...I only wanted to help her control it, to teach her how to use her powers. Caitlyn is the forerunner, the next step in human evolution..."

"Where does he **get** this stuff?" Jonathan muttered, remembering to keep his voice low.

"B-movies I'd say," Benedek replied.

"In **your** opinion," Liana said. "Did you bother to ask Caitlyn if she wanted to be experimented on, have her mind tampered with?"

"She dared to call it a **curse!** Her wonderful gift, its potential to be explored and savored and she wished it destroyed!" The voice came from Caitlyn's mouth and resembled her voice, yet the fanatical fury in her eyes was alien.

"To many, such a gift is a curse." Liana's eyes narrowed as she studied Caitlyn's form.

"To the ignorant, the cowardly--perhaps."

"She does not need you to help her learn to control it," Liana said bluntly. "You are not needed here now, Dr. Stafford. You may go and leave

Caitlyn's education to us." Sibyl came to stand on the other side of the bed, across from Liara.

"No!"

Jonathan winced at the cry of agony erupting from the form of the woman he loved. He tensed as he watched her thrash in her bonds and felt Benny's fingers tighten on his arm. He glanced at the journalist and saw his own concern reflected there.

"I know it's tough, Jack, but we gotta let them do their stuff," Benny muttered, for once wholly serious.

"But she's in pain!"

"He's in pain," Sibyl corrected, glancing over her shoulder at Jonathan. "Stafford must vacate if Caitlyn is to return."

"Return? Return from where?"

"She's there, but her consciousness has been subjugated by Stafford's," Sibyl replied, half her attention on Liara and half on answering Jonathan's questions. "We must get Caitlyn to fight back, to regain control--"

"Jonathan, come here," Liara commanded.

Jonathan gave a start of surprise. He looked quickly at Benedek, who nodded in encouragement and shoved him forward.

Swallowing hard, the professor moved next to Liara. "What can I do to help?"

She smiled at his earnest expression and positioned him on the right side of the bed, near Caitlyn's head. "Put your hand on her forehead," she instructed. "Let Cait know you're here. Benny, come stand at the foot of the bed, where she can see you, too."

When they had obeyed to her satisfaction, she said, "Caitlyn Cassidy, we want you back. Are you just going to let Stafford win without fighting for your own life?"

Cait's head moved restlessly under Jonathan's hand and he knelt beside her. "Cait, please come back," he murmured softly, stroking her forehead.

She strained against her bonds. "Professor?"

Jonathan gave Benedek a hopeful look, then bent his head closer to Caitlyn's. "I want us to work things out, Cait. I don't want you to go. Please listen to me," he said, letting his thumb caress her cheekbone while his fingers rested on her forehead.

"No!" She thrashed about, trying to shake off his touch, but Jonathan firmly kept his hand on her face, his other hand on her shoulder. Her back arched, bringing her body off the bed, and the scream reverberating around the room was piercingly unearthly.

"What's happening?" Jonathan yelled as wind began whipping at their hair and clothes.

"Don't break contact with her!" Liara shouted over the roar of the wind. "Whatever you do, Jonathan, don't break contact!"

His eyes were stinging from the uncanny wind enveloping them, but Jonathan was able to make out Benny standing his ground at the foot of the bed, his hands clasped by Sibyl on one side and Liara on the other. The journalist's face was pale and beaded with perspiration, his eyes squeezed shut in concentration.

"Caity, don't give in!" Benny shouted.

Caitlyn thrashed again, and Jonathan flung himself across her body, using his weight to pin her down, while keeping his left hand on her face. "You can't leave me, Cait! I won't let you go!" He was sobbing for breath now as the wind tried to rob it from him. "Caitlyn, I **love** you!"

Abruptly the whirlwind stilled and the tormented woman lay quietly, her eyes closed.

"Cait--?" murmured Jonathan uncertainly, touching her brow and throat. He felt the pulse and glanced behind him. "She's alive--will she be all right now?"

"If you'll get off her, I'll check," Liara said, smiling when Jonathan went scarlet. She cupped Cait's face between her hands and closed her eyes.

"Well?" Jonathan asked anxiously after a few minutes. "He's gone," Liara announced, withdrawing her hands and stepping back. "She's going to need a lot of rest but I think she should recover. And then I'd best work with her--she needs to learn control and self-preservation."

Cait stirred and slowly opened her eyes. When she tried to move her hands, she discovered they were tied to the bedposts. Blinking, she looked up at Jonathan.

"If you wanted to get kinky, Professor, why didn't you just ask?" she murmured before closing her eyes.

If possible, Jonathan's face reddened even more and he hurriedly began to untie the now-sleeping woman.

"Get kinky?" Benedek repeated, studying Jonathan with narrowed eyes. "Is there something about you two that I should know, buds?"

"No! I mean--nothing **happened**, Benedek, for heaven's sake," babbled Jonathan as he released Caitlyn's other hand and clutched the striped tie to his chest, heedless of the wrinkles in it. "That's what got me into this mess to begin with. She wanted to sleep together and I didn't--"



"What?" yelped Benny, his big-brotherly attitude toward his younger cousin all too evident.

"Not like **that**," Jonathan exclaimed. "Really, Benedek, I assure you I did not take advantage of Caitlyn in any way whatsoever--"

"Why not? what's wrong--isn't she good enough for you?"

"What?"

"She can't help being my cousin, ya know. But Caity's a wonderful girl--"

"Benny, I know that," Jonathan interrupted, staggering back as the smaller man advanced on him. "That's why I didn't want...she's too special for just casual--she deserves better."

"Yeah? Well you just remember that," Benny said, backing down when he realized he was threatening Jonathan.

"Benny, I think we'd better leave," Liara said, taking him by the arm. "The air is still much too charged for such a confrontation. Caitlyn and Jonathan are mature adults and can handle their personal problems without your interference. Besides, you and I need to have a little talk--you must reconsider my offer to help you learn control over your own psi."

"At least get some decent ties," Benny called over his shoulder as Liara forcefully escorted him from the room.

Jonathan stood there, clutching the badly wrinkled tie and trying to figure out just what had happened. Then he shook his head and went to sit on the edge of the bed, staring at Caitlyn.

She stirred in her sleep, turning toward him and her hand moved as if seeking something. Carefully, Jonathan enfolded it in both of his and she sighed, then lay still.

"I nearly lost you," he whispered, bringing her hand to his lips and kissing it. "I can't let that happen again, little love." He released her hand long enough to gather her to him.

Cait sighed again and snuggled against him, and Jonathan smiled as he kissed the top of her head. How could he have ever doubted the rightness of their being together?

The door opened and Benedek poked his head in. "Jack, just so you'll know--I've decided I'm gonna spend the night on your sofa once we get back to your place. I'll be able to hear any little sound..."

"Fine, Benny," Jonathan said amiably.

"Fine?"

Jonathan smiled and drew Cait closer. It was rather heart-warming to see Benedek at a loss for words. "We don't know if this is over, do we? What if

she has a--a relapse of something? I'll need your help."

"Well, yeah, sure," Benny stammered.

"Then, let's blow out of this popstand,"

Jonathan quoted one of Benny's pet phrases. He stood up and gathered Caitlyn in his arms, then looked at Benny. "We **are** ready to leave, aren't we?"

"Liara said we could go back to your place,"

Benny admitted. "She and Sib have a motel room near the campus and I've got the phone number in case there's a problem. We can drop them off before we take Caity to your place."

Jonathan nodded and carried Caitlyn from the room, Benny tagging after him.

* * *

"Yo, Jack."

Jonathan blinked and looked blearily up at Benny's grinning face. "What?" he mumbled.

"Ya gonna sleep all day?"

"All day?"

"It's noon, Jon-boy, and Dr. M is in your kitchen."

"Dr. Moorhouse..!" Jonathan squeaked.

Cait stirred in his arms, and he promptly lowered his voice to a whisper. "Dr. Moorhouse is **here?** Now?"

Benny nodded, obviously enjoying the look on the professor's face. "She won't go till she sees you, Jack. Says she has too much time and work invested in you to trust your care to someone like me."

Jonathan had little doubt that she **had** said something exactly that. He eased his arm out from under Cait's head and tucked the blanket around her, then crossed to the doorway. "Benny, before we go see the others, I just want you to know--I'm very grateful for everything you did to save Caitlyn--"

After a glance at his sleeping cousin, Benedek said, "**You** did it, J.J.; I was just along for moral support. Come on, let's get you cleaned up a bit before Dr. M spots ya, huh?"

Jonathan looked down and realized his clothes were badly rumpled as he hadn't bothered to change into pajamas when they'd gotten home. He rubbed a hand along his stubbled chin. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt--"

"Besides, one look at that mug when she wakes up, and C.C. is likely to run in the other direction."

Jonathan glanced at the bed. "Should she be left alone?"

"We're not going to China, Jack," Benny pointed out as he shoved Jonathan toward the bathroom. "I'll sit with her--you don't want to keep Dr. M waiting, do you?"

"No, no, of course not--"

Benny grinned as Jonathan closed the bathroom door. Moorhouse was more than just Jack's boss, although neither one of them would admit it.

He sat on the bed as carefully as he could, but still the movement caused Caitlyn to stir and open her eyes. "Hiya, kiddo," Benny said softly, smiling as she blinked, yawned and sat up. "Feeling better?"

"Jonathan?" she asked, panic in her voice.

One hand sought the space where Jonathan had slept, while she looked around the bedroom.

"Taking a shower," Benny assured her, covering her hand with one of his. "You ever give us a scare like that again and I'll put you over my knee."

"Jonathan's all right?" she persisted, ignoring Benny's threat.

"Best he's been in days, sweetheart. Now **you** answer **my** questions--how do you feel?" Benny squeezed her hand, anxious eyes fixed on her face.

Cait swallowed hard and used her free hand to drag her hair away from her face. "Tired," she admitted, and the faint shadows under her eyes attested to that fact. "Confused--"

"You and me both, kiddo," Benny assured her, one corner of his mouth lifting in his familiar crooked grin. "You were kinda out of it for a little bit, but we evicted the spook and you came back to us. Jonny's been worried sick about you, by the way."

"Really?" she questioned, rubbing her forehead. "I've been worried about him, too, Benny. I don't want him to die."

"Huhhh? Jonny's not dying," Benedek said, "Well, not right away, anyway. What do you mean, C.C.?"

"I keep dreaming...I see him dying, because of me...and I can't stop it."

"Sure ya can," Benny grinned cheerfully. "That's why Liara is going to hang around here."

"Liara?"

"She's a friend of Sibyl's who came to help--"

"Yes, I remember her," Cait interrupted, looking thoughtful.

"Yeah, well, she can help with what Stafford did," said Benny, touching her forehead.

"Can she? What about Jonathan?"

"What about Jonathan? Caitly, you look much better," that person said, coming into the bedroom and smiling at her. His hair was still damp from the shower, and, for him, he was dressed

casually: dress slacks, summerweight sweater, and minus a tie. "Shall I have Benedek run out and bring in some lunch?"

"Did you forget, Jack? Dr. M is in your kitchen and the last I saw of her she was ordering Liara and Sibyl around like galley slaves." Benny grinned at the look of horror on the professor's face.

"Excuse me, Cait, I'd better--please feel free to use the--er, the bathroom..." Jonathan waved vaguely in the general direction of the bath and hurried out.

Benny and Cait exchanged glances and burst out laughing.

* * *

Jonathan crossed the threshold to his small kitchen and halted, his jaw dropping in astonishment.

Sibyl and Liara were amiably doing his piled-up dishes together, while Juliana Moorhouse was energetically wiping down the stove's rangetop and the counters.

"I--uh--Dr. Moorhouse--?"

"**There** you are, MacKensie!" she said, whirling to face him, scrubbing cloth in hand. "Are you aware that there is nothing edible in your refrigerator?"

"Nothing? Oh. Well, I've not had a chance to go to market," Jonathan stammered guiltily.

"Really, MacKensie, this place has gone to ruin," Moorhouse continued, "I thought you were better trained. What would your mother say?"

"I don't usually--that is, I've had other things on my mind lately," Jonathan said, looking suitably abashed. "Caitlyn--"

"Yes," Moorhouse cut in, "how **is** the dear girl feeling?"

"Better, thank you," he said with a smile. He crossed to the sink and took the soapy tea kettle from Liara. "You must let me take over now, Miss Kelloran. You've done quite enough already."

"I don't mind helping out, Dr. MacKensie. As you said, you have had other things on your mind," Liara reminded him. "Is that not so, Sibyl?"

The red-head turned around, smiling at Jonathan. "That's what friends are for, as they say."

He looked a little uncomfortable, remembering what he had once said about Benedek's friends. "Yes, well, I **do** appreciate your help," he said, pushing up his sleeves and taking over the washing-up chores. He had just finished draining the sink when Caitlyn entered the kitchen, accompanied by Benny.

"Caitlyn, my dear, you had us all extremely worried," Moorhouse exclaimed as Benny made a production of seeing her seated at the table.

"Dr. Moorhouse, I want to apologize to you--to all of you--for the nasty things I've said and done," Cait began.

"Nonsense, my dear girl," Moorhouse dismissed. "No one blames you. There were extenuating circumstances."

"Phew, Jack! I hope you aren't using this." Benny said, holding his nose and waving a quart of milk around. He stood before the refrigerator, surveying its meager contents. "Even I would have trouble whipping up a little something with what you've got here, buds."

"I haven't had a chance to go to market," Jonathan snapped.

"No problemo, pal--I'll go for ya."

"Ah, no--I'll go," Jonathan said hastily, visions of what Benedek might purchase flashing before his eyes. "Why don't you see what everyone wants for lunch and get some take-out food."

"I know this little Thai-Taco place--" he enthused.

"I'll go with him," Sibyl spoke up, rolling her eyes. "How about Chinese?"

"Fine," Caitlyn said.

"No Szechuan," Jonathan added, pouring the sour milk down the sink.

"You've got absolutely no sense of culinary adventure, J.J.," Benny began.

"No, but I still have my tastebuds," Jonathan retorted, turning on the water to flush down the last of the milk. "Which is more than I can say for you."

Benny shrugged and grinned, pulling out his memo pad and a stubby pencil. He did a quick query of the others, took their lunch orders, and breezed out, waving for Sibyl to follow him.

Jonathan started poking into drawers and cupboards, mentally making a grocery list.

"Caitlyn, perhaps this would be a good time for us to--talk," Liara said, meeting Cait's gaze.

"Yes, yes, of course," Cait agreed after a moment. When she stood, Jonathan made a move to help, but halted at the look she gave him.

"She's a remarkable young woman," Moorhouse said when the pair had disappeared, presumably back to the bedroom.

"Yes, she is," Jonathan agreed.

"What are your plans?"

"What?"

"Surely you must have plans for her," the woman insisted.

He swung around to meet her steady gaze, magnified by her round glasses. "Plans, Dr. Moorhouse? I'm not Stafford! I intend to ask her to marry me, but I will abide by her decision.

"Of course you will--I never meant to imply otherwise," she said with a frown. "I just meant you'd be a fool if you let her get away. Why are you so touchy?"

Jonathan blinked and ran a hand through his hair. "I don't know. I'm sorry, Dr. Moorhouse. I'm a little tired still, I suppose."

She nodded. "You need to take care of yourself, MacKensie."

He managed a sheepish smile. "Yes, I'll try to do that, Dr. Moorhouse...I appreciate your concern."

"Yes, well, with so many of my professors off for the summer, I have to make sure the ones I do have stay fit," she blustered, putting on her stern, professional facade.

Jonathan just smiled and put the kettle on.

* * *

"Caitlyn, didn't you tell me that the dreams did not trouble you when Jonathan held you?" Liara asked, pacing Jonathan's bedroom while Cait sat on the bed.

"Yes," she said softly.

"Don't you see? He is your anchor, the key to control." Liara picked up a tie from the floor, smoothing the silk between her fingers.

"That doesn't seem fair, to use him--"

"But you love him."

"Yes."

"Then you're not 'using' him. A relationship is a balance between two people--Jonathan needs you just as much, only in a different way."

"But he doesn't even **believe** in psychic phenomena," Cait objected. "How can he want to be involved with--someone like me?"

Liara's gaze was compassionate, and she went to sit beside Caitlyn. "You are **not** a freak, Cait. There are many more people in this world who share your gift. Sibyl, for instance. And I think Benny has more Talent than even he is willing to admit." She smiled at the expression on Caitlyn's face. "And as for Jonathan--perhaps he doesn't **understand** the things he's seen, but he assisted us with the fullest measure of his courage to save you last night. He loves you very much, Caitlyn."

"He deserves better!"

"Ah, I see. You don't love him."

"How can you say that?"

"Well, if you loved him, you'd want to work it out, be with him," Liara said with a shrug. "It's an easy out, isn't it? So much easier to walk away, making noble claims, than to deal with it. Well, he's just a man, after all. He'll soon forget you and move on. You're probably wise--why fight for a life with Jonathan MacKensie?"

Cait stared at her in horror. "You don't understand at all."

"Don't I? Then tell me how it is, Caitlyn." Liara watched the other woman rise and pace in agitation.

"I love him too much to put him through another experience like last night. I don't remember much of it, but I do know he risked his life for me. How can I live with myself knowing he would do it again?"

"And you wouldn't risk **your** life for him?"

"Of course I would," Cait declared, whirling toward Liara, her anger flashing in her eyes.

"Then what is the problem?" Liara asked calmly. "To love anyone is always a risk. Don't you think Jonathan deserves a chance to make up his own mind as to whether he'll accept that risk rather than have **you** make it for him?"

Cait stared at her, then sat down hard on the bed. "I saw him die."

"Of course you did--mortals always die, eventually."

"But I--I was there."

"As a wife would be."

"I couldn't stop it."

"No one can stop Death," Liara pointed out. "We can delay him, but in the end he wins. Don't deny yourself and Jonathan a lifetime together."

"I do love him."

"Then tell him. It will be all right, Caitlyn," Liara promised, patting her hand. "Life is worth the risk."

"Ladies?"

They turned to see Jonathan standing in the doorway, an uncertain smile on his face. "I hope I'm not interrupting, but Benny has arrived with an enormous amount of wonderful-smelling cartons."

"Great! I'm famished," Liara announced, smiling brightly. "I hope he got everything I requested."

"Probably that and more," Jonathan said with a laugh. He watched as Liara bounded out of the room, then he looked at Caitlyn who still sat on the bed. "Cait?"

"Jonathan, can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you for what?" he asked, taking the hand she stretched out to him.

"I've been an idiot, and it's taken Liara all this time to make me see it."

"Well, you've been through a terrible ordeal," he excused.

"No more so than you have."

He shrugged and smiled. "It's over for now--the ordeal, I mean. As for our future, I was wondering if--"

She placed a finger against his lips. "Let's just take our future one day at a time for now, Professor. We've got plenty of time, don't we?"

"Yes, of course," he said happily. "And I foresee--lunch." Laughing, he pulled her to her feet and led her down to join the others.