

# Chapter 42

## THE RAW TASTE OF TRUTH

**C**OOK WAS LEAVING with a breakfast tray when I walked in on Dr. Colton. I declined her offer of a Danish and thrust my laptop on his desk.

“David—what’s this all about?”

I flipped the lid and spun it round. He sipped his morning coffee with his eyes on me instead of on the screen. The look was meant to say my barging in was growing tiresome.

Finally he dropped his gaze. “And these are—,” he made a languid gesture at the images of Eliot Pierce, “—what?”

“They’re the price of dropping someone in an alley and expecting them to get along with half their memories gone.”

He set his coffee down.

“No doubt that’s very clever, but forgive me if I fail to understand.”

“The dead guy was a trick. He died while I was trying to earn a buck.”

He bent closer to the screen and frowned. “You did this sort of thing?”

Not murder—S&M.

“It’s a little late to be concerned about it now. Two-thousand dollars isn’t much to start with when you’re only seventeen.”

“May I assume the death was accidental?”

“You weren’t so quick to think so when the victim was your lover.”

His face went hard. “I’ll equally assume you aren’t here just to make allusions.”

“An officer at CSIS did her homework. She’s threatening to go to the police unless she hears from me. Which she will, an hour from now. There’s an email with the Farm’s location queued up on my server in Toronto.”

He pushed back from his desk and spent a stoney thirty seconds studying my face.

“What do you want?”

“Tell me, Dr. Colton—how is it that a group who fears the excesses of BRAZIER has an archive of material that duplicates their work?”

“I see. You’ve been down to Chancery.”

“It wasn’t locked.”

“Why would it be?”

“Don’t avoid my question.”

He took a breath. “Whatever your suspicions, David, our methodology is utterly dissimilar to BRAZIER’s.”

“Why? Because your subjects volunteer? Fucking with a person’s mind is fucking with a person’s mind. Psychotropics, sensory isolation, sleep deprivation—and those are only what I got a glimpse of.”

“Glimpses aren’t enough to tell a story, and I’m not about to justify activities requiring no defence. As you say, our members volunteer for research.”

“Like I volunteered to have my memories excised?”

“I’ll concede that volunteered is stretching it, but you did, in fact, agree.”

“Yeah, when I had absolutely no will left to make a choice.”

Camouflage and misdirection may have kept his mind a blank, but anyone could see his guard go up.

“What’s open reading, Dr. Colton?”

“You’ve gone through John’s notes, too.” He nodded faintly. “Open reading is exactly what it sounds like: exposure to a psychic’s mind with no defences in the way.”

“Is that why it took six weeks to get over—how did Mr. Shen put it—the expected dissociative reaction?”

“Empathy is seldom instantaneous. It takes time, however brief, to circumvent the barriers all minds construct. Open reading happens all at once. For a while, you *are* the person being read. In one as young as you were then, the synchronous experience of two world views, two *Weltanschauungen*, can be traumatic.”

“The same way being blasted with a firehose could be called ‘traumatic’? Most people call it brute force.”

“There was no coercion.”

“Do you honestly expect me to believe that being in your head was all it took to scare me up to Dawe’s Lake for a ten month stint with Mr. Shen? That your fears—not mine, *yours*—frightened me so much I deserted Luke and never even tried to run away? What did you really show me? That you’d hurt him if I didn’t go along? Maybe even kill him?”

Dr. Colton made an exasperated sound. “You read too many novels. And not good ones, either.”

“Or maybe I saw something else, like what you planned for Luke and me if Project Four-One-Two panned out. *Empathy-enhanced imprinting through telepathy*? From everything you’ve told me, you didn’t think it possible till Luke and I screwed up with Garrett. Yet there you were, researching it before we even landed on the scene.”

“Four-One-Two dates to our early years. We considered many theoretic possibilities back then.”

“Including one the Caucus feared would be developed as a psychic weapon?”

“Surely John enclosed that in quotation marks.”

“And how come Four-One-Two’s not down in Chancery? I went looking. Couldn’t find it anywhere.”

“We have many projects, now inactive, not in Chancery. And that one, as I said, was purely theoretical.”

“As purely theoretical as memory dereferencing? My impression is that Mr. Shen knew all about it long before the ‘exigencies of

Luke and me' gave you a chance to try it out. You call it psychic surgery. Psychic lobotomy's more like it. What sort of theoretical use did you have in mind for that?"

"We hoped it might have application in a therapeutic setting."

"What the hell kind of therapy? The only people who can do this thing are psychics. Maybe only *gifted* psychics—ones so good it turns out the procedure doesn't work unless you boobytrap their brains without them knowing."

My voice was rising but the heavy velvet drapes conspired to swallow it.

Dr. Colton regarded me evenly.

"Is that what this is all about? The tripwire?"

His tone was dusty, dry, sweet reason.

My mind went back to waking up on park lawns, heavy with the emptiness of six years gone; to long nights skirting memories that narrowed to a point of pain; to all the years spent never knowing Luke existed; to meeting him again, only to discover he was dying.

"No, Dr. Colton, it's about retaliation. Retaliation by a man who lost his lover to a teenage prank—a prank played by a pair of psychic twins you had high hopes for and had coddled to the point of irresponsibility.

"First you separate them when they've never spent a day apart. Then you scare one into burying his memories of the other, while imprisoning the one who has his memories intact. That way, one of them is forced to live with loss he can't remember, and the other one is forced to live with loss he can't forget.

"But amnesia's not sufficient for the one who can't remember. He needs to feel punished, even if he hasn't got a clue what for. You arrange things so his every effort at recall is agony, and then, in a final twisting of the knife, you ensure his memories can't be restored until he's lost the very person he'll most want to share them with."

Dr. Colton's level gaze remained.

"You're certain of all this? Or have you other theories? Say, some dark secret you discerned while reading me that Luke must never know?"

I returned his look.

“My only theory now is that you think I’m bluffing about CSIS.”

“Are you?”

“Running from a murder warrant isn’t quite the same as vanishing off CSIS’ radar.”

His eyelids dropped, and with them, the charade of supercilious detachment.

“What do you intend to do?”

For once he hadn’t pulled off knowing in advance.

“Make demands, like anyone who’s holding something over someone’s head. You’re more than passingly familiar with the concept, I believe. What I want, to start with, is everything you have on BRAZIER.”

“BRAZIER? Why?”

Any doubts I’d had that he’d been lying all this time, reading past defences I’d been told were autonomic, dissipated.

“CSIS won’t call off the dogs unless I give them something. BRAZIER ought to keep them satisfied until next week.”

His eyes flicked up with interest. “Next week? May I cautiously assume, then, that whatever else your feelings, you intend to see things through?”

“The choice is yours.”

Like the choices he’d been giving me.

“Everything in Chancery’s been scanned. I can burn a DVD or transfer files now.”

*A trifle. Happy to oblige.*

He slid the keyboard out from underneath his monitor. “May I also ask what you’re intending when the time this buys runs out?”

“You mean, am I going to rat on you? Let me put it this way. BRAZIER scares me, Dr. Colton. So does Jena. Of all your carefully cooked stories, they’re the only ones that have the full, raw taste of truth. But I don’t give a shit about your little gang. If the price of getting CSIS off my case is you, trust me, it’s no price at all.

“I plan to meet up with my contact. Face-to-face, so I can read him and make sure that he—or, more precisely, his superior, the

woman who so kindly sent those photographs—is going to back off when I tell him what he’s going to find out anyway if I don’t kill that email I’ve got waiting on my server. Which gives you till next Thursday, when I go to Ottawa, to clear the Farm.”

“What will you do afterwards?”

“See things through, then disappear with Luke.”

“And further down the road?” *When your brother dies?*

“Track down Mr. Shen. I’m guessing that the final book of his Cassandra Island notes is like a key? A map to where I buried everything?”

“That’s correct.”

“Then I’ll be holding on to it.”

“Thursday’s not a lot of time.”

“I’m not trying to make things easy.”

I turned the laptop round and fired up a terminal.

“One other thing.” I stopped short of entering the password that would log me onto ase.ca. “That electronic tether in Luke’s shoulder? Get rid of it. Remove it, disable it—I don’t care. Just make sure it’s gone.”

Dr. Colton’s cool, assessing look returned.

“Would it surprise you, David, to discover it’s already taken care of?”



*I trace the outline of the dressing near Luke’s collarbone. It’s small and clean and white against his skin. My fingernail catches in the gauze.*

*“How come you didn’t tell me?”*

*He takes my hand and moves it to his chest.*

*“I was saving it.”*

*His heart is pumping fast. I can feel it in the cleft between his ribs.*

*“For when?”*

*“Later. When it healed. When we could finally go swimming.”*

*After my demands to Dr. Colton, it seemed only natural to pack*

*my things and cart them to Luke's cabin. As natural as stretching out beside him for some sleep.*

*When he met me at the door with, "Hey, what's up?" and I said, "We've got things to talk about," he'd answered: "Wanna catch some shut-eye first? You look like shit and I'm not going anywhere but back to bed."*

*His futon smelled of summer dragging on. I fell asleep telepathizing everything: Chancery, the notebooks, Eliot Pierce, Subira's threat. It was less a mind-to-mind exchange than one-way pouring out.*

*"Roy'll be here soon."*

*"Oh, yeah? When?"*

*"Mr. Shen said early afternoon."*

*He glances at the bedside clock. It's almost noon. The room, which faces east, is roasting. His skin is glowing like it's oiled.*

*"We don't have to do this thing," I say.*

*"It isn't like you haven't killed before," he grins.*

*His legs are underneath the sheets. A hard-on tents the cotton and he doesn't try to hide it.*

*"We could go anywhere, Luke. Do anything."*

*He rolls over, props his head and draws a lazy circle on my stomach.*

*"Luke and David Ase against the world?"*

*"Yeah," I answer hoarsely. "Like that."*

*"Hmm..." he ponders stagily, "what shall we do? Go crazy on a holdup spree? Fly the Jolly Roger on the Spanish Main? Hack a bloody swath through eunuchs to some Sultan's treasure?"*

*"I was thinking more like leaving. Flying off somewhere. Letting Colton and the Caucus deal with Jena on their own."*

*He drops his head and rests it on his forearm.*

*"I want to do it, Jimmy-Dean," he whispers in my ear.*

*He's not the only one who's got a hard on now.*

*"I don't get it, Luke."*

*He snuggles closer. "You will when Roy gets here."*