



MIND

IRIS



JOHANSEN

GAME

A NOVEL



*MIND
GAME*

IRIS JOHANSEN

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CHAPTER

1

LAKE COTTAGE

The woman's face might be beautiful, but it was also the stuff of nightmares.

And Jane MacGuire just wanted it to go *away!*

She jerked upright in bed, her heart pounding.

She closed her eyes, her hands clenched into fists.

She wouldn't do it again. Not again. There wouldn't be any change from the last time. And if there was a change, what could she do about it?

It was only a nightmare. She sat there in the darkness, every muscle of her body stiff and unyielding. Accept it and go back to sleep, she told herself.

But she found herself reaching for her sketch pad on the nightstand even as she gave herself that very excellent advice.

Okay, just *do* it. Get it over with.

She turned on the bedside light and started quickly sketching the woman's face. Same dark flowing hair, high cheekbones, pointed chin, same huge brown eyes, intense, burning eyes, hauntingly familiar eyes, in a face she didn't ever remember seeing before.

Just focus, don't think of anything else but the face you're drawing. Then it would be over and she would be able to go back to sleep.

Maybe.

Because it wasn't quite the same face. The eyes were still intense, but they held despair.

And this time there was blood.

The lower lip of that beautiful mouth was split as if from a hard blow and a trickle of blood was running from it and down her chin.

It was done!

Now leave me alone, dammit.

Jane tossed the sketch pad on the bed and drew a deep, shaky breath.

But there was no question that she wouldn't be going back to sleep anytime soon. She got out of bed and threw on her robe. Okay, get a glass of water and then go out on the porch and get some air.

She padded barefoot to the bathroom and turned on the light. As she drank the glass of water, she noticed her face in the mirror was as strained as that of the woman in the sketch. Her red-brown hair was rumpled and her jaw was taut.

And her stomach was still churning as she remembered the blood running from the lip of the woman in the sketch.

"I don't *need* this. It isn't fair. Find someone else." She turned on her heel and strode through the house to the front porch.

A moment later, she was standing looking out at the lake. If she'd hoped that staring out at those clear, serene depths would soothe her or give her perspective, it wasn't happening.

All she could think about was the blood.

"Problem?" Eve was standing behind her in the doorway. "You should be sleeping. Your flight leaves at eight in the morning."

"I can sleep on the plane." She turned and smiled at Eve. "You're the one who should be asleep. Michael is the most challenging two-year-old on the planet. Between taking care of him and doing your forensic sculpting work, you need all the rest you can get."

"Nonsense. Michael may be a challenge, but he's pure joy." She

came out and stood beside Jane and said quietly, “You didn’t answer me. Problem?”

It wouldn’t do any good to try to lie to her, Jane knew. From the time Eve Duncan and Joe Quinn had adopted her off the streets when she was ten years old, she and Eve had been so close that anything but total honesty was out of the question. Eve was one of the foremost forensic sculptors in the world, but she was also Jane’s best friend. They had been through tragedy and joy together, and now that Eve had given birth to a son, Michael, Jane had been privileged to share that with Eve and Joe, too. “Nothing that I can’t handle.” She made a face. “Maybe I’m a little sad to be going back to Scotland and leaving you and Joe and the baby. Three weeks wasn’t long enough.”

“Jane.”

“It’s the truth.” She grinned. “But I was getting to the other.” She glanced out at the lake. “I grew up here on this lake and I thought the familiarity would be soothing. It appears not to be happening tonight.”

“Why not try me? I’m a hell of a lot better than that lake in the soothing department.” Her arm slipped around Jane’s waist. “I’ve been told I have excellent credentials.”

“Yes, you do.” She felt a rush of love as she looked at her. Eve’s face was always intelligent and intriguing, but these days she seemed to glow. “But I’m out in the real world with a career as a budding artist these days. I was trying not to bother you with something that’s—” She shrugged. “I just feel helpless. I don’t know what I—”

“First, you’re not a budding artist; you’re totally brilliant,” Eve said firmly. “Second, you know there’s no such thing as bother when it’s family. Talk to me. Or we’ll be out here all night.”

She meant it, Jane knew. Family was everything to all of them. She drew a deep breath. “Dreams. I’ve had dreams for the past six nights.”

Eve went still. “Cira?”

“No.” But it was natural that Eve would jump to that conclusion. At seventeen, Jane had experienced a period when she had dreamed constantly of a young actress from ancient Herculaneum. She had even been so obsessed that she had researched and found evidence that the young woman had actually existed. “Not Cira. But it’s a woman.” She frowned. “Or girl. At first, I thought she was younger, but now she’s different. . . .”

“You’re not being clear, Jane.”

“*She’s* not being clear,” Jane said in frustration. “At least when I was dreaming about Cira, I had a story. I knew what was happening in her life. The dreams unraveled, telling me her story. I might have believed I was crazy and it was pure fantasy, but I *knew*. I don’t know anything about this woman. All I have is a face. I go to sleep and then her face is there before me. Then I wake up and I have to sketch what I’ve seen. I *have* to do it.” She moistened her lips. “And I think she’s scaring me.”

“Scaring you? Why?”

“Because I think she’s afraid. Oh, she’s fierce and angry and bold, but I think she’s afraid. And this time there was blood.” She swallowed. “And I think I know her. She’s . . . familiar.”

“You sketched her every time you had the dream?”

She nodded. “I *had* to do it. It was a compulsion.”

“May I take a look at them?”

“Why not?” She turned and went back to her bedroom and snatched the sketchbook from the bed. When she got back to the porch, Eve was curled up on the porch swing. Jane turned on the porch light and handed her the sketchbook. “Here she is.” She sat down beside Eve. “She. But I feel as if I should know her name.”

“She’s that familiar to you?” Eve was slowly going through the sketches one by one. “She’s lovely. Full of fire and boldness . . .” She gazed more intently. “And you’re right: The first sketches appear to be of a girl who is younger than in the later sketches. But the background is the same. . . .” She raised her eyes to meet Jane’s. “You only

mentioned the face, but you sketched in an entire background scene. Snowcapped mountains, garden . . .”

“I didn’t pay any attention to the background. I was only concerned with her face. Why can’t I remember her? Did I know her when I was a teenager? Is she familiar to you at all?”

Eve’s gaze narrowed on the sketch in her hand. “Not really. Perhaps a hint . . .” She shook her head. “Nothing is clicking.” She turned to the last sketch and froze. “Blood.”

“I told you.”

“But you didn’t tell me that she thinks she’s going to die.”

Jane inhaled sharply. “Why do you say that?”

“Because you drew it right here, Jane,” Eve said soberly. “I told you that you were a brilliant artist. It’s here in front of you. Look at it again. That’s why you’re so frightened.”

Jane lost her breath as she looked down at the sketch. The fear was stark and raw on that face. Boldness, defiance . . . and fear. Her hands clenched. “I’m afraid because I don’t know anything. I’m afraid because I’m helpless to *do* anything. Why do I keep dreaming about her? Why me?” Her voice was shaking. “For all I know, that woman died centuries ago, just as Cira did.”

“Or maybe she didn’t and is trying to reach you.”

“Why me?” she asked again. “I’m not even sure I’ve ever met her.”

“How do I know? Strange things happen. People are chosen. You know that I believe there’s a plan for all of us. At times, the plan seems unbearably painful, like when I lost my little daughter, Bonnie. Like the night Trevor, the man you loved, was shot. But sometimes we get lucky and have the chance to make the plan a little brighter for ourselves or someone else.” Eve closed the sketchbook. “Maybe you’re the only one this woman could reach. You were sensitive to Cira, but she was gone centuries before you were born and there was nothing you could do for her. Perhaps it’s your turn to reach out to someone you *can* help.”

“You know I’ve never been entirely sure that I had any actual

connection to Cira. Those dreams could have been figments of my imagination.”

“Because you’re stubborn and a realist who hates to admit to anything that she can’t see and touch.” Eve smiled. “But those dreams of Cira have dominated you in so many ways. I believe she’s as much alive to you as the rest of us in your life. Even when you fight acknowledging that Cira actually existed and reached out to you, you’re still drawn to everything connected to her. You spent months on the Internet and in libraries tracking down references to her. When you discovered she might have fled from that erupting volcano in Herculaneum to Scotland, you tracked her down to a connection with the MacDuff clan.” She reached out and touched Jane’s cheek affectionately. “And you’ve been at Gaelkar, Scotland, with the MacDuffs for almost two years, trying to find Cira’s treasure. Not because you want the treasure itself; you just want proof that your Cira exists.”

“But I don’t have that proof yet.” She looked at the sketchbook. “And if I don’t, then maybe I’m just nuts and I need to see a shrink.”

“But what if you don’t have time to wait for proof?” Eve asked. “Six nights in a row? And each one of these sketches shows an escalation. Something’s happening to make her more afraid every time she comes to you.”

Jane moistened her lips. “Maybe it’s already happened. Maybe she’s not even alive, Eve.”

Eve was silent. “It’s possible, I suppose. Do you believe that, Jane?”

“No!” The rejection came instantly. “I don’t want to believe it. She wants to *live*. She’s out there somewhere. But I could be wrong.”

“Or you could be right.”

“And what am I supposed to do about that? Look in your crystal ball. All I see is her face.”

“And the background. She makes sure that she’s giving you the background with every sketch. Study them and see if you can come up with something. Research. Go on the Internet, as you did when you were tracking down Cira.”

“It was easier to do research on Cira. That was history.”

“And this may be a matter of life and death,” Eve said quietly. “Stop being stubborn and do your job, Jane. Isn’t that what you were going to do anyway? You’re out here fretting and giving yourself arguments pro and con when you know you have to see if you can help her.” She paused. “So what’s your first move?”

“Eve.”

“The Internet?”

Jane sighed. “No, I can start doing that on the plane while heading back to Scotland. I’d like to ask Joe to take one of the sketches to the precinct in the morning and run it through the missing persons database and see if he can come up with anything. She was hurt in that last sketch. Someone struck her. It might be a stranger or a supposed friend or a member of her own family.” Her lips twisted. “Who knows? How many times have you run across the murder of a child caused by people who should have been taking care to keep the child safe, Eve?”

“Too many. But this isn’t a helpless child; this is a woman who is fighting back.” She got to her feet and handed Jane the sketchbook. “And you’re fighting back, too. What’s the next step?”

“Identify that mountain range in the background. *National Geo* might help.”

Eve chuckled. “Listen to you. This has all been simmering in your mind for how long?”

“I told you: I really didn’t notice the background.” Or did I? Jane wondered. She wasn’t even looking at the sketches, and that mountain range was before her, down to the last detail. “Well, maybe I did.”

“Maybe you did,” Eve said softly. “Choose the sketch you want to give Joe.”

“I will.” She made a face. “But he’ll probably think it’s a waste of time.”

“No, you know Joe better than that. He’s a realist, too. But he went through that Cira business with you when you were seventeen.

And since he's a police detective, he realizes that black and white can sometimes end up gray or even scarlet. He'll get you what you need." Eve leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "And now I'll say good night. If we keep talking, neither of us will be able to function in the morning." She started to turn away and then stopped. "You said you needed to know her name. It's bothering you. So give her one."

"What?"

"Give her a name. Do you remember when I was pregnant with Michael that I felt I had to know his name so that I could be closer to him?"

"I believe this is a little different, Eve," she said drily.

"It doesn't have to be her true name. I give my reconstructions a name before I begin working on them, so that I can form a connection with them."

"I know you do." She had grown up watching Eve work on those pitiful skulls and had known that every one was personal and special to her. "But she may not even exist."

"She'll exist for you if you give her a name. I think she exists for you now anyway." She turned away and headed for the door. "Good night, Jane."

"Good night. Thank you, Eve. I'm sorry to disturb your night. I hope I didn't wake Michael."

"You didn't wake him." Eve turned and smiled at her. "Who do you think sent me out here? He was already restless. I believe Michael was worried about you and sending out vibes. He'll sleep better now that I've done something about you."

"And you'll sleep better," Jane said. The closeness of the bond between Eve and her son was remarkable and far beyond the ordinary. Jane wasn't sure that she knew the full extent of that tie, but she was just grateful that Eve had been given this special child after all the heartache she had gone through after losing seven-year-old Bonnie all those years ago. "Between the two of you, I feel as if I've been railroaded."

Eve's brows rose. "Do you?"

"No, just kidding. As usual, you've managed to cut through all the fog and clarify. You and Michael are a great team."

"With a great deal of help from his father." Eve blew her a kiss. "See you in the morning."

The next moment, the door closed behind her.

Jane gazed after her for a moment before she looked down again at the sketchbook. She'd been telling the truth. She did feel clearer and more focused now that she'd talked to Eve. Yes, she still had doubts that this dream was anything but pure imagination, but Eve was right: She had to explore before she could take a chance on dismissing those dreams. So research, but don't become obsessed. Look upon it as an interesting exercise.

A name. Eve had wanted her to give the woman a name.

Why not?

She opened the sketchbook and looked down at the first sketch. In this one, the woman looked younger than she did in the later sketches. Maybe only eighteen or nineteen. Still intense, still burning and bold, but somehow more youthful.

A name . . .

Lisa.

The name came out of nowhere.

Not bad.

She looked at the second sketch.

Lisa.

She flipped to the third sketch.

Lisa.

Whatever. She wasn't going to sit here all night and try to think of names when her mind seemed to be stuck on that one. It didn't matter anyway.

"Okay. Lisa it is." She closed the sketchbook and got to her feet. "Now either let me go back to sleep or tell me what I'm supposed to do to help you." She moved across the porch and went inside the

house. "I'll take a stab at finding you tomorrow, but I can't promise anything. . . ."

But she could still see that drop of blood trickling from Lisa's cut lip.

And she could see those huge dark eyes staring out at her with fear and a knowledge of her own mortality.

"Well, maybe I'll spend more than just tomorrow," she murmured. "But *help* me, dammit."

Eve was smiling as she passed Michael's nursery. *Satisfied?*

Satisfied.

Jane really can take care of herself, you know. She didn't need us. She would have worked it out for herself.

But you would have gone to her anyway.

More than likely. Now go to sleep, Michael.

I will. Only waiting for you . . .

He was gone, slipping away into sleep like the healthy toddler he was.

And thank God he is that healthy, she thought as she opened the bedroom door and glided over to the bed where Joe was sleeping. Though no one could call her son exactly normal, he was healthy and caring and possessed joy, serenity, and an occasional mischievous streak that was wonderful to be around. Okay, so he seemed to sense emotions and disturbance in those around him and could still link with her as he had when she had been pregnant with him. It had been almost as if they were aware of each other's thoughts, as if they were truly one entity. That might fade in time, but for now she cherished that closeness.

She slipped out of her robe and slid into bed beside Joe.

"Everything okay?" He rolled over and took her in his arms. "Michael?"

"In a way." She cuddled closer. "It was really Jane." Her lips

brushed his bare shoulder and then she rubbed her cheek on the warmth of it. "She's been dreaming again."

He stiffened. "Cira?"

"That was my first question. No, someone else. A woman, but Jane doesn't have any idea who she is. She's going to ask you to take her sketch to the precinct in the morning and try to identify her."

"Long shot."

"But you'll do it."

"I'll do it." He made a face. "Maybe we'll get lucky and she'll stop dreaming about her."

"That might not be so lucky for that woman Jane is dreaming about. She may be in trouble." She cuddled closer. "It's not as if this happens that often. Cira has always been the main event, and our practical Jane fought tooth and nail against admitting that dream had any basis in fact. She's fighting this one, too." She paused. "But she's disturbed. She thinks she might know her. I don't want her worrying, Joe. It took Jane a long time to come back after Trevor was killed while trying to save her. She loved him so much, and it scared me that I couldn't seem to help her then. I don't want her spiraling down again."

"You did all you could. Jane just had to have time." He gently stroked the hair at her temple. "And I'll do my best to find this mystery woman as quickly as possible. Definitely no dragging of feet."

"I just wanted to explain. I knew you'd do it."

"Of course, there was no question. Jane is family."

"Family," Eve repeated softly. "I've been thinking a lot about that lately."

"No surprise. It's been less than two years since you gave birth to Michael. You'd be likely to be very family-centric."

"No, that's not it. Or maybe it is. I just feel as if I want to make sure that everything is tight and safe for everyone I love. I want everything that touches them to be just right."

“Not entirely possible.” He kissed her. “There’s a little thing called fate that we have to look out for. But everything that I can do will be done.” He lifted himself on one elbow to look down at her. “And I’ll wrestle fate if it comes our way and we don’t like it. Anything for you, Eve.”

“You’re joking. I mean this, Joe.”

“I’m not joking. I wouldn’t dare.” But his face was alight with humor. “I’m just having trouble worrying about the future when I’m so damn happy.” He buried his face in her throat. “It’s good, isn’t it, Eve? Better than ever before,” he said thickly. “So don’t borrow trouble.”

Her arms slid around him. “I’m not borrowing trouble. I feel as if we’ve been given gifts, and I want to protect them.”

“Tell me how.”

So that he could go out and battle her dragons as he’d always done since the first day she’d met him. “I’m still thinking about it.” She kissed him and whispered, “But I promise you’ll be the very first to know when I do.”

“It’s time for you to leave, Jane.” Eve opened the door of Michael’s nursery and ruefully shook her head as she saw Jane sitting cross-legged on the floor with her son. “You have a plane to catch. Joe’s waiting in the car.”

“Just one more minute,” Jane said absently as her pencil flew over the sketch she was doing of Michael. “I can finish this once I get to Scotland, but I want to catch . . .” Her voice trailed off as she concentrated on getting the curve of Michael’s mouth just right.

“Jane.”

“Okay. Okay.” She reluctantly closed the sketchbook. “But children change so quickly at this age. I just came in to give him a hug good-bye and I saw the sun coming in the window and his hair looked more red than dark chestnut like it usually does. And then he smiled, and I was lost.” She got up and knelt beside Michael and held him close for a

moment. "See you next time," she said softly. "You take care of your mother and Joe. Do you hear?"

He cuddled closer to her. "I hear." His small hand touched her cheek. "Jane . . ."

She moved her lips and kissed his palm. "And take care of yourself, too, young man. We can't do without you." She sat back on her heels and looked down at him. So beautiful, with the satin skin that all very young children had. His wide-set eyes were the same tea color as his father's, but his hair was a shade between red and chestnut that seemed to gather light. He was wearing blue jean overalls and a blue shirt this morning. She had to remember how that blue set off his coloring. She'd only had time to draw his face and hair this time.

She gave him another kiss, released him, and stood up. "I'll be thinking about you."

He nodded. "Me, too." His smile lit his face with a special radiance. "See you soon, Jane."

Adorable. She wanted to go back and scoop him up again.

"Jane," Eve said.

"Coming." She turned quickly and left the room, followed by Eve. "It's your fault, you know. You produced that heartbreaker."

"Did I? Joe and I aren't sure how he showed up on the radar. We just thank God for him. When you finish that sketch, I want it."

"If I don't decide to make it a painting instead. Then you'll have to wait until I finish it and put it on exhibition for a few months. I think this one may turn out to be something special. He's looking up at me so inquiringly and yet you'd swear that he had all the wisdom of the ages."

"Maybe he does. Maybe all children do before their vision becomes clouded by life."

"Nah. It's Michael." She grinned at Eve over her shoulder as she reached the porch. "And it's going to make a hell of a portrait. Which will please my agent, since she's not been getting much of anything but landscapes from me for the last year or so. She says that lake in

Gaelkar, Scotland, is very picturesque, but she's ready for something different."

"Hasn't she ever heard of Monet's water lilies? I think there're way over two hundred of those. And that lake is mystical. I loved it when I was there."

"I do, too, when I'm not frustrated." She made a face. "I might have given up trying to help MacDuff find the treasure that Cira brought from Herculaneum if that lake itself wasn't such a puzzle. A lake that never loses its mist, that's totally impenetrable?"

"You're the one who had a dream that led MacDuff to think that Cira's gold might be near that lake. You're entirely to blame for MacDuff's being so obsessed."

"MacDuff's been obsessed about finding the treasure for years. He didn't need an excuse. He's been searching all over the world for light systems that could pierce that mist on the north bank, but he hasn't found any yet. The only reason that I was able to come here and spend the last three weeks was that he was going to Perth, Australia, to some lab that's supposed to have had a breakthrough."

"And did it?"

"I'll know when I get back. I figured that it was time that I let you and Joe have Michael to yourselves." She smiled. "I get too comfortable here and I have to remind myself that I have a life and career of my own."

"That's crazy." Eve frowned. "Every moment you spend with us enriches us. *We need you.*"

"You also need your space. In a way, you and Joe have started a new life for yourselves. You have Michael and you also took Cara Delaney into your home. I know she's here as often as she can manage to escape from her classes at Juilliard."

"Which isn't that often," Eve said ruefully. "The trouble with bringing a violin prodigy into your life is that everyone wants a piece of her, including her music teachers. We get her for holidays and some

weekends when they don't have her doing special concerts. But Cara calls us every other night and that's good."

"Juilliard is in New York. She couldn't study closer to home?"

"She could; she wanted to do that." She shrugged. "But I couldn't let her. It's all about the music with Cara. She had to have the best. You can understand that, Jane. You've heard her play."

"Yes. She's magnificent. I wonder what she'll be like when she's a little older."

"Time flies. She's almost fourteen." Eve made an impatient gesture. "But that has nothing to do with the fact that you've mentally set me up with a family that doesn't include you. Not going to happen. We're all family and that's the way we're going to stay."

"I wouldn't do that. I'm not that much of a masochist. You're stuck with me. But I *will* give you space, whether you like it or not." She gave Eve a hug and then started down the steps. "I'll call you when I reach Gaelkar. I'll let you know if I have any more dreams about Lisa."

"Lisa?"

"Lisa." Jane glanced over her shoulder. "It seemed right."

"Then it probably is." Changing the subject, Eve said, "You mentioned MacDuff and Jock Gavin several times since you've been here, but not a word about Seth Caleb. Has he dropped by Gaelkar since you went back there after Michael was born?"

"I've seen him once." She tried to make her tone casual. "He and Jock have become good friends. Jock wanted him to look into something for him and he flew in for the day to talk about it." She saw Eve's expression and answered the unspoken question, "Not for me, Eve. He barely spoke to me. Caleb is very cool to me these days."

"Caleb is never cool. Particularly not to you," Eve said drily. "I can see him simmering. I can see him burning. I can see him plotting. I can see him waiting for his chance. Never, never cold. You must have really pissed him off."

Yes, she had, but she didn't want to talk about it with Eve right now. "You might say that."

"And he might have deserved it. But I'm having trouble condemning him for anything these days. Not since the night he saved Michael's life." She added quietly, "I'll always be grateful to him for that, Jane."

"So will I." Her lips twisted. "But you have to be careful about being grateful to Caleb. He's fairly ruthless about collecting on his debts."

"I haven't found that to be true so far. I just thank God that Caleb has that weird ability to control the flow of blood in everyone around him. It saved Michael." She met Jane's eyes. "It even saved you once, Jane. That's two people I love he gave back to me. So until he proves me wrong, I'm going to consider I owe Seth Caleb big-time." She smiled. "Now go get on that plane. I can see Joe is beginning to fret. You'll be lucky if you don't miss it."

"Right." She ran the rest of the way down the steps. "I'll try to get back here for Michael's birthday."

"Oh, I think I might see you before that," Eve said. "You heard Michael. He said he'd see you soon. Michael is usually fairly accurate."

"From the mouths of babes?"

"I've never thought of Michael as a baby except for maybe that first week. He's just . . . Michael." Eve called to Joe as Jane opened the car door. "Stop and bring home Chinese for lunch, Joe."

"Right," Joe said. "And Jane may join us if she doesn't get in the damn car. Stop talking to her, Eve."

"Sorry," Eve said. "She said it was Michael's fault she was late and then I had to ask about—"

"Bye, Eve." Jane was in the car and swinging the door shut. "Love you."

Eve nodded and waved as the car pulled out of the driveway.

Jane watched her as long as she could see her. "She's so happy, Joe. She glows. I've never seen her like this before."

"Neither have I. I believe it's her turn. I just pray it lasts. Because

then it's everyone's turn who loves her." He covered her hand with his own and changed the subject. "Dreams, Jane?"

She grimaced. "Yeah, but I'd rather think about Eve. I don't believe that woman I've been dreaming about is anywhere near as happy. I don't even know if she's a real person. Eve thinks I have to treat her as if she is." She handed him the sketch she'd put into a large envelope. "Thanks for the help, Joe."

"What's family for? Now sit back, relax, and take a deep breath. I'll get you to the airport on time. I just want to take one quick look at the mystery woman." He took the sketch out of the envelope and glanced at it. "Very pretty, but I'm not seeing—" He broke off, his eyes narrowing. "What the hell? Maybe you're right. Familiar. Damn familiar . . ."

CHAPTER

2

DELTA FLIGHT 1037

It was no use.

Jane rubbed her eyes and then impatiently shut down her computer. She'd been combing through search engines and sites for the last four hours since boarding her flight and had come up with zilch. What had she expected? That formal garden could have belonged to any house on the planet. The steepness of the mountains reminded her vaguely of the Alps, but she could be wrong. Even if she was right, the Alps were close to seven hundred miles long and it would be almost impossible to locate a house near them without some kind of clue.

She leaned back in her seat.

I tried, Lisa. I'll keep trying. Maybe Joe will be able to help.

Help me do what? she thought ruefully. She didn't even know why she was having these blasted dreams.

Sometimes people are chosen.

Eve had said that and believed it. It was clear that she thought Jane might have been the one chosen to help this time. Heaven knows how or why. So stop being impatient with yourself and frustrated with Lisa and try to figure it out. Banish the doubts and try to accept that somehow you have a job to do.

Okay, assume that Lisa is trying to get in touch with you for some

reason of her own. It would be logical to believe that she is doing it because she can't get help from anyone near her. She has to reach out to a stranger. She is terribly alone.

And both Jane and Eve had received the impression of the danger surrounding her.

Why had Lisa been able to reach out to her? Jane knew psychic power was rare, but she believed it existed. She had known people who possessed it. But why Jane when the only unusual thing about her were the dreams she'd had of Cira? She had told Eve that Lisa was vaguely familiar. Had there been some kind of connection between them that had made it possible for Lisa to contact her?

She opened her sketchbook and studied Lisa's face. It was the eyes, she decided. Slightly tilted, maybe a little exotic . . . She flipped open the computer again and accessed a search engine that would allow her to check her yearbooks from both high school and the university.

Thirty minutes later, she exited the program and shut down the computer again.

Zero. If she'd ever met Lisa, it hadn't been when she was in school.

Maybe it will come to me, she thought, discouraged. Sometimes if you focused too hard on something, you ended up putting up roadblocks.

But you'll have to do a little more than show me your face, Lisa. You may think I'm a prime candidate because of Cira, but she was a hell of a lot more helpful.

Don't be stupid. She was dead. I'm not dead. It's different.

Jane went rigid. That thought out of nowhere had been defiant and angry and come as a complete shock.

Lisa?

Nothing.

Imagination?

Maybe. Jane knew she might be so tired that she was putting words to the faces in those sketches. She'd been talking to Lisa all day as she'd been working, but she'd certainly not expected an answer.

But it might be that Lisa was becoming desperate and trying to break through to her. So concentrate and try to send a message to her, too.

Which one, Lisa? Imagination or desperation?

Nothing.

But that single bolt of thought had been as if Lisa was monitoring her thoughts and knew all about Cira. And she had expressed one other thing that was filling Jane with profound gratitude.

I'm not dead. It's different.

Somewhere deep inside her the uncertainty that Lisa might possibly be dead had been tormenting Jane.

That was a bit rude, Lisa, but I'm glad you set me straight. Anything else?

Nothing.

Okay, have it your way. She closed her eyes. I have a couple hours before we land in Edinburgh. I'm going to try to take a nap. You work on it and find a way to let me know what you're trying to tell me. . . .

SAN LEANDRO

“Bitch!”

Lisa's head jerked back at the force of Santara's blow.

Pain.

“Did you think you'd get away?” Leon Santara wiped the blood from his wrist, where she'd just bitten him. “You can't last, you know.” He hit her again. “You'll have to give in and make the damn call.”

She *hated* him.

She shook her head to clear it of the dizziness. “I almost did get away. Next time I will.” She glared at him. “And you're wrong: I'll never make that call. I don't care what you do to me.”

“You'll make it.” He jerked her to her feet and pushed her ahead of him through the hall and up the stairs. “I have my orders, and even

if I didn't, do you think I'd let a vicious little snake like you get the best of me? I don't know why they don't let me just cut your throat."

"You know why. You're afraid. You're all afraid."

He muttered a curse as he jammed her hard against the wall while unlocking the door. "You're the one who should be afraid," he said through his teeth. "You're *nothing*. You're just a weak, stupid girl who's going to end up dead if you don't keep your mouth shut. I don't care if you make the call or not. I'll tell them you killed yourself climbing down that cliff."

"No, you won't." Her eyes were blazing. "Because then they won't pay you. Who's stupid, Santara?"

He hit her again.

Darkness.

Lisa was vaguely aware of him pushing her into the room and slamming the door behind her as she fought to remain on her feet.

For an instant she couldn't breathe. Her heart was beating hard.

Stop it. She couldn't let them make her afraid. That would be a victory for them. She was strong and she would only show them strength. So stoke the fierceness and the rage that will keep any fear at bay. Remember every moment of how they have tried to subdue and weaken you since you've been here.

She looked down at her wrists, which were raw and bleeding from the ropes with which Santara had bound her to drag her back up the cliff.

And the healing rage returned in full force.

She would kill them all!

No, she couldn't do it. She'd been forbidden to do it. It was against the rules.

What did she care? He wasn't here. She was alone. She was always alone. He'd made her promise, and then he'd left her. Didn't she have the right to do what she had to do to stay alive?

It would be so easy. . . .

Why should he care if she broke the rule? They wanted to kill him, too. This was all about him. It had always been about him.

But he'd forbidden it. She'd given him her word.

So she couldn't kill them . . . yet, she thought grudgingly. She had to find another way, and that meant trying to reach out again to that Jane MacGuire and make her understand what was important. It was frustrating and she didn't always know what she was doing. The frustration alone made her impatient and angrier.

You listen to me, Jane MacGuire. Hear me!

Or I'll have to break my promise.

Done.

Jane drew a deep, shaky breath and dropped her pencil on the drink tray next to her airline seat. She sat there gazing straight ahead. She didn't want to look at the sketch she'd just drawn for a moment. As usual, she needed to catch her breath.

And she was afraid of what she'd see.

When she'd awakened from that short nap, it had been like being caught up in a tornado.

Hear me!

The compulsion had been far stronger, more violent, more demanding than the other times.

Oh, I heard you, Lisa.

And now I have to see what I've heard.

She slowly looked down at the sketch.

She flinched.

Darkness.

Anger.

Fierceness.

And the background was no longer a sunlit garden. She was inside a room that was also dark, with only meager light coming from a window across the room. Wooden shelves. Books. It appeared to be

a library. Some kind of ebony artifact on the wall. A distressed rough wooden table in the very forefront of the sketch.

She looked back at Lisa's face.

Passion. Fire. Darkness.

And pain.

She had been so shocked by the force and fever of the woman's expression that she had not noticed that there were ugly bruises on her left cheek. First the cut lip, now the bruises.

"What have you gotten yourself into, Lisa?" she murmured.

And then her gaze moved down and she saw the words written in blood in small block letters on the wooden table in front of Lisa.

He must not come.

Only you.

Fine, nothing like responsibility. Where was she supposed to go? And who the hell was *he*?

Well, she probably wasn't going to be told anything more by Lisa until the next contact. It appeared that Lisa wasn't able to reach her unless she was sleeping, and it wasn't as if Jane could drop off by sheer will alone.

But at least Lisa was trying to be more forthcoming, if that message was any sign. However, she was not being overly diplomatic about it, demanding and angry, not asking, but commanding.

What was she thinking? She was being too hard on a girl who was obviously being abused. And how would she have behaved if she'd been faced with a situation fraught with violence, like Lisa's? She'd always had trouble asking for help, even from the people she loved. What if she'd had to beg a stranger to believe her, perhaps even save her?

Not easy. She might not have been quite so rude, but she could identify with the frustration. Eve had always said don't judge until you walk in someone's shoes.

And maybe this Lisa had never had an Eve or anyone like her. What would Jane have been like if Eve had never come into her life?

She instinctively reached for her phone and started punching in a number. Two minutes later, Joe Quinn picked up the call. “You can’t be in Scotland yet, Jane.”

“No, about forty minutes out of Edinburgh. I just wondered if you’d been able to access that database yet.”

“Give me a break. It takes time. I’m working on it.” He paused. “But I keep looking at that sketch and I see what you mean. I feel as if I know her.”

“I thought you might. You deal with facial recognition all the time in your job. It’s part of your training. But you didn’t recognize Lisa?”

“No, and she has a very memorable face. It’s beginning to bother me.”

“I’m going to e-mail you another photo. It has a different background with a strange-looking wall decoration. Could you maybe add that to your file?”

“Send it,” he said, then added, “This is really worrying you, isn’t it? Kind of a surprise. I know you’d want to help regardless, but in that sketch, she doesn’t come across as being full of sweetness and light. Certainly not someone to touch the heart. But evidently she’s managed to touch yours. You have to remember we can only do so much, Jane.”

“I know that.” She was silent for a moment. “But I was thinking about her and I realized if I hadn’t had you and Eve, I might have been as defiant and angry as Lisa is. I was already on my way down that road by the time you took me in.”

“No, you weren’t. You were always tough, but not belligerent. You survived the streets and would have come out on top regardless of who you had in your corner.”

“Bullshit. I was incredibly lucky. Now it seems I have to give back.” She added lightly, “Eve thinks I was chosen. So help me find this girl so I can do what I need to do. Okay?”

He chuckled. “It shall be done. Send me the new sketch. Bye, Jane.” He hung up.

She took a photo of the sketch and e-mailed it to Joe. Then she sat there looking down at that face. Definitely not sweet or gentle, as Joe had commented. But the more she gazed at it, the more she found herself drawn. All that fire and passion and defiance. Warrior . . . Lisa looked like a warrior who had been attacked, taken down, but never surrendered.

Only you.

Her finger traced the words on the sketch.

Okay, it's a deal. I'll help you out. But you'd better work on an attitude adjustment. Understand?

EDINBURGH AIRPORT

Jock Gavin was waiting when Jane walked out of customs. His smile lit his face as he gave her a hug. “The laird asked me to come and pick you up. I think he was afraid that you’d go running back to your gallery in London instead of coming back to Gaelkar. MacDuff is sure that he’s found the right lights this time. It’s some new space-age technology.”

MacDuff had been trying for years, without success, to find a lighting system that would pierce the heavy mist on the north side of the lake, and permit them to explore and hunt for the treasure in that area. “And what do you think?”

He shrugged. “I hope it’s true. You know MacDuff needs the money. It takes a fortune every year to keep MacDuff’s Run a private residence and not have to turn it over to the National Trust.” He picked up her two suitcases and headed for the exit. “We’ll set up the lights tomorrow and check them out. But he wants you there in case we can move forward along the north bank.”

“I might not be of any use,” Jane said. “I’ve always told him that, Jock.”

“Aye, but he thinks you’re his lucky rabbit’s foot.” Jock’s face

was full of mischief as he turned to her when they reached his car. “Though I’ve always thought that concept a little unpleasant and certainly unfair to the poor rabbit. Ever since the two of you discovered each other when you were both doing research on Cira, the founder of MacDuff’s clan, he’s been sure you’re kin to one of his ancestors.”

“I’m no such thing,” she said flatly. “I’m very happy with who I am. And that’s not Scottish aristocracy.”

“Be who you wish to be,” Jock said as he stored her suitcases in the trunk. “As long as it’s my friend.” He slammed the trunk shut. “I won’t give that up, Jane.” He opened the car door for her. “Now get in and I’ll see if I can find a good place to have tea on the way to Gaelkar. Airplane food is generally ho-hum at best.”

He was smiling again, and she found herself smiling back. It was almost impossible not to smile at Jock. He was possibly the most beautiful human being she had ever seen. She had thought that when she had first met him as a young boy, and he was even more riveting now. He was a tall, lithe young man with fair hair and silvery blue eyes and there was a strength to his symmetrical features that doubled their high impact. “I’d like that, if you don’t think that MacDuff will be too impatient about showing off his space-age lights.”

“He needs to be kept under control,” Jock said lightly. “Everyone kowtows to the laird, and I consider it my duty to make him realize that even an earl has his limits.” He started the car. “There’s a small tearoom on the grounds of a castle on the way. . . .”

Jock was joking. No one loved MacDuff more than Jock Gavin. They had been friends for years. Jock had been the son of the housekeeper at MacDuff’s Run and he had grown up running in and out of the castle. And though MacDuff had been older, they had become like brothers. They still were, and there was nothing Jock wouldn’t do for MacDuff. “Did you go to Australia with him?”

He shook his head. “I wasn’t needed. I decided to go to MacDuff’s Run and check it out while MacDuff was gone.” He added grimly,

“And then I went on to New York to make sure that the investments MacDuff and I have funded there were being handled properly. The broker was being careless and I had to make certain he wasn’t also being criminal. I wasn’t about to let MacDuff lose money.” He shrugged. “But it only took one meeting to straighten him out. There won’t be any more problems.”

“I’m sure there won’t,” Jane said drily. He had probably terrified the man. These days, Jock could be everything that was warm and charismatic on the surface. It was only when he was angry or upset that he became the Jock that she had first met all those years ago at MacDuff’s Run. He had run away from home to see the world when he was fifteen and the world he’d seen had been a horror story. He’d become the subject of mind-control experiments conducted by Thomas Reilly, a terrorist who was trying to develop the perfect assassin. In Jock he had reached his prime goal, and the body count had been horrifying. By the time MacDuff had found Jock, he was in a sanitarium after trying to commit suicide, and could barely function mentally. It had taken years for him to come back to something close to normalcy, and Jane was aware that buried deadliness might be unearthed at any moment. “And did your broker turn out to be a crook?”

“Marginally.” Jock smiled. “But after our discussion, he made restitution to MacDuff and me and seven other clients out of his own accounts.”

“Did you fire him?”

“No, he’s brilliant. He’s going to make us a pot of money. The reason I set up the portfolio was just in case MacDuff doesn’t find Cira’s treasure. It was insurance. I can’t let him lose MacDuff’s Run.”

“And you’d rather deal with someone who came close to cheating you?”

“*Close* is the key word. It won’t happen again.” He met her gaze

and his silver eyes were ice-cold. “He understood the consequences. I explained that I’m very protective of my friends.”

“Did MacDuff know what you were doing?”

“It wasn’t necessary. Why bother him with something that I could handle myself? It would only have worried him.”

She nodded. “Because MacDuff is protective, too.”

His lips twisted. “And he likes to keep me away from temptation. He’s never sure if I’m going to break the chains he’s hammered to keep me in check.”

“He cares about you,” she said gently. “You’re worth caring about, Jock.”

“Am I? I suppose I do have a few valuable qualities.” His smile was suddenly brilliant. “Or you wouldn’t waste your time being my friend. I’m glad you’re back, Jane. It’s time we wound up this search for Cira’s gold. MacDuff needs to get on with his life.”

“And what about you?”

“I keep myself busy. I have a few degrees behind my name these days. That makes MacDuff happy. He knows where my real talent lies and he’s always hoping that it will be submerged by higher learning.” He shook his head. “Now stop frowning. We both know that I’m right. I accept it. I am what I am.”

“You don’t know who you are, yet.” She paused. “When you were in New York, did you visit Cara at Juilliard?”

“Of course.” He shot her a glance. “I knew you’d tongue-lash me if I didn’t. I took her out to lunch and then we went to Central Park and spent the afternoon.”

“Good.”

“Not so good. I found out when I took her back to school that she’d skipped a full day of classes and was going to be put on detention. She didn’t mention any of that when I picked her up in front of the school.”

“Oops.” She made a face. “But I’m sure she thought it was worth it.”

“Maybe. But I shouldn’t have done it. I told you that I should let Cara drift away from me now that she has Eve and Joe and a new life.”

“And I told you that couldn’t happen.” The bond of friendship between that eleven-year-old girl and Jock Gavin had been unique. Jane had never seen anything like the closeness that had been born during those few months when Eve had brought Cara to Scotland two years ago. Jock had saved Cara’s life, and she was totally devoted to him. “She wouldn’t have understood. And she wouldn’t have let you go,” she added. “All her life she’s been on the run and never been able to count on anyone. If you want her to have a normal life, you can’t reject her.”

“I won’t reject her. I just think it’s healthier for her not to have me for a friend. I’ve been trying to distance myself.”

“Too late. You should have thought of that before you became so important to her. You’re her best friend, you saved her life, and anyone can see that she’s not going to let you walk away from her. Now you’re stuck with it.” She studied his expression. “And you couldn’t stand it anyway. You have to know she’s well and happy. I bet you’ve been keeping a close eye on her from that distance you spoke about.”

He was silent.

She nodded. “I thought so.” She waved her hand as he started to speak. “You’ll have to work it out for yourself. But don’t hurt Cara because you think that you should fade into the background. She’s lost enough. Her entire family murdered, her whole life spent trying to escape the same murderer. She can’t lose her best friend, too.”

“She won’t lose me.” He was parking in the lot of a quaint tea-room with mullioned windows. “Though I’d think that you’d realize I’m right about this. She needs a normal life now. There’s nothing normal about me.”

“Bullshit. Normal is overrated anyway.”

He suddenly chuckled. “Now you sound like Seth Caleb. That’s something he’d say.”

“Caleb?” The sudden mention caused a ripple of shock to go through her. Her glance slid away from him. “Consider the source. No one can call Caleb normal. He doesn’t want to be like anyone else. He was born with that weird talent of being able to control the blood flow of the people around him and heaven knows what else. He’s arrogant as hell and thinks he rules the world. Compared to him, you’re practically angelic.”

He gave a low whistle. “That was a surprise. You’re usually more noncommittal about Caleb. It must have been building up.” He got out of the car and ran around to open her door. “And Caleb would laugh if he heard you describe me as an angel, unless it was Lucifer.” He helped her out of the car and slammed the door. “He’s probably all you say, but I’d rather have him in my corner than anyone else I can name. The other doesn’t bother me at all.”

“It bothers me.” She paused. “But he hasn’t been around much at Gaelkar in the last months, so I guess it doesn’t matter.”

“He’s been out of the country. But MacDuff may have called him and asked him to come to the lake when we set up the lights. He’s never liked strangers on the property, and he trusts Caleb.” A smile tugged at his lips. “We all respond to our own needs when it comes to Caleb. He appears to supply whatever makes him invaluable in any given situation.”

“Then maybe he’s the one who’s cloning Lucifer.” She grimaced. “Listen to me. I’m overreacting. Caleb has that effect on me.”

“I’ve noticed,” he murmured. “Do you want me to talk to MacDuff and ask him not to ask Caleb to come?”

“No.” That would have been a defeat in itself and it would probably amuse Caleb when he heard about it. “I don’t care.” She strode toward the door of the tearoom. “Now let’s get a bite to eat and I’ll tell you all about Michael. Eve said you hadn’t been by to see them since Cara left for school. He’s perfectly adorable. I spent half the time I was at the lake house sketching him. I’ll show you the last one I did before I left today.”

LOCH GAELKAR

“It’s going to work, Jane.” John MacDuff strode up the incline to meet them as she and Jock walked from the road where they’d parked the car. His arresting face was alight with excitement. “Carlisle showed me a demonstration of those lights that knocked me on my ass. He’s got contracts with three of the major airlines for his light system, but I persuaded him to let me have the first shipment.” He grimaced. “Though it didn’t take too much urging after I told him the possibility that I might be able to find Cira’s legendary treasure on that north bank. Providing I could pierce that mist that no one has ever been able to do in all of Scottish history. I think he’s regarding it as a challenge.”

“And that’s probably exactly the way you presented it to him. You’re no fool, MacDuff.” Jane grinned. “There was no way you were going to come back without what you went there to get if you believed there was a chance.”

“Aye, I’ve waited long enough.” His blue eyes were suddenly twinkling. “Let those airlines get to the back of the line.”

“Not as if that’s not your philosophy anyway,” Jock said. “Everything has to stop for the pleasure of the laird.” He turned to Jane. “See, I told you that we have to keep him under control.”

“Jane has no trouble embracing that mantra. She’s possibly the most stubborn woman on the planet,” MacDuff said drily. “And I’ll thank you not to encourage her to defy me, Jock. I’ve had a hard enough time keeping her here at the lake these past months while I was experimenting.”

“I wonder why,” Jane said. “I should be absolutely wild about camping out in a tent in the middle of the Highlands, ignoring my career while you try to pull rabbits out of your hat.”

“Nonsense. You didn’t ignore your career. An artist can work anywhere, and you turned out some damn fine landscapes. And you’re just as obsessed as I am about finding Cira’s gold. Perhaps not for the same reason, but she called you and you came.” He smiled. “True?”

“I guess you might say it’s true, in a way.” She smiled back at him. “Now you only have to address camping out in the middle of the wilds.”

“Who wouldn’t want to be surrounded by all this beauty?” He gestured expansively at the lake and the mountains. “And didn’t I have a fine shower house built for the camp? What else could you want?”

“I can’t imagine,” she said gravely. It was true that he had made the tent camp as comfortable as possible for them. Since Gaelkar Castle, the original home established by Cira and her family, was some distance away and in ruins, there had been no real choice. Not that MacDuff would have been inclined to let them go too far away from this lake anyway. “But I’ll think about it and let you know.”

“You’ve had a long flight,” Jock said. “Go to your tent and rest and I’ll bring your cases down.” He turned to MacDuff. “Come to the car and help me. Let her get her breath before you start inundating her with all your plans and that overpowering enthusiasm.”

“Enthusiasm is contagious,” MacDuff said. “And healthy.”

“Not when it’s mixed with jet lag.” He nodded at Jane. “I’ll see you at supper.”

MacDuff hesitated and then followed Jock. “I’m not doing this because you’re right, Jock. I just need the exercise.”

“Of course that’s the reason,” Jock said. “Everyone knows that you’re never wrong, MacDuff.”

“Bastard,” MacDuff muttered.

Jane smiled as she watched the two of them walk back up the incline. It warmed the heart to see a friendship that close. So different and yet forged of experiences and self-sacrifices that had almost melded them into one entity. She had known them both for years and considered them her friends, as well. And she had never lost her appreciation for who they were, both apart and together.

But she was glad that Jock had given her this short time apart from them. It was always a little overwhelming to come back here to Gaelkar after being away.

She turned and started back down toward the camp, her gaze on the deep blue lake. As usual, it took her breath away and drew her toward it. Loch Gaelkar was surrounded by rugged green mountains that plunged down to meet the glittering water on three sides. But the north bank was always blanketed by a heavy mist that swirled and shifted but never revealed what lay beyond.

It was the stuff of which legends were woven. The locals, who had lived with the lake all their lives, said that it was the place where creation either began or would be destroyed. Anyone who saw it found it mysterious and fascinating and even a little frightening. Jane could see why Cira had settled in this part of the Highlands when she had fled from Herculaneum. It had been a wild, challenging country where the strong could carve out an empire. Cira had never hesitated facing any challenge. She had been born a slave and fought her way from poverty to become a successful actress at the theater in Herculaneum. She'd been tough, sometimes ruthless, but honest when she could be. Life had been hard for her, but she'd kept her humanity when everyone around her had tried to use her. It was no surprise that she'd managed to triumph even over the devastation of the exploding volcano. The treasure chest with which she'd escaped after the eruption had been filled with gold and silver coins and one very special coin said to be the payment Judas was given to betray Christ. It would be worth billions in today's market.

But there had been no record of what happened to the treasure chest after Cira had arrived in Scotland.

Jane had reached the bank and dropped to the ground and linked her arms about her knees as she gazed out at the mist.

Is your treasure really out there, Cira? If it's not, why did I have that damn dream that hinted that it was? MacDuff is banking that you were trying to tell me something that could save the family you founded all those centuries ago. I'm not so sure. You were passionate about family, but you saw nothing shameful about struggle.

The sharp wind was blowing over the lake, stirring the mist, as

it probably had when Cira had walked these banks. Sometimes Jane felt as if Cira was just beyond that mist and, if she stared hard enough, she would be able to catch a glimpse of her.

Crazy.

But most people would say that her dreams of Cira had been crazy from the beginning and this was no different.

Screw them.

She had her own doubts, but no one had a right to impose their opinions on her. If she didn't find the treasure, then perhaps it would prove that she was a bit off-kilter. If the treasure was somewhere in that mist, then maybe the years of dreams and research had some kind of meaning.

She had to smile as she realized how defiant she was feeling at this moment. It reminded her of the defiance she'd portrayed in Lisa's face in those sketches she'd done of her. It could be Joe was wrong about her not being as belligerent as that girl. Apparently, it only took the right subject to bring it to the forefront.

Two of a kind, Lisa?

She got to her feet and stood there looking out at the lake. "It's good to be back," she murmured. "I've missed you, Cira. Now please be cooperative with MacDuff about his lights. You're driving him crazy with this darned mist." She turned toward the tent area. "But I should tell you I've learned a greater appreciation for you after dealing with this Lisa who's been plaguing me lately. I don't know how she hijacked me, but if you have any influence, you could help her to clarify a bit."

Of course there was no answer but the sound of the water lapping against the bank. She was just lucky Jock or MacDuff hadn't heard that one-sided discourse with Cira, she thought ruefully. Jock would have teased her unmercifully and MacDuff would have used it to convince her that she was even more on board with this treasure hunt than she admitted.

Okay, she'd greeted Cira and this strange world of Gaelkar and

now she was ready to go to work. For some reason, she always felt as if Cira was waiting for her to return when she left this place. Maybe MacDuff was right about her having a family connection with Cira. Not that she'd admit that to him. Eve and Joe were the only family she wanted or needed. Even thinking about them gave her a sense that all was right with her world. She turned and headed for her tent. Which reminded her that she had to call Eve after she took a shower and tell her she'd settled in again. . . .

CHAPTER

3

Joe showed me the photo of that last sketch,” Eve said soberly when Jane connected with her a couple hours later. “Not good. He said that you were pretty upset.”

“Understatement. I don’t like feeling this helpless. Messages written in blood scare me. It’s like something from a horror movie.” She paused. “And I’m almost afraid of going to sleep and finding out what else Lisa has in store for me. But I’m more afraid of not knowing and then not being able to stop it.”

“I can see it. You certainly never had that kind of pressure when you were dreaming about Cira.”

“No.” She hesitated. “I believe Lisa may be trying to reach me in a way outside the sketches. When I was on the plane, I was thinking something akin to that comment you just made. I received a bolt of very impatient and uncomplimentary feedback regarding my comparing her to Cira.”

“Really? Intriguing.”

“Bizarre,” Jane substituted. “But I’ll take it if it means that I can get to the bottom of this any faster. I need to get her safe and take my life back.”

“Or at least your nights.”

It felt like more than that to Jane. She was noticing that every subject that came to her mind seemed to drift, swirl, like that mist on the lake, until it had some connection to Lisa. “Whatever. She’s definitely a distraction.” She changed the subject. “And speaking of distractions, how is Michael? After supper, I’m going to try to finish his sketch. It will be a relief to concentrate on something that has nothing to do with anything but hope and youth.”

“He’s fine. Are you going to give me that sketch?”

“I think you’ve lost out. I’m going to do it in oil. This time next year, you’ll get it.”

“Okay. You’ll probably do a dozen sketches of him between now and then anyway.” Eve paused. “I’ve been thinking I’d like to have one of him beside Cira’s lake.”

“What?”

“Just a thought. I spent so much time beside that lake when I was pregnant with Michael, and you were helping me to hide Cara away from the people who were hunting her down. I feel as if that lake is part of both of us.” She added quickly, “Never mind. As I said, just a thought. You said you’re going to start putting up those lights tomorrow?”

“So MacDuff said. It’s kind of a complicated installation and may take a while. He can hardly wait to dive into that mist again.”

“He’s had so many trial and errors that he should have it down to a science by now. I can remember MacDuff, Jock, and Caleb working to put in those light poles on that north bank. MacDuff was so disappointed when the infrared lights didn’t work.” She paused. “Is Caleb going to be there to help?”

“Probably. I believe MacDuff called and asked him to come.” She kept her tone casual. “You know how MacDuff dislikes any strangers around when they’re working on the north bank. He doesn’t mind his sentries guarding the perimeter of the property, but he doesn’t want any of them near the actual hunt area.”

“But he trusts Caleb,” Eve murmured. “I’m sure you have trouble understanding that.”

“So did you for a long time,” she said. “For God’s sake, you saw him kill a man before your eyes.”

“That man was a serial killer. And Caleb was never charged. He didn’t touch him.”

“He didn’t have to touch him. You told me Caleb was able to send a rush of blood to his organs that caused him to bleed to death and finished off with a massive heart attack.” Jane added impatiently, “At the time, you didn’t want me anywhere near him.”

“But Caleb wanted to be near you,” Eve said ruefully. “And he’s a law unto himself. We couldn’t seem to stop it, so we had to trust you to use your own judgment. You seemed to be able to hold your own with him.”

And sometimes it had been like dancing on hot coals. For years he had moved in and out of her life, and every encounter had been disturbing and electric and filled with an overpowering sexual tension. “Of course I held my own. I’m an adult. I didn’t expect you to treat me like a child who needed to be protected. I was always wary of him.” She paused. “It’s just that everything got complicated when I realized I was in love with Trevor. He was everything that I wanted in a man, loving, gentle, intelligent. . . .” She swallowed. “Everything that I wanted, Eve.”

“I know,” Eve said gently. “And Caleb wasn’t the white knight; he was the black prince. Anyone could see that he was about to explode whenever he was around the two of you.”

“Trevor actually liked Caleb, or maybe he just understood him. Caleb can be . . . persuasive. It’s one of his talents.” She took a deep breath. “But there’s no use talking about Caleb. He is what he is. And I told you I barely talked to him the last time he was here.”

“But you didn’t tell me why he’s pissed off with you,” Eve said. “And since it’s obvious you don’t want to do it, let’s drop it. Hey, it’s time I gave Michael his dinner. Let me know how MacDuff’s lights work out.”

“I will. Give Michael a hug for me. Bye.” She hit the disconnect button.

She sat there for a moment. As usual, she felt a reluctance to break the tie with Eve and Joe. Even when the conversation was charged or conflicted, it was a comfort to share it with the people she loved.

And talking about Seth Caleb was always charged and disturbing. Put the thought of him behind her. She’d face him when she had to do it.

She rose to her feet and headed toward MacDuff’s tent, where they usually gathered for their meals.

“So you enjoyed your time with Eve and Joe Quinn?” MacDuff asked as he was walking her back to her tent after supper. “I’m always afraid that you’re going to insist on staying with them when you head for Lake Cottage. Eve is a magnet for you.”

“Can’t deny it.” She smiled. “But that’s love, MacDuff. You ought to try it sometime.”

“Someday. Too busy right now.” His gaze went to the lake. “We’re going to find Cira’s gold this time, Jane. I feel it.”

“And that’s why you were so anxious about my coming back here? Why? I’m not really that important to this hunt now.”

“The hell you’re not. I’ve been looking for Cira’s treasure for most of my life, but I never really had much hope until you came on the scene.”

“With my crazy dreams about her? Or was it my passion to prove to myself that I wasn’t as crazy as I suspected I was?” she asked wryly. “You must have been pretty desperate to believe that I could be of any help at all. No proof, MacDuff.”

“But there may be such a thing as racial or ancestral memory. The portrait in my gallery of my ancestor Fiona could be your double.”

“Coincidence.”

“Really? And yet that last dream you had about Cira led us to this lake.”

“And if I’ve led you here, you don’t need me any longer.”

“Yes, I do. Cira must have wanted you here. I’m just an invited guest. I’m not going to risk that you might wander off and spoil everything.” He added lightly, “All the stars must be aligned.”

She chuckled. “When we get deep into the mists, we won’t even be able to see our hands before us, much less the stars.”

“But my new lights are going to take care of that.” He stopped in front of her tent. “Have faith, Jane.”

“You have faith. I have hope.” She looked up at him. “And that dream was far from specific, MacDuff. It just seems logical Cira would choose to hide the treasure in one of the caves in that mist.”

“Then we’ll go with that unspecific but entirely hopeful dream.” He gazed at her inquiringly. “Unless you’ve had a more recent one to update us?”

She shook her head. “No dreams of Cira.”

His gaze narrowed on her face. “You hesitated.”

She had no intention of telling MacDuff about Lisa. He wouldn’t be able to help and he was totally focused on Cira anyway. She repeated, “No dreams of Cira. You know I can’t dream on demand. Sorry, MacDuff.”

“Oh well, maybe once we get through the mist.”

“Maybe.” She impulsively took a step closer and kissed his cheek. “I want this for you, MacDuff. And I’ll keep coming back here until we find out if we’re right or wrong about the mists.” She grinned. “Though I may have to take an occasional break to go back and see Eve’s baby, Michael, now and then. They change too quickly at this age and I want to catch every phase.”

“Deal,” he said gruffly, and gave her a quick hug. “But you may not have to take any breaks after this week. The lights are going to work and we’re going to find that treasure chest.” He turned on his heel. “Now get to sleep. I’ll see you at breakfast.”

Jane watched him walk away. MacDuff was always so full of vitality that it was impossible not to be caught up in whatever project he was embracing. And when it came to his obsession for finding Cira's treasure, there was no question that she would be swept in the center of the torrent.

She started to turn to go into her tent. Then she stopped. It was all very well for MacDuff to tell her to get to sleep, but that wasn't going to happen for a while. She was on edge about what was going to happen in those mists tomorrow.

And she was dreading going to sleep and facing what might have been happening to Lisa over these past hours.

And admittedly, she didn't want to lie there and think about seeing Caleb again.

So she decided to give herself time to relax and unwind. She turned and moved down along the bank toward the point where the mist started to form on the lake. She stopped as everything around her began to disappear and shift into the mists. Better not go any farther. She was not afraid. Somehow she had always felt comfortable here in the midst of the fog. But one false step and she could end up in the lake and have a cold swim back to shore.

She dropped down under a tree a few yards from the lake.

Dampness.

Darkness.

Mist.

You could become disoriented in only a short time in conditions like this.

That was all right. She liked the sensation of being in another world.

Cira's world.

Only it hadn't really been Cira's world. This had been the domain of her young son, Marcus, who had played here all his young life. Cira's world had been the castle some ten miles from here. But Jane's dream had not been of the castle; it had been of these mists. . . .

• • •

“Are you sure you want to do this, Cira?” Antonio moved to stand behind her. He put his hands gently on her shoulders, and whispered in her ear. “You don’t have to say farewell to him here. We can go back to the castle and have the priest give the gods’ blessings and bury him near us.”

“No.” She looked down at the small casket she’d had the carpenters craft with such care. “I want it to be here by the lake. Marcus liked it here.” She could feel the tears sting her eyes. “He told me someday he was going to go into that mist and bring me gifts of gold and jewels fit for a queen. I told him not to be foolish, that I had all the riches I could possibly want already.” She looked over her shoulder at Antonio. “It’s true, you know. This is a hard, wild land, but we’ve made it our own. I have everything I ever dreamed about in those days when I was a slave in Herculaneum. I have a husband I love who gave me five strong sons and two daughters who may be even stronger.”

“You would think that.” He kissed her temple. “You did not feel love for me when you were going through those birth pains.”

“It just seemed unfair that a woman has to bear all that pain. But I can see why the gods didn’t entrust having children to men. We do it so much better.”

“Whatever you say, love.”

She could feel his tears on her temple and knew he would not argue with her at this moment. He was feeling her pain at the loss of Marcus as well as his own. Marcus, eight years old, beautiful as the sun, who had been ravaged by the fever and fallen into darkness.

She couldn’t stand here looking down at that small casket any longer. It was time to say farewell and send her son to take his final journey.

She stepped away from Antonio and gazed into the mist. “We’re lucky, you know. To have had him this long, to have him the only one of our children whom the gods wanted with them.”

“It doesn’t seem lucky to me.”

“No. At first, I wanted to rage and beat my head on the stones. But then I started to think of Marcus and I was still angry, but there’s a kind of comfort in knowing that he’ll be here where he wanted to be. I can ride down here and

imagine him running out of the mist and telling me how he'd just been hiding and playing in the caves and had great adventures to tell me." The tears were running down her cheeks. "And now I believe we'd better go take him into that mist so that he can begin those adventures. Then we can go back to the castle and tell our other children that they must stop grieving and start living. Does that not sound like a good plan?"

"A fine plan," Antonio said thickly as he touched her damp cheek. "A magnificent plan, my own Cira. . . ."

Jane felt her throat tighten and tears sting her eyes. The memory was as fresh and poignant as it had been the night she'd had that painful dream.

She looked out into the mist. She could imagine that sad journey that Cira and Antonio had taken to Marcus's final resting place.

Is that where you put the treasure that was to protect your family? Did you give it to your Marcus to guard until it was needed?

No one could know. It was what Jane had thought was likely. It was what she thought Cira would have done. Cira had been part of her life, part of her youth; there had to be some reason why Cira had let Jane get to know her so well. Why else would Cira have given her that final dream?

Jane could only guess and follow MacDuff when he went deep into the mist.

She took a deep, shaky breath and straightened against the tree. Time to get out of this mist and away from that heartbreaking memory of Cira and her Marcus. She had come seeking isolation and another world, but that world had been too painful tonight. Go back to the real world and face—

Her cell phone rang and she glanced down at the ID.

Seth Caleb.

Shit.

He was more reality than she wanted to face right now.

But she wasn't going to avoid him. As she'd told Eve, she was an

adult. She just didn't feel like it all the time when she confronted Caleb. He managed to dominate effortlessly if she wasn't on guard. Even now, when she hadn't even answered the phone, she could see him before her. Olive skin, high cheekbones, dark eyes, dark hair with that thread of white, the faint indentation in his chin, that beautifully sensual mouth.

And that aura of fire and power that always seemed to surround him even in his most casual moments.

Answer the damn call and get it over with.

She punched the access button. "Hello, Caleb. Jock tells me that you're coming to help MacDuff tomorrow."

"That's why I'm calling you." His deep voice was faintly mocking. "I want you to have a good night. I didn't want you to be tense or on edge when it wasn't necessary."

"How kind. But I doubt if your intentions were entirely without another agenda."

"Of course not. We both know how self-serving I can be." He paused. "How are Eve and the baby?"

She could feel the muscles of her shoulders stiffen. "Fine. Wonderful. Michael is totally exceptional." She waited, but he didn't speak. She forced herself to go on. "She was just mentioning before I left how grateful she was that you were able to save him when all the doctors didn't think he'd survive that poison in her system when he was in the womb."

"Really?" He added mockingly, "Then you must not have discussed the arrangement you offered to get me to do it."

She didn't answer.

"No, of course you didn't. You wouldn't want to tarnish anything to do with Eve and her child. Everything has to be perfect for Eve."

"Yes, it does. I love her."

"And I like her." The mockery was gone from his tone. "She's a

unique human being. I was very happy for her when I heard she was pregnant.”

“You never said anything.”

“Would you have believed me? I’m always under your microscope. You’re never sure if I have an agenda. Just as you aren’t sure tonight. Deny it?”

She couldn’t deny it. Caleb was too volatile and he had too much power and magnetism. She’d never been able to discover what lay beneath that mystique that surrounded him, and she was too wary to explore it. “I never know what you’re thinking. I don’t believe that you actually want me to know. Maybe you don’t want anyone close enough to find out what you care about.”

“Very perceptive.” The mockery was back. “So I rely on being a challenge to you. That should be enough, right? Understanding is so tame compared to sex.” There was the faintest edge to his tone as he added, “That’s why you came to me and offered to let me screw you if I’d just try to save Eve and her child.”

“I was upset; I was desperate.” She moistened her lips. “I shouldn’t have done it. I should have just asked you to help her.”

“Oh, you mean as you would have asked anyone else who knew and liked Eve? But I’m not like anyone else, am I? I’m not one of the good guys. God knows, I accept that. You couldn’t trust me to give her that gift, to give *you* that gift. That’s not how you think of me.”

“It was a mistake. I know it made you angry.”

“Why should it? I took you up on it, didn’t I? When you offered me a deal, I said yes. It wasn’t the way I wanted it to happen, but the opportunity was too good to miss. It’s what I’ve wanted since the moment I met you. But it did sting. That’s why I decided not to call in the debt until I had time to get over it. I wasn’t certain what I’d do to you. We both know I’m not altogether civilized.” His voice became silky soft. “It’s what you’ve wanted, too, if you’d admit it. But you’ve been too afraid of me to take that step.”

"I'm *not* afraid of you," she said fiercely. "Look, I admitted I made a mistake. But I'm not the only one to blame. What do you expect? You're not like anyone else. You can do that thing with controlling blood flow. You can save lives, but you can kill, too. And, dammit, sometimes you can use that blood flow to the brain to alter perception and persuade people that black is white," she added.

"People? You mean you. And you enjoyed it, Jane."

"And, yes, I've seen you . . . wild. Damn right it makes me uneasy."

"Have I ever hurt you or anyone you cared about?"

"No."

"Even when it came to your wonderful Trevor, who should have been very high on my list. I actually tried to save him after he was shot."

"I know you did," she said wearily. "None of that changes the fact that you're not what I want in my life. You'd turn it upside down."

"Probably. But you'll never know until you let me in." He added recklessly, "Or I break down the doors, which is what you expect."

"I never know what to expect from you. That's why I made that mistake. I'm going to say good-bye now and go back to camp. This conversation isn't going to make me sleep any better, if that was really your intention."

"It wasn't. I like the idea of your lying there thinking about me. I just wanted you to know that I'm not going to ask you to meet your obligations while I'm at Loch Gaelkar this time. I intend to take my time with you, and I may have to leave right after we finish setting up those lights. I have a commitment I can't put off. Relieved?" He paused. "Or disappointed?" He didn't wait for a reply. "Never mind. I can't expect an honest answer in your present mood. Where are you? You said 'back to camp.'"

"I'm on the north bank. I needed a walk after supper."

"And you needed to go into the mist and touch base with Cira again."

"Perhaps."

He was silent. "But it made you sad."

How did he know that? “She lived a full life, and sadness was part of it.”

“Oh, I approve of everything about Cira. I think she approves of me, too. She’d have no objection to a little wildness, would she?”

The words brought back the memory of Caleb over her on this bank, his hands on her, his mind building erotic fantasies in the mist. She could feel her heart start to pound.

Heat.

Back away.

“I’m going to say good-bye now,” she repeated.

“Be careful going back. I wouldn’t want my upsetting you to cause you to take a dip in the lake. I’ll see you tomorrow, Jane.” He hung up.

As usual, he took the initiative away from me, she thought with annoyance as she shoved her phone into her pocket and started to walk down the bank.

But what did it matter? She was probably just on the defensive, as she usually was around Caleb. Actually, she was glad that he’d called tonight. Now everything was out in the open. What she’d done that night at the hospital had hung over her like a dark cloud for many months. She’d wanted to blame Caleb for striding away from her and not letting her say anything more after that terse and sardonic acceptance, but how could she have when she’d been in the wrong? She’d realized it almost at once.

Because she’d thought she’d actually seen hurt, when Caleb never showed hurt. But he’d armored himself so quickly that she hadn’t been certain.

Forget it. For heaven’s sake, she was worrying about hurting his feelings when he’d taken advantage of what she’d done and still expected her to jump into his bed the minute he snapped his fingers?

Nothing was ever completely as it should be between Caleb and her. If Caleb had his way, there would be plenty of other opportunities for both of them to heal or hurt each other.

And she wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of being right about

her lying awake in her bedroll and thinking about him. She'd been doing more than enough of that on this walk back to the campgrounds.

She stopped and took one last look at the lake before she went inside her tent.

The mist . . . and Cira.

That's all she should be thinking about tonight.

But Caleb had intruded and, as always, had disturbed any tranquility she might have experienced. Oh well, Cira had never liked tranquility anyway. She had wanted to live every minute.

Jane ducked into the tent and lit her lantern, then started to undress.

She saw her sketchbook on the canvas table and continued to gaze at it as she put on her nightshirt.

It seemed to be waiting for her.

Lisa?

Or not.

But Jane knew that she wouldn't be able to forget that sketchbook even after she turned off the lantern.

Nor should she.

She got into her bedroll, pulled up the blanket. Then she turned off the lantern and plunged the tent into darkness. She closed her eyes.

The mist.

Cira.

The sketchbook.

Lisa.

Sorry, Caleb, you'll have to stand in line. They're way ahead of you tonight. . . .

"Hurry!"

I'm trying, Lisa. Jane was fumbling desperately with lighting the lantern even as she reached for the sketchbook on the table. *Stop nagging and let me work.*

She had the lantern lit now and was flipping through the pages of the sketchbook.

You should have had it ready.

I wouldn't have been able to sleep with it staring at me. . . . She was drawing now, closing everything out but the pencil and the paper before her. Her pencil was moving at top speed.

Don't think.

Let it flow.

Let *her* flow.

Lisa.

Don't try to tell the story. You don't know it.

Let it come.

Fifteen minutes later, she threw the pencil down, breathing hard.

Done.

The sketch is different this time, Jane thought immediately when she pulled herself together enough to gaze down at it.

Lisa was standing at a tall, narrow window, looking down at the cliff below, which towered above a crashing surf. No view of her face at all, just her dark hair tied back, her slim body dressed in pants and a peasant blouse. One hand resting on the windowsill, which appeared to be smeared with a few drops of dried blood.

It appeared to be the same dark room, its dimness lightened only by the single window.

"You wanted me to see the cliff?" she murmured.

What else? Impatience. And that island in the distance. Pay attention to it. It's a way out. I almost made it.

Jane went still. The thought had been clear and unmistakable. She tried to gather her thoughts together and send a message back to her. *You're answering me. And now that I think of it, you were nagging me and trying to wake me. Why didn't you do that before?*

I do what I can. I'm not good at this. I've never been taught. I'm having to learn everything by myself. You're certainly no help.

Did you happen to get my message about attitude adjustment?

Yes, but you'd help me anyway.

But far more enthusiastically with a little politeness thrown in.

I don't have time for it. I can only get through to you for a short time after you do the sketches. You're not strong enough to hold me.

Jane could sense the desperation behind the words, and it frightened her. *Then connect with someone else who is strong enough. I'll do everything I can, but you're obviously in danger. I don't know anything about this kind of thing. Don't fool around with trying to reach me, Lisa.*

I can't do it. You have the connection. It has to be you. Now pay attention. The shore at the bottom of the cliff is rocky, but maybe a boat . . . Silence. Then she said desperately, *I can feel you fading away from me.*

Jane quickly tried another way. *Then tell me where you are. Tell me how I can get to you.*

Not yet. Not until I know I can trust you to keep your word. Not him. Only you. It has to be only you.

Then tell me your name. If it's some kind of kidnapping or something like that, maybe I can reach your family.

You're not listening to me. Only you. And I told you my name. Lisa . . . Big help. Please, your full name?

No answer.

Lisa!

Nothing.

Evidently, Lisa's time had run out.

Crazy. The entire thing was bizarre and beginning to be terrifying. The bruises.

The message written in blood.

The smear of blood on that windowsill that Lisa had probably been clutching before she climbed down to the cliff below.

The desperation, the frustration . . .

The vulnerability that Lisa was trying so hard to hide.

Just the fact that she was trying to hide both that desperation and vulnerability touched Jane.

What would she see in the next sketch?

She swallowed and reached for the bottle of water on the canvas table beside her bedroll.

If you're still around, I hope you know you scared the hell out of me. I don't know why, but like it or not, I'm beginning to care about you. Now help me to help you.

Nothing.

She drank half her bottle of water and then gave herself a moment before she took a photo of the latest sketch and texted it to Joe. Then she got up and went outside the tent and took a deep breath of the chilly night air. She gazed down at the lake and watched the mist move over the water. Tomorrow the lights would arrive and she would be down there helping to unpack them, getting ready to explore Cira's world.

So different from Lisa's bewildering, terrifying world.

"But you'd probably understand Lisa, Cira," she murmured. "She might be a little like you. Not as seasoned, not as savvy, but she's a fighter. You'd appreciate that in her." She turned to go back into her tent. "I do. . . ."

The truck with the Australian lights and transformers arrived at noon the next day. The boxes were carried down from the road by four of MacDuff's sentries and deposited on the shore leading to the north bank. Then MacDuff sent them away, and for the next four hours Jane, MacDuff, and Jock unpacked the contents, which resembled the light assembly on a high-tech movie set.

Complicated. Very complicated, Jane thought as she paused to wipe her forehead. "I hope these came with instructions, MacDuff."

"A few." MacDuff grinned. "We're lucky they're in English. Since I refused to let Carlisle come and set it up himself, he felt no qualms about making it hard for me. He did agree to accept my phone calls."

"Thank heaven for small favors," Jock murmured. He began to load the first of the lights on a dolly. "I'll take these back to the north bank, to that rock formation where we set up the poles."

“For those other super-duper infrared lights that failed miserably,” Jane said drily.

“But look on the bright side,” MacDuff said. “We already have the heavy work done. All we have to do is set up Carlisle’s power source and attach it.”

“After you figure out how to do it,” Jock said.

“There is that small hurdle,” MacDuff admitted. “But it’s going to work.”

“If you say so,” Caleb said as he came down the bank toward them. “But I hoped you’d have a little more accomplished by the time I got here.”

Jane went still and then forced herself to turn and look at him. The same. All force. All power. The same mocking smile and riveting charisma. “We might have accomplished more if you’d been here to help. As usual, you managed to bow out of the manual work, Caleb.”

“Hello, Jane. That dew of perspiration on you is very attractive. Sort of a glow.” He smiled. “And you know my expertise lies in other areas. Anyone can do common labor.” He turned to MacDuff and shook his hand. “Though I did mean to get here a bit sooner. I was out of the country.” He looked at the dolly Jock was loading and sighed. “But it appears that I’m still going to be forced to do my part. The poles by the boulders?”

Jock nodded. “You take the dolly and I’ll finish unpacking that final crate.”

“I’ll do it,” Jane said. “Take another dolly and both of you go, Jock. You’ll be able to unpack them faster and get back for another load. It’s starting to get dark, and we’ll want to get the rest of this stuff off the bank and where it’s supposed to go.” She glanced slyly at MacDuff. “We wouldn’t want a random crow flying around to grab one of MacDuff’s miracle lights to line her nest.”

MacDuff flinched. “Sacrilege.”

“I’ll make amends by going back to camp and putting on the coffee while you’re all bustling around in the mist.”

Caleb looked over his shoulder as he reached the trees. “That might not be an intelligent division of labor. You’re so good in the mist, Jane.”

The mist surrounding them, the cool dampness beneath her body. Caleb over her, his hands on her breasts, no breath in her lungs, wild eroticism everywhere.

She met his eyes. “Yes, I am. But it’s my choice if I want to go there.” She bent over the crate. “I’ll see you all back at camp.”

“Pity . . .”

MacDuff glanced at her as Jock and Caleb disappeared into the woods. “I’ll finish unpacking that crate. You can go back to camp now. You’ve worked hard today. That’s not why I want you here.”

“No, you want my invaluable vibes to soothe Cira.” She smiled. “But I don’t mind pitching in. You may not get much work out of Caleb.”

“You’d be surprised. He works hard when he chooses. That pose just amuses him. And he’s right: His talent lies in other areas. I just needed another man I trust to help with these lights. And Jock and he work well together.” His lips twisted. “They’re on the same wavelength.”

“It’s a wavelength you’ve been trying to keep away from Jock since you found him in that sanitarium.” She shivered. “He was an assassin, MacDuff. I would have thought you’d try to discourage him from being around a man like Caleb.”

“Jock runs his own life now. And there’re no other men like Caleb. They’re both deadly. I just have to hope that they’re not too explosive together.” He shrugged. “Hell, I’m only asking them to help me with those damn lights. It will be fine. Caleb shouldn’t be here too long. He warned me he couldn’t give me that much time.”

“Then all the more reason I should finish here before I go back to camp.” Jane pulled out another lamp from the box. “Now hush while I work up some more of that ‘glow’ Caleb was so sarcastic about.”

It was nearly ten that night when Jane saw MacDuff and Jock come out of the forest and walk toward the campfire.

She tried to make her tone casual as she hurried toward them. "It's late. I was beginning to worry. What happened?"

"Nothing," MacDuff smiled. "We just got caught up in the moment. Or should I say hours?"

"We got caught up in Caleb," Jock interjected drily. "He was in a fever, and we became infected." He went to the fire and picked up the coffeepot. "We only meant to start the job, but then we thought, Why not? So we went at it full speed." He poured coffee in his cup. "As full speed as possible in that mist and dark."

"We got a lot done," MacDuff said. "We finished the attachment on the first pole and Caleb almost finished the second himself."

"And where is Caleb?" She handed MacDuff a cup of coffee.

"He said he only had a little to finish on the second pole and for us to go back without him." Jock finished his coffee. "Now I'm going to grab a sandwich and then hit the shower."

"Should you have left him alone?"

"What's going to hurt him? We've never run across any wildcats or any other large animals." MacDuff grinned. "And if Caleb did, I'd bet on him. He's one of the most nimble men in the forest I've ever seen, almost like an animal himself. And if he fell in the lake, we'd just laugh at him. No, he'll be fine."

He's undoubtedly right, Jane thought. She was being foolish to worry about Caleb. She had seen him on the hunt in a forest in the Alps years ago and she knew what MacDuff meant about him resembling an animal. Wild . . .

But things could still happen. That mist remained a complete mystery to them. There could be sinkholes and underground currents in that lake. Agile or not, he could fall and break his stupid head open.

"He'll be fine," MacDuff repeated as he munched on a bacon sandwich. "Trust me. I wouldn't have left him if I'd thought there

was a danger.” His eyes were twinkling. “I might need him too much in the next couple days. He truly swept us along with him tonight.” He finished his coffee. “Now I think I’ll follow Jock and try to get this mud off me. It was a good first day, Jane.” He was moving away from the campfire. “If you and Cira have a nocturnal get-together, you might tell her about it. . . .”

But the day wasn’t over for Caleb.

She stared at the mist rising from the forest. Good God, she actually wanted to go after him. How dumb that would be. Caleb was no child and could take care of himself. He would only be amused if he knew she was worried about him.

And she would want to slap him.

She should go to bed and forget about him, as MacDuff and Jock were doing.

But she would only lie there and not sleep. That would amuse Caleb even more. Okay, she told herself, stay here by the fire and wait until you’re sure he is safe. He’d told MacDuff he wouldn’t be long out there in the mist. It wouldn’t look weird for her to stay up a little longer and enjoy the fire.

She got another cup of coffee and settled down to wait.

Caleb didn’t come out of the woods for another two hours.

She smothered her relief as she jumped to her feet and started to leave the campfire and head for her tent. “The coffee’s hot,” she called. “You should have come earlier if you wanted anything to eat.”

“Stop right there.” He was running along the bank and barred her way. “I’m damp and I’m cold and evidently I’m going to starve, but I’m not going to do it alone. You’re coming back to the fire and keeping me company while I dry out.”

“We said what needed to be said last night.”

“You don’t have to talk. I might prefer that you don’t. But I always like to look at you. Come on.” He turned and headed back toward the campfire.

She hesitated. Then she slowly followed him and dropped down on the ground before the fire while he poured a cup of coffee. "There might be some rolls and cheese in that metal saver over there."

"That you weren't going to offer me. So I don't have to starve?" He shook his head as he sat down and crossed his legs Indian-fashion. "I'm not hungry. The adrenaline is still pumping. I find it interesting that you're annoyed with me but that you still waited up until I came back."

"I wasn't sleepy. I wasn't waiting for you."

He tilted his head and gazed at her appraisingly. "I think you were. Tell me, were you afraid Cira would strike me down out there in the mist? She wouldn't do that. I told you: She likes me."

"Why should I be afraid for you? As MacDuff said, he'd bet on you against anything you might run into."

"But you still stayed up and waited." He nodded. "I'd do the same. Only I'd probably go after you."

"Finish your coffee. I'm not going to sit here and chat. You should have been back hours ago."

"I told you: I don't have much of a window to do what MacDuff needs me to do. He and Jock have time to play with those lights. I've got to help set them up and get out of here."

"Why?" She shook her head. "Never mind. One of your commitments. It doesn't matter. I never know what you're doing. It's none of my business."

"And you like it like that." He took another sip of coffee. "So do I, most of the time. But I liked it that you made it your business to sit here worrying about me tonight. It made me feel . . . warm. I think it might have erased that lingering bit of anger I was feeling toward you."

"And that's supposed to make me feel all soft and fuzzy?"

He chuckled. "Heaven forbid. There's nothing soft and fuzzy about you, Jane. But it should make you feel a good deal more secure. I really did want to punish you."

“Bullshit.”

“But it’s gone now. Do you want to know what’s in its place?”

Lust. Heat. Erotic fantasy.

“No, I don’t.” She got quickly to her feet. “I’m going to my tent. Will you still be here in the morning? Or did you finish tonight?”

“I have a few more things to do, but I’ll be out by noon.”

She started toward the tents. “Have a good trip.”

“I’ll walk you to your tent.” He rose to his feet. “You’re in escape mode and you might be conveniently busy tomorrow morning. I consider that I deserve a prize for interrupting my business to help MacDuff. We’ve already discussed the fact that I’m not one of the good guys.”

“And I’m the prize? No way, Caleb.”

“Not the grand prize. Though I do think I deserve it. I just want to see you smile at me. I didn’t realize how much I’d missed seeing it during these last months.” He grimaced. “Though you were never very generous with me in that regard. You were always too wary.”

She stopped outside her tent. “And I’m supposed to grin at you like a Siamese cat to please you?”

“That would be nice, but not expected.” He smiled. “So I’ll smile at you and set the example. Good night, Jane.”

“Good night.” She stared up at him. The moonlight was dim, but the glow of the fire in the distance outlined his features: the curve of his lips, the indentation in his chin, the slash of dark brows over his eyes. Everything was sharp and defined in this light. Usually, she was so aware of the power and personality behind those features that she didn’t notice the details. But every feature was intriguing. “And I don’t need examples. And I wasn’t worried about Cira. I thought you might fall off that damn pole and bust your head. That happens even to men like you.”

He laughed. “It certainly does. And if I was that clumsy, I’d deserve it.”

“And it doesn’t change anything.”

“Then I’ll have to work on it.” He turned away. “I’ll be back as soon as I finish up my business. Sleep well, Jane.”

“I will. I won’t have anyone to keep me awake by doing—” She inhaled sharply, staring at him. Profile. Sharp silhouette. Black and white.

He looked back over his shoulder. “What?”

“Nothing.”

She turned and bolted into the tent. Her heart was jumping out of her chest.

She stood there in the dark for a moment, trying to get control.

It couldn’t be, could it?

Of course it could.

Okay, give yourself a little time to check and then try to make sense of it.

She should have been happy and relieved.

But she couldn’t imagine a worse scenario for her.

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