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# SOMEONE ELSE'S SHADOW

*Night's Edge Anthology*

**Barbara Hambly**

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NIGHTS EDGE

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For George... and Baby

## **CHAPTER ONE**

"Tessa?"

Dim light shone at the top of the first long flight of stairs. Maddie Laveau hitched her duffle coat closer around her shoulders, glancing warily back at the plate-glass door onto East Twenty-ninth Street. Yellow streetlights glared through the glass doors into the narrow lobby, barely more than a widened corridor with a caretaker's booth. Quincy the caretaker had gone home an hour ago at ten, which was just as

well, since Maddie wasn't in the mood for a forty-five-minute monologue on the subject of taxes and the Republican party. The place smelled of moldy carpets and cigarettes smoked decades ago. The street door had been locked, and Maddie had locked it again behind her the minute she'd let herself in with Tessa's key.

But if her roommate had a key, she told herself—duplicated from that of another dancer, who'd duplicated it from one of the instructors who was no longer teaching at the Dance Loft—God knew who else in New York had them.

Heart pounding, Maddie mounted the dark stairs.

"Tessa, are you there?"

Silence. Though the Glendower Building had always given Maddie the creeps, it housed one of the most respected dance schools in the city. Maddie wasn't sure why this was so—God knew there were other buildings in New York City, including the one she lived in, just as old, just as shabby, just as dingily lighted.

But from the first time she'd walked through its doors, twenty-two months ago now, it had made her nervous, as if there was always something there looking over her shoulder.

She climbed the long stairway quickly, two stories past the dancewear shop on the first floor and the storerooms and offices on the second, glancing repeatedly over her shoulder: *Like someone could have been hiding in the lobby?* A Barbie doll couldn't have taken cover there. Someone had repainted the stairwell during the last remodeling in the eighties with the neutral pinks and grays fashionable then, but hadn't stripped the old wallpaper underneath or put in modern lighting. The result was simply dingy, and Maddie guessed that underneath the gray industrial carpeting lurked layers of carpet tiles and the brown linoleum stilt visible on the upper floors. Uncovering the original wood, laid back in the 1890s, would be like revealing the stratification in some archaeological dig.

During the several months she'd taught belly dancing in one of the Dance Loft's smaller studios, Maddie had always hated being in the building at night. Charmian Dayforth, the owner, seemed to have no qualms about handing out keys to students, instructors and the part-time office help that came and went with the speed of Hollywood wives. After seven and a half years of living in New York, Maddie moved through the building with great wariness, with one hand in her coat pocket curled around a can of pepper spray.

Her roommate, Tessa, had been in town exactly six months. And while the girl had a self-reliant barrio toughness to her, she *was* only eighteen.

Which was why Maddie was climbing the long flight of stairs from the lobby in the semidark at eleven-fifteen on a January night, after dancing all evening at the Al-Medina Restaurant on Lexington Avenue. The advanced ballet class officially ended at ten, but the instructor frequently ran late, especially now, with the auditions for the American Ballet Academy coming up.

With the auditions approaching, Tessa would stay on later still.

This was not a good idea, in a neighborhood that wasn't anything to write home about... Not that Tessa had anyone back in El Paso to write home *to*.

From the small and gloomy lobby at the top of the first flight of stairs, Maddie followed the light to the door marked *The Dance Loft* and pulled out the second of Tessa's much-duplicated keys. The front office of the dance school was identical to the dozens Maddie had seen in Baton Rouge, in New Orleans and in New York over the twenty-three years since her first ballet class when she was five: threadbare carpet, plywood paneling, posters displaying the names of teachers. Rows of black-framed eight-by-tens of ballerinas floating weightless and serene onstage, or head shots scribbled with autographs. Looking at the little room through its glass door, Maddie had to smile as she put the key in ..fee-lock...

But the door wasn't locked.

*Damn it!* Maddie was shocked. *Tessa, for God's sake, when you're in here by yourself, lock the door behind you! Didn't being raised by two drunks in a domestic demilitarized zone teach you any distrust? This is the big city!*

Tessa's dance bag lay in a corner of the big studio, where the fluorescents still blazed twenty feet above the sprung wooden floor. From the door, Maddie scanned the room. The mirrors threw back her own reflection, medium height and still slim, though she'd put on ten pounds since her own stick-thin ballerina days. Belly dancers might not get the respect ballerinas did, she reflected, but at least they didn't have to starve themselves to get into productions. Her light-brown hair; hung nearly to her waist, still curled into a maze of braids and twists, the jeweled clasps in it incongruous against the drab green duffle coat and jeans.

There was no sign of Tessa.

*Bathroom*, thought Maddie. She walked over to the black canvas bag: pink silk pointe shoes repaired with duct tape, worn and holed knit warm-ups wadded into: a ball, jeans hanging over the barre. They brought back to her so clearly the first time Tessa had slipped apologetically through the door of the Dance Loft's front office last July, as if she expected to be thrown out for daring to breathe the air in there. "I'm Theresa Lopez," she'd said in her soft voice. "Is there, like, a bulletin board where I can put up a notice asking if anyone-needs a roommate?"

Maddie had shown her—the board was crammed with similar ads—and because it was midmorning and Maddie had just finished teaching her own class, she'd got her a cup of coffee and they'd sat on the spavined old sofa in the front office and talked.

Though there was ten years difference in their ages—Tessa was just eighteen—Maddie had liked her immediately. Maybe because her response to Maddie's teaching belly dancing had been a heartfelt "How cool!" instead of a condescending "Oh... like those girls in the clubs?" Maybe because of the careful expression in the back of those huge brown eyes that had identified Theresa Lopez as a survivor of the same sort of war that Maddie herself had, at that time, only recently gotten out of alive, though in Theresa's case the enemy had been parents,

and in Maddie's case...

Sandy.

Maddie's mind still flinched from the recollection of her ex-husband.

And the flinch woke her to the fact that a good five minutes had passed.

"Tessa? The hall outside the Dance Loft's front office was dim and it seemed like miles to the bathroom. When Maddie reached it and pushed the door open a crack, she saw that the room was dark.

Tessa wasn't there. Hadn't been there, at least not when Maddie had come upstairs.

Maddie stood for several minutes in the gloom of the hall, listening to the silence of the building around her.

Not empty silence. Silence that breathed, and listened.

*Well, duh*, she told herself quickly, *Of course it's not empty, Tessa's here someplace...*

But a part of her knew it wasn't Tessa whose presence she sensed.

Maddie walked back to the office, checked the big studio again, hoping against hope she'd find Tessa there, folded into some impossible stretch and simply oblivious of the fact that it was now eleven-thirty.

*Nada*. She called out Tessa's name, hesitantly, but there was no reply from the other, smaller rehearsal rooms that the Dayforths rented to freelance instructors in tango, Hawaiian, hip-hop and, yes, belly dancing... so long as they didn't need them for ballet classes of their own.

Now truly uneasy, she let her bag slip down off her arm and knelt quickly to fish through the gaudy jumble of gold sequins and green silk for her cell phone. *Damn it*, she thought, *I knew this would happen...* without being precisely certain what "this" was. There was a miniflashlight in the bag, too—the electricity in the Glendower Building was notoriously erratic—and Maddie's wallet, which she transferred to her coat pocket along with the pepper spray.

Getting into the ABA was one thing—Maddie knew well how few new students they took each year, and how, with a direct feed from the most prestigious ballet company in the country, they chose none but the absolute best.

Putting your life in danger was another.

Not, she thought wryly, that you didn't do just that, cheerfully, when you were driven to succeed as Tessa was driven. She recalled her own teenage days of diet pills and bloodstained toe shoes. A few nights ago she'd come here at midnight, to see Tessa still in this studio, practicing *grand jetes* and *sautes de basque* back and forth across the huge floor with the gem-hard concentration of a gladiator training for a death fight. The younger girl's brilliance was matched only by her hunger for perfection of technique, a hunger sharpened by a short lifetime of denial.

In that first conversation six months ago, Tessa had spoken only of parents who "think I'm crazy." It wasn't until later—a week after their first meeting, to be exact, when Charmian Dayforth had dropped Maddie's two belly dancing classes in favor of another children's ballet class and Maddie had had to take a roommate to make ends meet—that Maddie had learned how hard that slim, dark-eyed girl had fought to dance at all.

Tessa knew the competition she was up against. Without a dime coming in from El Paso, she worked two jobs, getting up at four-thirty in the morning and putting in hours doing Mrs. Dayforth's clerking, filing and phone answering in trade for her classes, wanting only to learn. There were nights when Maddie had come up to the school after her own gigs at Al-Medina or the Algerian Marketplace and had found her asleep from sheer exhaustion on the front office couch.

Maddie flicked on the flashlight, left her bag beside Tessa's in the studio, stepped back into the dark hall.

"Tessa!" Her voice echoed in the halls, grating horribly on that watchful silence. "Tessa, can you hear me?" The flashlight was less than the length of her hand and had a beam that broke up a yard from the lens. It took her several minutes to find the light switches in the hall, and the dreary grayish glare was barely less depressing than absolute darkness.

Big studio, small studio, tap studio... dark. There was another big studio, though without the two-story ceiling, on the floor above, and a medium-size one where Maddie had taught her belly dance ladies the preliminary mysteries of isolation, shimmies and hip drops. Tessa was in neither of those, nor in the big changing room, though something that Maddie suspected was a rat darted out of sight under a locker. At that size she hoped it was a rat and not a cockroach, anyway.

That was another reason she disliked the Glendower Building.

Her heart pounded as she turned on the lights to the stairway up and mounted the narrow carpeted steps. The two floors above the Dance Loft—she thought there were two floors, anyway—had been divided and subdivided and reddivided over the course of nearly a century into a maze of small offices and tiny studios where a couple of fly-by-night music companies did business, along with three literary agencies and a handful of freelance computer technicians. There were little workshops and padded sound booths, reached by odd little passageways that turned back on themselves or dead-ended into blank walls; windowless cubicles surrounding dreary waiting rooms with names on the doors like Wild Adventure Tours—as *opposed to tame adventures*? Maddie wondered.

Maddie thought she'd covered the fifth floor—the one immediately above the two floors of the Dance Loft—thoroughly, trying every locked and silent door. But it was also completely possible that she'd missed a hallway or a whole section of doors. There was no way of telling.

There were definitely rats up here.

And a silence that seemed to look over her shoulder, waiting to grin at her if she

turned around.

Grimly, Maddie turned on the lights of the next stairway up, pushing from her mind the question of what on earth Tessa would have come up here for. She wouldn't have left her bag, wherever she was: Bloch pointe shoes cost upward of eighty dollars a pair.

Maddie was halfway up the stairs when the lights went out.

She cursed, froze as blind darkness shut around her, as if someone had dropped a blanket over her head. Damn the management and its cheap wiring—or were the lights on some kind of timer to save money? Anger carried her through the first half minute while she dug in her pocket for the flashlight...

"Stand still, you little bitch."

The whispered words came so soft that they might almost have been inside her head. Only they weren't. She knew they weren't.

Her heart constricted, then raced like a NASCAR engine as her hand scraped, pawed for the damn flashlight. *Oh, God, where the hell is it... ?*

".. little sluts are all alike... good for one thing... "

She couldn't tell whether that thick, slurring voice was in front of her or behind her. But it was close, close and very clear, for she could hear the hiss of breath, smell a faint whiff of some cloying cologne laid over the stink of sweaty wool and alcohol. *Oh, God, where is that flashlight... ?*

Her fingers touched it, buried deep in the folds of the left-hand pocket, slipped away from it, then grabbed it and flicked it on. Nothing above her on the stairs—she whipped around fast, shaking with shock, saw him...

Saw his shadow.

He was farther away than she'd thought, at the bottom of the stairs behind her, beyond the range of the flashlight's weak beam. A man's shape, tall and looming, a darkness against the deeper dark of the hall. Still his voice seemed to be right up against her ear as he whispered, "Bitch... "

And was gone.

Maddie climbed the stairs fast. The light switch was farther from the top than any sane remodeler would find useful, and as she hunted for it, sweeping the feeble beam along the walls, she listened desperately behind her, wondering if she'd just heard the stair creak, the floor creak.

*Tessa, she thought, Jesus Christ, Tessa, be okay...*

She flipped the switch. One light went on, far down at the end of the hall. Nothing worked near the stairwell.

In her mind she still heard the whispering. She couldn't tell where it was coming from, for it seemed to fill the air around her, some of it intelligible, some half heard and foul beyond the borders of sanity.

*He's down there. Behind me.*

Maddie retreated down the main hall toward the light. A corridor gaped to her right and she whipped the watery flashlight beam down it, the knobs of locked doors gleaming furtively in darkness. Something lay on the floor, something small—Maddie didn't know why she recognized it as one of the bandannas Tessa wore in her hair, but she did. She looked for a light switch but there was none, turned a corner into a dead end, retraced her steps, turned another...

*Damn it, thought Maddie with a sinking heart, I miscounted. Looks like there's another floor above this one....*

Stairs, narrower yet and as unlit as the fire escapes in hell, ascended at the end of the short hall...

The next second she realized that Tessa was standing at the foot of them, her back to Maddie, looking up.

"Tessa!"

The girl swung around, startled, catching at the corner of the wall for support. In her tights and leotard she looked about thirteen, her thin form half concealed by a baggy T-shirt, whose old rock-concert logo had been nearly chipped away by time and laundering. Her marvelous black hair was wound up into a neat ballerina's bun on top of her head.

"Maddie?" She sounded puzzled rather than afraid.

"Are you all right?" Maddie strode down the hall, put a hand behind Tessa's back, drew her toward the faint light still visible from the main hall. Through leotard and T-shirt she could feel every vertebra, as if she'd put her hand on a pile of jacks. "I was coming back from Al-Medina, and I thought I'd walk you home..."

They turned the corner by a locked door marked, *Vulgarian Records*, Tessa looking around her uncertainly, as if not entirely sure of where she was.

Maddie herself was just praying that the main hall would be empty when they reached it. "I saw your stuff still in the studio..."

There were still, of course, the stairs to get down...

"Thank you." Tessa sounded hesitant, but then made herself smile. "How was your gig? You get a lot of tips?"

"Decent." *And I left them downstairs in my bag, like an idiot, for our pal Whispering, Smith to help himself...* "Tessa, listen, there's somebody else in the..."

They stepped around the corner and there he was.

Maddie's breath jerked in her lungs, and Tessa stepped toward the tall shadow and said, "So what happened to the lights?"

"When I fired up the Doomsday Machine to destroy the planet, I had the microwave on and I blew a circuit." He stepped into the weak glimmer of the

flashlight: brown eyes, pleasantly craggy features, dark, stiff hair hanging in disarray over his forehead. Under a greenish-brown wool sweater the tails of a much-faded denim shirt protruded, finished off by patched and battered jeans. "You need something? Other than a better flashlight?"

"Maddie," said Tessa, "this is Phil Cooper. He plays piano for the ballet classes—he's got a studio here in the building."

"Hi." Maddie's heart was still pounding so hard it almost nauseated her. Her fingers closed around the pepper-spray can in her pocket, though her common sense told her that unless he were armed, the man probably couldn't take on the two of them. She wanted to pull Tessa back out of arm's reach but didn't know how to manage it unobtrusively.

"Maddie's my roommate," continued the girl blithely. "She dances over at Al-Medina—and reads tarot cards." Her pride and delight in both of these accomplishments rang in her voice. "She's really good."

"Remind me to consult you the next time I get offered a recording contract." His voice was pleasant, husky and a little hesitant, but Maddie could see that he didn't miss the way she drew back from him.

"I suggest you save your money for a lawyer," she said. "Tessa, we've got to get out of here. It's almost midnight."

Tessa's eyes widened with shocked guilt. "No way! Oh, sweetie, I'm sorry... " She let Maddie pull her down the stairs, Phil trailing behind. Maddie almost told him to get lost but decided that it was better if she knew where he was. The lights worked fine once they got down to the Dance Loft.

"Makes sense," said Phil cheerily as the bright glare flooded the halls. "If the Dayforths left, the owners would be stuck with two whole floors to rent out. They don't give a rat's ass what we think about them up on the sixth floor."

Maddie said nothing. As they collected their bags Tessa chatted with Phil about the long explanation Quincy the caretaker had given her concerning the building's electricity—"I swear the man took twenty minutes to tell me about buying a lightbulb! Well, first he told me about how electricity worked, *then* he told me about the lightbulb..."

"They're got a twelve-step program for that," said Phil as he followed the two women down that last long spooky flight of stairs to the lobby. "On-and-On-Anon. You ladies be okay walking over to the subway?"

"We're fine," Maddie snapped, and stepped out onto the stoop. Phil remained in the building and gave them a polite wave as Tessa followed Maddie out the door.

The night's icy mist had almost thickened to rain. Maddie's boots knocked sharply on the wet pavement as they headed for the subway stop on Park, making her glance back more than once, as if she expected to see someone drifting behind them in the dark. "Is he the night watchman for the school as well as the piano player?" she asked after they had walked a little way in silence. "Or does he just like

sneaking around old buildings in the dark?"

"I think he lives there these days." Tessa huddled her pea coat more closely around her and glanced worriedly at the sharp note in her roommate's voice. "But don't tell Mrs. Dayforth, okay? He rents his studio on the top floor and writes music, and about two weeks ago his roommate at his apartment told him his girlfriend was moving in, so Phil had to vacate—way harsh, I thought I mean," Tessa added contritely, "if you wanted me to boogie so you could bring in a boy, I know you'd give me more than a day to find someplace else. Horny is one thing, but you don't got to be rude."

"Sweetheart," smiled Maddie, "after my previous experience in the male-roommate department, I promise you, you have nothing to worry about" They walked on for another half block, detouring around the ubiquitous clusters of trash cans at the curb, glancing down narrow areaways where lights burned in tailor shops, button stores, basement clubs full of smoke. At the corner of Lexington Avenue an all-night Korean grocery glowed like a jewel with produce, bottles, steam trays filled with Oriental chicken salad and lasagna. At length—so as not to let her mind return to the male-roommate department—Maddie asked, "What were you doing up on the sixth floor? Why did you go there?"

"I don't..." Tessa hesitated. "I guess I thought I heard a noise or something. Or... or voices talking." In the yellow glare of the grocery's lamps her dark pixie brows drew down over the straight little nose; her glance darted sidelong to Maddie again. "I think maybe it had to have been my imagination."

"Did someone call you? Or... or whisper to you?" Theresa shook her head. "Whisper what?" Maddie shivered, remembering the note of vile gloating in the voice, as much as the obscenity of the words. Had it really been Phil Cooper? It was hard to put that hoarse voice together with the piano player's easygoing friendliness. But then, she thought, she'd trusted Sandy, too.

Lying awake in her bed later, staring at the street lamps' distant glare reflected on the hanging sheets that separated her "bedroom" niche from the rest of the big studio apartment, Maddie thought about Sandy.

Had it really been ten and a half months since that deep voice had spoken to her over the phone: "Mrs. Weinraub?"

"I was Mrs. Weinraub," Maddie had replied carefully. "But I'm no longer married to Sandy Weinraub." And she'd thought, *Oh, God, not another collection agency...* Though she could no longer be responsible for his debts after the date separation was filed, she still lived with the nightmare of some unsuspected creditor crawling out of the woodwork, some hitherto unrevealed legal technicality that would haul her back into the craziness of poor Sandy's existence.

But the deep voice had said, "I'm Officer O'Neill of the NYPD. Mr. Weinraub's body was found by his landlord this morning. His death appears to have been from natural causes. We'd like you to come down and identify it."

It still seemed like last week.

Had he always lied to her? Maddie was still trying to figure that one out. Nothing in her peaceful—if rather obsessive—childhood had prepared her for marriage to a man whose life was a surreptitious quest for chemical oblivion. Certainly nothing had prepared her to look behind Sandy's intelligence and charm into the nightmare of addiction and lies. Asking him to leave had been one of the hardest things she'd ever done, and for nearly a year she'd lived with the pleading phone messages, the desperate requests for money, the fear that she'd encounter him one day panhandling, homeless, in the street.

And then he was gone.

Natural causes, if you could call the results of a lifetime of drug and alcohol abuse "natural."

And looking back at nine years of memories, from the moment she'd walked into that first writing class at Tulane and been struck speechless by the youthful teacher's slow, wry smile, Maddie still couldn't hate him, or be angry at him. He certainly had not torn her , life to pieces in malice.

According to everyone she'd talked to, that was just something addicts did.

Or something men did. Maddie wasn't sure which. All the promises, and all the lies, and all the things she'd given up, trying to make a relationship work with someone who wasn't present in his body upward of fifty percent of the time. Had it been different, she wondered, when first they'd met? When first she'd dropped out of college to go to New York with him, to be his adored one and his admiring wife? Or had she just been too naive to notice?

She stretched out her hand to scratch Baby's black-and-white ears. The cat put a paw over Maddie's wrist and began to lick her hand; at times Maddie thought Baby considered herself Maddie's kitten, at times, Maddie's mother. Baby had been Sandy's cat, a useful lesson, Maddie thought, in human relations. Animals only understood what you did, not what you said. When Maddie had begun looking at what Sandy did, and not listening to what he said, the mist of infatuation started to clear from her eyes.

But she'd never ceased loving him.

On the other side of the sheet-wall, she heard the springs of the old sofa creak softly under Tessa's too-slight weight. The girl cried out something, a muffled sob in her sleep. Maddie half sat up, for her young roommate suffered occasionally from nightmares. Maddie couldn't imagine how, after three hours of class, ten hours of work and individual practice on top of that, Tessa had the energy even to dream. She listened, ready to go out and wake her if her nightmare continued, but the sound was not repeated.

Did she dream of her parents? Maddie wondered. Of the chaos she'd only hinted at in their conversations: her father's drunken rages, her mother's screaming efforts to control him, the ugly separation battle that had resulted in Tessa traveling back and forth from El Paso to San Francisco several times a year? Was she imagining herself at the age of eight, alone on a Greyhound bus?

Or the fears about what she'd do if she couldn't get into a ballet company, couldn't get a job doing what she loved?

Or did she dream of the darkness of the Glendower Building? Closing her eyes, Maddie saw Tessa again, standing in the darkness at the bottom of the stairway to the seventh floor, listening to a man's voice whispering obscenities while he reached out to her with his shadow hands.

## CHAPTER TWO

"Can I join you?"

Maddie turned, startled, from watching the dirty granite doorway of the Glendower Building across the street, and looked up to see Phil Cooper standing beside her table.

*So he exists in daytime, and outside the building.*

And the next instant, *What's that about?*

*... little sluts are all alike... good for one thing...*

He seemed very tall, standing over her in the heat-less morning brightness from the window of the Owl Cafe". She took a deep breath.

"Okay."

He drew back a bit from the chill in her tone. For a moment she thought he was going to say, *Well, don't do me any big favors*, and walk off. She couldn't tell whether she'd feel angry at him or immensely relieved if he did.

He set his coffee cup on the table and said—without sitting—"Look, I'm sorry if I pissed you off with that stupid crack about consulting you next time I signed a contract: Tessa tells me you take your card-reading pretty seriously... " He winced and added, "So now that I've shoved my *other* foot into my mouth, I'll just roll myself out the door. But I really didn't mean it to sound like it did." He picked up the cup and was turning to go when Maddie laughed.

"You'll never make it out the door with both feet crammed in your mouth."

"Hide and watch me." His shoulders relaxed and he came back. "If the lady in the yoga studio on the fifth floor can walk around on her hands with her ankles crossed behind her neck, I can sure get out with both feet in my mouth." He must have read the look in Maddie's eye, because he set his cup on the table again and sat down. For a man who was presumably sleeping on the floor of a practice studio he was clean and shaved, if scruffy. His hair was clean and still slightly damp—Maddie

guessed he was sneaking showers in the Dance Loft's dressing rooms.

Mrs. Dayforth would be beyond pissed if anyone ratted on him.

At this hour, shortly after two, the Owl was emptying out, the clerical staff and warehouse handlers from all the small companies in the neighborhood heading back to work and leaving the battered tables and the hard-worn bentwood chairs to the dance students, the lawyers from the offices overhead and their clients, and stray shoppers from Lexington Avenue.

He added with a rueful grin, "I've had lots of practice at it."

"And I've had lots of practice hearing people make cracks about the cards. People believe in them or they don't. There's no reason why you should." Maddie spread her hands. "You didn't... " She hesitated again, looking into those brown eyes and wondering, *Was it the same man?*

*Was it the same voice ?*

The smell of him certainly wasn't the same, that horrible rancid stink of grimy wool and cologne.

If she asked him, would he tell her the truth?

"You didn't hear anyone else in the building the other night, did you?" And as she spoke the words something in her flinched and she wished she could snatch them back, shove them in her pocket and walk away and be safe.

"Did you?"

*It was him.*

*Was it him?*

He'd drawn back from her at the question, suddenly wary. Maddie shook her head. "Tessa tells me you're sleeping there these days."

"Shh!" He hunched his shoulders and put a finger dramatically to his lips. "If the building management heard that they'd terminate my lease, and then I'd *really* be in trouble. I'm hoping it's just temporary, till I build up enough of a nest egg to get a place... but in this town you need a nest egg the size of a forklift. Between playing for the ballet classes I teach private piano students in my studio. If I lost that place I'd be back bustin' rods in Tulsa."

Maddie's eyebrows went up. "So you're really in construction?"

"I *was* really in construction," said Phil, then he looked down at his coffee cup, turning it so the handle lined up with the edge of the table. "Or rather, I was always really a musician but I had to do the construction thing when I lived at home. My dad would pay for me to go to college in engineering or business—he's a contractor—but music?"

He shrugged and glanced up to meet her eyes again. "That's one reason I wasn't in the best mood last night. It was my birthday—the big three-oh. Sleeping on the floor in an empty building wasn't the way I thought I'd be spending it."

Maddie looked down at his hands. Big hands, knotty from carrying steel rebars—"bustin' rods," the lowest level of the construction trade—but long-boned and supple. A musician's hands. His face, in daylight, seemed younger than it had last night in spite of the lines around the corners of the eyes, the few flecks of silver in the thick dark hair.

She found herself wondering under what circumstances he'd acquired the old break in the bridge of his nose, the short scar under his left eye. Wondering what he'd gone through to come here, and what kind of music he wrote in that desperately held studio on the sixth floor.

"I sent him the two CDs I cut," said Phil, more quietly. "Last time I was home I found them in a drawer, still wrapped in plastic. My stepmom keeps asking me how come I don't write the kind of music real people like?" He caught himself and glanced up at her, apologetic. "Sorry. You're not into classical music, are you?"

"You know," said Maddie solemnly, folding her hands beneath her chin, "I tried for years to work out a belly dance routine to Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nacht-musik*, and I just couldn't fit in a drum solo."

"Ow!" He flinched ruefully. "I'm sorry. 'Man develops third foot, shoves it in mouth—film at eleven.' I don't seem to be doing too well. It's just after years of having people's eyes glaze over when I talk about music... " .

"I ran into the same thing," said Maddie gently, "from all those people who think a belly dancer is the same as a stripper."

Phil looked away. In a Victorian novel, Maddie reflected, he would have blushed.

"Have you ever seen a good belly dancer perform?"

"Um... uh... "

*In a topless bar with the other construction workers*, she thought—she knew.

And then, like the recollection of a nightmare, in her mind she heard again.. *little sluts are all alike....*

And saw the wary look that had come into his eyes when he'd dodged her question and asked instead, *Did you?*

*What are you doing sitting here talking to this man? Much less imagining what he'd look like on a construction site at the age of twenty-four in an undershirt?*

Maddie got quickly to her feet. Instead of saying, *You should come on over to Al-Medina and check it out some evening*, she opened her mouth to retort, *You figure anyone who dances for tips couldn't tell the difference between Rossini and Tchaikovsky without a crib sheet and a copy of Classical Favorites in her Disc-man?*

Sandy had had the same attitude—it was due to his good-natured contempt for the art that Maddie had abandoned dancing, nine years ago.

But the genuine distress in Phil's eyes as he looked up at her—the helpless apology for having, as he thought, inadvertently angered her yet again—stopped her.

For a moment there was silence between them, Maddie looking down into his face as he sat with his big hands around the coffee cup, an exile like herself who couldn't go home.

She let her breath out. "There's Tessa," she said, nodding across the street at the thin pea-coated figure on the steps of the Glendower Building. "I guess I'll see you around the school."

And she added, though she didn't know why, "Good luck."

"Thank you," he said. "These days I sure need it."

She intercepted Tessa halfway across the street and suggested a quick lunch at the Twenty-ninth Street Cafe—a little to her roommate's surprise, since they usually had a sandwich at the Owl on the days when Maddie taught at the SoHo YWCA. Tessa, Maddie noticed, barely ate anything; she hoped her young roommate would go back to the apartment and take some rest between her afternoon class and the start of her late shift at Starbucks, but she knew it wasn't likely.

Afterward, Maddie managed to put Phil Cooper from her mind for the rest of the day. She had five scheduled card readings in the candlelit back room of the Darkness Visible bookstore in the West Village, and two more walk-ins while she was there—forty dollars per half hour, a substantial contribution to the rent

Only that night, as she took the subway home from her usual Al-Medina gig, did Phil return to her mind.

This was partly due to Josi, the other dancer at the restaurant that night, a kittenish California blonde who had, Maddie suspected, gotten most of her experience in topless clubs. She was younger than Maddie and stunningly pretty, and had a habit of taking drinks from customers' glasses, or wiping her face with a napkin filched off a businessman's lap, or casually adjusting her overflowing bra mid-shimmy. If she thought a man would stump up a bigger tip she'd invite him to tuck the money into her bra, which was adorned with large, pink, rhinestoned lips, rather than her belt. Everyone was thoroughly entertained: the Americans in the audience didn't know the difference, and the Arabs and Iranians were simply enchanted. But, as Abdullah, the owner, confided to Maddie later, it wasn't really dancing.

But when Maddie's own set came, and she trailed out in a swirl of purple veils and Farid Al-Atrash's timeless dance music, all her annoyance washed away—with Josi, with Phil, with the scheduling directors of the SoHo Y, with her mother...

For a time there was just dancing. The Moroccan and Egyptian waiters—and Abdullah himself—drifted in from the other dining rooms to watch, clapping along with the music and gathering up dropped dollar bills and her discarded veil for her after the set was done.

Josi, thought Maddie as she rode home on the subway later—though the girl was perfectly sweet and good-natured—was probably what Phil thought of when he heard the word *belly dancer*. Yet he would not leave her mind. As she sat wedged between a couple of home-going green-haired club rats and an elderly gentleman reading a Yiddish newspaper, their conversation at the Owl returned to her. She

remembered again the shape of those long hands, strong and work-hardened and deft-looking as they cradled the coffee cup. Remembered the fleeting downward quirk of the corner of his mouth. Spending your birthday sleeping on the floor of an empty building was probably enough to make anyone flippant.

Had that disappointed father, that clueless stepmom, even remembered to send him a card?

*I was always really a musician but I had to do the construction thing when I lived at home...*

Maddie's stomach curled in sympathy as she recalled the look on her mother's face, patronizingly amused when Maddie had come in breathless over that first belly dance class. *Honestly, what will they be teaching at that studio next?* And later, in those glass-sharp accents of disapproval, *Dearest, I understand you wanting to branch out a little bit, to improve your ballet, but what's wrong with tap? Your cousin Lacy takes tap.*

Cousin Lacy was also a cheerleader, a modeling-school graduate, a steady participant in teen and sub-teen beauty pageants since kindergarten and a practicing bulimic who was routinely two hours late to everything because it took her that long to get her makeup and hair perfect before emerging from her room.

Maddie couldn't explain what it was about the visceral joyfulness of Middle Eastern dance that drew her. Only that when she entered that first class at sixteen, for the first time she had felt that she could dance uncriticized and imperfect, for herself and not for her mother, her teachers, some future competition judges.

Only for herself.

She wondered if Tessa would know where she could get hold of one of Phil's CDs. Or both of them.

She dreamed about Phil that night.

Dreamed of the warm, lapping waters of the Gulf of Mexico, on whose shores her parents used to rent a summer house. Dreamed of lying on the beach, below the yellow-flowered tangles of wild jasmine, in the perfect restful stillness of the gathering dusk. Phil was lying beside her, on one of those faded old blankets that came with the rental house—only there was no house in sight, no other houses at all, just two crumbling Roman pillars marking the path down to the beach, and the luminous colors of the sky.

She said, "I wanted you to see this place. It's quiet. The world is too noisy."

And Phil's hand stroked her shoulder, drawing her down to him, so that her long hair veiled his face. "Were you happy here?" he asked, and she said, "Yes."

His hand slid up to the back of her neck and she lowered her face to his, their lips meeting, the soft whisper of his breath warm on her cheek. "It's safe," she said for no reason she could recall.

They were making love, Phil's hands exploring her face, her throat, her shoulders

and the soft flesh over her ribs, as if it had been a long time since he'd lain with a woman, or as if he had never felt free to touch bare skin before. Maddie's hands trailed over the heavy muscle of his forearms, the too-pale skin—so surprisingly soft—and corded muscle of chest and belly; touched the sharp cheekbones and the tucked-away half grin that always decorated one corner of his mouth.

The dream was slow and wordless, the strength of him pressing her down into the blanket, powerful without roughness, deft and light. When he cupped and cradled her breasts, the warmth that ran through her flesh was like the sand beneath her reflecting the heat of that afternoon's sunlight. When he entered her, she pressed her lips to his shoulder, to his throat, tasting and smelling his flesh and his sweat.

It was so good to feel simple passion, simple trust, after years of deception and lies.

She said, "I didn't think I'd be able to come here again," and tightened her arms around his shoulders, her legs around his thighs. The scent of him, the feel of him, were absolutely different from Sandy, and even in her dream she felt glad of that, glad that this was really Phil. Even when she'd dreamed about other men during her marriage—the delightfully silly fantasy parade of improbably costumed Johnny Depps and Brad Pitts and Nicolas Cages—their flesh had tasted like Sandy's. The way they'd held her had been with Sandy's light nervous touch, and they had all kissed her with Sandy's lips.

When she had asked Sandy to leave, she had ceased dreaming about men at all.

She woke with a gasp of delight, and for that first instant she felt that if she turned her head Phil would be there in bed beside her, beach sand still in his hair.

*What the hell am I thinking ?*

*... little sluts are all alike*, whispered a voice in her thoughts... *.good for one thing...*

The intense joy she'd taken from his touch washed away in cold shock.

But lying in the dark, staring at the ghostly trapezoids of streetlights reflected on the ceiling, she felt no surprise. It was as if she knew she was drawn to Phil from the first moment she saw him in the feeble glow of her flashlight...

Only of course that hadn't been the first time.

The first time was the dark shape bulking at the bottom of the stairs, blackness against blackness deeper still, whispering... reaching out to her.

Maddie sat up in bed, trembling, her arms clasped around her knees. Fearing that if she lay down she'd sleep again, and dream about him.

Dream about making love to him—or dream about the shadow at the bottom of the stairs.

Sandy returned to her mind, and her own crazy blaze of passion and tenderness for him. Even all those nights of drunken ramblings, all those nights of being wakened with demands that she go out to the pharmacy *right then* and get him more

of whatever he needed that week—all those moments of murderous rage and humiliation—had not erased her love. Knowing about him what she knew, though every single specific memory of Sandy was the memory of awfulness, the pain in her heart was the pain of loss.

*Of course I'd have frenzied dreams of making love to a maniac who lurks around deserted buildings at night!*

Dim illumination revealed the shapes of her little alcove, separated from the long axis of the apartment with its neat wall of sheet. Dresser, nightstand, bronze lamp in the shape of a dancing elf, closet crammed with costumes and veils, a print of an Alma-Tadema painting on the wall. From Eleventh Avenue far below a horn honked—New York never really slept—and very faint music trickled in from the apartment next door. Baby slumbered on the pillow at her side.

No sound from the other side of the curtain. Tessa had been asleep when Maddie had come in from Al-Medina, a tangle of Indian-black hair on the pillows of Sandy's pink-and-turquoise Populuxe couch. Knowing how poorly the girl slept, Maddie had not even turned on the light as she'd put up the burglar bar and the chains, and slipped through to her own cubicle.

The memory of Phil's lips, even through the surrogacy of a dream, wouldn't leave her.

The memory of his hands, a laborer's hands with a pianist's touch.

The weight of his body pressing down onto hers.

The slow grin in his eyes as he said, *lean get out with both feet in my mouth*, and his distress with himself that he'd angered her.

If she slept again, she wondered, would she be back with him?

*It's safe*, she had said in her dream. But she no longer trusted her dreams.

Moving carefully so as not to disturb Baby, Maddie switched on the bronze lamp to its lowest glow and. reached into the bottom drawer of the nightstand for the cards.

Being a card reader, Maddie had discovered, was similar in many ways to being a belly dancer: one was constantly getting tarred with the same brush that categorized the Josis of the world. Most of the people who made appointments to come to her little cubbyhole in the back of the Darkness Visible bookstore—or who just walked in off the street saying, *Hey, can you tell my fortune?*—had firm preconceptions of what the tarot cards were and did, and most of those preconceptions varied so widely from person to person that Maddie sometimes wondered if they were all thinking about the same objects.

Seventy-eight symbols.

Pictures that embodied truths or situations, or clusters of possible events.

*If there is a pattern, an intentionality, to Is-ness*, her teacher had told her, *the cards line up with that pattern, Like iron filings in a magnetic field. Those who*

*touch the cards affect the local swirls of the pattern of All That Is. Those who study them see different meanings in those alignments.*

If the dances of the Maghreb and the Middle East were Maddie's road to self and joy, the cards were her parallel road of connection to the world, in its widest sense. She couldn't imagine thinking in terms other than the shadowy armature of their infinite combinations.

*This should at least be able to give me some insights about who this man is, reflected Maddie, fishing from the same drawer a small scented candle on a green glass saucer, and whether I'm crazy to feel toward him what I do.*

*It may even mention whether or not he was the whisperer in the shadows... or why he chose to screen the whisperer when I asked, Did you hear anyone else?*

Her hands shook a little as she lit the candle, switched out the bedside lamp.

*What kind of an answer is Did you?*

Maddie took three deep breaths and shuffled the cards.

After a little hesitation, she chose the King of Pentacles to represent Phil. Pentacles was the suit of Earth, of craftsmen and artists, of money and property—which Phil didn't have any of, apparently. The king was used as a significator for a dark-haired man, a brown-eyed man and—if his birthday was yesterday—a Capricorn, one of the signs of Earth. She could as easily have used the Knight of Pentacles—Phil was, like the knights, a seeker and a traveler—but it was one of the several cards she'd used for Sandy, who had been a Capricorn, too. Poor Sandy had never had the core of adult strength in him to be King of anything.

Usually, the card she had used for Sandy was the card he had chosen to represent himself: the Fool. The blithe traveler so rapt in contemplation of his thoughts that he doesn't see the cliff that gapes before his feet.

Maddie closed her eyes, whispered her prayer to be shown what she needed to see, and laid out the cards.

And sat back, disgusted and appalled.

It was not anything she had expected to see in connection with Phil.

As if she had opened what she had thought to be a scented lingerie drawer, and found it filled with roaches and worms.

Even the most tolerant reading could not make the scattered gold circles of the Pentacles into anything other than warnings of blind greed. The five of that suit: spoke of fear of poverty, the six—reversed—of chicanery, bribes and legalized theft, financial oppression. And with the greed, the swords: strife, violence, coercion, rampant self-will.

Maddie saw Tessa—or a card that she assumed to be Tessa—in the dreamy Page of Cups, but everything else in the spread was harsh, frightening and dark as the halls of the Glendower Building itself.

There was the Devil, holding the captive lovers chained.

There was the ten of Swords—a worse card than the skeletal Death card, in Maddie's opinion—a dead man lying pierced with ten swords, in the last light of a fading yellow sky.

And the "outcome" card, the final card of the reading, was the Tower, struck by lightning and collapsing in flames, destroying all within.

*Do not have anything to do with this man or you will be very, very sorry.*

Her hands trembling, her heart pounding, Maddie gathered up the cards, slipped them at random back into the pack and shuffled again. Generally she accepted what the readings told her—acceptance was part of the mental discipline of the tarot—but she couldn't believe that Phil...

Her mind stalled on the sentence: *You mean, you can't believe that the man who whispered those half-heard obscenities to you in the darkness would have the cards give him a bad reading?*

*Grow up, princess!*

The second reading was also virtually all swords and pentacles, and contained both the Devil and the Falling Tower.

As did the third, with the Tower once again in the "outcome" position.

Maddie put the cards away, shivering. She had occasionally had this happen—the same cards coming up over and over again despite continual shufflings. It usually occurred when there was something she was trying not to look at, didn't want to see. The presence of Tessa's card—the Page of Cups—in all three readings didn't reassure her, either. She, Maddie, wasn't the one who could have been expected to be in the Glendower Building last night. And now that she came to think of it, what was Phil doing in the Owl, watching the entrance of the Glendower Building across the street?

*If I go to sleep, will I dream about him again ?*

*And do I want to?*

She hadn't made up her mind about this when she drifted off to sleep, and spent the rest of the night dreaming about going to a vast and colorful amusement park with Abraham Lincoln—an entertaining enough way to pass the rest of the night.

## CHAPTER THREE

In the light of the following morning, the possibility that Phil Cooper would be stalking Tessa seemed far less likely. Three appearances of the Falling Tower not

withstanding, the man simply seemed too sane—and appeared to have too much of a sense of humor—to be creeping around dark hallways whispering. *Something* of that insanity would show.

Wouldn't it?

Nevertheless, over the course of the next week Maddie watched and listened to her roommate with uneasy attention, mentally flagging those occasions when the piano player's name surfaced in conversation, noting where he showed up in Tessa's life, and when.

The result was totally inconclusive. The afternoon after her dream—and the card reading that followed—Phil wandered into the Owl while Tessa and Maddie were having a sandwich, caught Maddie's eye and raised his brows. *Mind if I join you?* She looked away, and when she looked back, he was gone.

Which was just as well, Maddie reflected; considering the rush of almost physical memory that flooded her, as if she had in fact felt his hands stroking her, his lips light and gentle on hers, instead of just dreaming the whole incident

If he'd followed Tessa there, he didn't do it again.

And with ABA auditions coming up, Maddie doubted if Tessa would have been aware of it if Phil had been slouching around behind telephone poles in a trench coat and a ski mask with a chainsaw sticking out of his pocket. She worked early and late, to leave herself time to attend as many classes as she could, training in beginner classes early in the morning to "warm up," as she put it, and practicing alone late into the night. Unlike many of her classmates—some of whom had parents who paid for personal nutritionists and trainers—Tessa wasn't a deliberate self-starver, but she tended to forget to eat, especially when she had a class coming up.

And these days she *always* had a class coming up.

It was just as well, Maddie reflected, that she herself was kept extremely busy between teaching, dancing and card readings. It kept things in perspective and kept her from acting like a mother hen—whatever she might be thinking. She'd seen how perilously easy it had been for her to take over responsibility for Sandy's disordered life. It was not something she wanted to do again.

Indeed, on the days when Tessa started work at Starbucks at five in the morning, if Maddie had a full lineup of readings to do after teaching her own classes at the SoHo Y—Middle Eastern and a Senior Flexibility—the two girls often didn't see each other until ten or eleven at night, when Tessa would finish Darth Irving's advanced class. If Maddie had a belly dance gig, their paths wouldn't cross for days.

"Help, help, some stranger is breaking into the apartment!" squeaked Maddie on Wednesday night, when Tessa came in at eleven to find her curled up with Baby on the couch watching *Casablanca*.

"Do I know you, madame?" Tessa had replied.

And yet, behind this appearance of normalcy, Maddie's instincts told her that something was very wrong. Her uneasiness would come in flashes, leaving a dark

stain of worry on her consciousness that couldn't be dismissed. Someone *had* been up in those tangled hallways on the fifth floor, someone mentally unbalanced if nothing worse. Tessa had promised to be careful, to lock the studio doors and not stay as late, but to her reassurance, "

It's okay, Phil's there," Maddie could find nothing to say.

In her dreams she sometimes found herself back in those dark mazes, stumbling against walls that seemed to narrow on her like a trap, frantically searching for a light switch with a flashlight that didn't work. Listening to a thick, hoarse voice mumbling vile suggestions. Smelling the reek of sweaty wool, tobacco and cologne.

One evening Maddie went to the Dance Loft after doing readings until ten, and found Tessa, as usual, working alone after class, doing *grand jetes* back and forth across the big studio with Phil playing a crashing Tchaikovsky accompaniment: Maddie watched for a time from the darkness of the empty hall, then left silently, without making her presence known, and kicked herself all the way back to Thirty-second Street. But she was still awake an hour later when Tessa's key rattled in the door.

"Does he usually do that?" asked Maddie as the younger girl sorted out her threadbare, sweat-soaked tights from the gym bag, laid out clothes for the following morning, unfurled sheets and blankets from the chest that doubled as a coffee table. "Stay to play for you?"

"Phil?" Tessa looked surprised, then smiled. "He's such a champ about it. He's like, 'As long as I'm sleeping here, anyway, I might as well be of some use.' Like he hasn't been working on his own stuff all day, and teaching those awful brats up in his studio every time he gets a spare half hour. Why didn't you come in?"

"Because you were in the middle of your dance," said Maddie. Which, she told herself, was actually perfectly true. "And I know you don't get enough studio time to practice."

Tessa paused in the midst of pulling pins out of her tight-wrapped sable bun, perched on the back of the sofa like a disheveled fairy in her pink tights. "You are so sweet," she said softly. "I think you're the only friend I've got who doesn't just come barging in and figure I'm dying to drop what I'm doing and talk *right now*. Thank you." She unfolded her long legs and hopped down, prowled to the refrigerator, came back with orange juice in a thick green glass mug. "Did I look okay? Hobbs and I are going to do a *pas de deux* as part of the audition—" Hobbs was the most talented of the male students, a thoroughly gay and thoroughly good-natured young man from Detroit. "Most of the time I feel like I come down okay on my jumps, but then I'll wobble. The ABA only takes... "

She stopped herself, shook her head. "Sorry. I'll sit here and nitpick myself for hours, and that's got to be about as interesting as watching me brush my hair. How was your night?"

"Other than the woman who wanted me to do a reading on why her cat wasn't accepting the new Chihuahua she just got yesterday? Pretty calm. What do you think

of Phil? Is he all right?"

"Oh, he's the bomb." Tessa nodded, suiting the action to the word by starting to brush out her hair. She looked like ten miles of bad road, drawn and fragile despite the thin striations of whipcord muscle in her chest, arms, back. "You aren't mad at him, are you? He asked me."

Phil's hands cupping her face as he pressed her back into the warm sand. The scent of his flesh and the feel of his skin under her fingertips.

The black-and-yellow Devil card, grinning at her amid the tangle of Swords.

The Falling Tower.

"No."

Tessa's smile returned, relieved. "I told him all that you told me, about how belly dancing is descended from some of the oldest tribal dancing in the world, and it traveled along the Silk Road, and all that about it turning up in flamenco and gypsy music and all kinds of other neat places. He's all like, *So that's why those ladies hang diamonds and fringe all over their secondary sexual characteristics.*"

She captured Phil's sardonic inflection perfectly, and Maddie thought of the infamous Josi in terms of traditional dances of the Silk Road and burst out laughing. "And you said?"

"*Don't you wish you could?* And he laughed."

Maddie tried to picture the Devil's face on the card laughing at himself, and couldn't.

"He really loves music," Tessa continued more quietly. "You should hear him play. Even if he's just playing for the classes, it's like... Sometimes your heart just hurts. He's one of those people who sees mathematical patterns in Bach, and all that"

Passion and lightness and beautiful technique, an integral part of Tessa's flying jumps rather than something simply to time them. A playful joy that echoed Maddie's own sense of what dance—whether ballet or hip-hop or Indian temple rites—was for.

Tessa stretched and went to pull her Sailor Moon nightgown out of the small drawer of her possessions. "I'm working on him, but he's still kind of like, *Oh, belly dancing...*" She raised one eyebrow in an exaggerated, patronizing sneer. "I think he just needs to have his consciousness raised."

"Come up to my place, little boy," purred Maddie in her best imitation of Mae West's throaty double entendre, "and I'll raise your consciousness."

Both girls went into gales of giggles.

But later that night Maddie woke to hear movement on the other side of the dividing curtain and, stepping out into the living room, found Tessa standing at the door in her nightgown, fumbling to get the burglar bar unfastened. Maddie said, "Tessa, what is it?" and Tessa's whole body jerked, her knees buckling. She caught herself on the doorknob as Maddie rushed to her. In the unearthly blue of the

reflected street lamps Tessa's dark eyes were filled with panic; when Maddie caught her to steady her she could feel her friend shaking.

"Sweetie, what is it?"

Tessa shook her head, looked around her, baffled. "I... I must have sleepwalked," she stammered, breathless. Her hands, gripping Maddie's arm, were icy cold. "I used to do that when I was a little *niha*, when Mama and Dad broke up."

"Were you dreaming about something?" Maddie walked her back to the couch, switched on the small leading lamp at its head. Last night—or maybe the night before?—Maddie had been wakened by Tessa crying out in her sleep in Spanish: *No! No me toque!*

Tessa shook her head uncertainly, groping for some half-recalled image. But the next moment the fine arches of her brows pulled together, and she flinched away from the memory of whatever it was.

"What did you dream?" asked Maddie softly.

"I don't remember."

The father who'd leave her sitting in his truck outside the bars in El Paso until one in the morning on the way home from picking her up after school? The mother who'd come screaming drunk into her bedroom at midnight pulling dresser drawers out and throwing everything into the middle of the floor?

Maddie had heard about both of these individuals. Tessa answered too quickly, but Maddie didn't press her. Maybe she didn't remember.

Four nights a week, Maddie danced at Al-Medina—sometimes with the incomparable Josi, sometimes with Zafira Mafous, a beautiful Lebanese girl who danced under the stage name of Lucy—and finished her last set at eleven. Upon occasion she'd get a private gig, a birthday party or bar mitzvah, and then it was anybody's guess when she'd get home, which was the case the following Saturday night ,

She unlocked the door at one—tired, smelling a little of champagne thanks to a tipsy rabbi, and three hundred dollars richer—and saw in the ghostly glow of the reflected street lamps the tumble of Tessa's bedding on the couch and the bathroom door open and dark.

Tessa was gone.

Maddie crossed at once to the curtain of sheets and looked through to her own bed. But the only one there was Baby, curled up on the pillows with that *And where have you been all night, young lady?* look in her green eyes.

In a New York studio apartment there are very, *very* few places where even an anorexic ballerina can hide.

In her mind Maddie saw Tessa standing in her nightgown, her long black hair hanging down her shoulders, fumbling at the door. When one or the other of them was home they left the key in the lock. The only thing that had defeated her the other

night was the burglar bar.

Maddie whispered, "Damn it!" The January night was freezing cold with an icy wind blowing off the harbor. A glance around the apartment showed Tessa's street shoes and coat still there, her jeans folded neatly on the arm of the sofa and the tights she'd had on earlier that evening when she'd left for class crumpled in the bathroom hamper. The clothes for tomorrow—white ; shirt and black trousers for work, tights and leotard for class—lay on top of her gym bag. The red sweatshirt she sometimes wore over her nightgown was gone, and j that was all.

How far could someone walk in their sleep? Maddie couldn't imagine Tessa operating the elevator, for instance, but even the residents of the tenth floor sometimes used the stairs out of sheer exasperation with the single rickety car. The thought of her roommate heading blithely for the stairs—did she walk with her eyes shut?—turned Maddie cold inside. The thought of her wandering around the hallway of the tenth floor was worse, given some of the creeps the tenant of 10-C sublet to. Maddie dumped her dance bag onto the couch and was heading back to the door when the key rattled in the lock.

It was Tessa, shivering and wrapped in a navy pea coat far larger and shabbier than her own, underneath which were visible a pair of familiar, patched and superannuated jeans, rolled up at the ankle, and two pairs of wool socks.

Phil, beside her, wore frayed black dress pants, a muffler wrapped around his neck over two flannel shirts and his green wool sweater, and looked frozen to death. "I found her outside the Glendower Building, trying to get in," he said, leading Tessa to the couch and set-ting her down, tugging the blanket over her. "God knows how long she'd been there. Probably not long, dressed like she was, in this town—she was just in her nightgown and a sweatshirt... "

"I must have sleepwalked." Tessa pulled the thick cotton quilt tighter around herself, shivering as if she would shake her bones loose. "Jesus, I've *never* sleep walked that far! My dad told me I once got out of the I house and halfway down the block, when I was about six. I don't remember that. But this time I woke up like in those crazy dreams, where you go to school in your pajamas, only it was for real. I was up in Phil's studio... "

Maddie's eyes widened and snapped to the man kneeling at Tessa's feet. She must have made some sound or move, because he looked up, met her furious gaze.

Saw the thought that screamed, *Oh, yeah?*

And she saw his startled, almost disbelieving shock that she'd suspect him of... what?

Kidnapping Tessa out of her apartment?

The absurdity of the suspicion doused her anger—and her suspicious demand, *And what were you doing happening along just at that moment...* ?—and she said, "Thank you," and meant it. She drew a couple of deep breaths, trying to force herself calm. "You look frozen. There's another blanket in that chest over there. You both look like you need some cocoa."

Phil got to his feet, his cheekbones red. "I'm okay." He sounded like he, too, was keeping his voice neutral with an effort. "I better let you get her to bed... "

"No." Maddie stepped quickly to intercept him on the way to the door. "Please. I'll make you some cocoa," she repeated softly. "Is that your only coat you lent her?"

Phil nodded, looking down into her face. His own anger faded as he saw her look of mortified remorse. He followed her around the end of the counter, into the so-called kitchen, which was in fact a nook about the size of Maddie's mother's dining room table back in Baton Rouge. "I was just coming back from the Met," he said. "*La Boheme*—if you're up in the nosebleed seats they don't care what you wear. When I saw her from down the street I thought she was some poor crazy woman, the kind you see wandering around the subways in housecoats with crocheted afghans wrapped around them. Then I got close and saw who it was. She was just about unconscious with the cold... "

"I know she sleepwalks." While the milk was slowly warming Maddie dug the cocoa out of one sealed container and the sugar out of another, and a package of marshmallows out of a third, even the cleanest of New York apartments being what they are. "She tried to get out of here the other night. And I just... " She hesitated, looking up at him, wondering how the hell she could explain the shadow in the hallway. The deep-seated sense of danger that haunted her dreams.

Phil leaned a shoulder against the corner of the cupboard and folded his arms. "You don't think much of men, do you?" There was no mockery in his voice, no scorn. Just a question.

Maddie said, "No, I know I don't. I'm sorry." *I'm sorry I immediately assumed you were a stalker, a kidnapper, and a rapist. My bad.*

"Are you a dyke?" He used the word as he would have used any other, without venom or judgment, just a question. A one-syllable word instead of a three.

She shook her head, the gaudy jewels in her long hair ghttering. "Just a survivor."

He nodded. The comprehension in his eyes was like the glimpse of a scar.

They stood for a minute looking at each other in the cold, white glare of the single fluorescent light over the stove.

Quietly, Maddie said, "That night I first met you, when Tessa was wandering around on the sixth floor, *did* you see or hear anyone else in the building? I asked you that before, and I think you ducked the question."

Phil was silent for a long time, the only sound in the kitchen the whisper of the wooden spoon as Maddie stirred the slow-heating milk in its pan. Then he said, "When you read tarot cards, does that mean you're psychic?"

Maddie shook her head. "Sometime—if you're interested—I'll explain why I think the tarot works, when it works. But you don't have to have second sight or be able *to* see auras or anything. They just... work." She said nothing for a time, swishing the spoon back and forth in the milk, then asked, "Have you seen something in the

building?"

"No." Phil answered very quickly and looked away from her as he did so. Maddie said nothing.

After a long time he said, "You mean like a ghost?" and this time there was a biting note in his voice that spoke of all his feelings about the inherent bull of the supernatural.

And that spoke more deeply still of fear.

"I don't know what I mean," replied Maddie quietly. "What do *you* mean?"

Phil drew in his breath, let it out. His face in profile was expressionless, except for a small line in one corner of his mouth. He said, "I haven't seen a ghost. I haven't seen anything." He shifted his arms, one hand cupping his chin so that the fingers half hid his mouth, concealed the telltale line. "It's just I have these dreams."

"Since you've been sleeping in the building?"

He nodded, and his breath drew in, then rushed out as if he were trying to flush out some darkness inside. Then his eye went past her and he half grinned. "You're going to lose that milk." Maddie turned quickly, shifted the pan from the stove and began stirring in cocoa and sugar. Phil stepped closer, looking down over her shoulder admiringly. "You're the first person I've met since I left Tulsa who makes it the real way."

"Down on the bayou *everybody* makes cocoa the Seal way. I heard tell from some Yankee once something about powder and microwaves, but I didn't believe it. There're things even Yankees couldn't possibly do."

"Don't trust us, Miss Scarlett." Phil shook his head as she handed him a mug. "We're capable of anything."

Maddie picked up her own mug and Tessa's, but when they carried them back into the living room they found Tessa curled up under the blankets, still wearing Phil's dilapidated pea coat, sound asleep. Phil switched off the main light and carried the cocoa back to the kitchen, where Maddie flicked on one of the fake candle-flame lamps she'd bought for a Halloween party a few years ago—the lowest light she could manage—and turned off the fluorescent light over the stove.

"Can I have her marshmallow?" asked Phil, and Maddie obligingly scooped it into his mug. They settled on the floor of the kitchen, lamp and cups between them, and Phil shrugged out of his sweater and one of the flannel shirts. She saw under the second one the rumpled white dress shirt he must have worn to the opera, and around his neck a loosened black satin tie. At the same time she noted that none of his clothes smelled of tobacco, the stench she remembered in the mix of smells that had hung around the whisperer.

Sweat and cologne could be cleaned away from clothing, cigar smoke almost never.

She drew in her breath, feeling as if she were slowly prying her fingers away from

their grip on mistrust.

She had spent enough years reading the cards—dealing with people who had exhausted rational explanations for their feelings—to know that all this time while they'd been joking and kidding, he was working himself up to go back and look into the dark box of his dreams.

"The first week I was sleeping there I walked through the halls of that building six, seven times a night," he said in time. "Turning on lights, listening... And there was nobody there. Then I'd go back to my studio and double and triple lock the door—I'll take you up sometime and show you the burglar bar and chains I got for it. That was before I realized what I was hearing was just dreams, those awful dreams where you think you're awake."

He spoke with his face turned slightly away, talking to the air, as if he were answering questions in a military debriefing.

"What did you dream about?"

"Girls. Not like you think," he added, with a faint gleam of humor, and Maddie shook her head. "Sometimes I just hear their voices, or hear them crying. Once I heard—I thought I heard—one of them say 'Stop it,' or 'Don't touch me,' something like that... And I heard him laugh."

"Who laugh?"

"I don't know. A man. Then I wake up and there's nothing." He looked again at her sidelong, not as if he expected she wouldn't believe him—she was pretty sure he knew she would—but as if he expected some reaction that would turn his dream into mockery in his own eyes, Maddie asked, "Where are you in the dreams?"

Whatever reaction he'd expected—possibly a long account of *her* supernatural dreams and how she knew they were part of some past life experience, something , Maddie had frequently encountered when speaking of the world of dreams—the matter-of-fact question seemed to reassure him.

"In my studio," he said. "That's the creepy thing. I'm in my sleeping bag on the floor and I can see the piano and the tape machine and the laptop and the boxes, everything exactly the way it really is. But I hear these girls crying—and I swear to you it sometimes sounds like they're right outside the door. And I hear this... this I *bastard* chuckle, or sometimes words I can't make out. I A couple of nights ago I heard him say, yell, 'You little sluts are all alike,' and it sounded like he was about ; three feet away, in the room with me." ' He raked his fingers through his hair, rubbed the back of his neck, a gesture she'd seen him make before."Other times it's far off. Or it's just footsteps. Footsteps overhead, only I know there's nothing overhead... My studio's on the top floor." He shrugged. "The first time I heard anything—I think it was the third night I slept there—it was... " He frowned, piecing together exactly what he had heard, or dreamed he'd heard. "That was weird. I did that dream-you're-awake number—which I've had maybe twice or three times in my entire life—and I heard this sound, this metallic rattling and pounding, like something being shaken or hammered on. Then I woke up sweating, and it was quiet. But I got

up and got my flashlight and went out to look, and I went all around the halls switching on lights. And I not only didn't see anything that made the noise, but I didn't see anything that *could* have made a noise like that."

He finished his cocoa, set the cup on the floor between them, his long arms wrapped around his knees. The flickering orange of the artificial candlelight hid his eyes in shadow, but Maddie saw by the drawn look of their corners that there were memories uglier still.

"So about a week ago I dream about a fire. I dream I'm caught in this dark place, and there's smoke everywhere and I can't breathe. Lines of fire run along the wood floor and up the walls. And I'm scared. I don't know when I've been that scared in a dream." He looked down at the floor, turned his mug so that the handle lined up with the lines in the linoleum of the floor.

"These girls are all around me, tripping over these big tables down the center of the room, trying to get out of there. And there's no way out. The stuff on the tables is all catching fire, and sparks and bits of burning stuff are swirling around in the air. One girl I remember—her skirt caught fire, long skirts down to the floor... "

His voice cracked and he shook his head, trying to rid it of images that would not go away.

"Jesus, it was awful, and so goddamn clear. I look around for some way to help them, to get them out of there, but I can't. The girls all run to this door, this metal door, and try to open it. But it's locked. They're all shaking it and hammering on it and screaming, and I realize that's the noise I heard, the rattling of the metal door as they pounded on it with their fists.

"Some of them jump out the windows," he finished softly. "Through the smoke I can see the roofs across the street, and it's high up, seven or eight floors. But there's no other way out."

He stared straight ahead of him, his hands folded in front of his mouth again, fear and horror at what he had seen like a darkness in his eyes. After a while, he said, "I don't know where I got all that from. Too many video clips of 9/11, maybe."

Maddie shook her head, trying not to see the nightmare that his words summoned to her mind. "That's not what it sounds like," she said quietly. "It sounds to me like the building is haunted. There may have been a fire there years ago... "

"Yeah. Right." The twist of Phil's mouth was sardonic again. "So who we gonna call?"

Maddie didn't smile back at the *Ghostbusters* joke. She leaned a little to glance around the edge of the counter that separated the kitchen from the rest of the apartment, saw the bony little lump that was Tessa, a shadow on the couch in the shadowy dark. "What worries me," she said softly, "is that this seems to be having an effect on Tessa. What was she doing on the sixth floor that night, trying to go up those stairs? Even she couldn't tell me. She'd been up since four-thirty that morning. If she rested between exercises, dozed off and sleepwalked... "

"Whoa," said Phil. "What stairs? There's no stairway up from the sixth floor:"

## CHAPTER FOUR

Maddie blinked at him in surprise. "Yes, there is. When I caught up with Tessa she was standing at the bottom of a flight of stairs, leading up to the floor above. I asked her what she was doing and she said she'd heard a noise, or voices talking. But I got the feeling that she really didn't know."

"And you didn't hear anything? Or go looking for anything? Because if you came up another flight... "

"We didn't," insisted Maddie. "This was just before we met you. The lights went off when I was on the stairway from the fifth floor up to the sixth. I didn't go up any farther than that."

"Well, if the lights were off, how did you see a stairway?" asked Phil "With that dinky little flashlight you had I'm surprised you didn't walk into a wall. You could have gone around a couple more turns of the stairs without knowing it... "

"Even in the dark I know up from down," pointed out Maddie. "Once I found Tessa there was no reason for me to climb any more stairs. And I saw the stairway. It was down one of those convoluted little hallways, away from the main stair... "

"You mean like a ladder up to the roof? Because there's one of those... "

"I mean like a staircase." She closed her eyes, picturing it again. Picturing Tessa standing at the bottom of that slot of blackness in her pink tights and Broken Glass U.S. Tour T-shirt, swaying a little on her feet as she'd swayed a few nights ago, when she'd stood fumbling with the burglar bar in her sleep. Slowly, calling the images back to her mind, she said, "The steps are wood. The walls are dirty, pale, there's paint peeling and water stains... "

There's evil up there, she thought. Something terrible, waiting in the darkness.

Maddie opened her eyes and saw Phil regarding her doubtfully, as if she'd begun a monologue about who she'd been in a past life, or how spirits channeled their thoughts through her while she meditated. She knew the look because she'd so frequently worn it herself.

It was quite common, when people got their cards read, for them to feel called upon to discuss every other aspect of their contacts with the supernatural, either because they felt themselves to be in the presence of a sympathetic ear or because they wanted to impress her. In her nearly two years of consulting in the back room of the Darkness Visible bookstore, Maddie had encountered large numbers of

people who felt themselves to be reincarnated priestesses of Isis, or channelers of various spirits from realms beyond Earth, or returned alien abductees. And while she had met people whom she felt did, in truth, remember past lives, or have contact with spirits—she wasn't so sure about abductees, at least not the ones she'd met—she was fairly sure there weren't *that* many of them walking around.

Phil said—speaking as if he were choosing his words with care—"Look, Maddie... What I had were creepy dreams. But dreams are all they were. I don't know what you saw, but I've been over every inch of the sixth floor, and there isn't a stairway like that. I've been through the other floors, too, and yes, that place is like a Skinner-box rat maze, but I'm pretty sure I've never seen a stairway like that in the whole building."

"You must have been pretty shook up," said Maddie quietly, "to search the whole building."

He looked away from her, then back. "Yeah. I was pretty shook up."

*Unless you're lying.* The thought came so close behind the impulse to reach across the slight space that separated them, to put her hand on his wrist—to lean into his touch and see if his lips would taste the way they tasted in her dream—that she suspected that her wariness sprang more from the recollection of Sandy's manipulative vulnerability than from any true judgment of danger.

Their eyes met and she felt—she knew—that he was inches from drawing her to him, breaths from pressing her down to the floor beneath his gentle weight, uncaring that she was a raving kook or that he was a whispering stalker who rambled empty buildings in darkness. *It's safe*, she had said...

*In my dream!* she reminded herself.

Not in real life. There was no safe in real life.

*If I step over the cliff, will I fall or be borne up on the wind and realize I can fly again?*

He said, "I'd better go."

*Stay.* "All right."

*You little sluts are all alike.* Had the words come from something that whispered in the halls of the Glendower Building—in the dreams of whoever drifted off to sleep there? Or from the dark at the bottom of this man's mind?

Rather than wake Tessa, Maddie dug Sandy's old leather jacket out of the back of the closet. Sandy had been thinner than Phil and narrower through the shoulders—putting the sweater back on underneath didn't help the fit any—but the jacket would at least still zip, and it was better than freezing. Phil turned the leather shoulder over and grinned at the Cleveland Indians patch. "That looks like it dates from the days before the Tribe was any good."

Maddie smiled at the memory. "He never gave up on them."

"Your husband?"

Tessa must have told him. Had he asked?

Maddie nodded. "She'll bring your stuff back tomorrow—or the day after, if I can talk her into taking a break for a day and resting. Thank you for getting her here safe." She turned the key in the lock as she stepped out into the hall with him and walked him down to the elevator. It took its usual endless rattling time to arrive, though God knew where else it was or who else was using it at two in the morning.

"Like I was gonna leave her on the sidewalk?"

Maddie poked him with her elbow. "What do you want, me to act like it was something you owed us? Did you bring her in a cab?" She fished in her pocket for part of the dancing money, and Phil raised his hand, refusing.

"We walked." It was a blatant lie—the dry socks on Tessa's feet would have proved that even if Maddie *had* thought even for one moment that Phil would force a half-frozen girl to cross most of Manhattan Island on foot at one in the morning.

She gestured her surrender. "Then let me buy you lunch."

"You've got a deal. I'm glad she has someone to look after her," Phil added in a quieter voice. "So many of them don't. The girls at the Dance Loft," he explained at Maddie's inquiring look. "And the other schools where I play. When the ABA's auditioning, or when any of the big companies come through town, they—the girls—get crazy, starving themselves or fainting in class or driving themselves in class after class as if it was the end of the world. Its not good for them, I know it's not. And some of the little ones are the worst, with these wild-eyed mothers hanging on the sidelines like vultures."

Maddie thought of her own mother, taking her to the doctor for diet pills and paying one of the neighboring college students to write her school papers for her when she had an audition coming up, so she could fit in just one more class. "It's a fine line between supporting someone else's dream and seducing them into your own," she said. "I gather Tessa never had anyone to support hers."

"Which is why she's pushing herself like this." Phil folded his arms, leaned against the jamb of the dilatory elevator's door. "Trying to sleepwalk back to the studio to get in just one more *saute de basque* if it kills her... "

"Is that what you think she was doing tonight?"

Phil raised his eyebrows.

*As opposed to falling under the evil influence of a haunted building?*

Maddie drew a deep breath. In either case, the answer was the same. "I'll do what I can to look after her," she said. "I understand that craziness. I went through it myself for years. Sort of like sleeping on the floor in a haunted piano studio in New York in order to write music instead of making a good living bustin' rods in Tulsa."

Phil swallowed a grin and shook a finger at her nose. "There is absolutely no comparison," he said severely. "And don't you think it."

And then, because his pointing finger was so close to her face, he slipped his

hand under the bejeweled waterfall of her hair and drew her mouth gently to his.

Maddie's lips parted, she felt the wall behind her shoulders, the hard grip of his arm around her rib cage and the cracked old leather under her palms. Felt the scratch of beard stubble against her chin, against her jaw and her throat as she turned her head aside to let him kiss her neck, the thin skin where her shirt opened above her sternum. Her own lips brushed his temple, the delicate rim of bone around the socket of his eye as her fingers tangled with the rough horsetail stiffness of his hair... and the whole world turned into a single dark, sweet torrent of need.

Where his body pressed hers she could feel him shake.

The elevator bell dinged.

Phil stepped back from her. They were both trembling, staring into each other's eyes, breathing deep and hard.

No possibility of pretense.

His rough-knotted fingers traced the shape of her cheekbone, her lips, as they'd traced her breasts in her dream.

He said, "I'll see you?"

Maddie nodded. She felt as if her body had been rock, in a single instant shattering and turning to light.

He stepped into the elevator and was gone.

The Darkness Visible bookstore was down a flight of steps in one of those old brownstones of the West Village, the railed areaway below sidewalk level hosting, in summertime, a coffee machine and a couple of bins full of old Grateful Etead posters and battered prints of unlikely sixties rock-stars in historical garb. Now, in December, the bins and coffee machine occupied the front part of the tiny shop, along with shelves of dried sage bundles and packets of pennyroyal and hyssop, assorted versions of the tarot deck, from Aleister Crowley's to the Barbie tarot, boxes of crystals, sets of runes, a small harp, yarrow stalks and small bronzes of Ganesh, Athene and Quetzalcoatl. From there back it was books, on every conceivable and inconceivable subject and, at the rear of the store, a stairway leading up to two small chambers draped in sari fabrics and chiffon, where Maddie and various other part-time diviners consulted with their clients. Beside the stair—its contents spilling over onto the surrounding wall—was the bulletin board, half an inch thick with flyers for drum circles and healing seminars, with lost-and-found announcements and the cards of every psychic counselor, personal trainer, computer consultant, dancer, musician, baby-sitter and housekeeper who had passed through the West Village since 1964.

Under an enormous painting of Shiva dancing with Rita Hayworth, Diana Vale sat at her tall Victorian desk, a square-faced, gray-haired, kindly woman who looked like she could have been the Good Witch of Someplace or Other or somebody's mother. She was in fact both, and a good deal besides. She said, "Hello, sweetheart," and hopped down from her stool to hug Maddie as she came in. "Did

you have readings this afternoon? I don't have anything written down."

Maddie shook her head. "I have a gig tonight out on Long Island. A Turkish gentleman's ninetieth birthday party, given to him by five of his daughters. I have to catch the train in about an hour and a half, but I need some advice. Have you ever heard of the Glendower Building?"

Diana's eyes narrowed. "It rings a bell... " Between running the bookstore and serving on the board of the local low-cost day care center, Diana wrote articles for a dozen magazines and journals concerning the occult. There was very little about haunted buildings that she didn't know or at least know how to find out about. "Where is it?"

"Here in town, over on Twenty-ninth Street. It's the building the Dance Loft is in. There's a dancewear store downstairs and storerooms on the second floor, then the Dance Loft has two floors and the upper two floors are rented out as studios and offices."

"I remember." Diana nodded. "You said you never liked it."

Maddie nodded. "It's a creepy building. I never could put my finger on what's wrong with it, and at the time it was the only place I could rent space to start dance classes, and I was actually glad when Mrs. Dayforth re-scheduled the room out from under me."

"And you think you saw or heard something?"

"I saw a man—a shadow after the lights went out—whispering things to me, terrible things. At first I thought it was... well, someone Tessa knows who's staying in the building because he lost his apartment. But now I've gotten to know this person and he doesn't seem like someone who'd do that—aside from the fact that I smelled tobacco on this person and Phil doesn't smoke. And Phil says that while sleeping in the building he's had weird dreams, about a fire, and young girls being hurt. He says they're just dreams... "

Maddie fell silent, trying to sort out facts from feelings and fears. "And Tessa's been acting strangely. Phil—he's the piano player at the Dance Loft—says it's because of her audition for the ASA coming up, but I don't know. She's been sleepwalking, trying to get back into the building. Last night she managed to get out in just her nightgown and a sweatshirt. I think if Phil hadn't been coming back from the opera when he did she might really have froze to death."

She turned her head and glanced out into the little shop's areaway. The slushy snow that had fallen late last night had congealed into dirt-fringed grayish globs on the steps. Boots and the hems of coats flickered by at sidewalk level, barely seen through the bookshop's doors.

"Then sometimes I think it's my imagination, like one of those pictures that sometimes looks like one thing and sometimes another. Phil may be right and it may be just Tessa's own stress, and some combination of anxieties out of his past, that are doing this same thing to them at the same time. I don't know. The building feels leprous to me—diseased. Especially at night'. But a lot of buildings in New York feel

that way."

"A lot of buildings in New York have some ugliness in their past that doesn't bear looking at." Diana took a mug from a hook on the wall behind her desk and went to pour herself some coffee. Her long gray braids hung down her back nearly to her waist, over a shawl she'd loomed herself. "New York is an old city, and it has always been a place where men would seek to make money regardless of the cost to those they exploited. Such things leave their mark."

She perched on her high stool again, turning to face her computer screen, and clicked into stored files, tapping in the name *Glendower Building*. Maddie leaned an elbow on the corner of the desk and watched her older friend's keen, kindly face by the screen's reflected] glow.

"Nothing here. I'll go online and look it up in the Spirit Guide Web site, but you can't find *anything* in the new edition since they rearranged the classifications. And I'll see what I can find in the block records of the insurance companies." She clicked on the DSL line, tunneling through the bright-colored ether of the Internet and dodging pop-ups like an X-wing fighter pilot! evading attacking Imperial disintegrator beams.

"Do you think what your friend—Philip, is it?—says about Tessa's mental state is true? I haven't seen her in weeks, but the last time she came here to meet you she did not look well. Not all evils in the world have supernatural explanations, you know."

"No," agreed Maddie with a sigh. "And God knows back in my ballet days I went crazy enough when I had an audition coming up. She isn't eating, and though I can't imagine not being able to sleep after eight hours of work a day plus four ballet classes, she's having nightmares, crying out in her sleep. I know I was always so dead tired all I'd dream about was sleep... and food. And sometimes Brad Pitt."

"But you didn't have to work to pay your rent, on top of worrying about the audition," Diana reminded her quietly, sitting back from the glowing screen. "And you had parents who, for all their faults, were at least present, and supported you in your dancing. From what you've told me, Theresa has none of these things. Who knows what ghosts are arising from the dark of her mind?"

*No*, Tessa had cried in her sleep. *No me toque...*

Maddie had no idea what that meant, and wondered if Tessa had screamed in Spanish because it was the language of her childhood, the language of her dreams... or because it was the language her father and mother spoke.

The phone rang. Diana said, "Bother," and picked it up, setting aside the mouse and turning her eyes from the screen as she listened to the caller. "I don't think so, sir... No, as far as I know, Barbie dolls were first marketed in 1956 and there's no evidence of a connection with ancient Egypt... Of course not... "

Maddie glanced at the clock, estimating how long it would take her to paint up, assemble her dance gear, and get to Grand Central from West Thirty-second Street if she had to check in at Mrs. Buz's house at six. Outside snow had begun to drift down again. It would be a bitter night.

Tessa had taken Phil's jeans, socks and pea coat with her when she'd left that morning for work at Starbucks before the beginner class at nine. Since Phil had no phone, Maddie had folded a note in with them, saying that she'd be out until late, and was he off Saturdays?

She had dreamed last night, disturbingly, of Sandy. Dreamed of those long, maddening arguments in which he'd insisted that he was just tired, he'd taken a long walk and gotten dehydrated, and he had a liver ailment that acted up now and again and made him "wibbly," as he put it. Dreamed of searching the apartment, over and over, looking for hidden caches of pills. *What kind of love do we have if you don't trust me?* he kept asking her, in that slurred singsong she'd come to identify and hate. *Why can't you learn to trust?*

Just as Diana hung up the phone a stout young man with greasy hair and a complexion like a mushroom came in, asking for a book on occult minerology. "The very fact that the outer circle of Stonehenge is composed of igneous diorite *proves* that the stones were raised by levitation, since it's far easier to levitate igneous rock than it is to levitate sedimentary or composite..."

No wonder Phil had looked at her that way last night

"I'm sure there's something in that section that will interest you," Diana finished, pointing the young truth-seeker to the archway lettered Lost Knowledge—Travel. She turned back to Maddie. "I'm sorry."

"It's all right. It was worth it to learn something I never knew about—uh—monolithic construction techniques of the Ancient World." Maddie wrapped her scarf back around her neck, covering the blue-and-silver Pakistani necklaces she wore when she taught dance, the strange-shaped Berber crosses that were said to protect one "in the four corners of the world." Though not a believer in magic amulets, Maddie wore them, anyway. In New York you needed all the help you could get.

"And you're right about Tessa. There's enough demons in peoples' own heads without imagining them coming out of the walls of old buildings as well. But if you get a chance, I'd still be very curious to learn anything you can find about the Glendower Building."

"I'll e-mail you tonight if I find anything," promised Diana. She took Maddie's hands in farewell, then stood for a moment, looking inquiringly into her face. "Is there anything else you want advice about?" she asked.

Maddie hesitated, seeing the Falling Tower in her mind, the stern-browed King of Pentacles crossed by the grinning Devil, with his down-thrust torch and his tiny slaves chained at the foot of his throne. "Do you have time to do a reading for me?"

"He's a Capricorn, a musician," said Maddie as she took one of the carved chairs beside the table in the front of the store. Some readers she knew could only work in the quiet surroundings of Diana's candlelit back rooms. Diana had lived with the tarot as an armature of her thought processes so long that she could drop in and out of the half-tranced state of contemplation at will.

The Seeker After Igneous Truth was still sitting on the floor in the Lost Knowledge section, deep in communion with *Hidden Secrets of the Lost Library*. Llyr and Mr. Gaunt, the two store cats, dozed heavily before the heater. Outside the usual ruckus of taxi horns and police sirens yowled from Washington Square, but the store itself was quiet.

Diana's large, competent hands flipped a card from the deck, then passed the remainder to Maddie. "The Nine of Pentacles?" asked Maddie, startled. "But Phil... "

"I don't know anything about Phil," replied Diana evenly. "Nor do you, if you've asked me to do a reading about him and, I assume, your feelings for him... ?"

Maddie nodded.

"You can't learn about him through the cards. But you *can* learn about *you*. It's about where *he* fits into *your* life, not where you fit yourself into *his*."

Maddie shuffled the deck, breathing deeply, as Diana had taught her, sinking herself into the state of light trance where she could be better able to act as a channel for the energies aligning the universe. When she'd first come to New York seven years ago and taken Diana's tarot class, she had done little the first year but learn techniques of trance and meditation. Diana did not believe in hurrying too quickly to knowledge: *It's like picking up a hot pan off the stove, before you've made yourself a glove to protect your hand*, she would say. *The knowledge isn't going anywhere. The energies that rule the cosmos will still work the same way a year from now.*

For the past year and a half, Maddie had used the Nine of Pentacles as her own card in readings. The picture on it was of a wealthy woman alone in her garden, a pet hawk on her fist. She watched it now as Diana built up the reading around it, Past and Future, Hopes and Fears. As well as the dark-browed King of Pentacles, the Knight of Cups rode his horse along the edge of the sea, "the coming of a matter of the heart." Maddie smiled as she recognized the Fool—Sandy stepping blithely off the edge of a cliff, the way he always did, his eyes on the illusion that it was possible to live without discomfort. It was in the position of a thing that influenced her outlook. Sandy had certainly done that.

Or was it herself, she wondered, who had stepped off the cliff edge of loving, without knowing whether it was safe or not?

In the position that marked the future, the Lovers clasped hands and smiled. Maddie saw also the Three of Cups, the Graces partying hearty. Above them was one of the best of the Greater Trumps, the sign of the Dancer at the Heart of the World.

"There's danger in the future." Diana touched the Nine of Wands, the beat-up hero defending the gap in the palisade. "And a warning here, about danger that arises out of the past... "

"The Devil has shown up in so many of my readings I'd be disappointed if he didn't put in an appearance here, too," sighed Maddie resignedly, looking down at the grinning shape with its torch and its chained slaves. When Diana read the cards,

she often described how she saw pathways linking them. Maddie wondered if she saw them now.

"Is this Phil?" She tapped the King of Pentacles, lurking at the nadir of the reading, the basis from which the problem sprang. Yet looking at the card, she felt an echo of the darkness of the Glendower Building around her, heard the whisper in her ear. Like the pathways Diana saw, Maddie sensed that this wasn't Phil at all, but something else. Something wicked, and old.

*Bitch... little sluts are all alike.*

"It may be some aspect of him that you will need to deal with," said Diana slowly. "I'm more inclined to think that it may be someone else entirely, someone you haven't yet met. But there's another warning here, of danger, the Five of Wands." She glanced up at Maddie, her brown eyes troubled. "For something that has the promise of a joyful outcome, this is a bad reading, Maddie. A warning. But not, I think—" her fingers brushed the Lovers and she smiled "—about your friend Phil."

Her smile faded, and she gathered up the cards. "You be careful, dear."

"I try to be," said Maddie, and put on her coat and scarf again. "But the trick is always to know what to be careful *of*."

## CHAPTER FIVE

Throughout the long ride to Westhampton, it was as if Sandy Weinraub occupied the seat at Maddie's side.

Her physical passion for Phil confused her. She wanted him, but knew in her heart that it was much more than that. The reawakening of desire was followed closely—as it had been last night—by misgivings about herself and her judgment.

She had loved Sandy, passionately and completely. It had seemed to her right and logical to surrender things. She loved in order to be with him and to keep him happy. The first night they'd been together, she remembered very clearly, he had spent sipping vodka, never seeming really drunk. Not that it would have mattered, as long as they were together.

She had willed herself not to notice. Not to have it matter.

She let her breath out in a sigh, her body moving with the jostle of the train. In retrospect she couldn't imagine how she could have been that stupid.

Stupid to love him, she thought. Stupid to marry him. Stupid to pound her head against the wall of thinking she could change him, by threats to leave, by pleas, by reasoning, by all her offers of help. She still didn't know whether he'd actually loved

her or not. Could addicts really love?

Had it *all* been lies?

She loved Phil. She knew that as surely as she knew her name, and the knowledge filled her with tenor and despair.

If he was lying to her—about loving, about sanity—she didn't think she could go through all that pain again. Every instinct she possessed told her that Phil Cooper was a man she could love, a man she could trust. He was strong and funny and listened to what other people said, to say nothing of the fact that just being in the same room with him made her want to rip his clothes off and drag him into bed...

But every instinct she possessed had once told her that Sandy loved her. And that their love was good and right.

Which left her where?

Bay Shore. Patchogue. Exhausted shoppers bundled in overcoats and rubber boots trying to juggle purses, magazines, brown Bloomie's bags from the after-Christmas sales, umbrellas, crying children who should have been settled down for naps and cookies hours ago. Early darkness flashed by the windows of the train, hiding the long gray shape of cold beaches, colder sea. .

In the river parishes along the Mississippi they'd be lighting bonfires, huge frames of logs whose orange glare was visible for miles through the dense winter fog. Everyone would be getting ready for Mardi Gras and holding King Cake parties—if you got the plastic baby in your slice of King Cake you'd have to throw the next party—and the whole world smelled of burning sugar from the refineries. Though it would be damply cold, it was seldom the wet, brutal, uncaring cold of New York.

"I came down here the minute I discovered there were places in the world where it didn't snow," Sandy had said to her, with his sly sidelong grin, as they'd walked up St. Peter Street to the Cafe "du Monde" from his apartment in the French Quarter, through that damp sugar-smelling fog and the glaring lights of Mardi Gras. Maddie had leaned into the shelter of his arm and laughed.

That first year of living in New Orleans—of her going to classes and pretending to all her friends that she wasn't having an affair with the writing teacher—there had been a lot of laughter.

After he came to New York to work as an editor for *Galactic* magazine, it seemed to Maddie that he had never actually worked again. She'd worked, mostly waiting tables. During his year at *Galactic* she had, in fact, done a lot of unpaid editing while he was "not feeling well." She'd gotten money once from her mother, but the emotional interest payments were simply too high: if she had to hear her mother one more time on the subject of the career as a professional dancer she'd just *thrown away*, she would have said something—as her aunts liked to put in—that did not do credit to her raising.

It had been easier to pretend that everything was all right.

*Didn't he see what it was doing to me?* she wondered. *Didn't he care?*

When Maddie had returned from Darkness Visible that afternoon to the apartment on Thirty-second Street to get ready for her gig, she'd found Sandy's leather jacket laid neatly over the back of the couch. Just the sight of it hit her hard. *Oh, my God, he's turned up again...*

Forgetting, for that first instant, that he was never going to turn up again.

The memory of her struggle against him was still burningly clear. When she'd asked him to leave she'd had the locks changed, but she knew Sandy was cunning. Her greatest fear, during the eleven months between his departure and his death, had been that he'd get evicted from whatever friend he was sponging off, or single flophouse room he was living in, and that she'd come home some afternoon and find his jacket on the back of the couch and his stuff piled in the living room: *This is just for a couple of days or weeks...*

And she'd have to go through the whole agony again of finding him a place, paying first-'n'-last, and getting him out of her apartment and out of her life. She'd have to steel herself against the panic attacks, the frantic declarations of love, the sobbed promises of reform.

She'd gone over and picked up the jacket, and found under it two CDs. *Wind on the Water* and *Dust Storm*, instrumental music by Phil Cooper. Produced by one of the myriad of tiny private music companies that had sprung up in the wake of inexpensive CD technology, complete with Photoshop covers and a not-quite-professional black-and-white picture of Phil on the back.

What her mother would say if Maddie informed her that she was in love with yet another penniless artist—and another Yankee at that—she didn't like to think.

*I love him. Does he love me?*

She didn't know whether she hoped he did, or not.

It would be easier to simply have a bone-shaking, teeth-rattling, back-clawing affair and call it quits. *See, I am too worth something.*

Easier all around to go on living with Tessa and Baby, to dance and teach and read the cards for those throngs of black-clothed Midwestern Goths and Gothettes who wandered through the West Village in search of sex, drugs and body-piercings. To seek her own strength, as Diana had advised, rather than spend her life guessing about someone else's weakness.

Like the Nine of Pentacles, the lady in her own garden, with the hawk on her fist. Alone.

The lights of Mastic Beach whipped by in the dark.

But the Nine of Pentacles, Maddie knew, like all the nines in the tarot deck, had the meaning of being one less than the ten. Nine was the place where you could stop the train and get off, if you didn't have the courage or the faith or the bund willfulness to continue to the ultimate outcome of the meaning of the suit. In the suit of the Swords, nine could mean—one of its several meanings—a wake-up call, the horror of realizing where violence and strife will lead. In the Wands it was a warning:

*Is this what you really want?* before you reached the ambiguous burden of what your will has brought you. In the suits of the Cups and the Pentacles, it carried implications of settling for what seems best—worldly riches or solitary content—rather than pressing on to the joys of greater love that lay beyond.

Diana had seen danger around her. *Not from Phil*, she had said, and had smiled.

*Why am I so ready to believe the spread that tells me he is the whisperer in the dark of the Glendower Building, while my mind balks at the spread that tells me he isn't?*

Maddie touched the insulated lunch box in which she carried her CDs—the party's hostess, Mrs. Buz, had promised her a live band but Maddie knew far better than to trust a client's assurances about anything. She fished out *Wind on the Water*, though it was too noisy in the train to play it, or anything, on her Discman. Gazed for a time at that grainy shot of the craggy, thoughtful face, the kitten he'd chosen to have photographed with him.

*If the building isn't haunted, Phil may be a lunatic. If it is, Tessa is probably in danger. Or am I just ready to believe the worst of him because I'm looking for a reason to run back into my garden and slam the gate? Keep your distance, pal, or I'll sic my hawk on you.*

Four sons and a grandson of Mrs. Buz were waiting at the Westhampton station in an enormous SUV to drive Maddie to their mother's house. Maddie put the CD—and the subject of its composer—aside, and the rest of the evening passed in a kaleidoscope of music, chatter and enough lamb and couscous to feed the Turkish army. Resplendent in green and gold, she danced for a wildly appreciative audience, the men springing up to dance with her—or flipping showers of dollar bills onto her head in the far-more-polite Middle Eastern fashion of tipping the dancer—and the women howling and ululating behind their hands.

As every dancer of Maddie's acquaintance could attest, private parties were always very much of a toss-up. She'd performed at birthday and retirement gigs where she'd come away with liquor and worse things in her hair, swearing she'd quit dancing for good. There were always people who treated dancers as if they'd just jumped out of a cake or stepped off the walkway at some Jersey strip joint. Like all her dancer friends, she'd had her share of occasions where she'd showed up and found twenty-five drunks and only a boom box for the promised "sound system," and had ended up having to change into her costume in the pantry.

But this, for once, was the other kind of party. Completely apart from a five-hundred-dollar check and nearly half that much again in tips, Maddie enjoyed herself thoroughly. There was always something infinitely delightful about dancing with a live band—*oud*, *mizmar*, *doumbek* and accordion—and about dancing for an audience that knew the kind of dancing they were looking at, rather than Omaha tourists out to see belly rolls. As always, the dancing freed her mind, washing away any concerns about Phil, or Sandy, or whether or not she'd ever be able to love and trust again or if she wanted to try.

*The energies that rule the cosmos aren't going anywhere, Diana had said. There is no way that you can miss what you're intended to have.*

At times like this, it made great sense to Maddie that there were sects of Hinduism that saw the guiding god of the universe as a dancer.

Afterward Mrs. Buz and her sisters packed up several pounds of leftover couscous, kebabs, *lokum* and sang *burma* and begged her to take it away with her "for your little roommate and your friends"—during the course of the evening the hostesses had gotten out of her all about Tessa and Phil. "You are too skinny—you need flesh to dance!"

Then they all hugged her, jammed more tips into her hands and put her in the family SUV to take her to the station for the last train to the city.

It was now midnight, freezing cold and snowing. It was the twelfth of January, the small hours of the year, when light and spring seem furthest away. A cold moon winked through bitter scuds of cloud. Almost no one was on the late train back to the city, leaving Maddie time and quiet to slip *Wind on the Water* into her Discman, and put the earphones over her ears.

Maddie had heard it said many times that you can't hide on the dance floor. She didn't know enough about music to know if it revealed the inner soul to the same degree—Richard Wagner at least seemed to be proof that one could compose exquisite melodies and still be a class-A prick—but if evil lurked in Phil Cooper's inner soul, it certainly didn't come out in his art.

Mostly piano, though he also played both mandolin and guitar, sometimes—according to the liner notes—multiple-tracking all three. He also played harpsichord, the light, jangly notes flowing into a style like jeweled ragtime. The music itself was beautiful, melodic, sometimes simple and sometimes complex, and absolutely nothing like anything either commercial or modern that Maddie had ever heard.

It delighted her, and she knew instinctively that it was too odd to be marketed as pop, too melodic to be what currently passed for classical style, and too unpretentiously old-fashioned for any of the New Wave stations she'd heard.

It was a beautiful anomaly, and it no longer surprised her that Phil was scratching to make ends meet.

Nor was it strange that he was getting a ration of grief over it from an elderly contractor in Tulsa.

She turned the jewel case over, regarded the harsh features and the gently smiling dark eyes. *You can't learn about him through the cards*, Diana had said. *It's about where he fits into your life, not where you fit yourself into his.*

The last song on the disk was called "Step Off the Edge and Fly." Something in the soaring cascades of notes told her that he understood.

*You can't learn about him through the cards.* The only way was the real way, the hard way everybody did it: putting in the time, putting out your heart, and seeing how

you felt about it at the end of every day.

Penn Station was nearly deserted—hard, flat surfaces echoing coldly the voices of those few unfortunate travelers still en route to someplace or other at one-thirty on a Sunday morning in January. Though it was only a few blocks, Maddie got a cab to the apartment on Thirty-second Street. "And another thing," the driver ranted at her the moment she shut the door, "there were videotapes of Kennedy's assassination, and Bobby Kennedy's and Martin Luther King's. *How come there wasn't a videotape of John Lennon's assassination? You tell me that.*"

It was fortunately a short ride. Maddie paid him and he zoomed away without pausing for breath.

When she slipped through the door of the apartment as silently as she could, the first thing she did was look at the couch. Her stomach sank with dread.

No Tessa. The bedding hadn't even been made up.

Maddie dumped her bag on the floor, looked at the clock.

Ten to two.

*Shit.*

She scooped up the telephone, tapped through to the message service. The first was from Diana. "Maddie, I've sent you an e-mail about what I could learn of the Glendower Building. Even if it's late when you get in, I think you'd better read it right away."

The second was from Phil. "I hope you pick up your messages the minute you get in. There's something weird going on here and I think you'd better come down. I'll be in the lobby waiting to let you in. If I'm not there, please wait for me, I won't be more than a few minutes. Love you."

The next three were hang-ups. Phil, probably—there was one per hour, nearly on the hour, as if he was walking across to the Owl—which closed at midnight—or down to the all-night liquor store on the corner to make them. Part of her mind tagged the information, and the fact that whatever "weird" was, it obviously was something that couldn't be explained to a 911 operator.

Part of her mind jarred breathlessly on his first message's closing.

*What did you say to me?*

*Love you.*

Quick and casual, like a kiss in passing or a pat on the shoulder.

*Love you.*

She was already on her way through the curtain to her alcove, where the laptop was set up on the tiny dresser under the soft glow of the bronze lamp. She clicked onto the Net and an obnoxiously perky droid voice informed her, *You have mail.*

To: BeautifulDancer

From: ValedGoddess@DarknessVisible.com

Maddie,

Here's what I've been able to find out about the Glendower Building and the man who built it, and what happened there in January 1908.

The Glendower Building was constructed in 1884 by Lucius Glendower, who owned a number of construction companies, tenement buildings, doming factories and match factories on the Lower East Side. It was eight stories tall, the upper three floors of which were occupied by the Pinnacle Ready-Made Shirt Company, which Glendower owned.

As you probably know, in the days before trade unions there was not only no regulation of how little an employer could pay—or how many hours' work he could demand of employees, firing at will those who refused to do as they were told—but there were no safety regulations, either. Glendower had a bad reputation even among the garment workers of the Lower East Side.

Maddie thought, Yikes! Her grandfather had been a reporter covering labor strikes early in the century, so she knew a little about the people who were running the garment business then. It was saying something for one man to have a "bad reputation" among that gang of robber barons.

Glendower paid four dollars a week and hired mostly Russian, Jewish, Italian, Irish and Cuban girls whose families desperately needed any income they could get. The girls worked a twelve-hour day in the winter, sixteen hours in the summer, and Glendower's floor managers routinely locked the doors of the factory loft except for a brief break at lunchtime. They said this was to check pilfering (the only toilets were in the yard behind the building and fabric could be sneaked over the fence) and also to make sure the girls didn't go down to the yard simply to loaf. This was common practice then.

The windows were locked for the same reason, also usual business practice in the garment industry. If nothing else it led to several faintings a day in the summertime and at least one girl's death from heat stroke and dehydration. Glendower paid off the city inspectors rather than go to the expense of putting fire escapes on the building, though they were added later.

What gave Glendower a smelly reputation was his sexual abuse of the girls who worked for him. His office was on the sixth floor and he would routinely take girls there and molest them, with the threat of being fired—and blacklisted from work in any of the other garment factories on the East Side—if they refused. This wasn't that uncommon, either, by the way. Back then it was thought that a girl who worked—especially an immigrant girl—was fair game. Judging by complaints to the fledgling ILGWU, it sounds like Glendower—a massive dark-haired man whose father made a fortune selling guns to both sides in the Civil War—was a sex addict and, if not clinically a sadist, at least got a kick out of roughing up girls.

Phil had said, *I hear them crying... And I heard him laugh.* Maddie heard again in her mind the whispering voice from the darkness: *little sluts are all alike... good for one thing...*

She thought of the endless stream of bright-faced children trotting up and down those stairs in their pink beginner's leotards, their wispy little practice skirts. The floors that had been trodden by girls not much older, on their way to earn enough money to keep their parents and siblings from being thrown out of their tenement rooms, were buried these days under God knew how many layers of subsequent

linoleum and paint.

But it was as if the walls remembered, and wept with shame in-the dark.

Like most loft garment factories at that time, Pinnacle Ready-Made was a disaster waiting to happen. Rags soaked with sewing-machine oil weren't taken out nearly often enough—it would be a nuisance to maneuver anything down the stairways, which were about two feet wide to get maximum advantage of space in the building for office and warehouse rental—and were allowed to pile up under the work-tables. This was long before any kind of flame retardant was used on cloth, and the factory floors were piled with rags, scrap, lint from the machines and cotton dust, and cotton dust, which is highly flammable, permeated the air.

On the morning of January 13, 1908, the inevitable happened and fire broke out in the seventh-floor factory.

Maddie closed her eyes, hearing in her mind the sound Phil had described, the frantic clattering of fists pounding on a locked metal door.

Ninety girls were killed. The seventh and eighth floors were destroyed completely and the sixth floor gutted. Lucius Glendower's body was found in one of the stairwells, where he'd apparently become disoriented in the smoke and confusion and burned to death. The consensus of local opinion was that this was only a preliminary to a similar but more lasting destiny.

His estate was divided between his second wife and his nephew, Grayson, who married one another in order to consolidate the stock holdings. They repaired the building, which they sold in 1925.

Maddie tried to imagine someone that coldheartedly calculating and greedy, and felt a little glow of gladness that Lucius Glendower had spent a portion of his life with not one, but two of them. Served them all right.

She scrolled down, expecting only an account of subsequent remodeling and sales.

The first time a girl disappeared in the building after the fire was in 1919. I couldn't find much about her except that she was one of Grayson Glendower's factory girls, but there doesn't seem to be any doubt that she never left the building, and that her body was never found.

Maddie thought, her heart curling in on itself with shock, The first time... ?

She scrolled down fast through the succeeding paragraphs of Diana's e-mail. Counting names and dates. Too appalled, at first, to believe what she read.

In all, since 1919, at least ten girls had gone into the Glendower Building and had not come out.

New York's finest had come up with a number of logical explanations to account for as many of them as possible. Some of them may even have been correct. One of the girls, a sewing machine operator who vanished in 1943, was called a "troublemaker" by her family and was apparently dating a Protestant boy they didn't

like, a boy who'd gone into the army. There was speculation she'd run off to join him before he was shipped off to fight in Italy, where he was killed a few months later; there was little surprise that no one had ever heard from her again. And the one who'd disappeared while working late one night in December 1967 had been a sixteen-year-old runaway from Portland, whose true name her fellow hippies in her East Village crash-pad didn't even know.

But even discounting those—and the few witnesses involved swore that neither girl had left the building—that still left eight girls whose families, boyfriends and roommates were positive they had no reason to drop out of sight. Eight girls who had simply disappeared in the mazes of the Glendower Building's dark upper floors.

Eight girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty. All of them except Eileen Kirkpatrick dark-haired, like most of the girls who'd been fodder for the East Side garment shops at the nineteenth century's turn. All of them between mid-December and the thirteenth of January, the dark midnight of the year.

*Little sluts are all alike... good for one thing...*

## CHAPTER SIX

DiANA Vale had enough friends in difficult living situations that Maddie knew she never left her phone tamed off at night or refused to pick up calls, even at two in the morning. After eleven rings it was obvious that the owner of Darkness Visible wasn't at home that night. Maddie tried, without much hope of success, calling the shop, but not much to her surprise got only the answer-droid. She hung up, her heart pounding and her breath coming fast.

*There's something weird going on here and I think you'd better come down...*

Maddie dumped out her costume bag, shoved her big flashlight into it and a pack of spare batteries. Two balls of string and a sharp folding knife, from the apartment's utility drawer, at the thought of those dark mazes of little halls on the upper floors. The household hammer and a pry bar that could double as a club. What else?

Garlic? Silver bullets? Cold iron? A crucifix? She slung the bag over her shoulder, headed for the subway.

*Love you...*

She saw Phil across Twenty-ninth Street, coming out of—as she had suspected—the all-night liquor store where there was a phone. Even at that distance she recognized the tall, angular shape, the way he walked. She called "Phil!" without even considering what she'd do or say if it wasn't him; he stopped and turned.

"Maddie!"

She crunched through a clotted drift of snow and dirt piled up at the curb, dashed across the icy street. At this hour there was almost no one abroad even on the avenues, let alone in this slightly run-down block. A few dim streetlights glittered on the ice-slick pavement, and turned Phil's breath into a cloud of diamonds. When he caught her in his arms—when he kissed her, quick and hard and relieved, on the lips, and when she returned both the embrace and the kiss—it felt like something they'd been doing for years.

"Jesus, am I glad to see you... "

"Where is she?"

"I don't know." He fumbled in his pocket for the lobby key as they walked the last few yards to the door. The reconverted lofts and boutiques and the emporia hawking Korean electronics, which had taken over the old brick factory buildings, were shut down and dark. Dingy utility lights made a yellowish square of the ; Owl's window behind an iron grille. The serviceways and alleys between the buildings were slabs of primordial night, and the cold defeated even the faint pong of old garbage and backed-up drains that seemed to be ground into the very fabric of Manhattan. Between the angular outlines of towering walls, black cloud made a matte nothingness of the sky.

"She stayed after Darth Irving's advanced class tonight and asked if I'd play for her. I said yes and went up to my studio to get a cup of coffee—Tessa had unplugged and washed out the office pot when she went off work before class. When I came back to the big studio she was gone. Her bag was there, so I waited... "

He let them into the gray little coffin of the front hall, locked the door and bolted it behind them, led her past Quincy the caretaker's empty booth and up the stairs.

As she ascended that first long flight—two floors past the ground-floor shops' storerooms—Maddie found herself wondering if the door onto Twenty-ninth Street was the same as it had always been. If that had been the entrance by which all those Russian, Jewish and Cuban girls had gone into the building every day, to work at Pinnacle Ready-Made.

She thought of them, girls who these days would be - the little green-haired Gothettes going in groups to the Village to get butterflies tattooed on their hips, or hooking up their laptops to do their NYU homework at Starbucks. Saw them in her mind, hugging faded shawls around themselves and gathering up their long, flammable skirts to hurry past the sixth floor, praying Mr. Glendower wouldn't step out of his office just then and say,

*Come in here. I want to see you.*

"I went through this whole building," Phil said. "Quincy'd left by then, and I've been trying to reach him all night. No answer. I called for her—yelled up and ; down those creepy hallways. Turned on every light and tried every doorknob in the place, looked in the men's rooms and the ladies... everywhere. Her key to the front door was in her bag, she couldn't have got out."

"No" said Maddie. "No, I don't think she did."

They crossed through the Dance Loft's seedy front office, stepped into the fluorescent blaze of the big studio, the glare of the lights off its walls of mirrors all the more shocking after the gloom elsewhere. According to Diana's e-mail the third floor had been a silk warehouse in January 1908. In the winter of 1962 it had contained three or four "to-the-trade" showrooms for wholesalers in artificial flowers and feathers, where a girl named Hannah Sears had worked... and where her purse, coat and galoshes had been found one morning, with the key to the locked downstairs lobby door lying on top of them.

Looking up, Maddie could see where one of the partition walls had been removed, a rough band like a welt in the wall above the line of the mirrors, painted over a dozen times.

"Phil," said Maddie, "I would rather say anything in the world to you other than this." She looked up at him, with his dark rough hair falling forward into his eyes and his shirt half-unbuttoned under his pea coat; the face that was already so familiar to her, so much a part of her thoughts. She was very aware that she had the choice to say *Call the cops-they'll be able to put a trace on her if she left the city...*

It would be the rational and sensible thing to do.

And it would mean Phil wouldn't look at her as he'd looked at her last night, sitting on the floor of the kitchen, when she'd spoken of the narrow stairway leading up from the sixth floor, the stairway that he claimed didn't exist.

*Who is this nutball? And why am I wasting my time talking to her?*

And nobody could say she hadn't done her best. Only she knew that the police had been called in when Maria Diaz had disappeared in 1956, and Vera Rosenfeldt in 1972, and little Moongirl in 1967... and for others as well.

*See where he fits into your life,* Diana had said. *Not where you can fit yourself into his.*

Which included, she supposed, his idea of how the universe was supposed to work.

She took a deep breath. "Tessa isn't the only woman to disappear in this building," she said, and told him, as quickly and in as few words as she could, the content of Diana's e-mail. "Now, people disappear in New York all the time," she said. "I have no idea what the statistics are for any single building, chosen at random, for people who're last seen in it and never heard from again. Sometime when we're free, I'll be perfectly happy to go down to City Hall and look up other buildings as a control group."

Phil said nothing. Only looked down at her, his eyebrows drawn together, listening and thinking... What?

"But every one of those girls disappeared between mid-December and the thirteenth of January—the anniversary of the 1908 fire. That's today. And every one of those girls was of the same age and general appearance of the girls that Lucius

Glendower victimized here in his life—first or second-generation Americans, mostly Latin or Jewish."

"Except for the last one, Padmini Raschad." His voice was quiet in the brightly lit box of the studio, and there was a flicker of anger in his dark eyes. "Quincy told me about her. Quincy has sat in that lobby every day since 1980, and since I can't piss him off by walking away too fast or too often, believe me, there isn't a thing that's gone on in this building that I haven't heard about, several times."

He slid out of his pea coat, draped it over the bench of the piano in the corner of the studio as he spoke, like a man preparing himself for a fight. "Padmini Raschad disappeared in 1994. She worked at a travel agency up on the fifth floor. There was a little bit of a stink when she disappeared—Quincy said they had the police in, but nobody ever found anything. But that means the Dayforths knew about her. They had to, the Dance Loft's been here since the eighties. And they never bothered to tell anybody that there was, or might be, something strange about the building. Probably didn't want to scare away customers."

Maddie had never had much use for Charmian Dayforth since the time her own classes had been dumped without notice. From what she knew of her, Phil was undoubtedly right. She couldn't see Mrs. Dayforth notifying anyone even if she'd seen Lucius Glendower's ghost prowling around the halls.

Phil continued, "I suppose a Pakistani would look pretty much like an Italian to someone who didn't really care."

Maddie shut her eyes briefly and whispered a prayer of thanks for the garrulous old vet who watched over the lobby.

"So what do we do?"

"Let's go up to the sixth floor."

The silence of the building pressed around them as they climbed the flights of stairs. Even with all the lights on, the sense of cold evil persisted, of something waiting for them, of something walking behind them, something that disappeared every time Maddie turned her head. A dark-haired man, Diana had said Glendower had been: a wealthy man and a ruler of industry.

The King of Pentacles, whose shadow Maddie had mistaken for Phil.

The king who fed on the spirits of the girls whose bodies he broke to his will.

The king who still stirred alive in the winter months, when the nights were long at the midnight of the year. Who, when he grew hungry enough, whispered to girls in the dark.

In her mind she saw Tessa again, standing at the foot of that narrow stairway, looking up. Listening. She was exhausted emotionally and pushed to her physical limits; Maddie had seen her too many nights stumble home and doze off before she could finish dinner. If Lucius Glendower's voice murmured to her in her dreams, it would find an easy entry to the dark part of the mind where the consciousness goes in sleep.

*No me toque*, she had cried in her sleep. Maddie had looked it up in a Spanish dictionary, before leaving for Mrs. Buz's wingding earlier that afternoon. *Don't touch me*.

She wondered where Lucius Glendower's office had been, in what was now the maze of subdivided offices and cubicles, studios and windowless rehearsal halls of the sixth floor. Near the main stair, where his shadow had hissed obscenities at her in the dark?

"Do you want to make another search?" asked Phil when they got to the top of the stairs and Maddie halted and began to dig through her bag.

"Do you feel satisfied that she's not up here?"

He nodded. "I searched every nook and cranny." From his pocket he produced the blue chalk that Mrs. Dayforth used to mark the scheduling board at the Dance Loft. "I marked every place I checked—which means I'd better make sure there's not a molecule of blue chalk dust anywhere on me when Quincy has to come up here and clean it up, or I'll be sucking sidewalk by nightfall. What you got?"

"Insurance." Maddie tied one end of the string to the banister of the main stair that led down to the fifth floor.

Phil raised his eyebrows. "What do you think's going to be chasing us, that we have to find the way through the halls that fast?"

"Things you don't believe in," said Maddie. "And neither do I. Not really."

Phil said softly, "Like Hamlet said, I guess there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy. You really think there's something up here?"

"I do," said Maddie. "Something that's been up here for a long time." She handed him the flashlight and closed her eyes.

It was one thing to read the cards, to accept that the random arrangement of symbols would line up along the intricate networks of energy and destiny comprising Time and Space. It was one thing to go with Diana to certain places in Central Park, or to old buildings upstate in the Hudson Valley, and watch her friend pass her hands along the stone of the walls, scrying deep-buried energies there. When Diana had talked her down into a deep trance, and had shown her how to seek the minute changes in temperature that indicated active psychic residue, Maddie had thought she'd felt them.

But looking back now, she wasn't sure.

And it was quite another thing, to breathe deep and slow, to empty and order her mind into the state of trance, knowing that the life of someone she cared about might be—was—at stake. *It shouldn't be doing this*, she thought desperately. *I should be watching Diana do it, Diana who's had years of trance-work and spirit-watching, who has crossed back and forth over the curtain that separates the world as we know it from those unseen places where energies have form. Diana knows what she's doing. I don't.*

But her instincts told her that the longer she waited, the less chance there would be of following Tessa to wherever she'd been lured. The less chance there was of bringing her back safe.

The deeper she breathed, the more she relaxed her mind, the greater Maddie's sense of peril grew. She remembered clearly her feelings the first time she'd stepped through the door of the Glendower Building, seeking a studio to rent to teach dance less than a month after she'd found Sandy a furnished room and helped him move his stuff there... That sense of uncleanness. Of ugliness. Of energies that screamed at her, *Don't come in here...*

Only she'd needed a place to teach a class, if she were going to make her rent. Like the little Jewish and Russian and Cuban girls who'd gone up and down the stairs each day to a factory floor they knew was a fire-trap, to work for a man who summoned them into his office under threat of blacklist, she did what she needed to do to survive.

And as she relaxed her mind, she felt those early feelings of dread sharpen and crystallize, as if the veils that shrouded and blurred them were being drawn, one by one, aside.

She heard no voices, and saw no shadows, but she was very conscious of those girls now, slipping along the hall in twos and threes with their shawls wrapped around them in the cold, their long hair braided up to keep it out of the machines. Names flickered through her mind and were gone.

She put out her hand, fingers spread as Diana had taught her, and brought it slowly close to the wall. She felt the energy at once, like the prickly horror of ants crawling on her skin. It took all her will not to jerk her hand away.

He was here. He was here everywhere in the building, as if his mind had spread like fungal fibers through the old brick that underlay all those layers of wallpaper and paint. Not living, but holding on to the living world, to the material pleasures and power that all his life he had refused to give up. A psychic monster that fed on what it could get.

Maddie walked forward slowly, following the fast-streaming energy along the wall. "There was a lobby here," she whispered through lips that felt numb, "outside the office door." She could see it, as if she'd visited the place in a dream. The stairway had continued up, where that wall now was. Farther down the main hall the energy ceased, turned cold. Unwinding the string behind her she entered one of the smaller halls, she was dimly aware of the blue chalk X at the corner and of Phil walking behind her, the flashlight in one hand and the pry bar in the other. He seemed barely more than a shadow to her, half unreal.

More real, a thousand times, was the sense of vile consciousness, the anger that seemed to vibrate the air. He was muttering, snarling like a caged dog, that hoarse, thick voice that had spoken to her ten nights ago at the foot of the stairway. He was somewhere just out of clear hearing, savage, furious, but she could smell his sweaty woolen suit, his expensive cologne, the brandy on his breath and the cigar smoke

that permeated his flesh and his hair. His need—for women, for power, for domination over those too weak to fight back—was a second stench, deeper than the first.

She turned a corner and then another, the string trailing from her fingers: Office doors, then another little hallway branching off toward a suite, but she knew where the stairway lay. She turned right again and was conscious that the hallway and all the floor behind her was dark, though she didn't know just when the lights had gone out.

The glow of the flashlight touched the stairway. Narrow, barely wider than her shoulders, wooden steps splintery and dirty, walls stained.

She could hear Glendower talking now. Hear him cursing. *Uppity women... come here organizing... man can do what he wants to with his property. Mind your own business. I'll get you... You little tramps don't like it, you go someplace else and work. Lazy foreigners, steal me blind, spend all your time sneaking cigarettes in the toilets while I'm paying you to work...*

Vile whisperings, chewed over and fermented for nearly a century. Resentment and rage, and under them the red strength of a soul that absorbs power from the pain of others. The death of others.

"He's up there," Maddie whispered, and put her hand on the fouled paint of the wall. "Tessa?"

And out of the darkness above—the darkness at the top of a stairway that had been destroyed ninety-five years before—came the stifled wail of a terrified girl.

Maddie put her foot on the lowest step, and the blast of rage that pounded down on her from the darkness was like the physical force of an explosion. *Get out of here! Get out of here, goddamn do-gooder hag! Rob a man of what's his! Tell a man what he can do on his own property, with his own girls!*

Nearly a hundred years ago to the day, the thing in the darkness above her had died, and in dying had swallowed up the strength of those who had perished with it in the inferno. As she climbed the steps, Maddie could feel those from whom that life force had been taken, the walls around her twittering, like trapped birds. Russian, Spanish, Yiddish, Italian—fragments of horror and pain. A warm hand closed on her wrist, reassuring and strong. "What is it?" breathed Phil. "This wasn't here..."

Maddie's mouth felt like she'd had an injection of lidocaine at the dentist. "It's the world he created," she mumbled. "The world that still exists in his mind..."

Pain stabbed at her, so sudden that she staggered. With the pain was a horrible and frightening sensation she'd never felt before, but she knew at once what it was: a cold grip twisting at her mind, seeking to tear her soul free of her brain. She gasped, turned her hand in Phil's and clutched at his fingers—"Hold me..."

His arms were around her, supporting her as the steps' seemed to tip under her feet, or else there was something thrusting at her, shoving her, trying to knock her back down the inky slot of the stairway. A voice was shouting in her ears, black thunder that shook the walls around them, and under it Phil's voice, "I've got you,

baby, I'm here... "

And like a wind-whirled bird, somewhere came Tessa's cry, "Maddie... !"

The pain ceased with a suddenness that made her gasp. The shouting ended in silence like the fall of an ax. But as Maddie led the, way, stumbling, up the last few stairs, she felt the darkness taking shape above them, waiting for them, drawing in on itself. Preparing another blow.

The world at the top of the stairs was the world that had been the Glendower Building before the fire, mutated into a lightless nightmare by the mind that had remembered and maintained it for nearly a hundred years. The high-ceilinged loft room stretched away into darkness, the air a fog of cotton dust that clogged the lungs and throat. The dark shapes of bales, boxes, machines loomed everywhere. The walls and floor shuddered with the dull throbbing of engines, growing louder as the beam of the flashlight weakened and failed. Phil called out "Tessa!" but the roaring of the machines boomed louder still around them. "Tessa!"

*We'll never hear her!* thought Maddie in despair. *She's growing weaker, she can't fight him!*

For a moment she wanted to weep, to flee back to the stairway—if she could find it—to get herself out of this place.

She concentrated on her breathing, on steadying her mind. "Help me find her," she said, her voice quiet in the shaking darkness. "Help me get her out."

She felt the energy running over her hands again, tugging gently at her arms and her long hair. Touching her cheeks with feathery warmth, like stiff fingers callused by needles and pins. *Allá, hermana*, a voice seemed to breathe in her ear, patting, guiding. *Oi, the momzer, is he gonna be mad...*

She followed the energy through vibrating darkness, through what felt like a maze of corridors, loft rooms, then up another stairway whose walls brushed her shoulders on either side. Rats sat up and hissed at her on the steps ahead, red eyes glaring. Phil gave Maddie the flashlight, strode forward with the pry bar, never letting go of her wrist. His face was expressionless: he, too, was a man, thought Maddie, who would do what he had to do.

The rats retreated, but their stink was everywhere around them as they ascended the dark stairway. Partway up, Maddie felt the walls seeming to close in on them, felt the greedy, angry power of Lucius Glendower's mind grip and tear at hers. Pain pounded in her head again, cramped in her body, and she heard him howling: *I'll get you, you troublemaker! I'll get you...*

Like the Devil on the tarot card, raving and ugly, with the lovers held in chains at his feet. *But the chains*—she recalled the image clearly—*are loose. We can take them off, anytime we please.*

Then he was gone. The cold, tearing pain in her mind vanished, into a silent stillness more terrible than before.

There may have been some warning, some movement or sound, or the sudden

reek of Glendower's tobacco and cologne. Maddie didn't know. But she looked quickly up into Phil's face and saw his eyes change, saw the blaze of greed and lust and triumph kindle there, in the instant before he snapped off the flashlight, slammed her against the wall of the narrow staircase, fell upon her in the dark.

She may have screamed his name;—she didn't afterward recall. He bit her neck, her shoulders as he ground his body against hers, ripped open her shirt, tried to drag her to the floor. She'd had a split second to brace herself, to pull away, but he was terrifyingly strong. The next instant he thrust her away, turned as if he would flee, and Maddie grabbed his arm, the violence of his effort to wrench from her nearly breaking her wrist.

"Goddamn you, you bastard!" he screamed into the darkness. "You son of a bitch, you catch fire and die!" And he fell against the wall, his breath coming in harsh sobs.

Maddie clung to his arm, felt the shudder of his flesh gradually lessen. She knew exactly what had happened, what Glendower had tried to do. For one instant, she had seen Lucius Glendower looking out of Phil's eyes.

After a time she said, "He's trying to split us up. Trying to get me to run from you, or you from me, so he can get us lost, deal with us separately. Don't let go of me."

Phil caught her wordlessly against him, his strength just as frightening as it had been a moment before when the evil old man's spirit had possessed his mind. But he only held her to him, desperate, for a long minute, his breath burning against the side of her face.

Maddie whispered, "Come on. He's going to try again."

She felt him nod. The flashlight came on again, the light of its beam fading and uncertain, as if the psychic forces loose in this madhouse dimension were even, drinking the chemical energies of the batteries. Maddie pulled her shirt closed around her bleeding shoulders, clung to Phil's hand as they ascended the last of the stairs.

Tessa lay in what Maddie guessed to be the original eighth floor of the Glendower Building, the loft that had been one of the factory floors. They saw her through the loft's open doors, crumpled unconscious on the rag-strewn planks. The room was hellishly cold, snow falling onto the plates of glass of the big windows overhead. Beyond that snow—beyond the glass of the windows lower in the walls—only darkness. Maddie wondered what she would have seen, could she have looked out in the daytime, if it was ever daylight here.

Dust hazed the air, furred the long tables down the center of the room, the oily black shapes of the sewing machines. Rats scampered along the walls. As Phil and Maddie hurried through the open iron doors into the loft, Phil whispered, "Here. I saw this room in my dream... "

"Tessa!" Maddie knelt beside her friend. "Tessa, are you all right?" For a moment she feared, as the younger girl opened her eyes, that she would see in them, too, the demon-glare of Lucius Glendower's consciousness, as she had seen it in Phil's.

But Tessa only blinked up at her, dazed. "Get me out of here," she whispered in a broken voice. "He said he'd kill me—he'd keep me here... Keep me here forever."

"You'll be okay, honey." Phil knelt beside her, picked her up in his arms. "Can you walk?"

Tessa nodded, reaching down with her long legs, her arms still around Phil's neck. The flashlight beam showed his eyebrows standing out very dark against a face blanched with shock and strain. Maddie wondered if Glendower's cold, ripping mind were twisting even now at Phil's thoughts, struggling to take over again. She swung the flashlight around the loft, but the beam was too weak to penetrate the darkness. In contrast to the roaring of the machines downstairs, this place was silent, with a silence that watched their every move.

In her mind she heard that evil voice again, a muttering babble of half-heard words. *Mine... mine... come in and tell me what I can and can do... show them... Get them. Get them. Show them. Little tramps... only good for one thing...*

*Only good to feed his lust*, Maddie thought. *To fuel the undead greediness of his mind*. She said, "We'd better get out of here." The voice was growing louder. Coming closer.

Beneath the smells of machine oil and rats and cotton dust, beneath the sudden reek of tobacco and cologne, she could smell smoke.

Supporting Tessa between them, Phil and Maddie headed for the door. Stumbling, running, as Maddie realized what would happen...

The iron door swung shut with a booming clang.

Far off in the blackness, she heard a girl scream, *Fire!*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Phil cursed, flung his weight against the door. The hollow metallic clatter turned to obscene laughter in the dark. "Pry bar," Maddie said, feeling strangely calm. "Hinges." She dug the hammer out of her bag and stood back, holding Tessa by the hand.

"The laws of physics goddamn better apply around here." Phil swung the hammer at the bar, the crash like cannon fire in the dark. "If this doorjamb is made of something other than wood..."

"Maddie!" Tessa screamed, and red light poured over them as fire burst out under the tables in the center of the room.

It was horrifying how fast the fire spread. Oil, rags, dust went up; lines of fire raced across the wooden floorboards, climbed the walls where the film of cotton dust exploded into sheets of flame. Heat smote them, driving Tessa and Maddie back toward the door where Phil hammered at the end of the pry bar, like a dark-haired, desperate Thor. Though Maddie could see no one else in the long spaces of the loft, she could hear them, hear their voices screaming: *Fuego!* And *Dear Jesus in Heaven, save us...*

The wooden jamb splintered and both girls flung themselves at the door, felt it give. Maddie cried again, "Help us!" and whether the wild, terrified energies in the burning room responded—whether they *could* respond—she didn't know. But when she and Tessa hurled their weight against the metal again it tore free of the broken jamb, opening a narrow space where the hinges were half torn free,

Phil slid through first, swore again—smoke poured through and it seemed to Maddie for a moment that the broken door, the shattered jamb, tried to close up again around him, crushing his body like a huge mouth. He braced his back, fought the iron and the wood apart and gasped, "Can you get through past me?" As the two women slithered through the narrow gap, Maddie heard Glendower's voice shouting, not in her mind this time but seeming to come from the fire-saturated darkness all around them.

The string that stretched down the stairway was burning already, a thin line of fire through opaque black billows of smoke. The air burned in Maddie's lungs, grit blinded her eyes. Somewhere she heard the sound Phil had described, the wild, despairing hammering of fists against a locked metal door. Screaming, a dim and far-off echo, like the wailing of storm winds above the guttural roar Of the flames.

They plunged down the stairs, through the holocaust of burning walls, flame-wreathed corridors below, desperately running for the next set of stairs. Swirling energies tore at Maddie's mind, wild spirits of panic and terror, eternally trapped in the darkness and the flame. Maddie clung grimly to Tessa's wrist, dragged her forward, following the burning streak of the string. She saw the flame race along the string ahead of them, as it plunged down the next flight of stairs; saw flame burst out of the walls, roar up in grabbing hands from the floor. The stairwell vomited smoke, hot wind pouring up it like a chimney, and in the smoke she saw him...

The shadow she'd seen, whispering to her at the foot? of the stairs.

He blocked the stair below them, massive arms spread across it from wall to wall. His eyes were red, like the glaring eyes of the phantom rats. Nothing else of him could she see, but it seemed to Maddie, as she plunged down the stairwell toward him, that his whole body was formed of smoke, and of the writhing energies that he held twisted around his core. Beyond him lay the doorway to the real world, to the real Glendower Building as it existed in the twenty-first century, and the dingy glare of cheap electric bulbs, far off around the corners, framed him, illuminating the billow of the smoke.

She flung herself at that ghastly shape of smoke and hatred, swinging the flashlight like a club. Instead of the solid impact of flesh she felt a burning jolt of energy, like

an electrical shock that numbed her arm. Yet his hands were solid as they seized her, shoved her against the wall as Phil had shoved her, with a force that knocked the breath out of her. She felt his weight buffet her, twist her, felt his teeth tear at her flesh.

Then Tessa dragged her free, and she heard the crackle and roar of energies as Phil slashed through the shadow of the ghost with the iron of the pry bar and hammer. Phil cried out, doubling over with shock and pain, but Glendower's shadow had broken up. The next instant it re-formed in the burning air, even as Maddie and Tessa turned back, caught Phil as he staggered, dragged him down toward the lights of the sixth floor.

*I'll get you!* Glendower screamed. *I'll show you... No one takes from me what's mine!*

Phil stumbled, collapsed on the battered brown linoleum of the sixth-floor hall, and as Maddie bent down to drag him to his feet Tessa cried, "Look out!" Maddie raised her head and saw the glass windows of a nearby office door shatter, as if kicked by some monstrous energy within. Smoke poured out, red-stained by the flame that ticked up close behind.

Maddie turned back, horrified. Smoke and fire belched from the stairway to the haunted realm above, the flames spraying, burning on the many-times-painted wallpaper, the wood of wainscots and doors. Against the flame the dark shape of Lucius Glendower rose, fists upraised, shouting incomprehensible curses, and fire poured forth around him and into the remainder of the building that had been his.

Maddie dragged Phil to his feet, thrust her shoulder under his arm on one side, Tessa supporting him on the other. His hand flailed, but Maddie felt the whole of his weight on diem—smoke inhalation? The shock of breaking through the black energies of Glendower's spirit? She gasped, trying to breathe and choking on the smoke. Somehow she dragged diem on through the tangle of hallways toward where she knew the stairway down had to lie. In the smoke and darkness she could barely see the white line of the string, except where the blaze raced along the walls, seared in frames of fire around burning doors.

*I'll show you!* Glendower's voice screamed behind *them*. *I'll get you!*

Tessa gasped, staggered, coughed, and when she fell the whole of her weight and Phil's nearly pulled Maddie to the floor. Her eyes burning, her vision blurred, Maddie fell to her knees beside them. "Get up! Please, get up!"

A dark shape emerged from the smoke beside her, reached down to drag Phil to his feet. Gasping, beyond speech, Maddie pulled Tessa up, hauled the younger girl's arm around her shoulders, as a voice shouted something to her. She thought it was *This way...* but couldn't be sure. Through the flaring horror of glare and smoke she could see the dark shapes of Phil and his rescuer following the line of the string, and she staggered after them.

The lights were gone, the fire spreading below them from floor to floor as they stumbled down the smoke-filled stairwell. Maddie heard, far off, the wail of sirens,

New York's heroes to the rescue again. She could see nothing, only clung to the banister, wondering how she would or could make it down five floors. Now and then a gleam of reflected red light showed her the two shapes descending ahead, and once she heard Phil cough.

*He's still breathing, she thought. He's still alive.*

*Dear God, don't let him die.*

She glanced beside her at Tessa but could tell nothing in the superheated smoky black of the stairwell. Only, she could occasionally feel when the girl tried to help her, tried to walk, only to sag against her, gasping for breath. "Hang on," she panted. "Please, hang on..."

Light reflected from below, the glare of searchlights from the street pouring into the lobby mingling with the firelight from above. The groan and screech of pry bars in the door frame, the confusion of shouts, sounding far away still at the bottom of that long double flight of final stairs.

The dark form that led Maddie stopped at the head of those stairs, lowered Phil down with his back to the wall. Maddie let Tessa slip down as well, stood with her hand against the wall, panting, getting her breath for the final descent. She turned her head to gasp something to the man who had helped her...

It was Sandy.

Sandy before drink and drugs had eroded him away to a man he himself would have despised. Sandy not as she'd last seen him on that cold metal table in the morgue, but as she'd first seen him, with a wry smile under his mustache and the old elfin gleam sparkling in the darkest eyes Maddie had ever seen. Sandy as he had always wished and hoped and wanted to be.

He smiled at her, and held out his hand.

With the amount of power and energy swirling around in the air—with the half-materialized forces Glendower had so long summoned into being—Maddie realized she shouldn't be surprised. Of course Sandy would figure out a way to mooch some of those energies, to come to her aid—to pay her back for nearly a decade of bailing him out of trouble. To save the life of the man she now loved. In his life, she recalled, Sandy had never been anything but generous.

She took his hand. Like Lucius Glendower's, it had solidness and strength to it, and Sandy's old lightness of touch. She said, "Thank you," feeling *no* fear or shock. Only happy to see him... happy that he looked so well.

He glanced down at Phil, then back at her, and grinned, the old shy Sandy grin. He stepped forward and kissed her, very gently, on the lips, his mustache tickling as it always had.

Then he turned and stepped off the edge of the final flight down—like the Fool stepping off his cliff—and faded into darkness and smoke.

Diana was at the apartment when Maddie woke up the following afternoon.

Maddie's memories of the emergency room at Roosevelt Hospital were confused, due to shock and, she suspected, whatever the paramedics had given her while they were wrapping Phil and Tessa in wet sheets and dousing them with distilled water. She had a handful of sharp, clear images in her mind, like stills from a movie she barely recalled seeing: Phil propping himself up on his elbows on the gurney and saying groggily, "Wouldn't it be cheaper to take a cab?" and, later, Tessa sitting next to her in the dreary ER waiting room while the triage nurses tried to sort them out from the cases of trauma, OD and gunshot wounds all around them—a typical night in New York.

While the paramedics had been loading Phil and Tessa into an ambulance—Maddie huddled in the doorway of the Owl to stay warm—the Glendower Building had collapsed, like the Falling Tower, in a shower of flaming debris.

"They kept Phil overnight." Diana carried a plateful of kebabs and *sarigi burma* from the refrigerator to Maddie's bedside. "Tessa's gone down to help Charmian Dayforth try to talk the fire department into letting her salvage what records she can from the Dance Loft's offices. I think she's one of the few students who did. All the rest are evidently scrambling to find practice space to get ready for the ABA auditions tomorrow." The white witch's voice was wryly amused at this evidence of artistic dedication. "The building was nearly gutted."

Maddie said, "Good. It should have been gutted—and razed—ninety-five years ago. Let's hope they'll finish the job this time."

When the Tower fell, she remembered from some interpretations of the tarot deck, the prisoners within it were freed. Lucius Glendower, and the spirits of all those girls whose souls had fed his greed. Freed to their final crossing, and to whatever, for them, would come next.

She sat up in bed, nibbled her neck, her arms. There were bandages where Glendower had bitten her, bruises where Phil had seized her by the arms. Her body felt as if she'd fallen down a flight of stairs, and her throat was sore as nobody's business. "Is Phil all right?"

"He seems to be." Diana glanced at the clock in the living room, through the white sheet curtains that had been opened wide. With her gray hair wound into a topknot and the sleeves of her homespun dress rolled over powerful forearms, she looked like a samurai den-mother. "I went down to Roosevelt Hospital this morning and talked to him. He asked several times if you were all right, and Tessa. He said Glendower had 'gotten into his mind'; he was afraid you would not forgive him."

"I hope you told him it was all right."

"I told him you had enough experience with the supernatural to understand what had happened. He said, 'I'm not sure that's the kind of experience you want to have a lot of, but I'm glad.' He seemed very shaken up."

"Well, he just had it proved to him that the world isn't put together the way he thought it was," said Maddie. She picked a fragment of chicken off a skewer, held it

out to Baby, who sniffed for a moment, then condescended to taste. "And so did Tessa... and really, so did I. It isn't that I didn't believe it was real, but... You can read about this, and hear about it, and even talk to people who've had experiences with the Other Side, but..." She shook her head at the memory of flame and darkness and smoke, of the cold brutal clutch of Lucius Glendower's mind, and of Sandy's farewell smile.

She glanced shyly up at her teacher and asked, "Did he say anything else?"

"To tell you that he loves you." Diana smiled and wiped the sticky syrup from the Turkish dessert from her fingers with a paper towel. "He said, 'Tell her I love her to hell and back, which I think is what we just did.' I don't know him well, but he seems to be a very remarkable man."

"I don't know him well, either," said Maddie. Baby climbed into her lap, settled down to washing her paws; there was great comfort in the soft black-and-white fur, the familiar presence. Maddie wondered if Sandy had ever appeared to his cat.

She wouldn't have put it past him.

"I love him—I want him—but... how can you love someone you don't really know?"

"Of course you can. You loved Sandy, and there were parts of him that you never knew. And he loved you, enough to return from beyond the grave to help you—you weren't his dupe, and his words of loving to you were not a lie.. We love people differently at different stages of our knowledge of them. As love changes its shape and its nature, we have to decide what we're going to do about that love on any given day. And on *this* given day," added Diana, "your Philip may be out of the hospital already—the doctors said they were-going to release him this morning, and it's past noon now."

"They'll release him," said Maddie quietly. "But with the Glendower Building burned to the ground, I don't think he has anywhere to go."

Phil came that evening with Tessa, Tessa filthy with soot and exhausted, but determined to catch an audition prep class being given at one of the other studios. "I mean, like, everybody else in the school has spent the whole day prepping for the audition while I've been shoveling out files," she said, emerging from the bathroom already resplendent in tights and leotard, winding her wet hair into a bun. "I'd like to know who Mrs. Dayforth bribed. Thank God I wasn't trying to break in my new shoes last night, so the ones I lost were the old ones... That sounds so cold, when poor Mrs. Dayforth just lost her studio. I mean, it was insured up the wazoo, but there were all her posters of herself, and mementos of when she was dancing... Will you stay here tonight?"

She turned to Phil, who was sitting on the end of Maddie's bed devouring kebabs and couscous as if he were a starving man. He ducked his head a little and said, "I'm lining up a couch at Hobbsie's place in Queens." Maddie had thought she recognized the shirt Phil was wearing as belonging to the Dance Loft's star male pupil.

Tessa looked a little surprised, and Maddie said shyly, "It would be all right if you

stayed here."

Phil scooted a last fragment of onion around the plate with an empty kebab skewer, not looking up. "Thank you. I figured you ladies would have enough to worry about, without me sleeping on your carpet." He glanced sidelong at Maddie as he said it and added, "Right now you don't need to spend your energy wondering if I'm going to turn into the Thing That Wouldn't Leave."

Maddie smiled. "I trust you."

Their eyes met. Phil said, for her ears only, "That's a scary thing to say. Thank you."

"Well, if you ever get tired of Beefcake on Parade over in Hobbsie's apartment," said Tessa, stuffing her shoes and a towel into a plastic grocery sack from a Chinese market in lieu of a gym bag, "the door is open here. We'll even give you your own dish."

She and Phil left together—Phil had gotten a job playing for one of the audition classes at a studio in Brooklyn—and Maddie dropped at once into deep sleep untroubled by dreams of either Sandy, Philip or the nightmare that had burned to ashes on Twenty-ninth Street. She dreamed of flying, of dancing wreathed in clouds at the heart of the world.

She didn't see Phil until two nights later, at Tessa's I-Got-Into-the-ABA! party at Al-Medina.

Abdullah had offered the girls the Big Room, a long chamber two stories tall with a gallery around it that was never used these days. The curtained booths that overlooked the main floor were given over mostly to storage, or served as changing rooms for the dancers. Maddie and Tessa invited everyone they knew—the Dayforths didn't come, having little use for belly dancers, but Quincy and Diana both did—and Tessa borrowed one of Josi's pink veils and did the Spirits of Coffee Dance from the *Nutcracker*, to the music of flute and *doumbek* and wild applause.

It was while Maddie was dancing that she saw Phil. He sat on one of the wall divans near the small band, a bottle of Moroccan beer in hand, watching with fascinated delight. Since this was a party and not a gig, Maddie was doing a sword dance, the curved blade balanced across the top of her head, a form of the art that she enjoyed but that was not much in demand. She caught his eye and gave him half a smile, sank to the floor in front of him—long, rippling movements of each arm, of the chest, the hips, the rest of her body still, the weapon on her head never wavering. The band gave her flourishes, to let her show off each isolated motion: her eyes touched Phil's again.

*Do you understand?*

*It's all dancing. Skill infused with joy. Weaving jewelry out of dreams.*

He returned her smile.

"You're good," said his voice behind her when she'd whirled herself off and climbed the narrow stairs to the curtained gallery booth she was using as a dressing

room. She turned, still panting a little from the last frenzied drum solo. Saw him standing framed in the dim light of the corridor, rumpled and a little tired-looking in jeans and a gray linen shirt.

It seemed impossible to her that she could ever have mistaken Lucius Glendower's shadow—or Sandy's memory—for him.

"So're you. I played those CDs on my way back from a gig the other night—I never got a chance to tell you."

"I'm glad you like them. Thank God most of my stock, and the master tapes, were in storage. That music down there tonight—the rhythms they use, and the way they use them. I'll have to try that."

"You'll look great," promised Maddie with a grin. "I'll get Josi to lend you that little pink outfit of hers with the valentines on it... "

The curtain fell over the door behind him and he crossed the booth to where she stood, with her back to a curlicued pillar. Put one hand on the wall on either side of her shoulders. Looked down into her eyes. "You know what I mean."

"I know what you mean."

"Do you?" His hand touched her face, slipped beneath the heavy swags of her hair.

"I think so."

His thumb traced her cheekbone, her lips and her chin. Then lower, brushing the bruises on her neck and shoulder that she'd covered with an elaborate necklace of ersatz topaz and diamonds. "I never got a chance to say I'm sorry," he said. "You know I'd never hurt you."

"I know."

"I love you."

She reached behind her hair and unfastened the neck-bee, the jewels sliding, glittering, over his hand and down her breasts, where he gathered them like a fistful of stars. She whispered, "It's hard to say. It's not something I ever wanted to feel again."

"You don't have to say anything. Or feel anything." He drew back from her. "It's what I say. And what I feel. I'm not expecting you to do anything about it."

She put her arms behind his neck, drew his mouth down to hers. "It would be a lie," she murmured, "for me to say anything else. I love you."

His hands smoothed the bare skin of her belly and sides, stroked her back when she unfastened the heavy, jeweled bra. Her own hands parted his shirt, slipped over the heavy muscle, the washboard bones of his ribs, slow music from below spiraling through the red velvet curtains, mingling with the sound of their breath.

He lifted her, carried her to one of the divans, her hair spread out over the pillows as he stood above her, looking down. "You're so beautiful." He knelt and stretched

out at her side. His hands cupped her breasts, gently exploring, then slid up under the silken clouds of skirts. Maddie arched her back, moving like a cat with his caresses, her world and her consciousness narrowed to the rough friction of his hands, the scent of his body, and widened, it seemed, to take in all of night, and all of life.

She took her time, endless time in the crimson gloom, as if she were dancing to the music down below. Her fingernails scraped lightly across his back and arms, and later his butt and thighs, teasing and sampling, in no hurry. Later they locked together, tighter and tighter, as if their bones would meld. He was patient, exploring the secrets that differ from woman to woman, and sometimes in the same woman from night to night. Maddie groaned and clung to him, guiding sometimes, sometimes taken by surprise at sensations she'd never guessed she could feel—later she was not the only one with bite marks on her neck and arms.

She thought as he entered her, *Why did I wait?* But she knew she hadn't been waiting for *a* man, but for *this* man. And for the healed woman that she was only now becoming. The Dancer at the Heart of the World.

Afterward they lay together panting on the dusty velvet, listening to the voices of Josi and Tessa in the corridor outside, to the quiet in the dining room downstairs. The music had ceased. The chatter had turned desultory.

Hobbsie's voice drifted up-from below, "Anybody seen him? I said I'd give him a ride back to my place."

Phil started to sit up; Maddie laid a hand on his back. "Tell him you're coming home with me."

He lay down again at her side. Maddie felt she could have spent the whole night that way, the whole winter, close to his warmth. Relearning what it was to spend nights alternately talking and dozing, and sinking into loving like young animals mating in spring.

"I meant what I said, about not wanting to become something you get sick of seeing. I don't want..." His fingertips stroked her palm. "I don't want it to turn into that. I don't want *us* to turn into that. In a couple of months I'll have the money to get my own place—I never planned to spend longer than that sleeping on the studio floor. Rather than risk losing what I think we can have, I'll couch-surf until then."

Drowsily, Maddie reached across to touch his face. "Now who doesn't trust who?" she asked. "Do you think we'll lose what I think we're going to have?"

"No." There wasn't a trace of doubt in his voice. "I don't think anything in the world can touch us. Or in any other world."

Maddie smiled. "Nor do I." She felt very calm as she said it, lifted out of herself, beyond the shadows of a haunted past. As if more than a building full of ghosts and memories had burned down the other night, releasing those imprisoned within. "Do you want to move in?"

He sighed. "I should be a sensitive New Age guy and say no, no, you need your

space... But ever since I met you, I've been wondering what it's like to wake up next to you in the morning." He brought her palm to his lips. "And I want to be next to you when I fall asleep at night."

"We can't know the future," said Maddie softly. "We can only know ourselves. And maybe, if we're lucky, each other."

He leaned over her, pressed his lips to hers. "Then I think you've got yourself another roommate."

They rose from the divan and dressed, then went down to join their friends, afterward walking to the subway together through the icy January night.