

Dream Series Book 2

*Dream*

*Doctor*

J.J. DIBENEDETTO

'Dream' Series Book 2

*Dream*  
*Doctor*

*A Paranormal Romance*

J.J. DIBENEDDETTO

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## **The Dream Series**

[\*Dream Student\*](#)

[\*Dream Doctor\*](#)

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[\*A Box of Dreams: the collected Dream Series \(books 1-5\)\*](#)

## **The Jane Barnaby Adventures**

*Finders Keepers*

*and*

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For Mom

Thank you for everything, always.

“Why does this keep happening to us?”  
- Holly McClane in “Die Hard 2: Die Harder”

*Prologue:*  
*The Princess Bride*

(JUNE 15-17, 1991)

**T**he sky is a brilliant blue, completely cloudless. The day simply could not be more perfect, Sara thinks. Except for the pain in her right ankle; she's slowing down the line of graduates as she limps towards the metal steps and then up onto the stage. She wishes she had her cane, even though she hasn't needed it in more than a year. She glances over her shoulder; the graduate directly behind her glares impatiently, but right behind him John from New York grins at her and a little further back Janet Black gives her a thumbs-up.

She stops at the assigned spot, helpfully marked with tape. She's grateful for a moment to rest. She only has a few seconds, though, before her name is called.

"Sara Katarina Barnes, Bachelor of Science in Biology, summa cum laude."

Sara hobbles across the stage to the podium, her right foot throbbing now. It hasn't hurt this badly, she thinks, since she injured it in the first place. She tries to push the pain aside but she finds it harder with each step, until her ankle gives



way and she tumbles to the floor, her cap falling off her head and rolling right off the stage.

Sara feels the eyes of several thousand people on her, but her only concern is the two eyes looking down at her from the podium just a few feet away. They belong not to the President of the university or to her Dean, but to the man she loves. Brian looks down at her but he makes no move to help, says nothing. His expression, though, speaks eloquently: “Why are you just lying there? Don’t you want to graduate?” it asks...

...Sara is suddenly elsewhere. She’s surprised to be on her feet again, the pain in her right ankle gone. She’s equally surprised at finding herself - where?

A cemetery, she realizes as she looks all around, marble headstones dotting the well-manicured lawn. Specifically, a cemetery during a funeral. She recognizes none of the people standing around the open grave, but as she listens to the minister’s words she gasps at the name of the deceased: Dr. Abraham Morris.

Sara knows who he is: chairman of the admissions committee of the Crewe University School of Medicine. She’s met Dr. Morris exactly once; he conducted her final admissions interview. It had been an extraordinarily stressful hour. Afterwards Sara had been left wondering if medical school was the right choice after all.

“I don’t hate him! And I got in anyway! I don’t want him dead!” Sara blurts out, immediately cringing, whirling around in search of somewhere to hide, to disappear. She sees no such place, but the reaction she expects from the mourners does not come; no angry words or disapproving stares. In fact there is no reaction at all.

Sara is surprised, but only for an instant; then it becomes clear to her what’s going on. This has happened before; this is not her dream at all. She doesn’t cry, or scream; she simply closes her eyes and pleads – already knowing she will not be answered – “Please, God, not again!”



I open my eyes, and I know before I can even force them to focus what I’m going to see. The clock reads 3:05 AM.

It was always three o'clock in the morning last time, too. At least I didn't wake up screaming. Or bite off Mister Pennington's arm again - my stuffed rabbit is still in one piece, right here in the bed with me. I didn't even wake up Lumpy, who's living up to his name, snoring away at the foot of the bed all tangled up in the sheets, or Beth, down on the floor, looking more comfortable sleeping on an inflatable mattress than I would ever be.

I'm not going to tell her about this. Or Brian. Or anybody. Especially not today.

It's almost funny, except it isn't at all. I haven't had any of these dreams in a year and a half, not since "it" happened - except one time, last summer. When Brian was dreaming about me, and I saw it. But that was the only time.

Talk about luck. Of all the times for this to start back up, for my brain to start picking up signals again, it has to be the night before my wedding.



I was able to get back to sleep, finally; I got maybe two more hours.

When I went to bed last night I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get to sleep in the first place; I thought I'd be up all night with the jitters. To my surprise, though, I had no trouble falling asleep. I spent a few minutes holding my hand up to my face and staring at Grandma Roberta's ring - *my* ring - and remembering that afternoon last summer when Brian gave it to me. I did my best to act surprised, but I couldn't pull it off. He knew I'd seen him, seen his dream, seen him asking my father for his blessing and getting more than he bargained for when Dad handed over my grandmother's ring to him.

I fell asleep with that memory, and a smile on my face. After that, I didn't expect to be woken up by someone I don't know dreaming about killing somebody. I thought I was done with that once and for all.

For about the first three months after Dr. Walters was caught, I went to bed every night expecting to have more nightmares. I was certain I'd keep seeing other people's horrible visions in my head. But it didn't happen, and it kept not happening. It wasn't until a week or two after my cast came off that I really started to believe that it was over for good.

Wishful thinking, obviously.

But I am *not* going to obsess about it today. I've got far better things to obsess about.

Beth is stirring herself awake. I don't see how she can possibly look as rested and refreshed as she does after a night on an air mattress. I offered her my bed, and Dad offered to pay for a hotel room, but she wouldn't hear any of it. She wanted to be here for me, she said, and as she put it: "I'm certainly not going to make the bride sleep on the floor the night before her wedding!"

I really do love her. I don't think I could be any closer to her if we actually were sisters. It's going to be so strange not having her right there, always just across the room or a couple of doors down the hall like she's been for the last four years.

It's going to be strange, too, to have someone else right there, every night, not just in my room but in my bed. I guess I should correct that – it's not going to be "my bed" anymore, it'll be "our bed." I feel like I ought to be more nervous about that than I am, but I'm not. I think that's a good sign.

I'm not even nervous about the wedding itself. It's pretty much all out of my hands anyway. It wasn't as though I could do much planning while I was finishing up my last semester, working on my senior thesis and getting ready for graduation. But I didn't have to - Mom was thrilled to step in and do basically everything. About the only thing I did was to choose the color for the bridesmaid dresses – light blue, almost a pastel sort of color. I'm not sure if anyone else likes it, but I do and like everyone says, it's *my* day, right?

And of course I picked out the dress; I did insist on doing that myself. Beth spent the week after Christmas at my house to help and it took almost that whole time to find it. I had no clear idea what exactly I was looking for and I turned down dress after dress that Beth or my Mom or both thought was perfect with the same unhelpful answer every time: "It's just not me."

I finally found it at the third or maybe the fourth bridal shop we tried, I honestly don't remember. We'd all lost count of how many dresses they'd brought out, when they showed me the perfect one. Both Beth and Mom immediately pronounced it boring. But it wasn't. It was – I can't explain it any better than to say, it was *me*.

It is very simple, I agree. It's plain white satin, no fancy lace or anything. It has just enough of a neckline that my emerald necklace is visible; it does set my eyes off so nicely, after all. Beth and Mom both argued with me, but I insisted on trying it on. When I came out of the dressing room they saw I was right. Mom teared up immediately, and Beth – even though she denied it later – nearly did as well. She did try to talk me into lowering the neck a little, which I absolutely refused to do. That's something that my alter-ego would have done. "Gretchen might," I told Beth, "but this is *my* dress, and the neck is perfect how it is." Everything about it was perfect – the dress might as well have been handmade just for me.

Mom took care of every other decision: the food, the cake, the flowers, all of it. The only thing I really have to do is show up, and since the limo is coming here to pick us all up, even that's covered.

There's just one thing I am nervous about, and I know how ridiculous it is. I don't even want to mention it to Beth, but if I can't tell my best friend and Maid of Honor, who can I tell?

She's up now, yawning and stretching; I guess I'll have my chance to tell her. But before I can say anything more than "good morning," there's a knock on my bedroom door and my Mom comes in.

"Good morning, honey," she says, and she sits herself down on my desk chair. She looks nervous herself. "It's going to be such a busy day, and there's just – I wanted to talk to you for a few minutes, you know, before – well, before."

Oh, God. There's no possible way this can be anything but embarrassing and horrible. Mom knows it too, but she puts on the bravest face she can and keeps going. "I know it's old-fashioned. But it's family tradition. My mother sat me down before my wedding, and her mother did the same and so on."

Beth and I look at each other. She gives me an apologetic smile and starts towards the door, but Mom calls her back. "You may as well hear it, too." For a moment I think she's going to leave anyway, abandon me to suffer through this alone, but – for about the millionth time she proves her loyalty to me. She stops, bows her head in defeat and shuffles over to the bed to sit down next to me.

"Mom," I say. "I'm twenty two years old. I don't need..."

She sighs. “I know that, Sara. But it’s my job as your mother, so I’m going to tell you anyway. Besides, I was twenty two myself once upon a time. I might know what you’re feeling right now,” she says. I believe that, but I don’t really want to think about it.

“Anyway, the night before my wedding, my mother sat me down, and - well, anyway. I’m not going to do *that* to you. I’m just – I want to tell you what I wish she’d told me.” Now I have no idea where this is going. I *do* know that I don’t even want to guess what advice Grandma Lucy gave to Mom on her wedding day.

“Mom, I don’t know...”

She actually smiles at me, and it’s a very kindly but also somewhat sad smile. “Yes, you do. You’re a smart girl,” she chokes up a little, “so smart. And so strong. More than I ever was.” She has to take a deep breath before she can continue. “You’ve also got a lot of - I don’t know how else to say it – romantic ideas about life.”

Beth nudges me; I don’t look at her but I’m absolutely sure there’s an “I told you so!” expression on her face. She’s right, too; she *has* told me so, many times.

“I have those same ideas myself,” Mom goes on. “And I did on my – you know, my wedding night. I had all these ideas about – well, I’m sure you know exactly what I mean. Candles and soft music and everything perfect and...” She can’t quite look at me now, and I’m looking everywhere but back at her. She somehow manages to finish her sentence: “...and - well – fireworks.”

How did she know? That’s exactly what I was going to tell Beth. I never expected to hear it from my mother – and I can’t imagine telling her she’s right, not if I live to be a hundred. But I don’t have to say it; my expression gives it away. “You’re expecting the same thing,” she says. “God, it’s like looking in a mirror when I talk to you.” She’s overcome for a moment. I am, too.

“Mom, it’s OK. I know...”

She recovers a bit. “I’m almost finished,” she says. “I think - if you’ve got anything at all of me inside you you’d probably sooner die than admit it – but I think you’re probably scared about tonight.”

I want to run over and hug her, and at the same time I'd like to go out to the backyard, dig a hole and bury myself in it for about the next thousand years. I can see in her eyes that Mom feels exactly the same. I don't know how she keeps going, but she does. "Well, here's my advice. Remember that – that Brian will be just as scared as you are. And there's nothing wrong with that. Maybe you've already figured it out on your own. It took me a long time to learn it, but being scared together can bring you so - so close."

Yes. That's something Brian and I learned right at the start of our relationship.

"There's one other thing I want you to remember tonight," she says, "you're going to be so overwhelmed and so tired, after the ceremony and the reception and everything, just – if nothing happens, or it doesn't happen how you're imagining it - if you don't feel – or he doesn't – that's OK. That's normal. There's nothing wrong."

Now I do run to her and hug her. I can't get any words out, but she understands what I'm saying just the same.

"That's right," she says softly, gently patting my head exactly the way she did when I was a little girl. "That's right. If – just remember – this is the most important thing of all. Whatever tonight is or isn't, you've got a whole lifetime together afterwards, you know?"

I do. I still can't speak. Mom holds me a little while longer, and then she kisses my forehead, snuffles, and leaves. When I turn to look at Beth, I see that she's hastily wiping a tear away.

"Wow," is all she says.

I agree. "Yeah. Wow."

"She was right about you," Beth says, looking at me curiously. "About being a romantic. But she wasn't - you're not – you aren't worried – don't tell me..." she trails off.

I can't look her in the eye, but I do give her a tiny nod.

"You can be incredibly thick sometimes, do you know that?"

So I've been told. I don't say anything, though. After a couple of moments of silence, she walks over to me, grabs my face and makes me look at her. "I shouldn't have to say any of this. Especially after everything your mother just

said.” she says. “But I guess I do.” She rolls her eyes and sighs theatrically. “Tell me, honestly. Has Brian ever had any complaints? Any at all?”

“No!” I blurt it out without thinking. Well, he hasn’t!

“Have you?”

The answer is the same, but it comes out in a much smaller voice, accompanied by a very red face. “No.”

“Then what are you worried about? You know what you’re doing, he knows what he’s doing, and you’ve never had a problem before, so don’t go looking for one now.”

When she says it that way, it *is* pretty hard to argue with.



At ten o’clock the team from the salon arrives: hairdresser, makeup artist, manicurist. My small bridal party is ready and waiting. Besides myself and Beth, there are just two of them: my fellow soon-to-be-med-student Janet Black, and Brian’s cousin Bianca.

They finish with all of us around noon, and then it’s a half hour getting everyone dressed. We’ve got another half hour before the limo comes. Beth and Janet are laughing about my bachelorette party, when they’re not needling me about how the color I picked for their dresses clashes so badly with Janet’s very red hair. What can I say? I chose the color two months before I chose Janet as a bridesmaid. I open my mouth to respond, and in unison they answer for me, “We know. It’s *your* day.” Meanwhile, Bianca is fidgeting uncomfortably in her dress and my Mom is running around trying to make sure she hasn’t forgotten anything.

I’m sitting in the kitchen, not thinking about anything in particular, but as I look up at the clock and watch the second hand sweep around I can feel my heart beating frantically. I’m not sure what’s going on; I don’t know why I’m so tense all of a sudden. This is supposed to be the best day of my life, right? I love Brian, I want to share my life with him.

So why do I want to tear off my beautiful dress, jump in the car and drive away as fast and far as I can?

I know exactly why.

“I need a minute,” I mumble, and I go upstairs to my room and lock the door. Lumpy’s sitting on the bed and I’m grateful. I’m going to need someone beside me who loves me unconditionally to get through this.

I pick up the phone and dial. Brian’s mother answers on the first ring, sounding very harassed. “Is Brian there? I need to talk to him,” I say without preamble. She can hear the panic in my voice, and I can hear the tiny note of hopefulness in hers as she calls out to Brian to pick up. It’s a year and a half and she still hasn’t really warmed up to me. She never, ever will, either. That’s fine – she’s about to get her wish.

As I wait for Brian to pick up, Lumpy nuzzles against me, licks my right hand. After this is done, he’ll be the only one who won’t think I’m horrible or stupid or crazy – or maybe all three. I hear a click as Brian picks up the phone. He’s panting. “Sara? What’s wrong?” He must have run to the phone. I can’t even guess what he thinks might be going on with me. I hate that I’m doing this to him, but what choice do I have?

I don’t know how to begin, so I just blurt it right out: “I love you – you know that. But I think I – we – you shouldn’t marry me. It’s not fair to you.”

“What are you talking about? You guys haven’t gotten into the champagne over there already, have you?” No, but I could use some right about now.

“I just – I’m going to be working all the time, I’m going to be cranky and crazy and it’s really unfair to you! What kind of life will you have putting up with that?” Which is all true, and we’ve been through it a thousand times and it’s never bothered him before.

“Sara, I know all that. It doesn’t matter. How many times do I have to tell you?” At least one more. “What’s got you so upset?”

He knows there’s something more. He’s going to force me to say it. “Fine! You want to know? I had a dream last night!”

Dead silence on his end. I know what he’s thinking. He doesn’t want to go through that again. He doesn’t deserve to. Nobody does. “Sara...” he says, finally.



“I don’t blame you. You’ll be better off. You could’ve been killed the last time, remember? You’re lucky you weren’t.” I’m glad he understands. He’s just being smart. It’s better for everyone this way.

“Sara!” I nearly drop the phone. He’s never shouted at me like that, not ever. “You’re an idiot, do you know that? I mean, you really are. You think I’m going to leave you at the altar because of a stupid dream?”

“You should!” I wish he would just accept it already.

He lowers his voice; it’s very soft, very gentle now. “Never. I don’t care what you dreamed. Whatever it is, I’ll be with you to face it. That’s where I have to be. That’s where I *want* to be, don’t you understand?”

I’m going to cry. I’m going to cry and ruin all the work Kellyanne from the salon did this morning. I really *am* stupid. Everyone’s saying it today and they’re all right. “Even if…”

“Even if anything,” he says.

“Even if it means marrying an idiot?” My heart’s starting to slow down now, just a bit. Maybe the tears won’t come after all.

“Especially if it means that,” he says, and I can’t argue with him anymore. I let him go, I’m sure he has last minute stuff to do before he and his family leave for the church, just like I do.

I’m getting married today, after all!



Brian’s looking at me expectantly. So is Father Murray, and so are a hundred other people. I look back at those hundred people sitting in the pews, my family and Brian’s, and our friends. There’s Grandma Lucy, with her oxygen tank right beside her, and Mom next to her, already crying. On the other side of the church I see Brian’s sister-in-law Lina and her two children, who Brian and I both met for the first time yesterday at our rehearsal dinner. They, along with everyone else, are waiting for me to say my vows.

I remember the words that I spent hours and hours wrestling with until they expressed exactly how I feel, but I can’t find my voice. I don’t know how long I stand there with all those eyes on me before I force myself to speak.

I can barely get a whisper out. “All I am, all I ever will be, I give to you.” Somehow, somehow, I feel stronger with every word. My voice gets louder, more confident. Everyone else starts to fade away; the hundred pairs of eyes and the altar and the beautiful stained glass windows and all the rest of it disappears. Brian and I might as well be floating in space, the only two people in the whole universe.

“I am yours and you are mine, body and soul.” He somehow recognizes the words, even though this is the first time he’s hearing them. “All my joys are yours to share, all your sorrows are mine to ease, in calm and in storm, now and forever.” I reach out and take his hands in mine. “Brian, my love, I offer myself as your wife, and I take you as my husband.”

The tears come suddenly; I feel as though my heart is going to burst. Brian looks as though he’s not far from crying himself.

Father Murray’s voice brings me back to Earth, but only for a moment. “By the power vested in me by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I now pronounce you man and wife,” he says. “You may kiss the bride,”

Brian lifts up my veil, takes me in his arms, and the world disappears again.



We’re in the hotel van for the five-minute ride to the airport. We spent our wedding night at the Keystone Gateway Hyatt, which was Beth’s idea. “You don’t want to spend your wedding night stuck on a plane for eight hours, do you?” she’d asked, and God bless her for thinking about it. Instead, we stayed near the airport and we’re flying out this morning. It’ll be early afternoon when we land in Hawaii.

This was much better.

And just for the record, yes, there were *definitely* fireworks.



One:

*Gross Anatomy*

(AUGUST 5-9, 1991)


I've been a medical student for exactly one week and already I feel like I'm a month behind. It's very little comfort that nearly everyone else in my class feels pretty much the same.

Well, I will admit that when Janet Black confessed to me – without prompting – that she felt like she was already *two* months behind, it did cheer me up a little bit.

I knew it would be like this, but knowing and experiencing are very different things. However unpleasant “Lecture – 8:00 AM to 12:30 PM,” Monday through Friday sounds, it's much, much worse. And that's just the mornings.

A few weeks ago I was laying out on a beautiful beach. Nothing but white sand and crystal-blue water, sipping a pina colada from a coconut with my husband – that still sounds weird to say – right next to me. Just a few weeks, but it already seems like another lifetime.

I wish I was back there.



The morning lectures are finished for today; two hours of biochemistry, two hours of Human Development. Now I've got an hour for lunch before my first ever Clinical Human Anatomy session. Also known as Gross Anatomy. Also known as dissection.

Whether to eat or not is a dilemma. I've been warned that it's best to come to the first few sessions with an empty stomach, until I get comfortable with the smell of formaldehyde. I've also been assured that I *will* become comfortable with it, probably quicker than I think (or want). On the other hand, it seems to me that standing over a body, scalpel in hand, isn't the best time to go light-headed from hunger. I compromise with a coke and a small bag of chips. I ought to be able to keep that down, no matter how gruesome it gets.

As soon as I finish, I'm joined by Janet Black. We've already decided to be dissection partners, so I'm assured that at there'll be at least one person in my group that I get along well with. We're going to be in groups of four, with sessions of four hours twice a week for the next six months, plus lots (and lots) of study time outside of that. That's far too many very stressful hours to spend with people you're not sure about, so having someone I've already known all through college is a great comfort.

We've already got a third member of the group as well: Paula Chen, from Hong Kong by way of the University of Washington. She was in the same orientation section with Janet and I, and she impressed us both with her near-photographic memory. I can't say that we became fast friends, but Janet and I agreed that having someone as obviously sharp as Paula seemed to be would be a good thing in our study group. For Paula's part, I think that, not really knowing anyone else in the class, she was just glad to be asked.

Paula sits down at our table in the cafeteria in her white coat; we're all in our white coats, and all of us have our hair pulled up into a bun. Great minds think alike, I guess - we all want to make sure there's no chance of it falling into our eyes while we're cutting today. We're all, I think, equally nervous. Paula can't quite look at either of us, and - although it's hard to see, since she's very fair to start with - Janet's even paler than usual.

We couldn't agree on a fourth member of our group, so we decided to let fate choose for us. Hopefully we'll get someone halfway decent. I've heard the first half hour of the first Anatomy session is a mad rush to get into a "desirable" dissection group.

At twenty after one, the three of us head over. I haven't yet set foot in Room 203-A, the Anatomy Theater, and when I do for the first time the smell hits me immediately. I expected it, but that doesn't really help. I close my eyes and try to put it out of my mind. Janet makes a sad sound somewhere between a cough and a whimper, so I know I'm not the only one feeling this way.

I give myself to the count of ten to collect myself and then I open my eyes. They're already starting to tear up from the formaldehyde, but I can still see. The Theater is huge; there are probably fifty tables spaced out across the room, each one with a sheet covering a cadaver. I'm trying really hard not to think too much about that, even though it's the reason I'm here. Some of the tables already have full groups around them, but there are large clumps of my fellow students in each corner, trying to sort themselves out.

"Let's get a good table," Paula says in her precise, perfect British accent – I've been meaning to ask her how she came by it - and she takes off for a spot near the front of the room, just one row back from the lectern. I take out my books (Grant's *Dissector* and Netter's *Atlas of Human Anatomy*), lay out my tools (scalpel, forceps, scissors, probe) in the little plastic tray, and fight my competing urges: to pull the sheet up and take a good look at our cadaver; or to turn tail, run out the door and never come back.

Janet and Paula busy themselves similarly while ungrouped students walk past one or two at a time, giving us a good once over. They're trying to decide if they want to spend the next six months in close company with us. Some just stand there for a second or two, while others take a couple of minutes. I can't begin to guess what basis they're using to decide; but whatever they're looking for, nobody seems to think we've got it.

Ten minutes pass, and there are still a good forty or fifty students who haven't found a group yet. One of them – if he's not the oldest person in the whole class,

he's got to be close to it – comes over to our table and looks the three of us over carefully.

I think I've spoken to him once, right after our first orientation lecture; his name is Jack, or John, something like that. He's – if I had to guess, I'd say late thirties. His hair is just starting to thin, and he's got the beginnings of wrinkles under his eyes. I also see, when the sleeve of his coat slides up, a very nasty scar on his left forearm. I think I remember him saying something about his dissertation, so I assume he's got a Ph.D. - in what, I have no idea.

He smiles at each of us in turn. "Are you ladies looking for a fourth?"

"Are you offering?" I ask. His smile goes all the way to his eyes; that seems like a good sign to me.

"Joseph Harkness, at your service," he answers, reaching out his hand. I shake it.

"Sara Bar – sorry. Alderson. Sara Alderson," I introduce myself. Out of the corner of my eye I see Janet grinning. It doesn't come naturally yet; it hasn't even been two months, after all.

"Newlywed?"

"Seven weeks," I answer.

"Congratulations," he says, then introduces himself to Paula and Janet. They quickly look at each other and then over to me. "Do I pass?" We all nod – yes, he does.

"Welcome aboard," I answer. While he gets himself set up, he tells us very briefly about himself. He *does* have a Ph.D., in Archaeology. He's also actually forty three years old, and married with three children. He volunteers his house, specifically the just-finished basement he's very proud of, as a meeting place for us if we want to all study together. That works for me.

Out of nowhere, there's a loud whine of feedback; Janet and I both cringe at the sound, and we're far from alone. Then it's gone, and the whole room, all 170 of us, turn towards the lectern. A short, balding Indian man stands there, tapping the microphone. "Welcome to Clinical Human Anatomy," he announces. "I am Dr. Bhapati." I will be assisted by Drs. Haynes," he gestures to one corner, where a tall, very severe-looking brown-haired woman stands, arms crossed,

“Morgan,” and he points to a dark-skinned man in another corner who’s almost, but not quite, smiling, “and Willis,” he nods behind him towards a bored-looking man who’s easily the youngest of our teachers.

“You may open your dissector to page five and begin by reviewing the structures of the back as indicated. When you have completed your review, you will find the instructions for beginning the actual dissection on page 8.”

This doesn’t seem right to me. We just start reading on our own, and whenever we feel ready we start cutting? I expected a lot more guidance. Janet and Paula clearly feel the same way, but Joseph shrugs. “Throwing us right into the deep end, aren’t they?” He takes the sheet and pulls it off, uncovering our cadaver; I force myself not to turn away. This is why I’m here, isn’t it?

Forty minutes later, all of us have identified everything we’re supposed to identify; we’ve looked at a skeleton and survived a brief quiz from Dr. Haynes on the vertebral column, and now we’re ready to begin cutting. None of us seem eager to take the lead, and we’re not alone. From the sound of it only a couple of groups have actually begun dissecting, and I can hear nervous – and occasionally angry – whispering around us.

This is ridiculous. No more waiting - *this is why I’m here*. I do give it a few more seconds, just in case anybody else wants to jump in. When they don’t, I pick up my scalpel. “Can someone read for me?” I ask as I lean over the cadaver, feeling for the correct spot to begin.

“I will,” Paula answers. “Make an incision starting at the external occipital protuberance,” she says; I’m already there, right at the top of the neck. I take a deep breath, and I start cutting.



I walk out of the Anatomy Theater and there’s a surprise waiting for me: Brian’s here! I was feeling – well, “tired” doesn’t really begin to cover it, but the sight of him wakes me right up.

“How was it?” he asks. He tries to hug me, but I push him away. He realizes why almost immediately.

“Let me get these off before you touch me,” I say, “believe me, you don’t want this smell on you.” Five minutes later, after I’ve taken off my gloves and stuffed my lab coat and apron into my locker, I do hug him very, very tightly. “It was – it was something. I’ll tell you all about it – as much as you want to hear, anyway.”

Joseph is right behind me coming from the lockers. “She was outstanding,” he says. “Steady hands, calm, you’d never know this was her first time.” He hastily pulls his hand back after he introduces himself, when he realizes he’s still got his exam gloves on. “Sorry about that. It’s all going to take some getting used to,” he says.

We’re invited to his house for dinner Friday night with his wife and children, and we accept. I say my goodbyes for the day to Janet and Paula and then we head for home.

Home is the grad student dorm, Drake Tower. The ninth floor is set aside for married students, and so we’ve got our own little mini-suite: a bedroom, a tiny living room and our own bathroom. 364 square feet all to ourselves to start our married life together. And then there are seven other couples on the floor each with 364 square feet of their own.

Anyway, there will be. At the moment we’re the only ones on the floor. There are a handful of med students scattered throughout the rest of the building, including Janet, but that’s it. The medical school is the only one that starts so early; next up is the law school, in another three weeks, and then everyone else the week after that. It’s very strange, living in a building that’s supposed to house 230 people, when there are only a dozen or so actually here.

Then again, everything about my life feels strange right now. Medical school on its own would be more than enough to get used to. Adjusting to married life is a whole other thing. There’s a big difference – much bigger than I had imagined – between eating most of our meals and spending three or four nights a week together, and eating every meal and spending every night together, forever. Not to mention sharing a bathroom and closets and everything else. But we’re both getting used to it.



We've budgeted for one fancy – well, fancy-ish, anyway - dinner a month, and Brian wants to take me out for it tonight as a treat for surviving my first Anatomy class. So it's into the shower to wash the smell of formaldehyde away, because nobody, least of all me, will appreciate that at dinner!



I think and hope I'm only imagining that I still smell, despite washing my hair three times. Brian swears that he doesn't notice at all. I guess I'll try to believe him. Over dinner, I tell him all about the class, at least as much as I can without spoiling both our appetites. As I do I realize something: "You know what? Today's really the first time I felt like I'm on my way towards being a doctor."

He looks at me blankly; he has no idea what I mean. "Everything up to now has just been words. Classwork is classwork. It's been hard, but it's in the end it's just lectures and reading. More of it than I'm used to, OK, but still, I can handle that." A lot more than I'm used to, and I'm barely handling it, but it's not fundamentally different than most of what I did in undergrad. "Today, though – picking up that scalpel – that was something else. It felt like – I don't know, an initiation, does that make sense?"

He nods; I think he gets exactly what I mean now. "I'm really proud of you," he tells me, and I can see it in his eyes. When he looks at me that way, my face flushes and I can feel my heart flutter.

He toasts me and I raise the one glass of wine I'm allowing myself. "Here's to the future Dr. Bar – Alderson."

We both laugh. "I did the same thing today. It's just going to take some getting used to."

We enjoy our dinner immensely; it's worlds better than the frozen meals we've been eating since we moved in, and we both definitely needed it. We linger over our food, but finally at nine o'clock we have to head home. I've got at least two hours of studying to get through before I can go to bed.



*Sara is in the Anatomy Theater, all alone. A voice calls out instructions to her, but she can't see who it is. There's nobody else at her table to read from the*

*dissector, to give specific directions on where to cut, what to do, so she props the book up and tries to keep one eye on it and the other on her cadaver.*

*She begins to cut, but as she does the instructions become questions: identify this, describe that. They come faster and faster, and she can't keep up, no matter how she tries. Her hands won't move fast enough, her mind can't come up with the answers quickly enough or, finally, at all...*

*...she finds herself somewhere else, in an immaculately clean kitchen. The appliances are new; stainless steel all around, gleaming as though everything has just been polished. On the stove a teapot whistles, and an older woman, someone Sara can't recall ever having met, picks it up and pours boiling water into a teacup. "Abraham," the woman calls out, and Sara does recognize the man who enters the kitchen: Dr. Morris. The woman must be his wife, and Sara knows now that it's her dream she's seeing.*

*She hands Dr. Morris his tea, and, still in his pajamas, he takes a sip. He frowns, sniffs the cup, and then begins to cough violently. The cup flies out of his hand, shattering against the wall, and he goes white as a ghost. The coughing fit continues and now blood comes up as well as spittle. He lets out a strangled cry and falls face-first into the wooden kitchen table, then slides backwards off of it. His head hits the floor with a hollow thud, and he does not move again.*

*His wife doesn't approach; she looks at the scene fearfully, but Sara can't tell if she's afraid for her husband, or for herself...*



My eyes open, and I'm out of bed in one swift motion. I have to call 911. Someone's very sick, they might be dead, they...

It was a dream. Someone else's dream.

Brian's awake; he's staring at me. My hand is still on the phone. "What – who – are you calling someone?"

I sit down on the bed. "I – I guess I have to tell you, don't I? I had a dream."

He knows immediately what I mean. "Who?" is all he asks.

"Dr. Morris. Well, his wife." I haven't had a dream since the night before our wedding, and that one was about Dr. Morris, too. Someone was dreaming about

his funeral. “I assume it was his wife, she must have been. She gave him some tea, and he took one sip and - basically he dropped dead as soon as he did.” As I tell it, I realize that I *have* seen her before – sometime during orientation. Maybe at the reception for my class that first night? It makes sense; a lot of the faculty had their spouses there.

I can’t think about it anymore – I’m starting to get a splitting headache. Brian takes me in his arms. “Are you all right?” I don’t answer; I want – need - to just sit here and be held for a while.



I’m still awake. I closed my eyes so Brian would think I had fallen asleep, and that way he would go back to sleep himself, which he did after a few minutes. I didn’t want to keep him up all night just because I was. But now that I’m lying here and unable to get the dream out of mind, it doesn’t seem like such a great idea.

I thought about the dreams all during our honeymoon; I was worried they were going to keep coming, but they never did. I told myself the one I had must have been a fluke, something random.

Then school started, and still nothing, and it was completely out of my mind. Especially once I actually saw Dr. Morris, alive and walking around just as he should be. But now, tonight, it’s happened again. And it was about him again - twice now I’ve seen Dr. Morris dead. I assume that first dream was his wife as well, but what does it mean? Is she worried about him dying, or does she want him dead?

Or, even worse, is she actively planning on making him that way?

Am I - are we - going to have to become detectives again? Save someone’s life, when they don’t even know they’re in danger? I thought, after Dr. Walters, we’d never have to go through that again. I hope I wasn’t wrong.



The week flies by and, thankfully, there are no more dreams. It’s still a tough week, though - a blur of lectures and presentations and endless reading. The one highlight – or lowlight, really - is when Janet freaks out Wednesday during her

first turn at dissection. The rest of us manage to talk her down and get her through it. After class, Brian and I invite her up to our rooms for dinner, which seems to help somewhat.

Thursday night Beth calls and we talk for a half hour; I could sit on the phone all night with her. I mostly let her talk; there'll be plenty of time to tell her about everything I'm doing and thinking and feeling, but it's really good to have a break from myself, even for just a little while. She updates me on her news: she's got her apartment in Columbus sorted out.

She's heading there in three weeks; she's going to be at Ohio State, working on a doctorate in psychology. If everything goes well, in just three to six years she'll be finished. As she says, "I might even get to call myself 'doctor' before you do!" I wouldn't bet against it.

God, I miss her.

Friday night we take Joseph up on his dinner invitation. He lives in a cute little house just off of Mayfield Road; it's an easy walk on a pleasant summer evening. His wife, Mary, introduces herself as she greets us at the door. Brian and I exchange a look; we're both trying not to laugh. Mary rolls her eyes, but she doesn't seem all that annoyed. "We've heard every joke you can think of," she says with a grin as she ushers us into the house.

"But I've got a standing offer, \$20 to anybody who tells us an original one," Joseph says stepping up behind her. She's a little taller than I am, and Joseph is a bit taller than Brian; they look something like an older version of us. I wonder if Brian sees that too, and what he thinks about it.

Joseph takes our offering, a box of fresh pastries from Presti's Bakery, and disappears into the kitchen. "Sit down," Mary says. "We'll eat as soon as the heathens get back with the food." I assume she's referring to their kids. "I was going to cook, but I got held up at work, and Joseph - he's been too tired to do much cooking since - well, Sara, I don't need to tell you." No, you don't.

"It's been a lot, that's for sure," I say. "I knew going in, but knowing isn't the same as doing." Especially not in Anatomy! "I'm keeping my head above water so far, though," I say, and Brian squeezes my hand. "With plenty of help," I add.

“Joseph tells me you’re newlyweds,” Mary says, looking us both over a little more closely now. “When we got married, we had this tiny basement apartment – Joseph was in graduate school, I was waitressing, we had no money at all. It sounds so dreadful when I say it now, but it wasn’t that way at all.” I know exactly what she means.

There’s a commotion outside the front door; their kids have obviously picked this moment to return. We’re introduced to them as they troop in with dinner. “That’s Kevin, he’s about to start his senior year in high school,” a teenage boy, the very image of his father, comes past. Behind him, a pretty girl with long blonde hair, maybe a shade lighter than her mother, “Jeannie, she just turned thirteen last week.” Both Brian and I mumble “Happy birthday” as she heads to the kitchen. And then there’s “Chris, he’ll be ten next month,” a shy-looking boy with dark hair comes in and shuts the door behind him.

The smell of good Chinese food draws us into the kitchen, where we fill our plates and then head into the dining room to eat. We get the story about Joseph’s scar, despite Mary’s protest that it’s not appropriate dinner table conversation. He’d just finished college, and he was working on an archaeological dig in New Mexico, way out in the middle of nowhere, just him and a couple of other volunteers and the site director. “I wasn’t paying attention, and I swung my pick right into my forearm. Took out a chunk this big,” he holds his fingers almost two inches apart, and everyone at the table winces. “The site director got the bleeding stopped, but it was an eight hour drive to the nearest hospital, and the wound got infected,” everyone winces again, “but they got me sorted out in the end,” he finishes with a sheepish grin.

A little later Jeannie asks Brian and me how we met, and I tell her our agreed-upon version of the story. “It was right before finals week and I was very stressed out, so my roommate dragged me to this new club downtown. We walked in the door, and I saw Brian across the room. Our eyes met, and I just knew, right then, he was the one. He proposed six months later, and here we are.” It’s even almost true.

After dinner Mary disappears for a moment and then returns with a box in her hands – a game I haven’t played since I was little: “Operation.”

It doesn't take long to get into the swing of things; it's exactly like my childhood memories. I remove the Spare Ribs with no problem, but I can't fix the Broken Heart. Joseph doesn't do any better representing the medical school – he can't even take out the Charley Horse. It's their eldest who's the big winner – Kevin gets out the Water on the Knee, connects the Ankle Bone to the Knee Bone, and earns applause from everyone for doing the hardest one of all, the Bread Basket. “You might want to think about medical school yourself,” Brian says afterwards, but the boy shakes his head.

“I see how much homework Dad's got every night. No way!”



I'm very quiet on the walk home. It was a very pleasant evening, but it also gave me a lot to think about. For one thing, seeing Joseph and Mary with their kids – that could be Brian and me in a few years. I want it to be. We've talked about it a little bit, but I've been thinking about it quite a lot and tonight really brought it home to me.

It's also very strange, comparing myself to Joseph. During dissection, I'm every bit his equal – if I'm being honest, I'm better – and he's a “real” adult with three children while I've only been out of college for two and a half months, married for not quite eight weeks. He's only a year younger than my Dad, for God's sake, and I'm comparing myself favorably to him as a professional – well, a professional-in-training, anyway.

At the same time, I'm only five years older than Joseph's son, who's still in high school. And when I think of it that way, it feels like Brian and me are just playing house, pretending we're adults when we're really nowhere near ready to actually *be* adults.

Brian doesn't say anything much walking home either, but when we get up to our rooms, it turns out he's been thinking along similar lines. “I mean, he's old enough to be my father, but I'm married the same as he is,” he says, shaking his head. “I'm not sure what to think about it.” I'm not either.

I look over at the clock. It's ten thirty. I could easily get another two hours of reading in tonight. But it occurs to me that there's something far more important

– and enjoyable – I could be doing right now. With my adult husband, who I am certainly not just “playing house” with.

Again, Brian is thinking the same thing I am. He leads me into the bedroom, and all thoughts of reading, studying or anything other than him and how much I love him, are forgotten.



*Two:*

*Flatliners*

(AUGUST 10-12, 1991)

**I**t's Saturday morning. The weekend! Two whole days to – well, do the same thing I do on weekdays. Read, study, review. I'll be doing it with my dissection group today; we've taken Joseph up on his offer to host us.

Brian's actually been studying as well; he's trying to get a jump on the semester, because he's taking two extra classes. If he can do that both semesters this year, he'll be able to graduate a semester early, in December of 1992 instead of May 1993. That's six months sooner he can start working, at a real job with a real health plan and real benefits and a real salary that would pay for a real apartment with real furniture and all the rest of it. It might even mean that we could – no, I don't want to get ahead of myself.

Anyway, he's been working really hard so he's going to take the afternoon off, go downtown and watch a baseball game, while I'm stuck in a basement going over everything I'm supposed to have learned this past week. I'm very jealous.



We have breakfast, get around slowly, and actually talk for a while. We haven't done nearly enough of that, and when we have mostly it's been me talking about my classes and my feelings and my everything else. I know things are only going to get more difficult and more stressful as the semester goes on. I'm going to both have less time for Brian, and need his support more when I do have actual free time. So I have to try and be conscious of that, and make sure to give him as much of my time and energy as I can when I've got it to spare.

At first he doesn't really say much and I have to keep asking questions, but after a while he opens up. The main thing he tells me is that he's trying to get used to everything; being married and living together is new for him as much as for me, after all. But it also comes out that he's worried about me "leaving him behind." When I talked about my first Anatomy session, and how it felt like an initiation, that really stuck with him.

"You're going to have this huge part of your life that I won't be a part of, that you can't share with me at all," he says. "I didn't realize until this week what that meant."

I want to reassure him, tell him that's not so, but the truth is that it is. I can tell him all about what I'm learning. Later on when I'm practicing, I'll be able to talk about what I'm doing – sometimes - but talk is all it'll be. It'll only be telling, not really sharing. I'm going to be doing things he'll never do, with responsibilities he'll never have, and the only people who'll be able to truly relate to it are my fellow students and my future colleagues.

He's absolutely right to be worried, to wonder if medical school isn't just going to turn me into a doctor, but turn the Sara he loves into a Dr. Alderson who's a stranger to him.

That's not acceptable. I can't let that happen. It isn't what I promised him. "All I am, all I ever will be, I give to you.' I meant that," I say. I'm going to keep on meaning it and however difficult it is, I'm going to make sure Dr. Alderson does, too.

"I know," is all he says, and I know he's answering not just my words but what I'm thinking as well. He takes me in his arms, kisses me, and he doesn't let me go.



We have our review session. We work from noon straight through until almost five o'clock. My back hurts, my eyes hurt, my brain hurts. We all look terrible; if I didn't know better I'd say that Paula's about ready to start bleeding from her eyes, and Joseph clearly needs about three days worth of sleep. But it's Janet who's in the worst shape; she was pretty shaky even before we started, her attention kept wandering all day long and now she's absolutely dead on her feet.

Joseph offers to grill some burgers for us – well, he offers to have his son Kevin do it, anyway – and I'd be happy to stay, but Janet refuses. She's looking worse by the minute and I don't want her walking back alone. I take a rain check on the burgers and go home with her instead.

I think something must be wrong, more than just lack of sleep and stress from schoolwork, but she won't admit to anything despite my best efforts to wheedle an answer out of her. I have to be careful; I don't want to push too hard and upset her even more. That's the least of our problems, though. She gets worse and worse as we walk; she's staggering as though she was drunk and not really looking where she's going at all. When we reach Euclid Avenue, she starts crossing against traffic – actually that makes it sound better than it is, really she's just walking blindly into the street. I grab her arm and barely manage to pull her back from getting hit by a bus.

“Janet! Look where you're going!” I shout at her, and she just collapses into my arms, right there on the sidewalk. She's not going to make it back home like this; the next best thing is to get her somewhere indoors, where she can at least sit down for a few minutes.

After much effort, I get her more or less back on her feet and steer her over to the Subway restaurant midway down the block. I deposit her in a chair and get her a Coke and a small ham and cheese sandwich. I figure it can't hurt to get some food, as well as caffeine and sugar, into her.

I manage to talk her into eating and she perks up slightly, enough that I feel like I can leave her for a minute to get something for myself as well. As we eat I try again to get some kind of answer; I'm convinced there's something very

wrong with her. “Look, if you’re sick I’ll take you to the emergency room. I’ll stay with you, don’t worry about that.”

She insists she’s not sick. Maybe she’s telling me the truth: she’s not coughing or sniffing or sneezing. She doesn’t have any other obvious symptoms that I can see. I stare into her eyes, not really sure what I should even be looking for. I feel her forehead, which she doesn’t protest, and her temperature seems normal, I think. I even start to reach down to touch her nose to make sure it’s cold and wet before I catch myself – that’s dogs, not people. I have to force down a laugh – two weeks of medical school and I’m trying to diagnose her!

But then I realize something: she looks pretty much exactly how I looked when I was having the nightmares, waking up in the middle of the night every night, seeing the most horrible things in my head.

She can’t be – can she? Is it possible? It seems absurd, but why should I be the only person who has the dreams?

I have to find out. She won’t tell me if I ask – *I* wouldn’t have - but if she is having them, she’ll give something away by her reaction to the question. I start by asking how much sleep she’s been getting, and she tells me “I don’t know. Three hours a night, four maybe?” A couple of weeks of that is enough to screw anyone up, but she hasn’t been like this for two weeks, just since dissection on Wednesday, at least that I’ve noticed.

The big question won’t seem so odd, now I’ve asked how she’s sleeping. “Have you been having any kind of weird dreams lately?” She gives me a blank look; no reaction at all. Nothing. Well, scratch that theory, and I’m happy for her that I can.

I’m still convinced that there’s something seriously wrong but she’ll have to tell me about it, if she even wants to, in her own time. For now she finishes her sandwich and she looks – hopefully – strong enough to finish walking home. We get back to Drake Tower in one piece, and I make sure she gets off the elevator on the right floor and into her room before I go upstairs.

Brian’s home and when I open the door he’s right there to greet me with a kiss; there’s no better way to come home than that. We’re there, just holding each other right in the doorway, for a few minutes before we get inside and I shut the

door behind me. I let him tell me about his day, how much he enjoyed the game, and how he wished I'd been able to come with him. Him and me both. When he's done I tell him about Janet, and he's not very surprised. "She looked terrible when you guys left this morning. I hope she'll be OK."

So do I.



*Sara's in an unfamiliar room; green-tiled walls, bright lights shining down on a table, monitor screens all around. The table is in the center of the room, with someone lying on it, covered up to the neck by a sheet; someone who's bald. And there's someone standing over the table, in a surgical gown, gloves, and a cap from which red hair spills down her back.*

*It's Janet in the surgical gown, and Sara knows this is her dream. Janet's dreaming of an operating room, scalpel in hand, standing over a woman who can only be her mother. Sara looks more closely, and the resemblance is obvious.*

*Janet's mother is out cold, and Janet turns from the table to a shelf behind her. Sara recognizes the textbooks she's using this semester on the shelf, and Janet takes them one at a time, flips through them, growing ever more frantic as she does. She gives up, finally, on finding the answer in a book and goes back to the operating table. She slowly, carefully pulls the sheet back, revealing her mother's chest, and she steadies herself, lowering the scalpel, ready to begin cutting...*



My cheeks are wet. I've been crying. Why?

Oh – oh, God. I remember it – I dreamed it.

Oh, Janet. I wish I hadn't seen. I wish it wasn't true. Now I know why she's been such a mess. "Her mother," I hear myself say.

My voice stirs Brian awake. "Sara?"

"I'm fine, don't worry," I tell him. "But I know what's wrong with Janet."

He looks at me blankly for a moment. Then: "You had a dream. You saw her," he says, comprehension dawning.

"I shouldn't tell you. We talked about that last year. You know I trust you, I'll tell you anything. I won't keep any secrets from you - but this isn't my secret. I

don't have the right to tell it. Not to anybody."

He nods. "I know. Don't say anything, I understand."

But I have to. I can't just carry this around by myself. It's too horrible. Besides, Brian won't tell anyone else. Even if I didn't trust him completely, who *would* he tell?

It's a flimsy rationalization; I don't really believe it. Still, it's good enough to quiet my conscience for the moment. "I shouldn't, I know what I just said. But – it's – her mother has cancer. She must have only just found out this week."

He shudders, and I know he's thinking exactly the same thing I am: "how would I feel if I found out it was my Mom?" I'd be – I don't want to go there. Not even hypothetically. The look on his face tells me his answer is the same as mine.

It's a while before he says anything. Finally: "Are you sure? You could have misunderstood, couldn't you?"

I've already violated Janet's confidence; there's no point in keeping any of it back now. I tell him everything I saw and he agrees - especially combined with the way she's been acting – that there's really no other way to interpret it.

So what the hell do we do, now that we know? It's not like the nightmares with Dr. Walters. There's no one to warn, no criminal to track down, no victim to save. There's just a friend who's in pain, and I can't even try to comfort her because I'm not supposed to know why she's hurting in the first place.



I wish Beth were here; she might have a good idea - or at least *an* idea - how to help Janet. I call her but she's away for the weekend. I'd ask Mom, but then I'd have to tell her how I know, and I can't think of a believable enough lie to make that conversation worth having. But – there is someone else who knows about the dreams. Someone whose judgment I trust.

Unfortunately, Aunt Kat doesn't have any brilliant thoughts either. "Just be there for her, until she decides she wants to talk about it," she tells me, which is pretty much what I'd come up with on my own.

She asks me, just like Brian did, if I could have misinterpreted what I saw. I snap at her, letting out all the pain and anger and helplessness I'm feeling, "She was dreaming about being in an operating room, with her bald-headed mother on the table, and she was getting ready to slice her breast off! You tell me what else she could be thinking about!"

There's dead silence on the other end of the line. I feel guilty for shouting at her, but before I can apologize, Kat speaks. "You're right. It's hard to see any other explanation. I feel for her – it was very hard when my mother got sick. Your Mom tried to be there for me, and - looking back, I'm grateful to her, for everything she did. But at the time, she – she wasn't much help. Nobody was. I had to get through it myself. Your friend's going to have to do the same."

That feels like the least helpful and also probably the most truthful thing she's ever said to me. We talk for a few minutes more, she asks how school is going and how I'm enjoying married life and I halfheartedly tell her, but I really don't feel up to any more conversation than that.



I try to do some reading, to see if I can get a little bit ahead for the coming week, but I can't concentrate at all. I can't stop thinking about Janet and what she must be going through. I try to think of anyone she might have to confide in, or draw support from, and I keep coming up blank.

She doesn't have a boyfriend. She's an only child, and – she's never said exactly why and I'm sure the reason isn't very pleasant – her father isn't in her life at all. She was social enough in college, but as far as I know she didn't have a really close best friend like Beth is to me. And I know for sure, because we spend so much time going to class, in class, and reviewing after class together, that she isn't especially close to anyone else in the medical school.

I don't know about her extended family or any friends she's still got from high school, but I kind of doubt there's anyone very close there, either. The truth is, I think I might be the nearest thing she's got to a best friend and confidante.

Kat may be right – she may have to get through this by herself. But while she does, I'm going to make sure she knows she's not all alone. I can't just sit here; I

have to do something. Maybe – even if she doesn't want to open up to me, at least I can take her mind off things for a little while.

I go downstairs to her room, and I have to knock several times before she answers. She doesn't look any better than she did last night. I'm wondering if I should rethink my plan; I was going to try and get her to take a walk with me up to Coventry, but I'm not sure she could handle a twenty minute walk outside right now.

"Hey, Sara," she mumbles. She's got headphones draped around her neck; no wonder she didn't answer the door right away.

"I just stopped down to see if you wanted to take a walk with me. I was going to go up to Tommy's and get a milkshake, you know? What do you think?"

She gestures back towards her bed, where her Biochemistry text sits open. "I'm going over Friday's lecture again," she says. "I still can't get my mind around it."

I turn around so she can see my backpack. "I've got my notes in here. I was going to do some work, too."

She gives me a faint smile, which isn't much but it's the cheeriest she's looked in several days. "Of course you were," she says. "You never go anywhere without your notes."

I nod. "Never. So how about it? Maybe a nice chocolate and peanut butter shake will help you figure everything out."

It takes a little more badgering but she eventually gives in. I keep a close eye on her as we walk up; I don't want her wandering off into traffic again. She starts to fade by the time we get to Coventry Road, but once we're there it's only two more blocks and she's – barely - got enough energy for that.

We really didn't talk much at all on the walk up; she was lost in her own very sad world. Once we get to Tommy's, she spreads out her books and notes while I place our orders. She doesn't really notice when I join her, or when her raspberry and root beer shake arrives. "How can you drink that? It looks vile!" I say, and she finally registers my presence.

"I'm sorry," she says, clearly not having heard what I actually said. "Did you want to try it?"

God, no. “It’s all yours,” I tell her. I open my notebook. “So what are you getting hung up on?”

She sighs. “All of it. I wasn’t feeling so great Friday, I couldn’t really make myself pay attention in the lecture, you know?” I nod. “I’ve been – I’ve had a – I guess I haven’t been sleeping well, that’s all. I think it’s catching up with me.” She was about to say something more, before she caught herself. I want to push, I want to make her say it. But I don’t. It’s got to be in her own time.

“I know what you mean. I’m just lucky I’ve got Brian, he’s been helping me so much.”

She goes somewhere else for a moment; her eyes are unfocused and distant. “I was so surprised when you asked me to be a bridesmaid,” she says, and I have to concentrate to keep from going back to my wedding with her. She needs me here, now.

“Well, we’ve been friends for four years, and you helped me so much when I broke my ankle, I never forgot that.” Maybe she’s working herself up to telling me. Trying to gather her courage.

“Your wedding was really beautiful,” she says, still far away. “And your Mom – you look so much like her.” She’s almost ready.


“That’s what everybody says. Anyway, I’m glad you were a part of my wedding. It meant a lot to me.”

“I wish – God, Sara, I really need to – shit!” I’m so intent on watching her eyes that I don’t see at first what happens; there’s a sharp crack and then Janet jumps up from the table. There’s a red stain all down the left leg of her jeans. She’s looking down at it, horrified.

She knocked her milkshake all over herself, and the glass shattered on the floor. But if you didn’t know, you could almost think it’s blood all down her leg instead, and I would bet everything I own that’s what she’s seeing in her mind.

This was a bad idea. She was so close to telling me, but not now. I’ve only made things worse. I go up to the cashier and ask if they can call a taxi for us; there’s no way Janet’s walking home in this state. I drag her into the bathroom and clean her up the best I can. Then I pack up my book and all of hers and take her home.





“I completely blew it,” I say. I’m lying in bed, Brian right beside me. “I wanted to help her, and I almost got her to open up to me and then - it’s all ruined now.”


He caresses my cheek. “You were just doing what you always do, trying to help someone you care about.”

“Keep doing that,” it’s so nice. Nothing seems quite so bad when he does that.

“It’s hard for her. Maybe she’s afraid you won’t want to hear it. She doesn’t want to lose the one good friend she’s got, you know?” He pulls me closer to him, kisses my forehead. “I wouldn’t want to lose you.”

I kiss him on the lips. “You won’t ever have to worry about that.” Neither of us say anything for a while; we just lie together, lost in our own thoughts. “You’re probably right, though. Or – I don’t know. I’m sure there are a million things going through her head, and each one is worse than the last,” I say finally.

He doesn’t have anything to say to that; he just keeps holding me, caressing me, and after a while I start to feel a little better. I know there are things I could be doing, notes I could review, chapters I could read. But I don’t feel up to any of that now; all I want to do is lie here in my husband’s arms and try to forget how badly I screwed up with Janet today.



*Sara is in a hospital room, sitting in an uncomfortable chair and staring at her mother, unconscious in the bed next to her. Visiting hours are long over, but Sara ignored the announcements and no one has had the heart to order her out.*

*Every few minutes there’s the buzzing sound that means her mother’s blood pressure is automatically taken, and occasionally Sara glances at the monitor to see that the numbers haven’t changed.*

*There are tubes down her mother’s mouth, and in her nose. There are two IVs. Even if she were conscious, she wouldn’t be able to move. But she isn’t conscious, and there is no sign that she’s going to be. Her chest rises and falls in time with the machine that’s breathing for her; her eyes, though open, are utterly lifeless.*

*On the small table next to Sara, there is a stack of books. Each one has post-it notes on nearly every page, each one is highlighted and commented upon in the margins from beginning to end. Sara looks at them, knowing she's been through every one more times than she cares to count, knowing they've provided no answers, no hope at all.*

*A woman enters the room in her long white coat. It's Dr. Haynes, looking every bit as severe tonight as she does twice a week in the Anatomy Theater. "Enough is enough," she says to Sara. "You know this patient's prognosis. You know there's nothing more to be done."*

*Sara argues that it isn't so; there are more treatments to try, more drugs that might have an effect. She's certain that she's missed something in one of the books; there must be something that can be done.*

*"You're being childish," Dr. Haynes tells her. "You have to learn to recognize when there is no hope, and accept it." Dr. Haynes walks behind the bed, behind the machines, and takes hold of a plug in the wall, pulls it out with a jerk. The machines go silent, the monitors and even the lights in the room go dark...*



I open my eyes, and I can feel that my cheeks are wet. I've been crying. Something – something bad happened, but I can't remember what it was. Brian's holding me, staring at me, wiping my tears away.

"What – did you have another dream?"

No, I don't think so. I don't remember – no. I just – I feel so sad, and I don't know why. "I want to call my mother. What time is it?" I need to talk to her. I need to hear her voice. I need to know she's OK – that there's nothing wrong with her. I wish I knew why I'm so worried about her; she's not sick, she's in perfect health. I talked to her just the other day and everything was normal, everything was fine.

"It's just after six," Brian says. That's too early. I can't call now. I'll wait until I'm ready to leave for class – she's usually up by then. She's fine, right? Of course she is.

*Three:*  
*Too Close for Comfort*

(AUGUST 12-14, 1991)

I call my Mom on my way out the door at twenty to eight, and nobody answers. I'm sure she's just in the shower, and Bob is asleep, and Dad's on his way to work and everything's fine. There's no reason to think otherwise. Still, I ask Brian to call again later in the morning, just to make sure.

Waiting for the elevator, I have a hunch about Janet. We've been meeting in the lobby and walking over to class together, but I've got a feeling she might not be there today. So I push three and get off on her floor. She enough, when I knock on the door she's still in her room, still in her pajamas.

"I just woke up," she says, but it looks more like she never went to sleep in the first place.

I can probably harass her into throwing some clothes on and going to class, but it's hard to picture her doing anything other than falling asleep in the back of the lecture hall. "Don't worry about it. You stay home this morning. I'll go over my notes with you tonight."

She relaxes, as though I've lifted a hundred pound weight off her shoulders. "Are you sure?" she says, but it's not really a question.

"It's no problem. Just get some rest, and come to dissection this afternoon. You really shouldn't miss that." She tenses right back up, but what am I supposed to do? Missing lecture is one thing, but I can't let her fall behind in dissection, too. She doesn't answer me. "Lie down for a while longer. I'll see you at one thirty," I say, and she nods and closes the door on me.

I go downstairs, and on my way out I stop at the phone right outside the front door. I call up to Brian and ask him to check on Janet at noon or so and make sure she comes to dissection. Then, finally, I set off for class.



It's only the fact that I'm taking notes for Janet as well as myself that enables me to keep my mind on the lectures. And even so I have to keep reminding myself every few minutes, because I keep having the most horrible thoughts about Mom.

What happened last night should have been obvious the minute I woke up: I had a dream about her, and in the dream something very bad happened to her. I don't remember what it was, but it had to have been pretty awful to make me this worried about her. And it's equally obvious why I dreamed about her: because of Janet and her mother.

Anyone else would probably have realized it five minutes after waking up, but it doesn't occur to me until almost noon, when the morning classes are nearly finished. I feel like an idiot not to have realized sooner. I wouldn't have been worrying all morning about my Mom if I had, that's for sure.

The last half hour of our Human Development lecture goes much more quickly now that my mind is eased. I take very detailed notes, and when the lecture is finally over, I walk outside – and straight into Brian. He's waiting right outside the door for me, and he doesn't look happy at all.

"What's wrong?"

He takes my arm and pulls me down the hallway out of the crowd of students leaving class. "Everything's fine, your Mom is OK, she's home now. But..."

Home now? Home from where? “But” what? He doesn’t want to say it, but takes a deep breath and goes on anyway. “She had an accident. She was in the car with your brother, and they got rear-ended. She’s fine,” he says again. “They just kept her overnight to make sure she didn’t have a concussion. They got home around ten o’clock, and your father called right away.”

She had a car accident. I dreamed – I don’t know what, but that something bad had happened to her, and she had a car accident the same night. How could I have known? Maybe it’s just a big coincidence? “You’re sure? You’re sure she’s OK?”

He hugs me close. “Yes. She’s home, she’s fine,” he says right into my ear. “No concussion, no broken bones, no internal injuries. She sprained her wrist, that’s it. And your brother just has some bruises from the airbag, but otherwise he’s perfectly fine.” I feel my legs go; he’s holding me up now. He lets me down gently and I slide into a sitting position on the floor. He sits next to me.

“I had a dream,” I say. “I don’t remember it, but it was about her. I knew there was something to worry about, and I was right. I can’t believe it.”

Someone is standing over us – Janet. Of course she picks this moment to show up. I look up at her, and she doesn’t look any better than she did this morning. But seeing me sitting on the floor, when I must look completely panicked, snaps her out of her own miserable thoughts. “What happened? Is everything all right?”

I completely forget about why she’s such a mess and I blurt out my news. “My Mom was in a car accident last night, I just found out,” I say. I can’t really describe the expression on her face – it’s a mixture of sympathy, horror and, maybe, a determination not to burst out crying. But her determination only lasts for a couple of seconds. Suddenly she’s down on the floor, hugging me, weeping uncontrollably.

“Janet, she’s OK!” I don’t think about what I’m saying; obviously it’s not really my Mom’s accident that she’s crying about. “She’s not hurt, she’s already home from the hospital!”

I’m not sure if she hears me or not. I’m thankful that the hallway is clear and nobody else is seeing this. “Brian, help me get her up,” I say, and together we get

Janet on her feet and I steer her towards an empty classroom. Anyplace to sit where nobody will bother us for a few minutes. She goes where we push her, and she lets us sit her down. Brian heads for the door, and I nod. This is probably best left between Janet and me for now.

“I’m – I’m glad your Mom is OK,” she says once she’s sure the door is closed. I guess she did hear me. “When you said – your Mom – I really liked her. She was so nice to me at the wedding.” She’s not looking me in the eye. I take her hands and squeeze them. She’s still crying.

“Janet, it’s all right.”

She pulls her hands away from me, covers her eyes. “No it’s not! It’s not all right, it isn’t going to be all right!” I don’t say anything. I let her cry. “She’s all I have! There isn’t anybody else!”

I take her hands again. “You don’t have to tell me, Janet. I don’t want to pry. But it might – sometimes you just have to say it out loud, no matter how horrible it is.” She gets up and puts her arms around me, squeezes for dear life.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do,” she says between sobs. “I’m going to lose her!” I let her talk in her own time. “It’s my mother. She’s – God, Sara, I don’t know what to do! She’s got – she’s got...” Janet can’t bring herself to say it. Her mouth opens and closes several times, and, finally, she blurts out, “It’s Stage Four! Do you know – God, never mind. Of course you know what it means. It’s spread all - all over.”

Oh my God.

I feel like someone just punched me in the stomach. I guessed – knew – it was cancer, but Stage Four? That’s – that’s as bad as it could possibly be. She is going to lose her mother. I feel my own tears flowing. I squeeze her back, holding her as tightly as I’ve ever held my husband. “Janet – I’m – I’m so sorry,” is all I can say. No other words come to mind. We just stand there, holding each other, crying our eyes out.



It’s five minutes until Anatomy begins. We’ve been here in this empty classroom for the last hour. Janet is – well, not really any better, but she isn’t crying

anymore. “I know I harassed you into coming to class, but if you don’t feel up to it I’ll ask Brian to walk you home.”

She shakes her head. “I’m here. I don’t want to fall any further behind.” She doesn’t say it with any conviction, and it’s clear she would rather go home, but all she’ll do is sit alone in her room and think about losing her mother. I don’t see what good that will do.

“We’ll be together. Come on,” I tell her, pulling her up. “Let’s go.”

Paula and Joseph are already there in the Anatomy Theater, books open and ready to go. It’s Joseph’s turn to dissect first today, but as soon as I step up to our table, I announce “Janet’s going to go first, and I’ll read for her.” Joseph turns to me, ready to say something, but he can read in my eyes that it’s not up for discussion. Paula keeps out of it; I can see that she doesn’t understand what’s going on but whatever it is she wants no part of it.

For my part, I might be handling this completely wrong. I don’t know. I think it’s best to involve Janet fully, keep her mind completely occupied so it can’t wander. Honestly, that’s why I want to read for her as well. I don’t need my mind wandering either.

Dr. Bhupati lectures us briefly and then we’re instructed to begin our dissection. Today we’re working on the deep muscles of the back. “OK, Janet, you’re looking for the serratus posterior superior muscle.” I’ve got one eye on my book and the other on her. She’s concentrating hard, and after a moment she finds her spot. “You’re going to detach it from the vertebra, starting at C7...”

Janet does better than I expect. Yes, she’s very shaky and it’s slower going than it would be if any of the rest of us were doing it but considering how she was just a little while ago, she’s doing fantastic. Dr. Willis stops at our table and quizzes her on the intermediate muscles of the back, which she handles well enough. Once he sees he’s not going to trip her up completely, he loses interest and heads for another group.

Joseph takes over halfway through the session and he does a very good job. Paula gets her turn for the last half hour, and I don’t get to cut at all. I don’t mind; helping Janet was more important. I really think it was good for her, too. And when the session is over, Brian’s waiting outside for me again.

God, I love him.



We get home without incident, and I invite Janet up to our rooms to go over what she missed today, once we've showered and washed the smell of Anatomy away. Brian volunteers to walk over to Little Caesar's and get pizza to help us study. I do feel guilty that he's running all around for me, but I'm going to let him do it anyway.

As soon as we get upstairs, I call Mom, and at first I'm not sure how I manage to keep my composure. I don't keep it for long; I imagine how I'd react if it was her, or Dad, or Brian with Stage Four – God, I can't think – I don't know what I'd do. I start crying again, and I have to tell Mom. Brian heads for the other room, but I grab his arm and pull him down to sit on the bed with me. I don't want to tell this twice.

"She's going to die, Mom! Her mother is going to die, and Janet doesn't have anybody else, nobody at all." That's probably the worst part of all. If – God forgive me for even thinking it – if something happened to Mom, I've got Brian to hang on to. And Dad and Bob and I would all be together, too. Janet doesn't have any of that.

"That poor girl," Mom says. "It's going to be hard on her. When Kat's mother got sick – you were too young to remember – it was like that with her. She's an only child, she didn't really have anyone but a couple of aunts she was somewhat close to, and me. She went through hell, and – you won't want to hear this..."

I don't mention that Kat's already told me. And I know what she's going to say next. "I know you, Sara. You're – we think, we feel the same in a lot of ways. You want to help her. Take care of her. But – you can't, really. She has to do this herself. All you can do – I know you won't listen, because I didn't when it was me and Kat – but all you can do is be there for when she comes to you. When she needs to not feel alone, when she needs to talk or cry or drink a bottle of wine or two and try to forget for a couple of hours."



She's right, I don't want to hear it. I don't want to think that I have to watch Janet suffer and lose the only person in the world who she loves or who loves her, and not really do anything to help. "Mom, there – there must be something I can do. She's all alone!"

"Be her friend. And when she does reach out to you, be there for her." I will.

"I hate this, Mom. It's not fair." She starts to say something but I cut her off. "I know – I'm not a baby, I know life isn't fair. I mean, all those people we're dissecting - they didn't deserve to die, either. It wasn't fair to them, they were young, a lot of them. I know all that. But nobody – nobody deserves to suffer how Janet is."

Brian's got his arms around me. He's been holding me for a while, I think, but I only just now noticed it. "No, honey, nobody does," Mom says. She doesn't have to add that life is full of things nobody deserves.

I don't feel any better at all. I talk with her a few minutes more, and I say hi to Dad and to Bob as well. Before I hang up, I talk to Mom again and beg her to go get a full checkup, and to make Dad and even Bob get one as well. "Everything, Mom. Every test. Make sure you're OK, please?" She agrees, although I'm not sure if she really will or if she's just saying yes to make me feel better.

As soon as I hang up, I shower and Brian goes to pick up dinner. When he comes back he collects Janet and brings her up with him. She doesn't talk about her mother or how she's feeling at all, and I don't ask. I can tell that she's fighting to keep it all out of her mind, to occupy herself as much as she can. We're up until after midnight, and I think if I left it up to her she'd just keep right on working.

She doesn't want to sleep – I know exactly what that's like. But at twelve thirty she finally gives in and heads downstairs. I really wonder if I'll see her in the lobby in a few hours to go to class. And I don't even know whether she should go.



*Sara is in a living room, sparsely but tastefully furnished. She's in a high-rise building, and judging from the view out the window, she realizes she must be on*

*an upper floor; the street is very far below. She's never been here before, she doesn't know whose living room it is, until the door leading from the bedroom opens up and Janet Black and her mother step through. Sara knows now: it's Janet's dream, and her mother's apartment.*

*Janet's mother looks dreadful; she needs her daughter's support to walk the few feet from the bedroom over to the sofa. She sits, and Janet goes to the kitchen, returns with a glass of water and a rattling bottle that must be full of pills. Sara watches as Janet, with great difficulty, gets her mother to take three pills and drink most of the water.*

*"You need me, Mom," Janet says. "You know you do."*

*Her mother struggles with the effort to speak, and her words come out in barely more than a whisper. "No! We've discussed this. You've worked so hard to get where you are. I won't let you throw it away so you can – so you can watch me rot away." Janet is crying now, and Sara knows she's had this conversation with her mother many times in the past few days.*

*"You're all I have!"*

*Her mother clutches at Janet's arm. "You have yourself. You're going to be a doctor. You're going to have such a life, and I won't let you throw it away on me."*

*Sara can't stand it anymore, but she has no choice; she can't turn away, can't leave...*

*...and then, without transition, she's somewhere else. It's a conference room, a large one. There are at least thirty people sitting around the huge table, some in suit and tie, some wearing white coats, and Sara recognizes most of them. She sees Dr. Haynes, and Dr. Bhapati and several of the regular lecturers she sees each morning. And there, on the other side of the table, is Dr. Morris. He looks terrible; circles under his eyes, a yellowish tinge to his skin.*

*In the seat right in front of her sits an older man who Sara has seen in passing, but whose name she doesn't know. He mutters to himself, "If Morris thinks he'll be the next Dean, he's got another thing coming. Hell, he won't live out the year."*

*This is his dream, this man she doesn't know. She concentrates on the details: his salt-and-pepper beard, his terribly out-of-fashion glasses and the cold blue eyes behind them...*



I open my eyes and I don't understand – what happened to the meeting? How did I get from the conference room to – oh.

It was another dream. I don't even know who it was I was seeing this time. I can see his face very clearly, but I don't know him. He must be on the medical school faculty, it shouldn't be too hard to find out who he is. All I know for now is that he'd like to be the next Dean, and he doesn't like Dr. Morris.

Counting his wife, that's at least two people who don't like him enough that they're dreaming about seeing him dead. I can't get dragged into this again – I almost lost my mind and nearly got myself, my best friend and my husband killed the last time. But I *am* going to get dragged in. There's no point in kidding myself, is there?

And then – Janet. I wish I hadn't seen that. It's not just that it was heartbreaking. I remember the whole dream, and I can't help but wonder what I'd do in her place. Or her mother's. Would I be as brave as she is? Could I push Brian away, if it ever came to that? If I had no hope and he was going to throw away everything he'd ever worked for just so he could watch me die?

I don't know. I don't want to know. I can't think about it, so I do the only thing I can think of to put it out of my mind. I kiss him until he wakes up and I go right on kissing him.



Janet is down in the lobby waiting for me. She's trying to put a brave face on, but it's clear she woke up in tears and she's only holding them back now with great effort. She chatters the whole time as we walk to class without actually saying anything, but that's fine.

We sit through the lectures. I take notes, she writes things down in her notebook that almost certainly aren't notes at all. When the lecture is done, we're reminded of something I completely forgot – this afternoon we have something

new. It's Introduction to Clinical Practice – twice a week, we'll meet in groups of eight and be given a “patient” to diagnose. If it weren't for Janet and what she's going through – and how it's making me feel - I'd be very excited about it.

After a quick lunch, we go to the third floor to sign up for our groups. We can form our own groups if we like, rather than be assigned randomly, and all of us in our dissection group opt to do this together as well. At any rate, Joseph and Paula and I do, and I write Janet's name in under mine while she stands just behind me, staring at nothing. There are four more spaces under her; we'll just have to see who shows up.

We go to our assigned room and find seats. At one thirty, we see who our fellows are. There's Max, a man with blond hair and bright eyes who I've never spoken to, but who I've overheard mentioning about a hundred times that he graduated in the top five percent of his class at Harvard. He walks in with Marcie, who I have spoken to a couple of times. She's got a Master's in Public Health and she's originally from Hawaii. I can only imagine what she'll think when winter arrives. She's holding hands with Max. A minute later Dominick joins us. He's very tall, so much so that he nearly hits his head walking in the room. He smiles at Joseph; I guess they know each other already. Our group is completed with Sanjay, who sits in the very front row every day during lecture, and who seems to fill up a new notebook every single day.

We all introduce ourselves while we wait for our teacher. We don't have to wait long; after just a couple of minutes, Dr. Morris strides into the room. I somehow keep my surprise to myself.

When I see who's with him, though, I can't keep quiet. “Mona!” My former RD, not to mention the person who helped me get through the MCATs after everything happened with Dr. Walters. She smiles at me, but Dr. Morris does not.

“I see you know at least one of our students, Ms. Charleston,” Dr. Morris says. “For the benefit of everyone else,” he sneers, glancing at me, “I am Dr. Abraham Morris, and assisting me is Mona Charleston. Ms. Charleston is a student here, in her fourth year.” What a jerk. No wonder people are dreaming about seeing him dead.

Dr. Morris lays out the basics of the class: every Tuesday he'll describe to us a patient and their symptoms. We'll ask questions, discuss which tests might help us to figure out what's going on, and so forth. On Thursdays, we'll meet again – Dr. Morris doesn't say it, but it's clearly assumed that we'll all do additional research in between – and talk about what we think the diagnosis is. We'll have this every week until the end of the semester.

“So, let us begin,” he says. Mona passes out folders to each of us as he goes on. “Mrs. Smith is a 55 year old Caucasian woman. She presents with fatigue, chronic shortness of breath and a variety of other symptoms as you can read in your charts.” I notice that Janet has gone white; I have a hunch that her mother might be 55 years old, too.

As I look at the chart, I don't understand a lot of what I'm seeing, but the things I do understand give me a sinking feeling. I hope I'm wrong, but as I keep reading and listen when my fellow students start asking questions, I know I'm not.

After nearly an hour, Janet and I are the only ones who haven't spoken. “Miss Barnes,” Dr. Morris calls out, glaring at me.

I can't help myself. “It's Mrs. Alderson, actually,” I say.

“Very well,” he says, ice in his voice now. “Mrs. Alderson, I assume from your silence that either you are so brilliant that you've already diagnosed the patient and see no need for further information, or you are so ignorant that you don't know where to begin. Which is it?”

I take a deep breath. He doesn't like me; that's fine. I have to be calm, and I have to protect Janet, too. “Neither, Dr. Morris,” I say as calmly as I can manage it. “I'm sorry – this patient could be my aunt,” I can't say what I'm really thinking, it's the first lie that comes to mind, “the symptoms are almost word for word what she was going through last year.”

“Do you expect sympathy, Mrs. Alderson?” What an ass. I hope his wife does poison him.

“No, sir. I'm just explaining why I haven't asked any questions yet.”

“Well, then, since you are so familiar with this case, would you care to tell the rest of us what your diagnosis is?” Everyone is looking at me.

No, I would not. But what choice do I have? I close my eyes and pray that Janet will forgive me. I open my eyes again and look straight at Dr. Morris, blocking everyone else out. “Cancer. Breast cancer. It’s metastasized – Stage Four, I think,” I say, and I hear Janet suck in her breath. I don’t dare look at her.

Dr. Morris stares hard at me and I stare right back. I have no idea what he’s thinking. He finally looks away from me and he’s silent for a moment more. Then, “that’s one possibility. Does anyone else have other thoughts?”



The moment class is over, Janet runs out the door; she doesn’t wait for me and I can’t really blame her. I console myself with the thought that if I hadn’t said what I did, Dr. Morris would have gone after her next, and that would have been much worse. I don’t feel very consoled, even though it’s probably true.

I talk briefly with Joseph and Paula; we agree to meet up after dissection tomorrow to go over the case. I promise to tell Janet, but I very much doubt she’s going to join us for that. I overhear Max telling Marcie what a know-it-all I am, and how I deserved to get smacked down the way I did. Any other day, I’d be more offended by that, but at the moment it’s pretty far down the list of things that are bothering me.

I wait outside the room for Mona and spend a few minutes catching up with her. She tells me that she thinks Dr. Morris was “out of line” but that I “may as well get used to it now. He’s far from the worst you’re going to run into,” and then she tells me she’s sorry about my aunt. I don’t bother to correct her.

I walk home alone, and the only thought that keeps me going is what’s waiting for me when I get there. He’s right there at the door when I come in. “I need you,” is all I can say, and all I have to say.



Wednesday morning Janet isn’t in the lobby to walk to class with me. I decide to leave her be and just go myself. She doesn’t show up for lecture at all, and there’s no sign of her for dissection either. Right before I go into the Anatomy Theater, I call Brian – thankfully I catch him – and ask him to check on her.

I'm sure she's not coming, so I go up to Dr. Bhapati and make an excuse for her. "She was really sick this morning," I lie. "My husband was going to walk her over to the Student Health Service, and I'll make sure to go over everything she misses today with her." I only hope she doesn't show up halfway through the session and make me look – well, like the liar I am - but as it turns out I have nothing to fear; she doesn't appear.

Joseph chalks her recent behavior and her absence today up to stress, and points out several students in other groups who don't look much better than Janet. Paula wonders how long we should allow her to go on like this before we "lay down the law," which I don't take kindly to.

"She's going to be fine," I say, with far more conviction than I feel. "I'll make sure she's in class tomorrow, and at our review on Saturday, and back in dissection next week like usual, all right?" I don't get any argument from Paula after that.

After dissection, I call Brian again, and he reports that he could hear Janet in her room, but she wouldn't answer the door. "At least we know she's still alive," I say, and immediately hate myself for it. He offers to try again, but I tell him not to; I'll knock on her door when I come home and see if I can get her to respond.

Then it's time to review the case Dr. Morris gave us; Joseph, Paula and I spend two hours in the cafeteria going over the information we were given, the notes we all took, and the research Paula did last night. We all agree in the end: I was right in class, it's cancer. I spend the walk home imagining how Janet will feel in class tomorrow when we're having an academic discussion about the very thing that's killing her mother.

It's eight o'clock when I get back to Drake Tower and, like Brian, I can hear Janet walking around in her room when I get to her door. I knock, and she doesn't answer. I knock again, and again no answer. Finally, I have to resort to shouting. "Janet, we need to talk, and I'm going to stand out here and yell until you open the door and let me in!"

Thankfully there's nobody else living on this floor right now, so there's nobody to be upset when I do just that. It takes a good five minutes before Janet gives in and opens the door. She looks like hell; I'm sure she didn't sleep at all last night

and she's still wearing the same clothes she had on when she left class yesterday afternoon.

Most worrying of all is that she's got a suitcase half-packed. It looks like she's been packing and unpacking it all day long. She slumps down onto her bed and buries her face in her hands. I sit next to her and put my arm around her. She smells terrible, too. She needs a shower, and a good night's sleep, and – I wonder. “Janet, have you eaten anything at all today?”

She moans and shakes her head. I get up and look in the little half-size refrigerator she's got in the corner. Nothing in it at all. I call up to Brian; he answers on the first ring. “Sara?”

“I'm down here with Janet. Can you microwave something, I don't care what, and bring it down here and maybe a soda, too?”

He doesn't question that. “I'll be right down,” he says, and barely five minutes later, he is. He hands me the food and heads for the door, but I shake my head and he sits down in the desk chair instead. I put the food in front of Janet, open the soda for her.

She doesn't say anything, but she does respond to the food; she eats quickly and looks marginally better when she's done. “There, that's good,” I say. I've gone over and over in my head what else to say, and nothing I've come up with seems very helpful, but I know I have to say something. “Look, Janet, I – I don't know what you're going through. I can't – I've never had to – I've never had someone I care about get – get sick like your mother is. So I don't know what to say or what to do. All I know is you're my friend and you helped me through a rough time, and I'm here for you.”

She pulls me down to her and hugs me. I think the only reason she's not crying is that there aren't any tears left. “Thank you,” she whispers. “For that. And – and for yesterday. If he'd called on me – I don't know...” I do know. She probably would have run out of the classroom and never come back. I might have done the same in her place.

“Anytime,” I say, hugging her back. “I'll do whatever you need me to do. Brian, too.” She looks over to him, and he meets her gaze.

“I haven't forgotten what you did for Sara either,” is all he says. It's enough.



At least she's interacting with us, and she's got some food in her. That's a good first couple of steps. Next is to get her cleaned up. "Brian, why don't you go upstairs, I'll be up in a little while." He comes over, kisses me despite the fact that I still smell of formaldehyde from dissection earlier, and leaves.

"Let's get you in the shower," I tell Janet, "and I'll get your clothes back in your closet and straighten up a little, OK?" She doesn't protest, so I take charge, get her undressed and in the shower and tidy up her room for her. I wait around until she's done and dried off and in her pajamas. She looks almost human now.

"God, I feel – I was a mess, I mean, I still am, but..."

I know exactly what she means. "You'll feel better with a good night's sleep. Go to bed, try – I know how hard it is, but try to think of - well, anything, I guess. And then we'll walk together to class tomorrow, and tomorrow night I'll catch you up on what you missed today."

I say it all forcefully enough that she doesn't have the will to question me; I think she actually will get some sleep, and I honestly expect that I'll see her in the lobby tomorrow morning.

On my way out, I glance at the clock. Ten o'clock. I'm exhausted, and emotionally drained myself, but I can't rest. I have to eat something, shower, and I've got at least two hours of reading to do. It's going to be a long night...



*Four:*

*Nothing But Trouble*

(AUGUST 15-18, 1991)

**I**t's Thursday morning and I was right; Janet is waiting for me in the lobby. She looks better than I've seen her all week; she's nowhere near back to normal, but at least her hair's washed, her clothes are clean, and her eyes are almost bright and alive. It's quite a change from last night.

I was like that last year during the nightmares – it was a roller coaster, from good days to utterly miserable and then back up again. The day Brian came back from Christmas break, after I surprised him in his room, I was feeling probably the most contented I ever have in my life. A few hours later, I was sitting on the floor in a pool of my own vomit thanks to the absolute worst of the nightmares.

Beth and Brian got me through that, and I'm going to do the same for Janet. I just have to think one day at a time, one class at a time. And I have to remember to keep my own head above water while I'm doing it, too. I can't help her if I wash out of school myself.

On the way to class, I start to fill her in on what we covered yesterday. Biochemistry wasn't the best lecture – it was almost all straight out of the textbook, and I think we have the same lecturer today so it shouldn't be too hard for Janet to catch up. I also tell her that I told everyone she was very sick yesterday. "I guess I had a twenty-four hour bug," she says with the closest thing to a smile I've seen on her face in a while.

She repeats her answer to Paula and Joseph after lecture and I don't think either of them believes it, but they don't call her on it either. We all sit together in the cafeteria and discuss our case over lunch. Janet tenses up and doesn't contribute at all, but she doesn't go running off either. That's probably the best I could hope for.

Paula's done a ton of research, and she's got a dozen possible diagnoses for poor Mrs. Smith. If I hadn't been helping Janet, I would have done – not as much as Paula, but at least some research. Paula's got no one to she needs to help, no one to take up any of her time – her family is back in Seattle and she talks to them for ten minutes once a week. And as far as I can tell, she's got no hobbies other than studying.

Despite all her work, Paula agrees that my diagnosis in class Tuesday is almost certainly the right one. What I'm hoping, though, is that we'll spend most of the class going over all the other possibilities.

When we get to class, it's only Dr. Morris; unfortunately Mona isn't with him. He starts in on me right away. "Well, now you've had time to look into the case, does anyone have anything to say based on actual medical science rather than Mrs. Alderson's intuition?"

I go a little red, but I don't react otherwise. Max speaks up and suggests a whole list of tests he would order. Paula rattles off several of her possibilities. Then Dr. Morris points to Janet, who shrinks back in her chair. "Do you have any thoughts, Ms. Black?"

"COPD would explain most of the symptoms," she croaks. That was on Paula's list, but near the bottom. Still, good for Janet for picking up on it.

Dr. Morris nods. "Lung disease. Yes. You saw, I assume, that the patient has a history of smoking." Janet relaxes a bit, but then Dr. Morris goes on, more

sharply, “But you did not take note of the length of her habit. According to her chart, she only smoked for four years, and she quit in 1971. It is a possible risk factor, but in the overall picture, which you would understand had you studied her chart more thoroughly, it is a small factor.”

Janet mumbles something that sounds like “yes, Dr. Morris,” and tries to disappear into her chair. I restrain myself from defending her – it wouldn’t do either of us any good. We suffer through the rest of the class, while Dr. Morris tears everyone to shreds.

“Mrs. Smith will be glowing in the dark from all the x-rays you’d order for her, Mr. Keller,” he sneers at Max, “not to mention that if your approach were standard procedure you’d bankrupt the hospital.” To Paula, he comments that “your command of the index of Harrison’s *Principles of Internal Medicine* would be impressive, if only it were paired with even a modicum of common sense.” Nobody else fares any better. At five o’clock, it’s an angry and dispirited group that trudges out of the classroom.



As Janet and I walk back home, I wish I could tell her about my dreams. The idea that Dr. Morris’ colleagues are fantasizing about his death and funeral would probably cheer her up. Still, she’s doing better than I thought she would; that was a rough class, and I’m proud of her for holding up as well as she did.

When we get to Drake Tower, she goes straight up to her room to study, and when I get upstairs, I find Brian chatting with a man and a woman I haven’t seen before. They introduce themselves as Mike and Barbara Stewart – both blond, both tall, both law students. They’re going to be our next-door neighbors. “You’re newlyweds too, Brian here’s been telling us,” Mike says as he shakes my hand.

“Two months tomorrow,” I answer.

“And you’ve already been here three weeks? How are you surviving the close quarters?” Barbara asks.

“We were more or less living together in my dorm room last year, so compared to that, this is plenty of space,” I say. It’s not, really, but it also hasn’t bothered

me yet. I might feel differently in six months.

“You’re just out of undergrad?” Mike asks me, shocked.

“Just graduated in May,” I answer.

“I’m still in undergrad,” Brian adds.

Now they both look at us with undisguised curiosity. “What are you, nineteen?” Barbara says to Brian.

“I didn’t think anybody got married that young anymore. Well, not educated people, anyway,” Mike chimes in. I don’t think I like him so much.

“I’m twenty,” Brian says, taking my hand. “And we knew right away we belonged together, what was the point in waiting?” No point, none at all. Mike makes a half-hearted effort to cover it, but I see him roll his eyes slightly at Brian’s words. I notice that Barbara doesn’t roll her eyes, however.

We chat a few minutes more. We learn that Mike’s been out of school three years, working in a friend’s real estate office. That’s where he met Barbara; she was saving up money to go to law school and they hit it off.

Finally they go to their room to finish unpacking, and I’m not sure what to think. Mike didn’t say anything else to annoy me, but he didn’t really say anything to make me like him any better, either; and it might have been my imagination but Barbara was looking at Brian a little bit too intently for my taste. He didn’t notice, of course; he was mostly looking at me the whole time.



“I didn’t like him either,” Brian tells me when I mention that I wasn’t thrilled with Mike. It doesn’t help, I’m sure, that he’s had a year full of his mother telling him he was too young to get married – he’s even more sensitive about that topic than I am. She still does tell him, by the way. She makes a special point of it every week when he calls her. I don’t know what she’d do if she knew that we’ve had a couple of pretty serious conversations about having kids – her head might literally explode. I probably shouldn’t admit it, but that thought makes me smile.

We talk for a while about our new neighbors while we eat our microwaved dinners, then I tell him about class today. He’s properly outraged on my behalf,

which also makes me smile. Unfortunately, he doesn't have any great ideas about dealing with Dr. Morris, other than to "be patient, he'll see how good you are sooner or later." I'm not going to hold my breath on that.

After dinner, I read for a couple of hours and then I turn on my computer for the first time all week. I'm glad I did when I log into my email and I see a message from Beth. It's very long, and reading it really brings home to me how much I miss her – and how much she misses me:

**...even with the TV blasting and the two dogs downstairs howling, it feels too quiet here. I'm having trouble getting to sleep at night. I know I'll get used to it, especially once classes start next week and I'm meeting people, making friends and all of that. But right now it's really hard.**

I can imagine. She doesn't say it, but it's probably even worse just because Ohio State is so huge. I think it would feel a lot lonelier to be somewhere with thirty thousand people and not know anyone than it would here at Crewe with far fewer students.

She isn't completely lonely – she mentions that she's already been on a couple of dates with a handsome neighbor in the next building to hers, and her baby sister visited for a couple of days. She also seems genuinely excited to be starting classes. I know she'll be fine.

It's too late to call her, but I do write a nice long email back. I tell her very briefly about Janet – I really wish Beth were here to help me out with her. And I mention, almost in passing, that I've been having some "strange dreams" lately, and that I'll tell her more about that the next time we talk on the phone.

Then I turn off the computer and go to bed, where – I don't think I'll ever get tired of saying this – my wonderful husband is waiting for me.



Friday is easily the best day of the week. When Janet and I get to class, there's a surprise – nothing is scheduled for the afternoon, we have actual free time! To ourselves! To do whatever we want!

There's also an announcement: starting next Friday and every Friday for the rest of the semester, there will be slots open for us to "shadow" doctors at

University Hospital for the afternoon. As soon as lecture is finished, I go straight to the notice board on the second floor of the medical school to see what's available, with Janet following behind me. I'm not fast enough – many of next week's slots are already filled by the time I get there, but there are still a few openings. One in particular catches my eye: Dr. Elaine Kamara, obstetrics.

“What do you think, Janet?” She looks uncertain, but she doesn't outright refuse. It seems like good luck to me – obstetrics is about as far as you can get in medicine from what's happening to her mother. “You want to do it with me?” I put as much encouragement as I can into my voice, and it seems to work; she nods her head a little, anyway. So I write both our names down for Dr. Kamara.

I'm very excited – I know we're going to get some exposure to the hospital later in the year, but as far as I'm concerned, the sooner the better. In the meantime, though, we've got a free afternoon, and I think it might be good if I can get Janet to do something fun. Brian's at the library today, and anyway, I think Janet might be more comfortable if it's just the two of us, so I suggest we take the train downtown and go see a movie.

She agrees, and we find a newspaper and look at the listings. “Terminator 2” will be much too violent. “Doc Hollywood” is probably very funny, but it is about a doctor, and we both agree that we want to completely forget the medical profession for a couple of hours. So we finally decide on “Hot Shots!”

Which, it turns out, is really dumb but also really entertaining. When we get back home at around six o'clock, Janet's in the best mood she's been in since school started, and I feel pretty good myself. I do feel a little guilty that I didn't even ask Brian, but when I tell him about it, he doesn't seem upset. Still, I promise him that I'll set aside Sunday afternoon just for him, and we'll do something fun. He's all for that.



*Sara is standing in the back of a courtroom. She doesn't know why she's here, and no one seems to notice her presence. This isn't her dream, but she doesn't know whose it is. She looks around. The room is full; every seat in the gallery is*

*filled, there are a dozen people in the jury box, a judge up on his bench, and a whole table full of lawyers in expensive suits on one side of the courtroom.*

*On the other side, at another table, there is a sad-looking woman with three small and equally sad-looking children. Next to them sits someone Sara does recognize, and she knows now that it's his dream: her new neighbor, Mike the law student. Sara's gaze follows everyone else's, as the bailiff walks up to the jury box. He takes an envelope proffered by a smiling older man wearing a sweater that Sara imagines might have once been owned by Mister Rogers.*

*The bailiff takes the envelope up to the judge, who opens it and reads it. He, too, smiles. He turns to the jury and asks, "Have you reached a verdict?"*

*The man wearing Mister Rogers' sweater, obviously the foreman, stands. "We have, your honor."*

*"What say you?"*

*"In the matter of Smith vs. Consolidated Chemical Corporation of America, we find for the plaintiff, and we award her \$78 million dollars."*

*Cheering erupts throughout the courtroom, and even the defeated lawyers don't seem very upset. One of them, the oldest of the lot, comes over to Mike and shakes his hand. Though she's much too far away, Sara can still hear his words perfectly clearly as he says to Mike, "Well, you beat us fair and square. If you ever want a job, give me a call," and then hands Mike a check.*

*Mike pats the sad-looking woman on the head and scans the gallery until he finds the face he's looking for. Sara expects it to be his wife, but it's not. It is a woman, though, and to Sara's eye she appears to be maybe twenty or twenty-one; and she's dressed very inappropriately for a courtroom. Mike approaches her, gives her a sloppy kiss, and asks, "So, you want to come with me and help me pick out my new Ferrari?"*

*Sara watches, appalled...*

*...and she is somewhere else. It's a faculty office, but Sara doesn't know whose. She looks around for any sign as to where she is, and why, and she finally sees a pad with personalized stationery: this is Dr. Haynes' office. The door opens, and Dr. Haynes stalks in, followed a few paces behind by Dr. Morris.*



*Dr. Morris looks awful; his hair is much thinner than it ought to be, and his eyes are strangely unfocused. He sits down, and winces in pain as he does so. Dr. Haynes takes no notice of his discomfort; she merely sits behind her desk and glares at him.*

*Dr. Morris tries to speak, but he's having great difficulty. He finally manages to get out: "What do you want?" before he begins coughing violently. The coughing continues, and Dr. Haynes makes no move to help him, or to do anything at all; she just watches. Then the blood starts to come up as the coughing gets worse, and Dr. Morris thrashes about. Finally, there's one last terrible, inhuman sound from his throat, and he slumps forward, face-down, onto Dr. Haynes' desk.*

*"That's what I was waiting for, Abraham," Dr. Haynes says, finally, with an air of satisfaction. "Thank you very much."*

I wake up, and I want to call 911. Someone's sick, very sick. But who? I'm – I'm in my bedroom. I'm not sick. Brian's still sleeping right here next to me and I can see he's not sick either, so who?

Oh, God. Dr. Morris. Again. Does every single person he knows want him dead? This is getting ridiculous.

When Brian wakes up I tell him about the dream with Dr. Morris. I decide to keep the other dream, the one that our new neighbor had, to myself. Partly it's because - and I know I keep saying this - I really don't want to go telling other people's secrets. But I also don't want to give Brian any more reasons to dislike Mike than he already has, and that dream would certainly provide them.

I realize you can't control what you dream about, but it was so ridiculous I just have to laugh about it. Except for the part where he kisses the trampy girl who's not his wife – that's actually pretty disgusting. All the more so because they're newlyweds.

Anyway, I don't talk about any of that; I limit myself to describing Dr. Haynes' dream about killing Dr. Morris, or at least watching him die. "That's at least

three people now,” Brian says. “His wife, the doctor you didn’t recognize, and Dr. Haynes.”

“Maybe four. I don’t know who was dreaming about his funeral – it could have been somebody else besides one of them.” And that’s a cheerful thought. It’s like one of those Agatha Christie books – somebody is killed, and every single person they knew has a motive for wanting them dead.

In a way, the nightmares about Dr. Walters were much simpler. It was obvious he had to be stopped – there wasn’t any dilemma about that. But – assuming I take these dreams seriously – what exactly is there to do? Hang around after class on Tuesday to talk to Dr. Morris and say casually, “That was a great class. Oh, by the way, did you know that your wife and several of your colleagues are fantasizing on a regular basis about murdering you?” I’m sure that would go over extremely well. Actually, he’d probably take the hatred of his colleagues as a compliment.

Or maybe this *is* Dr. Walters all over again – I’ll have to wait until someone does actually try to kill him and then go find the evidence to prove what happened. If that’s it – God, how am I supposed to find the time to play detective with my ridiculous school schedule, not to mention helping Janet, and also trying to be a halfway decent wife to Brian?

Brian suggests writing down all the details I can remember – after all, that did work when I was having the nightmares about Dr. Walters last year, so I agree. It’s much easier than last year – these dreams are creepy, but not even remotely as disturbing as the nightmares were. We spend an hour with Brian asking me questions and me remembering as much as I can, and he fills several pages of a notebook.

It does feel good doing something about the dreams, as little as it is. We keep talking about them on my way up to Joseph’s house for our Saturday review session; Brian very kindly walks me there.

“Why is this happening again?” I finally ask him.

I don’t really expect an answer, but he actually does have a theory. “Maybe for the same reason you want to be a doctor. You’re one of those people - when they see something wrong, or somebody who needs help, they just automatically act,”

he says, squeezing my hand. “It runs so deep in you, it’s even in your subconscious.”

If that’s true - and it does honestly make sense to me – well, I wish my subconscious would take some time off now and then. It doesn’t need to be on call all the time. “You realize what that means,” I say. “It means this is going to keep happening. You’re married to – what am I, a psychic detective?”

He stops, right in the middle of the sidewalk, and grabs me. “I’m married to the most amazing woman in the world,” he says, and he kisses me. Well, if that’s how he feels, who am I to argue?



I’m the first to arrive at Joseph’s house, so Brian sticks around for a few minutes and fails to come up with an original joke to win Joseph’s \$20. I have to give him points for trying, though – I think the one about carpentry in high school shop class is pretty funny.

Paula shows up, Janet makes her appearance a few minutes later and we get down to work while Brian goes – I’m not actually sure what he’s going to do this afternoon, to be honest. But he promises to return at six o’clock.

He’s as good as his word, too. It’s fair to say that we’re all wiped out by the time we’re finished with our review, but unlike last week everyone stays for dinner. It’s a relaxing couple of hours.

Over hamburgers and hot dogs, I learn a little more about Paula. The mystery of her accent is solved, for one thing. She explains how, as a very small child, her parents made her learn English by sitting her in front of the TV every day to watch the BBC World News. I guess that would do it.

I also finally find out where she lives – in a cramped basement apartment just off campus. It sounds awful, and Paula agrees that it is. “But it is all I can afford,” she explains. “My parents are paying my tuition, but they only give me \$500 a month to cover room and board and all my other expenses. And they’ve forbidden me to take a job to earn any extra money – nothing is to interfere with my studying. I couldn’t afford anything better.”

That's rough. I'm extremely lucky on that score – my parents are helping me, too, but most of my tuition and my expenses are paid for by the Livingston scholarship.

I don't really know Janet's financial situation, and she – understandably – doesn't want to talk about herself at all. I try to steer the conversation away from her whenever it seems like it's going that direction.

It's still light out at eight thirty when we walk home. Janet comes with Brian and me. She doesn't bring up her mother and I don't ask. The only thing I do ask her is what she's going to do tomorrow. "Try to catch up on everything I missed this week," is the answer. I almost offer to help her, but I stop myself – tomorrow is for Brian and me to spend together.

Well, maybe tomorrow night I can give her an hour, depending on what exactly Brian's got in mind for the afternoon. Or maybe in the morning – I'm going to try and get a couple of hours of work in to get a little bit ahead for the coming week. We'll see.



We're sitting outside, on the grass, in the middle of the main quad. It's a perfect day – not too hot, not too humid – and we're the only people out here. We walked by the Boarding House Deli on the way here, bought a loaf of bread, some cold cuts and a bottle of wine, and now we're enjoying a very relaxing picnic lunch.

"We should do this more often." I say.

"I agree," Brian says. "But this might be our last chance for a while. It's not going to be this quiet again, with everybody coming back to campus this week." He's right – school starts for the undergrads and for the rest of the graduate students a week from tomorrow, and people will start arriving this week.

That's a strange thought – I've already been in classes for three weeks, and it feels like a heck of a lot longer than that. It's also going to be strange seeing undergrad friends who I was living with in Carson Hall just three months ago – it feels like that was someone else's life. They're still college students but now I'm Mrs. Alderson, on the way to being Dr. Alderson.

“God, my brother’s going to be here in a week, isn’t he?” Speaking of strange. Although, to be fair, he matured a lot last year, or maybe I mellowed out towards him, I’m not really sure which.

“Your parents are driving him up, right?” I nod. It’ll be great to see them. Last I heard, the plan was for them to drive up Friday, and then we’ll all have dinner together that night.

“Can you take care of the dinner reservations? I’ve been meaning to do it, but – well, you know.” He knows all too well.

“Sure.” He leans back, and pulls me down with him – we’re both lying on our backs, a gentle breeze blowing, staring up into the cloudless sky. Right at this moment, everything else seems so unimportant and so far away. I reach over and take his hand, and it’s so quiet, so calm, it’s easy to believe we’re the only two people in the world.

I close my eyes and I can feel him next to me; above the whispering of the breeze I can hear him breathing. This is – well, there’s no other word for it - this is just perfect.

*Five:*  
*Only the Lonely*

(AUGUST 19-22, 1991)

**M**onday morning and I'm back to school. I don't feel up to it. Instead of making me more energized, the peaceful, quiet day we had yesterday just left me wanting more peace and quiet, and resentful that I can't have it. I can't believe I'm feeling burned out and I've only been in medical school for three weeks.

Janet is waiting for me in the lobby, and she seems in good spirits. That's kind of sobering - if she can be even halfway cheerful considering what's on her mind, I guess I've got no excuses, do I? I put the best fake smile I can manage on my face and we head for class. Maybe if I pretend to be in a good mood long enough, it'll really put me in one.

To my surprise, it actually works. By the time we're in our seats in the back of the lecture hall, I'm feeling much less resentful about everything. It helps that we've got a new and much more engaging lecturer today. Biochemistry breezes by, and Human Development does as well. Janet and I have a quick lunch in the cafeteria, and then it's time for Anatomy.

We're the first ones of our group today, and we quiz each other on today's area – the vertebral canal and the spinal column. I did do some reading last night after Brian and I got back, so I feel fully prepared. Paula and Joseph arrive just a moment before class officially starts, and Joseph reminds me that it's my turn to dissect first today – I'd forgotten that.

But before we begin dissecting, we have to familiarize ourselves with the vertebral canal and identify all the parts we'll be working with today. And we have to endure a quiz from Dr. Morgan. "Let us begin with some basics. Sara," he's the only teacher so far who uses first names, "will you please tell me how many pairs of spinal nerves there are?"

I know this, but for a moment my mind goes blank. I can't make myself recall the answer, then, for some reason – I can't imagine why - I'm thinking of ice cream. What does ice cream has to do with anything?

And then it hits me – "Baskin Robbins!" I blurt it out and immediately blush. Joseph laughs, Janet doesn't but looks as though she wants to and Paula stares at me blankly. For his part, Dr. Morgan pats me on the shoulder.

"Quite right. In future, though, you should strive to keep the memory aids unspoken." Paula still doesn't get it, and Dr. Morgan smiles, ever so slightly, at her confusion. "Thirty-one flavors, or so the commercials claim. I prefer mint chocolate chip myself, but that is neither here nor there." Paula nods; I'm not sure she actually *does* get it, but she clearly wants to move on. Dr. Morgan continues, "Paula, can you explain to me how the spinal nerves are numbered?" She does, and Janet and Joseph answer their questions in turn – unlike me, without embarrassing themselves.

I can't believe I did that! I'm just glad that Dr. Morgan has a sense of humor; I wouldn't have liked to see Dr. Haynes' reaction to what I said. I put it out of my mind as best I can, and Joseph reads for me as I begin my turn dissecting.

"Start at the T-4 vertebrae. You're going to use the scalpel to remove the erector spinae muscles..."



Janet and I walk back home together, and she's still giggling about my little moment at the beginning of dissection. If it were anyone else, I'd be annoyed – well, *more* annoyed – but with what she's going through, I'm willing to be laughed at a little if it helps her.

We arrive at Drake Tower at the same time as my new neighbors Mike and Barbara, back from their first day of law school. We all get in the elevator together, and Barbara introduces herself to Janet while Mike sniffs, makes a face and backs away from Janet and me. The elevator stops on the third floor and Janet gets out.

I shrug. “We just came back from Anatomy class.” Mike gives me a questioning look – I can't believe he doesn't know what that means. *Everyone* knows that, even if they don't know anything else about medical school. Maybe he's not that smart after all. “It's dissection,” I explain. “I guess I really am getting used to the smell.”

We get out the ninth floor. Barbara looks like she wants to ask me more about it, but Mike can't get away from my formaldehyde-tainted self fast enough. He doesn't even say goodbye; he's got their door open and he's inside in no time. Barbara apologizes for him, but I shake my head. “Don't worry about it.” The smell *is* pretty awful, especially when you get hit with it full-force for the first time.

“No, he was rude,” she says, and she looks like she's about to say more, but she catches herself. “We had our first day today – it was a lot, you know? He just forgot his manners,” she says without any conviction.

“I understand completely,” I tell her. I don't challenge her on Mike's lack of manners – it's obvious that this isn't the first time he's embarrassed her, and there's no point putting her on the spot. I wonder if she has any idea what kind of things he dreams about. I wish I could tell her, but – no. I've promised and promised myself that I won't.

I do wonder what exactly she sees in him, besides the purely physical. Maybe if I get to know them better, it'll make more sense, and – I guess anything's possible – maybe he's not quite as much of a jackass as he seems to be. We say our goodbyes and I go straight to the shower. Even if I don't notice the smell as



much anymore, I'm sure Brian does, and I don't want to carry it around with me all night.



*Sara is standing outside, on a beautiful, cloudless day. She looks around; there are hundreds – thousands – of folding chairs set up on a grassy field. The chairs all face a stage, and Sara can see a small figure in cap-and-gown climbing the steps. She recognizes the figure by her long red hair – it's Janet. And Sara knows this is her dream.*

*She watches as Janet walks across the stage towards the stand where the President of the University – or someone, anyway – ought to be, but nobody's there. Sara watches Janet pick up a diploma from the unoccupied stand, and then look out towards the sea of empty chairs. Sara is too far away to see it, but she knows that a teardrop is running down Janet's face. She's much too far away to hear clearly, but she can hear Janet all the same. "Mom? Mom, where are you? Hello! Anybody? Isn't anybody here?"*

*No one answers her; in all the thousands of chairs, there's not a single person here to watch Janet graduate...*

*...Sara finds herself elsewhere – it takes just a moment for her to orient herself. She's in the lobby of a bank, and she looks for any clue to indicate whose dream it is. She spots her new neighbor Barbara, and it's immediately clear to Sara that it's hers.*

*Barbara is sitting at a desk with the bank manager, and both she and the manager are looking at a report of some kind – an account statement. "But that can't be right!" Barbara says, with a sharp edge to her voice. "There should be \$6,000 in the savings account!"*

*The manager shakes his head sadly. "There was a withdrawal in May for \$2,000. Does anyone else have access to your account? I see here – a Mr. Stewart. Your husband?" Barbara nods, "perhaps he made the withdrawal? I can pull the records if you'd like."*

*Barbara shakes her head; Sara can see that Barbara knows exactly where and when the money was spent. Sara wonders if Mike's bachelor party involved a*

*weekend trip, maybe to someplace like Las Vegas. She wonders – if that’s true, and she feels pretty sure it is – how much of the missing \$2,000 was lost gambling, and how much was spent – well, “elsewhere.” She decides she’d really rather not know...*



I open my eyes, and I’m – where am I? In my bed, my room. With my husband. Why did I think I was – more dreams. Of course.

I wish I hadn’t seen Barbara – I already don’t like her husband, and I didn’t need any more reasons for it, but I’ve got them all the same. And I wish I hadn’t seen Janet, either. I think the worst thing about her dream is that it wasn’t even that bad. For me – probably for almost anyone – a dream like that would be terribly sad, but for her it’s an improvement. Still, I wonder if I’ll see her downstairs this morning.

I do. She seems a little shaky, though, and as we walk to class it occurs to me that it might not be due only to her dream. We’ve got Dr. Morris this afternoon. The prospect doesn’t fill me with joy, either.

The morning flies by. Before I know it, it’s time for Introduction to Clinical Practice. Janet and I get there early, but we’re not the first ones in the room – Marcie is already sitting there, reading over some notes. A minute after us, Max comes in. I notice that Marcie gives him an icy glare, and he sits as far away from her as he possibly can. They must have had a fight over the weekend, I guess. I imagine that makes things at their dissection table pretty tense – high emotions, close quarters and extremely sharp surgical instruments don’t seem like a healthy combination.

A few minutes later, everyone’s here, and then Dr. Morris and Mona walk in. “I hope all of you are prepared,” Dr. Morris says as Mona hands out folders to each of us. “Our case today is Mr. Robinson, a 45 year old Caucasian male. He presents with chronic hypertension, a severe rash covering his left arm and part of his back, and other symptoms as you can see in the notes.”

I skim the case notes quickly, just to get an overview. Nothing jumps out at me. He’s got a lot of things going on, but none of them seem related. If it wasn’t for

the rash, I'd almost think it was all just nerves – that he's basically making himself sick. But as far as I know, you don't get skin rashes from being nervous. It could be an allergy – he might not even know what he exposed himself to that caused it – but the notes say that he was given a shot of Benadryl at the hospital and that didn't help.

I raise my hand and wait for Dr. Morris to call on me. It takes a while. “Yes?”

“Are the records from his regular doctor available?” They're not in the notes.

“What do you think would be there that isn't in the case notes, Mrs. Alderson?” He just about spits out my name as he says it.

“A history of his blood pressure, for one thing.” The notes make it seem as though all these symptoms started happening at once. Obviously he'd know when the rash started, and some of the other things, but the blood pressure could have been bad for years without him realizing it.

Dr. Morris scoffs at that. “Did you fail to notice the medication list? There is a conspicuous absence of anything that might be prescribed to treat hypertension.”

Yes I did. “That's not proof, though. He still could have had high blood pressure, but maybe his doctor didn't think it was high enough to put him on medication. Or there could have been some other reason why he wasn't put on it – I think it would be good to have that history.”

Paula speaks up. “I think Sara is right.”

“Do enlighten us,” Dr. Morris says. “Please explain what Mrs. Alderson is apparently unable to articulate for herself.” Only because you're not giving me the chance to get it out!

Paula presses on. “It's important to know if the hypertension predates the other symptoms. If it does, there may be two completely separate issues with Mr. Robinson.” Exactly!

Dr. Morris isn't impressed. “That's wonderful in theory, but it assumes that there are records from his doctor. More to the point, it assumes that he even has a regular doctor, one whom Mr. Robinson has been seeing on a consistent basis.” I could scream right now. That's why I asked *if* the records were available! I wasn't assuming anything!

Things only go downhill from there. Dr. Morris isn't impressed by any of us, and even Mona gets the treatment from him every time she tries to acknowledge that one of us made a good point or asked a perceptive question. I don't know how we're going to get through a whole semester of this without someone in this room killing him.

Unless his wife or one of his co-workers does it first, of course. It's only that thought – that everyone who knows him seems to hate him as much as we've learned to in just three class sessions – that keeps me from cursing him all through the walk home.



I'm still in a foul mood at bedtime, despite Brian's best efforts to lift my spirits. He says all the right things, and I can see that they *are* right. It's not personal, Dr. Morris is just playing the role of the "mean teacher" to push us to work harder, and so on. None of it helps.

It doesn't even help when he first massages my shoulders and then begins to caress that certain spot on my neck. Honestly, I'm as surprised as he does that I don't respond – I've never not responded to that before. I worry for a while about it – I wonder if, after only three weeks, medical school is killing my marriage.

We're in bed now, both feeling very put out by everything. "I can't believe it," Brian says, looking at me curiously.

"What?"

"You. Tonight. I don't think you ever got this tense during the nightmares." That's not true, and several angry responses go through my mind. But I hold them back – and then I realize that even though he's wrong in one way, he's completely right in another. No matter how bad things got – maybe *because* of how bad they got – I was always open to him, and to being comforted and held and loved by him.

I laugh; it's the only proper response to how stupid I am. "You remember when I called you, the morning of our wedding? I hope you still don't mind being married to an idiot, because you definitely are."

He laughs, too. We just lie there, both laughing for a few minutes at how ridiculous I am, before he leans close and kisses me. He puts his arms around me, and this time it takes just the merest touch of his finger on that spot and I completely melt....



The sound of doors slamming wakes me up. It must be Mike and Barbara next door – there’s nobody else on the floor yet. I can just barely hear raised voices – not well enough to make out what they’re saying, just enough to tell they’re both angry. Considering what I saw Barbara dream about the other night, she’s got plenty of reason to be angry with Mike.

I’d be more upset about it, but it’s 6:25 AM – my alarm is set to go off in five minutes anyway. The way we ended last night helps, too. It’s almost impossible to wake up in a bad mood after that.

Brian’s still asleep; I kiss his forehead and hop in the shower. He’s still asleep when I’m finished and dressed, and I don’t have the heart to wake him up. He starts classes next week, so he won’t have many chances to sleep in after today. I write him a little note, putting it right there in the bed for him and I leave as quietly as I can.

The day goes by in a blur, at least until dissection. Today we’ve turned our cadaver over and we’re working on the veins and the cutaneous nerves of the arm - right below the skin. It’s very slow and delicate work, but all of us manage it pretty well. We’re about halfway through when Joseph, right in the middle of tearing the fat away from the cephalic vein, puts down his probe and steps away from the table with a sour look on his face.

For a moment none of us are sure what’s going on, but then I see that he’s looking at the scar on his arm. He follows my eyes and laughs weakly. “So that’s what I put my pick through that time in New Mexico. The cephalic vein. Doesn’t look like much, does it?”

Not on our poor cadaver, no. “You want one of us to take over?” I think I know what he’s feeling. We – everyone in this room – don’t really see our cadavers as people. You can’t, if you’re going to be dissecting them. So it’s rough when you

hit a point of connection – something that makes you remember that not so long ago, they were a person just like you. And – more to the point - one day you're going to be just like them.

Joseph shakes his head. “No, I’m fine. Let’s finish this,” he says, stepping back to the table. He picks up his probe, gets back to work and he completes his portion of the dissection without a hitch. For my part, though, I can’t help but glance now and then at his scar, and I catch Paula and Janet doing so as well.



*Sara is in Room 309, waiting along with seven other people for Dr. Morris to show up. She’s sitting by herself on one side of the room, and her classmates are all apart from her, all glaring at her.*

*“Maybe you should just leave,” Max says, pointing at her. “It’s you he doesn’t like. The rest of us are all suffering because he hates you.”*

*Sara looks to Janet for support, but she gets an icy stare instead. Joseph and Paula turn their backs to her. The others in the class, Marcie and Dominick and Sanjay, do likewise.*

*The door opens, and Dr. Morris stalks in. He hands out folders to the other students. “Our patient today is a twenty-two year old Caucasian female who presents with a rare combination of arrogance and ignorance. You’ll find all the details in the notes, but I assure you they are not pleasant reading.”*

*Sara doesn’t receive a folder, but she knows precisely what she would see if she did...*



Thursday morning. I get around very slowly; I didn’t sleep well at all. I feel upset and almost nauseous and I have no idea why. I guess it’s anxiety about class with Dr. Morris later today. All the classes so far have been miserable, there’s no reason to think today will be any better.

When I see Janet in the lobby, I feel a momentary flash of anger at her. I don’t know where it came from, but it’s gone as quickly as it appears. My mood doesn’t really improve, though – I’m very agitated all morning, and by the time

one-thirty comes and we head to Room 309, I have half a mind to just turn around and go home.

I don't, of course. I take my seat, and look around at a room full of people who appear to be as stumped as I am by the case of poor Mr. Robinson. I spent three hours last night on it, and I still have no idea what's going on. The notes list all the tests that he was given, and they all came back normal. He doesn't seem to have been exposed to anything contagious. There's no sign that it's cancer, or heart disease, or diabetes, or any of twenty other things I looked up.

If I didn't know better, I'd say the same thing that I thought on Tuesday: there is no disease, he's just making himself sick. But that can't be the answer.

We all ask questions, and Dr. Morris scoffs at each of us in turn. "I don't think the symptoms are connected," Paula says, echoing her comments from Tuesday.

"It could be an environmental factor. His house might be making him sick," is Joseph's theory.

"Zahorsky's Disease," is Sanjay's guess, which earns a cackle from Dr. Morris.

"You *have* been digging deep, Mr. Patel," he says. "But in your excavations, it clearly escaped your notice that Zahorsky's Disease, also known as roseola infantum, only affects infants and small children, not 45-year-old men."

We keep at it, but it's like beating our collective heads against a wall. Finally, at five o'clock, Dr. Morris sighs deeply, shakes his head and announces that he's appalled with the lot of us. "Briquet's syndrome. I should have thought it was obvious from the start." We all look at him blankly. "Also referred to as somatization disorder. In plainer words, since clearly none of you are capable of comprehending anything more, the symptoms are the result of the patient's stress. He is, essentially, making himself sick."

"There's nothing in the notes about stress!" Max blurts out.

"No?" Dr. Morris sneers, "No? You did not note the biographical information? A recent divorce? A teenaged child? Currently unemployed? You would not consider those things stressful?"

Well, yes. Obviously they are. And that was my instinct – that he was doing it to himself, but I dismissed it right out of hand. I admit, it didn't occur to me that making yourself sick was an actual, recognized medical condition.

I see what Dr. Morris was doing. It actually makes sense to me – but he didn't need to be such an ass about it. As the eight of us file out of class, it turns out I've got the most generous opinion of today's session, and "ass" is by far the mildest term used to describe him.

Five minutes after I get home, the phone rings. It's Paula. "0.2% of the population! That's how uncommon Briquet's syndrome is! *And* it is far more prevalent in women than in men!" As Paula rants about Dr. Morris, Brian is massaging my shoulders, and my anger is draining away. I'm just not going to let Dr. Morris make me miserable and insane, that's all there is to it.





*Six:*

*The Conversation*

(AUGUST 23-25, 1991)

**S**ara is in an office, a very cluttered office. From the titles of the books scattered all about, it's clear that it belongs to one of her teachers, but which one? She searches around fruitlessly, until the door opens and in walks Dr. Morris.

It's his office, but not, she knows, his dream. Whose, then? The answer comes walking in right behind Dr. Morris – an older woman, an inch or two taller than Sara, her hair just beginning to gray, a frown on her face. Sara thinks she's seen the woman in the halls – she is, Sara thinks, Dr. Morris' secretary.

“I won't be ignored, Abraham!” she shouts as she slams the door shut behind her. “Not after so many years, not after everything I've done for you!”

Dr. Morris sits down in his chair, leans back, sighs deeply. “You're being childish, Maureen. This is a delicate time, and I cannot allow any suggestion of impropriety if I am to be the next Dean.”

*The secretary – Maureen – does not sit. She glares at Dr. Morris, momentarily speechless. Then she picks up a crystal paperweight from his desk and hurls it at the wall, where it shatters instantly. “Really!” Dr. Morris stares at her with a combination of alarm and contempt.*

*“You liked that, Abraham? Then you’ll love this!” Maureen digs into her purse, pulls out a pistol. She aims it with shaking hands at Dr. Morris.*

*“Maureen, calm yourself!”*

*“Good luck becoming the Dean with a hole in your head!” Maureen shouts as she pulls the trigger...*



I wake up with the sound of – was it a gunshot? – echoing in my head. What the hell are they getting up to next door? No – not next door. It was a dream, it was – of course, Dr. Morris again. I remember it all now.

This time it was his secretary. He’s having an affair with her – I don’t see how else to interpret “I won’t be ignored.” I think it’s safe to assume that Dr. Morris isn’t the type to have a pet rabbit, so I guess she just decided to escalate straight to murder. That’s officially four different people who’ve dreamed of killing him now. I wonder if he has the slightest idea just how many people hate him?

Yes, I think he probably does. And no, I don’t think it bothers him one bit.



I try to put the dream out of my mind, even though I know I’m going to have to do something about it, and probably sooner than later. At least I learned one thing from the dream – it confirmed that Dr. Morris is aiming to be the next Dean. Our current Dean is retiring at the end of the academic year, and at some point between now and then – if I understand the process correctly – the faculty votes on their choice to replace him. Then, I think, the President of the University can decide whether he agrees with their choice, or if not he can appoint someone from outside the school. I probably ought to pay more attention to it, but I’ve been so busy that I just haven’t given it much thought.

Today is no exception on the busy front – besides the usual lectures in the morning and spending the afternoon shadowing Dr. Kamara I’ve got dinner with

Bob and my parents tonight.

The lectures go by even more quickly than usual, and thankfully they end early, at eleven thirty. There's a note in my mailbox from Dr. Kamara, to meet her in the University Hospital cafeteria at noon, so Janet and I head straight over there. Dr. Kamara is waiting for us – she sees the two of us milling around the entrance looking nervous and lost and she calls out, “There’s my two students for the day!”

She looks – kindly is the first word that comes to mind. My initial thought on seeing her is, when I get pregnant, I want her for my doctor. “Dr. Kamara?” I ask, just to say something, to distract myself from that thought.

“So you’re Janet,” Janet nods her head, “and Sara,” I nod mine. “Come on, lunch is on me.” I’m very surprised. I didn’t expect her to buy us lunch, on top of allowing us to tag along after her all afternoon. She’s the one doing something for us by even allowing us to shadow her in the first place. I was right about “kindly.”

She asks if she was the last slot open, and that’s why we’re here. “I’m always the last one to get filled,” she says, and we both shake our heads. “Oh, I’m used to it,” she laughs, “I suppose most students don’t think obstetrics is sexy enough, which is kind of ironic.” Janet laughs right away, but it takes me a minute to get the joke.

She asks us about ourselves, and she’s very interested when I mention that I’m a newlywed. “So that’s why you signed up for me,” she says with a grin.

“No,” I answer, but I wonder – was it in the back of my mind when I saw obstetrics on the sign-up sheet? Maybe. I might as well ask, since she’s brought it up. “It wasn’t, really. But can I ask you – you’ve been through school and residency and everything – when would be the best time?”

I don’t need to specify what I’m asking about; Dr. Kamara understands, and if the way Janet is staring at me in disbelief is any indication, so does she. “Well, you know the workload already,” I nod. “Third and fourth year, doing clinical rotations, you’ll be lucky to get away working less than a hundred hours a week. That’s not the time to be pregnant. Residency is the same, only worse.” I know all that. “The easiest thing would be to wait until you’re finished with

residency,” she can see from my expression that I don’t like that answer, “But if you don’t want to wait seven years, the only time I’d recommend is – honestly?” I nod again. “The next few months.”

Even though that’s the answer I expected, and the one I’ve been coming to myself, it’s kind of frightening to hear it out loud. “Really?” Janet is utterly shocked at this whole conversation.

“Definitely. The best time would be, probably, next semester, anytime from January to May. You’d be done with first semester exams, you wouldn’t have to come to Anatomy while you’re pregnant, and you’d deliver several months before you have to take your board exams.”

When I’ve considered it, that’s pretty much exactly what I figured. “Do you know anyone who’s done it like that?”

She nods. “One of my study partners, for a start. It was rough, but she got through it in one piece. Really, my advice is to think about it long and hard. It’s not easy, I’m sure you realize that. You know yourself best, what you can handle, what you can’t.”

The truth is that I know I want it, and I don’t want to wait seven years, and I think I can manage it all. But all I say is, “That’s a lot to think about.”



The first patient Dr. Kamara sees is a seventeen year old girl who’s three months pregnant. Counting back, it probably happened the night of her prom. That time and that age don’t seem all that far away to me, and for a moment I’m back in high school. It doesn’t matter that I was actually in the hospital the night of my prom recovering from having my appendix out. I still put myself in the girl’s place, imagining all my plans, all my hopes going out the window because of one mistake.

It takes a lot of effort to focus myself, to listen to Dr. Kamara as she goes over everything the girl should be doing, what she’ll need to know. I manage it only with great difficulty. When Dr. Kamara is done with the medical advice she asks, very gently, about the girl’s family. Is anyone with her? Yes, the boyfriend. He’s in the waiting room, as it turns out.

“He said he’ll marry me,” the girl says proudly. “He’s got a job, and - and we’re going to live in the little apartment over his Dad’s garage.”

Dr. Kamara pronounces that “excellent,” and tells the girl that, next visit, her boyfriend can come back to the exam room with her. When she leaves, Dr. Kamara asks us what we thought.

“In high school, a couple of girls in my year got pregnant, and, I mean, it happens all the time,” Janet says, “but it’s - I don’t know – she looks so young. I know I shouldn’t be surprised, but...”

Dr. Kamara looks at me, and I nod my head; I don’t have anything to add to that. “She’s far from the youngest patient I’ve had this week. But I understand exactly what you mean.” She takes a deep breath before she goes on. “You’ll learn as you go to distance yourself – I saw both of you imagining yourself in her place – but you’ll learn how to separate yourself from your patients.”

“But what about empathy, letting them know you understand what they’re going through?” Janet asks.

Dr. Kamara gives her a gentle smile. “That’s the trick. You have to do both. If you can’t distance yourself from your patients, you can’t really do this – not just obstetrics, but any specialty. But on the other hand, you do need to identify with them, understand what they’re feeling. Because they’ll know it if you don’t. It’s a fine line you have to walk.”

“How do you balance it?” I ask.

“It takes time and experience. There isn’t any special technique. Just – be conscious about it. Always keep in your mind that you’re dealing with a fellow human being, and probably one who’s very frightened, probably in pain. Keep it in mind, but don’t let it prevent you from doing what you need to do to help them.”

Janet considers that. “How long did it take you to learn that?”

Dr. Kamara shakes her head. “I’m still learning it. It’s a constant struggle. Maybe it’s a little easier now than it was when I started, but not that much, honestly.”

Well, that’s pretty sobering.

The next patient comes in, and she's nearly forty. She's having an ultrasound, and Dr. Kamara asks both Janet and I to assist. It takes all my self-control to stifle my excitement at the prospect. The patient – Karen – lies down, Dr. Kamara talks to her for a few minutes, and then she's ready.

“Sara, you'll apply the gel,” I know exactly what to do. I didn't expect to actually get to help with a patient – but it's – well, thrilling. There's no other word for it. I put the gel on, with Dr. Kamara watching and nodding her approval as I do. Then she begins the ultrasound, and Janet gets the chance to try and interpret the images.

“OK, there's the legs, so – right there, is that...?”

“Good eye, Janet,” Dr. Kamara says. “Congratulations, Karen, you're having a boy.” Karen is ecstatic; she's got four daughters and she and her husband have been hoping for a son.

We see several more patients, and in between nearly every one, Dr. Kamara takes a phone call, most of them frantic. She's so patient with every call, she gives every one of them as much time as they need. I definitely want her for my doctor if – when – it's my time.

At five o'clock, Dr. Kamara congratulates us. “You both did very well today. I think you're on the right path,” she says. “And, Sara,” she adds, “feel free to call me if you have any questions about your situation.”

All the way home, Janet questions me about that. “Are you seriously considering it?” and “What does Brian think?” and “You really think you can do it?” and “You can tell me – I won't say a word – you're not already pregnant, are you?”

The answers, for the record, are: Yes, He's okay with it, Yes, and God, no!



I tell Brian about my day. “I'm so proud of you,” he says, and I see in his eyes he's not just saying the words, he really feels it. I'm so lucky to have him. “Was it weird, though?” he asks. “We've been talking, and – it was probably strange for you...”

“Kind of. The weirdest one was the teenager, she was the first patient we saw. In my mind I was back in high school, you know?” He knows exactly what I mean. “But other than her, yeah, I did picture myself, and I talked to her a little about it. I think I – we – can do it. There’s a lot to consider, but...”

He kisses me. I throw my arms around him, and – God, my parents will be here in twenty minutes! We both realize that at the same instant, we pull back from each other, laughing.

“You know what we should do,” he says with a little glint in his eye. “We could have a little fun with them...”



We’re at dinner, all six of us, up at Hunan Coventry. Janet joined us - it was Mom’s idea to invite her, which I really appreciated. Mom doesn’t ask about Janet’s mother, and Janet doesn’t volunteer anything, but that’s fine. I’m just glad she feels – well, I hope she feels – that she’s among people who care about her.

Just as the fried dumplings are served, Dad asks how school was today. “Well, we only had class in the morning, and then in the afternoon I went to see Dr. Kamara – she’s an obstetrician,” I say.

Mom goes completely white, Dad stares at me in shock and Bob nearly chokes on an egg roll. Janet almost falls out of her chair laughing, as does Brian. I can’t keep a straight face for more than a couple of seconds.

“It wasn’t like that, Mrs. Barnes,” Janet finally manages to say through her laughter. “Sara and I both went – we were shadowing her, sitting in while she saw her patients.”

Calm is slowly restored. Mom is jumpy for a while, but eventually – after asking me several times to reassure her that I’m really not pregnant – she gets over it. I have to say, it was absolutely worth it, if for no other reason than to see Janet laughing the way she did.



After my parents drop us back on campus, and just before they head to their hotel for the night, Dad grabs my arm and pulls me aside. “I know I’ve said it a

million times, but you're so much like your mother."

"I know, Dad..."

"You're going to be twenty-three soon."

"Yes."

"Your mother was twenty-three when she had you," he says, staring hard at me.

"Yes."

"You can tell me anything, you know that."

"Yes." He's about ready to burst, I guess I should tell him. Again. "Look, Dad, I'm not pregnant. Seriously. I'm not. But – we have been - do you want to know the truth?"

He can't bring himself to say yes, but he does nod ever so slightly. "We've talked about it, pretty seriously. About trying to have a baby. Soon. If we time it right, I think I can do it and get through school in one piece."

He pulls me close, hugs me. "I don't know what to say. I look at you, and you're a grown woman. You're married. You're going to be a doctor." He's still hugging me. "I close my eyes and you're a little girl, and I'm picking you up on my shoulders so you can see over the fence and look at the polar bears at the zoo, or we're dropping you off for your first day of kindergarten, or – God, this is hard."

I hug him back. "Dad, it's the same for me."

He finally lets me go. "I trust you, honey. I always have. If you think you can handle a baby and school at the same time, if you think you're ready to be a mother – well, then I suppose I'm ready to be a grandfather."

I guess I can scratch another item off the list of "things I never thought I'd talk about with my father."

"Thanks, Dad," I say. "It makes me feel better knowing that's what you think. But," I add, "maybe you shouldn't tell Mom we had this talk just yet?"

"Maybe not," he agrees.





Brian and I stay up very late talking about “the b-word.” We’ve discussed it before, but this is by far the most serious as well as the most practical conversation we’ve had. It’s definitely not a conversation I ever imagined having in a dorm room.

For all my bravado, I *am* pretty frightened. It’s easy for me to sit here now and say that I know I can handle being pregnant while I’m in school, but I don’t really know that. And what about once the baby is born? Will I really be able to finish second year and pass my boards with an infant keeping me up every single night?

When I was having the nightmares, I was able to pass one somewhat tough final exam after a couple of weeks of sleeping badly. Will I be able to pass a massive exam that determines whether I’ll be able to continue my education or not, after six months of not sleeping?

And what about day care? What if we go for it during the brief window we’ve got, and then it turns out Brian can’t get a job when he graduates? Where will the money come from?

“We’re not going to have all the answers,” Brian says. “I don’t think anyone does. But we’ve got time to figure them out, right?” Right. “I think we will. I know it’s crazy, I’m not even twenty-one yet, and we’re talking about this. But I feel – I think it’s right. I know you think so too.”

I can’t hold myself back – I kiss him, then I pull him down onto the bed.

Much later, we talk a little more about it. We’re agreed – we’ll start looking into all the issues seriously, try to sort out the details of how we can make it work. I know it’s risky, and almost anybody else in our place would wait, but I don’t care. We both want it, we’ll figure out how to make it work.



Saturday morning Mom and Dad drive over to say goodbye – they’re heading home. They offer to take us (and Bob) on one quick run up to the mall if we need anything, but I can’t think of a thing. So after twenty minutes of hugs and tears and “we really, really have to go” they drive off.

The rest of the day flies by. I go to my weekly review session. There's a good half hour of griping, mainly about Dr. Morris. Janet and I talk about our afternoon with Dr. Kamara. Paula talks about her afternoon with Dr. Mendrell, who's an anesthesiologist. Joseph didn't sign up with anyone – he took his kids to Cedar Point and spent the afternoon riding roller coasters. I can't say I blame him, it sounds like they had a blast.

As usual, Joseph has his son grill burgers for us, and I take the time to talk with Mary. She's actually the one to bring up the topic of children. She asks me, just like Dr. Kamara did, if that's why I signed up to work with an obstetrician for my first time shadowing a working doctor.

"I didn't think so," I say, "but it was probably there under the surface."

"You're being smart. With us – it was a surprise with Kevin. I didn't know what we were going to do – Joseph was working on his Ph.D., I was barely making enough to cover the rent. But it all worked out, and look at us now."

I'm kind of surprised she volunteered that. I'm not sure I would have in her place. But if she's being that honest, I guess I can be as well. "I'm not sure how smart I am. I'm thinking about – well, we're thinking about having one next year."

She says almost the same thing Dr. Kamara did. "You know yourself best." She gives me a very serious look. "I don't know you that well, but I've seen enough of you the last three weeks to have a decent idea about you. You're very bright. I see how you've been looking after your friend Janet, you've definitely got a big heart. And it's pretty clear to me you've got a strong marriage."

"Wow. Thanks." I'd certainly like to believe all those things are true. I think they are.

"I'm just telling you what I see. As far as I can tell, you've got everything you need to be a good parent."

"I hope so." I laugh. "If we do try – if – a year from now we'll be calling you to have Jeannie babysit for us, you know that, right?"

She laughs as well. "She's already doing it. She charges eight bucks an hour."

Eight? "When I was in high school, I only charged four!"

Joseph picks this moment to come in and announce that dinner's ready. He sees us deep in conversation. "What are you ladies talking about?"

Mary answers. "We're negotiating Jeannie's babysitting rate."

I go red; I'm not sure I really wanted to talk about this with Joseph, too. But he's way ahead of me. "I was wondering about that, when you signed up with the obstetrician."

This is ridiculous. Am I the only one who doesn't know my own motives? Apparently so.



*Sara is standing behind an old, dusty purple couch. She knows immediately that she's in the lobby of her old dorm, Carson House. She looks around, wondering what's going on; it's not her dream, but whose is it? There are several people sitting on the couch, most of them from last year's crop of freshmen, but a couple of older students as well. She recognizes George, a year behind her, who broke his leg right after she broke her own foot, and Terrie MacKenzie the art student. And she recognizes her brother, sitting right in the center of the couch; she knows then that this is his dream.*

*God, I don't want to know what's in his head, Sara thinks, but it's too late. Bob, along with everyone else on the couch, is waiting for something, and what that is becomes clear a moment later.*

*Half a dozen girls march down the stairs and into the lobby, wearing nothing but high heels and bikinis. Sara sees Jackie, and her old next-door neighbor Kelly Travers, and she recognizes the other four girls as well, all freshmen last year.*

*They step up, one at a time, to the front of the lobby, twirl around and wait for the assembled crowd on the couch to give them their scores. Sara is torn between amusement and disgust at the sight.*

*When it's over, the clear winner is one of last year's freshmen, Susan Meeks, whose "prize" is a kiss from Bob. Sara can't watch anymore; she shouts "Enough!" and...*



“Enough! Stop it!” Who am I shouting at? What are they doing? Brian stirs awake; whatever was going on, it wasn’t him doing it.

It comes to me in a rush. Brian’s looking at me with bleary, unfocused eyes. “My brother. Bob was dreaming.”

That wakes him right up. “Seriously? You saw him?”

“Unfortunately.” I guess it could have been worse; I didn’t see anything *that* gross.

“What was he – no, it’s not your secret, don’t tell me.” I love him. He always knows just what to say. But on the other hand, this time he’s wrong. Bob doesn’t deserve to have this secret kept.

“He was having a beauty contest in his head to decide which girl he should go after once everyone’s back in the dorm.” It’s mean and petty to tell it, I guess. Well, I know it is, but – how is it fair to me that I have to watch my brother’s weird romantic fantasies?

What’s really sad about it is that he probably wouldn’t even be embarrassed if he knew I’d seen it. Brian, though, has to spoil everything by being reasonable. “It’s not so different from what I dreamed about when you saw me, that very first time.”

It’s completely different – it’s entirely – it’s - oh, who am I kidding? He’s right. He knows it, too. He puts his arm around me. “Maybe this is your chance to learn how to control the dreams,” he says. “Think of it that way. Maybe you can learn how to make yourself wake up.”

“That’s the best you can do for a silver lining to what I saw?” I shake my head.

“Sorry, honey. That’s all I’ve got.” Well, I suppose even Brian had to let me down sometime.



It’s almost seven o’clock, and I’m sitting in the balcony of Strack Auditorium, with Brian right next to me. Every year, the Sunday before fall classes start, the school Film Society has a free showing of “Casablanca.” They’ve been doing it for years, and I’ve gone every time since I’ve been here. But this is Brian’s first time – I don’t even remember why he couldn’t come with me last year.

I talked Joseph and Mary into coming as well, and Janet. Paula's the only one of our dissection group who wouldn't join us – she didn't want to give up even two hours of studying. Oh, well. It's her loss.

The lights dim, the music starts, my husband has his arm around me, and I'm in heaven.



“Would you have made me get on the plane?” I ask Brian as we're walking back.

Janet, one step behind us, laughs. “Be careful how you answer that. I think it's a trick question.”

“No it isn't,” he answers, squeezing my hand. “Victor Laszlo could fight the Nazis just as well on his own. Anyway, he could find somebody else once he got to America. But I wouldn't ever want to find anyone besides you.”

I give him a quick kiss; I really like his answer. Besides, I think Ilsa admired Victor more than she loved him. She'd be happier with Rick anyway.

I hear footsteps and I peek over my shoulder – there's a couple there, walking hand in hand, about five steps behind. They look like they might be in their late twenties, maybe even thirty, and they look vaguely familiar – I think I might have seen them waiting for the elevator in Drake Tower this morning.

“Hola, neighbor!” the woman calls out. Obviously I was right. She's tall – nearly as tall as Brian, with blonde hair and very fair skin. Her companion – her husband, I see the rings on their fingers now – is shorter than her and darker, with a mustache that's very – the only word that comes to mind is “macho.”

“I thought I recognized you from this morning,” I say. I stop to let them catch up, and we all introduce ourselves. She's Deia, and her husband is Jaime. He's Spanish, and still working on his English; she's American by citizenship, but she's lived most of her life in Spain. They live a couple of doors down from us.

We chat about the movie; Deia has a different take on the ending. She says that putting Ilsa on the plane was the romantic thing to do. “She'll always wonder ‘what if’ and the fantasy will be better than real life could be,” is her view. We'll have to agree to disagree, I guess.

I really like them, at least as a first impression. She's very open and friendly, and Jaime is trying his best, considering he only understands about half of what's being said around him. They certainly seem to be a nice change from the weirdness of our other neighbors Mike and Barbara.

Once we're back in our room, getting ready for bed, I ask Brian again. "You really wouldn't put me on the plane?"

He pulls me close, kisses me, caresses my neck, and I swoon. I can barely even hear him when he breaks the kiss just long enough to whisper, "Not a chance."



*Seven:*

*Frantic*

(AUGUST 26 – AUGUST 30, 1991)

*S*ara is standing in a dimly-lit parking garage. She's never been here before, but she recognizes the names stenciled on the floor of each space. "Reserved for Dr. Haynes," "Reserved for Dr. Morgan," and so on.

It's obviously the garage beneath the medical school. Sara is standing directly in front of a space marked "Reserved for Dr. Cooper." Parked there is a four-door Jaguar sedan, silver, in immaculate condition.

Brakes squeal behind her and she turns to see a black BMW come to a stop just inches from where she stands. The driver does not seem to notice her, and she knows instantly that this is his dream. He emerges from the car, and Sara recognizes him as well, although she can't remember how. He's an older man, with a salt-and-pepper beard and dreadful glasses, and a scowl on his face.

"Morris!" he shouts. "Morris, you son of a bitch! You're always in my way! Always where I need to go! No more!"

*The man – clearly Dr. Cooper – walks to the back of his BMW, opens the trunk, and pulls out a golf club. A two-iron, Sara decides, picturing her father’s golf bag. Dr. Cooper walks back around, approaches the Jaguar, and takes a mighty swing at the rear windshield.*

*After the third swing, cracks begin to appear, and after the fifth swing, the glass shatters and Dr. Cooper lets out a howl of triumph...*



I wake up, and I’m feeling around blindly – what am I looking for? I have to make sure there aren’t any shards of glass. Why? Why would there be – oh.

It comes back in a rush. Another dream about Dr. Morris. At least I learned something – it was the same man I saw a couple of weeks ago, and now I know who he is. Dr. Cooper. I haven’t formally met him yet, and from what I’ve seen inside his head I don’t think it would be such a treat to get to know him.

I try to put it out of my mind; I’ve got to get ready for class. And so does Brian – I nudge him awake.

“Wha?”

“First day of class. Rise and shine!” I give him a quick kiss, and that seems to get him moving. “Better?”

“Much,” he answers. He gets up and around, and we’re out the door by seven thirty. Janet’s waiting for us down in the lobby, and now that classes have started and the building is fully occupied, we’re not the only ones there at this hour.

Brian walks with us as far as Euclid Avenue, where he turns right to head towards the main quad and Janet and I go left to the medical school. As we cross in front of the entrance to the underground parking garage, we’re nearly run over by - God, of course it has to be him - a black BMW whose driver isn’t even looking as he turns into the garage. I don’t get a good look at him, but I don’t have to - I’ve already seen him. Besides, his license plate is a dead giveaway: “COOP-1.”

“What a jackass!” is Janet’s response.

“He wants to make sure Dr. Morris doesn’t steal his parking spot again,” I blurt out. Janet gives me a look, and I shrug. “Oh - I overheard Dr. Haynes talking



about it the last week,” I lie.

“That sounds like Dr. Morris, doesn’t it?” Janet and I both laugh, but neither of us is really amused. We head to lecture without any other incidents, and once we take our seats we’re greeted by none other than Dr. Cooper.

I don’t like him as a lecturer any better than I liked him in his dream. He’s arrogant, even compared to Dr. Morris, although I have to admit that he does know his stuff. Today is the first time all term I have serious trouble understanding the lecture material, as opposed to just being overwhelmed by the quantity of work, and I can see all around me that I’m far from alone.

The session drags on - it feels like four days rather than four hours, but mercifully, it finally comes to an end. Janet and I go to the cafeteria and I’m half-tempted to ask about her mother. She’s been in such (relatively) high spirits over the last week that I wonder if she’s gotten some good news. But, just in case I’m wrong, I don’t ask.

On our way to the Anatomy Theater, I spot a new sign-up sheet on the second floor notice board. They’re looking for volunteers to work nighttime shifts at the Student Health Service. “I’m already drowning,” Janet says, showing no interest, but I put myself down for Wednesday, six to ten PM for the next two weeks.

Then it’s on to dissection. Today we’re working on the shoulder. We have to survive a quiz reviewing the muscles of the back first, but each of us answers Dr. Haynes’ questions correctly and we move on.

Paula starts and I read for her as she begins with the deltoid muscle. I catch Janet looking at Joseph’s right shoulder as I read, and I can’t help but look, too. He does have some very-well developed muscles there, I must admit. Probably from all the work he did getting his basement finished. He doesn’t even realize we’re staring; he’s so focused on watching what Paula’s doing.

“Excuse me!” Paula snaps, and I shake my head. How long was I staring at Joseph?

“Sorry. Where was I?” I blush, and try to pick up where I left off reading. Paula is frosty to me for the rest of the session, and Joseph teases me mercilessly. I guess I deserve it.



Walking home I feel guilty, even though I don't think I really did anything wrong. I wasn't lusting after Joseph, I was just – I don't know, studying him. Brian wouldn't even be jealous if I told him. Not that I'm going to.

After I've showered and eaten I still feel, however irrationally, that I've got to make amends to Brian. I tell him to take his shirt off and lie face down on the bed, and I must say I love that he doesn't even question it.

"I'm sure you had a tiring day, first day of classes and everything," I say, "I want to give you a massage." I pay special attention to his shoulders, looking at his very nice muscles. Maybe they're not quite as well-developed as Joseph's, it's hard to say, but I know for sure I like them better because they're attached to the man I love.

As I massage him, he purrs contentedly. He doesn't notice at first - and, honestly, neither do I - that as I knead his muscles, I'm muttering their names, what they're connected to and the nerves that run near them.

"What?" he finally hears me, about five seconds after I realize myself I'm doing it.

"That's your serratus posterior superior," I poke it with a finger. "It attaches at your vertebrae, and also your ribs."

A ridiculous image pops into my mind, and I stop what I'm doing, breaking into giggles. "What's so funny?"

"I was just wondering if they'd let me bring you in as a study aid when we have our Anatomy exam."



Tuesday morning. The good mood I wake up with vanishes the moment I remember what Tuesday means: Dr. Morris. But before that, I have to get through lecture, and it's Dr. Cooper again today. I can just barely keep up, which is better than most of my classmates seem to be doing. Janet looks thoroughly lost; even Sanjay in the front row, who usually fills a whole notebook each class, looks like he's having trouble.

It finally ends, and after a quick lunch that neither Janet nor I really have any appetite for, we head up to the third floor and Dr. Morris. We're the last ones to

arrive; everyone else is already there. Max and Marcie haven't made up – they're sitting as far apart as possible again, while Sanjay still looks rattled from the morning lecture. Everyone looks apprehensive and dispirited.

But we're all in for a very pleasant surprise – Dr. Morris is not coming today! Mona arrives at one thirty on the dot and announces that Dr. Morris is sick. Max mutters, "Maybe someone poisoned him," and I don't know how I manage to keep from reacting. Someone very well may have poisoned him; there's no shortage of suspects.

I try to put that out of my mind as Mona starts the class. "I'm sure you guys won't mind, I'm going to run things a little differently today," and the sighs of relief from everyone are all the answer she needs. "I'm going to do this the way my teacher did it when I took this class." She begins passing out folders, and they're much thinner than they've been the last two weeks.

Mona waits until we've all looked at the very skimpy information in our folders before she continues. "We're going to treat this as though the patient just came to you, and you're the first doctor she's seeing. You can see in the notes, Mrs. Jones is a 34-year-old Caucasian female, and she's complaining of debilitating stomach cramps and difficulties with her bowel movements, which she's been suffering from for the past three weeks. There's also a general history, what medications she's currently taking, everything the patient would have written down on her paperwork when she came to the office."

"That's not much to go on," Paula protests.

"Well, that's where you'll be starting from when you're practicing." Mona tells her. "What I want you to do now is to spend the next ten minutes or so thinking about what you would ask the patient, and what tests you would order. I'd like you to write all that down, and then we'll discuss it."

My immediate thought is an ulcer. My uncle Jon had one, and I remember that he complained about horrible cramps from it. But I don't know the best way to tell if it is an ulcer or not. I don't want to send poor Mrs. Jones out for twenty different tests if I can help it.

I guess I'd start by going over what she's been eating, and confirming what medications she's taking. Then definitely blood tests, and the next step would

depend on how she answered and what the blood tests showed.

It turns out that I'm by far the most conservative person in the class. There are calls for x-rays, and for a colonoscopy. Dominick wants to send Mrs. Jones home to produce a stool sample to go along with the blood and urine tests he would order. Poor Janet goes white when Marcie wonders if it might be stomach cancer and suggests a CAT scan to find out for sure.

"We wouldn't do a CAT scan unless there was other evidence of cancer," Mona replies to that. "Sara has the right approach, at least to start with," she goes on, and I can't help but smile. It's the first kind word I've heard in this class so far.

We eventually settle on a suggested plan: interview Mrs. Jones, go over her diet, make sure she didn't forget to mention any medications she's using, and run a full panel of blood tests. I try very hard to keep a smug smile off my face, and I think I mostly succeed.

Mona's already got the results, and she passes them out to us. The basic blood tests are inconclusive, and – at least to my mostly untrained eye - nothing stands out in Mrs. Jones' diet that seems like it would give her the problems she's having.

We spend the remainder of the class discussing the tests and arguing over what we'd do next. Even though there's a lot of disagreement, it's still far more civil and pleasant than any of the previous sessions have been. We're no closer to a diagnosis at five thirty than we were when we came into class, but it's a much calmer and happier group that walks out the door.



Brian and I are in Lardner Commons, "enjoying" a late dinner. It's not any better than the microwaveable meals we've been eating for the last month, but at least there's all-you-can-eat ice cream once you've forced down as much of the hot food as you can stomach.

"It could be a food allergy," I mutter, the idea coming to me out of the blue.

Brian puts down a forkful of something in brown sauce. "What could be?"

"Oh, the patient in our class today. I'll spare you the details while we're eating." He looks very grateful. "But it could be an allergy. You don't always get

hives and all that, sometimes there are other symptoms.” I’ll have to look that up when we get back home. “Enough about me, though. How were your classes today?”

He shakes his head. “I’m going to lose my mind before the semester is out. Especially with Wide Area Networking, that class is going to kill me. I don’t know how I’m going to get through everything.” That sounds familiar.

“You can drop a class.” Seven classes is insane. He took six classes each semester last year, and it was very difficult for him. And unlike last year I won’t be able to give him any help.

“I’ll try to stick it out. Maybe once I get into a rhythm it’ll be easier.” I can hear in his voice that he doesn’t really believe it.

“You’ve got three weeks to decide, just think it over.”

Before he can answer I spot Janet walking over, and even across the room I can see the panic in her face. She sits down across from me, next to Brian, and announces without preamble: “I can’t get ahold of my mother.” She’s about two seconds away from going into full-blown hysterics.

Brian puts his arm around her. I’m looking right at him, and I honestly don’t think he even realizes he’s doing it. There’s someone in trouble, and he just reacts automatically – as if I needed another reason to admire him, and to love him.

“Slow down, Janet,” I say, in my calmest voice. Between that and the comfort of Brian holding her, she relaxes slightly.

“We talk every night at seven o’clock. Every night. And she didn’t answer. The machine picked up, but I couldn’t even leave a message, the tape was full. She’s – she could be...”

The tape being full doesn’t sound good, I agree. “Is there anybody else you can call to check on her?”

She takes a deep breath, fighting back tears. “I called her neighbor, Mr. Manning. But he wasn’t home. There isn’t anyone else to call, except 911.” She blurts that out and then she’s out of breath. I push my water glass over to her and she drinks it in one gulp.

“OK, let’s go back home. We’ll figure something out, Janet. I promise.”

Brian pulls her up, and I put my arm around her as well as we walk out. We make our way quickly back to Drake Tower, and we go straight past the small TV lounge. We're halfway to the elevator when a weak voice calls out, "Janet!"

We all turn in unison to see her mother sitting there. My first thought, which I'm amazed I don't blurt out, is that she looks like she needs to be in a hospital. She's very frail, and I can see her straining with the effort of standing up and walking over to Janet.

"Mom! What – how – why...?"

Her mother can barely speak. "I wanted to see my daughter," she gasps.

"Come on, Mom, let's get you upstairs so you can lie down." Janet says, her voice breaking. "Come on..."

But we don't make it to the elevator – her mother collapses right there in the lobby. I look at Brian and he nods; he heads for the phone to call 911. "Janet, give me your keys," I say, and she doesn't even bother to ask why, she just tosses them to me. "I'll be right down."

She's going to want to stay with her mother in the hospital, and she'll need her purse and her toiletries and a change of clothes. By the time I've gotten all that together and returned to the lobby, the EMTs are here, getting her mother onto a stretcher while a small crowd has gathered to look on.

"Do you want me to come with you?" I ask Janet.

"No," she says in a very distant voice. "No. No." She turns and follows the EMTs outside to the ambulance, and I'm torn. I think she obviously needs me – or someone, at least – but on the other hand, I'm sure she also wants to be alone with her mother. I guess this is what Aunt Kat and my Mom meant when they talked about Janet having to get through things by herself.

I wait in the lobby until the ambulance is gone, and then Brian and I head upstairs. I had great plans for researching our "case" tonight, but I don't feel much like it now. What I think I need is to just be held for a good long time, and I'm sure that Brian will oblige me.



I barely slept at all, and I don't think Brian did either. We didn't even talk much – we were both lost in our own horrible thoughts, imagining ourselves in Janet's place. It's just after six in the morning, and – I was wrong, Brian is actually asleep now, after all.

I get up, very quietly, go into the other room and turn on the computer. I've been a very bad friend to Beth, and I'm about to be an even worse one. I spend almost an hour writing her a very long email, mostly about Janet and how hard it is trying to take care of her and not get dragged down myself:

**Now I know how you must have felt when I was having the nightmares. Except you had it much worse. Janet isn't waking me up in the middle of the night, or vomiting on my clothes or any of the other terrible things I did to you. And she isn't putting my life in danger the way yours was at the end. But on the other hand, at least we all came through it in one piece, and we saved Rebecca. This isn't going to have a happy ending. Her mother is going to die, and probably very soon, and I don't see that there's a thing I can do that will make anything better for Janet.**

I do make it a point to mention how I spent most of Monday's dissection staring at Joseph's muscles and how guilty I felt afterwards. It seems only fair. If I'm going to dump all my troubles on her, the least I can do is let her laugh at me a bit.

Brian's up by the time I'm finished and we've just got time for a quick breakfast at the dining hall before we walk to class. When we hit Euclid Avenue and it's time to split up, he hugs me very close, and I don't want him to let me go.

I get a shock when I walk into the lecture hall about a minute before class begins – Janet's there. Yes, she looks terrible – I'd say "like a zombie" but honestly that would be an improvement – but she's here. I begin to ask her how she's doing, and I catch myself before I can say something so stupid – the answer is pretty obvious. Instead I take her hand and give it a squeeze, and she – weakly – squeezes back.

She even, somehow, makes it through dissection. I convince her to come to the dorm with me for a shower and then a quick meal before she goes back to see

her mother at the hospital. I'm supposed to have my first shift at the student health service tonight, but I can't. Janet needs me. I call over there and claim a family emergency, but I swear and swear again that I'll be there next Wednesday.



When we get to the hospital, Janet's mother ("Please. Call me Margaret. I insist") is in a room of her own, and she looks about as comfortable as anyone could be considering the circumstances.

"I'm getting all the attention I could want," she tells us. "Apparently, I'm quite the interesting case."

What a horrible, tactless thing to say! "Who told you that?"

"No one," she says with a hint of a smile, "but two of the interns were talking outside, and I don't think they realized just how far voices carry out in the hallway."

Janet looks completely defeated. I think – at least for now – she's past tears and hysteria, she's got nothing left inside at all. I remember that feeling from last year, from the nightmares.

"Do you need anything, Mom?" she asks in a dead voice.

"Would you go find the nurse and see if she can bring me an extra blanket?" Janet heads off in search of nurse and blanket, and Margaret motions for me to come closer to her.

"Sara, I – I know I don't have that much time," she begins, and I shake my head, but she looks me in the eye, and I can't return that stare and honestly pretend she's wrong. "It's not fair for me to ask you – you have a full life of your own, you have a husband now, but there's nobody else."

I already know what she's going to say. "Don't say it, Ms. Bla – Margaret. I know what you want. I'll do it. I'd do it even if you didn't ask." I've already *been* doing it for the last few weeks.

She reaches out and weakly grips my hand. She can't muster up the strength to properly squeeze it, but I understand just the same. "You're a good girl. I know you'll help my Jan."



Janet picks that moment to return with a blanket; she very carefully and gently lays it on top of her mother. “There you go, Mom. Is that better?” I wonder if she has any idea what her mother asked me?



I don't know where the time went; last night and this morning passed by in a blur. Janet and I are sitting in the classroom waiting for Dr. Morris. The news about Janet's mother has gotten around, and while everyone was quick to express sympathy, no one sits near her except Joseph or I. Do they think that having a sick parent - or being stressed out by it - is catching or something?

As the minutes pass I wonder if we'll see Dr. Morris at all today, but at a quarter to two he shows up. He doesn't look good; he's very pale, and I swear his hair is thinner than it was last week. Whatever he's got, he obviously isn't over it yet. He's also moving more slowly than usual, and he seems to be having trouble with his left leg; he keeps shaking it as though it's gone to sleep.

Whatever's wrong with him, it hasn't affected his demeanor. He's every bit as unpleasant as always. He has nothing but contempt for the way Mona ran the class in his absence, and then he starts in on us. My suggestion of unusual food allergies is ridiculed. “Had you done more research, you might have thought of Celiac Disease, which fits Mrs. Jones' symptoms far more closely than any known allergy does.” I have to rack my brain; I'm sure I've seen the name in one of my texts, but that's all I can remember. Nobody else seems to know it either, which is a relief for me, but it earns us all more scorn from Dr. Morris.

I cringe when Marcie again proposes her theory of stomach cancer, but even I'm shocked by Dr. Morris' reaction. “If it were stomach cancer, it would have to be so far advanced in order to produce the observed symptoms that there would only be one possible course of action.” When we all look at him blankly, he laughs bitterly and says, “Make sure her will is up to date, and you're included in it.”

Nobody laughs; the only response comes from Janet, who makes a sound something like a sick cat and runs for the door. “No sense of humor at all. She'll need a thicker skin than that if she's going to survive in this profession,” he says

as the door slams shut behind her. I'm shaking with rage and I can barely see straight – I've never been this angry in my life. I'm up without even realizing what I'm doing, pointing a finger at Dr. Morris in accusation.

“How dare you!”

Everyone is staring at me, but all I can think about is Dr. Morris and his hateful words. He looks at me as though I'm crazy. “Is there a problem, Mrs. Alderson?”

I know I should calm down, sit back down, let his words just roll off of me. But I can't. “Her mother – right now, right this minute her mother is in University Hospital. She's got – she's – she's terminal, she's probably not going to make it through the weekend. How dare you make a joke of it?”

“God spare us from overly emotional students,” he scoffs. I start to reply, but he meets my eyes and shakes his head. “You want to consider your next words carefully, if you intend to continue your studies.”

I – he – who the hell is he to threaten me like that? What gives him the right? Even if he's a teacher, doesn't he have some obligation to act like a human being? “It's your choice,” he goes on. “You can indulge your childish tantrum, or you can listen, and perhaps learn something for a change.” What I really want to do is walk up to him and wrap my hands around his throat until I've choked the life out of him, but I – somehow – keep enough control of myself to just stay where I am.

“Good,” he says, when I don't answer him. “You are not a complete idiot.” I don't know how much longer I can stand here and listen to this. I only have so much willpower, and I'm using it up fast. “Now, perhaps all of you,” he sweeps his arm to take the whole class in, “will learn something about the practice of medicine today. I want you to answer a question for me, Mrs. Alderson. It's very simple. Put aside your position as a student. Imagine yourself and Ms. Black as fully trained, fully licensed doctors. Now tell me, and please do me the courtesy of being honest: if you required care, if you were about to undergo surgery, would you want Ms. Black as your physician?”

Yes!

No.

Not today, not while her mother is sick and she's a mess, no. Not if I'm honest about it. I can't bring myself to say it out loud, but my silence is answer enough. "What about yourself? Would you choose yourself as a physician at this moment? You, with your trembling hands, and your desire to physically attack me only held back by a lifetime of respect for authority and the fear of expulsion?"

No. Damn him, no.

He sits down, and, very slowly, so do I. He's looking at me, addressing me, but he raises his voice slightly; he's really talking to all of us. "You will suffer the difficulties and outrages of life, as we all do. Your child may fall ill. Your car may be stolen. The IRS may audit you. A loved one may die. That does not matter to your patients. They come to you for care. They come to you for expert judgment and skilled treatment. If you cannot rise above your personal troubles to provide it, you are a danger to them, a liability to your fellow physicians, and a disgrace to your profession. Better she learns that now, and you as well, before either of you can do any harm."

No one says anything, and after a moment or two, Dr. Morris tries to start the discussion up again. But after five minutes of one-word answers that he has to drag out of us, he gives up and ends class early.

As he walks out of the room, I'm still shaking. I hate him, but what I hate even more is that I can see the truth in what he said. I'm ashamed of myself – both for losing control, and also for not physically attacking him on Janet's behalf. I sit in my seat as everyone else files out; nobody looks at me as they leave.

Finally, it's just Joseph and me in the room. He knows exactly what I'm thinking. "You still want to take a swing at him, don't you?" I nod. I don't trust myself to say anything more. He takes a while before he speaks, and his voice is very calm, very soothing when he does. "You know – I know you know it - he wasn't totally wrong. At least about some of it." As much as I want to, I can't argue. Joseph goes on, "But he chose the worst possible way to teach that lesson. And his idea of a joke – maybe that is how they all joke, but I'll be damned if I'm ever going to laugh at someone's suffering like that."

"Ditto," is all I can think of for an answer.

“Come on,” he extends a hand, pulls me up. “I think Janet could use a friend right about now, don’t you?” Yes, I do.

I could, too.



We find Janet – well, I find her – in the ladies’ room on the first floor. It takes a good fifteen minutes to coax her out. After I finally manage it, Joseph walks us both all the way home, which I’m incredibly grateful for. Neither of us is in any state to be left on our own.

He comes in the building and escorts Janet to her room. He very patiently waits while I make sure she’s got something in her mini-fridge to eat for dinner. He doesn’t actually leave until he and I are both satisfied that she’s going to make it through the night in one piece.

“Thank you so much,” I tell him as I walk him downstairs so he can – finally – get home. It seems really inadequate.

He shrugs. “If one of my kids was going through what she is, I’d want someone to be there for them. I’m just glad I could help.” His family is very lucky to have him.

Almost as lucky as I am to have Brian. When I get upstairs he’s waiting for me, and I can see immediately that he’s had a stressful day, too. We both start to talk at the same time, and I can’t help but laugh. Seeing him upset instantly puts my troubles to the side, and it’s the same in reverse for him.

“You first. Seriously. I don’t want to talk about my day,” I say, collapsing onto the bed. He tells me all about it – mostly it’s just a ton of schoolwork which he’s really afraid he’s not going to be able to keep up with. But there was something else as well.

When he got home, about an hour ago, he tried to take a quick nap but Mike and Barbara next door woke him up with a screaming argument. Then a few minutes later, Barbara knocked on our door. Apparently she had stormed out – without her purse or her keys or anything – and then while she was wherever she’d gone, stewing over things, Mike left and locked the door behind him. She asked Brian if she could borrow ten dollars so she could go out and get

something to eat, and by the time she got back hopefully Mike would be home and they could sort things out.

Of course Brian gave her the money. I'm surprised – and pleased, although I'm not really sure why – that he didn't invite her in to sit down and wait for Mike to return. Anyway, he wasn't able to take his nap, and that gets me up to speed on his day.

I still don't want to talk about Dr. Morris. "It'll only get me upset again," I tell him. "I'll tell you about it tomorrow, when it's not so fresh in my mind." I don't want to talk about anything; I just want to forget about everything that happened. I want to lose myself, and my wonderful husband knows the best way to help me do that.



*Sara is in the medical school cafeteria, and she knows immediately that she is seeing someone else's dream. It's very quiet; the lunch rush hasn't begun yet. There are only a handful of people here, but Sara recognizes one of them, Dr. Haynes, and she knows that it's her dream.*

*Dr. Haynes doesn't appear to be doing anything interesting; she's sitting by herself, eating a salad. She goes tense, though, when an older man – Dr. Morris – walks unsteadily into the cafeteria. "How is he up and walking?" she asks herself. "He was halfway to the morgue yesterday! What's it going to take to keep him down for good?"*



I open my eyes and my first conscious thought is "maybe a wooden stake through the heart would do it."

What does that mean? Was I dreaming about Dracula or something? As I get around, it comes back to me: Dr. Morris. Someone – Dr. Haynes – was dreaming about him, wishing harm upon him. I certainly wouldn't mind putting a stake in his heart, but I'm not sure even that would do the trick.

I shower, and as I stand there in the hot water, I go over the dream again and again. What did Dr. Haynes mean? Has she done something to Dr. Morris

already and it's not working? It doesn't make sense. I'd think that if anybody could effectively poison someone, it would be a doctor.

Maybe it's not that at all. Maybe she just saw how sick he was earlier in the week, and she was only wishing ill on him, not actively trying to hurt him. God knows I wish him ill. I don't even notice until I look down that my fists are clenched; I'd managed to forget how angry I was for a while last night, but it's all back now.



Somewhat to my surprise, Janet is in the lobby waiting for me. She doesn't know what happened after she ran out of class; neither Joseph nor I felt the need to tell her. I'm not sure whether she'd be pleased or upset if she knew.

The answer turns out to be: both. There's some whispering and pointing when we walk into the lecture hall and take seats in the very back. If I had to guess, I'd say it was probably Max who went around gossiping about what happened.

When we have a break at ten o'clock, Janet demands to know exactly what did happen, and I'm more pleased than I can say that Joseph comes by at exactly that moment. "Sara said what I wished I'd have said. If I'd known about your mother, I like to think I *would* have said it instead of her." Between the two of us, we give Janet the full story.

"I wish – I didn't want everyone to know about my Mom," she says, and for a moment I wonder what she's going to do, but all she does is bury her face in her hands. "It doesn't matter. Running out of class like that, everyone knew something was going on, I can't blame you for saying it."

She raises her head and stares at me a moment later. "Is the rest of it true? Did you really – did you really talk to him like that? Did you almost get yourself expelled for me?" I nod. I'm not sure whether she's going to laugh or cry or hug me or shout at me, and I don't think she knows herself. What she finally does is close her eyes, take several deep breaths, and then say, in a soft voice, "Thank you."

I did promise her mother. And she is my friend. I would – I hope! – control my temper better, choose my words more carefully, but if it happens again, I'll stick

up for her again. That's all there is to it.



I didn't sign up to shadow a doctor this afternoon, so I've got some actual free time. I head back to Drake Tower; I'm not even sure what to do with myself for five whole hours completely to myself.

As I walk back, my mood seems to change with every step: I go from angry to worried to relieved to frightened and then back again. When I'm about five steps from the door, something stops me in my tracks. I hear someone behind me - following me. I turn, and for a moment I don't recognize her.

"You've forgotten what I look like? For God's sake, it hasn't been *that* long!"

It's Beth. I walked right past her and didn't even register it. I can be awfully self-absorbed sometimes, I guess. But once my brain starts up again, I run to her and hug her. There's still something I can't quite process, though - I have to step back and stare at her.

"What the heck is that on your face?"

"Oh, these?" She takes off a pair of the ugliest, most old-fashioned glasses I think I've ever seen. They're huge and thick with a ridiculous black plastic frame. "I was going to tell you all about it, but I figured I'd be seeing you and I'd surprise you."

"Yeah, you did."

She blinks and puts the horrible glasses back on. "About a month ago, I got this really nasty eye infection and I couldn't wear my contacts anymore. So I got these." It's funny. They really *are* ugly, and yet somehow they work for her anyway.

"I know what you're thinking," she says. "Remember what your Mom said the first time I met her?"

I do. My Mom said Beth reminded her of a girl in her sorority in college who "could wear a potato sack and look good doing it. We all hated her."

I can't even express how glad I am to see her. I don't think there's anything that could have lifted my spirits as much as seeing my best friend. And I've got all afternoon to catch up with her.

*Eight:*  
*Desperately Seeking Susan*

(AUGUST 31 – SEPTEMBER 1, 1991)

*S*ara's standing somewhere outdoors. It's a moonless night, and cloudy enough that there's hardly any light from the stars; she can barely see her own hands right in front of her.

*This is not her dream, but as far as she can tell there's no one else around whose dream it could be. Sara has no idea what's going on, until the wind dies down and she can hear a sound that it had been drowning out. It's a woman's voice, crying, and though Sara can't make out the words, it's clear that whoever it is, she's the one who's dreaming, and she's in great pain...*



I wake up to the sound of someone crying. But now that I'm awake – no, it's not a sound at all. It's just in my head. I was dreaming. Seeing someone dream.

But who? I didn't see her, it was too dark, I couldn't see anything. All I know is, she was dreaming about being outdoors somewhere, and in her dream she was hurt.



I hear someone stumbling around in the other room; Beth must be awake as well. Brian's just stirring next to me. I look at the clock – it's almost nine in the morning. I guess three bottles of wine will do that.

It was so good to see Beth last night. We all had a great time. We're going to have breakfast together, and then – even though Beth is here – I have to go to my weekly review. But we'll make up for lost time tonight, I'm sure.

On our way downstairs, I stop on the third floor and we're able to convince Janet to join us. We walk the two blocks to Beth's "new" car, which is a lime-green station wagon with a license plate reading "MAGS 88"

"I guess clothes aren't the only thing that gets handed down from sister to sister in your family," I say.

Beth sighs. "Yeah. Maggie got a new car and I was next in line to inherit good old 'Kermit' here. We'll see if it lasts long enough for me to pass on to Chrissy."

I want to tell Beth and Brian about my dream, but I can't do that in front of Janet. So instead we exchange updates on some of our mutual acquaintances. I ask Beth about Melanie Vondreau, who's now a medical student at Ohio State, but she has no news. "There are thirty thousand people there!" she explains. Also, like me – probably in solidarity with me, actually – she never liked Melanie that much. She did, however, get a postcard from Jane Barnaby, who just finished her first year at Oxford and is apparently doing very well.

I tell her and Janet about John from New York – I got his latest information from Bob, who got it from George. He was just accepted into the Peace Corps. "I never would have imagined that," Janet says. There's more, too – he's still dating Natalie the law student.

"Natalie the lawyer," Beth corrects me. "She graduated the same time we did, remember?"

"I can't keep on top of everything. I had kind of a lot going on at the time."



After breakfast, Beth drops Janet and I off at Joseph's house. No one brings up Thursday afternoon, thankfully; we just plod on with our studying. We finish up

at five thirty, and Paula is out the door like a shot – I imagine she’s got an evening of further study in her horrible basement apartment to look forward to.

Joseph invites Janet and I to stay for dinner, as always. But since Beth is here and we’re going to do something together, I say no. I do promise I’ll stay and bring Brian as well next week, though. And Janet decides to stay, which I’m very happy to see. She needs all the friendship she can get.

I meet back up with Beth. I expect Brian to come out with us, but he declines. He says we probably want some “girl time” together, and honestly he’s right. Before I leave, I give him a kiss that’s a promise for tomorrow night, after Beth has left and we’re alone in our rooms again.

Beth and I walk over to Brandywine’s, and on the way we cross paths with my brother. “Robert,” Beth gives him a hug, “keeping out of trouble?”

“I guess,” he says distractedly.

“Something wrong?” I ask.

“Nothing,” he lies. “I was just heading over to the movie.”

“Bob...” I’m not even sure why I’m prying.

“If you must know,” I don’t, really. “I was supposed to be going with – anyway, she blew me off.” I wonder if it was Susan, the girl he dreamed about?

“She’s an idiot, then,” Beth says without a trace of sarcasm. “Who wouldn’t want to go out with you?” It takes quite a bit of self-control for me not to blurt out “anybody!” but that would just be cruel. And honestly it’s not even true. Bob really is much less weird than he used to be.

It takes him a few seconds to decide that Beth isn’t making fun of him, or at least, mostly not. “Thanks,” he finally says, before continuing on his way to the movie. We make it to the restaurant and soon the wine is flowing and Beth tells me about her very latest news.

“He’s – I can’t even keep track – I think he’s an assistant to the most junior assistant coach on the football team. I met him in a lecture about sports psychology. He said,” her tone indicates that she doesn’t believe it for a second, “that the first thing he noticed about me was my glasses.”

“I don’t know. I can believe it.” They *are* hard to ignore.

She gives me a mock-annoyed look. “Who do you think you’re talking to? You think I don’t know a pickup line when I hear one?” Fair enough. I can’t argue with that. “Anyway, I think I really like him.” Good for her! She gives me a full report on Zach, the assistant to the assistant coach, and we’re on our second bottle of wine when it gets back around to me talking.

I don’t want to talk about Dr. Morris, and most of what we do in class doesn’t make for terribly pleasant dinner conversation. But then I remember that I never mentioned my dream this morning.

“It was weird. Nothing happened, as far as I could tell. It was just the dead of night, pitch black, and I couldn’t see her, I just heard her crying. Like she was physically injured, not just sad, you know?”

Beth considers that. “You realize that you know her, right? Whoever she is, she’s somebody you’ve already met, the girl you dreamed about.” How does she figure that? I start to ask, but she answers me before I can get a word out. “Think about it. Every single dream you’ve ever told me about, every single person you saw, it was someone you already knew.”

Brian – that’s true. I didn’t exactly know him, but I’d seen him around. Dr. Walters – I knew him, not well, but I *did* know him. All the people in the dorm, obviously. Everyone who’s been dreaming about Dr. Morris – same thing. I’ve met all of them, or spoken to them or at least been in the same room with them long enough for my subconscious to take note.

“You’re right. I can’t believe I never figured that out on my own.” It really does seem obvious, doesn’t it? “So whoever she is, is she just having a weird dream, or is she actually somewhere and hurt and she needs help, and – God, why is it always me who’s the only one who knows?”

“You’re just lucky, I guess,” Beth says, and I wish I could laugh at that.



*Sara is outdoors, somewhere unfamiliar. The sun is just rising over a rocky hillside dotted with shrubs, overlooking a wood that stretches as far as she can see. Sara knows this is not her dream, but she sees no one around, no sign of whose dream it is.*

*She looks all around, and sees no clues to the identity of the dreamer. But her ears perk up; she hears something that might be a voice. She concentrates, and she can just make it out – a weak, sobbing voice. The owner of that voice is the dreamer, Sara has no doubt at all.*

*Sara searches for the source of the voice, even as she strains to understand what it – she – is saying. “Bob! Bob, you know where I went, you can tell everyone! Bob, you have to help me!”*

*After what seems like hours, Sara finally spots a crevice just large enough for someone to have climbed – or fallen - into. And sure enough, when she peers down into it, she can see someone there. Sara guesses she’s maybe ten feet down at the bottom of the crevice, and she can see a brownish puddle on the rock that she’s certain is blood.*

*Sara recognizes her; a pretty girl with reddish-blond hair, a girl who lived on Sara’s floor last year. The girl had been a freshman then, and Sara has seen her more recently as well. It comes back to her in a flash – she saw this girl in her brother’s dream. Susan Meeks.*

*Susan is calling out for him right now. “Bob, you have to tell them where I am! Get someone to come and find me!”*



I open my eyes and look around. Where’s the crevice? Where’s Susan? Where – oh, God. It was a dream.

I shake Brian awake. “Get up! I had a dream – another dream! She’s – she needs help, we have to help her!” He looks at me blankly. “Remember I told you, when I got home last night, the dream I had Friday?” He rubs the sleep out of his eyes and hesitantly nods. “I had it again. But it was light out and I saw her. She lives over in Carson House, it’s the girl my brother likes. She’s hurt, she’s stuck somewhere, and we have to help her!”

He sits up, taking that in. “OK,” is all he says, but he immediately starts getting dressed, and I do too. In the other room, I can hear Beth getting around; obviously I’ve woken her up as well. As soon as Brian is decent, I open the door, and I realize that I don’t know if Beth is.

Clearly I'm more concerned about her seeing my husband undressed than about him seeing her the same way. I'm not sure what that means, and it goes out of my head as quickly as it came in. I tell Beth what I saw, and I add the part I forgot to mention to Brian – that Susan was calling out for my brother.

“Why would he know where she is?” Beth wonders.

“Because he was going to go to the movie with her last night,” I say, thinking out loud. “He must have – I bet he asked her Friday, but she said no because she was going – well, wherever she is now. And she probably told him where, maybe she didn't tell anyone else. It's a long weekend, what do you want to bet her roommate's out of town and she did – I don't know, whatever it was, at the last minute, and nobody but Bob has any idea.”

Brian pipes in, “And he just figured she changed her mind when she didn't show for the movie last night, he didn't think anything more about it.”

Beth shakes her head. “This is just like old times, isn't it?”

Yes, it is. The three of us make a great team – I just wish we didn't need to do it in the first place. But obviously we do. I pick up the phone – it's almost eight o'clock, Bob should be up by now, and if not, too bad.

“Bob?” I ask as soon as the line picks up.

“Who is this?” I recognize his roommate, Eric.

“His sister. Is he there?”

“No. He went over to breakfast early.”

So it's off to Lardner we go. I spot him sitting with a couple of friends, and I head straight for him. He looks curiously at me, and I don't even say hello, I get straight to the point. “Bob, where did Susan Meeks go?”

“What?”

He's confused, and his friends are looking at me as though I'm a Martian. I don't care. “Bob, she told you where she was going. We need to know.”

“She didn't tell me anything. She – Sara, what are you going on about?” He's annoyed now. That makes two of us.

“Robert Matthew Barnes, you tell me right now!” I don't shout, but the tone is precisely the same one that our parents used when they were angry with one of

us. Heads turn all across the room; clearly it's impossible for anyone who ever heard their full name called out in that tone by a parent to ignore it.

"I don't know!" I believe him; he honestly seems not to know what's going on.

"Bob, come on. We have to talk about this privately." I have to tell him. It hits me suddenly; it's the only way to get through to him and make him remember whatever Susan told him. I grab his arm and pull him up and towards the door. He's too shocked to protest.

He doesn't recover his voice until we're outside and I've dragged him around the back of the building where there's nobody to overhear us. "Sara, what the hell are you doing?"

I take a deep breath. Brian and Beth are looking at me uncertainly; they have no idea what I'm about to say. "Bob, I know you like Susan. You had a dream about her. She was wearing a bikini and you kissed her." His eyes go wide, and he wants to say something, but I just keep on. "She's the girl who blew you off last night. Except she didn't. Something happened to her. She hurt herself, and she's lost, and she told you – I don't know what, but something. She thinks you know where she is. She needs you to help her."

"You're crazy!" Brian and Beth seem to think so as well. I don't care.

"Did you dream about her? Was it like a beauty contest, with her and Jackie and some other girls all parading in the lobby of the dorm, and Susan was the winner and you kissed her right there on the stairs?"

His slack-jawed stare is all the answer I need. "I know what you dreamed about. And I know what she dreamed last night. She's hurt, and she dreamed about you coming to save her, because you're the only one who knows where she is. You're the only one she told."

No one speaks for a moment, until Bob finally finds his voice. "You're psychic! This has to do with – I *knew* there was something weird about you! Ever since last year, that thing with the girl who was kidnapped!"

"Yes, Bob. I promise, I'll tell you everything. But first we have to help Susan."

He closes his eyes, lost in thought. "It was Friday afternoon, I think. She said – yeah, I remember now – she was going hiking. But that's all she said."

"There has to be more!" I try not to shout, but I can't help it.

Beth is calmer. She puts her arm around Bob. “Maybe we’re going about it wrong. Where were you when you talked to her?”

“Down in the lobby.”

“OK,” Beth coos. “Come on, Robert. Let’s retrace your steps. That might help.”

We walk back to Carson House and, thankfully, the lobby is empty. I don’t want to have to explain this to anybody else.

“I wasn’t even going to ask her out, but she was by herself – she’s always in a pack, her roommate and her friends, you know? It was just her, by the soda machine.” We walk through the lounge and out the back door, around the corner to the vending machines. “I was getting a bag of chips, she was getting a Diet Coke.”

“Then what?” Beth asks. “Is that when you got up the nerve?”

Bob nods. “Yeah. I wanted to go to the movie anyway, they were playing ‘Edward Scissorhands.’ She said she’d love to,” he blushes, “but she was going hiking, there was this hiking club she joined, but maybe we could go Saturday instead.”

That all makes sense. But it still doesn’t really help. “What happened then?”


“She was walking towards the back door, so I walked with her. I told her I hoped she would have a good time, and I’d see her Saturday. She was really excited.” We all walk towards the back door as well. “She looked – look, look...” He concentrates; I have no idea what he’s trying to say. “That’s the name of the place! Look Around – no, Look About!”

I look at Beth and Brian. They both shrug; it doesn’t mean anything to them. “That’s what it was called? Look About?” I ask.

Bob’s straining to think of anything more. “That’s not the name of the whole place, I think. She called it a trail. Look About Trail. But that’s all she said. I’m sure – that’s all.”

“Jackie!” Brian speaks up. “Her dad’s a cop. He’ll know where it is, won’t he?”

And he’ll be able to organize help. *And* he knows that I probably saved his daughter’s life last winter. He’ll help us. He has to.



Bob and I are in the back seat of Jackie's father's police cruiser, on our way to the South Chagrin Reservation, fifteen miles east of the city. He recognized the name "Look About" immediately – it's technically called the Look About Lodge Trail. While we were waiting for him to come and meet us, Bob and I rehearsed our story:

He wasn't worried yesterday when Susan didn't return from her hike, but when there was no sign of her this morning (and her roommate actually *is* out of town, so no help from her) he realized she must have gotten lost and possibly injured. I told him the few details I could remember about her dream, and he added them into his story, saying that Susan had mentioned she especially wanted to climb a hillside that overlooked a beautiful forested plain below.

Jackie's Dad – Detective David Saridakis, to give his full name – believed us, but "It's not a missing person case yet, that's not for 72 hours. It's just the three of us looking. But if she's there we'll find her."

He parks at the Lodge and from there we're on foot. It generally looks like what I saw in the dream, and as we slowly climb, the trees below us stretch out as far as I can see.

It's about a half-hour on the trail when we come to the spot I dreamed about last night: a rocky outcropping that looks like I could just about climb on top of it. From there, it looks like you could get another fifty feet or so up. I bet the view would be spectacular. "Bob, do you think this is where she meant?"

Bob gives his well-rehearsed answer. "That or nothing," he says. As I look up at it, I know I'm right, but I wish I wasn't. I really don't want to climb up there. It looks very unsafe. But I'm here, and I've got no choice.

Detective Saridakis goes up first, and he tells me to come next. "Bob, you spot her so she doesn't fall down," he calls out as I slowly and uncertainly climb up. I'm almost all the way there when I feel a very strong hand clasp my arm and pull me the rest of the way up. Bob follows, and then we're climbing, climbing, climbing.

I don't want to take my eyes off the ground in front of me, but I risk a glance to my left, and I see it – exactly the view from the dream. Exactly. We're close. Too



close – “Detective, look out!”

I yell out just in the nick of time; his very next footstep would have been into the crevice. As it is, my voice startles him, and he almost falls backwards; he barely catches himself with one hand on a protruding rock. God, that was close!

A moment later we hear her. A very weak voice calls out from inside the crevice, “Help me!”

Detective Saridakis braces himself with both hands and looks down. “Susan? Susan Meeks?”

“Help me! I can’t get out! My leg – I think it’s broken – I’m – help me!”

“We will!” he shouts down to her. A moment later he’s on his radio, and then he orders Bob and me back down to the trail while he waits up on the hillside, talking to Susan until more help arrives. I am more than happy to comply.

In the end, it takes nearly three hours to get Susan out; it’s a rescue squad from the fire department that actually extracts her safely from the crevice. When we all get back to the Lodge and the waiting ambulance, Bob goes with Susan to the hospital, while I’m left behind to talk to a reporter from Channel 5 News.



I didn’t get any work done at all today. I didn’t get home until three o’clock, and then I had a late lunch with Beth before she headed back down to Ohio State. Now it’s six o’clock, and Brian and I are watching the news to see my interview.

There’s a full ten minutes about the Browns and their sad opening day loss to the Dallas Cowboys. I couldn’t care less about that. Then commercials. There’s another five minutes about the weather and possible thunderstorms later tonight and tomorrow. Then some more commercials, and finally the anchor, Ted Henry, returns. He interviewed me last winter, after everything with Dr. Walters was over. He seemed like a nice guy, although I would have been happier if he and all the rest of the news people had just left me alone.

“Earlier today, a local college student was rescued after becoming lost and suffering severe injuries while hiking in the South Chagrin Reservation. With more details, our Wilma Smith was on the scene.”

They cut to the scene. The Lodge in the background, and I'm there on camera, with Detective Saridakis. Wilma Smith is next to us. She's pretty tall and very blonde, and although she's actually my Mom's age she tries to come across as though she's still in her thirties. I wasn't thinking of that earlier today, but it's kind of funny watching her now. "I'm here with Detective David Saridakis of the Cleveland Police, and local medical student Sara Alderson, whose brother is the hero of the day, is that right?"

The camera focuses on Detective Saridakis. "Yes, that's right. The victim was hiking on the Look About Lodge trail on Friday night, and she fell into a crevice. The young man is a fellow student, and when he realized this morning that she hadn't returned, he and his sister contacted me. We located her and called for assistance to get her out safely."

The camera then turns to me. On the screen, I'm identified as "Sara Alderson, sister of heroic student." A microphone is shoved in my face. "Bob – my brother, Bob Barnes - called me when he realized Susan was missing. I knew Detective Saridakis, so I called him, and, like he said, we found Susan."

They go back to the studio, and Ted Henry finishes the story. "The victim, Susan Meeks, a sophomore at Crewe University, is in stable condition at University Hospital. In a strange coincidence, the young woman we just heard from was a hero in her own right last year, when she helped find and capture Dr. Thomas Walters, who is currently serving multiple life sentences for rape and murder."

Oh, crap.

I didn't really want that brought up again. I guess I should have expected it. But I don't want anybody looking at me strangely in class – more than they already are after the way I shouted at Dr. Morris on Thursday, anyway.

It also reminds me that I'm going to have to keep my promise and tell Bob everything – and hope that he'll keep quiet about it once I do. I've been wondering when he'll get back from the hospital and come over here demanding answers – or maybe dreading it is more accurate.

It's been a hell of a day, hasn't it? I don't think I can take anything more. Brian doesn't seem as surprised as I am that they brought up Dr. Walters. But he can

see that it's not something I want to talk about. Instead he just says, "You looked good on TV."

That's not true at all; I looked awful, especially after hiking up and hiking back and getting all sweaty and dirty and tired. "I know I didn't, but it's nice of you to say. You know what, though, I think I'm looking much better right now, don't you agree?"

When he answers, "God, yes," I turn off the TV, unplug the phone and make sure the door is locked. I don't want any interruptions. I've got a promise to keep, which I'm going to very much enjoy keeping, and I think it'll take the rest of the evening for me to do it properly.

*Nine:*  
*The Day After*

(SEPTEMBER 2-3, 1991)

*Sara is in her living room, but she knows immediately that this isn't her dream. She sees Brian sitting on the small loveseat, watching a baseball game on their tiny TV but she can tell that it isn't his dream either. She's confused - whose dream is it?*

*The doorknob turns, the door opens, and the answer is revealed: Barbara from next door. Barbara the tall and attractive law student, who's currently wearing a bathrobe and – Sara is absolutely certain of this – nothing underneath it.*

*“Your wife's not here,” Barbara coos as she approaches Brian. He says nothing, shows no reaction at all. “You don't want to do anything that would hurt her. I admire that, you know. That's how a real man ought to act,” she says, stepping between him and the TV.*

*Sara smiles as Brian continues to not react to her, except for tilting his head to see past her to the TV. She does not smile when Barbara sighs, takes Brian's head in her hands and forces him to look at her. “You are a good man. But*

you're only human," she says, and then, letting go of him, she unties her robe and lets it fall to the floor...



"Get out of my room, you whore!" I hear myself shouting at someone, but who? There's nobody here. Brian's in the shower, I can hear the water going. And why would I call him a whore? That makes no sense.

Not Brian. I was dreaming. I saw – God, I saw Barbara! The woman who lives next door to us. The *married* woman who lives next door to us. I saw her dream. And she was dreaming about seducing Brian. "Whore" is far too good a word for her.

She's dreaming about my husband. My husband! Who the hell does she think she is? She's got her own husband! She should be dreaming about him, not Brian. Granted, I think her husband is an ass and I'm pretty sure she does too, but still. She can't have mine!

This is very strange. I can't remember ever feeling jealous like this before. But then again, before Brian I never had anybody worth being jealous over. I know this is completely irrational. I have nothing whatsoever to worry about. I'm in his heart and I always will be. Me and nobody else. Especially if last night was anything to go by.

Still, I'm going to keep a close eye on her. And if she so much as puts a hand on him, I'll cut her heart out. I know how to do it, too. I've been reading ahead - the instructions are right there in *Grant's Dissector*. Page 75.

I think I'll mark the page with a post-it note. Just in case.



I was in such a great mood. I did something good – I helped save a life yesterday. Last night was wonderful. Today is Labor Day – a holiday, a day off! And then I had to see that stupid, horrible dream and now I'm feeling angry and jealous and resentful. When he comes out of the shower, Brian can tell immediately that something's wrong.

"Did you hear something? Bad news?" Yes, but not the kind he's thinking of.

“No,” I say. “Just woke up with a headache, I guess.” It’s not a lie, really; I *am* starting to develop one. I can’t tell him about the dream; it’s just too weird. It’s not that I don’t trust him – that’s absolutely the farthest thing from my mind – but if he knew, how would he react the next time he saw Barbara? We have to live next to them for the next several months; I don’t want things to be any more awkward than they have to be.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you yesterday – it just slipped my mind with everything else going on, Barbara stopped by.”

What? That bitch! That scheming, slutty, horrible bitch! I don’t know how I do it, but I keep my voice relatively close to even when I ask, “What did she want?”

“Nothing,” Brian says, entirely oblivious to the fact that I’m about two seconds away from an utterly psychotic jealous freakout. “She just paid me back the ten dollars I lent her. ‘Hello, here’s your money, hope you’re having a nice day, bye.’”

She could have just slipped it under the door and not showed her face. Filthy whore! Flaunting herself in front of my husband! “That’s nice,” I say. I should get an award for the self-control I’m showing right now.

“Yeah,” he says. “I didn’t really expect to see the money again.”

I wish Beth were still here. She’d have good advice for me. She’d know exactly how to handle this. She’d tell me what to do about that man-stealing cow living ten feet away from us. But she’s not, and I have to deal with it all on my own. If worse comes to worse, there’s always page 75.

“What?” Brian asks. I look at him blankly; I didn’t say anything. Or did I?


“What’s on page 75? I couldn’t make out what you were saying.”

I force a laugh. “Just something I have to look up for Anatomy class.”

“You don’t have that until Wednesday,” he says. Of course he knows my class schedule by heart.

“You know me. I always read ahead. I like to be prepared,” I say, a little more sharply than I intended, and he does, finally, pick up on that. Fortunately, he chalks it up to me being stressed over missing a day of studying.

“I understand. You’ve got a lot to catch up on today – I’ll go to the library, I ought to try to get some work done, too.”



I decide to get some breakfast before starting work, and of course my plans for the day are immediately derailed. Janet is in the lobby, on her way to visit her mother at the hospital. “How is she?” I ask, trying to keep all my negative feelings out of my voice.

“Um – well – not too good,” is the answer. I’m not surprised, and now I feel awful on top of everything else; her mother’s situation puts my stupid worries about my stupid neighbor into perspective in a hurry.

“You want me to come with you? Maybe afterwards we can get some studying done for tomorrow.” I know I’m being selfish, worrying about my schoolwork when her mother is dying, but I tell myself that Janet needs to keep up as well. I’m not sure I believe myself.

Still, she agrees, and off we go. She tells me about her mother’s condition – she was there all day yesterday and she spoke to the head of the oncology department. It doesn’t sound good, and Janet confesses that she started crying when the subject of “last instructions” and a “living will” came up. I can’t blame her.

When we get to the hospital, things go further off-track - we run into my brother right there in the lobby. Janet looks very confused when Bob says to me, “Hey, thanks for mentioning my name on TV.”

“It was the least I could do,” I tell him, sighing. I give up. Obviously I’m not meant to have any control at all over my day today. To Janet, shrugging, I start to explain. “You didn’t hear about our big day yesterday? I thought everyone knew.”

Bob is only too happy to tell the tale; we follow him up to Susan’s room as he does. Janet is stunned. Her only response is, “God, everything happens to you, doesn’t it?” Yes, it certainly seems to.

“So how is Susan?” I ask Bob.

“She was a mess when we got here yesterday. Dehydrated, she had a fever, not good at all. But they got her sorted out, gave her fluids, they got her temperature down. But also,” he cringes as he says this, “the worst thing was, she broke her leg. It’s a really bad break, too.”

Susan is in traction, her leg in a heavy cast and suspended in the air when we arrive. She looks pretty thoroughly miserable, but she manages a weak smile when she sees us. “Hey, Susan,” I say. “I’d ask how you feel, but...”

“Yeah,” she sighs. “But I guess it beats the alternative.” Looking at her, I realize that I haven’t completely absorbed the medical student mindset yet. Rather than thinking about how I’d treat her or what her prognosis is, I’m remembering my broken ankle and imagining myself in her place. I’m sure it’s just my mind playing tricks, but I’m feeling twinges that I haven’t felt in months.

I put them out of my mind as best I can as we chat. She’s not really up for a long visit, so Janet and I excuse ourselves as quickly as we politely can. “I’ve just got one piece of advice for you,” I say on my way out, “Bob, you remember this if she doesn’t – when you get the cast off and start physical therapy, make sure to ask for Monica. Trust me.” She got me walking again after my broken leg; I’m sure she can do the same for Susan.

Bob stays behind, and Susan looks pretty happy about it – well, as happy as she can look under the circumstances, anyway. I don’t know if she was as interested in him as he clearly is in her before this happened, but I’ll bet anything that she is now. I guess I can be happy for him. Good for Bob.



Janet’s mother is awake when we enter her room. When she sees me, she says, in a very faint voice, “I saw you on the news last night. Your parents must be so proud of you and your brother.” Saying that much at one time seems to take all nearly all of her strength. Janet goes to her, looking for something to do. She settles for straightening her blankets.

“Easy, Mom.”

I sit down, and after a minute Janet does as well. Margaret’s words remind me that I haven’t actually called my parents to tell them about Bob and Susan and everything that happened. I tell her that with an embarrassed grin, and she scolds me.

“They’ll want to know. I always want to know when my Janet does something good.” I can barely hear her; she’s much weaker than she was the last time I saw



her. I don't think she has very long at all.

"I'll call them as soon as I get home. I promise."

She looks at me very intently. "I know you will." I look right back at her, just as intently. I want to make sure she knows that I keep *all* my promises, and when she gives me the closest expression she can manage to a smile, I know that she does.

We talk – well, mostly Janet talks – for a while, until Margaret falls asleep, and then we sit quietly for another half hour or so until Janet decides it's OK for us to go.

"I'm sure you don't want to do any work today," I tell her once we're out in the hallway and on our way out.

"No, but I know I need to," she says in a voice not much stronger than her mother's.

Her and me both. "You know what? Let's stop at Little Caesar's on the way back, we'll get pizza and bring it back with us. We can eat and study at the same time. My treat."



The pizza helps. The day doesn't end up a total loss - we get a good three hours of work done. I'm still behind, but at least I made some progress. It's four o'clock and we're wrapping things up when there's a commotion next door. I'm used to it – a couple of slammed doors, some yelling that I can't quite make out, and for the grand finale Barbara's voice very clearly saying "Well, screw you, then!" Lovely.

Janet is shocked. "I thought you said they were newlyweds?"

"Yeah, they are. I'd say the honeymoon phase is pretty much over." And my irrational, bordering-on-psychotic feelings towards Barbara come back full force. So much for perspective. I would love to tell Janet, if only because I feel like if I don't tell *someone*, I'm going to – I don't even know what, but I'm sure it won't be good.

"How can you study with that going on?" Janet asks. That's the least of my worries.

“It doesn’t usually go on for very long,” I say. I can feel myself tensing up; it’s only because she’s so completely distracted by her own concerns that she can’t tell. I’m going to have to calm myself down before Brian gets back.

Janet accepts my answer, packs up her books and heads back down to her room. The only thing I can think of to do is to take a shower. I stand there in the hot water for a good forty minutes, and by the time my fingers have completely pruned up, I feel ever-so-slightly better.

Unfortunately, that feeling doesn’t last. I’m just finished dressing again when there’s a knock at the door. I open it, and there’s my brother. I sigh and wave him in. “You really do have rotten timing, Bob. Did anyone ever tell you that?”



I haven’t felt the urge to strangle my brother in a long time, but I’m feeling it right now. I’ve just spent what seems like the longest two hours of my life telling him about my dreams. I’ve got a headache from thinking about Dr. Walters and the nightmares and how horrible they were. And I’m feeling guilty that I haven’t really given much thought to the dreams about Dr. Morris.

Bob’s excitement over having a “psychic detective” for a sister – he really loves that description – is not helping at all. “Could you not keep saying that?”

“But it’s true! That’s what you are! You should be proud of it!”

He really doesn’t get it. “I’m glad I could help Susan, and help catch Dr. Walters. But it’s more of a curse. Don’t you understand? I don’t want to see these things! You wouldn’t, either. I know it sounds cool, knowing other people’s deepest, darkest secrets, but really it pretty much sucks.”

He doesn’t believe me. He might if I told him about Janet’s dream, and how I had to carry that knowledge around before she was ready to talk about it. But I don’t; it still feels wrong to say anything about that, even though Bob knows about her mother.

Maybe there’s something else I can say to get the point across, though. “Would you want to see what Mom and Dad dream about? If they were...” I can’t even finish the sentence. I don’t want to put that image into my own head, let alone

Bob's. For a moment he doesn't really get it, but then he realizes where I was going and he looks positively nauseous. Mission accomplished.

I hear the key turn in the lock; thank God! I run to the door, throw my arms around Brian the instant he opens it. "I have never, ever been so happy to see you!" I whisper.



Bob is gone. I would love nothing more than to spend the evening with my husband, just the two of us. But it's not to be. Our other neighbors, Deia and Jaime, ran into Brian on the way upstairs and invited us to join them for dinner. Of course he said yes.

It's probably unfair for me to be annoyed at Brian for not somehow psychically knowing that I've just spent two thoroughly unpleasant hours being interrogated by my brother, but I am anyway. I do try my best to push those thoughts out of my head, with some success. I only snap at Brian once or twice and I think he chalks it up to residual annoyance at Bob.

Dinner turns out to be bread and cheese and a bottle of wine, sitting outside on the grassy field out behind the building. It's actually very pleasant. The conversation isn't bad, either. I've only spoken to them a couple of times since they moved in; this is the first chance either me or Brian has had to really get to know them.

It's mostly getting to know Deia; Jaime's English is still very much a work in progress. "We read together every night," Deia says. "He loves Agatha Christie – my father had a full set of them in Spanish, Jaime's read every one of them. So we're reading them in English now." I think that's very cute.

Of course I have to talk about yesterday's adventure, since they saw it on the news, but thankfully Deia takes the hint that I'd really rather not relive it in gory detail. Once that's over with, Deia tells us all about herself. She and Jaime are both studying archaeology; her father is a professor at Oxford, but he splits his time between there and Spain. That's where she and Jaime met; he's the local head of the archaeological site her father is working on.

And then I'm reminded how small the world can be. It comes up that one of the reasons they came here, to Crewe, was because of the recommendation of a girl who just graduated from here a year ago and Deia's father is her advisor at Oxford. I laugh. There's only one person that can be. "Don't tell me. Her name is Jane, isn't it?"

Deia is shocked. "You know her?"

"I lived down the hall from her for three years." I wouldn't say we were close friends, but we liked each other well enough. And I'm still grateful to her - and her roommate - for teaching me how to open a locked door with a credit card, so I could surprise Brian in his dorm room when he came back from Christmas break, back when I was first having the nightmares. I'm glad she's doing well over there; according to Deia she's made quite the good impression on her father.

In turn, we tell her how we met, and I ramble on a little about medical school. We talk about our mutual neighbors Mike and Barbara. Jaime remarks that "he is a lousy!"

"You mean louse," Deia corrects him. Brian and I nod our heads in agreement. Louse is a good description - although I can think of some stronger words that would apply, too.

Before we know it, the sun has set, and it starts to feel a bit chilly. Deia is shivering. "In Spain, in Mallorca where my father's house is, this is the coldest winter's day." Boy, is she in for a nasty shock in a month or two.

We both help them pack up and we all troop back inside. I'm sorry to see them go; I really enjoyed getting to know them better. But I also want to get to sleep early. I want to be as ready as I can be for class tomorrow.



*Sara is in an apartment, one that seems very familiar. The view out the window looks down on a busy street far, far below. The living room is spotless, and nearly empty. The only piece of furniture is a large recliner, and sitting in it is a small, frail-looking woman: Janet's mother, Margaret. This is, Sara realizes, her dream*

*Margaret is writing something. Sara knows before she looks at it that it's a letter to her daughter. Still, she feels compelled to walk around behind Margaret*

*and read the letter. When she does, she holds back from bursting into tears only with great effort.*

*Margaret slowly and with much difficulty sits up straight and turns her head. To Sara's surprise, Margaret is looking directly at her. Margaret, for her part, does not appear to be very surprised at this. Sara walks back around, so that Margaret can better see her. "Shakespeare was right," Margaret says.*

*Sara has no idea what she means, and Margaret laughs gently. "Hamlet. Act One, Scene Five." When Sara still shows no sign of understanding, Margaret sighs heavily. "What sort of education are they giving you these days? 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"*

*"Oh," Sara says. She does, vaguely, remember those words from a high school English class.*

*"Are you who you look like? Janet's friend?"*

*"Yes," Sara replies. She can't think of anything to add.*

*Margaret frowns, disappointed. "I wondered if you might be – I don't know - a messenger? Or a guide, perhaps?"*

*It takes Sara several seconds to figure out what Margaret means. "You think I'm an angel?"*

*Margaret nods. "Let's say that I hoped so. Some people say, when your time comes, an angel comes to take you to – to the other side."*

*"No!" Sara isn't sure what she finds more disturbing, the thought itself or the matter-of-factness with which it is said. Tears begin to roll down her cheeks; she looks away from Margaret.*

*"I know it's time, Sara. There's nothing to be gained by denying the truth." She waits for a response, but Sara is too busy avoiding Margaret's eyes and failing to hold back tears to answer. She continues, "Did you read my letter?" Sara nods, still unable to meet Margaret's eyes. "What did you think of it?"*

*Sara is silent for a long time, trying to find the appropriate words. She can't think of any, but she does, finally, force herself to look directly at Margaret. "I hope she'll take it to heart," is all she's able to say.*

*Margaret is silent for a long while as well. “She’ll need you to help her do that. She’s – my Janet is stronger than she thinks, but until she discovers that for herself, she’ll...”*

*“I understand,” Sara says, and she leans over and hugs Margaret tightly. When she lets go and steps back, Margaret is no longer there. Sara blinks, and when her eyes open again, the recliner is gone. Another blink, and now the walls themselves are fading away; there is nothing but blackness all around her...*



I open my eyes, and they’re full of tears. I was – I remember it all, I remember it exactly. I was talking to Janet’s mother. And then she died.

Brian is just waking up, and I clutch myself to him. His eyes open slowly, they take a while to focus on me. He sees I’m crying, he sees I’m a mess. I can see in his eyes; he already knows I had a dream.

“Margaret died. Just – just now. Just a few minutes ago.”

“How do you know?” he asks, but he already knows.

“I was with her. I was – I talked to her.” He knows it’s possible. In a way it’s how we met, after all.

“She saw you?”

I feel myself calming down a little. “Yes. I – I don’t know how to feel. She – she knew. She was – God, she was so brave. She knew, and she wasn’t crying or fighting or anything. And she’s not – not suffering anymore.” But then the real cruelty of what I saw hits me. “It’s - damnit! This is the worst – it’s all unfair, but this is the worst thing.”

Brian has no idea what I’m talking about. “It should have been Janet!” He looks at me now as though I’ve completely lost my mind. “Just now! It shouldn’t have been me. If she knew she was going to die, if it was the last time she ever talked to anyone, it should have been Janet. Not me.” Realization dawns on his face – now he gets it.

Even though it would make me feel a thousand times better right now, I’m glad Brian doesn’t lie to me and say something like “you might be wrong” or “maybe she’s still alive” or any of that. I know what happened, and he knows that there’s

no chance I'm wrong about it. He just holds me, and very gently wipes the tears from my face.

And then he asks me the question I've been dreading. "Do you think she knows yet?" He doesn't ask the rest of it, though: if she hasn't, if they haven't called her yet, and she's downstairs waiting for me to walk together to class, what will I do?

"I don't know," and that's my answer for both questions. If she doesn't know, how can I tell her? What can I possibly say?



Oh, God. When I step out of the elevator, Janet is waiting for me. And she very clearly doesn't know. My face falls, and she looks at me with concern. I have to – what? What can I say, how can I explain...?

"I was thinking about Dr. Morris this afternoon," I lie.

We walk out together, and she puts her arm around me. *She's* trying to comfort *me!* "Don't worry about him. I'm not going to let him get to me, you can't let him bother you. Right? We'll get through it together."

I hate myself right now. I feel like the most horrible, dishonest person in the history of the world. But I don't think I show it; I had no idea I could be such a good liar, and I hate myself even more.

"Yeah," I say, putting all the confidence I don't feel into it. She seems to accept that and she chatters on, wondering what our case will be this week, if we'll have a new lecturer today, and a dozen other things that don't seem even remotely important right now.

I half-heartedly participate in the conversation, concentrating on not letting anything slip out about her mother. "He's really got you rattled," Janet tells me when we're across Euclid Avenue. "I don't think I've ever seen you like this – except maybe junior year, when you broke your ankle, I guess."

"I'll be fine," is all I can say. This is so hard. I almost would rather be dealing with Dr. Walters again.

No. Not really. I shouldn't even think that. But this is – there's nothing I can do. Nothing I can say. She has no idea. She's going to find out soon, and her

heart is going to break and she'll be all alone.

I don't know how I make it the rest of the way to class without completely breaking down. We settle into seats at the back of the lecture hall, and after a minute I realize that I'm the subject of muttering and pointing.

It takes a while for me to figure it out: my interview on the news Sunday night. Joseph walks into the hall and sits next to me. "You've been holding out on us," he says without preamble. I don't answer at first; I'm still lost deep in my own thoughts, and it's not until he repeats himself twice that I understand what he said.

"What? I – it just happened, I haven't talked to you since Saturday!"

He looks at me curiously. "Not the girl on the hiking trail. The thing last year. The guy you caught. You never once mentioned that. Kevin told me the first night you came to our house that he recognized you from being on the news, but I didn't make the connection. And you never said a word."

I look him right in the eye and some of the pain and the anger I'm feeling comes through. "Would you have?"

He actually leans away from me, almost as if the force of my emotions is pushing him back. Maybe it is. He drops his head, unable – or unwilling – to meet my eyes. He barely shakes his head. "No, I guess I wouldn't."

"It wasn't a lot of fun. I try not to think about it, if I can help it." I notice that the people sitting near us are paying very close attention. I force myself to speak more slowly, more softly. "Anyway, this time it wasn't me. It was all my brother. I was just along for the ride."

I don't think he really believes me, but at the moment I don't care, and anyway he's not going to call me on it. Thankfully our lecturer – it's Dr. Haynes this morning – arrives a minute later and I'm spared any further questions.

It's very difficult to concentrate; I can't get Janet and the news that's waiting for her out of my mind. By the end of class, I've got several pages of notes I don't remember taking.

We walk down to the cafeteria for a quick lunch, and then up to the third floor for Dr. Morris. As soon as I sit down, though, Janet announces that she wants to



run downstairs and check her mail slot. She's out the door before I can stop her, and then the rest of the class files in, followed by Dr. Morris five minutes early.

I want more than anything to run out the door after Janet, but – I don't. I try to occupy my mind by figuring out if Dr. Morris looks any better than he did last Thursday. I don't think he does – he seems pretty shaky, and I swear he's lost more hair. His eyebrows even look thinner. And – I'd have to get closer to be sure, which I don't plan on, but it certainly looks like he's got some acne on his face. That definitely shouldn't be happening, not to a man his age.

He stands at the front of the room, looking up at the clock, then down at his watch, then at the seven of us sitting there. More than enough time has passed for Janet to go down one flight of stairs, check her mail and come back up here. Unless there was a note in her box telling her to come to the hospital. Which I'm absolutely sure there was.

At one thirty precisely, Dr. Morris clears his throat and looks pointedly at the empty seat next to me. "Does Ms. Black believe that having our city's newest heroine," he sneers in my direction, "as her advocate excuses her from arriving at class on time?"

Everyone looks at me. For a moment I don't say or do anything, and then I hear words that must be coming out of my mouth. "She won't be in class today. Her mother passed away last night. She just found out a few minutes ago." My voice sounds calm and steady and reasonable, none of which I feel.

There's absolute silence. Even Dr. Morris has the decency not to say something horrible. But I do notice that Joseph is looking at me very curiously. I know what he's thinking – he saw Janet and I in the cafeteria, he saw us come up to class together, so when did Janet find out and how could I possibly know about it?

After probably a minute, Dr. Morris clears his throat again. With as much politeness as he can muster, he says, "I trust you will convey our condolences to Ms. Black, and go over with her everything we cover today?"

"Yes, sir," I answer.

After that, he gets the class going. He mentions that Mona won't be with us today or next week either. Then he explains that, since we didn't resolve Mrs. Jones' case last week, we'll have to go over her again. He actually isn't sarcastic

when he laments the fact that it's put us a week behind, but after about fifteen minutes or so, he's back to his old self again.

The best I can say is that he's a little less harsh to me than he usually is, but he makes up for it by coming down harder on everyone else. Paula is close to tears by the end of class, and Max looks ready to commit murder.

Joseph and I are the last ones out, and as we leave he grabs my arm and pulls me back into the empty classroom. "There's a lot more to you than meets the eye," he says, staring hard at me. It's very disconcerting, but I stare back just the same.

I don't lie to him, though. I'm not sure why. "You're right," I answer.

"You're not going to tell me a thing." He's still staring. So am I. He still hasn't figured out how I knew about Janet's mother. I get why he's so curious – there isn't any reasonable explanation. I'm not going to give him the true but very unreasonable one, but I feel like what I said, as little as it was, was too much. Just telling him he's right, that there is something more to me, feels like I shared something far too – I don't know – intimate, maybe?

Oh, God. I shared something intimate with someone who isn't my husband. "No," I tell him, much too sharply.

He blinks, finally. "I didn't think so." He sits down, motions for me to join him. I do. "You don't need advice from me. But I'm going to give it to you anyway." I'm torn between annoyance, curiosity and guilt; I'm not really sure which one my face is showing right now. I can't tell what he's thinking, either. "I'll keep it short and sweet. Lifeguards can drown, too. You know what I mean?"

I start to give him a smart answer, but I hold back. He's not looking at me with a question in his eyes anymore; all I see now is concern for a friend. And besides, I know exactly what he means. I've worried about it myself. "You're right."

Neither of us speaks for a while. I wonder where I should go now. Try to find Janet? She could be anywhere. Or just go home, and hope that's where she went as well? I think that's probably best.

We both open our mouths at the same instant. He's asking if I want him to walk me home right as I'm asking him to do just that. We both laugh. "I just – my husband is still in class, and I'd rather not be alone right now." He looks a little bit uneasy at that – which matches how I feel.

I wonder what Brian would think if he heard me just now. Would he be as jealous as I was yesterday? That's crazy, of course it is. But the fact is, there's only one person I should be thinking of when I'd "rather not be alone," and it isn't somebody else's husband and the father of her children.

Thankfully, Joseph is thinking a lot more clearly than I am; he leads me out of the classroom, down the hall to a payphone, and he calls his wife. "Mary, I'm still here at school," he says. "Yes, everything's fine." I can hear Mary's voice but I can't make anything out. "No, it's just Sara, she's not feeling well." As best I can tell, Mary sounds worried about me. "Can you come by with the car and we can drive her home?"

Fifteen minutes later, Mary's out in front of the medical school behind the wheel of their dark green Volvo. I'm glad Joseph called her. We could have walked all the way back to Drake Tower in the time we waited, but this is better. Now there's no weirdness at all, no suspicion.

Mary stays parked there for a few more minutes while Joseph tells her the news. "Oh, that poor girl," Mary says.

Sitting here in the back seat of their car, I realize for the first time just how bad it is for Janet. All she had was her mother. I've known all along, of course, but it's only now that it truly hits me. It wouldn't be like me losing Mom or Dad, or even Brian.

It would be like me losing *all of them*: Brian, and Mom and Dad, and Bob, and Beth, and Aunt Kat too, all in one day. I – I can't even begin to imagine how that would feel. I couldn't go on after that. But I have to try and make *her* go on: I promised.



Ten:

*Night Shift*

(SEPTEMBER 3-5, 1991)

Joseph and Mary drop me off at Drake Tower. I go back and forth on whether or not I should ask them, but when I get out of the car I just blurt it out: “Would you – I know it’s a lot to ask – but if Janet wants it, would you let – could we have something for her mother at your house?”

“A wake?” Mary asks.

I guess that’s what it would be. “Something like that. I know you don’t know her that well, but I don’t think – if she wants it at all – I don’t think she’d want it in the lobby of the dorm and I can’t think of anyplace else.”

They both seem to understand. “Absolutely,” Joseph says, and Mary nods in agreement. I thank them, close the door and wave as they drive off. It may be my imagination, but I think Mary is staring at me in her rear-view mirror as she drives away. I guess in her place I might do the same.

I’m glad neither of them asked me about a funeral for Margaret. I would have had to lie to them and say that I had no idea, even though I know exactly what

her wishes are. There isn't going to be one, assuming that Janet follows those wishes, which I'm sure she will.

I hope she's up in her room. I hate the thought of her sitting alone over at the morgue in a cold, sterile room with her mother's body, and the idea that she's wandering aimlessly around campus scares the hell out of me. I go in the front door, straight to the elevator, up to the third floor. I knock and knock and knock again, and after about five minutes the door opens.

The lights are off and the blinds are lowered, but there's just enough sun spilling in from the edges of the window that I can see. Janet is already back on her bed, sitting straight up and looking ahead with a vacant expression.

"Janet? I'm – I'm very sorry."

She doesn't acknowledge me. She just sits there, holding something – an envelope – in her hands. I walk over, sit myself down on the bed next to her. I can see that she hasn't opened the envelope yet. We both sit there, silently, for what seems like a very long time. Then, without speaking or even looking over to me, she hands me the envelope.

I already know what's in it. I've read the letter. I could recite it to her without opening it. I take it from her, and I ask, "Are you sure?"

She whispers, "Please," still without looking at me

I carefully open the envelope, unfold the letter. It's exactly the same as I saw in the dream, word for word. I start reading it out loud, very softly. My voice is breaking; it's very difficult to continue, but I have to do this for Janet. I push any thoughts of how I'd feel out of my head – this isn't about me, it's about her.

"If I had another fifty years, I would tell you every single day how proud I am of you, but even fifty years of telling you wouldn't be enough. You have accomplished so much already, and you will accomplish so much more in your life." Janet leans against me, puts her arms around me. I keep going, and we're both in tears now.

When I've finished, after I've read Margaret's last wishes, I embrace Janet, and we sit there together for I don't even know how long. Neither of us speak; Margaret already said everything.



There's a knock at Janet's door. I look over at the clock, the blue numbers glowing in the almost-total darkness, and I see that it's eight thirty. "I think it's Brian. Is it OK if I let him in?"

Janet nods. She still hasn't spoken, this entire time. I go to the door and I'm right, it is Brian. He opens his mouth to ask what's going on, but the darkened room seems to tell him everything he needs to know. He comes in, shuts the door behind him. "Janet, I'm so sorry," he says, and she manages to look up at him. Her eyes don't actually focus on him, but that's still more than she's done in the last couple of hours.

"Thank you," she mutters.

He whispers to me, "Is there anything I can do?" and I shake my head.

"Go," Janet says, slowly standing up. "You need – you've taken so much time already."

I can't leave her like this. "I can stay down here with you tonight. Or you can sleep in our suite, in the other room."

She shakes her head. "I'll be – I'll stay here."

I'm not sure that's a good idea, but maybe I can call her later and see if she's changed her mind. There's something else I have to ask her, though, before we leave. "Do you want me to – tomorrow, do you want me to go with you? To make the – the arrangements?"

She looks very relieved. She doesn't actually say anything, but her expression is answer enough. "We'll go in the morning. I'll come down at nine or so, OK?" She just about nods. I can miss one morning of class for this.



When we get upstairs, the first thing I do is throw my arms around Brian and hug him so tightly that his face starts to turn blue. "You promise me right now, you're never going to get sick like that and – and..."

When I finally let him breathe, he answers me, "You promise me the same." I know how childish it is for us to say that, but we're both very relieved when we each make that promise just the same.

“I knew you had to be down there,” he says as he microwaves a frozen pizza for me. “I didn’t want to interrupt you, but I was worried – for both of you.”

“You came at just the right time,” I reassure him. He did, too. “We’re going to have a little – a small ceremony – Friday afternoon. And then we’ll go to Joseph’s house – I should call and let them know.”

A couple of minutes later, everything is sorted out. They’ll come to the ceremony, and then they’ll open their home to us afterwards. It won’t be big – Brian and I, Bob, them, Paula if she’ll come, Mona if she can get away from the hospital for a couple of hours, and I think that’s probably it.

I eat my pizza while Brian massages my back and tells me about his day. I’m grateful for him taking my mind off Janet and Margaret. When I’m done eating, I sit there for a while longer, just listening to him talk about which classes are going well and which ones are giving him problems and all the other little details of his life.

Unfortunately, my mind strays back to Janet as soon as Brian stops talking. Should I call her, check on her? Or let her be? She knows our phone number, she’s – hopefully - capable of getting in the elevator and coming up here all by herself. I ask Brian what he thinks.

“She might need to be by herself. And if she came up here, if she slept on the couch while we’re in here, that might make her feel even more lonely, instead of less.” I hadn’t thought of that, but he’s right. It would just be another reminder of something she doesn’t have.

I’ve got another dilemma bouncing around in my head. Should I tell Brian about my talk with Joseph after class? Nothing happened, nothing ever will or would or could happen. I didn’t do anything wrong – but even though I know that, I still feel like I did.

And I am so, so tired of keeping secrets. I’m tired of lying. I’m tired of keeping track of which lie I’ve told to whom. I’m tired of coming up with ridiculous explanations for how I know things I shouldn’t be able to know, or for why I’m acting weird because I know something about someone that they don’t know I know and would be horrified if they did. I’m tired of all of it.

There should be at least one person I can tell anything to, no matter what it is, no matter how weird or uncomfortable or whatever else. And if it's not Brian, who the hell else can it be?

So I tell him. I tell him how Joseph called me out about knowing that Margaret had died when there's no way I could have known. I tell him that I admitted, yes, there is something "more" to me. I tell him about asking Joseph to walk me home because I didn't want to be alone. And then, because if I'm not going to keep secrets from him, I can't keep *any* secrets from him, I tell him about Barbara and her dreams.

All the rest of it – my conversation with Joseph and so forth – doesn't bother him. But Barbara does. "You didn't trust me?" He's hurt; I don't know that I've ever seen quite that look in his eyes before.

No. Or, yes, but not in the way he thinks. "I didn't trust that you could help yourself from taking a swing at Mike the next time you ran into him," I say, keeping my voice level, trying to hold his eyes. "And I didn't trust that you wouldn't give her the cold shoulder and turn the other way anytime you saw her coming."

He considers that, and – I think – a little bit of the pain fades away. He doesn't answer me, though, so I continue. "I didn't want to give you more reasons to hate Mike. And – up until she dreamed about you, I didn't have the right to tell you. Even if he is an ass and he's probably cheating on her and stealing from her too, he's still – I guess he's got the right to have his thoughts be private. And so does she."

It takes him a long time to respond. "We've talked about this before. But I guess – I mean, I know it's hard on you, but I didn't realize how hard." Then something comes to him; I almost laugh – a light bulb might as well have popped into the air over his head. "I don't even want to say it this way, but I can't think how else to put it."

"What?" He's got me at a loss.

"It's – maybe in a way this is good." How? How can this be good? "It's – maybe you should think of it as another lesson. You're going to have to keep secrets when you're a practicing doctor."



Oh, my God. I know I keep saying it, but I really *am* slow sometimes. How is it that I'm the medical student and I'm almost three years older than him, and he's the one to think of that and not me?

He goes on. "If you're practicing, and I've got a job and - I don't know - say, my boss's secretary comes to you, and he's cheating with her and he got her pregnant. You couldn't tell me. Even though we're married, even though we don't keep secrets. You'll have to carry that around with you and never let on to me. And I can't expect you to, or ask you to."

He's absolutely right. If I don't learn now to keep other people's secrets, when will I?



It's not until we're in bed and I'm drifting off to sleep that Brian nudges me. "There's one thing I don't get. Did you think I'd be jealous because of what you said to Joseph today?"

"Honestly? Yes. It was..." I hesitate, because it seems ridiculous now, but no secrets, right? "It felt intimate, the way he asked me - his exact words were: 'there's more to you than meets the eye.'"

Brian looks at me kindly, but also as though I've just said that one plus one equals three or something. "I could see that the first time I met you. Of course he sees it too. I'd be more surprised that anybody doesn't see it."

I kiss him; it seems like a better reply than any words I can come up with.



Wednesday morning. Brian's already gone to his eight thirty class, and I'm waiting for the elevator. Barbara emerges from her room and smiles a greeting, walking next to me. I can't help but notice, again, just how tall and blonde and attractive she is, the whore.

But I also notice that her eyes are red, as if she's been crying. Which she probably has. "You're usually out before now," she says. I didn't realize she kept track of my schedule.

"Yeah," I say evenly. "I'm - my friend Janet, you've seen her around - her mother just died, and I'm going with her to help with the - the arrangements."

I'm not sure why I'm telling her this.

Her face falls. She puts a hand on my arm. "I'm so sorry." The little bell dings and the elevator door opens up. She waits for me to go in first. "She's lucky to have a friend to help her," Barbara says as she pushes "L."

She seems genuine enough. Maybe she's not such a horrible, man-stealing whore after all. She can't control what she dreams about, and maybe she doesn't even remember it anyway. "Thanks," I say, pushing "3."

Neither of us speaks until the door opens on the third floor. "Good luck – I don't know, is that appropriate to say?" Barbara asks as I step out.

"I think so. Thank you," I answer. We'll definitely need it to get through the morning.



The morgue is next door to University Hospital. When I was in undergrad (in other words, three months ago, though it feels like a hundred years sometimes) we would joke about that. You'd go to the student health center, and from there progress to the hospital, and then they could move you right on to the morgue. A model of efficiency.

That pops into my mind while we wait for the attendant, and I have to turn away from Janet for a moment. Thankfully he shows up in that moment, and I can push the joke out of my head. The attendant, Frank, remembers Janet from yesterday, and he's got the name and number for a funeral home nearby. He very kindly offers us his phone to call them.

"Do you want me to handle it?" I ask Janet.

"Yes, but – I – I should do it." I put my arm around her as she dials, and I don't let go throughout the whole conversation. It doesn't take long; Margaret's instructions were both specific and simple. She wanted to be cremated, and her ashes spread over the athletic field on the other side of campus where graduation was held.

Once that's done, Frank asks if Janet wants to go back and see her mother one more time, which she does. She asks me if I want to go back as well, and I would, but I think she ought to have this time alone.

I wait out front for half an hour, trying to think about anything except what Janet must be going through, and failing. I only keep from crying by reminding myself over and over that she's the one who has the right to cry, not me. My only job is to be strong for her.

When she comes out, I can see that she *has* been crying, probably for the whole time. I don't even try to speak, I just hug her tightly until she stops shaking. She doesn't say anything, and I don't ask her. When she wants to talk about it – if she does – I'll be there, but it'll be on her time and her terms. I know that's what I'd want in her place.

All I say is, "I don't think you should come to class this afternoon." I purposely don't say "dissection" or even "anatomy." "I'll go over everything we do with you later." Much later. She nods her head and lets me steer her out of the morgue. I walk her halfway back to the dorm – across Euclid Avenue, past the Student Union, until I feel sure that she can make it the rest of the way on her own.

"Thanks," she says, in a very small voice.

"Of course," I answer. "I'll come by and see you after class, if you want. We'll all have dinner together, how's that sound?" She nods, hugs me, and sets off for the dorm. I have to rush back the other way to make it to dissection in time.

When I get to the Anatomy Theater, exactly one minute before class officially starts, Joseph and Paula are already there. Joseph is unsurprised that Janet isn't with me, while Paula looks vaguely disapproving. I want to say something to her, but instead I take a deep breath and I remind myself that she's coming from a very different place mentally than Janet is. Based on what she's said about them, it's probably not an exaggeration to say that Paula's parents wouldn't consider their own deaths any excuse for her missing a class.

I'm worried that I won't be able to keep my mind on my work today, but I'm worried for nothing. We're working on the axilla today – the armpit, basically, and all the veins and everything else that goes through it – and it's the most difficult and complicated thing we've done yet.

I hear a joke or two about body odor from the table behind me right when we start, but after about five minutes everything is gone from my mind except

what's right in front of me. I don't think about Janet, or Brian, or dreams or anything else until Dr. Morgan taps me on the shoulder at six o'clock to let me know that we've run nearly an hour past the end of class.

Our group isn't the only one, either – more than half the class is still here. “Wow,” I say. “That was something.” Joseph and Paula both look every bit as wiped out as I feel. Joseph offers to call Mary and have her come over and drive Paula and I home. We both gladly agree.

As we're waiting outside for Mary, I remember – I can't go home after all. I'm supposed to be at the Student Health Center right now for my volunteer shift! I can't believe I forgot, especially after I missed it last week. So Mary drives me over there instead, and before I check in for my shift, I call Brian.

“Hey, I'm really sorry. I'm at the Student Health Center. I've got my shift here tonight until ten o'clock,” I say when he picks up.

“Are you sure? With everything that's going on?” He sounds shocked that I'm crazy enough to be doing this.

“No, I'm not. But I said I would, and I already cancelled on them once. I need to do this.” Even though I'm starving, and desperate for a shower and I'm also abandoning Janet for the night, after I promised her I'd meet her after class.

On the other end of the line, there's a deep sigh. “There's one more thing,” I say, not giving him the chance to try and convince me to come home. “Can you go down to Janet and let her know? I told her I'd meet her for dinner – maybe you could eat with her and keep her company for a couple of hours tonight?”

Another sigh. He won't say out loud that I'm wrong to leave Janet alone when I promised to see her tonight, but I know that's what he thinks. And he's right. But I promised here, too. “Sure,” he says, finally. “I'll have dinner with her. You take care of yourself over there,” he tells me.

Well, now I feel like a crappy person in addition to being utterly exhausted, not to mention smelling of formaldehyde – which I'm sure will go over wonderfully with everyone I see here tonight. Oh, well. There's nothing I can do about it now.



I check in with Martha, the beady-eyed, dark-haired nurse who's on duty here tonight. I apologize for my tardiness. "Class ran late, we were doing dissection."

She winces. "Oh, that's it. Well, maybe it'll be a slow night tonight and nobody will have to smell you." She introduces me to Maxine, the receptionist out front; and David, the other nurse. "And if there's a real emergency, Dr. Cooper is on call tonight."

I can only imagine his reaction if there's a case serious enough to bother him in the middle of his dinner. Hopefully I won't have to find out - during his lectures - not to mention his dreams - he certainly didn't strike me as a terribly patient man.

Martha takes me back to the treatment area, and delegates to David the task of showing me around. There are four small exam rooms, two bathrooms and several closets where the various supplies are kept. In the center there are two desks with computers and overflowing stacks of papers, and a couple of large file cabinets. David points out the closet where the prescription drugs are kept, and the cabinet where the contraceptives and the pregnancy tests are. "If you don't remember anything else, remember that and you'll be covered for ninety percent of the kids that come in here." I don't doubt it.

There's no one needing care at the moment, so I sneak away to the bathroom and stick my head under the faucet to try and get at least some of the smell off of me. I don't think it does much good, and now I look completely disheveled as well as dead on my feet. Oh, well.

At seven o'clock Martha is over at the cafeteria having dinner, and I'm following David around as he takes inventory of all the supplies. Maxine pokes her head in to announce that we've got a patient. She hands David a slip of paper, and he hands it to me.

There's not much there. No name, for one thing - just a birth date (May 10, 1973), sex (female), and a few boxes checked (are you feeling well today, "yes"; are you currently taking any medications, "no"; and so forth). "Reason for visit" is also filled out, and, sure enough it reads: "pregnancy test."

David explains that, for certain services, students can be treated anonymously. As he says it, I remember being told that way back in freshman orientation, four

years ago. He opens up the cabinet with the tests and hands one to me. “You ready to see your first patient?”

No. But I have to start somewhere, so I nod my head. David takes back the form, puts it on a clipboard and hands it back to me with a pen. Then he opens the door and beckons the patient in. She looks younger than the eighteen years old her form says she is. She’s looking down, walking in very slowly. She’s a pretty girl, with long brown hair that I’d love to have myself. And – I recognize her. It takes me a moment to figure out where I’ve seen her – she’s one of the new freshmen in Carson House. I must have passed by her in the lobby when I was visiting Bob last week. Thankfully she doesn’t recognize me.

“Room One is open,” David tells me, and to the girl he says, “Sara will help you, just follow her.”

She obediently does, and after she’s inside, I close the door and – making a show of it for her benefit – I lock it. She seems to appreciate that, anyway. “Why don’t you sit up on the table,” I gesture towards the exam table. She scoots herself onto it, the paper cover crinkling under her as she does. “I’m Sara, I’m with the medical school,” I tell her. That sounds, at least to me, slightly more reassuring than “I’m a medical student.”

She doesn’t say anything. “What’s your name?” Her eyes narrow and she tenses up. “Just your first name – just so we can talk like people. I won’t be writing it down, you don’t have to worry.”

She relaxes a bit. After a few seconds of consideration, she answers, “Brenda.”

“OK, Brenda. We’ll take care of you – I’ve got the test right here. Just – why do you think you might be...” she gives me an incredulous look, and I have to laugh myself. “I know why, what I mean is, how late are you?”

“Four days,” she says after another several more seconds of deliberation. If she is pregnant, it happened before she got to school. I can just picture how it went: her high school boyfriend pressuring her, pleading “we might never see each other again” or something like that. And her giving in, and now here she is wondering if her whole life is about to go off the rails because she did.

My mind wanders to a night almost four years ago, November of my freshman year.. The night that I ran into the drugstore and bought a pregnancy test for

Beth, and then locked myself in the bathroom of the McDonalds on Euclid Avenue with her for fifteen minutes while she took it, holding her hand the whole time. The night that we really became best friends

I put that out of my mind; this isn't about me. "OK. Well, I've got the test – I can just tell you how to do it and you can take it with you, or..."

She doesn't hesitate at all this time. "I'll do it here! If – if that's allowed?"

I'm sure it is; it has to be. Anyway, I'm here in the room, so *I* say it's allowed. "Definitely. Do you know what to..." she nods; she doesn't need me to explain. I hand the test to her and unlock the door. "The bathroom is right next door. Just – just do what you need to, bring it back in here and – if you want, I'll wait with you, or you can wait by yourself."

"Would you? Wait with me?" She doesn't look at me when she asks; she's already up off the table and halfway to the door.

"Yes. Just – you know what to do, and come right back here."

Two minutes later she's back in the exam room and I've locked the door again. The test takes five to seven minutes, according to the instructions, and I think I can guarantee that it's the longest five to seven minutes of Brenda's life. To pass the time and keep her from dwelling on what she might find out, I ask her how she's enjoying college life so far.

"I love it – well, I've been pretty stressed out the last couple of days, but other than that it's great." She won't look at me, and she also makes a point of not looking anywhere near the sink, where the test is sitting. It's funny; I can imagine exactly how she's feeling, but I may well be in her position a few months from now hoping for precisely the opposite result.

When the time is up, and we've waited an extra couple of minutes to be absolutely sure, I stand up and go over to the sink. I check the instructions again, even though I already know that pink is positive and blue is negative. "Would you like to look, or should I?"

She doesn't speak or move, and I take that to mean she wants me to look. I cross my fingers for her sake, I pick up the test and, just like that night four years ago, "Negative." Brenda jumps up and hugs me so tightly I can't breathe. I manage a weak grunt, and she gets the message.

“Sorry. I’m just – I mean, thank God!”

I’m not sure what to do now. I guess I should just send her on her way; I’d love to give her some free advice, but I’m not sure if I’m supposed to, or – far more importantly - if it would do any good. I settle for, “Is there anything else you need? Do you have any questions?”

She doesn’t. I unlock the door and she thanks me and leaves. David says, “I can see how that went,” and then he shows me where to file Brenda’s form and where to mark off the pregnancy test I gave her.

That’s the most excitement I see all night; there are only two other patients. One is a grad student with a nasty cold; Martha gives him a small bottle of over-the-counter cough medicine and tells him to come back in two days if he isn’t feeling better. The other is a girl I vaguely recognize from one of my chemistry classes last year. She comes in with a nasty-looking but thankfully shallow cut on her arm, courtesy of a mishap in the lab. Martha lets me clean and disinfect it and bandage it securely.

At ten o’clock, I’m more than ready to go home. The campus shuttle bus – we still call them “Greenies” even though they were all repainted white two years ago – stops right outside and drops me off just a few steps from Drake Tower.

I momentarily consider stopping by Janet’s room to check on her, but I’m too tired and too smelly and too everything for that. It turns out there wouldn’t have been any point; when I open the door to our suite, she’s there, sitting on our couch watching “Quantum Leap” with Brian. The remains of a Little Caesar’s pizza are on the table in front of them. “We saved you a piece,” Brian says as he comes over to greet me.

Normally I’d push him away when I smell like this, for his own sake, but I don’t have the energy. Besides, I need his touch, his arms around me. “I’m sorry,” I whisper in his ear as he holds me. “How is she?”

“Holding on,” he whispers back. That’s pretty generous, in my opinion; when I came in, she turned her head vaguely in my direction but her eyes weren’t actually focused on me – or anything else.

I sit down next to her on the couch; she doesn’t react to my presence at all. I don’t say anything; we quietly watch the last fifteen minutes of the show. When



it's over and the news comes on, she shakes her head as though she's trying to wake herself up, and she manages to focus her eyes on me. "Sara? How – how was the Student Health Center?"

"You didn't miss a thing," I tell her. "How about you? It looks like Brian took good care of you. I'm so sorry I wasn't here." Considering how little happened tonight, I really should have cancelled and stayed here with her.

"He was really nice – he – you..."

I try to put a smile on my face. "We're glad to help, Janet. Really. Anytime."

She makes an effort to smile back, but she can't quite manage it. She does squeeze my hand; I figure that's good enough. "Tomorrow morning?" she asks.

"I'll be downstairs at the usual time."

"Me too," she tells me. I think she means it. I hope she does, anyway. She thanks Brian again, and heads downstairs, and I can – finally – take my shower.

I leave the door open, and Brian pulls a chair over to talk to me while I try to wash the formaldehyde away. I tell him about my night – well, I tell him about two of the three patients. I don't think there's any doctor-patient (or even student-patient!) confidentiality to breach by talking about cleaning a cut or dispensing cough medicine. I don't say a word about Brenda, though, even though he doesn't know her and I could tell it without any details so he'd never have the slightest idea who she was. I have to learn how to do this sometime; it may as well be now.

Besides, I'm afraid if I did talk about her, I might not be able to stop myself from telling him how it made me feel, and what it made me remember. And that *would* be breaking a confidence. I honestly doubt Beth would care, especially four years after the fact, and I also doubt Brian would be very surprised, but none of that matters. It isn't my secret, and I have to respect that.

I wash my hair four times and the smell still isn't completely gone, but a fifth time isn't going to do any better so I turn off the water, dry myself and go to bed. It's been a very, very long day.

Oh, God. When I'm a resident, a day like today is going to be a "light" day, isn't it? That's the last thought in my mind before I drift off to sleep...



*Sara is standing in Joseph's finished basement, watching – herself. Herself, and Janet and Joseph, all hard at work studying for Dr. Morris' class. Janet looks far better here, in this dream, than she has in weeks.*

*Joseph dramatically slams a textbook shut and stands, announcing “That's enough for today. You girls go and wash up, your mother should have dinner ready upstairs.”*

*“Yes, Dad,” Janet says, heading upstairs with the dream-Sara right behind her. As Sara watches Joseph tidy up, humming to himself as he does, she realizes this is his dream...*

*The basement changes around Sara; she blinks and now she's in a classroom. She recognizes Dr. Flowers, an archaeology professor, from the long article written about him in the student newspaper last week. She recognizes her neighbor Deia, sitting in the front row attentively taking notes. And – Sara shrieks, “God, no!” when she sees him – Deia's husband Jaime, standing there completely naked.*

*As much as she wants to look away, Sara can't; she can't even close her eyes. No one else seems to think there's anything odd about the situation. Jaime stands there, trying to answer Dr. Flowers' questions in rapid Spanish with the occasional – and usually wrong – English word mixed in.*

*Sara understands perfectly well what's going on here, and why Jaime is imagining himself naked. She feels sorry for him, that he's obviously having such difficulty learning English and keeping up with his schoolwork. She also wishes she were anywhere else but here, even as – and she curses herself for the thought – she can't help notice that the view is very nice indeed...*

*Her surroundings change again; Sara finds herself now in a living room that's twenty years out of date. The fake wood paneling and the thick, nearly-orange carpet would fit right in on “The Brady Bunch,” Sara thinks. She has no idea whose home this is, or whose dream, until an older woman in a bathrobe walks in: Dr. Morris' wife. The last time Sara saw her, in a dream weeks ago, her hair was nearly all gray; now, it's almost back to what Sara imagines must be its original black. Mrs. Morris looks all around the living room with disgust. Sara*

*remembers the kitchen she dreamed about, with brand-new appliances and modern style, and she can only assume that this room is the province of Dr. Morris. His lack of style does not surprise her.*

*The doorbell rings, and Mrs. Morris goes to answer it. Sara recognizes the man who's there: Dr. Francis, the Dean of the medical school. He's older than Dr. Morris, but also taller and seemingly in much better health. He doesn't look to be bearing good news, however; he looks at Mrs. Morris with pity as she invites him in.*

*"Carol, I – I don't know how to tell you this," he begins, and then takes both her hands. "Abraham is – he – he passed away this morning." Mrs. Morris isn't meeting his eyes, but Sara doesn't think it's tears or sadness that she's hiding from him. He goes on to explain exactly what happened; how Dr. Morris collapsed in the middle of a lecture, how every heroic effort was made to revive him, but to no avail.*

*"Thank you for coming to tell me," Mrs. Morris says when he's finished. "I – I'd like to be alone, I think." Dr. Francis nods, clearly wanting to respect her wishes. The moment he's gone, Mrs. Morris begins to laugh, entirely unable to control herself.*

*"Finally!"*

*Mrs. Morris, still laughing – cackling, really – goes up the stairs and then, quicker than Sara would have thought possible, she's back downstairs again, wearing a red dress, with car keys in hand...*

*Eleven:*  
*Lean on Me*

(SEPTEMBER 5-6, 1991)

**M**y eyes open, and I can't see Mrs. Morris. What happened to her? She – it was a dream. She was getting ready to go out and celebrate the fact that Dr. Morris is dead.

Oh, God. If he is, and I've known since before school started that someone – well, almost everyone who knows him – wants him dead, I'm responsible, aren't I? If I could have stopped it, and I didn't do a thing?

No matter how much of a jerk he is, if I can help him – if it isn't too late already – I have to. I wake up Brian and I tell him exactly what I saw. “She must really hate him,” he says.

“Yeah. You'd think if she was that miserable she'd just divorce him.” Unless she couldn't, for some reason. Unless he's mistreating her, and she's too afraid to make him angry. But I don't know that, and I don't know how I can find out.

“Maybe he's just really sick, and she's tired of taking care of him,” Brian offers. That could certainly be it. Maybe “Finally!” means “the illness finally got

him” instead of “I finally finished him off.”

“Whatever the dream means, I need to find out more about him, and everybody who’s dreaming about him.” Which means that in addition to all my schoolwork, and taking care of Janet, and trying to be a good wife, and keeping an eye on my slutty neighbor and her worthless husband, now I have to start poking around in the personal lives of several of my teachers. I don’t have time for this!

I don’t even have a chance to tell Brian about my other dreams, which is just as well because I shouldn’t be telling him about them anyway. By the time we’re finished talking about Dr. Morris, it’s seven thirty and I have to go to class.



I catch a lucky break in lecture this morning. We’ve got a new lecturer, for one thing: Dr. Willis. He’s much more engaged than he usually is in dissection, and much less obnoxious than Dr. Cooper, so that’s good. But what’s much better is the topic: an introduction to the kinetics of proteins and nucleic acids.

First, I know the material pretty well because I had it in my last undergraduate Biochemistry class – I aced an exam on it just three months ago and I remember pretty much everything. Second, he’s starting with the basics, so I barely have to take any notes at all. Which means I can spend the time worrying about Dr. Morris. Obviously there’s the problem of whether someone’s trying to kill him, and if so who and how; and there’s also his class this afternoon.

I’m pretty sure he isn’t actually dead yet; if he were, it would be all over the school. So I still have time to do something about it, assuming the dreams mean what they seem to. As the lecture goes on, I sketch out some notes about the situation.

Dr. Cooper has dreamed about Dr. Morris three times that I’ve seen: Dr. Morris’ funeral, at a faculty meeting where he swore Dr. Morris would never become Dean and in the parking lot taking a two-iron to Dr. Morris’ car.

Mrs. Morris dreamed about him twice: once she gave him a cup of tea and he dropped dead a minute later and last night she was told he died and she went out to celebrate the news.

Dr. Haynes and Dr. Morris' secretary each had one dream. He dropped dead in Dr. Haynes' office after spitting up blood, and his secretary went all "Fatal Attraction" on him.

So what does all that mean? Dr. Cooper is the only one who didn't imagine the actual moment of Dr. Morris' death. The secretary is the only one who unquestionably killed him in her dream – it certainly seems like the wife and maybe also Dr. Haynes poisoned him, but I can't say that for 100% sure.

He *is* sick, too, and he has been for a couple of weeks. Could one of them be poisoning him right now? It's possible. His wife obviously has easy access to him – she could be slipping something into his morning coffee every day for all I know, but there's no guarantee she'd know what poison, or how much of it, to use. Dr. Cooper and Dr. Haynes would surely know what to poison him with to make it look like a natural illness, but I think it would be harder for them to actually do it. As for his secretary, well, who knows?

I need to do some serious research – I don't know the first thing about poisons or their effects, and I'm not even sure where to start. I'm going to need help. I can't do this alone. I didn't catch Dr. Walters by myself, after all.



I'm sitting in Dr. Morris' classroom, with Janet fidgeting nervously next to me. Neither of us really felt like eating, so we just went straight up to the classroom to review today's case. Between the two of us, we can't figure out what's going on with our patient, poor Mrs. Jones. We don't think she has stomach cancer, or ulcers, or celiac disease, or any other food allergy. She's not making her symptoms up, so it's not a repeat of the previous case.

My guess is something called IBS or "irritable bowel syndrome," which is a diagnosis that more-or-less means "there's something wrong and we have no idea what it is, but we'll give it a name anyway so we can feel like we've done something." Obviously it doesn't say that in Harrison's *Principles of Internal Medicine* but if I'm not learning anything else, I'm definitely learning to read between the lines.

The rest of the class arrives just before one thirty. Joseph and Paula sit right behind Janet and I; Joseph puts a hand on Janet's shoulder and smiles at her. Paula simply says "I'm very sorry for your loss," and sounds like she means it.

Max and Marcie come in hand-in-hand – I guess they've made up – and give Janet their condolences; Sanjay and then Dominick do the same when they come in a minute later. Dr. Morris shocks me when he walks into class and comes straight over to her. "My condolences to you, Ms. Black. But I should like you to remember this: our loved ones, though they die, continue to live on. They live within us in our memories, and also through us by our words and deeds."

I don't know what to say – I didn't think he had any kindness or wisdom inside him. Everyone else is as surprised as I am, Janet most of all. I'm so stunned that I don't take any notice of his physical condition, which I know I need to pay attention to. The moment passes, though, and Dr. Morris is his old, disagreeable self in no time. I hold back for the first hour, while he shoots holes in everyone else's theories. Nobody else suggests IBS, I suspect because it sounds like a cop-out. I think that everyone else in the class – except Janet, because she's not really thinking about it at all – thinks that there must be an obvious answer that we're all somehow overlooking. I don't. I think that's exactly what he's trying to teach us today – that there isn't always a good, clear answer.

Janet looks at me, and I look right back at her. I mouth to her, "Raise your hand." I'd rather have her speak up, before Dr. Morris comes after her. She gets my meaning and, very hesitantly raises her hand. "I think it might – it could be irritable bowel syndrome," she says, barely louder than a whisper.

Dr. Morris looks at me instead of Janet, and I don't flinch. He then, somewhat reluctantly, turns to her and questions her – much less harshly than usual. She's shaky but she answers him pretty well. When he's satisfied, he returns to me. "Do you agree with Ms. Black, Mrs. Alderson?"

"Absolutely," I say, with a confidence that I almost really feel. I'm right about the lesson he wants us to learn – I have to be.

"You would feel comfortable making that diagnosis if we were discussing, let us say, your husband?" You bastard!

But the truth is, I would. It's the only answer that makes sense. I start to say that, but I catch myself. I don't know if he's trying to trick me or not, but I'm going to make sure he doesn't. "I can't answer it that easily. Some of these symptoms could point to other issues in a man instead of a woman. There are a couple of other tests I'd want to run if the patient was a man," I say, and I go through them. Despite himself I think he might actually be a tiny bit impressed. Or at least surprised. "But, if the situation was similar, and all the other likely causes were ruled out, yes, I would diagnose my husband with IBS."

"Even though there's no cure, only treatment of the symptoms?" He won't let me go. Fine. I'm not backing down today.

"Yes. I'm not thrilled with it, but if there aren't any more tests to run, and we've ruled out everything else, I have to give him whatever answer I've got."

He keeps me on the hook. "Does anyone have any comments on Mrs. Alderson's diagnosis?" I look around, and I see uncertainty all around me. I don't blame my classmates – I'd feel the same way. Every question he asks is like a trap; the whole class feels like a fight – us against him.

Nobody takes my side very strongly; Joseph comes the closest when he says "I think she's probably right." But nobody really disagrees, either.

In the end, Dr. Morris pronounces IBS the "least bad" answer, given everything in the notes. I know I should have spoken up for Janet, when Dr. Morris turned the spotlight on me and made it sound like it was completely my idea. But I didn't think she was in any shape to really slug it out with him, and, besides, I doubt he would have let me get away with it anyway.


I do manage to get a really good look at him over the course of the class, and he's getting worse. His legs are twitching every so often, and he's definitely lost more hair. Whatever's wrong with him isn't getting any better.

When he finally lets us go, I walk out of the room feeling triumphant, as though I were Rocky and I just won a round against – whatever the heck his name was, the guy Mr. T played in the movie. I try to push out of my head the thought that it *is* only one round, and that even though he won in the end, Rocky still ended up in the hospital when the fight was over.



On the walk back Janet thanks me for “deflecting his attention” away from her. “I hate that I’m so – I don’t know, weak, I guess,” she says. “But I – it’s all I can do just to show up, you know?”


I know very well. “Anything I can do, Janet. I’m glad to help.” I don’t know how she’s going to get through tomorrow. And to tell the truth, I’m not sure how *I’m* going to get through it, either.



Brian’s waiting for me when I get home, and I immediately tell him all about class. He gets it right away. “I’m so proud of you!” he says, embracing me, kissing me. But a little later he frowns. “He’s going to make you pay for it in next time, isn’t he?”

I give him a mostly playful shove. “Figures you thought of that. I was trying not to think the exact same thing on the way home.” I guess it shows – not that I needed more proof – how right we are for each other. We really do think alike. Maybe I should test that. “What am I thinking about right now?”

He takes my hand and pulls me towards the bedroom. He’s facing away from me, but I don’t need to see his face to picture the grin he’s wearing. “The same thing I am,” he answers me. And he’s absolutely right...



Afterwards we walk over to the dining hall. I’m not sure about Brian, but I worked up enough of an appetite that even the Lardner Commons food seems appealing to me. When I’ve loaded up my plate, I spot my brother sitting with a couple of folks from Carson House and Brian and I join them. “Hey, Bob.”

“Hey yourself.”

“So how’s Susan?” I haven’t spoken to Bob since Monday morning. In my defense, I *have* had a lot going on.

“They’re going to release her tomorrow or Saturday,” he says. “I’ve been visiting her every day.” I notice that he sits up straighter and his eyes are much brighter than usual as he says it. Well, good for him.

“I’m sure she’s grateful,” I say. He doesn’t have to answer; his smile says everything. “You realize she’s going to be in a cast for a while. I had mine for

nine weeks, and her leg is much worse than mine was.”

He nods. “Yeah, I know. I’ve been talking to her roommate, and she’s been talking to some of her friends. We’ve got it all figured out. One of us will be with Susan to get her to every class, at least until she’s used to her crutches and she can get around by herself.”

Wow. I wouldn’t have expected that from him. Maybe that’s unfair; he’s changed so much over the last year – and maybe I have as well. “She’s pretty lucky you’re looking out for her.” Under the table, I grab Brian’s hand and squeeze it. I know exactly what it feels like to have someone special looking out for me.

Before Bob leaves, I ask him if he can come tomorrow afternoon. The news about Janet’s mother must have gotten around, because he knows exactly what I’m talking about. “I know you don’t know Janet all that well, but I – I’d just like you to come anyway, if you can. I think she’ll appreciate it.”

“Yeah. If you want, I’ll ask around the dorm, there’s plenty of people who know her, they might want to come too.”

I come around to his side of the table and kiss him on the cheek. “Yes, definitely. That’s really thoughtful.”

“Don’t sound so surprised,” he says with just a bit of a scowl.

I can’t help joking back at him, even now. “You’re right. You had me to learn from.”



I don’t dream Thursday night. At least, I don’t see anybody else’s dreams – if I had dreams of my own, I don’t remember them. I wake up, shower, kiss Brian and meet Janet in the lobby. She’s completely distracted, and so am I. Neither of us talks much on the walk over to class, and once we get there, we sit next to each other in the very back row of the lecture hall.

Thankfully, Dr. Willis is lecturing again, and again he’s covering material I already know so I don’t have to pay close attention. Not that I’d be capable of doing so anyway at the moment. I can’t bring myself to think about Janet, either

– my mind is bouncing around, from my brother to Dr. Morris to whether or not I really am ready to have a baby to a dozen other random things.

“Hey, anybody home in there?” It’s Joseph. He’s shaking my shoulder.

“What?”

“Class is over.” I look down at the completely empty notebook in my lap, and then up at the clock showing that it’s five minutes after noon.

“Thanks,” I mutter, and then I turn to Janet. “Hey, Janet?” She’s even farther away than I was; it takes a couple of minutes to get her attention and bring her back to Earth. “It’s time to go.”

Joseph nods. “I’ll go call Mary and she’ll bring the car, she’ll meet us outside,” and off he goes. We’re all going to go together to the funeral home and pick up – God, I don’t even want to think about it. I don’t want to say the words even in my own head.

This is ridiculous. I can’t be childish about this. I’m going to be a doctor! I’m going to be dealing with life and death. I’m – God, I know all this! Someday, when I’m practicing – hell, it’ll be sooner than that - I’m going to have to go up to someone and tell them that I did everything in my power, but it wasn’t enough, and their husband or wife or brother or child or best friend is dead. That’s going to be a part of my life, the life I’ve chosen, the life I’ve been working towards ever since I first got the idea in my head to be a doctor when I was in grade school. If I can’t even say the words to myself, how will I ever make it as a doctor?

We’re going to pick up Margaret’s ashes. There, I said it. We’re going to pick up her ashes and then come back to campus, and we’ll carry out her wishes. I’ll be there for Janet, and I’ll be strong for her, because I promised I would. That’s all there is to it.



“Oh my God,” Janet whispers as we walk out onto the field, right about where the stage was set up for graduation. It only now occurs to me to wonder if I should have gotten permission from someone – I have no idea who – to do this

out here. Too late now, and, honestly, God help anybody if they do come out here and tell us we can't do it.

Janet's got the urn in her hands, and I'm right beside her, with Joseph and Mary a couple of steps behind. The sky is blue and almost cloudless, and there's just a slight breeze. It's beautiful; it was exactly like this on graduation day. I think that's appropriate. I wonder if Janet notices?

I don't know, but she obviously does notice the whole crowd of people waiting for us. There's Brian, of course. There's Bob, and a handful of people from Carson House – George, Kelly Travers, and half a dozen others. There's Jim Quarters, who must have taken the afternoon off from his brand new job at an accounting firm. There's Paula, and Sanjay and several other classmates from the medical school. Mona Charleston is here, and Dr. Morgan, and even Janet's undergrad advisor, Dr. Maitland.

One at a time, everyone walks up to Janet and pats her on the arm, or squeezes her shoulder, or hugs her. "You're not alone," I whisper to her. "You see?" The tears are flowing, and she can't bring herself to speak, but she nods.

For a few minutes she just stands there, clutching the urn, crying and trying to gather up her courage. Nobody else says anything, and they all make a point of looking away from her, giving her space and time.

Finally, she wipes the tears from her eyes and clears her throat. "I – I don't know what I'm supposed to say," she starts. "I – most of you never met my mother. But she – she loved to meet my friends. She'd want to know all of you, she would be so glad you're all here."

That's all she can bring herself to say. I don't know what the right thing to do is, but Jim Quarters, of all people, speaks up. "I met her at graduation. She was so proud of you, I remember it clearly. I mean, all our parents were proud of us. But your mother – she was – I don't know how to say it – she was just in heaven when she was talking about you. It must have been the best day of her life."

Mary speaks next. "I never met her," she says, "but I feel like I know her, just from knowing you. I can see her in you. She had to be a special woman for you to turn out the way you did."

“My Dad’s a preacher,” George says. I knew him for three years and I never knew that. “He’d say – he’d say that she’ll always be watching you and looking out for you. I think he’s right.”

Kelly Travers is next. “I don’t know if you remember, Janet, the first day I came to school my freshman year. You would’ve been a sophomore. Your Mom brought you, and you were in the lobby of the dorm with her. You were going out to dinner, you and her and – Diana, right? She was your roommate, I think.” Janet nods. “I was sitting there by myself, my roommate wasn’t there yet, I didn’t have anyone to talk to, and your Mom looked at me and she said, ‘I’ve got more room in the car, why don’t you come out to eat with us?’” Kelly shakes her head. “I couldn’t – I still can’t believe it. She didn’t even know me, she just – I guess she thought I looked lonely and so she did something about it. That’s who your Mom was.”

Everyone has their say, and it’s amazing; everyone seems to say just the right thing. “I talked to her in the hospital,” I say, when there’s nobody else left to speak. “She loved you so much. She – she was – she took so much happiness from you. That’s all she wanted out of life, was to see you do well, to be happy. And you’ve given that to her.” I can’t go on; I feel my own tears coming, and I’m far from alone.

When I’m done, everyone is silent. Janet is looking down at the urn in her hands, and she stares at it for a long while. Then she takes the top off. “I – I don’t know how people usually do this. But I think she’d like it if all of you helped me.” She reaches in and comes out with a handful of ashes, scatters them in the breeze. I go to her and follow her lead, and Brian is right behind me. Everyone else follows suit. Dr. Morgan is the last, and as he scatters the final remains of Margaret into the breeze she puts down the urn and embraces him.

We all stand there, silent, for another while, before Joseph goes around and begins to give directions to his house. It’s a smaller group that ends up there: Brian and I, Bob, Kelly, Paula and Mona. Everyone else has class or work that they have to get back to, but that’s OK. They were all there for Janet when she needed it the most.

For about an hour, everyone just makes small talk and nibbles on the snacks Mary brings out. But then Janet begins to talk about her mother. She stutters and hesitates at first, but then she gets going, telling us about the time that her mother drove her to her first junior high school dance. “She walked me all the way inside, and she stood there by the door for half an hour until she was satisfied I wouldn’t try to run back out.” She sighs. “I didn’t even talk to a boy that night. When it was over I complained all the way home, I swore up and down I would never go to another dance.”

“So what happened?” Mary asks.

“There was another dance maybe a month later. She made me go to that one, too. I complained the whole way there, I threatened to jump out of the car, every stupid thing a thirteen-year-old could think of, you name it.” I catch Mary rolling her eyes as she looks over to her own thirteen-year-old daughter Jeannie, who scoffs in response. “Anyway, I went to the dance, and Billy Pearson – God, I hated him. He was such a jerk. He was there, and he was wearing these tight jeans – it was supposed to be semi-formal, but he had to wear jeans, you know? They were so tight, and he – he was giving me such a hard time.” I know exactly where this story is going. I think we all do. “Anyway, he was making me so angry, and the music was playing, it was ‘Rosanna,’ you know that song, right? I loved that song. And his pants were *really* tight. And – well, I had my first kiss. And then...” she blushes, “then we ended up making out for – I don’t even know - fifteen or twenty minutes, probably. It felt like forever, I remember that.”

Everyone laughs. Joseph turns to Jeannie. “Whenever your next school dance is, you’re grounded that night, young lady,” he says, which just makes everyone – even Jeannie - laugh even more.

“My mom – she knew. I didn’t say anything, but she knew. On the way home, she didn’t even ask me how it went, all she said was, ‘When is the next dance?’ and I told her, whatever the date was, and she just smiled at me, like, ‘I told you so.’”

Janet keeps going, telling stories about Margaret, and I’m so glad. I know she’s going to have a lot of very rough days ahead, but seeing this makes me think she’s going to get through them.

The gathering breaks up around seven o'clock; Bob says that he wants to go by the hospital and visit Susan. "I checked earlier – they're keeping her just one more night, she's coming home tomorrow, but I should go see her now." My little brother, acting all mature and responsible and thoughtful. Who would ever have guessed?

Mona and Kelly leave, and Paula follows a couple of minutes later. Joseph offers to drive Janet and Brian and I home, which of course we all agree to. On the drive home, I remember that I've been carrying around several pages of printouts in my purse. They're all for Janet – emails from Beth, and Melanie Vondreau and a very touching one from Jane Barnaby, who took time from her studies at Oxford to write three pages to Janet. If anyone knows what Janet's going through, Jane does - her mother passed away five years ago, when she was a freshman. I meant to give them to Janet earlier, but there wasn't a good time, and then it just slipped my mind.

When we get out of the car, after we all thank Joseph, I hand the emails over to Janet. She hugs me tightly, and then Brian. "Both of you – I don't know what I would have done without you. Just – thank you. I know that doesn't cover it..."

"We didn't do anything you wouldn't have done for us," I say. I don't know if that's actually true or not; I'd like to think it is. "Just – you take care of yourself. And call us if you need anything at all, you know where we live." Looking at her, I think she's going to be all right, at least for tonight. But I still have to ask. "Are you going to be OK? I mean tonight, if you need company..."

She shakes her head. I can see it in her eyes, she *is* going to make it through the night. I can't speak for tomorrow, but that'll have to take care of itself. "OK. Then – good night. I'll – we'll go tomorrow for review? Ten o'clock like usual?" She nods again as we step into the elevator together.

Two minutes later Brian and I are alone, and we both have the same thought. In seconds, we're in bed, in each other's arms. We don't kiss, we don't do anything else, for a while we don't even talk, all we do is lie there looking at each other, holding each other as tightly and closely as we ever have.

I know that we're thinking and feeling the same thing. I know he needs the same thing I do, to feel safe, to be connected. Really, just to not be alone. I'm the

luckiest woman in the world, because I've got a husband who will give that to me, and he's pretty lucky too, to have a wife who will give it right back.





*Twelve:*

*Secrets and Lies*

(SEPTEMBER 6-8, 1991)

*Sara is in someone's office; a teacher's office. From the view out the window, she knows it's in the medical school. She isn't at all surprised when, a moment later, a shadow falls across the open doorway, and Dr. Cooper stalks in after it. He goes straight for his desk and picks up a file folder that, Sara sees, has "Morris, Abraham" written on the tab. Dr. Cooper opens it up and begins reading, and Sara strains, standing up on her toes and craning her neck, to read with him. But his head blocks her view; all she can make out is two sentences at the top of the first page, listing symptoms. She sees "alopecia," which sounds vaguely familiar to her, and "Mees lines," which does not.*

*Dr. Cooper grunts in what Sara takes to be a very satisfied way, and puts the folder back on his unnaturally neat desk. He turns and walks out of the office, and Sara heads for the desk. But before she can take two steps, she finds herself elsewhere. Unlike every other time she can remember, though, there is no sense*

*of change; she has not entered someone else's dream. She's in the same dream, it has just shifted scenes.*

*Now she's standing in the corner of a large meeting room. From the view outside the window that runs all along one wall, she can tell that she's still in the medical school, but now on the top floor. This must be the faculty boardroom. Looking around at the huge leather-padded table with at least twenty expensive-looking chairs around it and all of them but one occupied with her teachers, she's certain of it.*

*She sees all her dissection teachers, all her lecturers, the Dean, and – there he is, muttering to himself, eyes darting all around the table – Dr. Cooper. The Dean clears his throat and all eyes go to him. "We've waited long enough. It looks as though Dr. Morris will not be joining us this afternoon."*

*Although she can't see his face, Sara knows Dr. Cooper is smiling. "You're damn right he won't be," he mutters; nobody besides Sara seems to hear him.*

*"Well, we all know what we're here for today. Since Dr. Morris is not here to speak for himself, does anyone wish to speak for him?" Dead silence. The Dean waits for a full minute, but the silence is unbroken. "Dr. Cooper? Is there anything you wish to say?"*

*There is; Dr. Cooper makes a forceful and passionate case for his selection as the next Dean. Despite her dislike of Dr. Cooper, Sara herself is convinced; if she had a vote, she would cast it for him after that speech, she thinks. And sure enough, when the Dean calls for the vote, every single hand is raised for Dr. Cooper...*



My eyes open, and I can't see anyone. Where did they all go? There was a roomful of people congratulating Dr. Cooper – oh. It was a dream. It was his dream.

"He knew. He knew Dr. Morris wouldn't be there. Why? What was he reading in that folder?"

Brian stirs awake beside me. His eyes flutter open and slowly focus on me. "What?"

“It was a dream,” I tell him, waiting to say any more until he’s fully conscious. When he finally is, I relate the dream to him. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know,” he says. “It doesn’t prove that he’s doing anything to Dr. Morris. Maybe he *is* just sick, and that’s all there is to it. I mean, if you see it, all your teachers have to see it too, right? They’re all doctors, they probably know exactly what’s wrong with him, even if he hasn’t talked about it.” He’s got a point.

But if that’s true, why am I still having the dreams about it? If he’s just sick, there’s nothing I can do that Dr. Morris can’t do for himself. “I thought – we’ve talked about this – I’m having the dreams for a reason. My subconscious *knows*. There’s something wrong, something my brain is picking up on.”

“Something only you can fix?” I don’t like that at all. But, basically, yes. Brian doesn’t need me to say it. “You think one of them is making him sick. Poisoning him.”

“It’s either that, or this is the biggest coincidence of all time. I wish – if only I could have seen what Dr. Cooper was looking at in the dream. That could be the answer, right there.” Last time, with Dr. Walters, I was able to make myself look for clues in his dreams. But there’s no guarantee I can do that again. Last time it was the same dream, the same person, every time. This has been completely different.

We go around and around uselessly for a while, but after nearly an hour I have to stop. I’ve got a review session to go to this morning. We get dressed go over to the dining hall for breakfast, and I run into my brother as we’re entering and he’s leaving. “Off to bring Susan home?”

“Yep.” I don’t think I’ve ever see him as proud of himself as he is right now. It’s amazing. I make a mental note to call my parents tonight and tell them all about it. I’ll bet he hasn’t said a word to them about how he’s visited her every day, or made sure she’ll have help getting to all her classes or any of that, and they really should know. For now, I just hug him. “Remember, tell her to ask for Monica when she starts physical therapy,” I remind him when I let him go.

We eat our breakfast – well, as much as we can stomach – and then we go our separate ways. Brian’s off to the Morley building, where the computer network

for the whole university is run from. He's working on something for his Wide Area Networking class, and today is his day to visit with one of the programmers who run everything. He's tried to explain what he's doing in the class to me several times but I still barely understand it. As for me, I'm headed back to the dorm to meet up with Janet and then off to Joseph's house.

She's waiting for me, and she seems to be in decent spirits. As we walk, she thanks me again, repeatedly, for yesterday. "I'm glad it helped – did it help? At all?"

"Yes. God, yes. Just talking about her, and hearing what everybody else said. It's – it hurts, it hurts all the time. But I felt like I wasn't alone. That means a lot." I'm glad – that's exactly what I hoped.

Paula is there waiting for us when we arrive at Joseph's house, and she's very impatient. "You know we have our first midterms in just nine days!" Yes, I did know that, but I've had kind of a lot on my mind. And anyway, arriving three minutes late today isn't going to be the difference between passing and failing. But I force myself to be good, I don't say that. We get down to work, and Paula is further frustrated at how slowly we go. It's not so much a review as teaching Janet the week's material for the first time, because even when her body was in class, her mind was anywhere but there.

I don't mind, and Joseph doesn't either, but Paula sighs a lot and occasionally mutters to herself. At her insistence, we go longer than usual, until almost six o'clock. Joseph, as always, invites us to stay for dinner, but nobody takes him up on it. Paula's out the door in a flash – no doubt to study for another four or five hours when she gets back to her apartment; and Janet wants to get home so she can try – again – to get hold of some of her more distant relatives. "Maybe somebody'll be home on a Saturday night. Who knows?"

I'm the last one to leave, and I'm only two blocks down Mayfield Road when I'm nearly killed – a black BMW sedan comes backing out of a driveway at what seems like a hundred miles an hour, the driver clearly not looking where he's going, and I jump out of the way with about three inches to spare. The driver never even notices; as he turns onto the street and zooms away, I can easily read the license plate: COOP-1.

This is his house! Dr. Cooper! My first thought is to run back to Joseph's house, just to ask him if he knew that Dr. Cooper lives here, not even five hundred feet from him. My second thought is that I know where he's going; there's a faculty dinner tonight. Apparently it's a tradition; there's a fancy steakhouse downtown, and once a semester the entire faculty goes there together.

My third thought is completely insane: if I went to the medical school right now, I could sneak into his office and see if there really is a folder all about Dr. Morris, and I could read it.

Maybe it's not as crazy as it sounds. The library will still be open and it's on the same floor as the faculty offices, so I'd have an excuse not only to be in the building but in that hallway. The individual offices don't have alarms; I've been in enough of them to know that for sure. And the building alarms aren't turned on until the library closes, so that won't be a concern either.

Just to be safe, I run back to Joseph's house, and use his phone to leave a message for Brian – he's still not home from the computer center. All I say is that I'm going by the library to do some research, and I'll be home as soon as I can. I don't want him not knowing where I am and wondering if something horrible happened to me on the way home.

It's almost seven o'clock by the time I walk through the door and onto the fourth floor of the medical school. On my way up, I see a couple of students on their way out, and as I pass by the second floor, I see lights on in the Anatomy Theater. I don't think I'd want to be working there alone at night; it's difficult enough sometimes in bright daylight and with 170 other people around me.

The fourth floor is deserted; I see the lights on in the library way down the hall but there's nobody looking out at the moment. If I'm going to do this, now's the time. I realize how utterly insane this is, but – it really does seem like the best way to find out what I need to. I can't count on Dr. Cooper having another dream. This isn't like last year; these people – these *suspects* – aren't dreaming every night on schedule like Dr. Walters did.

I guess I could try to talk to Dr. Cooper, find out what I want to know that way. But he is one of the suspects, and I don't trust my detective skills far enough to hope that I'd get what I need and not make things worse.

So it's come to this: breaking and entering a teacher's office in the dark of night. I stop in front of his office; there's still nobody anywhere up or down the hall. I reach into my purse, into my wallet, and pull out my Visa card.

I don't have to do this. I can just go home. I probably won't find anything anyway. But then I'll wonder, and what if Dr. Morris drops dead in a few days? I'll know I might have found out something that could have saved him. His death would be on my head. I slide the credit card in, and I feel it catch. I turn the handle and the door opens.

The office is exactly like I saw in the dream; the view out the window is identical. Slowly, quietly, I pull the door closed behind me. His desk is just as neat as it was last night, and – this is too good to be true – there's a single manila file folder sitting there. Sure enough, it's got "Morris, Abraham" written on the tab in meticulous handwriting.

The last sunlight is still streaming in from the window, enough that I don't need to turn on the overhead light. I pick up the folder and it's got three pages of notes about Dr. Morris. But I only need to read the first few lines on the first page to know that, whatever's wrong with Dr. Morris, Dr. Cooper isn't doing it to him.

Just the opposite. It looks like Dr. Cooper has been trying to figure out what's going on with him just like I have. There's a list of the symptoms, and he's got down everything I've noticed watching him in class. I see the two sentences I was able to see in his dream, the references to alopecia and Mees lines, as well as notes about the acne, and the problems Dr. Morris is having with his legs.

On the second page, under the heading "Chronic Exposure?" Dr. Cooper's got a whole bunch of possible toxins listed, each with a big red "X" next to it. There's arsenic, mercury, cadmium, lead and several others. There's "neurotoxins" and then below that "radioactives?" But he clearly doesn't think it's any of those.

I wish I had one of those tiny cameras, like you see in spy movies, so I could have a copy of all the notes. Unfortunately this is real life, no such luck. But I guess I really don't need a copy anyway – I know what I need to know. First of all, I can clear Dr. Cooper as a suspect, and second, if Dr. Morris is being

poisoned, it's with something really rare or obscure – something that even an experienced teacher at the medical school can't identify. That's definitely progress, and maybe when I go over all this with Brian, between the two of us we can make something more out of it. On the other hand, if someone with all of Dr. Cooper's knowledge and experience can't figure it out, what chance do I have?

I put that out of my mind; I can worry about it later. Right now I have to get out of here without being seen. I close the folder, making sure to leave it in exactly the same position I found it in. I look around just to be sure I haven't touched anything else. There's no evidence I was here, no possible reason for him to suspect a thing. I did it!

I tiptoe back to the door, open it just enough that I can peek out. There's nobody in the hallway, so I open it slowly, slip out and close it gently behind me. I hear the lock click; it sounds horribly loud in the silence of the hallway, but there's no one to notice. I can't believe I got away with this!

As long as I'm here, I may as well actually do what I told Brian I was going to do and go to the library. Unfortunately it closes at eight o'clock tonight, and it's already seven forty five – has it really been forty five minutes I was in his office? Anyway, that only leaves me fifteen minutes, not nearly enough time. I don't find anything about alopecia or Mees lines. I'll have to come back Monday after class and see what I can find out then.

The library closes up, and I go back down the empty hallway, down the stairs, past the Anatomy Theater, which is still occupied. I look in the window and – I can't be sure at this distance, but I think it's Paula there, working all by herself. I'm torn between going in to talk to her and just leaving it alone, and my desire to get home and see Brian wins out.

It's not Dr. Cooper. Three suspects is easier than four to work with, so that's good. But what's the next step? I see Dr. Haynes almost every day, but I'm not sure what I can do to learn more about her and what she might or might not know about Dr. Morris. I don't have much reason to interact with his secretary, and as for his wife – well, I've got no idea at all how to get to her or find out

anything there. I hope Brian's got some good ideas, because I'm going to need them.

I step out the front door of the medical school into the comfortable night air, my mind going around and around: Dr. Hanyes, the secretary, the wife; is it poison and if it is, what kind? I'm not paying any attention to where I'm going, and I miss the extra-steep step down to the street. I land hard on my right foot – my surgically repaired right foot – and there's a loud pop. It feels as though there's a red-hot knife jammed into my ankle. The leg collapses out from under me and I go down in a heap. I somehow hold back from shrieking in pain, but it's a close thing.

Oh, God. It hurts! I can't believe I was so careless! One stupid step, and I've broken my ankle again. If this had happened upstairs, in Dr. Cooper's office...

I'd be expelled. Maybe even arrested. They'd come and handcuff me and drag me off to jail, broken ankle and all, and Brian would have to come and pay bail to get me out. If he even would – of course he would. Wouldn't he? And then we'd need to borrow thousands of dollars to hire a lawyer to keep me out of jail, and I'd still be expelled, and my life would be ruined.

How did I not think of any of that? How could I possibly have thought this was a good idea?



I'll never know how I made it from the door of the medical school to the emergency room. It was probably only five hundred feet, but it was half an hour of agony that I'm trying very hard to block out of my mind.

Maybe I shouldn't. Maybe I should try to remember it, burn it into my brain forever as a reminder of what happens when I do something reckless. I'm waiting for the nurse to take me up to radiology, to find out how badly I've wrecked my ankle, how long I'll be in a cast this time. Except – since I've been here in the bed, I realize it doesn't feel the same as the last time. It hurts like hell, but it's different. The pain isn't quite as sharp. Maybe – no, I don't want to get my hopes up.



I called Brian five minutes ago, and he was properly panicked when I told him I was in the ER. I didn't tell him what I was doing, of course; I skipped straight to the end of the story, which is plenty bad enough.



I come back from radiology to the ER and Brian's there in the exam room waiting for me. I wish I could jump up and go to him, but I have to settle for sitting halfway up while he comes over to me and embraces me. "Thank God you're OK! The nurse told me – she got down here right before you did. Nothing broken, right?"

"Right. It's not broken. I was lucky. Just a bad sprain." I thought it felt different, but I didn't dare believe it until the radiologist told me; I was afraid I'd be back in a cast for three more months. As it is, I just need to keep it tightly bandaged and keep weight off it while it heals, hopefully just two weeks or so. I guess I'll be using my cane again for a while.

"I thought the worst – God, I rushed over here, I was afraid of what I'd find..."

I have to tell him what I was really doing. It can't wait. "Can you look outside, let me know if anybody's out there?"

"What do you need? I'll get it." That's so sweet; of course that's what he'd say.

"Privacy. I don't want anybody else to hear me. Can you please look?" He pokes his head outside the curtain that blocks off the exam room. He pulls it back in and shakes it.

In a low voice, barely more than a whisper, I tell him exactly what happened. Everything. He looks torn; he's stunned, and also really angry.

We've had definitely less than our share of fights – I wish I could say it's because we love each other so much, and we're both such wonderful people that we just never have anything to fight about. But that's not it. Personally, I think it's because of what we went through last year. When you're both nearly killed in the basement of a psychopath, that really puts everything else into perspective. It's hard for us to get angry at one another when the memory of that day is always right there to remind us how close we came to losing everything, and that

it's not worth wasting time getting upset about things that can't possibly be that important.

Of the few fights we *have* had, I don't think we've ever had a really awful one. But I think we're about to. I see it in his face; his anger is winning out over his worry about me. "What the hell were you thinking?" I know I've never heard that tone from him; I shrink back into the bed and put my hands up.

"I didn't know when I'd have another chance. You know the dreams – I have to do something." I try not to sound too defensive, but I don't think I manage it.

"Yes, but you don't have to do it alone." He turns away from me, pokes his head outside the curtain again. Clearly he still doesn't see anybody outside the room. He continues in a quiet voice that's much worse than yelling would be: "And you don't have to do something so risky. What if you got caught?"

I know, I know. "I looked. There was nobody to see me." I lower my voice, too, just in case.

He scoffs, and though he lowers his voice still further, his tone is even sharper, almost cutting. "No, you *thought* there was nobody. You *hoped*. You bet our whole future on a *hope*. You were right, but that doesn't make it OK." I don't like his tone at all. Nobody – well, nobody I care about, nobody I love – has ever spoken to me like that before.

"I used my judgment," I answer, and I can hear anger creeping into my own voice. I don't like my tone, either, and it's all the worse because I'm forcing myself to keep it low and quiet. I can't help it, though. "I'm – people are going to be putting their lives into my hands, betting on my judgment. I thought you were OK with that."

He closes his eyes; I know what he's doing, counting to ten so he won't say something he'll regret. When he does speak, he's a little calmer, the words come a little more slowly. But the anger, the sharpness, is still there. "You know I am. But that's different. I know you'll have lives in your hands. I know you'll have to make tough decisions, and sometimes all you'll have is your best guess. I understand all that." He paces around my bed. "But this – you could've called me. You had plenty of time to get to a phone, talk it over."

I take my time to answer. I'm not even sure what I'm going to say until the words just spill out. "You would've talked me out of it." There it is. I didn't realize it until this minute, but it's true. I have to be honest with him – and even more importantly, with myself. "I knew it was crazy. If I talked to you, I would have seen reason and not done it, or – I'm not sure, maybe this is worse – I would've talked you into it, and then both of us could have been in trouble."

He considers that. To give himself time to think, he peeks outside again; still nobody there. There's more pain than anger in his voice now. "How do you think I feel, hearing all this? 'Guess what, honey, tonight I broke into a professor's office, isn't that great, isn't it fun?'"

I almost hiss back at him, "Of course it wasn't fun!" But I catch myself. I take a deep breath and look away; I can't meet his eyes. I know my face must be bright red.

I don't have any right to be angry at him, not now. And the truth is, as much as I hate to admit it, he's right. It was – maybe not "fun" exactly, but definitely exciting in the moment. And he's also right that I didn't think about all the consequences, not until it was over. I turn back to him; I still can't quite meet his eyes. "When I hurt myself, you know what I thought? I went through this whole scenario in my head, what if it had happened in his office, what if I'd been caught? I pictured the whole thing. I saw myself in jail, calling you to come bail me out. That was the worst part, imagining what you'd think of me when you came for me."

He hugs me now, squeezes me tightly. Just like that, the anger is gone – his and mine both. "You should know better than that. Do you remember how you called me the morning of our wedding? Do you remember what you asked me?"

Like it was yesterday. "I asked if you wanted to marry me even if meant marrying an idiot. And you said, especially if it meant that. I guess we both knew what we were talking about, didn't we?" Now, finally, I look at him properly.

His arms feel so good around me. "I'm still angry at you." He says it, but he doesn't mean it. I can see it in his eyes.

"But you forgive me, right?"

“And you promise not to do anything else crazy without letting me know, right?”

He pulls himself even closer to me, and we kiss. I think we both take that as a “yes.”



I’m finally released at eleven o’clock with my ankle tightly wrapped and protected by a plastic splint that I can – very carefully – hop around on. We take a taxi back to the dorm. As soon as we get upstairs, Brian helps me get undressed and gets me in the bed. Thank God tomorrow is Sunday. I’ll need the day to recover, to get used to hobbling around with my cane again.

We don’t talk about what I found out; we’re both too exhausted to do anything but go straight to sleep. There’s a part of me that doesn’t want to sleep. It wants Brian’s arms around me, his lips on mine, his hands all over me...

Not tonight. I know there’s a part of him that wants it, too. There’ll be plenty of time for that, though, even with my injured leg. We managed it when I broke my leg - you’d think that being in a cast for three months would put a damper on those activities, and obviously it does make certain things more difficult. But there are – well, let’s just call them tricks to get around the problem. And I’m pretty sure we learned them all.

Thinking about lips and hands and tricks, there’s a smile on my face as my eyes close and I drift off...



*Sara is in the Anatomy Theater, but as she looks around, it doesn’t feel quite right. It’s much larger than it ought to be, with hundreds of tables instead of the fifty or so she’s used to. She’s standing behind a table, watching a group of five students – that’s strange as well. She sees herself, and Janet and Paula, and Joseph.*

*And the fifth student, white coat, hair pulled back in a bun, is Mary. Sara knows now that this is her dream. As Sara realizes this, she looks over to the nearest table, and she sees Joseph and Mary’s children there. Kevin, Jeannie and Chris, all in white coats, all wearing their latex exam gloves, scalpels in hand.*

*“Chris, stop playing with that! It’s disgusting!” Mary calls over, and Chris drops something – Sara pointedly doesn’t look to see what it is – back onto the table.*

*“Did you have to bring the kids?” Joseph asks Mary.*

*“What am I supposed to do with them? And how else are they supposed to spend any time with you?” Sara hears very clearly the unspoken “How else am I supposed to spend any time with you?” in Mary’s words...*



“I have to talk to her. It’s not fair,” I hear myself mumbling, and I have no idea what I’m talking about. Who do I have to talk to? What’s not fair?

It comes back to me – I saw Mary dreaming. She’s jealous. Of course she is. Brian was worried that medical school would drive us apart, why shouldn’t Mary feel the same way about it happening to her and Joseph?

It’s not me she’s jealous of. Well, she is – but it’s not about me personally. She’d be jealous of whoever was in Joseph’s study group, male or female, old or young, married or single. And I can’t blame her. Joseph spends more time with me – and Janet and Paula – than he does with her or their kids. And it’s going to be that way for the next four years.

I wish I could do something to help, but I can’t think of anything at the moment that would make things better – and I can think of a hundred ways anything I say might make things much worse.

I try to put that out of my mind for the moment; it’s not difficult, considering how many other things I’ve got bouncing around in my head. What I could use right now is some help sorting them all out, and I’ve got an idea how I can maybe do that.

I carefully slide out of bed, trying not to make any noise and also not put any weight on my right leg. I manage to hobble over to the desk without waking Brian; I turn on the computer and when it’s booted up, I start writing an email to Beth. Talking with her always helps.

I start off by asking her how things are going with the “assistant assistant coach” before I get into everything that’s going on with me. It takes almost an

hour to get it all down; what we did for Janet and her mother, my latest dreams, all the craziness yesterday. When I get to the end, I feel like I have to give her something to tease me about, as a reward for getting through everything I've just dumped on her. I have a definite Gretchen moment:

**Looking back on last night, I can see how ridiculous my freakout about what would have happened if I'd been caught was. But maybe going to jail wouldn't be so bad, as long as I could have Brian as my guard.**

I owe her at least that much of a laugh. And now Brian's up. I think he's actually been up for a few minutes and I just didn't realize; I was so engrossed in writing this absurdly long email. "Anything you want me to say to Beth from you?"

He laughs. "Nothing I can think of. Besides, it looks like you've written her a whole novel, I wouldn't want to make it any longer." Well, a short story, at least. I finish it up and send it, and then it's time to start getting around for the day.

Brian helps me into the shower. It's close quarters and very tricky for me to get down on the floor and sit cross-legged. Last year when I broke my ankle, I at least had the benefit of using the bathtub in the communal bathroom in Carson House. I never thought I'd miss sharing a bathroom with forty other people, but there you go.

We both have to get used to this; I'll be doing it for the next couple of weeks at a minimum. He stays there in the bathroom, and we talk about what I learned last night. I tell him everything I read, which wasn't much. Just enough to rule out Dr. Cooper as a suspect, and to rule out several of the most common possible poisons.

"What if he's not being poisoned at all?"

I think he must be; I believe my dreams. My mind knows something is wrong, I just have to figure out what – and who. "Dr. Cooper thinks he is – he just couldn't figure out what with."

"If he can't figure it out, how will you be able to?" I wish he hadn't asked that; I've been trying not to ask it myself.

"There are a lot of poisonous substances out there. He knows a lot, but everybody's got gaps in their knowledge. Besides, he doesn't know *who's* doing

it, and we do – well, we’ve got a short list, anyway.”

“What about the symptoms he saw – you said there were two things he wrote down that you didn’t know about?”

Alopecia, and Mees lines. “Yeah. I’m going to see if I can find anything in any of my books today. If not I’ll go to the library tomorrow.” When I’m clean and ready to get out, Brian helps me up and re-bandages my ankle. I don’t know how he’s able to wrap it as tightly as he does without hurting me; I guess that’s just another reason to love him, on top of the million or so I’ve already got.



It’s bedtime. I spent most of the day in our room, researching and studying. I finally found out what alopecia is, which turned out to be completely unhelpful. It just means hair loss, which I can already see perfectly well for myself every Tuesday and Thursday in class. I still don’t know what Mees lines are, though; that’ll be a subject for tomorrow.

The only time I got out of the dorm was for dinner. We ran into Bob and Susan – he was carrying her tray for her, just like Brian was for me. She thanked me for a good five or ten minutes, and I have to wonder what exactly Bob told her about how she was rescued. I hope he didn’t tell her the truth; that’s all I need is a stranger knowing about it.

Brian reassured me after dinner that, surely, Bob wouldn’t have been irresponsible enough to do that. I didn’t dignify that with an answer. And now here we are, in bed, just lying together quietly.

“Do you think we’ll ever have a quiet, peaceful weekend again?” I ask.

Brian laughs. “I doubt it. It’d be too boring anyway.”

I could do with a little boring right about now. As I close my eyes and drift off to sleep, I don’t think I’m going to get it anytime soon...

*Thirteen:*  
*Heavy Metal*

(SEPTEMBER 8-9, 1991)

*Sara is standing outdoors, but she can't tell where. The streetlights are very dim, and clouds obscure the moon; it's impossible to see clearly more than a few feet in any direction. The one thing she can see, right at her feet, is a body lying on the ground, twitching feebly. It is Dr. Morris.*

*In the distance, but growing louder by the second, comes the wail of a siren, and now Sara can just see the flashing red and blue lights of an ambulance.*

*Sara blinks, and when her eyes open, she's in the back of that same ambulance, watching two EMTs as they struggle to keep Dr. Morris alive. Another blink, and now she's in the emergency room at University Hospital as an IV goes in Dr. Morris' arm, a mask over his nose and mouth.*

*Sara knows this is his dream; this is, she realizes, what has just happened to him, probably only a couple of hours ago...*

*The emergency room is gone, replaced by a faculty office. As Sara looks around, she recognizes it: Dr. Haynes' office. Dr. Haynes is not alone; the Dean*



*of the medical school, old Dr. Francis sits across from her.*

*“Did you take a good look at him Saturday night? Abraham isn’t a candidate for Dean. He’s a candidate for picking out a funeral plot, if you ask me,” Dr. Haynes says.*

*Dr. Francis frowns, but under Dr. Haynes insistent stare he clearly can’t bring himself to deny the truth. “He – I admit, he has looked better.”*

*Dr. Haynes laughs, or perhaps, Sara thinks, snorts is a more accurate description. “We’ve got cadavers down in the Anatomy Theater that look better than he does! I know he’s your friend, and I won’t dispute his contributions to the school. But he’s obviously not the man to follow you,” she says with a cold glint in her eye, “and neither is Dr. Cooper, for that matter. Actually,” she says, keeping the Dean pinned to his seat with her gaze, “the only man who’s fit to follow you is a woman.”*

*The office vanishes, and Sara finds herself standing outside Drake Tower. She’s right behind Barbara and Mike, who appear to be in mid-argument. Sara does not find this surprising at all.*

*She is unsure which of them is dreaming. As they argue, Sara sees, walking towards them, herself and Brian. Dream-Sara is limping along with her cane, and Brian has his arm around her, supporting her as she goes.*

*When Barbara says bitterly to Mike, “Why can’t you be more like him?” Sara knows it’s her dream.*

*Mike replies, “Why can’t you shut the hell up?” and raises his hand as though he’s about to hit Barbara. Brian and dream-Sara are close enough to hear this and Brian walks right up to Mike, swings his arm and with one punch to the jaw knocks Mike to the ground.*

*Barbara claps her hands in delight, then goes over to dream-Sara, grabs the cane from her hand. Dream-Sara falls to the ground with a pitiful yelp, while Barbara hits Mike with the cane, in the head, repeatedly. When he shows no signs of movement, or any life at all, Barbara drops the cane to the ground. She throws her arms around Brian’s neck.*

*To dream-Sara, who’s trying but failing to get back to her feet, she says, “I need him more than you do. And, no offense, he’s got to be sick of you coming*

*home smelling like corpses. Not romantic at all. But no hard feelings, right?"*  
*Barbara doesn't wait for an answer, she plants a kiss on Brian's lips...*



Oh, my God! That whore! How can she – how dare she – she can't have him!  
No, no, no! He's mine!

Brian is looking at me as though I'm insane. I must have – God, not again! I can see the cogs turning behind Brian's eyes; he's just now processing what I said – how long was I talking out loud without realizing it?

"You had a dream – you saw Barbara again, didn't you?"

I don't answer right away, and he just rolls his eyes. "You said 'that whore' and 'she can't have him.' It's not that hard to figure out."

"She can't control what she dreams about, right? She's not trying to steal you away, not really." That sounds pathetic even to me; I don't want to think about how it sounds to Brian.

"I'm not a sack of potatoes or something she can just come in here and take away," he says, and I feel awful. He's absolutely right. But then he smiles, the smile that only I get to see. "But I *am* yours."

How does he always know just the right thing to say? He ought to teach lessons. He could make self-help tapes; we'd be millionaires in no time. "I had more dreams, not just the one," I say after a couple of minutes, when I'm finally able to calm down a bit. I tell him about Dr. Morris, and how I think it had to be real. I'm convinced he's in the hospital right now. And then I tell him about Dr. Haynes, and neither of us is sure what to make of that. Wanting to be Dean isn't a crime. Talking about how sick Dr. Morris is, even talking about him dying, ghoulish as it is, isn't necessarily proof of anything.

"I've – we've got to think of some way to find out more about her, see if she's really a suspect or not."

Brian looks at me blankly. He's got no more idea than I do. Unfortunately, we don't have any more time to discuss it. I need to leave earlier than usual to make it to class, thanks to my injury. As I get dressed, I can't help myself, I have to know one more thing from Brian:

“I don’t really smell like cadavers, do I?”

Actually, I don’t even need to know. I have absolutely nothing to worry about. Even if he wasn’t mine, which he is, Brian wouldn’t want someone as stupid as Barbara is. She didn’t even know the right word! “Corpses.” Really. And I was worried about her. How silly was that?



When I get to the elevator, who should be waiting there but the stupid woman who’s been dreaming about my husband? Every bit of profanity I’ve ever heard goes through my mind as I limp over to her. When I get close and see how red her eyes are, and how tightly she’s holding herself under control, though, all those thoughts run right out of my head. “Are you OK?” I think I actually even mean it.

“I’m...” she can’t bring herself to say “fine.” She thinks for a moment for an appropriate word, but she doesn’t seem to be able to find one. “I’m – I don’t know. Whatever. It’s too early in the morning.” The door opens and she holds it for me. “I started working over in the administration office at the law school,” she says, I guess to try and explain the red eyes and terrible mood. “Just to have a little extra cash, you know?”

That much I do believe. I certainly don’t need to ask why she needs the money. “How’s that going?”

She sighs. “The hours suck. Before class and after class. Who the hell needs sleep or free time anyway, right?” I have to bite my tongue to keep from giving her a smart answer to that one. But – I have to give her credit – she realizes how thoughtless it was almost as soon as the words are out of her mouth. “Look who I’m talking to. I can’t complain to you about my hours, can I?”

“I’d be glad to trade you, put it that way,” I say. “So what are you doing there?”

“Yeah, that’s the other part. Besides the crappy hours, the work is boring beyond words. All I do is send emails to the University Purchasing department. Everything – I mean everything that anybody needs - it goes to Purchasing in an email. Paper clips, business cards, light bulbs, whatever. I take the requests and

put them in the exact right format so a computer somewhere on the other side of campus can read them without any actual humans getting involved.”

Yeah, that does sound pretty boring. I change the subject. “How’s school going?”

“Who knows? I’m keeping up on the reading, but – I don’t know if you know how our classes work?” I shake my head. “We don’t have midterms. Our whole grade is the final exam. No papers, no anything.” I don’t think I like that at all. It sounds horrible. You could think you were doing great all semester and then – boom! Guess what, you weren’t, and now you’ve failed everything. No thank you.

The door opens in the lobby and, again, she holds it for me. Janet’s waiting for me, and as we head out, I wish Barbara luck at her crappy, boring job. And this time, I know that I mean it.



We get to class and Joseph is already there, sitting next to my and Janet’s usual spot. He opens his mouth, and I’m sure he’s going to ask how she’s doing, but then he sees my bandaged, splinted leg. “What happened?”

Is there a word for when you tell someone the strict truth, but it’s basically a lie all the same? If there’s not, maybe I should make one up; I do it often enough. “I finished up at the library on Saturday, and I tripped coming out of the building. I’m lucky I just sprained it.”

Dr. Haynes is our lecturer, and as she gets her presentation ready – she’s got slides for us today - I blurt out, “I wonder if she’ll say anything about Dr. Morris?”

“What about Dr. Morris?” Janet asks, completely lost.

“He’s in the hospital,” I say, and then I shut my mouth. Joseph gives me a look, and he doesn’t turn away from me when Dr. Haynes taps the microphone and everyone else in the room looks at her.

“I have a brief announcement. One of our faculty, Dr. Morris, was taken to University Hospital last night. It is hoped he’ll make a full recovery, but he will probably be there for several days. There is a card to be delivered to him in the

main office on the third floor, for any of you who wish to sign it.” She doesn’t seem to be especially upset about the news, and “it is hoped” is a pretty weak way to wish him well. That’s all she’s got to say on the subject; she launches straight into her lecture.

For his part, Joseph is still staring at me. “How the hell did you know that?” he whispers, and I mouth “later” in reply, which doesn’t remotely satisfy him, but it’s all he’s getting for the moment.

I spend the next four hours splitting my attention between Dr. Haynes and what to do about Dr. Morris. There’s always the chance that, now he’s in the hospital where they can do test after test on him, they’ll figure out what’s going on and cure him. But that seems like too much to hope for. He’s a doctor himself, and *he* obviously hasn’t figured it out, and Dr. Cooper didn’t, either.

Even if they do figure it out, there’s no guarantee his doctors will be able to tie it to whoever has been poisoning him, which means they’ll be free to try again until they finish the job. Which means it’s still up to me to do something.

But what? After lecture, I can go to the library and look up Mees lines. Past that, though, I don’t know. Last year I had so much help. But Brian’s not in a position to help me this time – what can he do to find out anything about Dr. Haynes, or Dr. Morris’ wife or his secretary?

I gasp, and everyone around me looks. “I just understood something,” I whisper, shrugging apologetically. Brian *can* help me! I know exactly what he can do, at least with Dr. Haynes, and the secretary. I hope he can, anyway. But that’ll have to wait until tonight.



I run – well, limp – straight from class up to the library. Joseph still wants his answer, and I promise him he’ll have one by the end of the day, but not just now. With the assistance of the regular librarian, as opposed to the student worker who was closing up the library on Saturday, it takes all of five minutes to find out what Mees lines are. They’re discolorations that run across the fingernails, and – if this isn’t proof, I don’t know what is – they usually appear as a result of exposure to toxic heavy metals. Things like mercury, arsenic, lead. Poisons.

What did Dr. Cooper have on his list? Arsenic, mercury, cadmium, lead. There were three others – what were they? It takes just another five minutes to find what I need - Goldfrank's *Manual of Toxicological Emergencies*. There are several heavy metals listed, and I recognize the others from Dr. Cooper's list – antimony, osmium, vanadium. And there's one he didn't list, for whatever reason. Thallium. Page 758.

It's all there: the hair loss, peripheral neuropathy – that's nerve damage, especially to the lower extremities. *And* the Mees lines. Everything fits. This has to be it. I have to go to the hospital. Maybe his doctors will realize and test for it – and maybe they won't. I have to go right now.

I take the book with me; I have to hand over my school ID to take it out, since it's a reference book, but that's fine. On my way out of the building, I pass Joseph and Janet in the hallway. They're heading up to dissection. "Where are you going?" he asks.

I don't even stop to answer. "I'll be back as soon as I can!" I call to him over my shoulder, and I'm out the door. I make it to University Hospital in what seems like record time, especially considering my leg, and I'm standing in the hallway outside of Intensive Care two minutes later. I head straight for the nurses' station. I don't even take a minute to calm down. "Who's – who's Dr. Morris' doctor?" I pant. "Is he here?"

The head nurse for the ICU, a frazzled-looking woman in probably her early thirties, answers me. "Dr. Martinez is on her rounds. I can pass a message on to her."

No, that's not good enough. "I – I'm a medical student," the nurse – Anne, according to her nametag – rolls her eyes. "I'm one of his students. I see him eight hours a week, and I've been watching him every class. I know what's wrong with him!"

I hear footsteps behind me, and I turn to see a dark-haired, very severe-looking woman in a long white coat, followed by a whole group of people, all younger, all wearing much shorter white coats. It has to be Dr. Martinez and all the residents and upper-class med students who follow her on rounds.

I see her name sewn onto her coat and I was right: Dr. Suzanne Martinez. “This is the Intensive Care ward, not a sorority party,” she says. “Please lower your voice.”

I bite back an equally snide answer. “I’m sorry,” I say, trying to slow down my words, make myself as calm and respectable as possible. “I – I’m one of Dr. Morris’ students. I know what’s wrong with him. Thallium poisoning.”

The oldest-looking man behind Dr. Martinez, I assume he’s the senior resident, laughs. “What are you, first year?” I nod. “Already a zebra hunter. What the heck do they teach you here?”

I know I’ve just been insulted, but I don’t have any idea exactly how. Dr. Martinez ignores it, but she doesn’t seem very receptive, either. Whatever. I know I’m right, I can convince her.

“I’m in class with him eight hours a week,” I repeat. “I’ve been watching him get worse and worse. He’s got all the symptoms,” I open the book and hand it to her, “Alopecia, and it’s been getting more pronounced each class. Thinning of the eyebrows. He’s been twitching and shaking his feet – that could be the peripheral neuropathy, it’s all there. And his fingernails. That’s how I know for sure. The discolored lines all across them? Mees lines? Everything is consistent with thallium exposure.”

The older resident, the one who insulted me, isn’t sold, but the rest of them are nodding their heads; they’re at least considering it. Dr. Martinez hands me back the book; I have no idea what she’s thinking. “Let’s go take a look,” she says after a moment’s consideration. “You too,” she calls to me when I don’t immediately follow.

Dr. Morris has two IVs going, a mask over his face, and overall he looks like he’s barely clinging to life. Poor Margaret didn’t even look this bad the day before she passed away. He’s unconscious, which is probably just as well right now. Dr. Martinez takes his left hand and peers at it, and then gestures for her residents and students to look in turn. Then she grabs his right and repeats the process. She calls me over to look.

“You were right.” She raises her voice slightly. “You all see? Classic presentation of Mees lines. Our first year student here thinks they’re the result of

thallium exposure, but are there any other causes?”

The youngest follower, a nervous blonde woman who doesn't seem much older than me, pipes up. “Chemotherapy?”

“Very good,” Dr. Martinez says. “Some of the more powerful drugs can produce Mees lines, that's correct. But in this case we can rule that out; Dr. Morris here has not been on any of those drugs.”

She quizzes her residents and students for another couple of minutes, the questions getting more obscure and difficult as they go. This is what I have to look forward to in my third and fourth year here, and then for three more years after that in residency.

When Dr. Martinez is finally done, she calls the nurse in and orders a whole series of blood tests. “We'll see what the tests show,” she says, and then she turns to me, “but I suspect your diagnosis is correct, Miss...”

“Mrs. Alderson. Sara.”

“Mrs. Alderson. Assuming it is correct, good work. I should warn you, though – I know Abraham, this won't earn you any extra credit.”

I laugh. “I didn't expect it.” She heads out of the room, her students and residents behind her, and I follow as well. Before I head back to school, I have to know one more thing, though. “Dr. Martinez? What's a zebra hunter?”

“Oh, almost all medical students are, at first. Let me explain it this way. If I told you I had an animal with four legs, hooves, about so tall,” she holds her hand up in the air, about where a horse's head would be, “and that's all I told you, what would you say it is?”

“Probably a horse.” Because horses are common, while zebras aren't. Just like thallium poisoning isn't. I guess I *am* a zebra hunter. And I just caught one.



It's a little after two o'clock when I get to dissection. I hobble straight over to Dr. Bhapati and apologize. Before he can answer me, Dr. Haynes stalks over, and from her expression I think she wants to hear my excuse. I'm glad – I want to see her reaction in return.



“I was over at the hospital to see Dr. Morris.” That earns a raised eyebrow from her, and she doesn’t need to say why; it is hard to imagine any student liking him enough to want to visit. “I wanted to see his doctor. I’ve been watching him in class, and I did some research. I think he’s suffering from exposure to a toxic material. Thallium poisoning.”

I’m watching her face intently, and she doesn’t react at all the way I would expect a guilty person to when confronted with the truth of their crime. Just the opposite; she looks like she’s ready to laugh in my face, but then she closes her eyes, thinks for a moment and says, almost as much to herself as to me, “His fingernails?” If she had done it, she’d already know about all the signs and symptoms; she wouldn’t need to think about them. And she can’t be acting – *nobody’s* that good.

I nod. Dr. Bhapati looks from her to me. He asks, “Mees lines?” I nod again.

She didn’t do it. There’s no way. Nobody could be that calm, if they were a murderer and they’d just been called out for it.

They can’t argue with my reason for being late, and Dr. Bhapati sends me over to my table with a smile and a pat on the back. A minute later, he brings a stool over for me to sit on, which I’m incredibly grateful for. I hadn’t even thought about that, but there’s no way I could make it for three hours standing on one leg.

Once I’m properly situated, Joseph and Janet want to know where I was, and I promise to tell them afterwards, but I want to get to work first. When I do, all thoughts of Dr. Morris, or almost anything else, are banished. We’re working on the upper arm today, and it’s very tricky going. I feel my attention sharpening. I guess I’ve always been good at that, focusing completely on the task at hand when it’s required.

Dr. Haynes comes over just before the end of class to quiz us. She only asks me one question, and it’s an easy one; I guess that’s my reward for possibly saving Dr. Morris’ life. Janet gets a couple of questions and blows them completely, but Dr. Haynes takes pity on her. I have to assume it’s because of her mother; I also assume this will be the last time Dr. Haynes will do that. Joseph does fine when it’s his turn, but surprisingly Paula has a lot of trouble, and all the

venom that Dr. Haynes spared from Janet is directed towards her. I wonder if this is why Paula was here Saturday night? She's putting in more study time than any of us; I don't understand how she's falling behind.

When class is over, Joseph offers to call Mary and have her give me and Janet a ride home. I hesitate, remembering Mary's dream. I can't imagine she appreciates being drafted into service as my chauffeur. On the other hand, I'm very tired and my leg is killing me, so I agree. I even let him take the Toxicology book back to the library and retrieve my ID.

While we wait for Mary, I tell them why I was late. They're both shocked, but Joseph is suspicious as well. I never gave him the answer I promised this morning – how did I know Dr. Morris was in the hospital before anyone else? I can see the wheels turning behind his eyes – how do I know all these things that it seems like there's no way I *could* know? How is it that I keep turning up in life-or-death situations – Dr. Morris, Susan Meeks, Janet's mother, and Dr. Walters last year?

Janet is oblivious to all that; she's just impressed that I was able to figure it all out. Joseph waits until Mary drives up, and when he's helping me into the front seat, he whispers, "You're still not going to tell me anything, are you?"

I give him my most innocent smile. "Come on, a girl's got to keep *some* secrets."



Brian's waiting for me at home, and after he gives me a kiss that doesn't go on for nearly long enough, he's got something to tell me. "There was a call on the answering machine from University Hospital." I play it back – it sounds like Anne, the head nurse.

"I'm calling for Sara Alderson. Dr. Martinez asked me to pass along a message. You were right, good job." And that's it.

I explain it to Brian, and he says "You did it!" and kisses me again; it still doesn't go on for long enough. When I break it to let him up for air, he says, "We should go out to celebrate."

I wish. But the idea of going anywhere on my bad leg is just too much. “Not tonight. I’m not going anywhere but the couch or the bed.” He’s got a backup plan, though – he’s always thinking. He’ll go and pick up pizza and bring it back for me. I can live with that.

Before he goes, I have to tell him that it may be too early to celebrate. “We still don’t know who did it. It’s not over yet.”

“Why do I think you’ve got something planned?” He knows me too well.

“Because I do. Hopefully. It depends whether I understood you right or not, when you were telling me about your Networking class and the control center in the Morley Building.”

I can see from his blank stare that he has no idea what the computer network has to do with Dr. Morris. “The way I understood it, every single email on campus goes through there, and there’s a copy saved. Do I have it right?”

Realization dawns. “His secretary?”

“His secretary. Everything she sent should be saved, right? A whole record of every message she sent and every one she received. If she did it, there might be proof in there somewhere.” That still leaves his wife, and I guess I could be wrong in thinking Dr. Haynes is innocent, but it’s still a place to start from. “So am I right?”

“You know you are.”

*Fourteen:*  
*Unsolved Mysteries*

(SEPTEMBER 9-11, 1991)

*Sara is in a hospital room, standing at the bedside of Dr. Morris. She's wearing a long white coat, and as she looks at his chart and verifies that all his vital signs are where they should be, she feels a swell of pride as she catches sight of her name. It reads: "Dr. Sara Alderson," sewn right there on her coat for all the world to see.*

*Dr. Morris is, by every indication, recovering nicely. He's asleep now, resting comfortably, while the poison is slowly but surely flushed out of his body. He will, Sara is certain, be back on his feet in no time.*

*Sara hears footsteps behind her, but before she can turn to see who it is, her right leg is kicked out from under her; she hears the bones of her ankle shatter as she falls to the floor, crying out in pain, and for just a moment she blacks out.*

*When her awareness returns, Sara hears alarms blaring, and several pairs of footsteps running towards her. A nurse pulls her up and sits her down in a chair. She somehow holds back another scream as the nurse props her broken ankle up*

*on a second chair. The rest of the people who've come into the room hover over Dr. Morris, but Sara can see that it's already too late.*

*She doesn't need to look at the blood pressure readout that now shows nothing but zeroes, or the heart rate that displays a flat line; she can tell with one glance that there's no life left in Dr. Morris. He's gone...*



I open my eyes and strain to see the alarm clock – it reads 3:26 AM. I feel like something's wrong. I've forgotten something, or maybe I haven't finished something. But I can't think what it is. I guess I'm worried about my first medical school exams next week. I have to try and get back to sleep. I need all the rest I can get. I close my eyes...



*Sara is in the faculty boardroom of the medical school, gazing out the window. She wonders whose dream she's in; when Dr. Cooper and Dr. Haynes enter together, she isn't sure at first which of them is dreaming.*

*Dr. Haynes locks the door and sits at the head of the big table, and Sara is, suddenly, sure that it's her dream. Dr. Cooper sits down next to her, and even though they're alone and the door is locked he speaks in a low voice, barely louder than a whisper.*

*"It's unbelievable. They figured out what was wrong with him. He's going to outlive us all, the bastard."*

*There's a smile on Dr. Haynes' lips, but it doesn't even make it as far as her cheeks. "He probably will. And he'll be back here good as new before we vote for the new Dean." She shakes her head. "One of his students diagnosed him. A first year, if you can believe that. Talk about bad luck. But..." her smile goes a little higher now. "If he was careless enough to expose himself to thallium – I can't believe he's still using it in his research – maybe he'll be careless somewhere else."*

*Dr. Cooper doesn't even manage a fake smile. "We're not that lucky. He's going to be back, and he's going to win. Unless one of us drops out so the votes aren't split between us."*

*“I’m glad you see it that way. I’ll welcome your support,” Dr. Haynes says. Dr. Cooper looks at her in complete shock, and now her smile does reach all the way to her eyes. “It’s the only way. Forgive me for being so blunt, Jeff, but no one likes you. Some of them might grit their teeth and vote for you, but nobody really wants you as Dean. You have to know that.”*

*With that, Dr. Haynes stands and heads for the door, leaving Dr. Cooper alone with his thoughts...*



I wake up and I don’t know why, but I’m thinking of Dr. Cooper. Feeling sorry for him. The dream comes back to me all at once; Dr. Haynes was dreaming about him, laying down the law to him, basically.

She was talking about Dr. Morris, too. There’s no doubt in my mind now that she didn’t poison him. I was pretty sure yesterday, but as much as I trust what I saw and heard when I told her about him in class yesterday, I could have been wrong. Now, though – I’ve seen exactly what’s in her mind, and she had nothing to do with it. She doesn’t think it was even deliberate poisoning at all; she thinks he did it to himself accidentally.

I wake Brian up; I’ve got to tell him, see what he says. It takes a little while to rouse him; neither of us is getting nearly enough sleep most nights. But I finally manage it and I tell him about my dream.

“You still think his wife or his secretary poisoned him, even after that, don’t you?” is the first thing he says.

I do. I know what Dr. Haynes said about Dr. Morris using thallium in his research, and it’s her dream so she must believe it. But the thing is, if she knows about it, so does everyone else at the school. And if it’s really true, then he’s safe now. Nobody’s trying to kill him. But then I wouldn’t have seen the dream, if there wasn’t any danger. “I’m having the dreams for a reason. My subconscious knows,” I say for what seems like the thousandth time. “If there wasn’t something still wrong, I wouldn’t be seeing the dreams anymore. My brain only tunes them in when there’s something I can do, something that needs to be done. So, yes, I still think one of them poisoned him.”

Brian isn't convinced by my logic, but he knows I'm not going to be talked out of this. "What do we do then?"

We start by getting hold of the secretary's emails, I think, and then we go from there.



I leave extra-early for class, so I can go by Dr. Morris' office and see where his secretary works. There's something I need to find, somewhere on her computer, for Brian to be able to get me her emails. He's supposed to go back to the computer center on Saturday, but he's going to try and switch his time with one of his classmates who's scheduled to be there tonight.

I make it over to the medical school with a half-hour to spare before class, and I head for the fourth floor. Dr. Morris has his office right next to the Dean, because he's the chair of the Admissions Committee – that's why he gets his own secretary as well, when none of the other teachers do.

She works in a cubicle that's divided by a half-wall between her and the Dean's secretary. I see her nameplate: Maureen Jackson, and below it in smaller print, Executive Assistant to the Admissions Committee. There's nobody else on the floor, and I take a moment to look at her desk. She's got a photo of her and Dr. Morris, both smiling, at what looks like a formal-dress party. There are several cards – no doubt get-well cards for Dr. Morris – in her in-box. That's my excuse for coming over here as well, in case anyone sees me.

As a further excuse, I drop my purse on the floor and, supporting myself with both hands on the desk, kick it over so some pens and my keys spill out. Now I have to go down to the floor to pick them up – and that's where Brian told me to look for the information I need to give him. There should be a yellow cable from the computer going into a jack on the wall – I see it. And on the jack, there's supposed to be a long number – the "IP address," whatever that is, of this computer. I bend down – not easy on one leg – and there it is. I grab one of the pens off the floor and quickly jot the number down on my hand before I shovel everything back into my purse and slowly, painfully lift myself up.

I'm just about ready to leave, with my get-well card in hand, when I can feel someone coming up behind me. I turn and look into the wrinkled face of Dr. Francis, the Dean of the medical school. I make a show of dropping the card into Maureen's in-box and smile at him. "I just wanted to leave a card for Dr. Morris before class this morning," I say.

He looks at me as though he thinks he should know who I am, but I've only ever had one conversation of more than a few words with him, during my admission interviews, months ago. Still, he does remember me. "You're Miss Barnes, yes?"

"Yes," I answer. I add, with a shrug, "Actually I'm married now, so I'm really Mrs. Alderson."

He glances towards the in-box. "If I understand rightly, he ought to be sending you a card, not the other way around. When he's fully recovered, of course. That was excellent work, you're to be commended."

"Thank you," I answer, putting as much modesty into it as I can. He turns to walk over to his office, but I can't let this opportunity pass. "Dr. Francis? Can I ask you something?" He nods. "I was just curious – what kind of research does Dr. Morris do? I know most of the faculty does some, and he hasn't talked about it in class at all..."

The Dean pats me on the shoulder. "And you see yourself as a research assistant. We encourage our students to become involved in research, of course. But I must tell you, Dr. Morris is not one to let personal feelings enter into his academic decisions. Saving his life will earn you no points with him."

Even if I hadn't heard the same thing from Dr. Martinez yesterday, it wouldn't surprise me. "I didn't think so. I was just interested, that's all."

"Of course, of course. It's actually quite fascinating. He's working with a professor in the electrical engineering department, I believe. They're working on a non-invasive technique for colonoscopy and endoscopy."

"I'll have to ask him about that when he's back. I'd love to know more about it," I say. What I'd really love to know is what that has to do with thallium, because from the little I read, the only medical use of thallium is in certain kind of cardiac tests.



The Dean praises me once more for my good work, pats me on the back again and heads to his office. As I go down to class, I'm more confused than ever. Dr. Haynes said in her dream that Dr. Morris was using thallium in his research. She must have some reason to believe it, but the Dean thought differently and I assume he has to know what's really going on. So I don't know what the heck to think.

Obviously I'm extremely distracted during lecture, which is a problem because Dr. Haynes is going very fast and covering material that's completely new to me. Several times I turn to Joseph to ask him what she's talking about, only to turn away again when I see the confused expression on his face.

We're not alone; when class finally, mercifully ends, I hear a lot of muttering, along with some curses and several variations on "please, God, don't let her be back tomorrow." I agree with that!

I go up to the library and thankfully there's a computer free so I can send an email to Brian with the information he needs. Then it's off to the cafeteria, and I sit down with Joseph and Janet for lunch. When Janet runs off to the bathroom, Joseph tries to wheedle more information out of me. My mysterious ability to know things I shouldn't is still bugging him. I can't be too annoyed at him – I don't think I'd be very quick to let it go if our places were reversed.

Unfortunately, I'm running out of evasions and diversions. Just as I spot Janet on her way back to the table, though, I have an inspiration. "You really want to know how I know all these things?" He nods. "Here's my big secret," I whisper. "The Archangel Gabriel came down from Heaven and told me. You ought to understand that – he's visited you, too, hasn't he?"

His expression is absolutely priceless. He's completely dumbstruck. I hold out my hand and look at him expectantly; he stares at it blankly. "Come on," I say. "Where's my twenty dollars? That has to be an original joke, doesn't it?"

He shakes his head slowly and smiles. "Fair enough. You got me," he says and pulls out his wallet as Janet rejoins us.

"What's going on?" she asks.

"Just settling up a bet," I say. "I'll tell you all about it later."

“I’d get that in writing if I were you, Janet,” Joseph says. I let that go by. I have to let him have *something* at my expense, right? Not only is he still frustrated, but he’s also out twenty dollars.

At one thirty we head up to class. I’m hoping Mona will be there today, and she is. She announces that she’ll be covering for Dr. Morris this week and possibly next week as well. “But he is responding well to the treatments and his doctor expects him to make a full recovery, so he may be back sooner.”

She then tells us that, to make up for having to repeat our case last week, she’s going to try to cover two cases this week, if we don’t mind. Nobody does. “Meet Mr. Davis,” Mona says, handing out folders to all of us. “Twenty-nine year old Caucasian male, suffering from dizziness, chronic muscle and joint pain, insomnia, rashes,” there are photos of very nasty—looking circular rashes on various parts of his body, “and several other symptoms. Take a look at the history for a few minutes and then we’ll discuss what tests or other steps you would take.”

I’m not sure what to make of it. It could be any number of things, based on the symptoms. I see that everyone else is reading intently through their folders; I can almost hear the wheels spinning inside their heads. All except Dominick; he’s put his folder down and he looks utterly sure of himself.

When Mona opens the discussion, there’s general agreement on an extensive series of blood tests. I think it could be an autoimmune disorder. Paula wants to rule out multiple sclerosis, and everyone else has a theory of their own. Dominick is the only one who hasn’t made a suggestion, and Mona finally calls on him.

“I’ve just got two questions. Where does Mr. Davis live, and does he work around animals, or go hunting, or camping out in the country, anything like that?”

Mona is momentarily surprised, but she looks through her notes for the answers. “Upstate New York. Albany’s probably the closest city. As for his job and his hobbies, we don’t know that. Why?”

“I just wanted confirmation. I know what Mr. Davis has, but I don’t want to ruin the class for everyone else,” Dominick says. He pulls out a notebook,

quickly writes something down, tears out the page and hands it to Mona. She reads it and nods.

“Thank you for being thoughtful of your fellow students. When the rest of us are finished, you can tell us how you figured it out so quickly.”

That sets off the competitive impulse in the rest of us; everyone – even Janet shows a little bit of fire – is shooting questions at Mona, arguing for their diagnosis. In the end, though, none of us gets it right. “Lyme disease,” Mona tells us.

“I had it three years ago,” Dominick then explains. “I came back from a hunting trip with my brother, and a few days later the symptoms started. Exactly like these,” he waves his folder in the air. “This might as well be my file.”

For just a moment I’m annoyed, and the thought that Dominick was just lucky goes through my mind. Then I calm down and see reason. Obviously getting Lyme disease isn’t “lucky” by any rational definition of the word. And if he’s able to make use of his personal experience, why shouldn’t he?

Mona gives us one reason why he shouldn’t. “If Dr. Morris were here, he would advise you to be careful in applying personal knowledge to your patients. It can be extremely helpful, clearly. But it’s always a danger to rely on that. My attending,” the doctor Mona follows around and learns from at University Hospital, “says, ‘We see what we expect to see.’ Take advantage of your experience, but keep your eyes open so you don’t overlook something.”

I hang around after class; I want to hear what Mona knows about Dr. Morris’ research. “That was good work you did,” she tells me. “I didn’t want to make a big deal about it in class,” she explains, and I appreciate that. “What can I do for you?”

“I just wanted to know if you know anything about this research he’s doing.”

“Oh, the cameras you swallow?” I hadn’t really thought about what “non-invasive” meant – I guess that qualifies. “They’re trying to build these tiny cameras with radio transmitters. The size of a capsule,” she holds her fingers maybe half an inch apart. “You won’t have to be knocked out, or have a tube stuck up your...” Yeah. Men are supposed to get a colonoscopy starting when

they turn fifty. My Dad's five years away and he's already dreading his, so I can see where these cameras would be a very welcome development.

But they also don't sound like they would need to use thallium. I don't see how Dr. Morris could have been exposed from working on them – and if he had been, wouldn't everybody else who was working on them have been exposed, too? There'd be a whole bunch of people in the hospital right now with thallium poisoning. I'm sure I would have heard about that. And anyway, Dr. Morris might be a jerk, but he certainly doesn't seem careless enough to let himself get exposed to a toxic material like that.



When I get home, Brian's already there waiting for me. I'm not sure what to make of his expression; he looks a little bit upset or maybe worried, but at the same time there's a hint of triumph in there, too. He holds up a floppy disk. He got the emails! I go to him, give him a kiss. When he breaks it and steps back from me, he still looks worried. Why?

"I've got good news and bad news," he says. "Which do you want first?"

The bad news can't be that bad; he sounds much too calm and collected. "I'm guessing the good news is that you got her emails."

"Yes. But that's the bad news, too."

I'm confused. "Why?"

He sighs. "Everything is stored for sixty days. So I pulled all her emails, everything she sent, and everything she received." That's good. That's exactly what I asked for. "She sends a *lot* of emails. And she receives even more."

I think I see what the bad news is. "What do you mean by 'a lot?'"

"You might want to sit down," he says, doing so himself. I stay on my feet. "All together? Just about five thousand."

I should've sat down.



It's nine o'clock, and instead of studying I've been going through Maureen Jackson's emails, one message at a time. I have to do it this way, because Brian

already tried the obvious thing – doing a text search through the whole file of emails for “thallium.” No luck. Of course it wouldn’t be that easy.

At least I don’t have to read each message in full. A lot of them are Admissions Committee business, and then there are staff memos and messages from students needing to make appointments with Dr. Morris. I can tell those from the subject line and skip past them. But that still leaves many, many messages I have to read all the way through.

I’m startled by a door slamming so hard next door that I feel the desk vibrate. Then another slam, and then the shouting begins. There’s a crash that’s probably something glass shattering against the wall, and finally one last door slamming – their front door, this time.

Brian goes to our door, opens it. I’m right behind him. Barbara is there in the hallway, panting, tears in her eyes and a few beads of blood on her cheek. I’ve grabbed her by the arm and dragged her halfway into our room before I even remember that I’m angry and jealous because of her dreams about Brian.

Before she’s all the way in, Deia pokes her head out of her door across the hall. “What’s going on?” she asks. It occurs to me that having another woman in the room might be useful.

“Barbara’s got...” I start to explain, while Brian pulls Barbara the rest of the way into our room. “Never mind. Could you just come over here? We can use your help.” I say. She looks back inside her room and quickly says something in Spanish, before walking over to us.

Brian’s already got Barbara sitting on the couch and he’s fetching her a glass of water. I get a paper towel, wet it, and wipe the blood off her cheek. “Did Mike do that?”

“No,” she says between ragged breaths, “I threw one of his precious shot glasses at him, and it hit the wall and I guess I got hit with a piece of it.” I can think of any number of good reasons why she would be throwing shot glasses at her husband. I’m not sure I really want to know which one it is, though.

I find out just the same; she tells us the whole ugly story, some of which I already know from her dreams. Mike has apparently been spending all the money in their joint savings account, for one thing. “\$900 on a car stereo! He

barely ever drives the goddamn thing! \$500 for a steak dinner with his buddies while I was home eating ramen fucking noodles!”

Deia looks scandalized. “\$500 for a dinner? How is that possible?”

Brian and I look at each other. We both know how: New Year’s Eve at the Blue Duck Inn, only a few weeks after we met. But that was a gift from my parents, given in love, shared and enjoyed in that spirit. It was a magical night, worth every penny. Mike’s \$500 dinner was taken – stolen, really – and, I have no doubt, selfishly wasted.

Barbara goes on, detailing Mike’s many sins. Her voice gives out before the list does. “You must not stay there tonight,” Deia says. I agree, but I don’t really want her sleeping on our couch. On the other hand, maybe she doesn’t have to. I’ve got an idea...



I’ve only spoken to Ricky Benes, the Resident Director here, a couple of times; I barely know him at all. So I feel kind of bad to be knocking on his door with Barbara in tow at almost ten o’clock.

Thankfully, though, he’s awake and seemingly in decent spirits. “What can I do for you?” he asks. Looking past him, I see three stacks of books on his desk going almost to the ceiling, and I remember that he’s a Ph.D. student, working on his dissertation.

“Sorry to bug you, but we’ve got a little problem – well, Barbara here does.”

“I need to move out – I can’t stay with my husband. He’s – we – I just can’t. I need to move.”

Ricky doesn’t ask why; one look at Barbara is all the evidence he needs that it’s a bad situation. He retreats into his room and returns a moment later with a notebook. He flips through it. “There’s a single, fourth floor, room 403. There’s some paperwork, but we can handle that later. You want to sleep there tonight?”

“No,” Barbara answers. We’ve got other arrangements for her already.

“You know – you realize your husband can’t stay on the ninth floor by himself, right?”

Barbara could absolutely not care less about that right now; personally, it makes me very happy indeed. “That’s his problem,” she says in an icy tone that unnerves both Ricky and myself.

“Fine, tomorrow you can move down there,” he goes back inside again, returns again with a key. He hands it to Barbara. “Here you go. I’ll get the paperwork to you. Good night.”

We say good night to him, and he heads back to his work. We go outside, to wait for Mary. It’s only a couple of minutes later that she drives up.

She wasn’t surprised when she heard my voice on the phone a little while ago, but she *was* surprised that I wanted to talk to her rather than Joseph. I explained the situation briefly and begged for her help. Could Barbara sleep there, maybe in their basement, just for a night until she can move into a new room tomorrow? She – reluctantly, but who can blame her? – agrees.

It’s a big imposition on them, but it’s also my way of trying to help Mary out. I know how stressed she is by Joseph’s schedule, and how jealous she is about medical school taking up all his time and energy. Maybe seeing Barbara and hearing about how awful her husband has been will make Mary see how lucky she is to have Joseph – medical school and all.

And also, maybe seeing her will remind Joseph what a great wife he’s got and that he needs to make time for her no matter what else is going on. Yes, it’s meddling. No, it’s not my place to worry about anybody else’s marriage. And, no, I don’t care about that one bit – I know I’m right. Well, I’m pretty sure, anyway. That’s good enough, isn’t it?



Once Barbara is safely on her way to Joseph and Mary’s house for the night, I go back upstairs. “Is she all sorted out?” Brian asks.

“Yes. She’s moving downstairs – there’s a free room on the fourth floor. She’ll move tomorrow night.”

“Does she need help?” God, I wish he hadn’t asked that. Yes, she almost certainly will. And obviously I trust Brian completely. I trust him with my life – I *have* trusted him with my life. But I still don’t want him alone with her. I don’t

want him carrying her possessions up and down the hall while she stands a few paces back and admires his muscles. That's – I know exactly how petty and absurd that sounds, but I don't care - I won't have it.

“Yes, I'm sure she does,” and he'll obviously volunteer, of course he will. Because that's what he does. But he won't do it alone, not if I have anything to say about it. I think I know where I can recruit him some help, and divert Barbara's attention from him at the same time. I dig through the top drawer of my desk for my address book. I hope I have the phone number – there! It's late, but he should still be up.

One ring, two rings, three rings, and finally there's an answer. “Hey,” Jim Quarters answers.

“Hey yourself. This is Sara Alderson, I hope I'm not calling too late.”

“No. What's up?” I have to hold the phone away from my ear; he's so loud. And he's not even shouting, that's his normal voice. I guess a big voice goes with a big body. That's good – it's exactly what the situation calls for.

I don't bother with small talk. “I need a favor. I've got a neighbor – very pretty, blonde, tall – you'd like her,” as the saying goes, you catch flies with honey. “She's separating from her husband – he's an ass, it's no loss. But we've got to move her out of where she is and to a new room, and I was hoping you could help.”

There's some hemming and hawing on the other end of the line. “Come on. It's a couple of hours. I'll do something for you in return if you ever need a favor, OK?”

“Sure,” he finally agrees.

“One more thing – maybe while you're moving her, you could talk to her about her finances? She's going to have to get them untangled from her husband, maybe you could give her some advice?” He *is* an accountant, surely he can help with that.

“I guess so,” he says.

“Come on over tomorrow, five thirty or so, my husband – you remember Brian – he'll be helping, too. You remember where we live, Drake Tower, just come up to the ninth floor.”



Not only will he be a distraction for Barbara, and keep all her attention off of Brian, but there's always the chance that he's her type. He's not bad-looking, if you like the burly football-player look, anyway. And also, hopefully he'll be intimidating to Mike and keep him from causing any trouble. Jim is awfully big, and there's no way for Mike to know that at heart he's a big softie who wouldn't hurt a fly.

Before we hang up, he asks how Janet is doing. "Better. It's going to be a while, but a little better every day," I tell him.

"Good. Tell her I'm praying for her," he says. That's really sweet. I will tell her; she'll appreciate it. "See you tomorrow."

"Good night," I say. That went about as well as I could have hoped. I think that's what they call a "win-win situation."

I hang up, but before I can get back to Maureen's emails, Brian wants to know something. "You want him here in case Mike wants to make a scene, right?"

"Yes," and so Barbara won't drool after you, too, but I don't need to say that.

"You don't think I can take him?" Wow, Brian's jealous. Or – not jealous exactly, he thinks that I don't think he's up to the task of protecting Barbara from Mike, if he decides to make trouble. I didn't consider that. That's the last thing I want him to think.

"That's not it!" I sit down on the bed, and motion him next to me. When he sits I put my arm around him, pull him close. "I know you could take Mike. But I don't want you to. I don't want a fight. Do you?" He shakes his head ever so slightly. "I mean, if he got mad enough, *he* might not believe you could take him, and he might start trouble. Jim's six foot four and built like a tank. I don't care how mad Mike is, when he looks at Jim he'll know he'd better just keep out of the way."

Brian nods; he's OK with that explanation. It actually is true, after all. I hold him for a couple of minutes more, just to make sure he knows I really do think he could beat up Mike if it came to it.

Truthfully, though? I don't know if he could or not. The last time he was in an honest-to-goodness fight was in junior high school. And Mike's got a couple of

inches and probably twenty pounds on him. On top of that, I have a hunch that Mike's the type to fight dirty. All in all, better we don't have to find out.

That's not what I communicate to him, though. It's kind of a lie, I know, but it's a lie in a good cause. And then I really do have to get back to work. Several thousand of Maureen Jackson's emails await.

Unfortunately, I only discover one thing that's even vaguely relevant. Dr. Morris has been taking her to lunch at the fancy French restaurant just on the edge of campus every week for – well, probably for years. As far as I can tell, they've got a standing date every Friday afternoon. I take that as confirmation of the affair that she talked about in her dream, and Brian agrees. But that doesn't prove anything as far as her – or Mrs. Morris – being the poisoner.

At midnight, I finally give up and go to bed. I haven't learned anything more. I'll try to get up early and spend an hour going through more emails before I go to class. And of course I still have no idea how to go about finding anything out about Mrs. Morris. Being a psychic detective definitely isn't all it's cracked up to be.



*Sara is in a hospital room. She looks over at the bed, and she sees Dr. Morris, sitting up, still frail but clearly no longer at death's doorstep. She and Dr. Morris turn their heads at the same moment to see Mrs. Morris walk in the door.*

*Sara knows now that this is her dream. "Finally awake, I see," she says. "It's about time. I've been here the last two nights, you know."*

*"I know. I could tell," Dr. Morris says in a soft, humbled voice that Sara is certain he's never used in real life. Mrs. Morris smiles faintly at it.*

*"I'd say this is just desserts for you. But it still doesn't make up for what you've done to me."*

*Dr. Morris looks her in the eye. "No, it doesn't. Nothing can. But if you'll let me, I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make up for it just the same."*

*Sara watches as Mrs. Morris looks away from her husband's gaze and stares at the IV going into his arm. Her fists clench and unclench. "I'll think about it," she says, turns on her heel and walks out...*

*Fifteen:*  
*Wife vs. Secretary*

(SEPTEMBER 11, 1991)

**T**he clock reads 4:50 AM. I couldn't even stay asleep until five o'clock when the alarm's set to go off. I was dreaming – it was Mrs. Morris. I remember everything, but I don't know what it means. She knows about Dr. Morris' affair – I think it's safe to assume that's "what you've done to me" was referring to. And she said that Dr. Morris being in the hospital was "just desserts" for it.

But what did she mean by that? What are the just desserts? That she poisoned him herself and put him in the hospital as revenge? Or just generally that he's suffering as punishment for his cheating on her? I play the memory over and over in my mind and I can't even hazard a guess.

I put it aside until Brian wakes up – I'll let him sleep until six o'clock – and I turn on the computer. Maybe something more will turn up in Maureen's emails. But six o'clock comes and the only thing that's even remotely interesting is an email from the library. She took out a book – "The Pale Horse," by Agatha Christie - and she never returned it. According to the email, after a book is sixty

days overdue they consider it lost, and they charged her \$38.50. She paid it, too – there’s an email two days later showing that her record is clear and she can take books out again.

That’s hardly earth-shaking information, and my eyes are starting to hurt from looking at the computer screen in the dim light, so I go to wake Brian. Once he’s fully conscious I tell him about the dream. He doesn’t have any more idea than I do what to make of it. We spend half an hour going round and round with it. He questions me about every detail, and I remember as best I can, but it doesn’t help.

Mrs. Morris was very tense in the dream, but that’s hardly a surprise. She’d be tense whether she was the poisoner or not. Anyone would be. In the end, we have to set it aside; I want to go through a few more emails before I have to go to class.

I give myself until seven o’clock, and I go five minutes past my deadline, because I – finally – find something that looks relevant. It’s a series of emails back and forth from Maureen to the Office of Human Subjects Experimentation.

I know all about them from working on my senior thesis last year. Any research that involves human subjects in any way at all has to be approved by the Office. It doesn’t matter how trivial it is, or how obviously harmless.

My thesis was about the “Effects of dietary modification on microorganism population and distribution in the pre-pubescent human female.” It was a huge project, and I put in very long and hard hours on the computer and under the microscope. I’m very proud of it. But the “human subjects experimentation” portion consisted of two weeks of feeding several different varieties of yogurt to a group of eight-year-old girls and then following them into the bathroom to collect stool and urine samples afterwards.

That’s not very involved or invasive and it posed absolutely no danger to anybody, but I still had to submit reams of documents to the Office of Human Subjects Experimentation. Consent forms, painstakingly detailed descriptions of my work and expected results, signed approvals from my advisor, the Chairman of the Biology department and, before I was done, even the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. It took longer to get all the paperwork sorted out and

receive final approval from the Office than it did to actually do the research and write the thesis.

I giggle as I think about all that – I can't help but remember dinner the night before graduation. In front of her parents and mine, Beth summed the whole experience up perfectly: "Sara, your thesis is completely full of shit!"

Anyway, the emails from Maureen to the Office don't say much about Dr. Morris' research; mainly they're requests for documentation, or acknowledgments that documentation has been received. But there is one email that talks about the project, and it leaves me more confused than ever. According to the emails, Dr. Morris was working on new techniques for nuclear stress tests.

In between everything else yesterday, I managed to do a little reading just to make sure I knew exactly what those were. They're cardiac tests using radioactive tracers and special cameras to observe the blood flow in and out of the heart. And the radioactive tracer is usually an isotope of thallium.

That's what Dr. Haynes thinks Dr. Morris was working on. But the Dean told me he was working on non-invasive colonoscopies – the miniaturized cameras Mona told me about. There's something very wrong here somewhere. I have to try and get some kind of confirmation on this.

But how can I do that? Dr. Morris isn't in any condition to answer questions, and his secretary's a suspect so she's obviously out. But maybe I could find out from another source. The Dean said he was working with someone in the electrical engineering department and I know someone who's an electrical engineer. Before I turn off the computer I send out an email – hopefully George actually checks his messages and hopefully he's free at lunchtime today.

Once that's done I throw on clothes and leave without showering. I don't even wait for Janet; I want to see if I can catch Dr. Haynes before class and talk to her. I don't know for sure that she'll be our lecturer today, and I don't know her morning routine but I cross my fingers and head for her office when I get to the medical school at a quarter to eight.

Luck is with me; she's there. She looks up with surprise when she hears me in her doorway. "I know you're busy, Dr. Haynes. I just wanted to ask you something really quickly." She nods. "I'm confused about Dr. Morris' research. I

understand that he was exposed to the thallium while he was working, but I thought his research was on the miniature cameras they're trying to use for colonoscopies." I don't mention where I got the idea that he was exposed in the course of his research, and thankfully, she doesn't ask.

"He *is* working on the cameras. Apparently," there's a note of bitterness in her voice, but she gets control of herself and it's gone with her next words, "he's got a second project as well. You've probably already guessed what it is."

"Nuclear stress tests."

"Exactly." She pauses for a moment, debating whether she wants to share anything more with a first-year student or not. Then she makes a sound somewhere between a laugh and a snort. "I wouldn't even know about it, if his secretary hadn't accidentally sent me some of the documents she meant to send to the Human Subjects office. I suppose he wanted to have work he could publish before he shared it with the rest of us. Well, the joke's on him now – everybody knows what he was doing."

"Wow," is all I can say that. "Thanks, that explains everything," even though it doesn't. "I'll see you in class."

I head to lecture, this new revelation bouncing around in my brain. I think Dr. Haynes was telling the truth – and I can verify it when I get home. If Maureen did send her some of the documents for the research by mistake, it'll be there somewhere in the file on my computer.

I don't know why Dr. Morris would have been working secretly, though. I know that professors don't always share every detail of their work, but I've never heard of a professor here at Crewe conducting a project completely in secret, without even informing their department chair or their Dean. I guess, maybe, if it's military research or something like that, it could happen. But cardiac stress tests aren't like that. It doesn't make any sense at all.

On the other hand, Dr. Morris seems like enough of a jerk that he might try to flaunt the rules and keep his work hidden from his colleagues. Maybe someone else in the school is working on a similar project, and he wanted to beat them and publish his results first? I guess that's possible. But even if that's true - how could he expect to hide a major research study involving expensive equipment,

radioactive materials and God only knows how many patients? I'm missing something big here, but what?

When I get to the lecture hall and take my usual place in the back of the room, I'm confronted by another problem entirely. Joseph does not look at all pleased to see me. "I'm not running a hotel, you know," is how he greets me.

"I know. I'm sorry. I just – I couldn't think of anywhere else to send her. She needed to be out of the dorm last night."

He relaxes just a bit. "I won't argue with that. And I suppose some good came out of it. She and Mary were up until after midnight, and I caught Jeannie at the top of the stairs listening in." Oh, God. I bet she got an earful. How can that be good, though?

Joseph smiles, finally. "I would've yelled at her, but actually I'm glad she heard everything. She tunes her mother and I out whenever the subject of boys comes up, but hearing that horror story, from someone a lot closer to her age than we are – I think it made an impression on her."

That makes sense. I probably could have used something like that when I was her age, too. "So last night wasn't a total loss?" He doesn't dignify that with an answer. "Anyway, she'll be moving into an empty room in the dorm tonight – she told you that, right?"

"Yes, she did. I should still bill you for last night, though. And charge you for the taxi service as well - Mary's going to drop her off on campus on her way to work."

I know he's – mostly – joking, but the truth is I'd gladly pay him. Getting her out of the dorm last night and – especially – guaranteeing that she didn't end up on our couch is worth any amount of money to me.



If anything, today's class is worse than yesterday's. I'm going to have to study all weekend just to try and understand what Dr. Haynes talked about. And then when will I find the time to review for our exams next week? I'm starting to get worried.

I'm not the only one. Janet and Paula both head for the library instead of the cafeteria when we're finished with lecture. Joseph isn't giving up lunch, but he's reading his notes as he walks to the cafeteria. Before I can eat, or study, though, I've got a meeting. At least I hope I do; I walk into the cafeteria with fingers crossed.

I clap my hands in glee; George is sitting at a table waiting for me with a mildly confused look on his face. Obviously he got my email.

"Hey, thanks for coming. I really appreciate it."

"No problem," he says.

"I know my email was kind of out of the blue. I just need to know something." I'm hoping, as an electrical engineering major, he can tell me for sure. "One of my teachers is doing research with a professor in your department. I was wondering if you knew anything about it."

He nods his head. "Old guy? Dr. Maris, something like that?"

"Morris." I was due some good luck. Maybe this is it.

"He gave a lecture. It was pretty interesting. He's got Dr. Bronstein building these tiny cameras with transmitters."

I wanted confirmation, and there it is – Dr. Morris is definitely working on the cameras! "So they can put them into a capsule and patients can swallow them."

"Right. It's really cool," he says. "Anyway, it will be if they can get the transmitters to work."

One more question. I already know the answer, but better to be sure. "Would the cameras use thallium – would there be any thallium anywhere in them?"

Now he's confused again. "No. There's nothing you'd use that for in a camera or a transmitter. And it's really toxic." He gets more puzzled with each word. "You wouldn't put that in something people were going to swallow, that's crazy."

Yes, it is. "That's all I needed to know," I say, and he gets up to leave. "Actually – you know what? Don't go," I tell him. He came all the way over here just for me, the least I can do is buy him lunch.

Unfortunately I'm not great company; I'm completely distracted. I can't fit all the pieces together with Dr. Morris' research. And there's something else I'm



missing, too. Something I've forgotten or glossed over and didn't realize the importance of. I'm giving myself a splitting headache trying to figure out what it is with no luck. I'm tempted to tell George about it and see if, coming at it from a completely different perspective, he might think of something that I haven't. But it's not fair to drag him into it, and at 1:25 PM, with me none the wiser, he leaves and I go down to dissection.

My group is all there already, waiting for me. I must look even worse than I feel because Janet – who's not doing very well herself – looks at me in sympathy. "Are you sick?" she asks.

Not yet, but probably soon. "Just a headache. I'll be fine."

Joseph comes over to my side of the table, leans close. "If you need help, just ask. Whatever's going on, you can't do it alone." I wish I *could* ask him. I wish I could tell him everything – and Janet, and everyone else. But I can't. He's wrong - I do have to figure this out on my own.

I don't have any more time to do that, though. Dr. Morgan comes over and quizzes us. I do OK – I'm slow and hesitant but I eventually manage to come up with the right answers. Janet and Joseph do as well, but – like Monday – Paula doesn't. I don't understand it. She has the least distractions of any of us – God, I'm an idiot.

How the heck do I know what's really going on with her? I haven't gotten to know her as well as I ought to have. I've made no effort to reach out to her. And as the semester has gone on and she's gotten more uptight and more distant, I've just sat back and let it happen. All I know, really, is that her family has put tremendous pressure on her. I can tell myself I understand, but I don't really "get" it, because I've never had that from my parents. I don't know what that pressure is really doing to her. I don't know what she's doing to cope with it.

I *should* know. I need to get it. I need to step into her shoes – when I'm a doctor, I'm going to need to be able to do that for all my patients. If I can't make that connection and really comprehend what's going on with them even when they're dealing with issues I've never experienced, how will I be able to help them?

There's very little I can do about Paula right now, but I can at least try to be kinder to her. Once Dr. Morgan is finished with us and we begin working, I give up my turn at cutting to her, and I offer to read for her as well. She's surprised, but she gets to work and I slow down whenever she seems to be having difficulty. I don't know if I'm really helping, but I think at least I'm not making things any worse for her.

Two hours later, it's finally my turn again and I'm just getting started when the door opens, and I hear a voice that I've only heard before in dreams: Mrs. Morris.

I turn to see what's going on, and luckily I've got enough presence of mind to pull my hands up and away from our cadaver. Not everyone else in the room is that fortunate; there are a few shouts as students, startled by the commotion, accidentally do something nasty to their cadaver, or to themselves.

Mrs. Morris is calling, loudly, for Dr. Haynes. "Marie! You tell me where she is! I know you know!"

Dr. Haynes rushes over and, with great difficulty, drags Mrs. Morris out of the room. But even with the door shut behind them, I – and everyone else – can hear perfectly clearly. Dr. Haynes is trying to calm her down, but it's not working. "I never liked her! I knew she was nothing but trouble from the first time I met her! And now I find out she's been carrying on with him for God only knows how long! I sat next to you at all those faculty dinners, and you knew all that time and you never let on!"

I can't see clearly; it's much too far away, and my view is blocked by my fellow students all standing and watching just like I am, but the sound of Mrs. Morris slapping Dr. Haynes with all her strength is unmistakable.

The rest of the teachers head for the door; Dr. Bhapati calls out from the doorway, "Return to your work!" before he joins Dr. Morgan and Dr. Willis outside. Together they wrestle Mrs. Morris away from Dr. Haynes and out of earshot of all of us.

How does this fit with the dream I saw last night? Mrs. Morris knew in the dream that her husband was cheating on her. Based on her behavior just now, she can't have known about it for long. Maybe – here's a theory: she didn't know

until yesterday. Dr. Morris woke up at some point and, overwhelmed by his conscience after his brush with death, he confessed everything to his wife. Maybe he actually told her, or maybe he just wrote a note and she read it. Either way, she learned about the affair sometime last night. And then today, now, she came looking for the other woman. And when she couldn't find her, she went looking for any other faculty member she knew to scream at, because she had so much anger and pain inside that she had to let it out at *someone*.

If that's right, and it really does seem like the only reasonable explanation for the scene we just witnessed, she can't have poisoned her husband. I know she dreamed about his death, but – I guess – idle dreams were all they were.



It takes a good twenty minutes for the class to get back to normal. I strain to listen to the chatter at the tables around us, in hopes of hearing something that will confirm my thinking, or help me figure out whatever it is I'm missing, but nothing does the trick.

Even when we do get back to work, I can't put the scene out of my mind. I'm very distracted until Dr. Bhapati ends the session at five o'clock. I know there's something I'm forgetting, or missing, or not interpreting correctly. And something else occurs to me - where exactly *was* Maureen when Mrs. Morris came? Did she get wind of her visit and just leave for the day, to avoid exactly the kind of scene we all saw?

Outside the Anatomy Theater, Joseph and Janet want to talk about what happened some more. As we walk to the lockers to put our coats and our tools away, Joseph says with a laugh, "That was right out of 'Days of Our Lives.'"

Janet laughs too, but I don't. It's not funny at all but it *is* true. Except – it isn't. "It's not a soap opera!" Something I saw this morning on my computer pops into my mind. Maureen's emails. "It's a novel!" The library book she lost and had to pay that big fine for. The Agatha Christie book.

The murder mystery.

They're both looking at me as though I've gone mad. I don't bother to explain – maybe I have. "I have to make a phone call," I say as I limp down the hall to

the pay phone. I fumble around in my purse for a quarter, and I dial. Please, God, let Brian be home.

Five rings later, the answering machine picks up. He must be already helping Barbara move. Of course he is. I need more – I need confirmation, I need to know about the book. Who told me they read the Agatha Christie books? My neighbors! Deia and Jaime! They read them together, to teach him English. She'll know. She can tell me.

Thank God the phone numbers run sequentially in the dorms – they're three suites over from us, so their number should be 1876 instead of 1879. I dial, and the line picks up on the first ring. "Hola?"

I was right! It's Deia. "Hi. This is Sara, down the hall?"

"Oh! How are you?"

I take a deep breath, I have to slow down, calm down. "I'm fine. I just – I need to know something. Your Agatha Christie books, right? You've got all of them?"

I can hear how puzzled she is. "Agatha Christie? Yes, we have – not all, but maybe a hundred or so."

What are the odds? "Is there one called," I try to remember from this morning. I can see the computer screen in my mind, I've got it. "The Pale Horse?"

"Yes," she answers, and I hear a thump as, I assume, she puts the phone down on the desk. A minute later she's back. "Exactly right. 'The Pale Horse.' Is that all you wanted to know?"

No. "What's it about – I know it's a mystery, but what's the murder weapon?"

She answers immediately. "Poison. You can borrow the book if you want."

I don't need to read it. I just need to know one more thing. "Can you – I know this is a weird question – can you flip to the end and tell me what kind of poison? It's for – I need to know for my schoolwork." I can feel Joseph and Janet staring at me, and it doesn't take a psychic detective to imagine their expressions or what they're thinking.

"Hold on, I should remember this, we read this one over the summer – hang on – it's was a poisonous metal, there it is – it's called thallium."

Oh, my God.

I hang up the phone; I'm not sure if I even thank Deia or not. That's what I was missing, that's what I was trying to puzzle out all day long. The answer was right in front of me.

I turn around to see my friends still staring at me. Janet is completely lost, and Joseph looks as though he thinks I need to be taken for a psychiatric evaluation. I would love to tell them everything, but I don't want to drag them into it and I'm not feeling creative enough to come up with a believable story to explain how I know what I know.

So I take the offensive instead – time to distract them. “Janet, how are you holding up? You doing OK?” She blinks twice, and her confusion over my strange behavior is gone as she remembers how shaky and uneasy she's been feeling.

I hate myself for doing that; if worrying about me lets her forget her own troubles for a while, I ought to let her. But she can't be involved in this. “I'm – I'm fine,” she says, but her tone doesn't agree.

Now I go for the two-pronged attack. “Joseph, could you walk her home? I would, but I want to go visit Dr. Morris. I think he might be awake, I want to see him.” His eyes narrow, and he's ready to argue with me, but then he glances at Janet and sees how troubled she suddenly looks.

“Sure,” he agrees. “I'll call you later, you can tell me how Dr. Morris is doing,” he tells me, keeping his voice level for Janet's sake. He takes her arm - always the gentleman – and starts down the hall. I stand there by the pay phone for a couple of minutes, collecting my thoughts and gathering my courage.

It was Maureen. She did it. But I still have no tangible proof, or at least none that I can give to the police. I need something more, and I hope to God that Dr. Morris is awake now to give it to me...

*Sixteen:*  
*Diagnosis: Murder*

(SEPTEMBER 11-20, 1991)

**W**hen I get over to University Hospital, I check in at the information desk, and I'm glad I did. They've moved Dr. Morris out of Intensive Care and into a room of his own. The lobby is very busy, and when I look up at a clock, I understand why. Six o'clock. Shift change.

I have to wait seemingly forever for an elevator, and it stops on every floor on the way up to the fifth. I've been on this floor before; this is where I stayed for three nights after I broke my ankle last year. I don't need to look at the signs to find room 537; I could get there with my eyes closed. A left, down the corridor, another left, and I'm in front of the nurses' station. There's one nurse there, engrossed in whatever she's entering into a computer – maybe prescriptions to be sent down to the pharmacy, or ordering tests.

Room 537 is at the end of the corridor, the last room on the left side of the hall. The door is closed; maybe he's sleeping? It doesn't matter – I need to see him now. I open the door slowly and tiptoe in, then pull it closed behind me.

Dr. Morris is not alone. There's someone standing over him – a woman with dark, just-graying hair, a little taller than I am. Maureen!

She's bent over Dr. Morris, who's still unconscious. She's looking at his IV, with something in her left hand. It's a hypodermic needle – she's trying to figure out where to inject it so it'll get into the IV fluids. She's muttering to herself. "You said you'd leave her. Over and over. You told me and told me. You promised. And you never did. Well, you're leaving her now."

She's here to finish what she started. She must have come as soon as she heard about Mrs. Morris coming over to the medical school. That was it – as soon as that happened, Maureen must have known that Dr. Morris had woken up, that he was talking. And then it would only be a matter of time until someone put two and two together and realized she was the one who'd poisoned him. So she's come to silence him once and for all.

She hasn't noticed me yet; she's completely focused on her task – I can see the muscles of her arm tense and their names come to me automatically – deltoid, brachioradialis, and all the rest of them. I've got one moment to do something. If I shout, she might stick the needle in and then it won't matter if help comes. I have to stop her, right now. I do the first thing that comes into my mind – I don't know what possesses me to do it.

I throw my cane at her.

I hit her in the arm and she staggers back, more in surprise than anything else. The cane falls to the floor and she kicks it under the bed. She recovers her composure almost immediately, and I realize how utterly stupid I was. I'm barely standing; I still can't put any weight on my right leg. I begin to hop over to her, but I'm too far away. Before I can get close, she jabs the needle into Dr. Morris' side, right below his armpit. He doesn't even stir.

Maureen pulls the needle out and comes for me. I'm still five feet from the bed, holding my arms out to either side to try and keep my balance when she kicks me in the left leg. I shift to my right, but it won't hold me; I shriek, the pain almost blinding me, and collapse to the floor. As I do, though, I reach out and get my hands knotted in her blouse. She comes down with me.

“You little bitch!” she says as she falls on top of me. I’m on my back, the wind knocked out of me, her weight pressing down on my chest. My leg is throbbing; it hurts just as badly as it did last year. I try to push the pain away, but it’s so hard. I have to do it – I have to stop her. I have to save Dr. Morris.

She sits herself up, all her weight on me now. She’s crushing me. I start to call for help, and she hits me in the throat. My shout dies out, and now I’m coughing uncontrollably. She’s still got the hypodermic in her hand; she never dropped it. She raises it high; she’s going to stab me, too!

I catch her hand as it comes down towards my neck, and for a moment I hold her off, but between the coughing and the pain she’s too strong for me. The best I can do is deflect her aim so it goes into my shoulder instead. It stings, but it’s nothing compared to the pain in my leg or the pressure on my chest.

“No!” I say through my coughing fit. “I saved him already, I’m not letting you kill him!” With all my strength I roll over to my right, toppling Maureen to the floor. The hypodermic breaks off in her hand; the point is still stuck in my shoulder. I hear it clatter to the floor. My breath is starting to come back. I push myself up with my left leg and shove her away from me. I shout at the top of my voice the one thing I know will send help running. “Code! Room 537!”

I keep shouting it over and over, and before Maureen can get to her feet I punch her, right in the mouth, with all my weight behind it. The shocked expression on her face is very satisfying, for a moment. Then the back of her head hits the wall and she flops over, unconscious, and I collapse in a heap on top of her.

I wonder why nobody’s coming. “Code” is the word for a life-threatening crisis; everyone in earshot is supposed to drop whatever they’re doing and come deal with it. It’s the same in every hospital – everyone knows it. So why hasn’t anybody come yet?

My throat is sore from her punch, and it hurts to keep shouting. I’ll have to go get help. But I can’t walk – I’ll have to crawl to the door, down the hall, until somebody sees me. That’ll take too long. I can hear that Dr. Morris is having trouble breathing. I have no idea what she injected him – and me – with. The



needle rolled almost to the door, it's ten feet away but it might as well be ten miles right now.

Dr. Morris' vital signs must be going crazy – even if nobody heard me, the alarms should be going off at the nurses' station. They ought to be here already. Why aren't they?

I crawl to the bed; it seems like it takes an hour, but it's probably only a minute. I'm having trouble breathing myself; my throat feels like it's closing up. I'm shaking, and I have to close my eyes for a minute; the room is spinning all around me. I open my eyes again, get my hands on the rails of the bed and slowly pull myself up. It's hard to focus on the monitors – I can barely see them. My eyes are tearing up, and they're burning. It looks – that can't be right – it looks like his monitors aren't working at all.

Maureen disconnected them. She's been – she must know how to turn off the alarms, too. She's certainly been here often enough. God, I can barely breathe at all. I can't get any air. My hands are shaking violently. What's wrong with me? What did she inject?

I know why nobody's coming. It's the shift change. Maureen had it all planned out perfectly. But there has to be somebody at the nurses' station. I can call. The call button. It's in the bed somewhere.

I see it – God, it's all the way on the other side of the bed. I have to get there. It takes forever – six inches at a time, hopping on one leg, hanging onto the bed for support. I can barely see, I'm getting dizzier, I don't know if I can make it that far. What did she do to me?

I'm almost there, just another five feet. I lose my balance for an instant, come down on my right leg again. I can't even scream. My throat is almost totally blocked. I'm going to die, right here with Dr. Morris.

There's the call button. My vision's going dark. I pick up the button in my hand, and I have to feel around for where to push it. I'm not getting any air at all. I can't breathe. Can't breathe! My fingers find the right spot, hold it down. I can just barely hear static and then a voice. "Dr. Morris? What do you need?"

I keep holding on to the button, but I can't get any words out. I can't breathe. No air. It's so dark. So dark. She killed me, and I never said goodbye to – to

Brian. Never said goodbye. I'm sorry. Sorry.

So sorry...



I open my eyes, and the light is blindingly bright. I close them immediately and keep them shut tight. There's a voice; it's so loud. I try to reach up and pull the pillow over my head to block it out, but my arm won't go that far. There's something holding it, it's attached to something.

"Sara?" The voice is a little quieter now, but it's still much too loud. I think – I can't tell for sure, but I think it's Brian. What's he doing here?

Where *is* here?

I hear more sounds; I can't even guess what they are. "Sara try to open your eyes again. It's OK. I promise." That's definitely Brian. He wouldn't say it unless it was true. But – but I was dead. I was dying. I couldn't breathe, and I never said goodbye, and I don't know what happened. "Please," he says, in what's probably a whisper, but still sounds like shouting at the top of his lungs.

I trust him. He'd never lie to me. I do what he says. I open my eyes very slowly, and it's still bright, it still makes me head throb, but it's not quite as bad as before.

"Goodbye. I just – wanted to say. Had to say. Goodbye. And love – I – I love you."

He's holding my hand, squeezing it. "I love you," he shouts, or whispers. "But there's no goodbye. I'm not going anywhere. And neither are you."

It takes me a while to understand him. I was going – dying. I couldn't breathe, I was going to die. But I'm here, wherever here is, and he's here holding my hand and talking to me. Could I be in Heaven? But if I am, how is he here with me? He didn't die too? No!

"Don't – don't want you to be dead too. Go back. Go – live."

"Nobody's dead," he tells me. He says it over and over, five times, or a hundred, I don't know, until it sinks in. If I'm not dead, I must be – I turn away from him, look around – I'm in the hospital. I'm not dead, somebody must have saved me.

“You’re going to be fine,” he says. His voice isn’t as loud now; my head doesn’t throb with every single word. He’s still holding my hand. Of course he is. He doesn’t say anything for a long time, and I can’t think of anything to say either. He just stares at me, and I stare back at him. I don’t ever want to look at anything else.

Finally, a week, or maybe a few minutes later, he asks me, “So how come you never mentioned you’re allergic to penicillin?”

What? Allergic to – I’m not allergic to anything. “I’m not,” I say. It’s hard to speak; my throat still feels raw. Allergic to penicillin. Anaphylactic shock. That’s what happened – that explains what I felt, what happened to me. I guess I *am* allergic to penicillin. Extremely allergic. “Didn’t – didn’t know I was.”

I can’t think anymore. I’m so tired. I need to rest, close my eyes again...



I have no idea what time it is. I don’t even know what day it is, for that matter. I open my eyes, and I see Brian and behind him – I blink, and blink again, and they’re still there – the Dean is standing right behind him, and Dr. Haynes too.

“Dr. Francis? Dr. Haynes?”

They both nod. At least I think they do. “We wanted to talk to you when you woke up,” the Dean says in what’s probably supposed to be a kindly voice. It’s still hard for me to tell.

Dr. Haynes comes up to the bed, leans over me. “You’re going to make a full recovery. And Dr. Morris will as well. You got there just in time.”

“He was – he’s allergic to penicillin, isn’t he? I guess we have that in common.”

Brian walks around to my other side, takes my hand. “You’re a hero. Everybody knows.”

I’m looking at him, all my attention is focused on him. I see how ragged he looks, the circles under his eyes. He was going out of his mind with worry; I’m so sorry I put him through all that.

I hear Dr. Francis sigh and I slowly turn my head to look at him. “We did try to keep things quiet – it’s quite scandalous, you understand. An attempted murder,

here in the hospital – absolutely shocking. At any rate, word got out. Your actions are all anyone is talking about.”

Wonderful. Because I didn’t get enough of that last year. I guess I’ll just have to get through it, though – what choice do I have? I just hope – I wonder...? “What happened to...?”

“Maureen?” Dr. Haynes says. “She’s in jail. After you and Dr. Morris were treated and stabilized, the doctors figured out what happened very quickly. The police were called.”

“She – she had it all planned out. The monitors – and – and – she came during the shift change, and – and she knew – she must have known he was allergic to penicillin, right?”

“I assume she did,” Dr. Haynes answers, shaking her head. “It was all quite clever. She only made one mistake. One of the nurses found the hypodermic, and obviously it had come from the hospital pharmacy. Maureen must not have known there are security cameras there – and she’s on video, taking the hypodermic right off a cart, plain as day.”

“What about me?” I sit up as best I can and glance towards my leg – which isn’t in a cast, I notice.

“Nothing broken,” Brian says.

Dr. Francis walks to the foot of the bed and picks up my chart. “An aggravated sprain, oh, and I see here - some bruised ribs.” Boy, that sounds familiar. “You’ll be up and around in a day or two, and back to your old self before you know it.” Well, he *is* the Dean of the medical school, he ought to know.



It’s Friday afternoon. I’ve missed two full days of class. I’ve had visits from classmates, friends, most of my teachers, and my Mom even arrived yesterday and spent the night in the room with me. She left this morning, once she was completely sure I was going to be fine.

The biggest surprise was when Barbara stopped by today, right after lunch. She wished me well and thanked me profusely for helping her get away from Mike. The last thing she said, on her way out the door, was, “By the way, when you get

back home, could you give me your friend's phone number? I wouldn't mind seeing him again." I guess my little plan to divert her away from Brian worked. I will be absolutely *thrilled* to give her Jim Quarters' phone number!

Oh, and the police came, of course. Thank God Detective Saridakis was one of them; at least that made things a little easier. By the time they arrived, around four o'clock yesterday, I finally knew everything, so I knew what they expected to hear from me. It was actually very close to the truth.

Brian figured out the one thing I hadn't been able to wrap my mind around – Dr. Morris' research. After he came to the hospital to see me Wednesday night and the doctors assured him I was going to be fine, he went home and went through Maureen's emails himself. He looked more closely than I did at the ones to and from the Human Subjects Office, and he saw something I missed.

None of them went to Dr. Morris. He wasn't copied on *any* of them. Maureen didn't have a single question for him, she didn't pass a single thing on to him. And that's because he didn't know about it. There never *was* a research project with nuclear stress tests. It was just an alibi Maureen made up to explain why Dr. Morris was exposed to thallium – just in case anybody ever figured out that he had been in the first place.

And that's why she "mistakenly" sent copies of some of the emails to Dr. Haynes. Someone who already didn't like Dr. Morris, and was predisposed to think the worst of him – who better to be a witness to his "carelessness" if anyone did look more closely into his death?

On top of that, Brian found emails to the Purchasing department. When he first got the file, and did his search for thallium, he didn't think to try different forms of the word. And I didn't, either. But on second look, there it was - an email from Maureen, ordering a hundred grams of thallos acetate, which – exactly like it sounds - is a very toxic chemical containing thallium.

And then – this is yet another reason why I love him, he's so smart sometimes! – he printed out the most important emails and hid the printouts, just in case we might need them later. Then he deleted the whole file off my computer, and physically destroyed the floppy disk he'd brought it home on. Now there's no

proof that he was snooping in people's emails, nothing to show that we did anything inappropriate or wrong.

When the police arrived, I gave them the edited version of the story. I talked about Dr. Morris' research, and how I'd asked some of my teachers about it and it didn't make sense, so I went to visit him and surprised Maureen in the act of trying to finish him off. Which is all true and all verifiable. My story, plus the security video that Dr. Haynes told me about, was enough for the police to get a warrant to obtain all of Maureen's emails. And since they already know what they're looking for, they'll have a much easier time of it than I did. So, hopefully, case closed.



Saturday morning. I get to go home in a little while. Brian should be here in twenty minutes or so – he called me just a moment ago to tell me he was on the way.

There's a knock on the door. It can't be Brian, not this quickly. The door's open, so whoever it is, the knocking is just a courtesy. "Come on in. I'm awake," I say.

It's Joseph. He closes the door behind himself and walks over, sits in the chair next to my bed. "I hear you're getting out this morning. Figured I'd give you a ride to our weekly review."

Oh, God! I completely forgot. I haven't spent much time at all thinking about school these past two days. There's no way I can – I need to go home, I need Brian, I...

He laughs. I can only imagine the panicked expression on my face. "You're still pretty out of it, aren't you? It was a joke. Obviously we're not reviewing today. We all agreed to switch to tomorrow instead so you could come. Of course, we both know Paula will be studying all day today anyway."

"Good joke. It's not worth twenty bucks, but it was pretty good. And I'll be ready tomorrow."

He pats my arm. "I'm glad. It wouldn't be the same without you." He takes a deep breath, scoots the chair right up to the bed. "Look, I'm sure Brian is on his

way here right now. I have to ask you, before he gets here...”

He’s staring hard at me. I don’t know what to do. He deserves some kind of answer. And it would be nice to have one less person who I have to lie to. Maybe I *should* just tell him. But there are several good reasons to keep quiet.

For one thing, every person who knows it is another person who can talk about it, even if they don’t mean to. For another, he’ll never look at me the same way again, knowing that I was inside his head, and his wife’s. How could he ever feel comfortable around me? And on top of all that, it *is* very intimate. I don’t want to share it with someone who’s not family.

An idea comes to me. Unless I’m completely wrong about him, I can keep my secret and satisfy him, too. I meet his stare. I never realized before, just how brown his eyes are. Almost as brown as Brian’s. “I’ll tell you everything. I’ll tell you my secret,” I say, and his eyes widen, “and if you don’t believe me, I can prove all of it.” He’s halfway out of his seat. But that was the carrot. Now comes the stick.

“I’ve got two conditions.” I hope I’m right about him and how he’ll react, because I’m committing myself here. “First, you can’t tell anyone else. Not even your kids. And not Mary, either. This has to be our secret, yours and mine.” He blinks once, twice, three times, but then he’s staring at me again. “Second, if I tell you, you’re involved. And I *will* drag you into it – into anything that happens, whether you like it or not. You see where that’s got me.” I gesture to indicate the whole room. “Last year, Brian and I both ended up in the hospital. If you know, you’re part of it.” Maybe I’m not being fair, but it’s the best I can do. “We don’t have a choice, but I’m giving one to you.”

“You’re serious.” He’s considering it; I can just about see the wheels spinning behind his eyes.

“Completely.”

He continues to think for a full minute, maybe two, never taking his eyes off me. Neither of us says anything. Finally he reaches a decision. He’s clearly very torn about it. “I can’t keep something like this – whatever the hell it is – from Mary. You can’t ask me to do that.”

I sigh in relief. I knew he wouldn't go for it. "No, I can't. But I have to anyway. That's the price. If you knew the secrets I've had to keep – all the lies I've had to tell people I love – if you knew all the trouble this has caused for me, you would never have asked me in the first place."

Another couple of minutes go by silently. "I don't have any answer to that. You win," he says. "But – I count three people who'd be dead now if it wasn't for you," I nod. Rebecca last year, Susan Meeks and now Dr. Morris. "I won't ask you about it again, I – I can see what it costs you. But – whatever it is, however you know all the things you know – if you ever find out that my family – Mary, or the kids..."

He needs to ask? "Maybe you're the one who's out of it. I risked my life for complete strangers, and you have to ask if I'd do it for people I care about?" He has the decency to look embarrassed; now he can't meet my eyes. "Of course I'll keep an eye out for you guys." I sit up, and he stands, leans over, hugs me.

"I'm sorry I missed your mother when she was here. I'd like to have told her what an amazing daughter she's got." I hug him back, sore ribs and all. I hold back tears, but just barely. "Not that she doesn't already know, but as a parent I can tell you, hearing it from other people never gets old."

While we wait for Brian, he tells me what I missed in class, and I wish he'd stop. It's giving me a headache – I know I have to, but I don't think I'm quite ready to think about how far behind I am just now.

Thankfully, five minutes later, Brian arrives. Ten minutes later I'm discharged. Twenty minutes after that, I'm back where I most want to be, and need to be. In my room, in my bed, with my husband.



Saturday night. I check my email for the first time since Wednesday morning, and there's a very long message from Beth.

**I'm not sure whether to congratulate you for figuring everything out and saving the day, again, or yell at you for being so reckless and almost getting yourself killed. Again. You might have thought about me. It's not like I have a lot of best friends. I can't afford to lose one.**



How'd she find out? I look over to Brian and he shrugs. "I called her Wednesday night, once you were out of Intensive Care. I thought she'd want to know." And you thought I'd want her to know. Right on both counts.

"Did you think – you know – that I was reckless?" After our argument, after I promised not to do something like that again?

"No," he says, and I can hear in his tone he's not just saying it for my benefit; he means it. "You called – I wasn't here. And you didn't think you *were* being reckless. You had no idea she was there." He comes over and kisses me. God, I love him. He goes back over to the bed and I keep reading.


**I would have driven up to see you, but I thought you'd be overwhelmed with visitors in the hospital, and once you got home I didn't think you'd appreciate a houseguest on your couch. But I'll come visit in a couple of weeks, and you can tell me every last detail. Maybe I'll have some details for you about my "assistant assistant coach," too. He thinks it's "cute" when I call him that, by the way.**

I'm glad – it sounds like that's going really well. Good for her. Of course she can't resist giving me a little grief at the end.

**You can't fool me, I know you too well. You put that joke about going to jail in your last email for my benefit; you've never seriously had a thought like that in your life. When I read it, I had half a mind to send you a pair of those furry handcuffs in the mail. And then I thought, even better, I'll mail them directly to Brian, and tell him you told me to do it. I got as far as wrapping them up and addressing the envelope when he called me Wednesday night to tell me what happened. Obviously I changed my mind. For now, anyway. But remember, the post office is a five-minute walk from my apartment, so I can send them any time I want to.**

I'm actually surprised she didn't give them to me during my wedding shower, but I guess she didn't have the heart to embarrass me like that in front of my Mom and everyone. And she wouldn't really send them to Brian like that. I'm pretty sure she wouldn't.

But even if she does, she's still my best friend and she always will be. What would I ever do without her?



Sunday morning. I'm sitting outside Drake Tower with Janet, waiting for Joseph – God bless him – to drive by and pick us up. Janet came to see me in the hospital, but we didn't talk much. This is the first chance she's had to ask me about Wednesday and Dr. Morris and everything.

"I would have come with you, and I'm sure Joseph would have, too. Why'd you go alone?" In the end, that's all she really wants to know.

Because – because I didn't want to have to lie to the two of them more than I already had. Because even though I was – if it came to it – willing to tell Joseph about the dreams, what I've been seeing, all of it - I'll never tell Janet. I don't want her to know I was the last person to speak to her mother. I wouldn't want to know if – God forbid – something happened to Brian, that somebody else was the last person to talk to him, instead of me. She deserves to think that she was the last one to talk to her mother – that nobody else shared even one second of Margaret's time at the end, that it belonged only to her. She deserves at least that much from me.

I can't say any of that, obviously. "You've got so much going on. I know how hard things are for you – you know what, I don't even know that." All I can do is imagine it, and even that hurts too much. "I don't know, but I think they must be. I didn't want you to get dragged in – maybe it was arrogant of me to make that choice for you, but I didn't think you needed any more trouble in your life." I'm not sure what to make of her expression. She's touched, sad, grateful and a little bit insulted all at the same time.

"It *was* arrogant," she says. "But – I know how I've been, how I've looked. I probably would have done the same, in your place."

"I won't do it again. You're," I remember Margaret's words, "stronger than I gave you credit for. I promise I won't forget that next time."

Joseph drives up just then in his Volvo. He helps me into the back seat so I can stretch out my leg, and we're off to our weekly review. Because of the exams this week, and because everyone else has to spend the first hour catching me up on everything I missed, we work until almost seven o'clock.

We all stay for dinner and Brian walks over to join us. Even Paula is convinced

– well, harassed, really – to stay today. I make an extra effort to get her to open up while we enjoy burgers, hot dogs and grilled corn-on-the-cob.

With two beers in her – a shock in itself to me, I don't know why, but I just assumed she didn't drink – she finally bares some of her soul. “I really hate this! I – it's not what I want. I hate Anatomy! I hate Dr. Morris! I like – I guess I like the lectures OK, but I hate all the rest of it! I don't – how am I going to do this for the next four years?”

Wow. I didn't expect that. She goes on and on, detailing all the things she hates about medical school at great length, and it's Brian who finally calms her down. “You said you do like the lectures. What about them do you like?”

He *always* knows what to say. How did I get so lucky?

“I – I like learning how everything works. I just – I don't want – how do I say it? – I don't like the patients. I don't want to be a practicing doctor. I like the theory. It's clean. Neat. You understand?”

I think I do. She wants to be at the microscope, in the lab, not the hospital. I can see that – it's not what I want, but I get it. And, even though she said she hates Dr. Morris – who doesn't? – he's doing some really interesting research that she might like to be a part of.



Friday again. The week is over. My first exams of medical school are over. We won't get results until next week, but I'm pretty sure I passed everything. I know I did in Anatomy, anyway – Dr. Morgan's reaction after he gave me the oral portion of that exam was very clear. I think I did well enough on everything else, especially considering all the madness of the last few weeks.

Joseph and Paula both think they passed, too. Janet, on the other hand, is very worried. She spent every spare moment cramming, including all the time that she was in lecture, so she completely missed everything new we were supposed to learn this week.

I'll just have to spend that much more time studying with her to get her where she needs to be. That's all there is to it. But maybe there's another way I can help her, too.

I was planning to just go home, now that I'm done for the day. God knows I could use the rest. But I need to make one stop first. I haven't seen Dr. Morris since the night I saved him, and it's time to pay him a visit.

He's back in Room 537. According to the nurse on duty, he's supposed to be released this weekend. I'm assuming we'll see him back in class next Tuesday. For now, though, he's sitting up in his bed, watching TV. I knock on the open door as I walk in, and he turns to see me.

"Mrs. Alderson. I wondered if you'd come by." He looks pretty good to me – his color is right, and his hair's even started to come back in.

"I hear you're going home this weekend?"

"Thanks to you, so I'm told." He can't even just say "thanks" like a normal person! "So I'm told." Who says that?

"I'm glad I could help," I'll take the high road, even if he doesn't.

"You ought to know, it was entirely outside of class. As grateful as I am, there won't be any extra credit."

"I've already had several people tell me that. You've got a reputation, Dr. Morris." He nearly smiles – I mean a genuine smile, not a sneer. I don't think I've seen him do that before. He doesn't disagree with me. "But that is kind of why I came by." I hesitate for a moment, but, damnit, he owes me! "I assume they told you everything." He nods. "I saved your life twice. So you owe me twice over."

He starts to open his mouth, but I hold up my hand. "Let me finish," I say, more sharply than I intended. "I'm not asking anything for myself, and I won't ask for anything else from you ever again. We're even after this."

He's stares at me curiously. "I'm intrigued."

"First, Janet Black. You know about her mother. But you don't know how hard it hit her. She has no siblings, no boyfriend, nobody at all. Her mother was it," it's no secret; he already knows all that, or he ought to if he paid any attention at all to his students. "This really set her back – she's working hard to catch up, but she needs help. You're going to help her. You'll – I don't even know – arrange special tutoring for her, maybe extra time in the Anatomy Theater with you to

help her, just – whatever she needs to catch up. She’ll do the work, but she needs – she just needs a little help.”

“I’ll do all that?” Now he’s sneering.

“Yes, you will. And second, Paula Chen. What she wants is to do research. You’re going to make her one of your research assistants, and you’re going to give her real, useful work to do, not just the drudgery you don’t want to deal with. She can handle it, and she needs it. And, you’re going to write to her parents and tell her you’ve specially selected her, and what an honor it is, and how proud they ought to be. And the letter had better be good.”

“You really expect me to do that?” He’s on the verge of laughter.

I stare him down. “Yes, I do,” and I don’t know where the steel in my voice comes from – I’ve never heard it there before.

He blinks first, looks away. After a little while, he looks back at me, but he can’t quite meet my eyes. “Do you know,” he asks me, “why I was so hard on you during your admissions interview?”

What’s that got to do with anything? “No.” I may as well tell him the truth. “I just assumed you were that way with everyone.”

“To an extent, yes. But with some applicants more than others. You struck me, with your ‘I’ve wanted to be a doctor since I was a child,’ and ‘I want to help people,’ as unserious, and unprepared for the realities of medical school, let alone actual practice.”

It’s a tremendous effort to hold back from telling him what he can go do with himself. I don’t say anything at all. “You did not seem to me to be strong. And in class, while your concern for Ms. Black was commendable, you did not show the discipline and self-control that is necessary for a successful physician. Or, shall we say, the backbone.”

“That’s your opinion.” I have to bite my tongue to keep from saying anything more.

“But here, now, you come into my room – perhaps I should say you stride in - confidently, with strength and certainty, making demands which you expect to be carried out. *That* is the mark of a good physician. You may be mistaken – in our profession that’s inevitable at times – but you may never be indecisive, or

uncertain or weak. Those are the cardinal sins of our profession. And you've shown me today, for the first time, that you have the strength to rise above them."

I'm horrified. What a sick, ridiculous, backwards attitude. There's only one thing I can say. "Thank you."

"I will do as you ask. When I return to work on Monday, I will make arrangements for remedial work for Ms. Black, and I will – assuming she is capable of understanding the work and what will be required of her – accept Ms. Chen as a research assistant. Is that satisfactory? Are we – as you put it - even?"

I reach out, shake his hand. "It is, and we are. I'll see you in class Tuesday, Dr. Morris," I say. I turn my back on him, and without another glance his way, I walk out.

*Epilogue:*  
*She's Having a Baby*

(MAY 7-8, 1992)

*S*ara sits in Dr. Kamara's waiting room. The clock on the wall seems to be moving in slow motion; it feels as though each tick of the second hand takes a minute or more. She's the only one in the room; she stares at the door that leads to the rest of the office, willing it to open and for Dr. Kamara to emerge.

Finally, after an hour or possibly ten, the door does open, and Dr. Kamara does walk out, smiling. "I've got your results," she says, and Sara leaps up, runs to her to find out...



I wake up in the best mood I've woken up with in what seems like ages. Today's going to be a good day. I have a feeling – I don't know why, I just do.

Brian's got his last final exam today, and we're going to celebrate tonight, but it's more than that. It's – I hope I know, but I won't be sure until this afternoon.

Brian's up right after me; we dress, and before I head out the door I grab him and kiss him, hard. I don't want to let go, and neither does he. Finally I have to;

Janet's waiting for me downstairs. "Good luck today!" I tell him.

"You too!" he answers as I head out.



Lectures are done for the day, and right now I'm over at University Hospital, sitting in Dr. Kamara's waiting room. Her receptionist said ten minutes, and I've been here ten minutes. But it feels like I've been waiting hours, or even days. Doesn't she know I'm going out of my mind here? She has to know. Maybe one of her regular patients called and she's talking them through whatever crisis they're having.

That's how it was way back in August, when Janet and I shadowed her for an afternoon. I remember it very clearly – she got a dozen frantic calls, none of which actually were emergencies. But she still gave each of them as much time and attention – and patience – as they needed. I told myself at the time that I'd come to her when – well, when it's my time.

If - well, if I get the result I'm hoping for, she'll be my doctor. I'd like to think I won't panic every time anything seems even the slightest bit off, but if I do, I want someone who'll give me all the time and patience I need, just like she did for all those other patients.

I look up at the clock, and fifteen more minutes have passed. Then, finally, the door opens and Dr. Kamara comes out. "I'm sorry, Sara," she says. "I had a call – you understand." "I do," I say, more calmly than I feel. Now tell me what I need to know already!

She beckons me to come back with her and I get up slowly. I can't tell from her expression what the answer is. "Come on," she says, already walking back to her office. "We've got a lot to talk about." A lot? Does that mean...? It has to, doesn't it? I'm – I'm really...?



I'm waiting for Brian to get back from his last final exam. I've been bouncing off the walls all afternoon. It's taken every ounce of self-control I have to keep from calling Mom, or Beth, or just running up and down the halls shouting about it.



Brian deserves to know first - well, third, anyway. Dr. Kamara was first, then me of course! I don't know what he'll say now that it's real. We've talked and talked and researched and planned and agreed. But as I've learned in a thousand different ways this past year, thinking about something isn't the same as experiencing it.

But at least we *have* done all the thinking we can do, and everything has fallen into place. Brian's been working at an internship since January. He's at NASA – the Lewis Flight Test Center out by the airport. My husband – an actual rocket scientist! How cool is that?

What's even better is that he's almost guaranteed to get a job offer from them when he graduates in December. Even if he doesn't, with that internship on his resume he's bound to land something. And he *will* graduate in December – he's worked every bit as hard as I have this year, between the internship and his overloaded class schedule. So come December, we'll have real money coming in, and real health insurance. We'll be set.

And, we'll be moving into our own apartment in June. A very nice, fully furnished one-bedroom with plenty of space, and that'll be perfect for us. And for our addition.

Then there's my schedule. This is the perfect time. If we didn't do it now, we'd probably have to wait until I was done with my residency – that's six years from now. Neither of us want to wait that long.

I hear the key in the door; he's home! He staggers in, smiles at me and then heads straight into the bedroom and collapses onto the bed. "Done. Finally!"

I go to him, lie down beside him. "I'm proud of you," I tell him, and I give him a quick kiss. "We should go out and celebrate," I say, but he barely stirs at that.

"I know we were going to, but I'm wiped out. I just want to sleep right now," he says.

We'll see about that. "I understand. But I – I've – we've got something else to celebrate, not just getting through finals." I'm not sure if he even hears me. I take his hand, put it on my stomach and hold it there. "OK. Remember the Christmas card? Our first Christmas? You remember how I said that I wanted to

always be your best gift, every year?” He sits up slowly, looks at me curiously now.

“I remember,” he says. How could he ever forget?

“Well,” I keep holding his hand to my stomach. “I still mean it, but I think you’re going to have – well, we’ll both have an even better gift. It’s just going to take another eight months or so to arrive.”

He stares at me blankly, then looks down to his hand on my stomach. When he looks back up, I can see probably a dozen different feelings register in his eyes. “You mean – you’re – we’re – you’re going to – really?”

“Yes!”

“I’m pregnant? You’re going to be a father?” I can excuse a little confusion right now. It’s a pretty big thing to take in.

I pull him tightly to me. “Something like that,” I laugh. “We’re having a baby. Our baby. What do you think about that?” He kisses me, and holds me even tighter. My cheeks are wet – he’s crying. I pull back from him, just look into his eyes. All I see there is love for me.

Not just for me. He pulls up my shirt, leans down and kisses my stomach. I already knew, but there’s my answer. Not that there was ever any question.

*The End*



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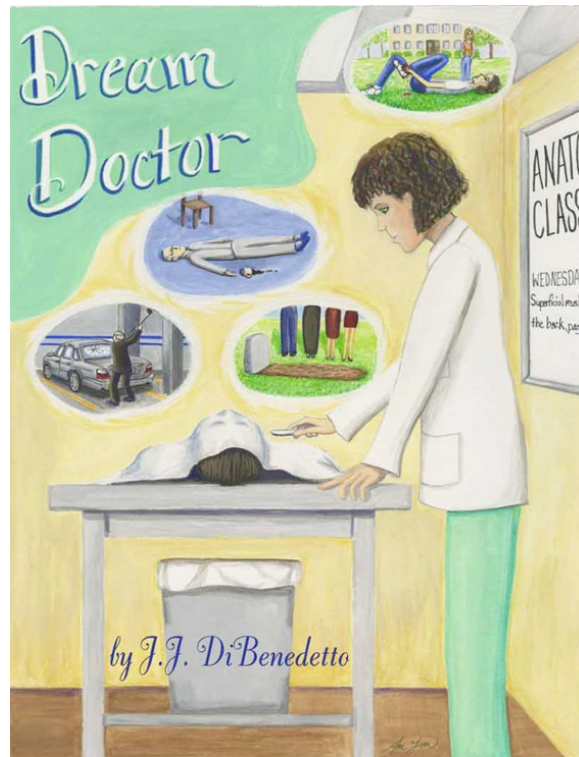
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(Ami Low's original, handpainted cover for the first edition of *Dream Doctor*)

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