

Chapter 1

Wynne Cantrell patted the lightweight helmet, switched the setting from Record to Play, and prepared to inspect her dream. Already, remembering, her excitement began to build. This one should make her agent grin his evil grin and rub his fingers together in the ageless gesture for counting money.

It was always strange, though, to relive her own dream without the specifics she had included. The helmets could record the ebb and flow of emotion with exquisite delicacy, but the capacity to capture full sensory detail remained out of reach. Instead of seeing her ex-lover, her customers would encounter a mysterious Other, imbued with the aura of forbidden fruit; they would find themselves in luxurious surroundings, but not necessarily the scarlet leather and shining dark wood of her dream decor. Where she had recreated specific implements and their various impacts, she could only be sure of conveying the surge of pain and pleasure intertwined, arousal and fulfillment.

How disappointed the researchers must have been at the limits of the technology! Wynne herself would no doubt be a good deal wealthier if she could market her visions more fully. But she was just as glad that she did not have to fine-tune the line between profit and privacy. The customers would fill in the blanks with their own subconscious imaginations—particularly if, as was recommended, they set the playback to begin when they entered their own REM sleep.

Even without that assistance, by the time the playback ended she was panting and twisting in her chair. She turned off the helmet, took two deep breaths, and stood up to stretch, the smile on her face fading as she turned her mind to the business of the day.

It was a good thing she could dream in this lucrative direction. All lucid dreamers had their strengths and weaknesses, scenes they could easily generate and others that would dissolve away despite their best efforts. Dreamers who could handle any kind of kink had a clear advantage.

If Hal and her lover had ever met, there was a chance Hal would sense familiarity in the man's dream analogue—but the issue was unlikely to arise. Twice a month, at most, he condescended to “see what she'd been up to.” And it had been some time since she attempted to interest him in any dream of intimacy.

What did it say about their marriage, that she could more easily share herself with strangers than with her husband?

She shook off the question and glanced at the latest industry news summary. She was engaged in an entirely new form of competition. On the one hand, performers of various kinds, from athletes to dancers to porn stars, were busily recording their actual experiences. On the other team: the few dreamers like her, striving to outdo mere reality with the vigor and creativity of their imaginations.

(And then there were those other recordings, with their grimmer purpose. Justified, cruel, or both? Well, no one was asking her.)

She had better get dressed. It didn't much matter what she wore to meet with her agent, so she could concentrate on how she wanted to appear at lunch with Hal. She would not aim at an obviously enticing look: Hal responded poorly to the obvious, let alone the desperate. But she knew well enough, by now, what colors and shapes would spark his interest.

Luck was with her: she finished with her agent in plenty of time, and the subway came roaring up almost as soon as she reached the platform. Wynne reached Cardinem Square almost ten minutes before Hal was supposed to show. It was a perfect day for relaxing by the fountain: the water catching the sunlight, with the occasional fleeting rainbow in the spray, and just enough breeze that a few errant drops touched her, but not enough to be a bother. She sat on the low stone wall surrounding the fountain with her legs crossed, facing the sculpture from which the water leapt in a nested series of arcs. Nearby, a woman her age, or perhaps younger, held a toddler around the waist while the child reached out to feel the spray, squealing in delight whenever the water reached him.

The fountain was one of her favorites of Hal's pieces. When his submission won the contest, she'd been over the moon, not only because it meant money and recognition for Hal, but because she knew that she'd be able to see the work in situ, often and easily.

The week after the sculpture was installed and the water turned on, she had had a dream—a spontaneous one, not controlled—that the fountain's long, branching arms had grown long, graceful hands, their bronze fingers reaching out to her and beckoning her in. She had held hands with the sculpture, then climbed to the top of the fountain, with the water—sparkling like champagne, refreshing but not cold—dancing over and around her. She had dreamed it again, on purpose, quite a few times since then—and had offered to record it for Hal, despite the lesser level of detail he'd be able to experience. Predictably, Hal had shown little interest.

She had time to relax for a bit, and enjoy the warmth of the early May sunshine. She stretched her legs out on the wall, leaned back on her hands, and closed her eyes.

Some while later, the ache in her arms roused her from her almost meditative state and reminded her of the time that must have passed. She checked, then sighed. Hal was late again. But only a few minutes. She would wait a little longer before trying to reach him. The restaurant was a few blocks away—would they have time to get there and eat before Hal would want to return to his studio?

She checked the time again. She had better call. She reached for her phone, rolling her eyes.

And then the world exploded.

Chapter 2

Hal Wakeman looked at the model on the table and grinned. He loved this idea. He had always marveled at the unexpected beauty of buildings in mid-demolition, the ever-shifting shapes as the rubble descended. But it had never occurred to him before that he could hearken back, in his art, to the days when he had destroyed—carefully, expertly, benignly — instead of created.

Would strangers, those who neither knew nor cared about his background, perceive the origin of these straight and curving lines, this towering and crumbling structure? Well, he had revealed as much in an interview or two, if anyone bothered to read them. Hal glanced at his monitor, still displaying the latest story. Of course they'd eaten up the father/son angle: the father builds skyscrapers, the son used to obliterate them. He hadn't tried to convince them it was coincidence. (And Wynne had never accepted that it really was a coincidence. She kept hinting that he'd been trying to goad his father in some way, or even hurt him. Why did women see drama wherever they looked?)

The photographer had taken the theme and run with it: the portrait of Hal had an intense, wild-eyed look. (Maybe he'd spooked the fellow by commenting that he sometimes missed the noise: the first explosions, then the even louder second series, then the anticlimactic but sensuous hissing as the building collapsed. . . .)

If only the structure could be larger, towering over the observer, almost as a building would have done. Perhaps he could sell the committee on an expansion.

Damn! He'd lost track of the time again. If he didn't hurry, or even if he did, he would be late meeting Wynne. She was used to it, but in the barely patient manner of long-suffering spouses.

Hal checked his pockets for keys and phone and ran out the door, thundering down the stairs rather than waiting for the elevator. Hitting the street, he raced toward the subway entrance, taking deep breaths of the crisp spring air as he ran. It had turned out a splendid day, a gift of a day. Maybe after lunch, he and Wynne would take a walk around the city. He would listen to her describing her latest dreams, and she would indulge him as he imagined how long it would take to bring this or that proud building tumbling down.

As he ran up the steps toward the subway exit, a phalanx of police—riot police or something of the sort, with shiny plastic body armor and tall transparent shields—converged on the exit. Unless he moved quickly, they would prevent his leaving. Wynne had been kept waiting long enough without that. But there could be some dangerous situation in the street, from which these officious Myrmidons genuinely sought to protect him.

As he neared the top of the stairs, one of the officers reached out an arm to block him. "Where do you think *you're* going?"

Well, that didn't sound like someone especially concerned for his safety. To hell with that attitude! He ducked around the fellow and darted out into the street, ignoring the shouts behind him.

But in a moment, he skidded to a stop, mouth frozen open in a gape of disbelief.

The bomb must have been hidden inside the fountain.

The van rounded the corner, wheels screeching, throwing the rookie against the window, and he caught his first glimpse of the devastation. The bronze sculpture at the center, always abstract, had become a nightmare vision of itself, twisting off in every direction, reaching jagged claws toward the chaos around it. The debris of the fountain was littered with an incongruously colorful array of other objects—water bottles, bits of clothing, toys—that had been sucked back toward the center by the vacuum after the blast.

The van pulled up and the driver flung open the door. The rookie shrank back as the wailing and screaming hit him at full volume. A moment later came the odors: the sharp bite of explosive mingled with a stench that might be burnt hair and clothing, and a smell like roasted meat that could only be burnt flesh. And all around lay sprawled and writhing bodies, pools of blood, severed limbs.

For a moment the rookie stood paralyzed, as all around him the more experienced record techs spilled out of the van and got to work. Then, just as they had told him would happen, his training kicked in. He grabbed a case of helmets and looked around. Right away he noticed and tried to ignore the explosive ordnance disposal techs, sweeping the scene for additional bombs. They would do their job; he had his own.

Highest priority were those victims still conscious, yet grievously wounded. The most potent experiences would occur before the emergency medical personnel reached the victim, and he was not allowed to apply the helmet without an EMT or paramedic present—but if he acted quickly, he could get a helmet on before any pain medication kicked in. And the new helmets were supposed to be able to grab a few minutes' worth of short-term memory.

He needed someone to follow. There were dozens of EMT's and paramedics on the scene, some doing triage, some tending to those victims already tagged as most urgently in need of help. Close to him lay a woman whose shoulder bore the painted symbol for Second Tier: seriously injured, but likely to survive a few minutes while the First Tier received stabilizing treatment. She would have been given pain medication a while ago. That would not do for his purpose. He trotted over to one of the workers. "Recording team, here and ready. I'm—"

The woman snorted and turned away, the sound and movement eloquently conveying both anger and contempt. "Vulture squad. Just what we needed."

"I'll try to stay out of your way."

"The hell you will. You'll be grabbing at the victims over my shoulder, shoving helmets on their heads."

He should have expected this attitude. The police were used to working with recording techs, who hung back until a path to the victim was secure and then rushed in. EMT's most often dealt with trauma that had no human cause. Unlike the police, they did not normally view themselves as adjuncts to the criminal justice system.

The rookie's supervisor chose that moment to appear. The rookie wasn't sure whether to be relieved: he could use the backup, but he doubted he cut an impressive and competent figure just now.

"Any problems?"

The EMT glared at the new arrival with impressive scorn. "You know exactly what

the problem is, but let's stop wasting time." She hurried toward a man—well, more of a boy—lying a few yards away, clutching his leg. His thigh. It wasn't a leg any more, not all of one. The boy seemed to be in the process of regaining consciousness.

The supervisor dug his elbow into the rookie's ribs and hissed in his ear. "Get on it! He's about to realize what's happened to him."

The rookie gaped. "But when they're conscious, we're supposed to try to get consent first—"

"There's no time! We've got to catch the moment when he knows his leg is gone! A memory won't be as vivid—*move!*"

The rookie jumped, then scurried over to the boy, approaching him from the side opposite where the EMT was kneeling. He looked quickly at the helmets, grabbed one the right size, then made himself stop and breathe. It was a good thing the helmets were shaped as they were—he could apply one without taking the risk of lifting the boy's head. As gently as he could, he seated the helmet across the boy's forehead and hit "Record". Then he clambered to his feet and stepped back. The EMT's jaw dropped in shock. "What the hell are you doing?"

The boy reclaimed the EMT's attention by moaning and muttering something the rookie couldn't hear. Then came the moment the supervisor had anticipated. The boy struggled up onto one elbow and looked down at himself. Even from the distance to which the rookie had retreated, he could see the boy go pale. "What—did—my leg! My leg!" He turned and gripped the tech hard with one shaking hand. "Can you—is it here, can you find it, can you fix it?"

The rookie turned toward his supervisor, who was almost rubbing his hands in satisfaction. Of course, it wasn't what it might seem to an ignorant observer. Neither of them was some kind of sadist. They were here to ensure that when the police caught the son of a bitch who had planted the bomb, the bomber could be made to live through something close to the agony he'd caused.

And knowing you'd lost a leg—that was horrible. The victim was just a kid, the age the rookie had been when he was playing high school football. And now? If he was lucky, maybe they'd be able to grow him a new leg, but legs took years, even when everything went well. The kid wouldn't be whole until long after his football, or whatever, days were over.

Suddenly the supervisor's expression changed. "What the—get over there and switch it off!"

The rookie's head whipped back toward the boy. He had collapsed, and the EMT was cursing under her breath, unpacking a portable defibrillator, checking around the boy, applying the device. The rookie froze. If he followed that order, if he went anywhere near the boy, he might somehow be responsible for what was about to happen.

In a few minutes, it was over. He might not have known, even watching the boy shudder, and shudder again, and then slump in final relaxation; but the EMT's body language told the story. The boy had died.

Had died, with the helmet on "record."

The rookie looked back at his supervisor. The older man was shaking his head heavily from side to side. "Well, now, don't we have the hot potato on our hands."

At police headquarters, all was chaos. Crackling radios, phones buzzing or ringing, screens muttering on multiple channels, people constantly in and out with more and more information: the growing list of identified casualties, the status of clearing buildings which might be structurally compromised, sightings of suspicious persons, sightings of suspicious planes and spacecraft

Arthur Kellic granted himself a moment to rest his face in his hands. It was a mistake: now he could tell just how exhausted he was, how his shoulders ached from immobility and tension. And there, waiting, were the feelings he had no time for: horror, rage, grief.

What had they done to his city? Who had done it, and how would he catch them?

Arthur straightened up and looked around to see who might be awaiting his attention. His assistant Hannah hovered in the doorway; he waved her over.

“Boss, something’s come up with the vultures. They’ve picked up something they weren’t supposed to.”

Arthur frowned. “You know I don’t like that label.” The recording technicians might be a nuisance for police and medical, but Arthur thoroughly approved of the idea. What better punishment than inflicting the very same suffering that the perp had caused? Without the barbarity of an eye for an eye, the criminal could learn firsthand how it felt to be blinded.

Hannah shrugged. “Whatever. One of them recorded a death.”

Arthur whistled. “Hoo, boy. Are the press on it yet?”

“Not yet. But you know they’ll get hold of it soon enough.”

“Where’s the recording? I want it locked up tight. No one makes a copy, no one gets near it, until we have instructions.”

Hannah nodded and threaded her way back through the desks and people toward her own station. A phone buzzed while she was still en route; Arthur looked for anyone likely to answer it, shrugged, and picked it up. “Senior Detective Kellic here.”

“Sir, we’ve detained someone who tried to evade the patrol near the subway.”

“Trying to get out, or get in?”

“Out. Should we hold onto him or cut him loose?”

“Anyone we know? Does he have a sheet?”

“No, but I ran him through the database, and I came up with something. He’s some sort of artist now, but he used to bring down buildings. With explosives.”

Arthur found he was clutching the phone so hard that the edges hurt his hand. “Harold Wakeman.”

“Yeah, that’s the guy! What’s the story?”

“Just hang onto him. I’ll be there as soon as I can.” Arthur hung up and put the phone down, carefully, so as not to drop it. He looked around. “Who’s got the latest casualty list? Send it to me.”

He opened the file, willing his hands not to shake, and scrolled down. The names were going by too fast; he made himself slow down. Had she been at the site?

And there it was. Status critical, traumatic amputation of one hand, extensive reconstruction necessary.

Wynne.

And Hal—the rival, the victor—caught in the thick of it, trying to get away from the

police.

What had that bastard done?

Arthur sat in the Director's office as the Director studied images of the wreckage, trying not to fidget. He could just as easily have made this report by phone, but the Director sometimes preferred, according to no rule or pattern that Arthur could identify, to have his subordinates appear in person. He would lean slightly forward in his expensive office chair, his hands just barely resting on the desk, and peer at one as if examining a bacterium through a microscope; or he might inhale, slowly and deliberately, and then sit back and smile. But however eccentric, the man was more competent and efficient than many a superior with whom Arthur had had to cope in his career.

"So you already have a suspect?"

"A person of interest, at least." Arthur handed his tablet to the Director, pointing toward the top. "Harold Wakeman, the husband of one of the victims."

The Director raised both eyebrows. "Looking first to the victim's nearest and dearest seems somewhat less appropriate when the victim is one of many. Where the others merely thrown in for good measure? How very heartless."

Arthur couldn't help but frown. "Fourteen people dead. Dozens more burned or maimed or both. Heartless enough, whatever the motive."

The Director scrolled through Arthur's notes, nodding a few times. Then he put down the tablet, picked up a marble paperweight, and stroked its smooth surface. "And what motive do you propose for Mr. Wakeman? Was the bombing an artistic exercise of some kind? An experiment in the aesthetics of destruction?"

It sounded so implausible, stated like that. But to his surprise, the Director gave him back the tablet and gestured toward the door. "One never knows how the artistic temperament will express itself, Mr. Kellic. Carry on."

Interlude

The pop-up ad read:

“YOUNG—FOREVER

“Nothing feels like youth.

“You who are young cannot yet appreciate your youth. The humming in the blood, the tautness of skin, the spring in the step, the sharpness of perception are bestowed on us for far too short a time. In later years, only a wisp of scent or a scrap of song can revive for a moment the sensation of youth—and then it passes, beyond recall.

“But now, you can capture these sensations forever!

“Our studios provide a wide variety of activities to ensure your full enjoyment of your youthful vigor and vitality.* (*Parental consent required for customers under eighteen.) Record any or all, for a single one-time fee! Then, take your recording with you—or entrust it to our secure storage facility, where we will keep it safe, through the years, for you to enjoy again and again.

“Helmets available for an additional charge.

“Parents, what better graduation present could you possibly give your proud young graduates? Special rates available through May 31st. Helmets available in all local school colors. Call now!”

Chapter 3

The lawyer—what was his name? Pavel something—stared at Hal as if Hal were an exotic and dangerous creature. God knows what the man had been told. The tale must have been hair-raising indeed to overcome the well-earned sangfroid of someone who dealt with criminals for a living.

It was a discouraging beginning, but he had no one else to ask. The police and jailers had all refused to acknowledge his questions, let alone answer them. “My wife—*she was in the plaza!* Is she all right?”

The lawyer’s eyebrow twitched, as if he had expected some other initial question. He brought out his tablet and poked at it, then scrolled down some document. “She’s on the list of those you’re charged with killing and injuring—”

Hal’s head swam. He clutched the side of the hard metal chair, willing himself not to vomit. “And? Which? Is she—is she alive?”

“I’ll have to check, and that may take a while. Let’s talk a bit about your defense first—”

“I’m not talking about anything until I know what’s happened to Wynne!”

The lawyer heaved an aggrieved sigh, then retreated into a corner and made a phone call, muttering almost inaudibly. Hal did not try to follow the half-heard conversation. He felt somehow detached from his own terror, observing it with interest as he experienced it. What medium, what forms, would translate this emotion into tangible art? How could he make the observer share some dim reflection of it?

Finally the lawyer hung up and turned to him. “She’s alive, but she’s in pretty bad shape. Assuming she pulls through, she—”

“Assuming? What kind of —” Hal did not finish. If his lawyer thought him guilty of mass slaughter and mayhem, he could hardly expect him to have tender sensibilities.

But something in Hal’s tone or body language seemed to have gotten through to the man: his face, for the first time, showed something like sympathy. “I think she’s expected to make it.”

Hal slumped backward, the relief leaving him almost as nauseated as the initial suspense.

The lawyer went on. “She’ll need a lot of reconstructive surgery. And—I’m sorry, but she’s lost a hand.”

Hal was seized with a sensory memory of Wynne’s hand lightly tracing the contours of his face. Her hand. Was that the hand that someone had blown into pulp? And they thought he’d done it. Who, why, how could they think that? “Why did they arrest me?”

The lawyer consulted his files again. “Well, you were there. Sort of. And you evaded the police. And then they found out about your background—explosives and all that.” He paused. “There’s a note in the file from some higher-up. Arthur Kellic. He seems to have taken charge of your case personally.”

Of course. Arthur. The man must be delighted—oh, horrified, of course, but delighted as well—to have some excuse for hating Hal’s guts, after all this time.

Hal was well and truly fucked.

The lawyer looked as if he agreed with that assessment. He shifted uneasily in his own chair. “Look, Mr. Wakeman. I’m not a complete novice, but I haven’t handled very many serious felony cases, and only one murder case. I’m not sure why you chose to call

me—”

“I needed someone in a hurry. And they wouldn’t let me look up any names.” The anger welled up again, a welcome respite from panic and grief. “They have an old wall phone for the prisoners to use, and someone scratched your name and number on the wall—so I figured I’d start with you and see how we got on.”

“Mr. Wakeman, I’m not saying I won’t take the case, but I’m not sure you should hire me. You’re kind of famous, right? Couldn’t you afford some big-name private lawyer, someone who’s got staff and backup and a bunch of major trials under his belt? It might not make that much difference, the way these cases go. Still, you’d have a better shot.”

Hal tried to remember the details of his latest bank statement. He had been planning to rent a larger, better equipped studio, and had been saving for the deposit. But—“Wynne lost a hand.”

“I’m afraid so.”

Their health coverage would cover most of the cost of a prosthetic, nothing more. Regeneration cost much more—“an arm and a leg,” as some wit had put it. If he used his savings and bonds and retirement account, and hocked his propane furnace, Wynne could maybe get her hand back. But not if he blew all their money on legal fees.

If he’d met Wynne on schedule, if he hadn’t figured keeping her waiting was no big deal, then Wynne—both of them—might well have been safely away by the time the bomb went off. She would have been safe.

“If I’d been there on time, she’d still have her hand. I’m damned if I’m going to keep her from getting it back.”

He did not realize he had spoken aloud, until the attorney responded with a long, whistling sigh. “Damned? That’s not too far from what may happen to you. You may get a chance to visit hell.”

“I want to see Wynne.” Having said as much, Hal realized how intensely, how frantically, he needed to see her, to hold her hand—oh, my God, which hand?—and tell her he loved her, whether or not she could hear.

“No way they’re going to allow that.”

Finally, belatedly, Hal found that he was crying. “Please. Please check. I’ll talk to them; I’ll do whatever they want. Please try.”

The lawyer shook his head vigorously. “No, you won’t.” Then his disapproving expression turned sly. “But I might be able to hint at some sort of cooperation and see if it gets us anywhere. You’re already in enough trouble that it can’t make things much worse if we disappoint them afterward.”

Hal finally did laugh, a short bark. “Good enough.”

As they rode to the hospital, the lawyer kept muttering. “There’s something going on. I don’t think I fooled anyone, but they’re letting you see her anyway. They want something.”

Hal looked over at the guards accompanying them. “Should we be talking?”

The lawyer shrugged. “I haven’t said anything that matters. Don’t you.”

Wynne still looked tall.

It was an absurd thought, to be sure. But weren't patients in hospital beds, surrounded by machinery, supposed to seem smaller? Wynne still came near to meeting the ends of the bed. He felt a stirring of pride in her.

She was unconscious. The lighting had an odd purplish cast—Hal vaguely remembered something about lighting with antibacterial properties—that gave Wynne's face a cold, lifeless quality. Even her dark red hair, the locks that showed, looked maroon. But a reassuring steady beep came from the monitor, as various incomprehensible jagged or wavy lines scrolled continually from left to right.

There was no one by the bed. Why was she all alone? Her parents might not be able to afford the trip, even in this extremity: they would be keeping track of her progress and waiting in desperate hope for the chance to communicate long-distance. But Wynne's sister should be there. Or did she even know? He had had no chance to call her.

Hal could smell nothing but the aggressive reek of cleaning chemicals. A craving for Wynne's own scent, her natural blend of musk, lemon and cinnamon, swept over him. He tried to approach the bed, but a nurse and one of the guards converged, the nurse blocking the way, the guard grabbing his shoulder and yanking him back. He tensed, then backed up in the direction of the guard's pull, waiting with clenched teeth until the guard released him.

Hal turned to his lawyer. "How long can I stay?"

A voice came from the doorway. "That depends."

Hal turned to see Arthur Kellic lounging against the door frame, inspecting him as if were some poisonous but intriguing specimen.

"If you really want to stay a while, that can be arranged. If you cooperate."

Hal opened his mouth; his lawyer dug an elbow into his ribs, presumably to silence him. "My client has no statement to make at this time."

Arthur sneered. "Of course. But he doesn't need to say a thing. We just want to put a helmet on him. With his wife's activities, surely he's accustomed to helmets."

Hal kept staring at Wynne. "I want to stay. If I let you, will you let me stay? And get closer to her? Touch her?"

The lawyer interposed himself between Arthur and Hal, herding Hal into the far corner of the room. "No way, no how. We don't know what those recordings can be made to yield. A week or a month or a year from now, they may turn out to have all sorts of information no one can read today."

"But—"

"That thing records feelings! Can you tell me you don't have any feelings someone could use against you? Or could twist into damaging evidence? Hell, they could find someone to lie about what they recorded, and who'd be able to contradict it? Some 'expert' who doesn't know any more than the cop's tame scientist?"

Hal cast a despairing glance toward Wynne's motionless form. The nurse, who had been hovering protectively by the bed, saw his face; her glare softened into a sort of wary sympathy. Quietly, as though Wynne were capable of being disturbed by louder speech, she said, "I don't think she'll be conscious for some hours yet."

Hal slumped, fighting to stand at all, utterly drained. His lawyer came and took his arm. "We'll be going now."

"Please—can I kiss her?"

No one even bothered to answer him. He swallowed tears once again as the lawyer,

flanked by the alert and suspicious guards, led him away.

Tertius Shaw pondered the latest news as he squeezed his morning orange juice. Naturally, in the absence of the actual perpetrator it was necessary to produce a scapegoat—and it seemed one had already been found. Mr. Wakeman should be flattered to be named the author of so dramatic an event.

Tertius finished squeezing the juice and carried the glass to his breakfast nook. The sunlight streaming in backlit the juice; he relished its intense orange color. The toaster oven pinged as he set down the glass. Tertius extracted the bagel, slathered on a liberal portion of truffle-infused cream cheese, and settled in to enjoy himself.

Was it too soon to plan his next project? He may as well begin. He could stretch out the early phases as much as he liked, let the populace relax somewhat before jerking the chain once again.

Tertius took a judiciously sized bite of his bagel and washed it down with the tart, tangy juice.

What a very lovely morning it was!

“The problem is, you could have set it up ahead of time—even way ahead, when you installed the sculpture. So it doesn’t matter how many alibis you have: you’re bound to have some time unaccounted for. . . .”

Hal listened to his lawyer tell him all the ways he was up the proverbial creek. It didn’t sound as if they had many paddles available.

“You haven’t been spending much time with people as a couple, so we’re short on current character witnesses—at least, favorable ones. The prosecution seems to have dug up a couple of their own. And we’re stuck with the new anti-terrorism procedures, so we can’t file a motion for change of venue to a different county, or get a continuance until Wynne is able to testify.”

Somehow, despite the noose contracting around him, he found time to mourn the destruction of the fountain. It had been his biggest public contract, at the time—a real game-changer, a paradigm shift for his career as an artist. And Wynne liked it so much. . . . That dream of hers, the one she tried to describe to him: he had the thoroughly irrational conviction that if only he had shown interest in the dream and let her try to share it with him, then maybe they could have joined together somehow to protect the sculpture. He had abandoned it spiritually, and Wynne was too weak to protect it on her own. . . .

Was Bitsy feeling abandoned? They had never boarded her before. He had forgotten about her for hours after his arrest: she must have been horribly bewildered, with dinnertime passing unheeded, her water bowl empty, no one heeding her whines When he finally remembered, only the luck of a dog-loving jailer had allowed Hal to arrange for his father to go and fetch her. (Fetch. Ha ha.) Was his father up to taking care of her? What havoc might she wreak, without walks and games to exhaust her energy, and how would his father respond? . . .

“From their witness list, it’s hard to tell whether they’re saying you tried to kill your

wife, or whether you were making some twisted artistic statement, or both."

The first few times the idea had been mentioned, he had erupted, turning his fury on the hapless messenger, even lunging toward the lawyer on one occasion. But now, the accusation that he had meant to cripple or kill his wife could barely rouse him from dazed lethargy.

He had to stop drifting like this. He had to do something to help his lawyer, to help himself. But only this strange detachment, like a ringing in his ears blocking out unwelcome noises, kept him from unendurable terror.

Nothing made sense; nothing was as it should be. Wynne kept trying to awaken from dreams, only to find she had been awake already; or she believed she was awake, and proved to be dreaming. Waking and dreaming were more alike than they had ever been: in this place, she could control neither.

She had seen a child, a child with its mother, and everything around them had been bright and joyful, and then something terrible had happened. What had happened? Where was the child, and where the mother?

She closed her eyes and tried to dream that she was well and whole; without pain, with Hal. She almost achieved it, but it all fell apart again, swept away in dust and noise and fire.

Could she possibly have used her hands in dreaming? It seemed so unlikely; but a part of her was missing, and at the same time, another essential part of her was gone or broken.

She worried about Hal. Something must be wrong. If not, he would be here. He might, perhaps, have found some way to suggest that this was really her fault, at least a little; but he would be here. She had a dim sort of notion that he had been, at least once, but it might have been just another muddled dream.

Could he have been caught in the explosion, perhaps hurrying up to meet her just as the bomb went off? Was he somewhere in this hospital, alone like her, needing her as she was needing him?

Wynne became aware that she was awake, and that not far away, people were talking. She could feel the pain waking as well, and if she had some way to summon a nurse, she could not find it. Were those nurses talking, and how far away were they, and could she find the strength to make a noise?

Then she caught a fragment of what one of them was saying—or had she misheard? Had the nurse said Hal's name? She strained to hear more, even as the buzzing of an electric wheelchair in the hall, and then the rattling of a cart, intermittently obscured the words.

"... believe he would . . . his own . . ."

" . . . what's coming to him . . . know what it feels . . ."

She managed to force an ugly, honking call of distress. The gossiping ended abruptly; a nurse came hurrying over. "You poor dear! It's time for your medication again, isn't it? Here, I'll run and get it." She moved away again before Wynne could begin to form a question; but as she passed the other nurse, she murmured something and

shook her head.

Wynne must have misunderstood. It had sounded as if they were blaming Hal for the explosion. No one could have thought such a thing! Or maybe none of this was happening. Maybe it was a nightmare. But she never had nightmares.

And then the nurse was back with an injector, and sleep flooded over Wynne again, a blanket of sleep too thick for dreams.