

Sweet Lorraine / Now You See It

By Jane Tesh

The voice on the telephone was childlike and frightened.

“Jonathan?”

It took him a few seconds to get fully awake. A glance at the bedside clock told him it was almost three in the morning. Who in the world was calling, and why did she sound so scared?

“Yes?” he said. “Hello? Are you there? What’s wrong?”

The voice quavered. “Jonathan, it’s me, Shelley. I’m over at Theo’s. You’ve got to come right away.”

“What’s the matter?” he asked worriedly, pushing the bedcovers aside.

“I-I can’t explain on the phone,” she said. “Just please hurry.”

“Yes, of course. On my way,” he said.

As he hurriedly dressed and pulled on his shoes, Jonathan speculated on what could have happened. Shelley was one of Theo’s brightest trainees and had assisted him and Benedek on several cases. Although she looked and sounded like a vague, off-center teen, she was actually a bright young woman with a genuine talent for Goldberg’s unorthodox brand of science.

Theo’s probably turned himself green, and Shelley wants me to help return him to his normal color, Jonathan thought as he hurried out the door.

Theo’s small stucco house was, as usual, crowded with odd instruments, bags of odd-smelling plants, and enough tubes and beakers to stock the Georgetown Institute science department. Jonathan brushed aside the dangling roots and drying herbs and went past the cluttered counter.

“Shelley?”

“Here,” she called.

Jonathan looked around cautiously. “Where?”

“Here,” said a voice so near his ear, he jumped. “Sorry,” said the voice.

“Where are you?” Jonathan demanded.

“I’m right in front of you,” said Shelley’s voice.

Irritated, Jonathan said, “Shelley, it’s three in the morning, and I’m in no mood for games.”

“It isn’t a game,” the voice said tearfully. “I’m right here, but you can’t see me. I’m invisible.”

“Invisible!” he echoed. “That’s impossible.”

“It’s true,” she insisted. “I was working on some transparency experiments, to see if I could reconfigure the density of ore samples, and something must have backfired.”

Jonathan kept staring in the direction of the voice. He couldn’t see anything except Theo’s bizarre contraptions. Was the girl hiding in another room and using some sort of hidden microphone? “Shelley, I can’t believe you’re invisible,” he said.

There was a gusty sigh that ruffled his hair. “You have on gray slacks, a white shirt, and a grey sweater, inside out,” she said. “You also have on two different shoes.”

"I was in a hur--" he stopped, staring at the empty space before him. "Where are you right now?"

He felt a light touch on his arm. "Jonathan, I'm scared," said the voice. "Theo won't be back until Friday. What am I going to do? What if he can't get me back?"

Jonathan's hand closed over a real, warm, and completely invisible hand. My God. She really was here. Or wasn't here. "We'll think of something," he said.

"Is Benny around?" Shelley asked.

"He had some sort of party to attend this evening," said Jonathan. He glanced at the Felix the Cat clock on the wall, hanging askew, eyes moving back and forth. "I'm sure it's still in full swing." He kept the invisible hand in his. "Come on. We'll go to my place and see if we can reach him." He had serious doubts that Benedek could bring Shelley back into view, but then, his partner often surprised him with an arcane talent or two. More likely, Benedek had an outlandish friend who knew the cure.

This is going to cost me, he thought as he escorted the transparent Shelley out the door.

The girl was slender and seductive with dark hair and eyes of a rich green jade. Edgar Benedek was quite certain he had never seen her before. Who could forget such a come-hither smile? But the young woman greeted him so delightedly, he shrugged off any doubts.

If she says we're pals, we're pals, he decided, grinning. Now if she'll just tell me her name.

"I am so glad to see you, Benny," she said, her eyes warm. "It's been, what, a year, at least."

"Oh, at least," he agreed, searching frantically for some clue. Had he done a story on her? Had she been involved in one of his shadow chases? "Some party, huh?"

She looked around at the glittering crowd that filled the palatial ballroom of the Sheraton. The celebration was being given by Senator Thorton, who's been found not guilty of tampering with government funds. Since the National Register had had a hand in uncovering those responsible for the scandal, the entire staff had been invited.

"Quite a gathering," she remarked. "Thorton always throws huge affairs."

"You've been here before?" Benny asked, still hoping for a clue.

"Of course, silly," she said. "This is where we met, remember?"

His mind a complete blank, Benny said, "Oh, yeah, sure. I was thinking it was the Embassy Ball." Sheesh, who was this girl? It wasn't like him to forget such a looker. Must be losing my touch, he thought.

"When I saw the announcement of the party in the paper, I just knew you would be here," the woman continued. "I said to myself, 'Lorraine, you'd better get over there before somebody else snatches him up.'"

Whew. Not that he recalled a Lorraine, but it was a start. "Well, you know better than that," he said. "Let me get you a drink, and we can talk about old times." Assuming there are any, he thought.

"That would be wonderful, Benny," she said, "but--" She hesitated. "This is sort of awkward, but I've come to ask you a favor."

"Yeah, sure," he said.

"You may not want to do it," she said.

"For you, Lorraine, anything," he said with a sweep of his hand.

A look of relief crossed her face. "It's my pet, Zippy. I have to go out of town for a few days, and I can't find anyone who'll keep him for me. He hates the kennel, he doesn't eat, and he's just miserable. Could you possibly keep him? I remember you're very fond of animals. Zippy's not any trouble, and of course, I'll pay you."

Benny had imagined many favors, but this was not one of them. "Lorraine, my apartment's awfully small," he said, "And it's in New York. I'm just in town for the senator's party."

She looked so crestfallen, he hastened to add, "But it's no problem. I've got a friend who lives in Georgetown, and he'll be glad to help."

She brightened immediately. Are you sure? It would help me so much, Benny."

"Sure," he said, basking in her smile.

She snuggled in closer. "I'll bring him by in the morning," she said, "but first, I'd like to show you my deepest appreciation."

"Anything for an old friend," said Benny, his pulse on the rise.

It wasn't until much later that he realized he hadn't asked what sort of pet Zippy was.

Jonathan was often alarmed to see Benedek heading his way. To see Benedek and a large shaggy black animal heading his way was enough to make him jump back into his front door.

"Benedek, get that dog out of here! You know animals make me sneeze."

"Chill out, Jack," said Benny, holding onto the animal's leash with difficulty. "It's just for a day or two."

"In my house? Absolutely not!"

"Aww, look at him," said Benny. "He's friendly, aren't you, boy?"

It was probably the ugliest dog Jonathan had ever seen, fat and ungainly with tangled ropes of black hair, a snub nose, and eyes that glowed eerily. Knowing Benedek, this was some species of werewolf or a cousin to the Hound of the Baskervilles. "Out!" he repeated firmly.

"I will if you sneeze," said Benny.

"What?" he said.

"Go ahead and sneeze. You said you would."

Jonathan paused, eying the animal curiously. He didn't feel even the slightest stirrings of an allergic reaction. "That's odd. It should make me sneeze. It's certainly hairy enough."

"Then he can stay," said Benny cheerfully.

"No!" said Jonathan. "Look, we have a much more serious problem. I tried to reach you last night. Shelley was doing some experiment and now she's invisible."

"Wowzers!" said Benny in delight. "I have always wanted to do that! Is she here? Can I see her – I mean, not see her?"

Jonathan sighed. I might have known this would be Benedek's reaction, he thought. He is totally un-shockable. "Yes, she's here. I thought it would be best until Theo returns." He started to say more, but Benny hopped up the steps, preparing to enter the house. "Wait, wait! That animal stays out here."

"Pal, I can't leave him out here," Benny argued. "I promised Lorraine I'd look after him."

"And who is Lorraine?" Jonathan asked. "Are we never going to come to the end of your weird friends? Why did she leave this dog with you? Why not at a kennel? Or a circus?"

"It's just a favor I'm doing," said Benny. "Come on, what's the harm? He can stay in your backyard, can't he?"

"The neighbors," Jonathan protested.

Benny patted the dog's head. "He'll be quiet, won't you, Zip?"

"Zip?" Jonathan repeated. "This thing's name is Zip?" The dog didn't look like it could even walk fast. "What sort of dog is it?"

"Lorraine didn't say," said Benny. "Looks sorta like a poodle on steroids to me."

Jonathan hesitated. The problem with Shelley far outweighed this sudden inconvenience. "All right, look, just for a short while," he said, "until we can work out a solution for Shelley."

"You got it, J.J.," Benny said with a grin as he led the dog into the house. "Oh, Shelley," he called. "Come out, come out, wherever you are."

Jonathan followed, wondering how things could get so hectic in such a few short hours. First this horrible accident with Shelley, and now Benedek arrives with an overgrown terrier, he thought, shaking his head in dismay. Maybe I'm still asleep. He glanced at his wrist watch. And there's still a whole day to go.

"Hello, Benny," came Shelley's voice from the living room. Jonathan could see an indentation in the sofa and hoped Benny wouldn't sit on her.

"Shelley!" Benny sang. "Lookin' good!"

"Can you do anything?" said her voice. "Do you know where Theo is? Do you know if he's had this problem before?"

"Hold on," said Benny, his eyes darting around the empty space. "You know, it's real hard to make eye contact with you today, kiddo." He let go of Zippy's leash, and the dog shuffled off toward the kitchen. "No, I don't know where Theo is. Did you try his pager?"

"He doesn't answer," said Shelley. "Benny, I'm really worried. Suppose this condition is permanent?"

Jonathan's attention was divided between the space that was Shelley and Zippy's slow progress. "Shelley, you'll just have to stay here until we reach Theo. If something happens to you, if you fall or get sick, we'd never find you. Benedek, I really think you should put the dog out in the yard."

There was a rustling of air, as if Shelley had turned to face him. "I want to go back to Theo's and work on a cure."

"Great idea!" said Benny. "I'll come with you. I want to see how you did it."

The idea of an invisible Benny filled Jonathan with horror. "No, no," he said. "She should stay here. We'll go find Theo." There was a thump from the kitchen, and he saw Zippy flop underneath the table. "Benedek, I can only concentrate on one problem at a time," he said sternly. "Would you please do something about that animal?"

"That's a neat dog," said Shelley. "What is it?"

"Some kind of super poodle," said Benny. "See, this girl I know met me last night at--"

"For get the dog!" Jonathan exclaimed. "Shelley is invisible! We have to do something!"

Benny held up his hands. "Okay, okay, relax. Let's all just sit down and work this out. Where are you, Shelley? Are you sitting down?"

"I'm right here on the sofa," said her voice.

Benny flopped down on the sofa beside her, and Jonathan sank into the recliner. He

could hear snuffling sounds from the kitchen now. That animal is in the garbage, he thought in alarm.

"Now, what we have here," said Benny, "is a golden opportunity. Can you imagine the possibilities? Can you imagine the stories I could get?"

"The havoc you could wreak," Jonathan muttered.

Benny was up on his feet, caught up in his fantasy. "No one would be safe! I could get into the White House, the Kremlin, the Playboy Mansion!"

"Benedek, for heaven's sake," said Jonathan. "I'm sure this all sounds like fun and games to you, but you haven't asked Shelley how she feels about it."

Benny sat down again and put his arm around the empty space that was Shelley. He looked ridiculous with his arm propped in mid air, but there was no mistaking the sincerity on his face. "Hey, sorry, kid, you know how I get," he said.

"Benny, I'm really scared," she said. "I don't want to stay this way forever. It might be fun for a while, but I'm just not into it, you know?"

He glanced at Jonathan. "Okay, we'll see what we can do. Jon-Boy, you got classes this morning?"

Jonathan checked his watch. "Just one, at ten."

"You take care of business. I'll take Shelley back to Theo's." As Jonathan started to protest, he said, "No fooling around with powers I don't understand, I promise. But there may be a clue there that can help, and if Theo calls home, we can tell him to get back pronto."

Since he was rushed, and this was an extremely reasonable idea from Benny, something he didn't often encounter, Jonathan agreed. "Just be careful," he said.

"Come on, Shelley," said Benny, holding out his hand. "You're gonna have to hang on. Don't want to lose you."

Jonathan still had on the mismatched clothes he'd scrambled into that morning. He hurried upstairs to change, grabbed his books and lecture notes, and ran back to the kitchen for a quick cup of coffee. When he saw the dog, he skidded to a stop. He'd completely forgotten about Zippy. Damn! Why didn't Benedek take this thing with him?

Despite his fears, the dog hadn't been rooting in the trash or digging in the cabinets. It was still in a lump under the table and didn't move as he cautiously walked around to the coffee maker.

"Wouldn't you be a lot happier outside?" Jonathan asked hopefully. He opened the back door. "Look, a nice little yard, sunshine, fresh air. Come on, boy. Outside." Zippy didn't move. "Come on," Jonathan said. "I don't want you in my house all day. You haven't made me sneeze yet, but it's only a matter of time before all those long black hairs invade the atmosphere."

The dog didn't move. For a horrible moment, Jonathan thought it had died under his table, but then he saw the bulging stomach rise and fall. Now what? He didn't want to leave his back door open. The only choice was to shut the dog up in the kitchen and hope it didn't try to claw its way out. From the looks of Zippy, this wasn't likely.

"All right," he said with an impatient sigh. "You win this round. Just stay in here and sleep."

The dog raised its head and gave him a long stare, a stare that was so odd, Jonathan hurriedly gulped his coffee and left the kitchen. I think he understood me, was the errant thought that ran through his mind as he went out. Maybe I should have told him to do the dishes.

It wasn't the smartest thing in the world to be rummaging through Theo's house, thought Benny, but it was certainly interesting. He'd found a couple of plastic Hawaiian leis for Shelley to

wear around her neck so he could find her. To see them floating around the machinery and bottles of unidentifiable goo added to the surrealistic scene.

“So where were you when it happened?” he asked.

The leis turned and paused by one of the work tables. “Over here,” said Shelley. “I was testing the transparency of ore samples.”

Benny joined her. “Any particular reason why?”

“Theo had hypothesized that the elements that create transparency in mineral ores could be used to create transparency in other objects,” said Shelley.

“Then why didn’t you end up looking like a rock?” he said with a grin.

One of the ore samples rose from the table, as if Shelley were hefting it, possibly preparing to throw. “Benny,” she said testily. “Theo’s derivator isolates the elements we’re studying.”

“What kind of tator?” he asked.

He heard a tapping sound and realized Shelley had indicated the small green metal machine on the work table. “This,” she said. “I must have used too much power.”

Benny took a closer look at the innocent-looking piece of equipment. “It only goes up to five thousand,” he said with another grin. “What’s your problem?” Five thousand what? He wondered, keeping the grin on for Shelley’s benefit. Geez Louise, the things Goldberg keeps around here!

“Maybe if I reversed it,” said Shelley.

Benny reached out and managed to brush her hand away from the machine. “Let’s wait until Theo’s here,” he said. “It’s his invention. He oughta know how it works. Where’s the phone? I’ll start calling some of his favorite haunts.”

It took a while to locate the telephone, but Shelley finally found it under a pile of old Scientific America magazines. Benny sat down on a stool and started dialing. “Told you he wouldn’t be back till Friday, right? He might be at the wax museum. He goes there a lot.”

He watched another pile of magazines float up and down as Shelley cleared a place to sit on another chair. This was a great story! Too bad pictures wouldn’t come out. But if he could ever get a hold of Theo, he could try this tator thing out himself and have a drama in real life. Too bad Jonathan couldn’t see the fun in this.

Thinking of Jonathan made him remember Zippy. Uh-oh. Left him in the kitchen. This was definitely not going to be a fun day for MacKensie.

Jonathan found it almost impossible to concentrate on his lecture. Fortunately, most of his students were in their own zones today and didn’t notice his occasional lapses. He hoped to goodness Benedek hadn’t found more toys to play with at Theo’s and had found a way to bring Shelley back. What if there were side effects to this invisibility? What if she never came back? How would they explain this to her family? And how could he keep Benedek from playing up the sensational elements and making a huge tabloid scandal?

Well, he couldn’t. He’d learned long ago this was impossible. The best thing to hope for was to have Shelley back safe and sound.

And to have my kitchen in one piece, he thought. If that dog has made a mess --!

A couple of students needed his advice on term papers and projects, so he got back to his house later than he’d planned. He hurried to the kitchen, but there was no mess, no doggy smell. In fact, there was no Zippy. Puzzled, Jonathan looked out in the yard. Perhaps Benedek had remembered and come back for him. He turned and gave a startled yelp. Zippy was under

the table.

“How did you --? Where have you been?” he asked the dog. “I could have sworn. . .” he let his voice trail off. All right. Zippy must have found a way out of the kitchen and was under a chair or something when you came in. Just calm down.

The dog gave him another eerie stare. “Good dog,” said Jonathan nervously. “Good Zip. Stay there, okay? Just stay there.”

In all the rush and excitement of the morning, he hadn't had a chance to eat anything or take a shower. That sounds wonderful, he thought. A nice relaxing shower and some food. Then I'll call Theo's and see what's going on. I can't handle anything else today on an empty stomach.

He went upstairs and got into the shower. If it wasn't one thing, it was another, he thought. Ghosts, mermaids, druids. He let the hot water pound on the back of his neck, the steady rhythm beating away frustration. It was then that he heard the giggle, a giggle, he recognized.

“Shelley!” he yelped, snatching the nearest towel and quickly wrapping it around his waist. “Where are you? Get out of here!”

He heard another giggle. As he whipped back the shower curtain, he saw footprints on the mat. He turned off the water and glared around the bathroom furiously. “How long have you been in here?” he demanded.

“Long enough,” came her voice, uneven with laughter.

Jonathan pushed his wet hair out of his eyes. “This is not funny! I thought you were at Theo's.”

“Benny dropped me off,” she said. “He's gone to pick up Theo at Marsha's.”

“Well, wait downstairs,” said Jonathan, grumbling. “Haven't you ever heard of privacy?”

“Okay, okay,” she said. “I'm sorry. I'll leave.”

He saw the bathroom door open and close. Well, maybe she left and maybe she didn't. Choosing another towel, he snapped it in the corners. Not hearing any startled squeaks, he sighed, exasperated, and returned to his shower. Keeping a wary eye on the door.

When he'd dried and dressed, he came down the stairs. Now what was she up to? He wondered. She could be anywhere. “Shelley?”

“Over here,” came her voice. He saw a magazine suspended in the air above the armchair. A page turned. “How was your shower?” she asked mischievously.

“Don't you dare try anything like that again,” he warned.

“Oh, don't be mad,” she said. The magazine flipped over and landed on the coffee table. “I'm sorry. You know there are just some things you have to try when you're invisible.”

Jonathan felt it was time to change the subject. “Did you find out anything useful at Theo's?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “I'm pretty sure what happened, but Benny didn't want me to try to reverse the process until Theo got back.”

“That's amazingly sensible of him,” said Jonathan. “Are you hungry? I was going to have some lunch.”

“That sounds good,” said Shelley. From the sound of her voice, he knew she had gotten up.

“Wait right there,” he said. “I've got to have some way of knowing where you are.”

“Jonathan,” she said. “No more peeking, I promise.”

There were several African beaded necklaces on the mantel on display with other artifacts from his digs. Jonathan chose one with smooth black and white stones. “Wear this,” he said, holding it out towards her voice.

The necklace dangled a moment in the air and then went up and over and came to rest. “It’s really nice,” said Shelley.

“It’s just on loan,” said Jonathan. “Come on, let’s get something to eat.”

The necklace followed him into the kitchen where Zippy lay snoozing under the table. Jonathan saw one of the chairs pull out and a napkin lift from the holder. “You didn’t move the dog when you came in, did you?” he asked.

“No,” said Shelley.

“You didn’t see it do anything strange?”

“Nope,” she said. “Is he supposed to?”

“He probably will,” said Jonathan. He put the bread on the table. “I have bologna, cheese, tuna, and some leftover peanut butter.”

Jonathan turned to get a knife from the silverware drawer. When he turned back, the dog was gone. He stood, his mouth open, until Shelley asked what was wrong.

“Zip has disappeared,” he said, alarmed.

“No, he hasn’t,” said Shelley. “He’s right here under the table.”

“You can see him?” Jonathan asked in disbelief.

“I’ve got my feet propped on him,” she said. “What’s the matter? Can’t you see him?”

Jonathan shook his head. This really was too much. Now I have an invisible girl and an invisible dog.

“Jonathan, he’s right here,” said Shelley. “Honest.”

Zippy suddenly popped back into view. Jonathan jumped back, bumping into the open silverware drawer and sending forks and spoons flying. “He’s back! How? What? What did you do?”

The necklace came his way, and he felt her hand on his arm. “Calm down,” she said worriedly. “I didn’t do anything. Zip’s been right here the whole time.”

“Maybe for you he has,” said Jonathan. “But he was gone, and now he’s back. What is going on around here?”

He stared at the dog, which gave him a benign stare in return. What sort of creature had Benedek saddled him with now? More to the point, what sort of friend handed it over to Benny for safe keeping?

“Maybe Theo will know,” said Shelley reasonable. “But I didn’t see Zippy disappear.”

“Because you’re invisible already, perhaps?” Jonathan said. This was getting more and more confusing. He stooped down to pick up the scattered silverware and got an eye level look at the dog. Was it a dog? It was a big black shaggy animal with oddly glowing eyes. It seemed friendly. Perhaps by coming in contact with Shelley, it had caught invisibility. But if that’s the case, why haven’t I become invisible, too? he thought. Or maybe I am. Maybe the whole world is invisible!

“Jonathan.” Shelley’s worried voice brought him back to earth. “Jonathan, will you come back up here?”

He straightened, returned the forks and spoons to their proper places, and sat down

heavily at the table. The idea of lunch was no longer appealing. He looked at the necklace suspended in air. "Would you excuse me for a moment? I need a reality break."

"Sure," said Shelley.

He watched as the necklace wandered out of the kitchen. This was just too bizarre. There was a snort from under the table, and he cautiously bent down for a look. Zippy wasn't there. Then the animal reappeared. Jonathan jumped, startled.

"Don't do that!" he exclaimed.

"I'm just practicing," said the dog.

Jonathan leaped from the table and found himself up on the kitchen counter. He tried to call for Shelley, but words caught in his throat. This really was too much! Not just an invisible dog, but an invisible talking dog! I've had enough, he thought, as he watched Zippy's slow progress from under the table. This creature has got to go, and I don't mean disappear.

Zippy stood up on his rear legs and leaned casually on the table. "This is better," the animal said. "I didn't know I could do this."

Jonathan tried to speak, but just a few wheezing noises came out. He wanted to climb into the nearest cabinet and shut the door, but he couldn't move.

Zippy rolled bright golden eyes his way. "Don't be afraid, Jonathan," he said. "I'm really very friendly."

Okay, Jonathan thought. I'm having a nervous breakdown. Why don't I just relax and enjoy it?

"W-what are you?" he asked weakly.

"I'm not sure," said Zippy, frowning in an alarmingly human-like fashion. "I'm remembering things in little bits and pieces."

"You're obviously not a dog," said Jonathan. He uncurled himself from the counter, but kept his distance. "Benedek said he was keeping you for someone named Lorraine."

The creature cocked his head. "Lorraine," he repeated. "A dark haired woman with green eyes?"

"I don't know," said Jonathan. "I've never met her. But if you belong to her, surely she knows what you are."

The necklace floated back into the kitchen. "Jonathan, who are you talking to?" asked Shelley. The necklace halted as if Shelley had stopped at the sight of Zippy standing upright at the table. "Wow, what's going on?" she said.

"This is not a dog," said Jonathan.

"Gosh, this is neat!" said Shelley. "And he talks, too!"

Zippy nodded. "I can probably do lots of things once I remember how."

"Shelley," said Jonathan, still hoping for some reasonable explanation, "do you have any idea what this could be?"

The necklace went around until it was in front of Zippy. "A big friendly talking animal that's usually invisible? Has to be a pooka."

Jonathan shook his head as if to clear it. "There's no way this could be a poodle."

"Not a poodle," said Shelley. "A pooka. Didn't you ever see 'Harvey'?"

Jonathan shook his head again. "Please don't tell me Theo has one of these things."

The necklace swung his way. "'Harvey' is a movie about a man who has an invisible six foot rabbit. You must have seen it. Jimmy Stewart's in it, and Harvey is his pooka. I think Zippy

must be a pooka, too.”

Jonathan wished they were back to just the invisible dog stage. Each new revelation was causing his mind to reel further back. “I vaguely recall a play with that title, but it was a fantasy.”

“Well, this isn’t a fantasy,” she said. “It’s real, and Zip must belong to somebody who really needs him, because that’s what pooka’s do.”

Jonathan had a moment of sheer terror thinking he might be saddled with this creature for the rest of his life. “Needs him?”

“We have to find his owner,” said Shelley.

“That won’t be necessary,” said a new voice.

Jonathan turned to see an attractive dark haired young woman at the back kitchen door. She was smiling, but there was something about her smile he didn’t like. He noticed that Zippy had quickly dropped down under the table again, and that Shelley had slipped off the necklace, so he had no idea where she was.

He spoke to the woman. “How did you get in, miss?”

She kept her jade green gaze on Zippy. “I’ve come for my pet,” she said. “Thank you for watching him.”

“So you’re Benedek’s friend Lorraine,” said Jonathan. He didn’t like the way Zippy was cowering. Obviously the animal was afraid of this woman. He hated to just hand Zip over. “Perhaps you wouldn’t mind waiting until he gets in? I’m expecting him at any moment.”

“I’ll just take Zippy and go,” she said, moving forward.

Zippy started to fade out, but the woman said, “Oh, no, you don’t,” and grabbed a handful of his thick black hair. Zippy stayed visible, and Jonathan took hold of the animal on the other side.

“There’s no need to be so rough,” he said. “I think you should consider what Zippy wants.”

The woman laughed unpleasantly. “What Zippy wants? How about what I want?” She eyed him and laughed again. “You’ll do very well,” she said.

Jonathan had the sensation the kitchen was closing in, fading to a soft grey. Just before everything blacked out, he took a firm grip on Zippy and felt an equally firm grip of a small invisible hand on his arm.

Shelley, no, he thought, but by then, he wasn’t thinking anything.

Benny knew something was wrong. For one thing, Jonathan wasn’t waiting at his front door, all righteous indignation at being left with Zippy and the invisible Shelley. When the reporter found the back door wide open and no one in the house, he definitely knew something was wrong.

He went through the empty house and opened the front door for Theo. “Bad news,” he told the tall alchemist. “Nobody’s home.”

“How do you know?” said Theo as he stepped inside. “Perhaps we just can’t see them. You know, I had this problem with Marsha not long ago, but it was simply a case of not reading the instructions.”

Benny looked around the living room. He knew Jonathan wouldn’t have gone anywhere with a large dog and an invisible girl in tow, especially when Jon had said he’d wait for him here. Something had happened, and he had the sinking feeling it had to do with the mysterious Lorraine.

"No, they're gone," he said. "I don't like this, Theo. I think I've been had."

"Well, then, we shall find them," said Theo.

"Great, fine," said Benny. "Any idea where we start looking?"

Before Theo could answer, the front door opened on its own, and Benny heard a rush of footsteps and was abruptly seized by two small and insistent invisible hands.

"Benny, Theo, come quick!" said Shelley's voice. "She's got Jonathan and Zippy, and I don't know what she plans to do!"

"Hold on," said Benny, catching her hands in his. "Slow down. Who's got Jonathan and Zippy?" He tried to focus on where her face might be. "Are you okay?"

Theo was staring at the empty space in admiration. "Really, Shelley, this is an excellent transformation," he said.

Benny gave him a warning glance. "Later, okay?"

"This woman," Shelley said, catching her breath. "Lorraine. She says Zippy belongs to her, only he didn't want to go, so Jonathan said, let him decide, but she got angry and took both of them. I know where they are, come on!"

The three of them hurried out to Theo's bright pink Volkswagen Beetle. Benny took the wheel, Theo squeezed into the back seat, and by the creaking of the upholstery, Benny could tell Shelley had hopped into the front passenger seat.

"Go to the end of the street and turn left," she said, as Benny put the little car in gear. "They're in the old Mayfair Building." "How did you get back here?" Benny asked.

"I jumped into a taxi that was headed this way," she said. "It stopped just a block from Jonathan's."

"Good thinking," said Benny. "Guess that's another advantage to being invisible, huh? Free rides." He spoke cheerfully to cover his anxiety. Who or what was Lorraine, and how did a big shaggy dog fit into all this? "So what else did you do? What's the deal with Lorraine? What does she want Zippy for? How come I had to keep him for a few days?"

There was a big sigh from the front seat. "I don't know. It must have something to do with the fact that Zippy's a pooka," said Shelley.

Both Benny and Theo exclaimed. "A pooka?"

"Are you sure?" said Theo. "My heavens, it's been years since I've seen one. Benny, you should have told me!"

"I didn't know," Benny said. "Shelley, are you sure?"

From the tone of her voice, he could tell she was giving him an exasperated look. "Well, since Zippy can talk and turn himself invisible whenever he wants to, I think I'm pretty sure."

"Wowzers," said Benny. "This is all beginning to make sense now."

"Maybe to you, Benny," said Theo. "I must confess I am somewhat in the dark. If this creature is indeed a pooka, then why did this Lorraine entrust him to you, even for a day or two? If it's her pooka, why not just keep it?"

Benny kept his eyes on the traffic as he maneuvered the little car towards the Mayfair Building. "Maybe it's not her pooka," he said.

"Stolen?" Theo said in alarm. "Oh, that would never do."

It took a good forty-five minutes to reach the Mayfair Building, a four storey brick structure in the initial stages of renovation. Workers were repairing the brick work on the right hand side of the building, but Shelley told Benny to park in the lot on the left hand side.

"She took them down there," she said.

"Where?" said Benny. "If you're pointing, remember I can't see your finger."

"See that side entrance?" said Shelley. "It leads down a hallway to a ballroom. She put Jonathan and Zippy in a small room off of that."

Benny got out of the car and took a long look at all the workmen and equipment. "Shelley, maybe you could get in and out, but I'm going to be a bit more conspicuous."

The door on her side of the car opened and shut. "I'll distract them," she said.

"So shall I," said Theo, unwinding his tall frame from the backseat. "We'll be ready for a quick get away, Benny."

Benny grinned at him. "You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

Theo looked down his long nose. "Purely from a scientific standpoint."

Benny clapped his hands together. "Okay, team, let's do it." He watched as Theo strode off to confront a group of workers out front and as mysterious accidents began to happen on the work site. A pile of boxes fell over. Tools floated off. A wheelbarrow full of trash suddenly dumped its load.

The things I could get away with, he thought enviously as he hurried, unobserved, to the side door. Hang on, J.J. I am here to rescue a boy and his dog.

Jonathan had paced the length of the small dim room until his angry energy was spent. The room had obviously been used for storage. There were a few empty shelves and a battered trash can. The one window was narrow and set high in the wall. The door was firmly locked.

He sighed, exasperated, and sat down on the floor next to Zippy. The animal regarded him with mournful eyes.

"Sorry to have gotten you mixed up in this, Jonathan," he said.

"It wasn't your fault," said Jonathan. "Benedek's the one who got me mixed up in this – this whatever this is. Who is Lorraine, and why does she want you?"

"I don't know," said Zippy, "but I don't want to be with her."

"It's really very simple," said Jonathan. "Just make yourself invisible. She won't be able to find you."

Zippy sat up and put his paws around his knees in an unnervingly human gesture. "But what about you?"

"Shelley's gone to get help, remember?" At least, he hoped she had gotten away. He wasn't really certain how Lorraine had transported them to this place, but Shelley had been clinging to his arm. She had whispered she'd be back, and that was the last he'd seen – well, heard from her.

Zippy shook his head. "I'd better stay with you."

"That really isn't necessary," said Jonathan. "You're the one in danger here. Make yourself invisible, and when Lorraine opens the door, run for it."

Zippy settled back on the floor in a more doglike position. "Nope," he said.

"But this is ridiculous," Jonathan protested. "You don't know what she's going to do to you."

"You stuck by me, I'm going to stick by you," said Zippy. "That's what pooka's do."

Yes, but--" Jonathan couldn't think of any way to convince Zippy to try to escape.

"Scratch behind my ears, would you?"

Jonathan sighed and scratched behind the animal's ears. It was really sort of nice not to be trapped all alone, and it was a novel experience to have a big dog. He'd never been able to have pets because of his allergies. However, he wasn't sure he wanted to have a large talking pet with a talent for invisibility. He wanted to get out of this room. Whoever this Lorraine was, he knew her intentions could not be good.

Benny crept along the narrow hallway until he came to the remains of what must have been a fine ballroom in its time. Now the polished floor was badly scuffed, and draperies sagged at windows made dim with dust. He wasn't sure what he was going to encounter, but he was relieved to see Jonathan and Zippy in the middle of the room unharmed. He was not relieved to see the mysterious Lorraine with them. Jonathan and Zippy had identical dazed expressions as if they weren't sure how they got there. Lorraine's expression could only be described as triumphant.

"Hello, Benny," she said. "What a pleasant surprised."

Benny sauntered up. "Hello, yourself," he said. "I don't really know you, do I?"

She smiled. "But I know you, of course. You're quite well known in certain circles."

"And certain covens?" Benny guessed.

Her smile widened to display more than a comfortable amount of teeth. "You might say that."

Whoa, boy, Benny thought, repulsing a shudder. Let's see if I can figure a way out of this one. "Well, the party's over," he said. "I'll just take my friend and my dog and go home."

"But Zippy doesn't belong to you," she said.

"Doesn't belong to you, either," said Benny. "This is some weird sort of scam here, dealing in black market pookas."

Lorraine stopped smiling, and her green eyes took on a fierce light. She took a few steps toward him. "How did you--?" she began and then stopped. She smiled again as if acknowledging a hit. "Very clever, Benny. I see how you got your reputation. No, Zippy doesn't belong to me."

Jonathan had been standing very still, his hand on Zippy's fuzzy back. "Then who does he belong to?" he asked.

The witch swung her gaze to him. "Someone who needs him. Someone who, unfortunately, will die without him."

"Die?" Jonathan said, the word catching in his throat.

"Yes," she said calmly. "But I want him to die, so my purpose is served."

"Seems a roundabout way to do business," Benny remarked. "Why not just kill the guy?" He could tell by Jonathan's scandalized expression his friend was appalled by the questions, but he had to know more about the witch's plan.

"But this way is much more fun," said Lorraine.

"Okay," said Benny, "but why involve me? Why ask me to keep Zippy?"

Lorraine approached Zippy. The pooka backed away, pulling Jonathan with him. She laughingly toyed with the animal's thick hair and eyed Jonathan as if she'd like to do the same. "Two of my enemies had discovered me. I had to hide Zippy. He's a young pooka, just discovering his talents. I had no idea he'd be able to talk or disappear so soon. But no matter. I'll take him back with me now and get rid of him." Zippy cringed against Jonathan. "And his real

owner will never know anything about him.”

Benny had been thinking frantically of some way to get Zippy and Jonathan away. If only he hadn't gone to that party! If only he'd trusted the instincts that told him he'd never met a Lorraine. If only he hadn't been so quick to agree to look after her pet – hey, wait a second.

“Well, you know, Lorraine,” he said casually, his hands in his pockets, “you got a great little evil plot going, and we appreciate you sharing it with us, but you've left out one little detail.”

She arched an eyebrow. “Oh?”

“You said you'd pay me,” said Benny.

“What?” she said, frowning.

“You said you'd pay me to look after Zippy. Where's my pay?”

“Benedek,” Jonathan said in amazement. “Of all the crass – how can you think of money at a time like this?”

Benny grinned at him. “Did I say anything about money?” he turned to Lorraine. “Of course, if you want word to get around you renege on deals--”

“Words will not get around, because you will be dead!” she said, furious.

Benny shook a warning finger. “Hold your fire, sister. If there's one thing I've learned about playing with the supernatural, it's that critters like you have to play by the rules. You set up this game; you see it through. Pay up.”

Jonathan was now looking at him with a new understanding. Lorraine, however, was looking at him as if she'd like to see him squished on the highway. She waved her hand, and a shower of gold pieces fell with clinking sounds onto the ballroom floor.

“There,” she said.

Benny shook his head. “We didn't agree on gold.”

“Silver, then,” she said. “Jewels.”

“Nope.” He liked the way she was getting nervous. “These, ah, enemies of yours. They wouldn't happen to be in the neighborhood, would they?”

Lorraine gritted her sharp teeth. With another wave of her hand, the gold pieces disappeared. “What do you want?” she said angrily.

“Time,” said Benny.

She stared at him, and so did Jonathan. “Benedek,” he said, puzzled.

“Yep,” said Benny. “Look, Jonny, Zip's a young pooka, but he's learning fast. I'll bet if he concentrates, he can remember where he's supposed to go and who's waiting for him.” By the alarmed look on Lorraine's face, Benny knew he'd found the answer. “Didn't count on that, did you, Lorraine? He was just a pup when you snatched him. Once he remembers and goes to his real owner, you have no power over him. So we're gonna wait right here till he remembers.”

A crafty look replaced the one of alarm. “How much time?” the witch asked. “You must set a limit.”

Uh-oh, Benny thought.

“An exact amount,” said Lorraine, “or the deal's off.”

Benny went to Zippy and patted the creature's head. “What do you think, Zip? Can you remember?”

The pooka was shivering. “I don't know, Benny. I'm awfully scared.”

"Hey, pal, you could've disappeared at any time, but you stayed with Jonathan. That takes real guts. You can do it."

"How much time?" Lorraine insisted.

"Would you just wait a minute?" Benny said, exasperated, and at the same instant, realized his mistake.

"A minute?" she said sweetly. "Of course. One minute."

"Oh, no," said Jonathan.

Zippy moaned, "A minute!"

Benny hurriedly whispered in the animal's ear. "Fake it! Disappear!"

"Forty-five seconds left," said Lorraine, chuckling.

Zippy stood up on his back feet. "I remember now!" he declared, and vanished.

For a moment, Lorraine believed him. Then her lips drew back in a snarl of rage as she approached Benny and Jonathan, her hands up, nails glittering. As the two men scrambled to get out of her way, there was a burst of light, and three figures appeared in the tall windows of the ballroom, bony faces grinning and red eyes glowing.

"Lorraine!" said one in evil delight. "Long time no see!"

Lorraine gasped and began to scream. "It wasn't my fault! I didn't do anything! I didn't know it was yours!"

"And now you've lost it," said another witch. "Did you really think you'd get away with this?"

Jonathan clutched Benny's arm as they slowly backed out of the ballroom. "What are they talking about?" he asked.

"Sounds like they had first dibs on Zippy, and Lorraine got a little ambitious," Benny answered.

"They seem to be ignoring us," Jonathan said. "Not that I'm complaining, you understand."

Benny watched as the three witches advanced on Lorraine, who was still screaming her innocence. "They have no quarrel with us. Lorraine's the one who's going to get fired – literally."

Jonathan tugged at his arm. "I'd rather not watch."

Benny agreed. "We're outta here," he said.

They ran down the hallway and out of the building, hearing louder screams behind. Once safely at Theo's car, they heard a thump, and suddenly all the ballroom windows blew out. Workmen came running from the other side of the building and stood shaking their heads in amazement.

Theo was behind the wheel. "Ah, excellent," he said. "Get in, gentlemen. We must flee the scene of the crime." "Where's Shelley?" asked Benny.

"In the back," came her voice. "Come on, hurry."

Benny hopped in the back and let Jonathan have the front seat. "I love it when a plan comes together," he said.

"Wait, wait," said Jonathan. "Where's Zippy? We can't leave him. Do you see him anywhere, Shelley?"

The workmen were inspecting the damage, and now a few of them were eying the pink Volkswagon suspiciously.

"I suggest we make our getaway," said Theo in an anxious tone. "We may be blamed for that explosion."

"I don't see Zippy," said Shelley.

"Let's go," said Benny. "He'll show up."

Theo put the car in gear and they drove away. Benny took a long look out the back window. The witch had been taken care of, but what about Zip? Jonathan was gazing back in equal concern.

"Benedek," he said, "we can't just leave him."

"He's a pooka, Jack. He's magic," Benny said. "Lorraine's no longer a threat. He'll be okay."

Jonathan turned in the seat to face him. "Do you suppose he really remembered his owner?"

"Yeah, that's a good thought," said Benny. "Hang onto that." And I'll hang onto it, too.

The voice on the telephone was cheerful and bright.

"Jonathan?"

He settled back on his sofa. "Hello, Shelley. How are you?"

"You can see for yourself," Shelley replied. "Theo's got me back to normal. Only took him a day. He's a genius, you know."

"Yes, I'd love to see you," Jonathan said.

"Great!" she said. "I'll stop by later. Any word on Zippy?"

"No, I'm afraid not," he said. "We'll just have to hope he found where he was supposed to be."

He chatted with Shelley a few more minutes and then hung up. He didn't have any more classes this afternoon. It was pleasant just to sit quietly in the house for a while, although he found himself looking under the kitchen table every now and then. Witches, pookas, spells – what next? He wondered. But Zippy wasn't a problem. He'd really enjoyed the animal's company.

The doorbell rang in a familiar rhythm. Jonathan opened the door to find Benny holding the latest edition of the National Register in front of him like a banner.

"How about this for a story, Jack? 'The Case of the Purloined Pooka'! Is that an eye-catcher or what?"

"And what sort of supernatural nonsense have you gotten us involved in today?" Jonathan asked.

Benny came in, tugging another newspaper out of his pocket. "You may not believe this, Jon, but I also read other newspapers, including the Washington Post. Have a look at page six."

Jonathan sat back down on the sofa while Benny plopped into a chair. He opened the paper. "Which story on page six?"

"The one about the doctor."

Jonathan scanned the page until he came to the headline "Doctor Elburn Returns to AIDS Research Team." He read the story and then raised inquiring eyes to Benny. "Dr. Elburn was suffering from severe depression, but suddenly and inexplicably came out of it, this says."

Benny nodded. "This young guy is one of the best in the field, J.J. The team was lost

without him. Now he's all ready to go back to work, and there's a good chance he may find the answer." He grinned. "I think he found a little zip in his life."

Jonathan closed the paper and regarded Benny thoughtfully. "I might have argued with you earlier, but that was before I had an invisible girl and an invisible dog in my house."

"We'll make a believer of you yet, Jonny," said Benny. "I say this Dr. Elburn has a real live pooka to keep him from going off the deep end. Always helps to have a friend, no matter what kind."

"Or if you can see him or not," said Jonathan. "Why don't you be a real friend and disappear?"

Benny hopped up. "You got it, J.J. Theo promised to show me how his invisibility tator works."

Jonathan followed him to the door in alarm. "No, that's not what I meant!" he said as Benny went out. "Benedek! No, wait! Come back!"

"I'm gone, Jack!" came the cheerful reply. "Real gone!"