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Professor Charles Smart.

Smart by name, smart by nature?

The man who opened the Einstein–Rosen bridge (that’s a wormhole, to you and me) and understood as much about it as a chimp does about the molecular composition of the banana it has just peeled, Charles Smart poked a *hole* in the banana peel and then tossed people in there, hoping they would come out intact at the other end. In fairness to the professor, most did; but some were transformed utterly. There were a few positive changes—such as the time FBI Special Agent Cody “Cue-Ball” Potter got his hair back, or when stumpy little Jerry Townsend went in five feet one and came out six feet three—but most of the mutations could be judged as negative. Men got spliced with animals: there were dog-men, monkey-men and, on one particularly memorable occasion, a

tyrannosaur-guy. Time travelers picked up tumors and lesions and third-degree burns in all sorts of sensitive areas. Dr. Marla DeTroit, who funnily enough was from Detroit, went into the time tunnel a statuesque thirtysomething lady and came out a

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payment had to be exacted, as Chevron Savano and Riley were about to find out.

Cue creepy foreshadowing music: *Bom-bom-bommmmmmmmm.*

NEWGATE PRISON, THE CITY, LONDON, 1899

Newgate Prison: the most notorious block of lumpen misery ever to put down foundations in old London town. Built on the orders of Harry Plantagenet way, way back at the last gasp of the twelfth century, and refashioned on the say-so of Lord Mayor Dick Whittington himself, which is rarely mentioned in the storybooks.

Constructed in accordance with the principles of the French *architecture terrible* school, with deliberate, heavy repulsiveness, the building itself served as a warning, to those who looked upon it, of the fate of anyone who would choose a life of crime. The prison contained not a single elegant line nor a decent patch of natural light.

Outside this forbidding structure, flinching at the sounds of diverse wailings from within, stood the boy magician Riley, not yet fifteen, and his companion, Chevron Savano, warrior-maiden from the future and just over two years his senior, both thinking thoughts along the lines of:

This place is hell on earth.

And:

We must free Tom from here.

“Gold will do the job, Chevie,” Riley said, with a slight

tremor in his voice that only a close friend would notice. “Shillings for killings and pound-letters for debtors. Cash is king in the Gate.”

“Right,” said Chevie in the American fashion, and squeezed his fingers.

For in this, young Riley was indeed correct.

Newgate was every bit as much a financial establishment as Threadneedle’s Bank of England. Food, clothing, family quarters. Everything was on offer for cash in the prison, up to the striking of a man’s fetters from his ankles or a dram of laudanum to quiet the condemned’s nerves on his short walk to the triple gibbet.

And the man to be hanged need not be a murderer. There were hundreds of crimes that would get a man or woman invited to dance the Newgate Jig. One of these crimes was that of defaultery.

London was a city of commerce and, to many of the local business folk, renegeing on one’s debts was a crime most heinous. A man who would cheat his neighbors deserved no less than a spot of capital punishment while his fellow prisoners cheered and jeered. And, according to all available information, Tom Riley, known commonly as Ginger, was in debt up to the apple of his soon-to-be-stretched neck.

Unless.

Unless the wronged man could be paid off.

In that case, it would be all kisses and cuddles and *Off you go, Ginger*, into a bright new tomorrow.

But not so quick, youngster. Not so sprightly.

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It was a reasonable theory—much more credible, in fact, than the time line presented to her by this reality: FBI, time machines, magician assassins, megalomaniacal army colonels, and so on.

Coma or not, Chevie had agreed to pull on a dress from the Orient Theatre's costume wardrobe, wearing it over her FBI jumpsuit to spare Riley's blushes. She topped off the outfit with a straw bonnet that hid her dark hair and skin so as not to attract more attention.

I must look like Darth Vader's daughter, wearing this monstrosity, she had thought at the time.

Being the only Shawnee Native American in the entirety of England was stare-worthy enough without being dressed in a fashion shockingly immoral for the period.

Or, as Riley had put it: "We got us plenty of eyes on stalks without you parading yerself like a slattern."

Chevie was pretty certain that being a slattern was not a good thing, and so tied the bonnet tight under her chin, scowling all the time and wondering why it was okay for Riley to wear his magician's cape in the street, even though surely that would also attract attention. But now, as she looked around, Chevie had to concede that there were plenty of becaped guys wandering the area. It was like some kind of old-timey Comic Con out there.

Sometime later the wheedler's stocky frame barged through a side gate and, heedless of the ragamuffins clustered around her voluminous skirts begging for a twist of tobacco or a pull of gin, she gestured for Chevie and Riley to join her, and they

hurried across the street to where Nancy was applying an ember from a nearby brazier to the clay bowl of her pipe. Tough customer that she was, Tartan Nancy held the ember in her bare hand, little finger cocked as though she were pouring cream from a sterling jug.

Tartan Nancy Grimes was not Scottish, and neither did she wear the tartan of any clan. While waiting for Nancy to return with tidings, Riley had informed Chevie that the nickname "Tartan" was a touch of Cockney rhyming slang applied to the wheedler on account of her gassy insides.

Oh, Chevie had said; and then: *Ohhhhh*, when the penny had dropped.

And, though no elaboration had been requested, Riley had proceeded to particularize: *Nancy has been wearing them old skirts so long that they've grown rigid. They act like a bell, they do. Amplifying the sound, as it were, Chevie. Only don't ever mention it, as Nance don't like it brought up.*

Being indiscreet like this was not usually a part of Riley's nature, but he was agitated, and the words tumbled out. He needn't have worried; Chevie was hardly likely to raise the subject in the middle of a sensitive situation, as she had two semesters of hostage negotiation at the FBI compound in Quantico under her belt.

Tartan Nancy Grimes tossed the smoldering ember into the gutter and puffed up a storm cloud on her pipe. She was a stout woman with grizzled ringlets of fading red hair framing her round face as strands of weed might frame a pitted river rock. On her head sat a pristine white bonnet, which seemed

out of place with her own self and the rest of the environs, but keeping a fresh bonnet was central to Nancy's credo—if a lady may not have a fresh bonnet, then what in the name of God may she have?

“Have you seen Tom?” asked Riley, and then: “How did he seem? Hale and hearty?”

Nancy puffed a while longer and said, “I seen him, young fella. He's a mite battered, but nothing as will put him under, lessen he gets himself infected, which could happen easily enough.”

Tom being still aboveground was about the best news they could have hoped for, as it was not uncommon for new fish to croak on the first day—to mix cold-blooded metaphors.

Chevie squeezed Riley's shoulder. “There, you see? We're gonna be okay. Family reunion by dinnertime, right? Or is that teatime?”

Not one of the party smiled, not even the joker.

“And how is Maccabee's mood?” Riley asked the wheedler. “Has the notion of payment cheered him?”

Nancy knocked out her pipe, then spat in the bowl. “Ah, now here we arrives at the nub, my young fella, for it ain't Maccabee what has been wronged. It's another gent, a mysterious shadowy fella what lurks.” Tartan Nancy jammed her thumb into the pipe bowl and worked the spittle. “And Old Nance hates a lurker. It's the devil of a job to read a lurker. Maccabee is simply his attorney. And for a man to have a man like Maccabee beaking for him inside the Gate itself”—here

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Nancy whistled through a gap in her side teeth—"well, that

worked a job like this. They got your brother in a nice private cell, all ready for bargaining, and then they turns up their noses at gold like it's sewer droppings. A right puzzler, this is."

Chevie, who had at least theoretical experience in these situations, cut directly to the important question. "There's always a demand. What is it?"

"The Injun maid has put her finger on it," said Tartan Nancy. "They has a demand right enough, and a strange one, too."

"Anything," blurted Riley, already forgetting Nancy's advice that he play his cards close. "Anything they want."

"They wants you, young fella," said Nancy, incredulous at the idea that this stripling could be worth more than shining sovereigns to anybody. "You seem like a nice chap, Riley, but I offered twenty sovs. I *opened* with twenty."

Chevie's soldier sense buzzed, and something told her there was more going on here than a simple payoff.

"I don't like it. How does this Lurker guy even know that you exist, Riley?"

Riley was not interested. "What do they want of me, Nance?"

"Your person. In the cell. They will talk only to you."

"No," said Chevie. "Absolutely not. If Riley goes in there, he isn't coming out."

"Once again, the Injun is spot-on," said Nancy, looking Chevie up and down. "You ever think of apprenticing in the wheedle trade, miss? Your exotic appearance could be a real

boon, throw the customers off balance. Perhaps you would consider a scatter of facial tattoos?"

"Thanks for the offer, Nancy," said Chevie. "However, let's concentrate on today. Purely in terms of bargaining power, it would be disastrous to let Riley into that prison."

"That is true," admitted Tartan Nancy. "But they is not giving a smidge on that front. It's the boy Riley in the box, or go to blazes and the ginger fella swings."

Riley squared his shoulders and frowned his best determined face. "I have to do it, Chevron. There ain't no other way."

Chevie thought that her friend's determined face was pretty effective, and one look at it made it clear that his mind was not for changing.

"Okay, pal. But if you're going in there, I'm going with you."

Nancy wagged the pipe stem. "Just the boy, Maccabee said. And him alone."

Chevie swatted the objection aside with her palm. "Yeah, well, Maccabee is going to have to learn to live with disappointment. This is a negotiation, isn't it, Nancy? Give and take? Well, I'm going in there, so you can take that, put it in your pipe, and smoke it."

Nancy snorted appreciatively. "Strong tone. Good posture, not a sign of a bluff. If you makes it out of the Gate alive, girl, come see me. You're a born wheedler."

A born wheedler.

Chevie did not know whether to be flattered or insulted.

She would, she decided, not worry about it as she was in a coma, after all.

A born wheedler?

Which dark corner of her unconscious had that one come from?

Please, doctor, she broadcast as she followed Tartan Nancy toward the prison. Now would be a good time to resuscitate me.

Tartan Nancy Grimes led them quickly through the throng to the prison entrance. Such was her grease in the Gate that the guards parted before her without so much as a challenge to the identity of her company and with only the most cursory of searches, for it was in everyone's interest, from cook to warden, that Nancy's commerce proceed unhindered.

They passed through a wrought-iron gate and then a reinforced door, both of which clanged ominously behind them, and Chevie could not help but worry that this was a one-way trip for Riley and herself, and the *triple gibbet* she had heard about would be full to capacity by morning.

Calm yourself, she thought. You have done nothing wrong.

It was, she realized, becoming difficult to hang on to the coma theory with the black stone of Newgate Prison closing in on all sides.

Riley must have noticed the anxious sheen on her brow as he sidled closer and whispered, "Fret not, Chev. These locks are cake to me. I got picks in me hair."

Cake locks, and picks?

Maybe it was a coma, after all.

Onward they strode, hurrying to keep pace with Tartan

Nancy's pneumatic stride. She might have been a steam engine, with the pipe as her funnel.

Nancy spoke as she walked, and the wheedler's words drifted over her shoulder encased in puffs of smoke.

"I'll do the talking, boy."

"Yes," said Riley obediently. "Not a peep out of me."

"And no bawling neither," added Nancy. "As far as Lurky Boots is concerned, you don't give much of a fig for this Tom fella. You is only here outta family duty, see?"

"I see," said Riley. "Not a fig does I give."

"That way we keeps the price low."

In truth, it was for keeping the price low that Riley did not give a fig. He would gladly fork over the last gold sovereign from Albert Garrick's ill-gotten stash to see Tom free, but he knew better than to express this opinion to a wheedler like Tartan Nancy, as the shock could set her bell ringing, so to speak, and nobody wanted that in an enclosed space.

The corridor opened onto the main yard, where prisoners shambled about in chains if they had not the price to have them struck off. Many of the interned lolled around the gate, scratching at festering blisters, their time served but without the exit fee demanded by the system. Each year many men and women died inside Newgate because they couldn't scrape together the shilling to get out. The sounds and smells were cacophonous, overpowering, and uniformly in the negative. Even the famously buoyant Cockney spirit could not stay afloat in such an environment.

I don't belong here, thought Chevie, feeling the horror and

historic grimness of the place push her close to panic. This is not my time.

In truth, nobody on earth belonged in Newgate, and Newgate did not belong anywhere on earth.

Mercifully, Nancy did not lead them through the yard but turned with marching-band precision into a doorway marked out from the wall only by a marginally darker shade of gloom, and disappeared into the shadows beyond. Riley picked up his pace, and Chevie had little option but to follow, even though her Quantico training buzzed in her skull like a trapped bee at the notion of waltzing into the black unknown, especially since her night vision was one of the qualities she seemed to have lost in the wormhole.

Chevie had noticed over the past few days that this latest jaunt through the time tunnel had affected her in many ways. Nothing big yet, no dinosaur parts—but she was a changed person. Her hearing was not as sharp as it had been, and the chevron tattoo on her shoulder had become a straight-edged birthmark. She found running a little awkward and would swear that one leg was half an inch longer than it used to be. And the latest thing on her growing list of mutations was that a couple of times a day, though only for a second or two, she would swear that she had X-ray vision.

Dear Professor Charles Xavier, she thought. I am writing to you because I think I have what it takes to join the X-Men academy.

Curiouser and curiouser.

And then there were the headaches.

But later for these thoughts.

Now for surviving.

The dark swallowed them, and Chevie made herself focus because, whether or not the coma theory was sound, everyone knew that if you died in your dreams, you died in your bed, too.

Dream deaths are just wake-up calls for people who aren't ever waking up.

Which made zero sense.

Chevie disguised a bitter laugh as a cough. *Sense?* How long had it been since anything made sense?

Chevie realized that she and Riley were holding hands, and not in a young-love kind of way, which would have been weird, but in a white-knuckled, I-want-to-make-sure-my-friend-is-beside-me kind of way.

The poor kid doesn't even know he's dragging me along, she realized. That's how much he wants to see his half brother.

Chevie understood. What would she not do for one more day with her dad? One more shared bottle of orange cream soda?

Two straws, one bottle.

That had been their thing. Then a single spark in a leaky Harley gas tank, and it was all over.

One in a million, the highway-patrol cop who'd come to their little Malibu home had told her. *I ain't never seen nuthin' like it, miss.*

One in a million, thought Chevie now. Those kinds of odds seem to beat me all the time.

But back to the prison corridor: Tartan Nancy, deadly danger, and so on and so forth.

Nancy stormed ahead with the confident stride of the

powerful or the bluffer, and Chevie wanted to call after her:
Slow down. Don't be so eager.

For they had no way of knowing what awaited them in that room. Whoever this *Lurker* guy was, he wanted something from Riley, something worth turning down cold hard cash for. Chevie ran through possibilities while they walked.

An old enemy?

Maybe. One of Box's men?

No. Too soon to have set this up. Those guys are barely twenty-four hours out of the picture.

One of Garrick's victims?

No. Garrick's victims were precisely that. Victims. They weren't hunting down anyone, ever. Garrick was the man who had killed Jack the Ripper, for God's sake. Out of jealousy!

Another witness from the WARP program, then?

Possible. It seemed unlikely that someone from the future would care about some kid magician in the past, but *unlikely* was a term in which she was fast losing faith.

Chevie found her free hand patting the Timekey that hung around her neck, underneath her clothes. There hadn't been a peep out of it for days, doubtless broken by the various treks across London and a dunking in the city's delightful sewers, but if there was some *future* guy in that cell, it could be that this was his endgame: get hold of the key and destroy it.

Funny how nobody from the future wants to go back there. Except me.

But did she really?

I don't even know which future I would be going back to.

Social media and reality shows? Worldwide fascist empire?
Or some blend of the two, perhaps?

Whatever the future held, Chevie was determined to hold on to the key just in case she needed a way out.

If there's a portal to go in. If there's a pod at the other end.

It would take a dire situation to force her to jump into the wormhole with no sure way out, but she had to admit that dire situations were ten a penny in this century. It seemed to her that here all situations were dire, and all smells uniformly terrible. Even the sweet smells were infected by what they tried to mask.

Speaking of terrible smells, they had arrived at yet another door, which was even blacker than the first and seemed to be composed of gathered shadows. The door was guarded by one of the foulest-smelling beings that Chevie had ever been unfortunate enough to sniff. With her eyes closed, she would never have guessed he was human by his odor or the snuffling sound of his breathing. The sentry's uniform seemed to have been cannibalized from those of dead soldiers from various campaigns and was topped off with a ridiculous Napoleonic hat, which might have been comical in another setting.

"Broadband," said Nancy, saluting him with a dip of her pipe.

Chevie was surprised. Had Nancy just referred to this particular guard as "Broadband"?

Broadband acknowledged the pipe dip. "Back so soon, Nance. How's the wheedle?"

Nancy whistled through the gap in her teeth. “Slow connection today, Broadband.”

“Too many users,” said Broadband. “They is congestin’ and stuff.”

Chevie blinked. Were they messing with her brain, or was her brain messing with her?

“Broadband’s your name?” she asked, suspicious of a wind-up. “How come?”

Nancy answered, as if the guard was too slow to remember

He hasn't spoken, Chevie realized. Not since the outer corridor.

She glanced down at her friend. His pale face seemed to glow in the gloom, and the rough and tumble of the past few days had his hair sticking up in a hundred different ways.

Very Manga, thought Chevie. He's ahead of his time.

But, in spite of all the life experience crammed into his fourteen years, Riley seemed very much a small boy, squeezing her fingers and staring at the cell door.

What must be going through his head, now that he is finally about to be reunited with his only living relative?

In truth, the inside of Riley's head was all a-jumble, with images and emotions falling over one another, trying for the upper hand. It was more than his young head could process. At least Chevie knew about the future. At least she had some understanding of the past. Riley had been a wide-eyed ignoramus in the twenty-first century and now felt a stranger in his own time.

Ginger Tom will be my anchor was the thought that finally broke through the maelstrom in his head. It was a good, strong thought, and he began to murmur it under his breath.

Tartan Nancy raised her eyebrow at this but made no remark, for she was used to unusual behavior during the wheedle. One musty sea dog had taken to answering questions in the voice of a small girl, which had been most disconcerting.

2 » THE PRISON TERM

The cell door did not creak like a prison door might in a penny dreadful, for this particular door was well used, and the hinges were often greased with animal fat or lamp oil. This door opened into what might be called a *premium* cell, where the fate of special prisoners was decided. Previous occupants of the cell included a senior Romanov and even one of the House of Hanover, who had been led astray after a day at the races with a band of high-spirited Oxford chums and ended up in the hidey-hole.

But now the cell held plain old Ginger Tom Riley, and Nancy Grimes could not help but wonder what was so special about this debtor that a premium cell had been rented for the wheedling.

In the old days, she thought, a debtor like this common-as-muck cove would have been dumped in the Stone Hall.

The door yawned open, and there was a ghostly candle flicker on the wall that picked out soot-blackened masonry pitted by pocks and cracks. A sour smell oozed into the hallway: it was the odor of despair and persecution.

Either that, or damp.

Nancy went through first, as was the protocol, and next walked Chevie, with her fists tightly curled and ready for fight or flight. *Protect Riley* was her prime objective. Generally Riley was more than capable of protecting himself, trained as he had been in the martial arts of master assassin Albert Garrick, but today her friend was distracted and not in tip-top form.

An elephant could sneak up on him right now, Chevie realized, and moved to position herself as a shield between Riley and whatever was in that room.

What *was* in the room was primarily layers of shadows and darkness, which were barely disturbed by the flickering arrowhead of candlelight.

As the newcomers' eyes adjusted (some more slowly than others), they saw that their arrival brought the room's number of occupants to six, though one of the occupants had to be inferred from the rake of his boots, as not a detail of his actual person breached the wall of shadows beside the cage. Any sense of the hidden figure was gleaned from those boots, and from these came the impression that he was both rangy and spry—the first from the two-foot length of the knee-highs, and the second from their splayed stance.

These impressions were stored by Chevie but not Riley,

whose attention was utterly focused on the unfortunate prisoner in the cell's cage.

"Tom," he said. "Tom, it ain't really you. Could it be you?"

Riley was thinking that it could indeed be Tom. The prisoner certainly sported the copper mop of hair that Riley remembered, and the face seemed similar to the one he sometimes glimpsed in his dreams, though the features were veiled by grimed blood and distorted by terror.

Riley's own face must have shone with hope, for Nancy pinched the boy's arm, her eyes blazing a warning.

"Hold your nerve, boy," she whispered. "Or we lose this battle before a shot is fired."

Maccabee was the final person in the room.

Sir James Maccabee.

London's most feared attorney. The attorney who had made his name leading the crusade against the scourge of highwaymen almost half a century since. They said that Sir James had *stretched more necks than a turket.. T-h*

were on Tom, up and down his body and face, searching for clues. "Speak to me, Tommy," he pleaded. "Give me something to jog me memory. It's been so long, and I was so very little."

Maccabee laced his fingers, resting them on the prow of his belly, and in that stance it was easy to imagine him in chambers, sporting the powdered wig.

"No, sir," he said, his voice deep and rich but nervy like an actor's on opening night. "He may not speak until our business is concluded. This man is condemned as a debtor, and as such he has no right to life or any part of it until my client is satisfied. And I must say that bringing this young lady in here is hardly the perfect start to our business."

Nancy glared at Riley, a warning to hold his tongue; then she stepped forward, took a few puffs to demonstrate her calm, and launched into the wheedle.

"Come now, sir. We ain't heathens. We ain't in Scotland or the like. We is civilized Englishmen, God bless the queen, and so forth. We is in a negotiation here, ain't we? I brung the boy as you requested, and brought the lady as *he* requested. Now we must confirm whether or not the product is the genuine article, as it were, and not some fakery."

Maccabee glanced into the shadows before replying to this salvo. The man in shadow did not react visibly to the glance, not with so much as the twitch of a toe, but still Maccabee nodded rapidly as if he had received some orders.

"I am afraid, madam, that this negotiation will not be like the others you have previously, eh, *wheedled*. My master . . . that

is to say, my *employer* is not interested in your offer. He has terms, and they are absolute.”

Nancy puffed up a storm, which hung in the eaves like a thundercloud. “Terms, is it? Terms, now? We ain’t in the Bailey, Sir James. This here is a wheedle cell, and why for are we gathered here in the sight of God if not to wheedle?”

Maccabee licked his fleshy lips. “Please, Nancy, please. For all our sakes . . .”

The Lurker stamped the heel of one boot, and the darkness seemed to ripple. The meaning was clear: Maccabee had said too much.

Riley had only one ear on the conversation, and the rest of his senses were focused on the man in the cage. Tom had been a boy when they had last met, barely older than he himself was now. Over a decade it had been since they shared a room when Riley was but a tot.

Could this be Tom?

Was it him?

His heartstrings were being tugged, right enough. Perhaps his instincts knew what his brain could not fathom.

The Lurker’s boot stamp brought him fully back to the wheedle.

“Your Honor,” Riley said to Maccabee, “tell your employer to name his terms, for there must be more to it than seeing me stew in this foul place.”

Maccabee sat on a battered stool in the opposite corner to the Lurker. The stool wobbled and clunked on the uneven floor.

“There are terms,” he said. “That is to say, a term. One term, which is not open for haggle. You take it or you leave it, at your pleasure.”

Nancy spat on the floor. “Do my ears confound me? One term? No haggling? What class of a wheedle is this? Come you out of the shadows, Lurker, or must I drag you?”

Maccabee was upright so quickly that the stool toppled and the attorney himself staggered forward, off-balance.

“Quiet, woman,” he hissed, righting himself. “No talk of dragging. Do you want to see us all put under?”

There was a noise from the Lurker’s corner then—a dry rasp, like the sound a rusty blade might produce when dragged along a stone. The disconcerting noise may have been a cough or a chuckle from the throat of a disturbed man. Whatever its origin, the sound did nothing to calm Maccabee’s nerves.

“We must finish this business and be away from here,” he shouted. “We must conclude, I tell you.”

Nancy was vexed and confused. The advantage here should clearly be in her favor as her opponent was wound tighter than a clock spring, and yet she felt outmaneuvered. “Sir James Maccabee? That be you, am I right? The man that cleared the Great North Road?”

Maccabee had apparently suffered enough of Nancy’s impudence.

“Quiet, woman! Blast you!” he shouted, and for a moment the Old Bailey lion of legend asserted itself. “The single act that will secure the release of Thomas Riley from Newgate is as follows: one Riley for another. A simple trade.”

Nancy gawped, for this was a condition unlike anything she had heard in her three decades on the wheedle business.

Chevie filled the silence with outrage and blurted her first words since entering the chamber. "Okay. Enough with the garbage. We are so outta here."

A simple trio of sentences, but their effect was electric. Riley reacted instantly, backing away from Chevie as though she were the enemy.

"No, Chevie," he said. "No. This is a decision for me to make. Mine alone."

Nancy wasn't far behind. "No one leaves the chamber. Not till a deal is hammered. I ain't having no amateur-like walkouts on Nancy's watch."

But the most surprising reaction was from the Lurker. Surprising in that he reacted at all. Not that he was flinging himself about or bonking his head on the stonework, but, given that his sole contribution to the negotiations so far had been a tap of his boot and possibly a wry chuckle, it was surprising to see the boots withdraw entirely into the coal-black shadows with harsh scrapes at the sound of Chevie's anachronistic expressions. And even more startling was the sight of the Lurker's dark figure stretching to its full height, and a single hand emerging from the corner into the candlelight.

The slow-moving hand hypnotized the room's occupants and they watched it as they might the head of some poisonous snake. The pale hand was cuffed by velvet and fringed with long fingers, which quested through the dark as though seeking to pinch the echoes of Chevie's words. But then they stopped,

reconsidered, curled themselves under the shell of fist, and withdrew, leaving everyone spooked and none the wiser.

“Well,” said Nancy. “Well. That was a fine howjadoo, weren’t it?”

The man who might be Tom defied the order imposed upon him to remain mute. “Please,” he said. “In the name of mercy, please. I didn’t do nothing.”

“I’ll do it!” blurted Riley. “I accept. Him for me. A soul for a soul.”

Maccabee bolted across the room, almost stumbling in his haste, and grabbed Riley’s hand. “Agreed,” he said, and spat on the clasped hands to seal the deal, as he had heard once that this was how the lower classes conducted their business.

“A pox on you, Maccabee,” swore Nancy. “You shift yer-self plenty quick when the mood takes you.”

Maccabee sighed mightily, flapping his fleshy lips. “The deed is done, madam. The shake is shook.”

Normally Chevie prided herself on her quick reactions, but for a person raised in twenty-first-century America’s litigious society, this deal had been concluded in lightning fashion. There had been no haggling. No mock disbelief. No throwing of hands in the air. Just *bang, boom*, done. Shake, spit, and that’s all. Her friend had condemned himself to death.

“Oh no no no,” she said, as though admonishing a naughty group of children who had agreed to run off to Narnia together. “This isn’t happening on my watch. This deal smells so bad, I hardly know where to start.”

Riley was ready for the objections. “I know what you plan

to say, Chevie. It ain't really Tom, perhaps. Or we don't even know what he is accused of."

"Exactly," said Chevie. "And no offense to this so-called *Tom* guy, but I don't know him from Lady freaking Gaga. Not to mention the fact that we're all having our chains yanked by some creep in the corner. No, thank you. This stinks. We are vacating the premises. Elvis and his entourage are leaving the building."

Riley closed his eyes tight, as if he could shut out Chevie entirely. "I have no choice, my dear friend. None. There ain't no horns and no dilemma. If there is a single chance in a dozen that this is my kin, then I must take the chance. I must." Riley thought of a devastating argument and opened his eyes to present it. "Were this your father, Chevron, would you not do anything to save him?"

Chevie stepped back. That was a cruel argument to throw in her face, but Riley was right—she would do whatever it took to save her dad from pinwheeling his flaming Harley on the Pacific Coast Highway, including switching places with him. She would do it in a heartbeat and without guarantee.

Maccabee threw his eyes to heaven and his hands in the air. "It matters not. None of this. The deal is struck. Our hands shook, and that is both legal and final. Consult your wheedler if you doubt it."

Chevie turned to Nancy, who was fumbling with the makings of a smoke. "Is he right? Does the handshake do it?"

Nance spat on the floor, and not just a symbolic blobette of spittle: a weighty globule that would have drowned a cockroach.

“Yes, blast the pair of you. Yes, it seals it. And my reputation, too. Not one matchstick did I wheedle out of this do. Not a sausage.”

Maccabee seemed to be regaining his poise now that the deal was done. “You have gained more than you know, madam, believe me. For more was at stake than you could realize.”

Another noise from the shadows. Perhaps a grunt, perhaps a convulsive retch, then the ghostly hand reappeared, index finger ticking like a pendulum. The message was clear. *To business.*

“I agree with the Lurker’s finger,” said Nancy. “I am for finishing this bowl of tripe.” She banged on the door with the side of her fist. “Broadband, get yer carcass in here and open the box.”

There followed a full minute of clatter and rattle before Broadband stumbled inside, a weighty ring of keys dangling from his hands.

“Apologies for the delay,” he said, shamefaced. “Only sometimes I forgets which door is locked. Cos there are two doors and I know one is locked, only sometimes I forget which one, so I was endeavorin’ to unlock a door what was unlocked already, which is what delayed my arrival.”

The Lurker clapped from the shadows. It seemed he was now in fine form, but he was still not choosing to reveal himself or even speak.

Maccabee’s spirits were on the rise too. “What a capital fellow. Destined for the House of Commons, he is.”

Broadband was smart enough to know he was being mocked but also smart enough not to make a big deal of it, or

he might end up on the wrong side of a locked door himself.

“We is finished here, I takes it,” he said.

“Yes,” said Nancy. “A pox on this day and the memory of it, which I shall carry to my grave.”

Riley pulled Chevie into a corner diagonally opposite to the Lurker.

“I’m going into the box,” he whispered with some urgency. “Ain’t no avoiding that now.”

“You crazy kid,” hissed Chevie. “What’s going on in that thick head?”

“We ain’t got time now,” said Riley, his mouth close to her ear. “Seconds we got, is all. So listen careful. I got the tools for this door and the one outside, but then I’m stumped. Go to Otto Malarkey and ask him to clear a path for me to the wall. After that it’s cake, believe me. All I need is the moonlight and a smidge of luck, and I will float right out of this hellhole. Coves manage it every day, and none too smart ones, neither.”

Chevie nodded. “Okay. I got it, Riley. You mad fool. I’ll talk to Otto. I’ll drag him here if I have to—but once you’re out, what then? We don’t even know what’s going on here.”

Riley’s eyes flitted toward the darkness of the opposite corner. “One problem at a time. Dodge the rope, that’s my goal for the time being. Once that’s taken care of and Tom is safely stashed, then we can investigate this shady character and why my person is so important to him.”

Chevie felt as though events were leaving her behind. She had missed the bus by a fingertip and was now rushing to catch up. Her instincts screamed at her to take control of this room.

She was pretty sure she could subdue everyone in here, including the Lurker himself. But what then? Could she break them all out of Newgate? And, once on the outside, where could they go? Unless there was a time portal handy, they were stuck in Victorian London with the entire constabulary on their tails.

The damage was done, and she would have to make the best of it.

“Some bodyguard I turned out to be,” she said to Riley.

“I scuppered you myself,” the boy said. “I put me own head in the noose.”

Broadband had by this time got his keys in order and set about unlocking the cage, to the visible relief of the ginger prisoner, who was rattling the door, eager to be away.

“Hold yer powder there, convict,” grumbled the guard. “This lock is sensitive. It don’t open unless you approach it just right, and you is throwing me off me diddle.”

In spite of the guard’s moaning, the cage door sprang easily enough and swung open on its oiled hinges without creak or whine.

Tom smiled at last and then took to weeping, the sheer relief being too much for him.

Riley took his hand and led him out. “There now, brother. The ordeal is past. Miss Chevron here has a nice cot waiting for you, and a flask of cider to see you off to nod.”

Tom snuffled and said, “My thanks, mister. Thank you kindly. Bless you, mister.”

Mister? thought Chevie. A strange thing to call a brother.

Riley must have thought it too, for he said something, which may have been “Wait . . .”

But then it seemed as though time expanded somehow to allow for a greater concentration of events than it could usually accommodate. The Lurker was out of his corner with the speed of a flickering shadow and up behind the man called Tom before his image could settle upon the eyes. Then he had Tom by the throat and dragged him to the main door, barricading it with his own body. The shadows seemed to follow him, for he was still not entirely visible—there were just details that seemed not to stand still long enough for classification. Such as the four fingers now clamped round Tom’s neck. Thin, white fingers that shone like glow-worms. Fingers that were clearer now than they had been. The long, white fingers of a pianist.

Or an assassin.

In that instant Riley knew the truth, and all hope left his body with the huff of his breath.

The assassin has returned. Albert Garrick has cheated time and death.

Though he could see but fingers, there was not a doubt in Riley’s mind. He knew each nail and knuckle intimately from the many beatings he had endured over the years. How often had Albert Garrick lashed out in a rage? A thousand times over, surely. Most memorably on the occasions when Riley had attempted to flee from his cruel master. Many times those selfsame fingers had been the last things Riley had seen before sinking into the fog of concussion. He had nightmares about those fingers to this very day.

The digits had changed, it was true. They had turned pale and bore some new scar tissue; but Riley felt sure they belonged to the demon Albert Garrick. So certain was he that he blurted it out: "Garrick! Albert Garrick!" and in that instant he felt no fear for himself, only a cramping terror that Garrick would kill his brother for the sport of it.

Chevie, who had been moving obliquely to a flanking position, stopped in her tracks, as though petrified by the Medusa of legend.

"No," she whispered, and then with more force: "No!" She would not have it. "Garrick is dead."

Riley responded with even more force. "No, that devil is alive!"

And what happened next set Maccabee's heart, already laboring to pump his life's blood through arteries clogged by decades of rich living, into a fatal spasm. Because Albert Garrick's head appeared, like a macabre balloon, in the space above Ginger Tom's shoulder.

"Garrick is dead!" his head crowed, his face as pale as his hands. Like alabaster it was, except for the deep wrinkles around the eyes that might have been scrawled by slate pencil. Then he added, "Or perhaps he yet lives."

It seemed at first glance as though Garrick had been driven stark raving mad, with his face of stone and bloodcurdling shriek; but then Chevie saw that he was not mad but exultant. A man whose dreams have finally come true.

Broadband was a bit confused with all the happenings and stared at his fingers as though events could be counted

off. Eventually he said, "Eh?" This was his final word for some time as Garrick treated the single confused syllable as a threat and magicked a weighted club and hurled it at the prison guard, felling him where he stood.

For her part, Nancy, who talked for a living and had been in tight spots as a matter of course, straightened her pristine bonnet, cleared her throat, and chose her words with considerable caution. "Now then, Your Honor. Surely you ain't got no need for a wheedler no more. . . ."

Garrick did not speak to Tartan Nancy, simply treated her to a devil's glare, which was sufficient to send her stumbling backward as though pushed.

You stay right here, Nancy girl, she told herself. Keep yer back to the cell wall and p'raps you shall live to wheedle another day.

But she didn't believe this. She believed that the madman would slaughter them all with no more thought than a child squashing ants.

Maccabee did not trouble the cell with verbals or histrionics, but simply fell over dead, into the cage, as it happened, catching the barred door with a hand so that it swung and clunked behind him. Very neat.

How this could be was not really an issue, as it clearly *was*. This strange Garrick was certainly ghostly, but no ghost. The fist that held Tom aloft was skin and bone, albeit the first the color of the second.

The hand lifted Tom clear off the ground.

"Family!" Garrick screeched. "Family? Ain't it?"

Riley could do nothing.

All his nightmares had come true and were standing before him, holding his dream by the neck. He was nine years old again, lying in a West End gutter with Garrick's boot at his throat, waiting for the stamp that would crush his windpipe.

Chevie too was shaken to her core, but she was also trained, and she knew that a sudden attack while Garrick was focused on Riley and his vengeance could be their only chance.

She was wrong.

Chevie bent low and darted toward Garrick's kidney area, hoping to put her knuckles deep in the spongy tissue. Her Quantico instructor, Cord Vallicose, who was to become a woman in this reality (don't ask), had assured her that *there is not a man alive who can shake off a ruptured kidney*.

Perhaps Vallicose had been / would be right, but Chevie was not to confirm her instructor's maxim on this day, for her attack met with one of Garrick's blacker-than-black boots, which whipped up and stopped her dead in her tracks, leaving her with an indent in her skull that any fool could see was a fatal wound. She fell to the cold floor like a tossed sack of coal and went into alarming spasms.

"Chevie!" said Riley, and then: "Tom!"

"*Chevie!*" mimicked Garrick mockingly. "*Tom!*"

Riley wanted more than anything to weep. He wanted to fall to his knees and beg, but he knew from bitter experience that Garrick despised overt displays of weakness or emotion, and so he stood his ground and put together the most complex sentence he could in the circumstances.

"What do you want?"

Garrick laughed, delighted. "What do I want? No, that ain't it. That ain't the question. The question is, my son: what do *you* want?"

The assassin grinned like a naughty child, relishing his moment of vengeance. "To know your name, is it?" A curved Arabic blade appeared, curling around Tom's neck like the coil of a snake. "This fella here. Perhaps he knows your true name. Why don't you ask him?"

Riley did not, for he felt that to play Garrick's game meant death for Tom.

"ASK HIM!" roared Garrick, hamming it up for the imaginary stalls, and the blade jittered at Tom's neck, drawing a spurt of blood.

"Wh-what is my name?" Riley stammered, the choice taken from him.

But all Tom could say was, "Mercy. Mercy, please. I don't understand. I never even played cards with these gentlemen. I ain't no debtor. Being ginger ain't no crime."

Garrick was theatrically appalled. "You don't know my friend's name? Why, it's like you ain't even family. And if you ain't family, I don't have a use for you."

And without further ado he drew the curved Arabic blade crosswise, slicing his captive's throat, then dropped him like a slaughtered animal.

"Tom!" cried Riley, sinking to the floor beside the dying man, whose blood issued from his neck in a broad rippling sheet, drenching Riley's person in a second; and even as Riley tied one of his magician's scarves around Tom's neck, he knew

that it was futile. There was no help for Tom. The best thing for him with these injuries was a quick death, which would surely be granted.

“Damn you!” Riley swore. “Damn you to hell, Albert Garrick.”

Garrick’s face was serene. “You tried that, my boy. You sent me to hell, and now I have returned.”

Chevie flailed on the floor, blood leaking from one ear. Garrick noticed and affected a sad face. “Oh, it don’t look good for the Injun maiden, does it now? No, not good at all. I would rather have dragged it out a bit, given her part in my, what shall we call it, inconvenience? But Albert Garrick never did know his own strength, and I had forgotten the little vixen’s trademark bursts of speed. As a matter of fact, I had almost forgotten her entirely, believe it or not.”

Chatter and babble was all Riley heard, and even that at the back of his mind. Nothing was making sense to the lad. Tom was dying, perhaps dead already; and Chevie, his dear Chevie, was surely breathing her last.

“Oh,” he said or perhaps sobbed. “Oh . . . oh.”

Garrick seemed not to care whether Riley paid attention or not, so wrapped up was he in his moment.

“So, my plan in a nutshell,” he continued, “was to subject your traitorous person to the same pain that poor, betrayed Albert Garrick was subjected to.”

Chatter and babble. Babble and chatter.

Tom jerked on the cold floor and gave up the ghost entirely. Chevie was moaning with each breath.

“I took you in like a son. But you denied me a family, and so I am denying you a brother. First, however, and this was the genius of it”—Garrick twirled an imaginary mustache—“I made you beg for his life. I made you value it above your own. This made the killing all the sweeter, for you now realize, Riley, just how much this dead man meant to you.”

Garrick nudged Tom’s corpse with his toe. “And here’s the last nail in your coffin, my son. This bag of bones ain’t even Tom. You have doomed yourself for a stranger.”

Riley knew the meaning of each individual word but could not fathom their collective gist.

“It ain’t even Tom? Not Tom, then?”

Tom or not, there was a dead man on the cold floor, and Riley was drenched in his blood and the sour smell of it was in his nose.

And Chevie. Oh, poor Chevie.

Riley had seen an Irish tinker boy kicked by a donkey at the Islington market several years since. He had never forgotten the sight of the poor Gypsy lad all a-quiver in the mud, with his eyes rolled back till they were mostly white and his body racked by convulsions.

She will die horribly, like Tom who ain’t Tom. Two dead on my account.

Garrick gloated on. “How you are feeling at this precise moment, Riley, my boy, is unimaginable to most common folk. Lured to a foul pit by a master you had given up for dead. To have the gift of hope granted you, only to be snatched away just as sudden. And then for the awful realization that your

dear kin ain't nothing more than a patsy. A ringer, as it were. A common longshoreman stitched up on account of his ginger mop." Garrick smiled an uncommonly wide smile that was rarely seen, but which, when fully extended, bisected his head like a zipper. His ivoryed teeth were made all the more yellow by his unnatural pallor.

"Ain't you going to say anything?" said Garrick, his grin gone. "Just moping, is it? I must say, after all this time, all these centuries, I had dreamed up such an amount of lively conversations we would have. And now all I get for my trouble is a weeping boy. I am quite the disappointed fellow. In truth, I cannot fathom how you outfoxed me on the first go-round. But I was younger then. Now I am the Forever Man."

This was undeniably a decent villain's monologue, but it was all blah and blabber to Riley. Garrick could have been a huffing gorilla for all the sense the boy could put to his words. And, as for Chevie, she was beyond attaching sense to anything. Her automatic functions would keep her alive for another minute or so, but it was already too late for her brain. Her skull was fractured and leaking fluid like a cracked gin jug.

So fast it had happened. One boot-heel crack in the forehead, and she was a goner. After all the diverse scrapes and tumbles she had endured, to be done for almost casually was indeed cruel.

A thought formed in Riley's mind: *Chevie doesn't know what's happening. It's for the best.*

But he would not deal with this notion, would not even

glance sideways at it, for that would mean admitting that Chevie was dying.

As will I be presently.

Another thought. This one did not seem so important now. There was only one door in this room, and to leave through it meant passing Garrick, and that was inconceivable.

Oh, Chevie. Oh, Tom.

But not Tom. Who?

Riley was useless. Paralyzed by a flood of emotions, like an insect in a blob of resin. And, more than that, he was sure to be scarred emotionally beyond all hope of recovery if he did by some miracle walk out of this room.

But the universe was not yet done with unforeseen events. Riley would leave this room, but not through the door and not on his two feet.

Garrick stepped into the meager light and treated the stunned, silent Tartan Nancy to a wink.

“What say you, madam? For sheer melodrama? Top marks, surely. I once trod the boards, you know, all over this fair country. The Great Lombardi, they called me.” Garrick held up his palm, which fairly dripped with Tom/Not Tom’s blood. “Or perhaps you will remember my infamous moniker, the Red Glove.”

“Oh, Lord save us,” gibbered Nancy, and executed a strange combination of crossing herself and repetitive curtsying, shaken to her core by the mention of the murderous magician who most believed to be a mere theater legend from the penny

dreadfuls. But the Red Glove was as real as Jack the Ripper and, in fact, the former had done in the latter.

It was Garrick's habit to bow in a theatrical manner whenever the opportunity presented itself, as it transported him back to his theater days, which were centuries behind him in one way, and mere years in another. Garrick had always been inordinately proud of his stage bow, and he used to deliver weekly lectures to Riley on the importance of rigidity and sweep.

Fold yerself as clean as the queen's notepaper, Riley, my son, he would say.

And thunderheads would brew on Riley's brow and he would think: *I am not your son, devil.*

Garrick bowed now, prompted by Tartan Nancy's botched curtsy.

"At your service, madam," he said, which both the bow-er and the bowed-at knew was balderdash.

As Garrick silently counted to three, which was his rule for the low point of a bow, his nose passed close to Chevron Savano's chest, within a foot, perhaps. And something beeped.

Beeped, and then flashed.

Curious, thought Albert Garrick.

It was a strangely electronic beep for the nineteenth century. Unnatural and anachronistic—and yet it was familiar to Albert Garrick, and it evoked in him the darkest urges.

His blood-streaked fingers quested toward the flashing light that seemed to emanate from Chevie's heart.

A twist of lanyard glinted on Chevie's collarbone, and

Garrick hooked a thumb underneath it, pulling out the cord until a flashing teardrop-shaped charm appeared.

“God, no!” he shouted.

For he realized that this was no simple adornment; it was a cursed Timekey. Much like the one that had been used to dispatch him into the time tunnel.

It should not exist!

Garrick calmed himself. *The key is nothing without a pod. Just a lump of plastic.*

And I am protected by silver!

Garrick had discovered, quite accidentally, that the wormhole could not abide the element of silver. He could feel the time force’s pull waning, and sometimes actually recoiling, whenever he wore silver chains or bracelets, which was all the time since he had made the discovery—for the wormhole’s pull was like a cloud in his mind that stopped him thinking clearly and set his heart battering a tattoo inside his chest.

But there were quantum facts missing from Garrick’s argument. Things even Charles Smart had never known when he’d first entered the wormhole. For instance, once a body had been as thoroughly saturated with quantum foam as Garrick’s had, the wormhole did not need a pod to absorb him again. A Timekey would do the job just fine. And, while the wormhole could not take him while he wore silver, the Timekey was more than strong enough to trump the metal’s powers of repulsion.

The Timekey grew warm in Garrick’s hand, then hotter still, and the assassin was hypnotized by it. The last time

he had held a gadget like this one, the wormhole had taken him prisoner for nearly two and a half centuries. Garrick had believed himself in hell, such was his torment. He had barely survived with his wits intact and did not wish ever to repeat the experience.

Flee! he told himself, but it was too late. The device had activated, and Garrick's molecular structure was already bonded with the key's and there was no separating them on this plane. He felt that familiar draw, a sickening pull as the time tunnel welcomed him home. And, though it had been some two hundred and fifty years since he had regained his human form, Garrick remembered the sensation well, and the associated helplessness that went with it.

Not again! he thought, his ability to form simple thoughts being the only thing left to him. *I cannot survive it again.*

And then: *I never meant to hurt the dove, master.* Which was an unrelated memory from an unresolved childhood issue.

Riley, for his part, did not notice the Timekey's activation; he simply saw the assassin hunched over his fallen friend. The sight brought him around and sent him lurching toward Garrick.

"Leave her be!" he snarled. "Get away from her, you devil."

His attack was clumsy, and ordinarily Garrick could have casually swatted the youth away; but now reality was bending, and solid matter was phase-shifting to quantum foam.

How? wondered Garrick. There ain't no pod. There ain't no landing pad.

The truth was that none of the three would ever know

the *how* exactly, no more than the average human can ever truly understand how a bird can fly; but that did not change what was happening. A whirlwind rarely stops spinning to explain itself.

Riley's attack was successful in so much as he reached his target, but a failure in that he did not force Garrick away from Chevie. In fact, his lurch bunched them all together, so that when the orange quantum sparks surged from the Timekey's heart, all three were engulfed.

Garrick's limbs were already insubstantial. Riley saw his own arms dematerialize and could not believe they were once again being tumbled into the mouth of a time tunnel.

But where will we tumble out? he wondered. Or, more accurately, *when?*

Chevie thought nothing. In her mind, a photographer's flash had exploded and would not fade. In her head, she stared at the sun and began to go slowly mad.

In the last seconds before the three disappeared from the Newgate cell in a swarm of orange sparks, Riley could have sworn he heard Big Ben strike in the distance.

As a matter of fact, the sound came from inside the room.

"Pardon me, I'm sure," said Nancy, even though there was no one left to hear her.