

Chapter 33

SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS

SPEND THE TIME *with Luke.*

As if it were that easy. Tell me Luke's a psychopath, then send us off to play. Tell me I'm one half of something aberrant, then stick us both together—after telling me a tale that begged a thousand questions. Was Luke supposed to answer them? Luke, whom Garrett hadn't trusted? Luke, too dangerous to be let loose upon the world? Luke, the candle to my moth?

I'd gone back to my room instead and stretched out on the bed. The pretty sage-and-white décor, homey when the sun streamed in, felt drab and claustrophobic. The ceiling fixture's tulip shades looked cloudy more than frosted. The bronze arms needed polishing.

The morning I arrived, the view outside my window had been green and gold and glittering with dew. It was less as if I'd woken in a dream than that a dream had woken round me. For a second, just before the knock that turned out to be Marion, the mystery of me since seventeen had broken free as magic. But Dr. Colton's dry summation of the six years I'd spent here had stolen every dram of wonder. Jello concentrate without the water? More like marvel rendered into dust.

Dr. Colton wanted me informed, not *au courant*. Along with Mr. Shen, he'd been drawing charcoal outlines, just enough for me

to know about—not understand—his reasons for reversing a decision made in fear and never meant to be undone. That the Caucus needed me and Luke together as we used to be was obvious. But trying to figure out what for was pointless. Dr. Colton would dole out whatever else I needed when he thought I needed it.

The problem was, his idea of need and mine were manifestly different. Hearing about memories I ought to have was miles from reliving them. You've changed, he said. But how? What sort of person had I been? Would I recognize myself? Would I even *like* myself? Or would I find the me I'd built with half the pieces missing couldn't stand my former self at all? As Dr. Colton told it, I'd been weak, a follower. What did that say about me now?

I tried to muster anger—at Dr. Colton's wilfully unsatisfying brevity, at Marion for keeping secrets, at myself for things I'd only heard I'd done. I couldn't. Crammed with information, all I felt was empty.



I went downstairs an hour before supper to tell Cook I'd be eating in my room. She was at the table with a colander, shelling peas and humming to herself.

"Not feeling sociable?" she enquired sympathetically.

"Not tonight."

"Is everything all right? You look a little pale."

"Must be the weather. Grey's not my colour."

She stopped what she was doing.

"Dr. C told you, didn't he? About the accident."

"Is that the word you use? He made it sound like murder."

She *tsk*-ed, then shelled the last few peas.

"He told me you weren't here," I said.

"I wasn't. I got back to find you gone, and Luke. . ."

She stood up with the colander and took it to the sink.

"Luke?" I prompted when she'd rinsed the peas and tipped them in a waiting pot.

“What else could they do?” she said, towelling her hands. “They didn’t really have a choice. He’d have run away. The two of you had never been apart. He raged for weeks. They had to keep him drugged. Poor thing, locked up in his room like that.”

“Locked up?” Dr. Colton’s résumé hadn’t gone that far.

“They couldn’t very well just go to the police, now could they? Or call up Child Services. It took some time to figure out a workable arrangement. In the end, they joined some rooms in the extension at the back so he’d have proper quarters. They’re Mr. Shen’s now when he’s visiting.”

“*Locked quarters?*” I repeated.

“Well, yes,” she said uncomfortably. “He was under supervision.”

“For how long?”

“Until he understood. Afterwards they set it up so he could move about as freely as he wanted. Didn’t Dr. Colton say?”

“No. I get the feeling he wants Luke to flesh things out. His story ended with me riding off into the sunset in a blaze of shame.”

She sat down next to me and took my hand.

“That’s very brave of you, making light of something so distressing. In your place I’d be worried sick that every question’s answer would be more disturbing than the one before. Dr. Colton said that when he got you to this point, we weren’t to hold things back. Just the same, it probably is best if you get Luke’s side of things from Luke.” She gave my hand a squeeze. “Now, if you don’t want company, you better scoot upstairs. I’ve co-opted Dom to help me peel potatoes. She’ll be here any minute.”

Halfway up I heard her at the bottom the steps. I turned around to see her foreshortened to the size of Mrs. Pepperpot.

“Don’t get me wrong, David. I’m a sentimental, not a fool. I adored you both, but what you did, what you might have done—well, let’s say I shared the Caucus’s concerns. But I put the blame on them as much as you. Letting you run around like little princes, training you in gifts they hardly understood themselves, never bothering to teach you about consequences. And them, a bunch of

shrinks.”

Colour rose into her cheeks.

“Thanks, Cook.”

The kitchen door-spring screeched.

“Skedaddle,” she said. “I’ll bring your supper around seven.”



I spent the evening torn. Not actively, as in a tug-o-war, more like contemplating slips of paper torn from the same sheet and thumb-tacked to the corkboard of my brain.

This one up top? Get the fuck away from here.

That one? Unload on Kirin.

Over here? Beard Dr. Colton, cause a scene, demand a better truth, if truth it was, than carefully-constructed digests.

Down there, niggling at my conscience? Email Byron and come clean.

And that one in the centre, larger than the rest? Luke—the holder of my past, murmurer of comfort, delinquent puppet-master.

A storm blew up around eleven, starting with a lightning crack so close my arm hairs prickled. The window fulminated like a dance-floor strobe and thunder peeled in waves. Even through the mattress I could feel the bedframe shake.

In time the thunder dwindled to low rumours and the pelting rain abated to a soft drip from the eaves. I fell asleep with moonlight breaking on the coverlet.



To: david@ase.ca

From: sleemans@pet.csis-scrs.gc.ca

Subject: Not enough

David --

The IP address and the plate were useless. So was your Rockwellian description of the farm.

> anywhere in rural Canada except the Rockies or the
> prairies

You've got your car. Supposedly you're free to leave. Subira wonders why you don't just drive around.

Myself, I'm still suspicious. I wouldn't recommend it. Not yet anyway.

A house that size with all those people--someone's got to pay the bills. Check garbage pails for envelopes. Have a look around the barn. You never know what you might find.

I'm guessing there's no rural address signpost by the road, but keep your eyes peeled for a string of digits written near a telephone. 911 is linked to rural addressing.

> First names only seems to be the rule

The list you sent sounds cosmopolitan. Anything to that? Are any of these people foreign nationals? If so we need to know, and fast. Other agencies may have to be informed.

Find out everything you can about this Dr. Colton. You've talked to him. Did he say anything--anything at all--to help establish his identity? You're good at clues. He can't be totally opaque to someone in your line of work. A physical description might be useful.

Push buttons if you can. Ask about the drowned and missing psychics (profiles attached). These people know about your working for us. They won't wonder where you got the names.

> gathering is taking place, which seems to coincide
> with my arrival.

The group is called the Caucus. A gathering is taking place. Conclusion: they're debating something. What?

The name is troubling. A caucus is a group within

a polity whose goal is putting forth its own agenda. What are they a caucus of? Are we dealing with a faction? What's larger group's agenda? The questions aren't rhetorical.

Your past, to put it mildly, is hazy. Subira fields the theory that you have some former tie--possibly without your knowing. That's too *Manchurian Candidate* for my taste, but there has to be some reason for their interest in you. Do everything you can to find out what. Use those skills you pointedly displayed when we first met.

--

JB

To: sleemans@pet.csis-scrs.gc.ca

From: david@ase.ca

Subject: Re: Not enough

Josh --

> Subira fields the theory that you have some former
> tie

She may be right.

At one point in my life (late teens), I suffered a significant memory loss. I haven't mentioned it till now because it didn't seem germane. My "hazy past" was none of your concern.

I tell you now because this Dr. Colton claims to know me, as do several others. They maintain this farm--*which I do not recognize*--is where I spent a portion of the years I can't remember. More importantly, they claim they have the power to restore my memories.

I have reason to believe they may be telling me the truth about my having lived here. As for getting back my memories, I've learned the Caucus formed around a nucleus of paranormally-obsessed psychiatrists. No guarantees, but if they can in fact uncover what I lost, the information could prove gold.

Consequently I'm unwilling to do anything that might arouse suspicion--snooping, pushing buttons, driving around, whatever. The Caucus will be meeting for the next two days. I'm being passed off to a farmhand, who's supposed to keep me company. Afterwards, Dr. Colton says he "wants to talk".

The man himself's Caucasian, in his nineties, 170 centimetres, slender, white hair, hazel eyes, no distinguishing features.

As for foreign nationals, none that I'm aware of.
--
DA

I read over what I'd written.

Then again.

And one more time, in case.

Was every sentence factual, no matter how misleading? Insurance for the lawyers, Ferko would have called it. Required to defend myself, I didn't want to have to say I'd lied. But after Dr. Colton's grainy video, I didn't want Intelligence—Canadian, American, or Patagonian—to have the means to track the Caucus either.

Not yet, anyway.

My eyes began to blur. Was Luke up yet? Would he make breakfast for himself or wander over to the house?

The Caucus will be meeting for the next two days. Two unbroken days with Luke. Why was I dithering?

I shook my head and sent the message off.



The horizon is a strip of orange shading up to greenish-yellow, powder blue, and closer to the zenith, indigo. The air is sweet with odours loosened by the rain. The bottoms of my jeans are soaking by the time I mount Luke's porch and knock.

"Hey, there, Jimmy-Dean."

A loopy smile spreads across his face. He's dressed in jeans and

nothing else. His hair is flattened on the left side, tousled on the right. He opens up and stands aside. A rich aroma hits me.

“Scrambled eggs with pork and beans, toast and wild grape jelly. The jelly’s courtesy of Cook. I pick the grapes.”

He lets me in and sits me down and feeds me till I’m stuffed. Afterwards he sends me to the porch with coffee. I close my eyes and let the sun’s warmth penetrate my face.

The door snaps open. Luke comes up and stands beside me.

“Still do the Sun Salute?” he asks.

“I always wondered how I knew it.”

“Part of John’s routine.”

“Yeah. I know. He told me.”

“Bit late for it now.” He pats his belly, covered by a workshirt. Moisture films the patched grey bucket seats. He wipes them with his forearm and sits down in what is obviously his.

“Jimmy-Dean,” he says again, holding up his mug.

We clink. Coffee sloshes on the porch. He rubs it with his toe.

“Did you ever think . . . ?” he starts, then stops himself.

“That we’d be sitting here like this? How could I?”

“Guess not, eh?”

He sips his coffee, blows on it, and sips some more. It’s not as good as what I drink at home, nor as good as Cook’s. But here, with Luke, it tastes just fine.

“Colton tell you everything?” he asks.

“I’d hardly call it everything, but yeah.”

“He said he would. Before the Caucus started meeting.”

“That how you knew I’d come a-knocking?”

“Yepper.”

He’s sure of everything to do with me, like Dr. Colton. But where Dr. Colton lords it, Luke sits on it quietly.

“How does he do that, anyway?” I ask.

“How does who do what?”

“Dr. Colton. Everything he says comes out so perfectly. The way he talks, it’s like he’s reading from a book.”

“Cold,” Luke says. “No feelings.”

"You think?"

"You don't?"

"Just a sense I get."

"From reading him?"

"No, not that. I couldn't, anyway. He's hidden—'camouflaged', whatever—like everybody else. I still don't get quite how that works."

"You're doing it yourself twenty-four/seven."

"That's what Mr. Shen said. Some sort of reflex."

"In your case, more like auto-pilot. They took away the over-ride. Normally you should be able to control it. Let your guard down, put it up."

"You're hidden, too."

He nods.

"Can you control it?"

"Mm-hm."

"Dr. Colton told me you're on drugs that cripple your abilities."

"Anyone can learn to misdirect an empath. Like Marion or Cook. It isn't easy but it doesn't take a psychic."

The porch is half in sunlight now. The air is close. It's going to be a scorcher.

"How do they make you take them, anyway? The drugs, I mean."

"Injections once a month. Depot dosaging, same as what they do with schizophrenics who forget their meds."

"And you just go along?"

"At least I've always known what choices I don't have. And I've got a little secret." He leans across the gap between our seats and whispers in my ear. "Colton skipped my dose this month."

His breath sends gooseflesh down my spine.

"He did?" My voice is hoarse.

Luke sits back. "They want us as we were."

I clear my throat. "I figured. Why?"

"To deal with a problem."

“Kirin told me they uncovered something in her mind. Does it have to do with her?”

“Nope.”

“What, then?”

He drains his mug and stands. “Refill?”

Just like Dr. Colton.

“Why won’t you tell me, Luke?”

He pulls the screen door open. “Doctor’s orders.”

I swivel round.

“Do you always do what Dr. Colton says?”

His face grows still, his eyes as hard as north Atlantic ice. He schools himself, relaxes.

“For this—,” the two of us together on his porch, “—anything he asks.”

He goes inside and comes back empty-handed. It’s too hot now for coffee. He stands as I did, taking in the sun.

“How long till the drugs wear off?”

“Could be anytime.”

“How will you know?”

“I’ll try imprinting Cook to make her dance buck naked.”

“No, seriously.”

He kneels in front of me, inclines his head and pulls me forward so our foreheads butt.

“Telepathy?” I stutter.

“Ooo-aaah,” he intones, then grins and lets me go.

He moves over to his seat, strips off his shirt and lays it on the back. His torso’s lean, the musculature clear. A thin scar mars the tawny skin beneath his collarbone. Blond hairs dust the cleft between his pectorals.

“What was it like?” I ask. “Telepathy?”

“Badass fucking awesome,” he replies, no hesitation.

“Something Dr. Colton said confuses me. The way he tells it, our telepathy developed after we came here. But in the memories I have, the ones where you’re invisible, I hear you speak. Like whispers. Thoughts.”

“That’s because of how they made you reconfigure things inside your head. Colton told you right—the telepathy came later. You could say we grew into it.”

“I can’t imagine.”

“You won’t have to, soon.”

Anticipation of it makes him squirm. He’s like a little kid.

“Dr. Colton says we tried to hide it.”

He hears the question in my voice. “What kind of picture did he paint of life back then?”

“He made it sound like paradise. Marion did, too.”

“More like Eden with no privacy. He wanted to know everything about us, everything we did. Like God. We had to let him read us any time he asked. He told us it was for his research.”

“You think there was more?”

“He would have checked the bedsheets if he could. Probably did.”

“Did we have other secrets?”

He daydreams for a moment. The corners of his mouth go up. His eyes go far away.

“What?”

He reaches over lazily and rubs my arm. It’s all the answer that I’m going to get.

For now.



He doesn’t ask me about me. He doesn’t wonder if I’ve changed. He doesn’t question if I want to be with him. For Luke, our fifteen years apart, now over, never were.

Time expands, contracts.

He tells me about Mr. Shen—our training sessions, how he made us work, how light his hand at discipline. The sun stands still, beating at an angle on the porch.

“John knows only one morality,” Luke tells me. “He’s inquisitive. Curious as hell. Wouldn’t hurt a fly, but if you pulled the

wings off one he'd be the first to stick them on a slide."

Then he reminisces—actively, for me—about the Farm, the fields, the places where we played. Suddenly it's noon, the porch in shade, the sun above the overhang. The view across the cornfield is so bright we have to squint.

"Day like this, we should be in the woods," Luke says.

He gets two beers, hops off the porch and gestures me to follow.

We cross his patch of lawn and head toward the woodlot. The dirt track by the fence is dry. The beers are gone before we get halfway.

Luke sets the empties up on posts, walks ten meters, grabs a clod of earth and chucks it. One can topples over. I find a rock and aim. Can two disappears.

"Get 'em later," Luke says, brushing off his hands.

The corn looks taller than it did when Dr. Colton talked me round the field. Luke lifts his arm and trails it across the tassels.

When we reach the woods the scent of brush and raspberries is like a solid wall.

"Careful," he instructs, angling through thorny canes. "We had a dry June last year so I didn't cut them back."

Inside, the odours change to earth, damp bark and moss. The green shade lifts the noon heat off my shoulders. Everything's bright shadow till my eyes adjust.

Luke leans back against a trunk.

"We used to come in here to get away," he says.

"I know."

He looks surprised.

"Dr. Colton mentioned it."

Surprise gives way to disappointment. I'm not somehow remembering, and Dr. Colton's telling me has sullied a fine memory.

He stoops to pick a flower—tiny, pink, with leaves like curled parsley. He crushes it and sniffs.

"Herb Robert," he says idly; then, pointing: "Celandine—" like

skulking buttercups, “—and over there, twinflowers. Up close they smell like Cook’s perfume, the one she always wore when she got dolled up in her pearls.”

I’ve been listening for something—anything—to indicate unhappiness, resentment, discontent. So far, I haven’t heard it.

“How do they keep you here?”

He rubs the scar beneath his collarbone.

“An implant. A high-tech deadman’s switch. As long as there’s a signal from the home base nothing happens. If the signal weakens past a certain point, the implant sends a beacon and I get pumped with sedatives. Knocks me out in nothing flat. Colton keeps the home base under lock and key.”

“What’s the signal’s range?”

“Enough to let me move around the Farm.”

“The other day, Cook said you’d gone somewhere. Off on farm business.”

“Oh, I can travel just so long as there’s a minder and a chaperon along. The minder keeps the home base—it’s compact—and stays some ways away. The chaperon sticks to me. If I approach the minder minus chaperon, the minder throws the switch.”

“Have you ever tried?”

His mouth twists crookedly.

“Woke up with a pounding head and puked my guts for hours.”

He pushes off the trunk and dusts the loose bark from his back.

“You’ve been captive here for fifteen years?”

A squirrel natters overhead. Luke looks up with eyes as emerald as the backlit leaves.

“Does this look like a jail to you?”



There’s no path that I can see but Luke has said Come on, I wanna show you something and set off.

The woodlot’s different from the forest at Dawe’s Lake. The

canopy admits less light. The floor is littered with decaying leaves instead of sere, brown needles. The silence there was loud with open spaces. Here it's muffled, private.

We're not penetrating deep, rather sticking to the northern edge. Luke makes his way with purpose, pointing out a rotting tree fort, bug-infested hollow logs, blasted stumps with shelves of orange fungus.

The trees begin to thin. Through the trunks I see another cornfield and a slip of the horizon. We're near the eastern border. Waxy plants with frothy blooms roll out a mat of foam. A limestone tablet rises in the middle.

Luke comes to a halt and waits till I catch up.

"Garrett Finnestad."

He nods toward the headstone. The carving's uneroded: name and date in chiselled caps, epitaph beneath.

A HAND THAT CAN BE CLASPED NO MORE

SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS

"Tennyson," Luke says. "The first line, anyway."

"From In Memoriam, A.H."

"Marion made us read it."

"Guess I read it all again."

"You would."

"How was I supposed to know?"

"The Latin says: 'Light lie the earth upon you.'"

"I know. The inscription found on Roman graves."

"You did keep up your reading."

Enough to realize the hand that could be clasped no more was male and that Roman culture owed a lot to ancient Greece.

"Dr. Colton didn't mention he and Garrett had been more than friends."

"I'm not surprised."

"He wanted you to show me."

"That'd be my guess."

I step up to the marker. "We killed Dr. Colton's lover?"

"A tractor killed him. It was an accident."

"Like Tom Bennett in the fire?"

A muscle twitches in his jaw. "Does it bother you he died?"

"He was a bastard. I remember that."

I crouch and trace the letters with my fingertips.

"What was your problem with him, anyway?"

"Finnestad? He didn't like us spending so much time together.

Claimed we were too close. It wasn't natural."

"Dr. Colton says you didn't trust him."

"The guy was always trying to get you by yourself."

"Dr. Colton said we got along."

"You were a chameleon."

"I didn't trust him either?"

"A blind man could have seen you made him itchy."

"Did Dr. Colton know?"

"I don't think he wanted to. You used to say he had the hots for you himself."

"Sounds like teenage swaggering."

"Nah, you read it from the horse's mouth."

"How, if he was hidden?"

"He didn't realise how good you were."

"Something else we kept from him? Like our telepathy?"

Luke grins.

I stand and shake a kink out of my leg. "Was it only me that Garrett had an interest in?"

"You were everybody's darling. Finnestad included."

He starts chuckling.

"What?"

"I just realized. Some things never change. You always called him Garrett. I always called him Finnestad. To his face, of course, it was always 'Sir'."

"Was there some sort of rivalry between us? 'Everybody's darling.' That's pretty strong."

"Rivalry? Nah. Not unless you mean like this."

He hooks his foot behind my legs and shoves me hard. I try to

keep my balance but surprise is on his side. He presses his advantage, dropping as I fall and pinning me. I grab his hands to keep them from my shoulders, but he leans with all his weight. I raise a leg and jam a sneaker in his ribs. He tumbles and we start to roll. I try to get on top, but overshoot and wind up eating dirt.

He scrambles up and straddles me.

“Uncle?” he demands.

“Never.”

He drops down on my back and stretches out on top of me.

“Sure?”

There’s no wriggling away. He’s won.

“Next time, Luke.”

“As if.” He struggles up and offers me a hand. “That’s what you always used to say.”