

Chapter 45

OCULUS PRO OCULO

IN DAYLIGHT, THE casino's Hilton looked like a displaced Miami condo. Rearing from the middle of a quarry in Québec, its vapid whites and pastel greens screamed wannabe.

We arrived ten minutes prior to the start of Jena's show. Mr. Shen, who wasn't staying, dropped us off in front. *Goodbye, boys—good luck* was all he said before he pulled away. Unaware that CSIS was no longer to be feared—that Luke and I no longer had to run to ground—he was, from his perspective, bidding Luke a last farewell.

You and Mr. Shen already made goodbyes?

Three days' worth.

How're you feeling?

A noncommittal shrug.

The Psychic Fair was in a large, divided ballroom, not as vast as the Convention Centre in Toronto, but swankier. A sinusoidal ceiling, like the inside of an ocean swell, was hung with glass parabolas whose intricately-blown motifs reflected muted lighting on the waves. Everything was shades of mustard, with a border in the carpet adding muted greens and rusts.

A retracting wall, solid as the real thing, separated Jena from the exhibition floor. Open double doors gave free-flow access either way.

Her setup was the same as the Toronto Psychic Fair: a banquet

table dressed in blue, chairs for five with Thermoses and water glasses, towering Klipschorn speakers and a pair of big-screen monitors. The stage's bright red carpet and the purple drapery were not a good match for the mustard colour scheme.

A wide space had been cordoned off between the dais and the audience. The monitors were running clips of Jena—touring the Casino, chatting up the gamblers, winning at roulette.

Luke and I made for the rear. We wouldn't be there long. When things got going we would have to be up front.

Luke was glancing round and fidgeting.

You all right?

Not used to all these people.

That's him up there.

The purple sweatshirt fussing with a floor mike.

I know, remember?

An image of the CRT in Dr. Colton's study, coloured with some telepathic teasing.

There's his partner.

The stocky woman standing by a door she clearly wasn't letting anyone get through.

BRAZIER's pointers, Baldie and The Blonde, were nowhere to be seen. In disguise? Perhaps they'd been retired and were baying with a pack of similarly out-to-pasture hounds.

The monitors went blank. The kettledrums that signalled Jena's theme began. Dom, the empath from Québec, the woman named Jameela, and Franklin, Dr. Colton's hacker-guru, entered from the exhibition floor. If Jena'd overloaded with just me and Kirin in the crowd, how would she react to this configuration?

Nothing we were doing had been tested. No one knew how Jena would respond when Luke and I got down to business. No one knew for sure if we could even pull it off. Luke's confidence aside, the only thing for certain was we wouldn't be connected with the outcome—whatever it might be.

“Mesdames et messieurs, bienvenue au Hilton Lac-Leamy et à la Foire psychique de l'Outaouais. Il nous fait honneur d'avoir été

sélectionnés par les organisateurs de cette exposition annuelle...”

The French voice whipping up excitement got a sprinkling of applause. It took the English version for the fever to catch on.

“...and now, ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together for renowned TV personality, Jena, and her Psychic Nexus.”

Enthusiastic cheering as the guarded side door opened and Jena and her handlers filed in.

She's shorter than I thought.

On TV, you only ever see her sitting.

She's tiny. Sure hope your buddy's got good aim.

The ovation died and Jena started.

“Welcome, all you good folks here from Ottawa and Gatineau. You ready for a show? I only been here a short time, but I tell you this whole area be sizzlin’ with vibes. *Goo—ood* vibes. You goin’ to see the power today. The cards be glowin’. Omru’s burstin’ to tell all. You know Omru? He’s me spirit guide...”

Luke shook his head disgustedly.

I did a quick check of the room. All eyes were on Jena. Dom and Franklin were together. Jameela had moved off. Hopefuls were already queueing up before the mike. The sentry by the side door hadn’t budged.

Ready to get started?

Time to lock and load.



Chase is in the no-man's land in front of Jena's stage. While one dupe's fortune's being read, he's chatting up the next.

Luke advances to a spot where he'll be visible to Chase. They need to have reciprocal eye-contact. I take up position further back. For me, it only matters he be in my field of view.

I start reading him, but only superficially. Luke concocts an imprint Chase is certain to react to: a commotion in the room. The image-feeling isn't focused. Several people turn their heads the same

time Chase looks up.

He scans the crowd, but nothing's happening. He frowns and double-checks.

His gaze lands on a pair of eerie emerald eyes.

Two men with the same unearthly looks?

The sketchy map inside my head grows spikes of lust and puzzlement.

Luke senses it.

Contact, Jimmy-Dean.

His words reverberate, like echoes of a sound without a source. His face, if I could see it, would be smiling.

Jena scores a string of hits. The spectators go crazy. Chase escorts the patsy from the microphone and lets the next one through. His discipline's superb. The eyes that are not mine form only part of what he sees. Luke's presence is an oddity. It doesn't trouble or distract him.

I have to focus now. I need to pull Chase into me for Luke to go to work. He knows, and lets me be. There's no regret, no emptiness, no loss when he withdraws. His absence or his presence are the same. The daemon process wakes or sleeps; it doesn't go away.

My cock squirms as the image-map of Chase begins to grow. I've seen his full, unguarded Self, in darkness on a spit of rock. He's cum in me; I've cum in him. I know the joists and joins that make the scaffolding of Chase. I'm not suffering the blindness that afflicts me in a crowd.

Chase the BRAZIER bodyguard isn't quite the Chase I screwed. His image-map is altered by the audience, the change of day, the time of day, the venue, and the sum of all he's done and seen and thought about since then.

Luke rises from his quiet place, eager to begin. I sense him rolling mental sleeves and cracking mental knuckles.

He starts off with a pair of eyes, picked out in the throng but set aside as a distraction. Background becomes foreground as Luke teases them to prominence. Puzzle-pieces shift and flow and snap together differently. The image-sculpture flip-flops like an optical

illusion.

As yet, Luke's only toying with the image that he has inside his head—a Chase Chase could be rather than the Chase Chase is.

Chase-prime—like what we did with Roy.

My cock grows stiff against my thigh.

Suddenly the man I'm reading isn't Chase. Luke's imprint and the sculpture-puzzle-map are one. I don't see the transformation. I feel it, like the sweet first thrust of entry after foreplay.

Chase has no idea of the change that's taken place. Nothing has been added or subtracted or transformed. He's always been the kind of guy who'd stare at Luke too long.

The monitors show Jena shuffling cards. So far she's acting normally. I'd read her if I could. She might be hiding her reactions. No one knows for sure what triggers her abilities.

Luke attacks the obvious. Chase works hard to stay in shape. He tells himself it's rudimentary military readiness. It's really for the high of looking better than most men.

His image changes colour-texture-shape-proportion-meaning. A tingle ripples through my balls. He's standing taller, thrusting out his chest.

Jena's finished with a rube. Chase unhooks the cordon and allows another through. His eyes are never far from Luke.

Body-pride is only the beginning. Darker vanities lurk underneath. Chase thinks he's superior to everyone. His birth, his class, his upbringing—all confirm his status as a cut above.

Step-by-step, Luke moulds another Chase, one who's more than usually conscious of the gap between himself and the civilian roadies he's required to go drinking with.

Arrogance of class turns into arrogance of place turns into Southern insularity turns into loyalty turns into brotherhood turns into Donovan turns into bigotry turns into rage.

All of it is Chase. He's a story with the sentences mixed up. The words remain the same, but ending's always different.

He's always hated Jena. She's one of them—a nigger, like those Haitians Donovan was sent to teach a lesson to. They speak French

down there, and here she is, finishing her tour in a place they don't talk white.

She does hoodoo like them, too. And her darkie mojo works. She's got BRAZIER wrapped around her little finger. INSCOM squanders its elites protecting her.

At least she could be grateful. Her kind never is.

On stage, Jena's hectoring a sceptic Chase let through. There's always one. The audience adores it. Jena pulls a psychic ace from underneath her turban and the doubter's forced to yield. It makes for a good show.

But the disbeliever's white, and this little Aunt Jemima has no right to dress him down. Chase wonders how she'd look if someone put a bullet through her wired headpiece. Froze her dead mid-sentence. Blood and brains exploding on the drapery. The purple drapery. Chase can't stand the colour purple.

Bits of dreams and shards of memory and lessons learned and wrongs remembered...

She's protecting her own kind. Coloured psychics never wind up in the BRAZIER labs. Only white folk do.

Donvovan is dead, and no one paid.

Oculus pro oculo. One eye for another.

It wouldn't be that hard. Shoot her here and deal with the consequences. Donovan avenged, the little monkey neutralized...

Something's happening on stage. Jena's flailing uncontrollably. Her head is twisting back and forth. Real spittle's flying from her gaping mouth. She's trying to speak, but nothing's coming out. Her eyes are wild, the pupils ringed with white.

Forget her, Jimmy-Dean.

Inside my head, the words are urgent, low, and ragged. Chase is nearly there. Luke is playing with his conscience now, probing for the soft spots where it wants to give, the sensitive restraints that cave so easily when lusts are roused. I feel Luke quivering. The lightest touch, the faintest nudge, and Chase will shoot...



Pandemonium.

A woman screamed.

A crimson paintball struck the purple drapery.

Jena's head snapped backwards.

Only afterwards, the sound of gunshot—two reports so close they sounded like a stutter.

Who knows? It may have happened in that order. Time is relative, they say. Cause can sometimes follow on effect. I was Chase in me and Luke in Chase and Chase in Luke and Luke in me. Then . . . nothing. A vacuum of the senses. An enraging void. Frustration so intense my body shook.

Bridget was advancing on the spot where Chase had been. Her gun was drawn and aimed toward the floor. Chase's shot—the first—had toppled Jena backwards. I couldn't see her, either. Two white-ropes were crouched down where her chair had been. The other two were vaulting from the stage.

The crowd in panic mobbed the doors. I tried to hold my place but terror has momentum of its own.

Get going, Jimmy-Dean. I'll catch up.

I let myself get swept along. Beyond the doors, hotel security was trying to keep the curious from blocking the stampede. I hunted for an opening and elbowed my way through.

In the corridor outside, I sank against a marble wall. The cool seeped through my T-shirt. The outward shakes subsided, but I still felt like a wire stretched to breaking. My body shouted for release.

Luke appeared as uniformed police came sprinting down the hall. His eyes were fever-bright and waves of manic energy preceded him. Wordlessly, we rode the escalator to the lobby, hurried out the doors and hailed the nearest taxi.

Luke slouched down inside and let his head drop back. He looked absolutely wasted. So, his thought confirmed, did I.

Get it now?

His question had a funny twist—wry and grim and goatish all at once.

Rhetorical as well.