

# Chapter 40

## NOT EXACTLY ANGELS

LUKE'S CABIN WAS in darkness, as I'd known it would be long before I reached the Farm.

Driving north on Hwy. 6, I'd sought him out and found him, as for ten days I'd been finding him, a reassuring presence like a night-light in the hallways of my mind. But he was sleeping—napping, maybe?—and I didn't want to rouse him. I wasn't even sure I could. Up close, telepathy allowed us to converse; further out, perceptions-thoughts-intentions found a language of their own. Beyond that, it became noesis—a joining that entailed nothing but itself. Luke *was*, and I perceived perceiving him.

The lights were on in Dr. Colton's study when I parked behind the house. The kitchen, too, but I couldn't deal with Cook. One look and she'd know something was amiss. I walked around instead and entered from the front.

Dr. Colton must have heard me on the stairs. He raised his eyes with only mild curiosity when I burst in.

“Yes?”

The single word was colourless, a question asked by sandpaper. He'd donned a terry bathrobe and his hair was damp, marshaled into furrows with a comb. The smell of Yardley's soap hung in the air.

I marched over to his desk. “Why didn't you tell me Luke was

dying?”

He'd been writing in a journal—quarto-sized and bound in kid—in script so dense it looked like solid blue. He screwed his gold pen shut and laid it on the page.

“Apparently because there was no need. Who told you? Luke?”

“How could he? I've been gone the past ten days.”

“Please,” he said dismissively, “don't be insulting. There's your telepathy.”

“It doesn't work like that.”

“No? Well, perhaps some day you'll tell me how it does.” He closed his book with studied care. “From your friend, Miss Neemes, then?”

“Who gives a flying fuck how I found out? What matters is you never told me.”

“Like you never told us you were still in touch with CSIS?”

The room expanded and contracted. I could almost hear the blood drain from my face.

“The router, David,” he pressed on. “Did you think we wouldn't notice? I had Franklin checking logs from the moment you arrived. More from curiosity, I have to say, than lack of trust. You told them nothing of importance.”

“You can't possibly know that. Everything I sent them was encrypted.”

“Perhaps. But you are not. At most, you sent them factual but useless information. Am I wrong?”

“Why bother asking? You seem to think you know me better than I know myself.”

“But David,” he replied, his voice like cinders in the wind, “in some ways, I do.”

I'd never felt the urge to smack someone so strongly. I balled my fists and stepped toward the desk. He didn't flinch; my rage was futile and he knew it. The terry bathrobe, plush and white against the deep red chair, made the man inside seem smaller but his presence more commanding. He snugged the collar while he watched me flex my fingers as I fought down the reaction he'd so skilfully

provoked.

“Luke has a progressively enlarging tumour in his brain. It showed up first in MRI scans after his attack of NMS. The tumour is itself benign. However, it impinges on the ring of arteries that feed the brain. The location militates against excision.”

“How long does he have?”

“At the present rate of growth, he’ll be fully symptomatic in about three months.”

“*Three months?*”

Three months ago, I didn’t even know I had a brother. Now, that same span hence, it might as well have been as if I never had.

Three months.

Ninety days.

Ninety days to fill with fifteen years.

And to accomplish what the Caucus wanted. The light began to dawn.

“This rush to take out Jena—it’s not about her schedule. It’s Luke. You’re afraid he’ll die before we get the chance.”

For the first time ever, Dr. Colton looked as if his hand had been played out.

“Am I wrong?” I mimicked in the silence.

“No,” he sighed, “you’re not.”

“What the hell were you hoping to gain by keeping this from me?”

“Focus, David. Knowing Luke was dying might have pre-disposed you to—,” he frowned, “—inappropriate emotional priorities. We hoped to minimize distractions from the task at hand. What was—what *is*—important is developing your psychic bond with Luke, not grieving for a situation that won’t change.”

“Do you get off on being callous?”

“Callous?” He looked genuinely puzzled. “No. Introducing you to Luke and telling you he only had a short time left, then asking you to set aside the shock of finding out you had a brother *and* that he was dying while you helped us with our problem—*that* would have been callous. There was a time you weren’t so high and mighty.

You would have seen past the expedience.”

“Seen past, or overlooked? If that’s what I was like, I’m glad for every second I spent ignorant of you, the Caucus, and this farm.”

“And Luke?” He held up a placating hand. “We hoped to spare your feelings, David. Or rather, to defer the grief occasioned by his illness to a time more apt for dealing with it.”

“*Jesus Christ!*” I shouted. “You’re a shrink, or used to be. Since when has sparing people’s feelings ever been good therapy? And just so’s I can get this straight, you were going to what?—sic Luke and me on Jena, bring us back here afterwards, take me out one day and say, *Oh, by the way, Luke’s dying?* Then nurse me through a Kübler-Ross while helping me recover everything I’m going to lose again?”

“Or was the memory retrieval to be put off? ‘To a time more apt for dealing with it?’ And maybe then again, with even feebler excuses?”

Dr. Colton pushed away from his desk and stood. Not abruptly—more like he was saying my hour was up.

“Minus all the paranoia, David, and your crack about how cavalierly we were going to break the news, then yes, in essence, that’s how we foresaw it.

“But you’re missing something. Perhaps the shock of finding out is still too raw. You seem to feel that I—or rather, or we, the Caucus—are the ones who chose to keep you in the dark.

“May I suggest you take the matter up with Luke?”



*The sun’s directly overhead. Beneath the trees around the shore, the surface of the pond is black, even though it’s blinding in the middle. Minnows nibble insects floating on the surface. The tiny ripples dissipate before they reach the shore.*

*“What were you waiting for?”*

*Luke had been there in my mind next morning, telling me to meet him at the pond. He’d risen early. So had Dr. Colton.*

*"Till after we'd had all the fun we could," he says.*

*I'd arrived ahead of him and sat down on the stonecrop with my arms around my knees.*

*"So it really was you didn't want me knowing?"*

*"Like I told you—Colton doesn't lie."*

*I'd sensed him walking to the woodlot, entering the shade and pushing through the ferns. By the time he'd reached the pond, his simple wish to keep our time together free of sorrow was forgiven.*

*"I should have seen it, Luke."*

*"Prevoyance isn't perfect. Even John screws up sometimes."*

*He's settled close behind me now, scissoring his legs so I can nestle in the V.*

*"Not like that. I mean the obvious. They couldn't let us stay together afterwards. They'd be too scared. What did I think was going to happen? Dr. Colton would extract that thing there in your shoulder with a 'Guess what boys, you're free to go'? Or they'd keep you here forever, and I'd just go along with it?"*

*"It's hard to see what you don't want to, Jimmy-Dean."*

*His hands are on my shoulders, loosening the muscles. The callouses are catching in my T-shirt.*

*"I have a hard enough time seeing things I want to."*

*His fingers make a detour through my hair. "Because of what's up here? The tripwire?"*

*"Yeah."*

*He traces patterns on my back then puts his arms around my chest.*

*"You know, Luke, I don't buy it anymore."*

*"What?"*

*"This 'damage to my psyche' crap. My real memories can't be any more traumatic than the bullshit I've been hearing."*

*"You think Colton's stalling?"*

*"I've spent ten days being taught stuff I already know, or would, if I remembered. Wouldn't helping me—I still don't know the word . . . retrieve? restore? repair?—my memories have been a whole lot easier? Why the rigmarole, unless there's something Dr. Colton*

*doesn't want me knowing? Something about you, or me, or us? Let's face it—if my recollections of the foster home aren't totally fucked up, we weren't exactly angels.*

*I feel him start to chuckle through my spine. "You remember that old witch? The one whose kitchen we destroyed? All those jars of pickles?"*

*"Mrs. Chenoweth."*

*"Hey—you're the one who's s'pposed to have a memory problem."*

*I swivel round and cuff him. "When half your memory's gone, you work hard at keeping what you've got."*

*He rubs his ear, gets up, and saunters to the bank.*

*"We did some bad shit, Jimmy-Dean, there and here, but nothing Colton doesn't want you knowing."*

*A cloud of midges floats toward the middle of the pond. It hovers like the shadow of a shadow. Luke picks up a stone skips it through.*

*"If not us, then maybe something about him? He says the morning after what we did to Garrett, he made me read him. Fully, so I'd feel the pain we'd caused."*

*"That was thoughtful."*

*"If he had secrets, I'd have seen them then."*

*He fires off another stone. "You're the empath, Jimmy-Dean."*

*"And those months with Mr. Shen at Dawe's Lake afterwards? Was there more to it than learning how to fuck my own mind over?"*

*"You could always check in Chancery."*

*"They kept records?"*

*"It's not exactly privileged information around here. And John and Colton are obsessed with keeping notes."*

*He finds another stone, inspects it, drops it in the water.*

*"Did you ever take a look?" I ask him.*

*"Kinda lost my taste for anything to do with Caucus shit."*

*There's more, but he's not saying. I feel his resistance, though I can't say whether it's telepathy, or empathy, or intuition. He comes*

*back and stretches out, his face toward the sun. His eyelids are half-closed. The irises beneath them are the pale, fluorescent green of anti-freeze.*

*“Imprint me, Luke.”*

*“With what?”*

*“I dunno. A memory. Something from Mt. Hope. Something where I think you’re my imaginary friend.”*

*“You know what’ll happen.”*

*“Roy’s been in my mind all week. I know what imprints feel like. They’re not like reading or telepathy. They don’t become a part of me unless I let them.”*

*“Colton says—”*

*“I know what Dr. Colton says.”*

*There’s algae drying on the shore, giving off a rotting odour that brings Mrs. Chenoweth to mind again—her kitchen with its sour smell and all those shelves of pickles. But the recollection’s slightly off. Angles and perspectives aren’t as I remember them. The camera of memory has moved a foot or two. The windowpane is smashed before I break it. Shards of glass crunch underfoot before I step on them.*

*Luke’s imprint’s not like Roy’s. His were mind and concept; Luke’s is sense and feeling. If there are colours past what eyes can see, sounds beyond what ears can hear, if a feather’s touch can feel like a lead weight and a cannonball a snowflake, I have only to embrace Luke’s memory to know.*

*I pull it close and feel a surge of recognition, sharp and sweet, stopping breath and making me go hard.*

*The pain starts dully, like a throbbing toe, then blossoms in a heartbeat into waves of agony encroaching on the beach of consciousness. I want to let Luke go, but it’s too late. The process has begun and I can’t stop it anymore than I could stop myself from cumming.*

*The world explodes and darkness crashes in.*



*Somehow I'm still sitting, shivering. Luke is on his knees, his hand behind my head. I feel him ease me back.*

*He lays down with his leg across my thighs.*

*The woodlot makes its forest sounds.*

*The pond exhales its odours.*

*He slides his hand beneath my shirt and gently rubs my chest.*