

Chapter 39

DREAMS OF FLYING

I FORGOT TO pull the curtains when I went to bed, and woke up to a velvet sky just starting to go navy. I used to see that colour, sometimes, waking up on parkland grass my first year in Toronto. Listening to bird calls and the swell of distant traffic, I'd forget my situation and just *know*. Know that there were twenties in my wallet. Know that no essentials needed stealing. Know my stomach would be filled three times that day. It wasn't that the questions of survival had been answered, or the mystery resolved. Rather it was knowing, for a while, that I could rest.

Sometime in the night, or perhaps the day before, a page had turned. The Caucus had dispersed. The Farm was back to normal: Dr. Colton, Mr. Shen and Cook. A few visitors—Marion, and Kirin's little household.

Luke, whom I'd left nodding off by firelight, had mentioned something about Hamilton that afternoon, but planned to spend the morning working on the truck.

Cook was up and at it when I got down to the kitchen. Her porridge pot was smaller but her energy the same. I gave her a big hug and let her feed me like a king. I wondered why Luke seldom took advantage of her breakfasts. Maybe the attention got to be too much.

My broker was to keep me posted on his progress via email at a

throwaway account. I checked it after breakfast, figuring if Dr. Colton was prepared to let me use the phone I didn't have to fret so much about the router. There were no messages, other than that tired plea from a Nigerian official wanting access to my bank account to hide his fortune from the despot who'd already killed his family.

I checked my server in Toronto, too, to see if Byron had sent anything.

He hadn't.

Luke was up. I heard the truck turn over and the tires as he moved it to the barn. Content with just a trace of where he was—of *that* he was—I stretched out on the bed and finished off *The Chrysalids*, then showered and shaved and went outside to join him.



Mr. Shen came out while Luke was underneath the truck. It had taken less than thirty seconds to establish I knew nothing about disks or shoes or callipers, which left me fetching tools while he did something to the brakes.

"Boys," said Mr. Shen by way of greeting, "how's work progressing?"

Luke drew the dolly forward with his heels. His face was smudged, his T-shirt flecked with rust.

"Pretty good. After this, it's change the oil and we're done."

"Excellent. Ready for this afternoon, then?"

"No problem."

"In which case, may I steal your helper for a minute?"

"Sure, if he'll find me an extension for the socket wrench. Blue toolbox, top tray."

I pawed through greasy tools. "Long or short?"

He craned his neck under the chassis. "Better make it both."

"I don't know if Luke told you," Mr. Shen began outside, squinting in the brilliant sun, "we're going into town this afternoon."

"We' as in . . . ?"

“Luke and Roy and I. For a medical appointment.” He smiled good-naturedly. “Luke needs his tune-ups, too.”

“Must be interesting, explaining to his doctor what the implant in his shoulder’s for.”

“No need. She put it there.”

“A Caucus member?”

“Let’s just say, a friend.”

“Like Marion?”

“Not exactly. She spent some time here when the Farm was home to CISAP. But that isn’t what I want to talk to you about. When we get home, you and I are going on little trip. Not far. Just down to Port Dover. You might want to pack some things. We’ll be spending a few days.”

“Doing what?”

“Helping you to be all you can be,” he said with heavy boot-camp irony.

“You mean starting to re-learn things? Like Dr. Colton said? How did he put it—reawaken what I used to know about my gift?”

“More like teaching you to shake old habits.”

“Still with the riddles, eh?”

“It’s been said there’s no such thing as magic, just technology we don’t yet understand. Riddles are like that, except it’s logic, not technology, escaping us. At any rate, Robert and I feel you should be off the Farm for this.”

“Away from Luke.”

“Away from all distraction. And Luke, whatever else, has farm work to attend to. What I’m thinking is, when we return from Hamilton, you and I can drive to Caledonia, eat footlongs by the river, then head down to Port Dover. I’ve booked us rooms at a hotel. Roy will join us in the morning.”

“Roy? I was under the impression he was going to be the guinea pig for me *and* Luke.”

“And so he will, but his involvement starts with you alone.”

“Doing what, exactly?”

He gave my arm a pat.

“You’ll see.”



Footlongs by the Grand with Mr. Shen was like a trip down memory lane, even with my slice of personal nostalgia removed.

We got them from a stand called the Oasis on the south side of the river. The structure has eight sides, approximately one for every decade it’s been open. It was built to feed the workers raising Caledonia’s nine-span concrete bridge and hasn’t missed a summer’s operation since.

With soda-fountain Coke and French’s mustard happily cohabiting my tastebuds, I took Mr. Shen’s advice and turned off Hwy. 6 for a detour through tobacco country. Sweeping roads and sandy shoulders shimmered in a setting sun that washed the elephant-eared crops with brass.

We rejoined the highway near Port Dover, slowing to a crawl and stopping for the lift bridge while a sailboat glided through on water stained the colour of the sunset. The pier beyond, in silhouette, seethed with evening strollers. The lighthouse at the end, a squat square pyramid, wavered like a heat mirage.

Past the bridge, Main Street was a free-for-all of jaywalkers and families with strollers.

“You call this away from all distractions?”

Mr. Shen shrugged.

“I like to be near water. The Farm is peaceful but I feel landlocked if I stay too long. Perhaps tomorrow things won’t look so crowded.”

I wasn’t optimistic when I saw *No Vacancies* in stuttering green neon on the sign outside the ’50s-style beach hotel where Mr. Shen had rented rooms. In addition to prevoyance, though, he must have had some special kind of weather sense. Next morning when I peered outside through blinds stained beige with decades’ worth of guilt-free cigarettes, the sky had turned soft grey, the colour of the fog that clings to snowbanks in the spring. The surface of the lake,

undulating slowly, had the matted sheen of brushed aluminum. The crestless swells that reached the shore slid round the legs of sandpipers who looked more lost than hungry. Not a day for sunbathing, or even eating French fries from the Arbor—kin to the Oasis—on the pier.

Mr. Shen had slipped a note under my door:

*Lazybones. Gone out for a walk. Meet me
after breakfast on the pier. JWS.*

Breakfast was buffet, in a dining room that needed sun to make the oilskin tablecloths and knotty pine look cottage-y. The walls were lined with photographs that told the story of the art itself from sepia through tinted black-and-white to saturated Ektachrome.

I checked the beach for Mr. Shen, then set off for the pier. The morning air was damp, but neither warm nor cold. I stopped to run my fingers through the sand. It, too, felt oddly neutral.

The pier was empty but for one bench near the lighthouse. As I approached, I saw it wasn't Mr. Shen, but Roy Calhoun. He looked vulnerable all by himself, not the macho prick who'd nearly crushed my fingers when I met him at Cassandra Island.

He watched me coming up. I had the feeling he was missing Kirin, even though the Farm was less than one hour's drive away. It struck me as unfair, the role he'd had to play to make her falling-for-the-wrong-guy sham believable.

"David."

The greeting came out sheepishly, as if his thoughts were running in the same direction and he wanted to apologize.

"Hey, Roy. Where's Mr. Shen?"

"Not here yet."

"He said to meet him after breakfast."

"Yours or his?"

"Mine, I guess."

He slid over to make room.

At a loss for words, both of us pretended interest in a motor

boat a hundred metres out. It took forever for the wake to slap half-heartedly around the pylons. A gull lit on the railing, cocked a greedy eye and flew off in a snit.

I couldn't get my mind off Kirin. Finally I asked how it was going with the two of them.

"Good. I really like her little girl."

"I've noticed."

His smile was almost bashful. I really had misjudged him.

We went back to scanning the horizon. Scanning *for* it. The distant, faint-grey smudge could easily have been a strip of cloud, and nowhere near where sky and water met.

I could feel Roy losing patience. He drew out a pack of Camels.

"You smoke?" he asked, nipping at the cellophane to open it.

I shook my head.

He flipped a matchbook open with his thumb and struck the light one-handed.

"Good thing Kirin does. You know how hard it is to find a squeeze these days who lets you light up afterwards?"

Instantly, Cassandra Island Roy was back, the one who'd summed up Kirin by her hair and tits. He checked his watch and frowned.

"What the fuck is taking John so long?"

He got off the bench and started pacing.

Alpha arrogance... envaginates the world... considers it an insult when the universe refuses to put out for him...

Roy-the-jerk in full ascendance. What was it with this guy?

Mr. Shen appeared a short time later, ambling toward us in a pair of cargo shorts and Birkenstocks. Roy parked his ass against the railing, crossed his arms and tapped his foot.

"So, Roy," Mr. Shen enquired as he came up, "which one is it? Lovesick fool or chauvinistic throwback?"

Roy twisted round and flicked his cigarette away.

"Asshole."

The epithet left Mr. Shen untroubled.

"And the other?"

“Tried it first. Started getting worried David here was going to hug me.”

He winked. Not at Mr. Shen—at me.

“Would either of you care to tell me what the fuck is going on?”

They exchanged a look. Mr. Shen was better at inscrutable. Roy lost it first. The macho posture melted.

“Shit, David, if you could see your face right now. This—,”
..lonely pier... thoughts of Kirin... missing her, “—was me imprinting. So was this.”

... self-importance... patience dwindling... world contracting to a phallic-driven centre...

Both felt utterly authentic, like before, but this time with a speculative edge—ways Roy *could* be seen, not ways he was.

Mr. Shen allowed himself a smile.

“Fascinating, isn’t it? Once you know an imprint is an imprint, it feels a little different. More like an idea than an intuition. Come—,” he touched Roy on the arm and beckoned me, “—we’ve made it this far up the pier. Shall we go all the way?”

We strolled around the lighthouse three abreast. The sky looked whiter here, the lake more argent, as if lights beneath the surface were reflecting off the clouds.

Mr. Shen stood quietly, flanked by Roy and me. When at length he spoke, he sounded like a man entranced.

“We have much to do, and not much time to do it in. For many years now, David, your empathy has been reflexive. When you read someone, it’s passive. The puzzle pieces fall in place. A mental map begins to form. Intuition and experience interpret what you see.

“What you made yourself forget is that the mental map can be manipulated. Elements can be re-ordered, moved about, uncovering connections that reveal the hows and whys of who a person is, not just the what. Luke requires this fluency from you in order to perform his part in Jena’s killing. Roy and I are charged with re-instilling it.”

A gull screeched overhead, perhaps the same one who’d been hoping for a scrap from Roy and me. I glanced up, remembering

another soft, grey morning where the rains had come and gone while I was sleeping and a wailing gull had offered hope of showing me what city I was in.

The bird rose high and vanished in the whiteness of the sky. Staring up began to make me dizzy. I dropped my gaze. As I did, an afterimage—milky, luminescent—seemed to form above the lake. For a brief, disorienting moment, the world turned achromatic: the canescent not-quite-colour of a mirror having nothing to reflect.

No—the *concept* of a mirror having nothing to reflect, like imagining imagining the inside of a silver ball.

More like an idea than an intuition.

I looked at Roy, standing on the other side of Mr. Shen.

“You?”

He nodded.

“Someone has to draw the maps for where John’s taking you. We got started on the wrong foot, you and me. You’ll see. Underneath the hood, we’re not so different.”



Everyone has dreams of flying. Ferko once confessed his patients spoke of them more often than they did about their nightmares.

Typically, the dreamer is engaged in an activity that momentarily puts him aloft—jumping puddles, skipping down the street—when, as if it’s normal, he prolongs the instant just before he lands. It isn’t difficult. All he has to do is hold his feet above the ground. There’s nothing strange about it. In dreamspace, anyone could do it. No special skills or muscles are required.

The dreamer lands and jumps again. This time he hovers longer—maybe with his knees bent so his feet don’t touch the earth. Suddenly it dawns on him: *Hey—if I stay this way long enough, it’s tantamount to flying. Cool! How come I never noticed?*

Thus flight in dreams originates, not with rising up, but an epiphany—a whole new way of using the familiar.

For ten oneiric lakeside days, Roy touched my mind and showed

me I could fly. Psychic artefacts and mental maps, my own and other people's, didn't have to fall immutably in place. By an act of will, like saying to myself *Don't let your feet make contact with the ground*, I could hold them in suspension, shuffle them around and re-arrange them into new, revealing shapes.

It seemed so obvious, so simple, when I had Roy's imprints guiding me—overlays, seen and yet not-seen, like the grid of Golden Rectangles that govern the proportions of the Parthenon. But when the imprints faded, I had trouble practising what seconds earlier had made such perfect sense.

"Have you ever read a book called *Flatland*?" Mr. Shen asked early on. It might have been a morning. Or an afternoon. Or an evening. The silver weather, holding fast, had stopped time in a bubble made of lake and pearly sky.

Flatland. Nineteenth-century. A novella chronicling the exploits of a humble Square living in a universe of only two dimensions. Square's ordered life amongst exceedingly well-mannered Polygons is shattered by a visit from a Sphere, who transports him from his flat existence into three dimensions: Spaceland.

"Do you remember how the Square describes his shift to Spaceland?" Mr. Shen enquired.

In *Flatland*, *up* is always north. Back in two-dimensions, Square, trying to recall how Sphere effected his translation, keeps repeating: *upward, but not northward; upward, but not northward*.

"Consider psychic space as being like Spaceland to the Square. When Roy imprints, you occupy the next dimension up. Not because he's showing you, but because you can—on your own, without his help. That ability defines the essence of psychism. For now, your mind is following reflexively. With repetition, that will change. You'll catch on. Or should I say, catch on again?"

Which didn't stop me chanting to myself at night: *outward, but not upward; outward, but not upward*. Nor waking in the morning with an almost-understanding, and the memory of Mr. Shen's hypnotic promptings: "*Notice how the ligature that binds a recollection to its affect-field unravels when you juxtapose a different trigger*

from the ambiance array... ”

The timeless silver days wore on and Mr. Shen proved right. Of my own accord, I found that I could summon up the colourless geometry of inner space and move inside it at the same time as I mentally stepped back and watched its axes become fluid: left-and-right transforming into up-and-down and up-and-down, in turn, to in-and-out.

So obvious.

So simple.

Such a relief.

After fifteen years of holding back, my mind, at last, was breathing free.



The strange, calm weather broke the evening I was leaving. I was carrying my suitcase to the car when a ribbon of cyan at the horizon widened till the setting sun protruded like a tumour from beneath the silver clouds. Lurid pink rushed in to fill the vacuum left by ten days' grey. The air itself appeared to be on fire for a while.

Coincidental with the gaudy light, an SUV pulled in the parking lot and honked. A moment later, Kirin Neemes stepped out—a newly minted Kirin Neemes I almost didn't recognize. She'd cut her hair, and dyed the short bob gleaming black. Bright-red lipstick and a pair of Capri pants announced a serious commitment to reviving sixties' Monte Carlo.

“You like?” she asked, spinning around.

“I think the operative word is *Gulp!*”

“Too much, you think?”

“That's a question better left for Roy.” I nodded at the SUV. “Whose wheels?”

“Mine. Or rather, Karen Naylor's. Here, have a look.”

She dug into a chartreuse vinyl handbag and produced a matching wallet. Flipping through, she flashed a photo ID, health insurance card and driver's licence. The former Kirin Neemes, now

identified as Karen Naylor, looked a bit like Audrey Hepburn.

“New car, new identity,” I said. “Deep pockets, good connections. They’re moving fast.”

“And a new house, too. Already.”

“Oh, yeah? Where?”

“BC. We’re driving out. Carlin and I. Roy’s going to join us after you get finished whatever it is you and Luke are doing with him.”

“Won’t your family worry?”

She snapped the wallet shut.

“What family? Mom and Dad were in a pile-up two years after Carlin. My only relative’s my grandmother, who’s in a home and thinks that Diefenbaker’s still prime minister. I thought you knew. Feel like a walk?”

“Mr. Shen’s expecting me to drive him back.”

“He’s gone already. Roy gave him the truck.”

“Where’s Roy?”

“With Carlin getting ice cream cones.”

“Do I sense your coming here is—how shall I say—arranged?”

“Kinda. We need to talk.”

“Okay. Just let me finish checking out.”

For a woman with a need to talk, Kirin didn’t say much when we started down the beach. Instead, she took my arm and shot me funny glances.

“What?” I asked.

“You’re different, somehow. Easier to be around.”

“Perhaps it’s you who’s changed.”

“No. I mean yes,” she amended quickly, “of course I’ve changed. But so have you. I feel like I can trust you now. Shit. That came out wrong. It’s just that, remember how I used to wonder all the time if there was something you weren’t telling me? Like you were pulling my leg or something? I don’t get that now.”

She gave my arm a squeeze.

Further down the beach, I asked what she’d been up to in my absence.

“Oh, this and that. Trying to keep Carlin occupied. I’d never

have believed it, but Roy's actually better at it than me. We've been doing what there is to do in Hamilton—the Botanical Gardens, Dundurn Castle, that sort of thing. Marion and I had to run Luke into town a couple of times, what with Roy and Mr. Shen down here with you.”

“Which of you got to hold the switch?”

“Marion. It felt weird, knowing she could knock him out at any time. And weirder that it didn't bother him.”

“He's had a while to get used to it.”

“I guess.”

A little further on, she dropped my arm and knelt to pluck a triangle of frosted glass out of the sand, the green kind Sunday beachcombers are always on the lookout for. She held it to the setting sun, then dropped it in her purse.

“We should be getting back. Roy and Carlin won't be all that long.”

Arm in arm again, we set off down the beach. Our shadows stretched ahead of us like Giacometti sculptures.

“Do you remember, David, just after you met Luke, you sort of asked me to choose sides? Like, if there was anything I learned I thought you ought to know, you wanted me to tell you?”

“I remember. Feels like ages ago.”

“This is probably the last chance we'll ever get to talk. The SUV is packed. Carlin and I are spending tomorrow here with Roy and then we're taking off. We'll drop Roy at the Farm, but we won't be staying long.

“I've given this a lot of thought. Like it or not, I'm part of something now.”

“You mean the Caucus?”

“Yes. And don't get me wrong, it's mostly 'like'.”

“Even when you have to change your name and start all over?”

“It won't be so bad. The Caucus has arranged things so I never have to worry about money. And knowing what I am now, it's like being a brand new person anyway.”

“I smell a *but* . . . ”

“Well, that’s the thing. I’ve had to ask myself, which is more important: doing what the Caucus wants because I’m part of it—and grateful—or acting like a friend. We *are* friends, aren’t we?”

“That’s how I plan on thinking of it.”

The clearing sky had raised a breeze that ruffled up the lake and made a spray of copper pennies of the sunset trail. Kirin stopped to light a cigarette and stayed in place, admiring.

“I wish this weren’t how you’ll remember me,” she said, her eyes far off. “The bearer of bad tidings. But I’d rather that than have you think I lied. There’s something no one’s telling you. Something Dr. Colton asked us not to talk about.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

She turned to face me.

“It’s Luke, David. He’s dying.”