

THE LOVE OF FRIENDS

By Sheila Paulson

"How long were you married to the deceased, ma'am?"

Karen Archer stared in total disbelief at the men with the FBI badges. What on earth was this about, and how could they have the nerve to approach her here, at the graveside of her adored husband? "Uh, twelve years," she replied. "What is this about, Agent Kendrick? Agent Jones?" Involuntarily, she shivered in the chill of the misty Virginia morning.

"Is this your husband, ma'am?" Kendrick whipped out an 8 x 12 black and white photo, an obvious enlargement of a man much younger than Steven, wearing sun glasses and a full beard. In an outfit of jeans, boots, and a chambray shirt, the man in the picture looked totally different from her elegant husband, who rarely appeared in public less than impeccably groomed. How old was this picture? Twenty years? The shaggy hair looked like the right color; the style suggested the late sixties. Steven would have been around twenty-one at the time. The lanky, unformed features of the man in the picture suggested the age was right. He had the same cheekbones.

"I can hardly tell with the beard and without seeing his eyes. Why are you here, now? We've just had his service." She gestured miserably at the grave. Impossible to believe, even now, that Steven was dead. Yes, he'd had heart trouble, but he took good care of himself, saw his doctor, followed his health regimen. But Doctor King had told her such things did happen. She didn't care about 'such things'. She only cared that Steven was gone.

Jones, the younger of the two, stepped in. "Ma'am, the man in this picture is Kenneth Steven Archer, wanted for the murder of a professor at the Georgetown Institute in Nineteen sixty-seven. We've seen pictures of your husband, although very few of them, and they match other shots." He waved another picture in front of her, obviously a high school graduation picture. The man--no, the boy--in it did look like Steven, like a young, barely born Steven. The eyes, obviously blue even in a black and white shot, gazed out at the world with an inner zeal. By the time she'd met Steven, he was at least ten or twelve years older, the zeal had been tempered to a steady purposefulness, and the dreams had been replaced with plans and goals. This boy looked like Steven, but that bony face, all planes and angles, was so different from the more mature, finished husband she'd lived with for the past twelve years that she couldn't say for sure if this picture were her husband or not, only that it could have been. Steven's nose was surely thicker, but then it also had that little ridge she had loved to kiss that he said resulted it in its being broken a couple of years before they met.

"Murder? Steven?" She stared at the agents in disbelief. "Steven was the most gentle, caring man I ever knew. He couldn't have hurt a soul. It wasn't his nature. I never knew anyone more loyal. We never had children so I can't say how he would have been with them, but I've seen him go out on a limb for his friends time out of mind." She gestured at the funeral guests. A number of Steven's co-workers still lingered, waiting, and Karen knew they were doing it out of loyalty to her husband, waiting to make sure she was all right.

"We've done the research, Ma'am," Kendrick replied. He stowed the photos away. "Ma'am, if we can confirm that this is your husband, we can close the books on an old case."

"And destroy my husband's reputation in the process? That's not Steven. It couldn't be. The man I loved could never have killed anyone. Never." Her hands were shaking. She closed them into fists.

"Are you all right, Karen?" Doug Jacoby, Steven's closest friend, came up to them. His craggy, lined face was creased with concern.

"They say--they say Steven murdered someone in Nineteen sixty-seven."

"That's absurd." Doug put his arm around her shoulders. "Steve was no killer. I'd stake my life and my reputation on it."

"Ma'am, do you have pictures of your husband, old pictures?" Jones asked.

She didn't. Not a one. Steven had a quirk that way. He didn't like being photographed. *Was he afraid he'd be recognized?* She pushed the traitorous thought away. No. Steven was not a killer.

"That doesn't mean anything," Doug insisted gallantly. "Just a personality quirk. I have an aunt who won't

allow herself to be photographed, and she hasn't killed anyone, either."

Karen slipped out of the circle of Doug's arm and went over to the grave. *Oh, Steven, I miss you so much. Tell me it isn't true.*

The figure on the other side of the grave materialized so slowly that she thought she'd summoned him up out of her extreme need for him. Misty at first, he slowly solidified into near normalcy, although he had a tendency to shiver around the edges. He gazed at her sadly, his eyes full of grief and regret.

"Steven!"

The Feds whirled. Maybe they thought the funeral was a hoax. Maybe they thought she was demented. Eyes full of suspicion, they stared right through the ghostly form of her husband. Doug, abruptly pale, blurted, "Dear God," in a shaking voice.

Steven raised a fuzzy hand and pointed at himself. His eyes locked with hers and he mouthed her name. Then he faded away again until he had vanished without a trace.

Although she had never fainted before in her life, Karen Archer slid backward into Doug's arms and went out like a light.

"Primitive man? Why isn't it ever 'primitive woman'? When will anthropology free itself from the chauvinism of ages past? When will the cavewoman break out of the little wifely patterns of staying behind to tend the cooking fire and go out beside her husband with a spear?"

Jonathan MacKensie groaned. There had to be one in every class, a student with an axe to grind who decided that Anthropology 101 was the perfect springboard for his pet subject. Jonathan generally returned such papers ungraded, not because they might not, on occasion, be interesting, but because they were not true to the assigned topic. Camilla Raven--could that be her real name?--had been difficult from the moment she stepped into his class. Bad enough her liberation sometimes slipped enough for her to gaze lustfully at Jonathan and to bat her eyes at him like the besotted students in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* but, in spite of that, she never hesitated to challenge any statement he made that she could twist around to chauvinism. Hard to defend the chauvinistic Australopithecus when so little was known of his lifestyle. For all Jonathan knew, they elected female mayors for the cave settlements and denied men the vote.

With a chuckle, he shook off that fanciful thought. Camilla's paper would go to the bottom of the stack. Knowing her keen intellect, she would have sneaked in just enough of the required topic to prevent a return of the paper, and done it well enough to obtain an excellent grade. But Jonathan didn't enjoy a side dish of polemics with the grading of papers. Or maybe he was just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

It had been nearly three months since Doctor Moorhouse, his department chair at Georgetown Institute, had assigned him an Unexplained Phenomenon file, nearly three months since Benedek had popped in with a weird case to pursue, prepared to drag Jonathan along for the ride. The past quarter had been peaceful, focused entirely on his beloved anthropology. No tearing him away from his classes for a trek to New Orleans to track down a Voodoo queen, no side trips to Alaska to hunt the ghost of Napoleon. His life had been peaceful, quiet, normal, at least the way it had been before Moorhouse developed the paranormal bee in her bonnet and sent him to Farham to investigate his first case of the mysterious, before he had run into Edgar Benedek in a cemetery and changed his life forever.

Peace and anthropology should have been a blessing but, to Jonathan's increasing irritation, they were not. He still loved anthropology and cherished those classroom moments when bright students 'got it', and real education took place. He loved the stimulating discussions with colleagues, and the satisfaction having a paper accepted for publication.

But, to his astonishment, he missed the Unexplained Phenomena work. He missed the thrill of the unexplained, the challenge of explaining away some of Benedek's more ludicrous theories. Sometimes, before bed, he found himself imagining the tabloid journalist popping in to drag him off to 'chase some shadows, Jack,' and he would feel a little smile creep across his face at the thought.

Damn it, he missed Edgar Benedek.

There, he'd admitted it. He missed his friend. All right, Benedek was a friend, a friend who exasperated him, who nearly drove him at times to drink but, while he had annoyed Jonathan, plagued him, pestered him, teased him, he had never once bored him. His friendship, once won, had been completely loyal and unswerving. While he might think nothing of towing Jonathan in his wake, charging houses and plane tickets from Liverpool to the Institute, he had never once backed away when Jonathan was in trouble. He'd never given up for a second the time that the people in the Glenbar Hotel had supposedly possessed Jonathan, one after the other. He might drive Jonathan nuts, but Jonathan liked him.

He'd known how much he valued his friend when Doctor Moorhouse had appeared in his office doorway last year to tell him Benedek was dead. The words had hit him like a hard kick in the solar plexus, and he had gone, despairing, to Benedek's funeral--only to learn later that it was a hoax and that Benedek was alive. After that, he couldn't take Benny for granted.

But maybe he had. Why should Benedek always be the one to initiate contact? It wouldn't have hurt Jonathan to pick up a phone and call him, would it? Too much time had passed. The midterm papers in front of him signaled a break. He didn't have to finish them right now, did he?

"Jonathan?"

Doctor Moorhouse stood in his doorway. How long had she waited there watching him while he gazed unseeingly at Camilla's paper? Then the diffidence of her tone struck home, and his gaze sharpened. He hadn't seen that look on Juliana Moorhouse's face since the time she'd come to tell him of Benedek's supposed demise.

*Oh, god, is **that** why I haven't heard from him?*

"May I sit down?"

Doctor Moorhouse never asked permission, as a rule. She breezed in and made any room she entered her own. *Who are you, and what did you do with the real Doctor Moorhouse?* The question flashed ludicrously through Jonathan's mind, but instead of speaking it aloud, he scrambled to his feet and adjusted his tie. "Of course. Please sit, Doctor Moorhouse. What's wrong?"

"Does it show?" She touched her hair in one of the most unconsciously feminine gestures he'd ever seen her make. Then she caught herself and yanked her hand down.

"Is it Benedek?" Jonathan blurted out.

"Benedek? No, of course it's not." She frowned and then remembered the other time. "No, I've not heard from him for several months. A small blessing."

There would have been a time when Jonathan might have agreed with her, although not today. He didn't say so. Even quiet and introspective as she was now, Moorhouse had quite a bite. She might like Jonathan but she never pulled her punches.

So he said instead, "What's wrong, Doctor Moorhouse?"

"I just had a visitor," she explained. "Doug Jacoby. You don't know him, but he took some of my classes over twenty years ago. He's just told me that Kenneth Archer is dead."

Kenneth Archer? That name was familiar to Jonathan, but he couldn't place it or explain the distaste the sound of it evoked. "Archer?" he prompted.

Doctor Moorhouse's eyes dropped. "He was the man identified as the killer of Charles Frederick."

Dear God. Jonathan had been a teenager at the time but his father had taught at Georgetown even then. Charles Frederick had been a fellow professor at the Institute. He and Doctor Moorhouse had been engaged to be married. Two weeks before the wedding, Frederick had learned that one of his prized students, Ken Archer, was dealing drugs on campus. It was the late sixties, the time of Haight-Ashbury, not that long before Woodstock. The drug culture was prevalent, often active, on many university campuses. The psychedelic age. Good things had come out of that time. Doctor Martin Luther King had been active then, promoting equality--a worthy cause; he'd been killed the following spring. The Sixties. Jonathan had been too young to be caught up in the fervor, and his father had been strict, but he remembered.

Instead of reporting his top student to the police, Doctor Frederick had confronted him, determined to work with him, to convince him to see the error of his ways. Jonathan remembered Doctor Frederick with fondness. The man had been his father's friend, and was always kind and encouraging to Jonathan when he came to their home. He'd thrown a massive party when Leonard MacKensie was awarded his Nobel Prize, a glittering celebrity romp that Leonard's hero-worshipping son had enjoyed, basking in reflected glory, mingling with the literati.

Frederick had evidently believed that Archer would respond to the personal touch and had invited him to an evening meeting at his office, but instead, Archer had bashed him over the head with a bust of Plato and fled. A janitor had seen him dart from the room and had gone to investigate. He found Frederick with a dented-in skull, and even the paramedics had believed him beyond hope, although they had attempted resuscitation. Frederick had died en route to the hospital without ever regaining consciousness.

Jonathan remembered the funeral; he'd been nearly seventeen, old enough to look forward to becoming a student at the Institute. Doctor Moorhouse had been quiet and dignified, her grief invisible to all but those who knew her well. Jonathan's father had accompanied her.

Now this had brought it all back to her. No wonder she looked so shaken.

"Did the police catch him?" he asked, simply to give her something to say.

She shook her head. "No. He'd been living under the name Steven Archer, evidently his middle name. He worked for a D.C. insurance firm. Evidently he had put the past behind him. Doug said he'd been an exemplary citizen, and a good friend, and he was having trouble believing it. Doug's older than you; he had already graduated when Charles was killed and didn't know anything about it. He was shocked and sorry to have come to me when he realized I had been involved. He thought I would have known about it because I teach here."

Jonathan frowned. That sounded wrong, somehow. "If he didn't know about your involvement, why on earth did he come to tell you about it?"

She drew a deep breath and pulled her professionalism about her like a blanket. "He came to me because of the Unexplained Phenomena Department."

A wary stirring made Jonathan straighten up. "Oh, yes?"

"Evidently Archer's ghost appeared at his funeral, not to the FBI agents at the scene, but to his wife and to Doug. Doug wanted the UP Department to investigate."

Wonderful. The ghost of a murderer. And to think Jonathan had been sorry about the death of shadows to chase. He assumed that the widow and friend of the deceased had been primed by circumstances to imagine Archer's spirit. Neither of them would want to believe the person they cared about was a killer--unless of course the wife had always known and covered for Archer.

"Did they have any idea the man they knew was wanted for murder?" he asked.

"No. Doug was shocked and disbelieving. He insisted his friend could not have done it, that there had to be a mistake. Evidently he'd been living under his own middle name, with his own social security number, which the FBI must have had access to over the years. Doug said that either they slipped up there or they had other suspects who were more viable than Archer. You and I know that's not true. That and the fact that Doug said the man had a phobia about having his picture taken convinced me that he was guilty. He may have turned his life around, but he killed Charles, and he should have paid for it."

"What did he die of?" Jonathan asked. He could hear Benedek offering wild theories about the man's death that ranged from a stake-out and gun battle to long-suppressed guilt eating at him and driving him to suicide.

"Apparently he had a heart condition. Jonathan, I want you to talk to his wife. I want to learn the truth. If his ghost exists, I want to speak to it, to find out why he killed Charles. I want you to investigate this spirit."

There was absolutely no way to refuse. A case wasn't often personal to Doctor Moorhouse, but this one was. He remembered her dignified grief at the funeral, and he nodded. "Of course I will, Doctor Moorhouse. But I'm not sure it will help."

She avoided his eyes. "Perhaps it will give me closure, after all this time."

He patted her hand. "I'll do all I can."

"I know you will." She managed a shaky smile for him and went away quickly. Jonathan stared after her and admired the determined set of her shoulders. She was a lady with a great deal of courage. He would have to solve this little problem for her, even if he didn't believe in the ghost in question.

The widow of Kenneth Archer lived in Arlington, Virginia, in a mid-Victorian house in an excellent state of preservation, with a wide front lawn and a huge porch with a swing. Someone had maintained the grounds as well as the house; the lawn was lush and rich with nary a sight of crabgrass or dandelions, and the shrubbery was so neatly clipped that it looked like it had been cowed into shape and would never dare put a leaf wrong. The house resembled a showplace instead of someone's actual home. Jonathan greeted the sight of a pair of abandoned tennis shoes on the front porch with relief; this was a human dwelling after all.

Then he saw the man about to ring the front doorbell, and he blurted out, "Benedek!" at the sight of the vivid patterned shirt and the familiar Nikes.

Benedek grinned and waved as Jonathan climbed the steps to join him. "Yo, Jonny. Thought you might be here. A murder victim right on your stomping grounds. I figured Doctor M would send you here to avenge her."

Jonathan hesitated. He should have expected that Benedek would know about Doctor Moorhouse's late fiancé. Campus murders must be meat and drink to tabloid journalists. For all Jonathan knew, Benedek had scoped out everything useful to know about Jonathan himself, Moorhouse, and Georgetown long ago.

"You know about that?" he asked involuntarily.

"What, that the murder victim was Doctor M's main squeeze?" He nodded emphatically and beat a tattoo on the door.

"You do remember this is the alleged murderer's widow we're coming to see?" Jonathan pointed out sternly.

"Relaxovision, Jon-jon. Tact is my middle name."

Jonathan barely had time to erase the blatant skepticism from his face before the door opened and a woman stood there with longish hair as blonde as a Viking's. She was about Jonathan's age, but grief had added years to her pixie-like face, giving her the momentary appearance of an aging fairy right out of the Brothers Grimm. She pulled herself together, and the illusion faded. Tired and sad, she drew the door open wide. "You must be the men from Georgetown that Doug said would be coming." Even her voice was weary and strained.

"I'm Doctor Jonathan MacKensie." Jonathan jumped in before Benedek could speak. "And this is my...colleague, Edgar Benedek." Benedek shot him a fleeting look at the hesitation.

"Doug said you'd be here today. You'd better come in."

The interior of the house was cozy and comfortable rather than affluent. The furniture looked like early Sears rather than any attempt at a decorator style. It flashed through Jonathan's head that being on the run for murder didn't grant the killer wealth. Yet everything was tidy, chosen with pride. The layer of dust that covered the furniture was likely a sign of Mrs. Archer's grief rather than habitual slovenliness.

"I'm Karen," she introduced herself. "Would you like some coffee?"

The old habit of hospitality came so naturally to her that Jonathan and Benedek both nodded. She went to fetch it. They looked around the room but when Benedek would have prowled to snoop, Jonathan caught his arm and restrained him.

"Don't, Benedek. It won't take much to make her fall apart."

"Gotcha." He tried to protrude eyes on stalks to read the title of books in the bookshelf but he didn't move from his position. Jonathan was slightly surprised at his acquiescence.

When Karen returned with a pot of coffee and cups on a tray, Jonathan leaped to take it from her and set

it on the coffee table. He settled into a comfortable old armchair beside the sofa--Karen winced as he did it, which made him think it must have been her husband's chair, but she didn't protest. It would have embarrassed her if he moved, so he stayed there. Benedek noticed. For someone who often appeared to cultivate insensitivity, Benedek was a lot more in tune than Jonathan had thought when he first met him.

Selecting the other end of the sofa, Benedek accepted the coffee Mrs. Archer poured out and denied cream or sugar. "This has been hard for you," he suggested.

She swallowed hard. "It's a nightmare. Losing Steven is enough. I knew his heart was bad, but he was good with his care; he took his medications regularly and didn't cheat on his diet and he got exercise like the doctor told him to. We always knew it might happen, but it was something I didn't *want* to know. I think I pretended that it wasn't real." She fell silent and gnawed hard on her bottom lip.

Jonathan leaned over and patted her hand. "I'm sorry."

She swallowed hard. "Thank you. It's just--this murder thing on top of losing him. That can't be real. I *know* Steven." She didn't seem to realize she'd used the present tense, and Jonathan willed her not to catch her mistake and correct herself. "Ask anyone. Steven was the most caring man I ever met." There came the past tense, breaking her heart. Her coffee cup rattled in the saucer and she put it down hastily on the table. A little coffee slipped over into the saucer. "He couldn't have killed anyone. I *know* he couldn't."

"It must seem like a horrible dream," Jonathan offered.

She wrapped her arms around herself. "Except that I won't ever wake up."

"Did your husband ever say anything to you about his past?" Benedek asked.

She jumped on the question. "No, not much. His parents were dead, he said. He was from Chicago--except the police say that wasn't true. Yes, about his parents being dead and having no brothers or sisters or any close kin, but they say he was from Richmond, not Chicago." She hugged herself hard. "I'm from Minneapolis myself. We used to talk about being Midwesterners together. He never sounded southern. Never used a turn of phrase like 'y'all' or anything to suggest he wasn't from the Midwest. He *sounded* like he was, and if it was a lie, in our entire marriage he never slipped. I believe him. I think the FBI have the wrong Steven Archer. Or that it was a mistake, that someone else killed that professor. I think that's why Steven appeared to me, to reassure me that he wasn't a killer." She tossed back her hair and faced them defiantly. "I will never believe Steven killed that man. Never."

"Tell us about the appearance at the cemetery," Benedek urged. "Was he like he'd looked in life? Or was he transparent and misty? Did he hover above the ground? Did he speak?" In spite of his eagerness to hear about the ghost, he kept a note of sympathy in his voice.

Her grip around herself tightened. "He was...fuzzy at first, almost insubstantial. Then he got more solid until we couldn't see through him. I could see him and Doug could see him, but the FBI men couldn't. Well, I don't think Jones could but the other one looked kind of funny right at the end. Kendrick. I don't think he saw Steven as well as Doug and I did, but I think he saw or sensed something. He wouldn't admit it, of course. But I think he knows it was real."

Jonathan stepped in. "Did you and Doug compare notes at the time or did you make your accounts separately?"

Her gaze sharpened on him. "You think we influenced each other?"

"I think it's possible, yes. It does happen. People see something they can't explain and they babble about it excitedly and their stories will often merge. It's better to write separate accounts before comparing notes verbally."

"Doesn't usually happen, Doctor Jon," Benny contradicted him. "How many people who see a ghost are gonna put logic first? If they're not rushing to call yours truly for the headlines or telephoning the Ghostbusters, they're running scared or trying to top each other's stories."

"Headlines?" Karen reared back. "I thought you were from the university."

"I am from Georgetown," Jonathan reassured her. "My colleague is a writer on the paranormal. It's true he does write for a newspaper, but any cases he takes with us are confidential unless you sign a waiver releasing

your name and relevant information." He shot a stern glance at Benedek to urge him to play along.

"Hey, I can be discreet," Benny agreed with a ready grin. "And if I'm tempted not to, Doctor Moorhouse will threaten me with lawsuits."

Karen eyed him doubtfully.

"My department chair, the one who sent us," Jonathan explained hastily. "Your friend Doug used to take classes from her. Mrs. Archer, have you seen the spirit since the funeral?"

She shook her head. "No, not seen him. But I've had a feeling more than once that he's here. That he's trying to communicate. Before you say anything, I know it could be grief and hysteria at work. I've had such bizarre thoughts, wondering if Steven's death was really his heart. I even called his doctor."

"Was there an autopsy?" prompted Benedek.

"Yes, there was. Even though Steven was seeing a doctor regularly and on a known heart medication, he hadn't been to the doctor's office for several months. His potassium levels were elevated, but that can happen normally. Digoxin, which he took for his condition, and perhaps an unwise food intake, could have caused arrhythmia, and that's likely what caused his death. It was ruled a natural death. The doctor thought he may have absent-mindedly taken an extra dose of his medication. I wanted to be very sure, so I asked. The coroner said that there was no reason to suspect his death was anything but natural." She stopped hugging herself and pressed her hand to her mouth. "You're not suggesting--suicide? I won't believe that, not for a second. What for? Guilt over this supposed murder that took place twenty years ago? That's ridiculous. I tell you, Steven didn't kill that man."

"Did he ever mention Doctor Frederick?" Jonathan asked.

"No. Never. Nor the Georgetown Institute, either. He didn't talk much about his past. He'd lost his parents and I don't think his early life had been happy. We were happy together. There was no need to dwell on the past. None." She glared at them. "If you've come to accuse Steven--"

"We haven't," Jonathan said hastily. He had liked Doctor Frederick, and knew himself to be partisan toward the victim. It was also true that a killer's loved ones might protest his guilt. Maybe Archer had been so shocked by his actions he had turned his life around. Maybe living a lie for twenty years had perturbed his spirit--assuming the ghost was anything more than the widow's grief and shock. Jonathan was a skeptic, had always been a skeptic, in spite of Benedek's urging to jump into the pool of belief with both feet.

"We came to find out why his ghost might appear," Benedek said hastily. "Ghosts usually have unfinished business. You think Steven was trying to tell you something?"

She hesitated. The experience had shocked her so much that it wouldn't have occurred to her to assign motives to the spirit. "Maybe to reassure me it wasn't true."

Benedek caught Jonathan's eye, then he plunged in. "Maybe. But if he knew it wasn't true, then it wasn't guilt that made him pop up at the grave."

"He might have been trying to convince me they were wrong," Karen insisted. "I *know* they were wrong. I know Steven, and he was not a killer. I will never believe he was a killer."

She sounded utterly positive. Jonathan couldn't tell if it were a case of self-delusion or not. But the man's social security number matched the killer's. He had to have done it. Or if someone else had, his drug supplier, perhaps, if he had been there. The janitor hadn't seen anyone else, so even if the supplier had been present and actually killed Doctor Frederick, Archer would have been at best an accessory to murder.

"What about drug dealing?" he asked.

Karen's eyes widened with astonishment. "*Steven*? You can't be serious. He'd no more have dealt drugs than he would have killed someone. What other lies have you come to tell me?"

"Karen, I knew Doctor Frederick, the murder victim," Jonathan admitted. "He was a professor at the Institute. He was a good man and a good teacher, and he chose to confront Kenneth Archer over the drug dealing rather than turn him in to the police. A janitor saw him leave the murder scene and found the body. Your husband ran. I know you and his friend Doug Jacoby believe him innocent, but it was always an open-and-shut case."

"No." She jumped to her feet. "I don't care. No one actually saw him commit murder. He might have gone in there and found the body and panicked, but he didn't kill that man. I *know* he didn't do it. I know it. I *know* it." Her voice rose to near hysteria. Benedek reached out to pat her hand, but she threw herself to her feet.

That was when the ghost came. This time it didn't gradually phase in from transparency. It materialized all at once, one moment nothing, the next present. It went to Karen and stretched out a hand to her. She gasped, whitened, and took an involuntary step backward before she caught herself. Then she cried, "Oh, Steven," and ventured a tentative hand to the spirit. When he took her hand, she drew a shocked breath, then began to cry.

Benedek whipped out an Instamatic and snapped away, but Jonathan studied the ghost. Surely he was imagining this, but if so Benedek and Karen were imagining it, too. Jonathan resolved to write down what he had seen at the first opportunity. Benedek's pictures surely wouldn't work. Did ghosts photograph?

"Oh, Steven, I know you didn't kill that man," Karen cried. "I *know* it."

The ghost eyed her sadly then he shook his head. Jonathan didn't know if that meant he *hadn't* done the killing or if he were telling Karen her faith was misplaced. She might have hesitated for a second, too, because she caught herself, tightened her grip on the ectoplasmic hand, and said, "You didn't. Did you?"

Again the headshake. Did ghosts lie?

"Can't you speak?" Karen wailed. "Please, Steven, speak to me."

The ghost struggled to vocalize. "N-not," he managed in a ghastly hollow tone that reminded Jonathan of Marley's ghost in *A Christmas Carol*. Marley had turned fluent fast. Maybe Steven would, too.

The near-transparent face contorted with effort. "Murdered," he breathed, the tone hollow and echoing. Then, no matter how hard he fought against it, he faded away.

"No. Steven, come back," Karen cried. Her fingers tightened convulsively on air, then her hand fell to her side. She looked even whiter than the spirit had, and Jonathan put his arm around her shoulders and guided her back to the sofa.

"Murdered?" echoed Benedek. "Who was murdered?"

"Steven," cried Karen, struggling up again. "Steven said he was murdered."

Jonathan wasn't sure that was what the ghost had meant. And what did 'not' mean? She'd asked if he could speak, and he'd said 'not'. Definitely not a direct answer to the question. An answer to the ghost's own need? But 'murdered'? Why would anyone murder Steven Archer? No one but the FBI had suspected he was the long-sought killer, and they were slow to track him down. Jonathan was positive the ghost hadn't meant the FBI had killed him. Maybe he was referring to Doctor Frederick's murder, but the way it had felt to Jonathan was that the ghost had been speaking of his own death. What had Karen said, that they feared he might have taken an accidental overdose of his heart medicine, that there was too much potassium in his system? How to kill someone with a heart condition and make it look like an accident? Substitute the incorrect dosage of his medication? Sneak something into his food? But *why*? If no one knew who he was, why try to kill him? Or had he realized he was about to be exposed and took the overdose himself to spare his wife the knowledge? Was that why he had manifested, because the Feds had not let sleeping dogs lie?

"Did he have any enemies?" asked Benedek.

"Steven?" Karen stared at him as if he'd suggested her husband had run a medieval torture chamber. "No, he was the kindest man who ever lived. He'd do anything for a friend. He was always bringing me little gifts, not because he had to but because he liked doing it. When Gary Herman at work had a heart attack, Steven organized a series of fund-raisers to help pay the medical expenses that weren't covered by insurance. He didn't have to. He wanted to. He coached the little league team and was in the Big Brother program every year. He loved kids. He helped them get scholarships whenever he could. He was the kindest man I ever knew. So if you're saying someone messed with his medication and killed him, I can't even *imagine* it." She shivered. "Oh, Steven...."

Jonathan and Benedek exchanged uneasy glances. It was hard to imagine the man she described as ever being a drug dealer who had killed his mentor. But people did change. Maybe those crimes had shocked him into altering his life. But it seemed a long way to go, from willingness to squander other lives through drugs, from killing a good man. Still, it was possible, and the FBI had to have reason to suspect him. He had even used his

own social security number. That had to indicate he had a lot of confidence that he wouldn't be found. Maybe after twenty years, some of that had been justified. It was hard to say.

The ghost hadn't looked like a murderer, though.

And that was where Jonathan came to the sticking point. Bad enough that he had actually seen a ghost--at least he'd seen a man materialize out of mid-air, a man that Karen called Steven. Benedek had probably conversed with many ghosts--or thought he had--but this was new for Jonathan. He didn't want to believe it, not for a second. He still remembered the sham ghost of his father that Benedek had produced in Fartham. A high-tech medium could fabricate almost anything, although the FBI incursion at the cemetery had been unexpected, and there would have been no reason to fake a ghost there--at least no reason Jonathan could imagine.

The ghost didn't reappear. Benedek started making signs that he was ready to leave, and Jonathan said his farewells to the stricken widow and allowed Benedek to pull him away.

When they were outside, he stopped near his car. "Benedek, could that have been a fake ghost, like the one in Fartham?"

Benedek considered it. "Not unless that woman's the best actress on Earth." He grinned. "Usually, when they fake them, the ghosts spill the beans like you wouldn't believe. They say things that make sense and get the point across. They rattle off answers like contestants on Jeopardy."

Jonathan had to say that every word the ghost had uttered was subject to interpretation. "Not?" "Murdered." Was he saying he *hadn't* been murdered? Or that he *had*? And, if he had, who could have done it? Someone who knew he was really Kenneth Archer? *Had* anyone known? Even if they had, they'd also have to know about Doctor Frederick. Even Doctor Moorhouse hadn't known Archer was still alive and living in the D.C. area, and who else would care more? Jonathan didn't think the murdered professor had had any family; there had been no one at the funeral but friends and colleagues, with Doctor Moorhouse the chief mourner. She would hardly have killed Archer, no matter how much she might have hated him.

Of course if he *had* been murdered, there was no reason to suppose it tied in with the long-ago murder. Archer had been a drug dealer and a killer. In spite of his wife's contention that he was a saint among men, he might have continued secretly in his criminal ways and have enemies no one was aware of. Sometimes, the wife was the last to know.

Jonathan felt for Karen Archer, though. She was so utterly positive her husband was the good man she believed him to be, and so, apparently was Moorhouse's former student, Jacoby, who had come to tell her about Archer. That wasn't proof the man was virtuous, of course. He must be who the FBI claimed, especially if he had the same name and social security number. Had he simply believed it was safe after all this time to emerge, using his middle name?

"We have to find out what he's been up to since the murder," Benedek said. "How long he's been at his job, for instance. The FBI might have closed the books on Frederick's murder, but you know Doctor M is not gonna go for that."

She would definitely want more information. Karen's insistence on her husband's innocence probably wouldn't cut any ice with Moorhouse. "So how did you know to come here?" Jonathan asked. He'd wondered that, certain Doctor Moorhouse wouldn't have called in Benedek.

"Well, not from you." Benedek didn't linger over that point, once it was made. Instead he smiled brightly. "Simple. A guy at the funeral saw the ghost, too, and called me. I did some checking. There was a bit in one of the New York papers about Archer being identified, but it didn't make big headlines. Buried on page ten. If they'd arrested him alive, it would have been all over the place, but nobody cares once he's already croaked."

"Your sensitivity never ceases to amaze me," Jonathan murmured.

Benny wagged his eyebrows. "Next step, we talk to the ghost," he said. "Without wifey. Better yet, we summon up Doc Frederick's perturbed spirit. Time for a séance."

Jonathan groaned. He could well imagine Moorhouse's reaction to such a strategy. Even worse was the thought of discussing the incident in detail with her.

"I'll call in the big guns. My favorite medium," Benny said with one of his shameless grins. "Malcolm the Mind. Former hitman for the CIA. He can get at anything."

"You're kidding." He wanted to yank the words back as soon as he had spoken them. Benny didn't kid. He just flung incredibly unlikely weirdos in Jonathan's direction and considered it a means of broadening MacKensie's outlook. "Malcolm the *Mind...*"

Benny's grin broadened. "I'll have him here tomorrow," he promised and headed for his car. "Maybe even tonight. Ta." Jonathan stared after him for a moment. Benedek had been...different somehow. He wasn't sure how to explain it. It was just a feeling. But then it had been three months since the last time. Benedek wasn't exactly effusive. Who knew what he'd been up to in the meantime?

Jonathan glanced at the Archer house. Would Archer's ghost appear again? Had that been real or simply what he'd been led to expect? Conversations with the recently departed had never taken place before Benedek showed up in his life and disrupted his comfortable academic niche.

The funny thing was, he wouldn't change it back, ex-CIA hitmen, psychic ventriloquist's dummies, wall-feelers, and aerobic exorcists notwithstanding.

He concealed his own smile until he was safe in his car and Benedek couldn't see it.

"Doctor MacKensie?"

Jonathan half expected the ghost of Kenneth Steven Archer to appear again, but the 'apparition' in his office doorway was far more substantial, and much more familiar. One of the professors in the mathematics department, wasn't he? Tall, with a flourishing red mustache *a la* Pancho Villa, and five to ten years older than Jonathan, he wore a brigand's aura to match his facial adornment, and compensated for it with Armani suits and Gucci shoes. His hair was slate grey, with only the mustache and fair complexion to announce its former color. A tenured professor, Harry Naughton was reputed to come from old money. Jonathan had seen him around campus but had never spoken to him other than to say hello in passing.

"Doctor Naughton? Can I do something for you?"

Naughton contrived to appear diffident, but a suave diffidence that he countered with a man-of-the-world grin. "I heard you're investigating the death of Ken Archer? Or tracking down his...ghost?"

"Doctor Moorhouse has me involved in the Unexplained Phenomena unit, yes. I'm certainly not investigating the man's death. As far as I know, he died of natural causes. I'll leave criminal investigations to the police department."

"But there was a ghost sighting?" The man's mouth curled fastidiously.

Jonathan bowed his head in confirmation. He wasn't comfortable admitting that he had encountered the spirit himself. "At the funeral, yes, when his widow was certain to be distraught." He frowned. "How does this concern you? I shouldn't have considered you a believer."

Naughton laughed. "I shouldn't consider myself one, either. While I admit that there are many things out there that I haven't encountered, I have trouble with the concept of ghosts. I don't believe in life after death, heaven or hell. When we die, we stop. That's all. I do believe in grief-induced hysteria and collective imagination, though. So tell me--" with another you-and-I-know-better look-- "what really happened?"

"It's too soon to be sure if anything did. As you say, most so-called paranormal incidents have rational explanations. Once in a great while, there is something conventional reality can't explain, but that doesn't necessarily mean there are ghosts and goblins loose in the world, or werewolves, or any of the myths the gullible thrive on." Naughton's matter evoked the most pompous side of Jonathan's nature. "Why do you ask?"

Naughton spread his hands. "The thing is, I was an undergraduate here at the same time as Ken Archer. I knew him. I frankly have my doubts that he was guilty of the murder of Doctor Frederick. I think he was framed."

Ah. Now that would be a motive for haunting, all right. An innocent suspect, content to depart until his reputation was impugned after death. *God, MacKensie, you've been hanging around Benedek too long.*

"There was a witness," he reminded the other man. "The janitor."

"Well, now, that's interesting. He was automatically assumed innocent, wasn't he? For all anybody knows, he might have seen Ken leave the building and killed Frederick himself and put the blame on Ken."

For an instant, Jonathan hesitated. That was possible, after all, and it went with what Karen Archer had insisted, that her husband couldn't kill anyone. But there was still the drug charge to deal with. "How well did you know Archer?" he asked. "There was talk that he was dealing drugs."

Naughton grimaced. "I think he sold a little grass. It was common then. I'm not saying it was right--it was illegal--but it wasn't as if he were supplying heroin to children. I'm not even sure about the marijuana. Somebody mentioned it to me once, but I never saw Ken high, and I never saw him with any, other than at parties where there were people smoking it. Flower children, you know. Hippies." He quirked his mouth in tolerant amusement at another era's foibles. "I'm not saying he didn't, but I am saying he was a decent guy, and that it's a long way from sharing marijuana to killing a professor he looked up to."

"You were his friend back then?" Jonathan asked.

"Not a close friend, but I knew him and I liked him. We had one or two classes together, not too many because by then we were specializing and our fields were different. I wasn't there after the murder because I came down with a serious case of mononucleosis right about then and had to take time out. I went back home to recuperate and then I wound up finishing my degree at Columbia, instead. I only returned to Georgetown a year ago. I hadn't thought of Ken for years, not till I saw an article in the paper this morning. And heard a rumor that you were involved in the investigation."

"Doctor Moorhouse sends me to investigate paranormal occurrences," Jonathan explained. "Maybe you can help. You knew Archer. What did he look like?"

"He was about my height, and he was blond, a dark dirty blond, I remember. I used to have some snapshots of the old gang, but I've moved around in my career before I came here and I doubt I could lay my hands on them. He was more a drinking buddy than someone I'd have stayed in touch with after graduation. But I thought since I knew him, maybe I could help."

Jonathan wasn't sure how. He was pretty certain Naughton had come here to get the dirt about the scandal rather than to offer any information that would be many years out of date. Mention of the janitor was interesting, though. Had Benedek considered that possibility? Was the man still here at the university? Was he so far above reproach that no one would have questioned him? Jonathan needed more information.

"Were you here at the time of the murder?" he asked.

Naughton frowned. "I don't think so, or else I was already sick. I know I went home about that time. I was pretty much flat on my back for six weeks. The semester had ended and I hadn't completed my work so I had to retake those courses. It was easier to live at home and resume my studies there, and my credits transferred. But you don't care about that. Look, if I were you, I'd check out the janitor. Ken was no killer, and anybody who ever knew him will tell you that."

Yes, that was definitely the party line. His wife, his friend Jacoby, and now an old acquaintance, all claimed the same thing. Maybe it was time to look into the janitor. Jonathan realized he didn't even know the man's name.

Unwilling to admit to Naughton that he had seen the ghost of Archer himself, Jonathan showed the man out of his office and returned to his desk, frowning. This was moving past a simple paranormal investigation. Maybe he needed to know more people who had been friends with Archer, or even acquainted with him. Who had been teaching here then who might have had Archer in a class? He dug out his list of the tenured professors on the staff and went through them carefully, marking the ones he knew who had been here. Doctor Frederick had been a history professor. Did that mean Archer's major had been history? Naughton had studied mathematics and mentioned that they didn't have many classes together. Just the basic general ed classes. So, check out history professors who had been here twenty years earlier.

Jonathan sorted through the names. Doctor Kelly had been here then, but Kelly had been ancient even twenty years ago. Now he could barely totter from classroom to classroom; he was going to retire at the end of the semester, and his memory was shaky. All the teachers knew about the way the students automatically delegated someone to walk the professor to his next class. Once he got started on a lecture, he was fine, but the basics of organization eluded him. He might remember twenty years ago better than what he had for breakfast,

but there were no guarantees. Jonathan marked him down as a last resort.

Moorhouse had been here, of course, but Jonathan wasn't sure he wanted to take this to her yet. The long-ago killing still disturbed her. Police records might reveal the janitor's name, but Archer had never been apprehended so there had been no trial. The janitorial staff that worked Meyer Hall, where the killing had taken place was part of a firm that cleaned all the university buildings. Had it done the same work then?

That was the quickest route. Jonathan looked up the number and phoned them. No, Acme Cleaners had secured the university contract in Nineteen seventy-six. They didn't know who had held it before.

Professor Taylor. She had been here then as a teaching fellow. Jonathan regretfully put aside his still-ungraded papers and hurried across to Meyer Hall where the History staff had their offices. He knew Taylor fairly well professionally because she taught ancient history and could relate to the archaeology department. Her minor had been in archaeology and she'd been on a few of GI's sponsored digs in Egypt. Jonathan's primitive man and pre-man were well before her period, but she was the department's leading expert in Ancient Egypt. To enter her office was like stepping into a detached wing of the Cairo Museum, crammed with artifacts that would have been better for a little dusting. A row of canopic jars, their lids in the shape of ancient gods did paperweight duty for four stacks of papers. A couple of *shabti* statues adorned the top of her bookshelf and a whole slew of them decorated a table stacked with books and papers. A jackal statue in black edged with gold had pride of place on her desk.

The woman herself lent an air to the period with a huge scarab necklace that lay on a flattish chest, and matching, smaller, earrings, in a near-turquoise blue that went well with the fair hair, so determinedly not grey that everyone on the staff suspected her of coloring it. She was in her mid-forties, her face still smooth and unlined, and she didn't carry so much as one extra pound. All business, Doctor Taylor. When he thought of her at all, Jonathan had always considered her wedded to her career.

"MacKensie? Good afternoon. I have ten minutes before my next class. What can I do for you?"

He came right to the point. "You were teaching here when Charles Frederick was killed."

"I was a teaching assistant then, finishing up my doctoral studies." Her eyes darkened with vivid memories. "He was a good man, an honorable man. I read that the killer has since died, but of natural causes. A shortened life, but then he shortened Charles' life." Her mouth quirked. "The grapevine has it that his ghost is flitting about, and that you and your journalist friend have been investigating."

The campus grapevine had been frantically busy, by all accounts. "Merely asking a few questions." Jonathan couldn't tell this practical woman he had seen the killer's spirit and that, somehow, he had doubts. The ghost hadn't fiercely proclaimed his innocence, which somehow spoke louder than his faltering two words. "And I've one for you."

"Yes?" Her eyes grew vague. "I was with my husband that evening--he wasn't my husband then, but we had started dating. I remember we'd been out to dinner. The police questioned me the next day to see if I had been in the building; that's how I remember it. I think they checked my alibi, not so much because I would have been a suspect, but to verify that I wasn't here, that I couldn't have seen or heard anything." Her mouth twisted. "I am not in the habit of lying to the police. I did remember that Charles had been upset about a student and had talked about having a meeting with him. He'd said so in the lounge here without naming the student, although a few of us suspected he meant Archer."

"So anyone might have known there was a meeting planned?" Jonathan frowned.

Her eyes lingered on his face. "And that is significant?"

"I don't know if it is or not. The widow questions his guilt." He held up a hand before she could interrupt. "I know. That's natural. Of course she would. But the man is dead and can't fight for himself. I know there was a police investigation and they would have asked these questions already."

"They did," she said. "Yes, people knew Charles would be working late. But Archer was seen running from Charles' office. No one else heard or saw anything, but Archer ran and the janitor found the body immediately after that."

"Do you know who the janitor was?" Jonathan asked without much hope. Taylor didn't look like the kind of woman who paused to chat with the cleaning help.

"I can't remember," she said, right on cue. "I think his name was Max or Mac, but I didn't really know him."

We greeted each other if we passed in the corridor, no more. He was nearing retirement age, I know that. He had a mustache like something you'd buy from the Fuller Brush Man, and eyebrows to match, maybe to make up for the fact that he was as bald as an egg, but I can't remember anything else." She planted an elbow on her desk and cupped her chin in her hand. "Do you honestly believe someone else committed the murder and Archer ran so he wouldn't be suspected? Isn't the most obvious solution usually the correct one?"

"Do you always assume that, Doctor, even on a dig?"

Her fingers tapped against her chin. "Hmm. Not that I indulge in wild speculation, but I see your point. Archer's wife--was she pretty?"

"You think I'd be more sympathetic to her because of that?"

She narrowed her eyes. "No, I think you'd be sympathetic to anyone in distress, and she obviously must be. I remember your father, MacKensie. He used to say that you were the type to jump on your white steed and ride off to tilt at windmills. Only then he'd smile, and say, 'but my son's windmills would be more than they appeared, every single time.' He was very proud of you. I think he'd be proud of you now."

A kernel of warmth filled Jonathan's stomach and spread outward. Hearing that his father had respected him enough to praise him to his colleagues touched him. The Nobel Prize had always loomed over him as a measure of his father's worth. To have secured the Nobel Laureate's respect was as good as winning an award of his own.

Taylor must have realized he was speechless, because she continued calmly, "Ask Mike Alvarez about the janitor. He used to play racquetball with him." She lifted her chin out of her hand and reached for a folder. "If I remember anything else, I'll give you a call, although I'm sure you'll find Archer actually did it. He should have paid for it long ago."

Jonathan wasn't as certain as she was. Oddly, he was becoming less positive of Archer's guilt as the afternoon progressed. Naughton was convinced someone else had done it, maybe the janitor, and Taylor said other people knew Charles Frederick would be working late that night. It didn't make Archer innocent, but it flung a mild question or two into the mix.

It was the ghost. That was what bothered Jonathan. He did *not* want to believe he'd really seen it, but he was too honest with himself to deny that he had seen...something. It might be what he expected to see. It could even have been a fake set-up, there at the house. Much more likely to falsify a haunting in a controlled setting, and Jonathan had seen what a high-tech medium could accomplish at the Pence house in Fartham on his very first case. Benedek was sure a fake ghost would have been more articulate, and Jonathan realized that was a point in the ghost's favor. Ready to jump on any spiritual bandwagon, Benedek could have been defending the spirit as real. But the fact that Benedek was willing to consider the likeliness of fakes and have a reason why he believed in it other than the fact that they'd both seen it said something about its possibility.

The ghost had said 'not' after his wife had asked about the killing. Was he saying he hadn't done it? Or something else that neither Jonathan or Benedek had considered? Maybe even a protest that he was not dead. Jonathan had been forced to read a little literature in the field of hauntings. Doctor Moorhouse had forced it on him, and he'd waded through it as if it were assigned reading for a boring course. Some ghosts didn't understand that they were dead. Maybe Archer didn't, either. Some ghosts, apparitions, tended to repeat the pattern of a traumatic moment, without conscious awareness of their surroundings. Archer's ghost had seen his wife and responded to her, although inarticulately. What did it mean?

Jonathan knew he wouldn't figure it out easily, if at all, so he shrugged it aside. How long before Benedek showed up with his hit-man medium in tow? Before that happened, Jonathan wanted to learn as much as he could. Mike Alvarez? He was a fluent linguist, taught both Spanish, which he'd been raised to, and French. Jonathan had heard him rattle off rapid-fire French so colloquial that he would have fooled a Frenchman, and even thrown in a dash of Greek and German. It was time to see what he would do in plain English.

"Max Rasputin," Alvaraz said promptly. "I knew him pretty well. A decent guy. Entirely self-taught. He

never finished high school, but I swear he'd read more books than any man I ever met. I remember when he was reading *Ulysses*. He carried it around poking out of his backpack, and if he had a spare moment, he'd be into it, reading a page here, a page there. We had a discussion about it once, and I swear, the guy was articulate and insightful--and sharp as a tack. I remember urging to him get his G.E.D. and take some classes. He'd have run circles around even the brightest students."

Rasputin didn't sound like a killer, but then nobody said murderers hated to read or couldn't be intelligent. "He found Charles Frederick's body, I'm told," Jonathan suggested.

"That's right, he did. I was still in grad school then. I didn't know that Archer guy who did it, but I remember being pissed off about it. Doctor Frederick was a great guy, and poor old Max was pretty shaken about finding the body. He said this Archer barreled out of the office and nearly knocked him flat on his keister."

That had a ring of pure truth to it as if Alvarez were inadvertently quoting. Of everything Jonathan had heard today, that made it most likely the story had happened the way the police and everyone insisted that it had.

"Is Rasputin still alive?" he asked.

Alvarez stopped and rubbed his forehead as if the gesture would somehow jump-start his brain. "I *think* so," he said slowly. "I lost touch with him a few years after he retired. I think he was planning to retire to Florida, but I'm not sure if he did or not. Something makes me say not, but I can't precisely recall." He gave a wry shrug. "Just wasn't important, I guess. I mean, I liked the guy, but he was a casual acquaintance, and I was young and just getting established. I'd finished up my doctorate and was teaching and had my eye on tenure. I was involved with reshaping the linguistics program here and even studying a few ancient languages on the side, just for the fun of it." He rattled off a line that Jonathan suspected was Aramaic, added a couple of words in Latin, and concluded in ancient Greek. Jonathan was no linguist, but he'd been exposed to the academic mindset all his life but the only one of those languages he knew was Latin, and that shakily.

"Beyond my touch," he said with a smile. "I'll try to track down Rasputin. Doctor Moorhouse is remembering Charles Frederick, now that Archer is dead."

"That's right, she was going to marry him. Sad for her. I don't know her very well, but I can see how it might hit her. Jessica Taylor, too."

"Professor Taylor?" Jonathan asked in surprise. "Why her, particularly?"

"That's right, you weren't here yet back then. She had the hots for Frederick like you wouldn't believe. Even though he was engaged to Moorhouse, she made a dead set at him. She was pretty decent-looking back then--I think Frederick was tempted. For all I know, he followed up on it." He shrugged. "No, I don't have any reason to think that, just that he was a red-blooded guy and she was like a nice juicy plum that just dropped into his lap."

"I don't remember her at the funeral." Jonathan could call up a memory of all those people standing there at the graveside. It's possible he had forgotten, or that she had been at the church but hadn't followed on to the cemetery.

"No, she wouldn't have come," Alvarez replied. He grimaced. "I'm sure somebody told her it would have been in bad taste. It was over by then, if there'd every been anything to it from his side. The wedding date was set. God, I haven't thought of this in years. I'd forgotten about Jessie making such an ass of herself. It was a minor scandal. Then, after Frederick was dead, she pulled herself together and turned to Jack Taylor. At least he wasn't attached to someone else. She was dating him by the time Frederick was killed. They married that summer."

"I don't know him. She mentioned him just now, but I thought she was divorced."

"She is. Many years divorced, I think. I don't remember the details." His expression suggested that it was just a routine divorce, not particularly interesting. Except, of course, to Jessica Taylor.

Definitely of interest to her. So, in a way, she had been the woman scorned. Did that make *her* a suspect in the killing? Had anyone ever looked beyond the words of the witness? Probably not. Why scrounge around for alternate motives when a suspect had been seen fleeing the scene, a suspect who might have had reason to kill him.

"Did the ghost of Archer really show up at his funeral?" Alvarez demanded. "Word's going around campus

that he did."

"So they claim." Jonathan had always avoided discussing his paranormal investigations with his Georgetown colleagues, half-convinced they would look down on him for it. This avid interest, as if they were witnesses at a gory accident or entitled to the inside scoop at a society scandal was unexpected, and probably shouldn't have been. People thrived on gossip, after all.

"I wonder why? Guilt and remorse after all this time? Or just the widow's unwillingness to let go?"

Jonathan frowned. Ghosts took to haunting because of unfinished business, or so the studies claimed. Killing someone and getting away with it would definitely be unfinished business, but Archer hadn't felt the urge to confess in twenty years. Would his spirit even care?

Yet the misty figure Jonathan had seen at his widow's home in Arlington had definitely looked as if he had unfinished business. It hadn't been guilt Jonathan had seen on his face, but then he couldn't always read the expressions of the living. Why should the dead be easier?

Was he actually starting to believe in this? Was Benedek rubbing off on him?

"I have no idea," he said honestly. "Thank you for your time."

Back in his own office, he resorted to the simplest source of information, the telephone book. There was a Max Rasputin listed at a Georgetown address.

Surely there couldn't be two men with that name. Jonathan brooded over the address. To phone or to visit? Better to visit if he meant to carry on with his impromptu investigation. Why should he keep it up anyway? Even as the 'other woman', Taylor probably hadn't sneaked over to Frederick's office and bashed him over the head with a bust of Plato. Too much coincidence for her to have done it and sneaked out for Archer to find him and flee. As for Rasputin himself, there had evidently been no evidence that he had any reason for wishing ill of the professor. That didn't mean he hadn't hated Frederick, heard the campus gossip about Archer dealing drugs and the story that Frederick had meant to meet with him and had gone in afterwards and killed Frederick himself. But that was adding complication to what sounded straightforward. A student had been involved in drugs. During a confrontation, he had killed his mentor and fled. Now, years later after an exemplary life, his spirit couldn't rest because of what he'd done.

Damn it, Benedek is rubbing off on me. I'm starting to believe in this ghost.

But I saw this ghost.

He made an impatient gesture. "There has to be a logical explanation," he said stubbornly.

"Sure there is, buds." Benedek poked his head in the door. "The logical explanation is that Mrs. Archer is haunted by a genuine, chain-clanking, drifting-through-walls spookeroo. You can't deny it, either. You saw the whole show."

"I saw a ghost in Fartham, too," Jonathan reminded him more tartly than he'd meant to.

Benedek didn't even look abashed at his actions then, but a fleeting frown touched his brow and disappeared again. "Just because it's possible to fake it doesn't mean every ghost is a fake, Prof. Sure I've tracked down my share of fake ghosts--exposed 'em, too." He rocked on his heels and grinned. "Debunking's good copy. Thing is, at least three people saw the ghost at the cemetery, and it's tough to rig something like that outside--and right on cue after the Feds showed up. Nobody knew they were coming, either--and if it had been fake, they'd have seen it, too."

Benny made several good points, but Jonathan was still a little uncomfortable with the idea. Still, selective fake ghosts sounded really lame to him, too, and it disregarded what he'd seen in Arlington. Maybe it had been mass hysteria.

Jonathan didn't feel remotely hysterical.

"So, what'd you track down?" Benny brushed his hands together as if to announce the discussion of the ghost's reality closed.

"I found a woman Frederick may have had an affair with--and if you mention that to Doctor Moorhouse, I'll see that she closes down your expense account, Benedek."

"Hey, go to the Ice Queen with that news? I value my life more than that. The other woman? Think she bashed him?"

"A former acquaintance of Archer's thinks the janitor did it and put the blame on Archer."

"Fingered him to pass the buck? Could be. I went through the morgue."

"Benedek!"

"Relax-o-vision, Jack. The newspaper morgue, not stacks of stiff. Read all about it. No mention of another woman. Doctor M had an alibi."

Jonathan felt his eyes bugging out. "They suspected *Doctor Moorhouse*?"

"Nah. Just checking out all the angles. The janitor guy Rasputin had no axe to grind. They checked him out, too, and had a list of everybody who was working late that night. Nobody but the janitor saw Archer, and he saw a few people in their offices as he worked, but nothing else suspicious. Said they had gone by the time Archer showed up and offed Frederick."

"I'd like to talk to him, though."

"Thought you might, Detective Jack. Got his address right here."

Jonathan read the one out of the phone book, and Benny nodded. "You're coming on there, JJ. Turning into a regular Sherlock Holmes."

"I thought I was supposed to emulate Hans Holzer."

Benny grinned. "Nah, that's my schtick." He wagged his eyebrows. "Malc says he'll be by tonight and can we hold our séance in Frederick's old office?"

"I don't know who has it now," he started.

"I do. A Dr. J. Taylor."

"Then I was there this afternoon." Jonathan remembered the room cluttered with its Egyptian artifacts. "She's the one who was in love with Frederick back then."

"And now she has his old office. If she bopped him on the noggin, she's got ice water in her veins to work there every day."

Jonathan didn't believe for a second that Taylor had killed Frederick, but the image of her creeping into the office filtered into his mind and he wondered. If she were innocent, she couldn't object to the séance, could she? Of course she could, simply because she might think the whole issue ludicrous. Could Moorhouse clear the way for it? Would she even consider putting up with Benedek and the unlikely hit-man medium in order to seek closure?

"I'll check with Doctor Moorhouse and have her arrange it," he said. "But I'd like to talk to Rasputin first."

"And hope he isn't like his namesake, the mad monk," Benny responded. "I'd better go with you, in case he's a deranged killer. Knowing you, you'd walk right into the murderer's lair and smile politely at him until he swung the axe. Too bad I haven't been keeping up with my karate lessons."

Max Rasputin lived on a quiet Georgetown street in a house that looked like it had gone from ritzy to shabby to nearly ritzy again, but a kind of amateur ritzy as if the man had beguiled the hours of his retirement fixing the place up. Jonathan, who had once dated a woman who could ramble on for hours on historic Georgetown, decided this place wasn't one of the original old mansions but a copy. Still, it was nicely maintained, even if it was the smallest house in the block.

With the ease of a pro Benedek slid his rented car into a space that was nearly too small for it. Driving in Manhattan probably gave him a lot of practice, just as he had practice ignoring the no-parking sign that hadn't daunted any of the local Georgetowners. He stuck a press-card in the window automatically, although Jonathan

doubted traffic policemen would care. "Come on, Watson," he urged.

"I'm Holmes--you're Watson," Jonathan insisted and realized when Benedek grinned wickedly that he'd risen to the bait, just as Benedek had expected him to.

"So, you think Doctor M will have permission for the séance by the time Malc shows up?"

Jonathan remembered the steely thread in her voice over the phone. When he'd filled her in on who he'd talked to and what they'd said, she had listened without interruption until he mentioned the séance. "Benedek. I should have known. You told him about Charles?"

"No, he already knew."

"Of course he did. What a good thing I have no dark secrets, or my life wouldn't be my own. I've heard of Malcolm Thomas. He is considered gifted. Very well, Jonathan, I will make the arrangements."

Remembering the firmness of her tone, Jonathan nodded. "She means to do it."

Benny's eyes glimmered. "Betcha she won't mind coming down on Taylor with her spike heels, either."

No, Jonathan was certain she wouldn't. One didn't cross Doctor Moorhouse, as he had learned when she had decided to make him the head of the Unexplained Phenomena Department.

They got out of the car and went up the steps to Rasputin's house. Jonathan had phoned for an appointment, and the old man had agreed to meet them at four o'clock. When Jonathan explained that he taught at the Institute, Rasputin had grown expansive. "Then you're the son of Lenny MacKensie. Come right ahead. I'll look forward to it."

Lenny? Jonathan had never heard his father addressed so informally, not even by his mother. His interest in meeting Rasputin definitely piqued, he led the way to the door and pressed the doorbell. They heard it chime faintly within.

No one answered.

"That's odd," Jonathan remarked. "He sounded eager to meet with us." Had it been cover? Had Rasputin thought himself busted and fled? He pushed the bell again.

Still nothing. Jonathan leaned sideways to squint through the glass of the nearest window. The angle of the sun denied him any image but that of his own reflection.

Benedek beat out a tattoo on the door. "Yo, Rasputin, the Tsar is here...." His voice trailed off uneasily when the door shifted under the onslaught. Without hesitation, he put his palm against it and pushed.

It flew open.

"Will you step into my parlor...." Benedek chanted. "Come on, Jonny, I don't like this."

"We can't go bursting into a stranger's house, Benedek."

"I think we'd better. The guy was hot to meet you. Now he's not answering and his door is unlocked. He's old. Maybe his ticker is playing up. Maybe he's fallen and he can't get up." He led the way into a colonial entry hall, bare of any furniture but a table that served as a collection point for anything the owner carried into the house. A couple of hats shared the space with a keyring crammed with keys, a sack of groceries that hadn't been put away, a jigsaw puzzle with a picture of a sailing ship and huge waves, a stack of leather-bound books, two used glasses, one with the remains of what might have been tomato juice in the bottom, and three cassette boxes with titles scrawled on them in a crabbed hand. The telephone lay half-buried under the accumulation.

"Mr. Rasputin?" Jonathan called. "Are you here?"

The silence that followed his cry carried an edge of uneasiness to it. Jonathan and Benedek exchanged a doubtful glance, then Jonathan said uneasily, "We'll stick together, Benedek."

"You bet. Weird vibes in this place. Like it's listening to us."

"Haunted, no doubt," Jonathan said sourly and pushed open the nearest door. Then he shouted and ran into the room to kneel beside the elderly man who sprawled on the floor, clutching a wadded up piece of paper in his fist, while a gun lay beside his other hand as if he had dropped it. Blood oozed from a wound at his left temple.

From the bushy mustache and eyebrows and shiny bald dome, he must be Max Rasputin. Was he dead? No, MacKensie heard the forced rasp of his breathing even as he felt for a pulse and found it weak and thready. "He's alive, but he's bad. Call 911, Benedek."

Benny jumped for the hall phone and spoke urgently and succinctly into it. Jonathan heard him explaining what they had found.

He chafed the unconscious man's cheek lightly. "Mr. Rasputin? Can you hear me?"

The victim's eyelids fluttered and he gazed muzzily at Jonathan with no trace of recognition. Probably without any awareness of his setting. "Archer," he muttered faintly. "Archer." Then his eyes slid shut, and he was out again. Archer? Was he trying to tell Jonathan something? Was he rambling? He had to know Archer was dead; he'd said so when he talked to Jonathan on the phone. But there had been a shocked, protesting note to his voice. Had he tried to kill himself out of remorse for lying about what had happened to Doctor Frederick? Had Jonathan's call prompted a suicidal fit of remorse?

The wound in his temple looked more like a graze than a penetrating wound to Jonathan's inexperienced eye. Had his hand spasmed or his purpose faltered at the last moment? He was breathing raggedly. If he stopped, Jonathan would have to start mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He knew how to give CPR, and Benedek did, too. Should they elevate the man's legs? Was he going into shock? Jonathan spotted a folded-up quilt on the back of a huge, sagging armchair and grabbed it. The two of them spread it over the fallen man.

"He mentioned Archer while you were on the phone," Jonathan offered. "He wasn't really conscious, but he said the name twice."

"Whoa, wonder what he means. Think the ghost appeared to him and scared him into trying to off himself?"

"He doesn't look like the kind of man who would scare easily," Jonathan objected. Discounting the fragility due to the man's physical state, Jonathan could see that he had a strong face, a determined face. He didn't look like a poor, helpless victim, except of his own advancing years. He didn't look like the kind of man who would take his own life. Yet here he lay with the gun beside his hand.

Benedek surveyed Rasputin. "Not with a stubborn chin like that. He'd probably stand up to a ghost-- unless he already had a bad ticker. He must be seventy-five. What's that he's holding? Suicide note?" Careful to avoid tearing it, he worked the paper out of the man's grip and opened it. Then he stiffened, not as much with shock as the way a pointer would if he were about to flush a game bird.

"Yo, Jack, listen to this. He did try to off himself. 'I can no longer live with the guilt I feel. An innocent man has died condemned because of me.'"

"Jonathan looked up from Rasputin's face. Benedek's expression gleamed with excitement, even though it was muted because of the man's condition. "Are you saying he really did this because of Charles Frederick's death? But he sounded so eager to talk to me."

"Could have been cover-up, buds. Or maybe after he hung up he figured you were doing your Holmes number. He'd know you worked for Doctor M, if he kept in touch with GI at all. He might have figured the jig was up. So he typed this up, grabbed his trusty gun and--pow." He aimed his finger at his own temple in mimicry of the imagined scenario.

Jonathan stared at the unconscious man with real distress. "I wouldn't have wanted to...." he began then fell silent because it was a singularly pointless remark. "'An innocent man died condemned....' Let me see that, Benedek."

"No clues. It's typed. Probably on that old Underwood over there." He waved his hand at a cluttered desk next to the fireplace. "Never got around to signing it. Or putting away his groceries, either. They're sitting out there on the table--melting ice cream, the whole bit."

His tone was significant. "You're saying...."

Benedek frowned. "Just that he couldn't have been planning to do the deed when he went to the market. Sudden whim?" He glanced around the room as if searching for clues. "Suicide notes ought to be hand-written. More personal. They should be signed, too. Think he got so eager to end it all that he pulled the trigger and then keeled over before he could put his John Hancock on it?"

Jonathan frowned. "We shouldn't be touching the note. It's evidence for the police." Benny set it on the carpet and yanked his hand away as if he could yank back his fingerprints. "You'd better call them too, Benedek," Jonathan continued. "And don't touch anything but the phone."

"Yes, sir, Inspector MacKensie, sir." He threw Jonathan a snappy salute and hurried for the phone again.

"I hope you make it," Jonathan told Rasputin. He couldn't help feeling an edge of responsibility for this man's condition, even though he'd never dreamed his phone call would trigger such a violent reaction.

Benny appeared in the doorway, stopped there, and regarded Jonathan with a knowing frown. "No, you don't, buds," he said with unaccustomed gravity.

"What?" Absently, Jonathan patted Rasputin's shoulder.

"No way this has anything to do with you, Jonathan." Benedek stared at him and frowned. "You didn't kill Frederick. You didn't tell this guy to lie about it, if he did. Only chance he's got to live is because of your Holmes number. If we hadn't shown up when we did, he'd probably have bought the big one. Got it?" He dropped to his knees opposite Rasputin and reached out to poke Jonathan in the arm.

He sounded so stern that Jonathan stared at him, grateful for his friend's determined insistence. "Yes, but..." he began doubtfully.

"No buts about it, JJ. Either he was guilty and it caught up to him because he was afraid the jig was up or..." Abruptly his eyes widened.

"Or?" Jonathan prompted.

"Or somebody else thought he'd make a really great scapegoat, and that's why the note's typed and not even signed." He muttered something under his breath that sounded uncharacteristically profane. Benedek didn't swear. His language was far too colorful already for him to need to.

"You think somebody else was afraid of what he might say to us and tried to *kill* him and made it look like a suicide attempt?" Jonathan glanced over his shoulder involuntarily. The house suddenly seemed huge and echoing, full of menace.

The two men exchanged glances over Rasputin's body. Then Benedek hopped up and grabbed the fireplace poker. They didn't say anything else, but Jonathan listened anxiously for the sound of approaching sirens.

"So let's run through this again. You think someone might have tried to fake a suicide?"

The Metro police had called in the big guns. Instead of explaining their theory to a uniformed patrolman, Jonathan and Benedek found themselves sitting in the back of a car outside Rasputin's house, confronting a genuine plainclothes detective. He had introduced himself as Lang McKellen. Comfortably in his mid-fifties, his center of gravity had shifted toward the region of his belt buckle and his hairline had migrated backward to mid-scalp, but his eyes were alert and intelligent, and regarded them with interest.

"Well, we wondered," Jonathan admitted uncomfortably. "Because he was a witness at a long-ago murder."

"Doctor Charles Frederick," McKellen said promptly. "I know. I was the investigating officer on that one. That's why I'm here. Somebody heard Rasputin's name when the call came in, and I made it out here fast."

"No lie?" Benedek's eyes flashed. "So you think maybe Archer didn't bop Frederick over the head with a statue?"

"No, I'm sure he did. All the evidence points to it, more than just Rasputin's eyewitness account of him running from the scene. He dealt drugs and he had a reputation on campus for being a ruthless little shit who didn't care who got in his way. He was said to have cheated on exams and then fingered other, innocent students to distract anybody from his own actions. Once he'd run, a lot of people were willing to talk about him. Disregard

seventy percent of it because of the publicity and the way people come out of the woodwork to be important when something dramatic happens, and there was still enough to prove that Archer was an amoral bastard who wouldn't have hesitated to bash Frederick over the head even though the prof was trying to help him. But once the APB went out, Archer vanished. A discretion-is-the-better-part-of-valor guy. I heard he'd surfaced, dead, and that the FBI wrapped up their case. Ours was always unsolved. I'd like to wrap it up, but this Rasputin thing...." He grimaced. "We'll need your fingerprints, Mr. Benedek, to compare. I'm sorry you touched the note."

Benedek grinned. "Me too. My prints are on file, but I'll come in. If that note's a fake, you probably won't find any prints but Rasputin's on it anyway, besides mine."

"I'm aware of that, but it must be checked. So tell me this. Evidently the two of you have been running around cavalierly playing detective. Which means that if we were wrong all these years and it wasn't Archer who did it, you probably stirred up the actual killer. I want names, people. Anyone you talked to."

"I'm sorry, Detective." Jonathan frowned. "Of course we'll give you names of anyone who is involved. Doctor Moorhouse asked me to visit Archer's widow, and she was so positive of his innocence. She said so many good things about him, and so did a business friend of his, that I was curious."

"Not to say he didn't turn his life around after he killed Frederick," McKellen mused. "Your Doctor Moorhouse knew Frederick, I assume."

"She was his main squeeze," Benny chipped in.

"They were engaged to be married," Jonathan corrected. He hoped Moorhouse would never learn how Benedek had just described her. She would explode, and since Benedek knew precisely when to eel away and make himself a small target, the bulk of her rant would fall upon Jonathan.

"Interesting. I remember her. Beautiful woman, very intelligent. Quietly devastated by her loss." He wrinkled up his brows. "Go on. Who else?"

Jonathan named everyone he'd talked to, and even one he hadn't, Doug Jacoby. "But he came to Moorhouse. He wasn't even involved with Archer at the time of the murder."

"That you know of, Doctor MacKensie," Keller reminded him. "This Naughton you mentioned? He knew him then. Liked him?"

"He said he didn't believe Archer could have committed the crime."

"Deluded or covering for him?" McKellen rubbed his forehead. "And you mentioned Jessica Taylor. She was in love with Frederick?"

"That's what Alvarez claimed. That there might have been a--"

"Fling," Benny put in when Jonathan fumbled for the word.

"Fling." McKellen tasted the word and didn't seem to find it unsavory. "Evidently over by the time of Frederick's death, assuming it had actually taken place and Alvarez wasn't just reporting old gossip. Which means that Taylor might have been resentful--and so might Moorhouse."

Jonathan was so astonished that his jaw dropped. "You think *Doctor Moorhouse* could have killed Charles Frederick?"

"Hey, you look for the spouse or lover first, right, McKellen?" Benedek grinned. "Not her style, but you never know. Goes up like a firecracker, Doctor M."

"She's not a killer," Jonathan insisted.

The detective made a soothing gesture. "Probably not. I didn't have cause to suspect her at the time, even though this possible love triangle never came out. I still think it was Archer. But it's possible that I was wrong, or that there was more going on than we suspected. We'll turn the note over to forensics. The fact that it's typed and unsigned could mean that the killer wanted to shift blame to Rasputin. Since Archer is dead, that could imply that someone else is the killer and he feared that Rasputin knew something. Or it could simply mean that the guy typed the note and then pulled the trigger before he could sign it. The gun is registered to Rasputin, though."

"He was half-conscious before the paramedics arrived," Jonathan said. "And he muttered Archer's name,

twice."

"You don't say." McKellen went into a fit of abstraction, considering all the implications, which were probably more than Jonathan had imagined. He was an anthropologist and used to following logical steps to solve mysteries about primitive man, but solving modern crimes was not in his job description. Solving unexplained phenomena was entirely different, often accompanied by shaky leaps of logic and totally unfounded claims--by Benedek as well as by the people who supposedly witnessed them.

If he had been the killer, Rasputin might have been trying to exonerate the man he'd framed. Or he might have been a victim of the real killer and trying to clear Archer. If the killer had broken in, found Rasputin's own gun, and tried to make it look like a suicide, Rasputin would surely know who it was. In order for the shooting to look like suicide, wouldn't the killer have had to put the gun in Rasputin's hand and forced it to his temple so there would be powder burns and traces of residue on Rasputin's hand? If he'd struggled, it might explain why the bullet had only grazed him, and why he had a chance to live. But then, why wouldn't he have named the actual killer? It didn't make sense.

"What do you think it means?" Benedek leaned forward, best journalistic manner to the fore, practically inspiring confidence.

"My opinions and theories aren't newsworthy, Mr. Benedek. I want your word--and yours, Doctor MacKensie--that the two of you will cease questioning witnesses and potential suspects. This may be a police matter. If the suicide note is genuine, we'll have to investigate it; if it's faked, then we have a case of attempted murder on our hands. A ruthless killer who had to go one on one with Rasputin and cold-bloodedly shoot him or physically manipulate him to shoot himself. In either case, the matter is now in the hands of the police, and I would take it very unkindly if either of you continued to play amateur detective."

Jonathan considered Doctor Moorhouse and knew she would insist he follow through, but the only legitimate frame of reference he had was the ghost. Imagining McKellen's reaction to the ghost was not pleasant.

"We'll just have our seance, then," Benny said with a big grin. "You're welcome to sit in."

"Seance?" McKellen would have stepped backward if he weren't sitting down. "What seance is this?"

"We're going to try to contact Doctor Frederick and see if he can tell us who did him in. Hot line to the murder victim. Come on, Detective, we can still do that, can't we?"

McKellen couldn't have looked more astonished if Benedek had suddenly pulled off a mask and revealed himself to be President Reagan. "That's outside my responsibility. Doctor MacKensie, are you planning to be involved in this...séance, too?"

Jonathan heaved a sigh as he watched his credibility trickle away. "Unfortunately, yes."

"Well, excellent. Maybe it will keep the pair of you out of trouble." When he saw Jonathan's face fall, he pasted on a hearty smile and said, "You can go now. We'll let you know how Mr. Rasputin does. I'm told he made it to the hospital alive. Evidently he stands a chance of recovery. With a head injury, there are always unpleasant possibilities, but he does have a chance."

"Thank you," Jonathan said and reached for the door handle.

"And one other thing, Doctor MacKensie."

"Yes?"

"I'm told that your father was a good friend of Doctor Frederick and that you knew him. You might not have been a student at the Institute at the time, but you lived here. It's possible that even you may know something you don't remember. If you should recall anything, I expect you to tell me first, before you report to your department chair about it. Have we an agreement on that?"

Jonathan frowned. He had never known anything about what had happened other than what he'd heard on the news and what his father and his father's friends had mentioned at the time. He couldn't have been more surprised if McKellen had told him that he was a suspect in Frederick's death himself.

"I'll make sure he does," Benny agreed and all but pushed Jonathan out of the car.

Jonathan's ideas of a seance were culled from second-rate films and rumors, and only a little from the reading material Doctor Moorhouse had forced on him. Table tilting, mysterious rappings, the extruding of ectoplasm. The experience in Fartham proved how easy it was for a modern medium to fake people out. Benny had explained that Malcolm the Mind didn't want to set foot in the room before the exorcism started, and that he was willing to be searched, if anyone had doubts, to make certain he wasn't carrying anything that could produce ghostly special effects.

Doctor Moorhouse had pulled strings in her own inestimable way, so that Doctor Taylor had agreed to allow them to hold the seance in her office. Watching the two women together, Moorhouse in her usual tailored suit and pearls, determinedly middle-aged, and Taylor, casual in off-duty jeans and sweater that she fondly imagined made her look younger than her actual age, Jonathan did not look forward to their interaction. If Moorhouse knew that Taylor had possibly had a brief affair with her fiance or had made a bet for him and failed, there was no evidence of it in her bearing. She was tense and solemn, and her mouth was tight, but she half expected to receive a message from beyond, from the man she had almost married. Doctor Moorhouse, while quick to discount the sham, the phony, genuinely believed that psychic phenomena was possible. Not all psychic phenomena, not all claims about the paranormal. But she believed that some things had mystic answers. It should have made her gullible, but it didn't. If Malcolm the Mind proved phony, Moorhouse would cut him no slack, former hitman or no.

Since it was her office, Taylor had agreed to allow the seance there only if she could be present. Benedek had shrugged and nodded, and given Jonathan a nudge. Maybe he wanted all the suspects present, because he'd had Jonathan contact Alvarez and Naughton, too. They hadn't disturbed poor Karen Archer. If this seance failed and they needed another, it would have to be at her Arlington home to contact the inarticulate ghost of her husband and urge him to speak.

"But if he bopped Frederick on the head, he might show up anyway. Scene of the crime," Benedek confided before he went off to fetch his hitman.

Everyone had gathered by the time he returned, and Jonathan had started to feel very uncomfortable, watching the people milling about. He hadn't mentioned to anyone that, according to Detective McKellen, Rasputin was still holding his own in the hospital under police guard. If one of these people were a killer, he or she would already know that. The hospital would keep track of anyone who called to inquire after the patient, but McKellen didn't share that information with Jonathan. It was probably just as well, since he wasn't here tonight and Jonathan was. He didn't want to win the attention of a possible killer, any more than he may have done already.

"I've never attended a seance," Naughton said with a charming, wry smile. "I've seen them on television, and I have to admit I am an utter skeptic."

"I'm not sure I am," Alvarez disagreed. "Although I'd be inclined to say that most of it is fake. Like the Gypsy fortunetellers at county fairs. They spout off something so vague that it could apply to ten different situations and then play on the audience responses."

"A successful medium probably has to be a fairly good amateur psychologist," Doctor Moorhouse said, just as Benedek ushered the medium into the room.

Everybody stared. Benedek looked even gaudier than usual beside the utterly nondescript man who accompanied him. The vivid plaid of Benedek's shirt shrieked for attention, but the medium wore jeans and a casual knit shirt with a neutral sports jacket. His hair was somewhere between brown and blond, of a painfully average cut, and his features were so regular that not one of them stood out, unless you saw the shrewdness in his hazel eyes. If he'd really been a hitman, he would have been ideally suited to it, because no one would have ever noticed him in a crowd.

Jonathan's eyes narrowed. No, a shrewd witness might notice him because of the intelligence of his face as he surveyed the audience who awaited them. A quick glance around the room proved that they weren't sure how to take this bland, ordinary character. Some of them had probably half-expected a turbaned swami or a witchy old woman clutching a crystal ball. Malcolm saw them stare and his left eyebrow twitched fractionally. He had evidently counted on their reaction and enjoyed it. A more subtle man than apparent at first glance.

"Everybody, this is Malcolm. He'll be our link to the other side." Benny waved the medium in. Taylor's desk had been shoved to one side to give more room to the table that had been against the wall beside the door. Now it had been far enough out for chairs to fit around it. Most of the books and papers had been piled on Taylor's desk instead, leaving a regiment of *shabti* in the middle of the table.

"Hi, folks." Malcolm grinned self-effacingly. "We'll see if I can get hot-wired to the beyond. Sometimes it works, sometimes not. You want to tell me your names? Ah, you're Doctor Moorhouse? I'll want you on my left, if you please. And you? Harry Naughton? You're the one who knew the suspect? Fine. You on my right." He directed them all, placing Taylor beside Naughton, Jonathan beside Moorhouse, then Alvarez, then Benedek next to Naughton. "A good sized group. No, Doctor Taylor, we won't need the lights off. That's for mediums who want to stage a good show. No spirits will actually manifest, er, appear. If they wish to communicate, they'll speak through me. My voice may change, or it may not. It varies."

He was professional. But then, if he had really been a hitman, he would have to be. A hitman for the CIA, Benedek had said. Jonathan had no doubt they employed people for that, but he had never expected to meet one in a social situation.

It was too bad Rasputin couldn't have been here, too. What had he meant, whispering, "Archer. Archer"?

"Do we need to hold hands?" Doctor Moorhouse asked in subdued tones.

"No. Unless anyone will feel more confident if my hands aren't free?" No one seemed willing to make an issue of it, although Taylor made an exasperated sound and deliberately propped her chin in both hands. She assayed a slightly amused look at Alvarez as if asking him to share her scorn for the entire process.

Malcolm gave her a quick glance, equally diverted, then he turned his attention to the group as a whole. "Benny filled me in on what's been happening here. Most of you are no doubt aware that Kenneth Steven Archer died several days ago, presumably of a heart condition. I've been told his troubled spirit has appeared on at least two occasions. Oh, come, Doctor Taylor, what is it? The term 'troubled spirit'? Corny, perhaps. Better than 'angst-ridden apparition' surely."

Naughton gave a snort of laughter. "Yeah, I'd say a lot better. I'm not sure why we're doing this here instead of at Ken's place, though."

Jonathan had mostly wanted to avoid upsetting the distraught widow. Benedek had been half-convinced that the ghost wouldn't really have a lot to add to his near-wordless manifestation. If they could get information directly from the horse's mouth--the horse, in this case being Doctor Frederick--then there was no need to barge in on Karen Archer and traumatize her further.

McKellen wouldn't consider any séance results as evidence, of course.

"All right, people, we'll begin."

"We don't have to say a prayer or anything, do we?" Taylor's hostility was neon-bright.

"Unless you feel the urge for a personal prayer, no." Malcolm grinned, and the smile transformed his whole face from that of a bland nonentity into someone who was probably ten times more interesting than anyone had suspected. Taylor gave him a second glance and a tiny wrinkle appeared between her eyebrows. For an instant, a flash of recognition touched the medium's eyes before he continued. "I'm just a conduit here. I'm not doing it because I have any axe to grind. I'm not advocating belief. I'm just opening myself up to see if anybody wants to talk to us. Sometimes we get blabbermouths, and sometimes not so much as a word. It's not about religion, unless your particular belief in an afterlife insists upon it."

Naughton, the atheist, shook his head. "I don't mind if anybody else prays, though," he said. "It's their business."

"We won't pray," Moorhouse said with a kind of distaste, not for religion, but for the suggestion that what they were doing had any basis in conventional Christianity.

The telephone rang.

Taylor made an impatient gesture and scooped it up. "Doctor Taylor.... MacKensie? Yes, he's here." She thrust the phone at Jonathan.

"Doctor MacKensie? Lang McKellen. I just wanted to know that Rasputin regained consciousness. And

what he's saying is very peculiar."

"Oh, yes?" Jonathan glanced around the room. Every eye was pinned to him, every face full of concentration. "I'm with a group of people," he said carefully.

"I see. Your, er, seance. Well, don't share this with them. It's perplexing enough. Rasputin will probably live and he seems to be intact mentally. He says he came home from grocery shopping to find an intruder in his home in possession of his handgun, the .22 that was found with him. The man overpowered him, forced the weapon into his hand, and fired it. And he says that the one who did it was Kenneth Archer. However, only Rasputin's fingerprints appear on the gun."

Jonathan felt his mouth fall open. "You can't be serious." If the group could have spouted extra ears, they would have resembled a crowd of donkeys.

"I assure you, I am very serious. Now we both know he's an elderly man, and it's possible there is some senility present or possibly even disorientation following his head injury. But you and I know that a...ghost could hardly hold a gun to a man's head. The abandoned groceries found on his hall table bears out his story. That and the fact that the gun has only fingerprints in the appropriate positions as if he had picked it up and fired it after cleaning it thoroughly. Which is, of course, possible."

"He's not...disoriented?" Jonathan asked. The others stared all the harder. Donkeys with their eyes standing out on stalks. Even Malcolm focused on Jonathan with that very penetrating hazel gaze. Benedek looked like he wanted to jump up and press his ear against the receiver so he could hear what's going on. He made an encouraging gesture with one shoulder and nodded. Maybe he was having one of the premonitions he'd claimed he'd experienced. For once, Jonathan wished he *did* have them on cue, so that he could hear this, although he could well imagine the slant Benedek would place on it. Killer ghosts. Vengeful spirits from beyond the grave.

"He seemed particularly lucid to me. However, considering the fact that Archer is dead, this leads me to several questions."

"The ghost..." Jonathan began, then closed his mouth when a flurry of raised eyebrows proved that there had been no convenient distraction to mislead his audience. The ghost? Yes, he'd seen something, but it had appeared misty and insubstantial even if it had been able to hold Karen's hand. Could it appear more solid? Could it have panicked Rasputin and threatened him into shooting himself in the head? No, there had to be another explanation, a sane explanation. Jonathan didn't want to buy into the ghost-as-would-be-killer theory.

"The ghost." McKellen was frowning. Jonathan didn't have to see his face to know it. "I talked to the widow," he continued. "Evidently at least three people saw the 'spirit' at the gravesite, including one who was only a casual acquaintance and uninvolved in its communication or lack thereof with its wife. Then you and Benedek claim to have seen it, too. Your reports about what it said were not especially helpful."

"To us, either," Jonathan admitted. "I'm sorry, McKellen. I don't want to accept that, either."

"Sometimes we see what we expect to see," the detective replied. "And that would include Rasputin, too. However, I want you to be careful. Is it necessary to proceed with the seance?"

Jonathan thought it would be impossible to stop it now and he doubted he could rope any of these people in for a second try. "I think we'd better," he said. He had the weary feeling that even if Frederick spoke to them through the medium he would only confirm the fact that Archer had killed him. This would be dreadfully upsetting to his widow.

"Very well. I've got one of these new cellular phones. I'm always forgetting at the station or leaving it on so the battery goes dead, but I have it with me now. You can use it to contact me if anyone says anything that seems useful. But I want your word that you won't go off alone with any of those people when it's over, or Mr. Benedek, either."

"You have it." Unless one of them were in cahoots with Archer's spirit, he didn't see how they could threaten him. He frowned, perplexed.

"Then take care." He rattled off a number and Jonathan wrote it down on a scrap of paper from Taylor's desk. If this were a mystery thriller, the paper would hold a mysterious clue, but all it said was 'butter, milk, half-dozen eggs, lettuce.' A grocery list.

Jonathan hung up, more perplexed than ever. Archer was dead and buried, appearing to his widow--and

to Jonathan and Benedek. Could the ghost have sought revenge on Rasputin for turning him in? *What's wrong with you, MacKensie?* he asked himself. *There has to be a more logical explanation.* Then he remembered realizing how much he missed Benedek and their excursions into the paranormal. Benny probably had twelve ideas, each more ludicrous than the last. Jonathan would have given anything for a chance to confer privately with his friend, but the eyes that pinned him were full of impatience that nearly overrode their curiosity.

"What did you find out, MacKensie?" Moorhouse asked.

"That was McKellen. He says Rasputin will probably live."

"And he saw the ghost?" Benedek asked. "I love it. Betcha dollars to doughnuts he'll pop in for a visit the minute we start up."

Taylor's face curled with distaste. "Surely not."

"I don't believe in ghosts." Naughton shook his head. "I don't think I'd want to see poor old Ken's spirit, even if it were possible."

Kenneth Archer...all things to all people. Was he really the saint his wife and colleague claimed him, the product of the drug culture with a good heart that Naughton insisted he was? Or was he really the 'ruthless little shit' McKellen's investigation had produced? A certain type of personality could be both, or at least appear to be both. Amoral, the detective had said, but evidently able to put a good face on it. Yet, if he were really as bad as he had painted, why donate time and energy--and money--to help that ailing colleague? Why bother with the Big Brother program? Could one *grow* a conscience?

Even if he had turned his life around, then why would his spirit have attacked Rasputin? Reverting after death? It wasn't logical and it made no sense.

"I'm not here to summon spirits," Malcolm said. His eyes were busy, studying each person's face. Jonathan had already decided he was a very shrewd man, and Benedek would have given him the complete background. Did he know that, at the very least, he might sit at the table with an accomplice to murder? Was there an answer, a way to untangle the threads? "I'm here to relay messages, no more. Ghosts don't pop in when I sit, at least not usually."

"Thank goodness for that," said Alvarez with a quick grin. Jonathan was inclined to exonerate him in this whole mess. Alvarez's Latin good looks could hardly mislead Rasputin into thinking he was Archer, and the two men knew each other. But then he would probably know best how to find him. The thought of the killer wearing an elaborate mask of Archer appealed fleetingly to Jonathan, but surely that was the stuff of *Mission Impossible*, not real life.

"Let us begin." When Moorhouse talked like that, everybody in the department jumped.

Malcolm didn't jump, but he acknowledged the command in her voice. "Very well. You needn't close your eyes, but I ask for quiet. Try to think about Professor Charles Frederick, any of you who knew him. We want him to talk to us."

No frills and furbelows. Jonathan was more comfortable with that than the conventional trappings of a seance. Not that he expected this to produce results, anyway. Malcolm might ramble, might spill out the required patter, but surely he wouldn't give an over-the-top performance. Would he?

The man's eyes twinkled briefly at Jonathan as if he could read his thoughts. Then he went on. "Charles Frederick. We're met in the room where you were killed. We need your help. Will you talk to us?" He closed his eyes and his hands tightened up into fists on the table before him. He looked like a weightlifter trying to set a new record. The effort was palpable. Sweat beaded his forehead.

No one spoke. The audience barely breathed. Audience? Well, why not? Jonathan was witnessing an interesting performance. Surely, it was all a sham. Doctor Moorhouse evidently thought so because her face was taut. On the other hand, she had loved Charles Frederick. Maybe she was afraid he *would* appear. She had never married. Was that coincidence, or had Frederick been the one great love of her life, the one no one else could measure up to?

"Not...dead." The voice altered subtly. It didn't turn into a stranger's voice; he was still Malcolm talking, but it was as if he were suddenly reading lines someone else had written, like an actor in a play who needed a prompt copy. "Not...dead."

Doctor Moorhouse sucked in an agonized breath. *I wish that were true.* Jonathan could see that response on her face even though she didn't speak a word.

Benedek fell into a pre-assigned role. "Who are you?"

"Doctor...Charles...Frederick."

Taylor made an impatient gesture. "This is ludicrous."

"Quiet!" Naughton urged. He grinned, enjoying the show.

"Remember the night you died?" Benedek prompted.

"Not...dead."

Benedek glanced around the audience. Taylor's face was stiff with distaste and resistance. Alvarez was skeptical but interested. Doctor Moorhouse's eyes held an old pain. And Naughton was tense but intrigued. "Sometimes," Benny muttered in an aside, "the departed spirits don't realize they've crossed over. They can be confused." He turned back to the medium. "Come on, Charlie baby? Who offed you?"

Moorhouse let her eyes fall upon Benedek the way she'd glare at a black beetle that scuttled over her shoe.

"Archer," said Malcolm in that same distant, barely-connected tone. "Kenny...Archer."

It was the 'Kenny' that sent a frisson of doubt racing up and down Jonathan's spine. He'd never heard Archer called 'Kenny' before, not even by his old friend Naughton. Who knew what Frederick had called his pet student? Malcolm might be clever enough to fling that in, but unless one of the audience jumped in and refuted him, who was to say that Frederick hadn't indeed called Archer Kenny.

Malcolm's eyes moved around the room and came to rest on Moorhouse. "Juliana," he blurted in astonishment. "My little Julie."

Her face twisted. Her hands clasped each other and the knuckles whitened. "Ch-charles?"

"I'm sorry. I couldn't be with you. I don't.... I always loved you."

"And I you, Charles." She had slid instantly into belief. Had Frederick really called her 'my little Julie'? Jonathan couldn't imagine her enjoying that, but she had been twenty years younger then and very much in love. He turned his eyes away from her stricken face, feeling uncomfortably like a voyeur. He had no right to witness her pain.

He had to give Benny credit for turning his eyes away, too. *There's no story in this, Benedek,* he thought, and knew that Benedek wouldn't find one in Doctor Moorhouse, even if he wrote up the seance.

Malcolm's eyes moved on, taking in the room. "My old office...." he said thoughtfully. "All these *shabti*.... Who.... Jessie?" His gaze lingered on Taylor, who tossed her hair, and tapped her chin impatiently with her fingertips. "So you made it after all," he said.

"In spite of you," Taylor snapped.

"As it should be. That was never the way to get ahead."

Moorhouse glanced over at Taylor, and saw no jealous resentment in her posture or in her eyes. She was sad, of course, but she didn't look particularly concerned about her supposed rival.

"I always knew, Jessica," Moorhouse said gently. "Charles told me, of course. He tried to understand, and I think he handled it very well."

Taylor's face slid down into her hands. "I loved him," she whispered. "I had to try."

"He knew. I knew. It's all right."

"It's all right," Malcolm's slightly altered voice continued. "No one blamed you."

"It's good to have that resolved," Benedek interjected smoothly. "But we need to know what happened that night, Doctor Frederick."

The hazel eyes touched on Benedek in some surprise. "I don't know you."

"I'm a friend of Jonny's," Benny said quickly and nodded at Jonathan.

"Leonard's boy? Yes, you have a look of him." Malcolm looked tired and drained, but the consciousness that gazed out of his eyes was edged with recognition when he squinted at Jonathan.

"He remembered you fondly, sir," Jonathan said quickly. Was he sliding into belief now? Was this real? How could it be? How could it *not* be?

"That night?" Benedek prompted. He caught Jonathan's eye and beamed encouragingly. He was having the time of his life. That was one thing Jonathan had always realized, that Benedek plunged headfirst into each new mysterious experience. He might pretend to be hardened, but there was a charming vitality about him that drew people in. All those weird friends who rallied around him proved it.

I hope we don't have to wait three months for another case, he thought irrelevantly.

"Told Kenny I'd talk to him. I thought the boy had potential. Too much to waste on this drug thing. Only marijuana, but there was a streak in him, a hardness. But so much charm."

Charm? As if it were a bad thing? Maybe it was bad--in a sociopathic personality. A 'ruthless little shit'. Had Frederick wanted to see the best in a gifted pupil and overlooked the side of his nature that allowed him to kill his mentor without hesitation?

"Charm can be phony," Benny reminded him quickly. "When it's natural, it's great. But sometimes people put it on like a hat."

The hazel eyes regarded him with interest. "Perceptive. Leonard's boy chooses his friends well," he commented. He moved on, considered Alvarez with no trace of recognition.

Taylor raised her face from her hands. Her eyes were too bright, but she wore a very controlled face. Beside her, Naughton's lip curled. He shifted in his chair and risked a glance at his wristwatch.

"I told him I knew about the drugs," Malcolm continued, relaying words from 'the other side' or from his own subconscious evaluation of the situation. He let his gaze linger on Moorhouse, as intimate as a caress. Pink tinged her cheeks and her eyes widened. She wasn't seeing the former hitman as she listened. She genuinely believed. "I said I'd help him. I said we'd go to the police together, and I'd stand by him. And he picked up a bust of Plato that sat on the corner of the desk--no! Don't! Kenny, what...."

Malcolm sagged in his chair, all color gone from the nondescript face. Doctor Moorhouse half rose, one hand outstretched, the other pressed to her chest.

"Quite a performance," Naughton muttered skeptically. And that was the moment when Jonathan suddenly realized he *knew* what this was all about. Abruptly, it all made sense to him, the whole thing, the reconciliation between McKellen's 'ruthless little shit' and Karen's husband who would do anything for a friend. He knew why Rasputin had nearly been killed. Everything resolved itself in his mind. He caught his breath in astonishment and tried to signal Benedek. Benny intercepted the look, and his brows came together as he asked a wordless question.

Malcolm turned his eyes on the man beside him. He jerked back in stunned revulsion. "You!"

Naughton exchanged a doubtful glance with Jonathan, who tried to control his features. From the minute arch of Naughton's brows, he was certain he had failed. He had to get to the phone and call McKellen before this blew sky high.

"Me?" Naughton said blandly. No, impossibly enough, not Naughton after all. Just the tone of his voice proved to Jonathan that his improbable theory was correct. "Harry Naughton. Remember me, Prof?"

"Get away from me." Malcolm jerked back so quickly his chair tipped over with a crash and he nearly fell with it. He lumbered up, not with the trained reflexes of a CIA operative but with the startled reaction of Doctor Frederick, who had always been slow and deliberate in his movements.

Benny let out a whoop and snapped his fingers. "I get it, I get it," he bellowed.

No, Benedek, don't, Jonathan worried.

Naughton whipped up his hand from under the table and, impossibly, he held a gun. Not so impossibly. The idea that he might be prepared for trouble had already flashed across Jonathan's mind, especially if he had

already forced Rasputin to shoot himself with his own gun. The weapon--Arche's own weapon--pointed right at the too-vocal Benedek. That left Jonathan, primed to expect trouble, to imitate the operative's moves and fling himself past the astonished Alvarez at his friend to knock him out of the way. Alvarez shouted a warning and tried to push him aside as the gun went off. A hard blow slammed into Jonathan's arm as he knocked Benedek to the ground, and he jerked and sprawled across the table, toppling three of Taylor's Egyptian statues in the process, neatly beheading one of them.

"Get him, get him!" shrieked Taylor, then she gasped as Naughton grabbed her and wrapped an arm around her neck. Jonathan saw the pistol press up against her temple. She turned as white as milk.

"Kenny. Kenny, why are you here?" Malcolm demanded, his hands outstretched toward Naughton and his hostage.

"He's Harry Naughton," Alvarez said blankly. "Isn't he?"

"No, gotcha," cried Benedek from under the table. Either he'd picked up on Jonathan's non-verbal signal or he had found his way to the answer on his own. Knowing Benedek, probably both. "I think he took over Naughton's identity. They traded faces. Betcha all the royalties of my next book that it's the real Naughton pushing up daisies in Arlington--and I bet good money we've got his killer right here with us." He didn't raise his head above the tabletop, and Jonathan was certain he was scheming a way to disarm Naughton. He had to get up and warn Benedek not to try anything. They couldn't risk Taylor's life. They needed a plan.

"The two men switched identities?" Moorhouse blurted. Then her face hardened and her eyes grew cold. Jonathan had a perfect view of the way her mouth twisted as he struggled to push himself up off the table. His right arm didn't want to support him. That was funny....

Doctor Moorhouse glared at Naughton--Archer? God, if he was Archer, then no wonder Rasputin claimed Archer had forced him to shoot himself. He'd been right about the reason for the attempted murder of Rasputin. If only he'd thought of it sooner, but it was unbelievable. The two men had switched places? Voluntarily? Karen Archer had said her husband would do anything for a friend. But would even he have done something as incredible as this? Why? Why would anyone do that? Take the identity of a killer? With the real Naughton dead, how would they ever find out? Had they looked that much alike? Jonathan couldn't remember seeing a picture of Archer, although he knew he must have seen one at the time. The man had worn a beard, he remembered that. Maybe under the facial hair, the two men had been of a similar type.

"You're *Archer*?" Alvarez asked blankly. "You can't be. You're supposed to be dead."

"Yes," said Moorhouse in a dead level voice. "He should be dead." Jonathan shuddered at her relentless tone. He made faint, scrambling motions to push himself upright. His arm felt odd, numb, and his sleeve was wet.

Benedek risked a look over the tabletop, spotted Jonathan, and let out a fierce, protesting yelp. "Jonathan!"

"Get *down*, Benedek!"

Benedek ignored the order. He even ignored Archer and the gun in his hand. Without a thought for his own safety, he ducked around the stunned Alvarez and pushed Jonathan into his chair. "You're bleeding like crazy," he scolded as if the condition were somehow Jonathan's fault. "Look at you!"

"He's got a gun, Benedek," Jonathan warned.

"Yeah, buds, I know. Never mind. Let's get this jacket off." He helped Jonathan work his right arm out of his sleeve, a process that Jonathan realized was starting to hurt a great deal. He sucked in his breath. Archer didn't interfere but his hold on Taylor tightened. She let out a faint, distressed squeak, then bit her bottom lip hard. Her lipstick was a vivid streak of red against the pallor of her face.

"Kenny," said Malcolm again in a resigned, weary, patient voice. "You're a damned fool, Kenny. A damned stupid fool. You won't get away with it now. Too many witnesses."

"A dead witness is no good to anybody," Archer snarled. "I didn't believe any of this, but I had to be here to see if there was one chance in ten million that it was real. Damn Harry anyway. He saw me. Saw me on the street and knew me. Ought to. We always looked like brothers. That's why I rooked him into this scam. Can't believe the damn fool kept my name--and my social security number. Shit. Right here where I was, maybe calling attention to me. He was so fucking sincere, I could confess, they'd know I'd turned my life around. He'd help me,

he'd do anything for me. Well, I figured, yeah, Harry, one last favor. Die for me, get the FBI off my back. And he died, and it was all over--until *you* started nosing around," he snarled at Jonathan. "Pulled in your lunatic buddy there to set up this seance. It's all a trick, isn't it? A setup to get me to talk? Well, all of you can damn well die together."

"Someone will have heard the shot," Doctor Moorhouse said icily. "And if I die, I will die stopping you."

"What can you do, you old bitch? Ah, ah, ah, don't move or I'll blow your precious Jonathan's head off. I'll blast this crazy medium, and so much for a touching farewell with your precious Freddie."

"I'll stop you," Moorhouse said. She was so focused that the threats hadn't even penetrated her steely resolve. Benedek stared at her with wide-eyed admiration.

Something pressed against Jonathan's arm and he gasped sharply and looked down. Where had all that blood come from? Benedek tied a makeshift bandage around the wound. "It's okay, Jack," he said in an undertone. "It's just a graze. You'll be hunky dory."

"Hunky dory?" echoed Kenneth Archer. "You'll be dead!" He lifted the gun from Taylor's temple and aimed it at Jonathan. The barrel looked as big as the mouth of a cannon.

Benny grabbed up one of the toppled *shabti* from the table and flung it at him.

The gun went off and Jonathan cringed, half expecting Benedek to pitch over, dead. But Benedek grabbed for another statue as Kenneth Archer ducked then swung back to fire again. Jonathan pushed himself up unsteadily in an awkward attempt to yank Benny out of range.

All trace of Frederick gone from his face, Malcolm the Mind, ex-CIA operative, brought down his hand in a controlled sweep and knocked the weapon away the way another man might bat at a fly. The snap of Archer's wrist breaking was nearly drowned out by the man's anguished cry. Taylor collected herself neatly, stomped on Archer's foot as hard as she could, and pushed free of his grip while he was still hopping on the other foot. A second later, Moorhouse was there, and the ringing slap she delivered to Archer's face rocked him back on his heels, still clutching his shattered wrist.

"That'll do, I'll take over now," said Detective Lang McKellen from the doorway. "Don't try anything. Kenneth Archer, I arrest you for the murder of Charles Frederick and Harry Naughton and for the attempted murder of Max Rasputin. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you...."

Jonathan stopped listening to the Miranda warning. His knees lost their firmness and he dropped into the chair, quivering with reaction and bloodloss.

"Jack? JJ? Jonathan?" Benedek ran through the names, his voice quivering.

"Flesh wound, Benny, remember?" Malcolm said quickly. "Doctor Taylor, if you would call 911...." He stepped up beside Jonathan and knowingly scanned Benedek's handiwork.

The shaken professor glanced at him sharply, probably expecting remnants of Doctor Frederick. When she only saw the bland face of the medium, her shoulders slumped, then she nodded curtly and edged around Archer and the detective to her desk.

"Better be a flesh wound," Benedek muttered. "Jon-boy, hang in there. Next time, *yell*, okay?"

"That suggestion does have its advantages," Jonathan said crossly. "But I remember you facing down Wyatt at the Whitewoods. Somebody has to get between you and guns, or you'll talk yourself right into getting your head blown off."

"I think I like you better intact, too, buds. You okay?" he fussed.

Jonathan considered it. He felt lightheaded and his arm was sore as blazes, but his mind had cleared. "I think so. Just a little shaky. Benedek, can this be real? I realized that must be what had happened just before everything went wrong. That's why I jumped for you. But it still seems impossible to believe, that this man is Kenneth Archer, and not Karen's husband."

"She'll be glad to know she wasn't married to a killer," Benny said with a grin. "Whoa. What a story this will be. Ghosts, seances, secret identities." His eyes blurred as he savored the imagined headlines on the

next issue of the *National Register*.

"What I can't figure is why no one recognized him," Alvarez remarked. "After all, he went to school here. Somebody should have remembered him. What brought him back here? Ego?"

Moorhouse frowned. "He looks different. I didn't recognize him, even though his face was once branded on my memory. But I thought he was dead. I'd never have expected to see him."

"Grey hair," Archer said with a smug grin. "None of you knew. You looked right at me and didn't see me. I counted on that." Even in custody, the man reeked arrogance. He'd done that from the first, but he'd hidden it under a casual superficial charm. He'd played Jonathan like a fish on a line. He'd played them all.

"But I should have known," she said.

"I thought he was a redhead," Jonathan muttered with a nod at the man's Pancho Villa mustache, so dramatic that it constituted a disguise in its own right. People would see it, not the face beneath it. "And I thought Archer was blond."

"Oh, yes." Archer couldn't resist talking, even with a broken wrist, the other wrist handcuffed to a heating pipe. "I was blond, but my beard was always red. Anybody could have remembered that, but who did? Who knew me? Who even remembered? Nobody, not till Harry nearly bumped into me on the street." He shrugged. "What the hell, it was a damned good run."

"Why did you kill him?" Jonathan asked. "Why come to me and call attention to yourself? Passing the buck to Rasputin? All he'd have done was stick to his story. But no, you had to go and confront him--and he recognized you, didn't he?"

"Old bastard, who'd have thought he wasn't gaga by now." Archer grimaced as he fingered his wrist. He cast a look of sheer loathing at Malcolm, who grinned, unmoved.

"But he recognized you," Benny persisted.

"From the minute he walked in and found me waiting for him. So then I had to fake it. Make it look like he had heard about poor old Harry dying and was suffering remorse. He even had a gun--I went through his stuff and found that before he came in lugging his groceries. Would have worked, too, if the two of you hadn't shown up and called 911. He'd have died; I'd have made certain of it, taken a second shot. When you came in, I went out the kitchen door. I never thought he'd live."

"But he's alive and he remembers you very well," McKellen said with satisfaction. "Now you're going down."

"Smarter than all of you," Archer insisted. "I'll beat it. A good lawyer. Seances. Entrapment."

"Not by me," McKellen said with a grin. "Don't count on it."

Moorhouse shook off her vengeance and suddenly descended on Jonathan in complete mother hen mode, a side of the Dragon Lady that rarely surfaced. Thank goodness for that. "Save me, Benedek," Jonathan murmured urgently in Benedek's ear.

Benny's eyes gleamed with amusement as he watched the unexpected earth mother bearing down on them, then he jumped smoothly between her and Jonathan. "So, Doctor M, let's set up that interview. This is gonna make great copy."

It worked. She stopped dead, her face twisted into furious exasperation. "Benedek, I absolutely forbid you to write this story."

"He was who?" Karen Archer stared bemusedly at Jonathan the following afternoon. She was slightly calmer than she had been at the last visit, or at least she had started out that way. Apparently her husband hadn't made any more ghostly appearances in the past several days. "You're saying my Steven was really someone else? That's impossible...isn't it?" Her voice trailed off doubtfully. She glanced up from the picture of Naughton--

the real Archer--that Jonathan had brought with him to their meeting. "He did look like Steven, didn't he? Not identical, but close enough so that someone who didn't know them might mistake them."

"Yep, almost twins," Benedek said with a grin. "Archer always wore a beard back then. We figure he shaved it off the second he was far enough away so that he could blend in. Turns out that even though his hair was the same color as your husband's, his beard was reddish. Happens sometimes. He went clean shaven for years, and only grew the mustache after his hair had gone grey. Figured no one would ever assume that he'd been blond. No one ever did."

"They looked less alike as they got older," Jonathan reminded her. "The resemblance was mostly in the face shape, general coloring, and cheekbones. I saw Naughton right after I'd seen...seen your husband here, and I didn't make the connection. It was more than the fact that your husband was clean-shaven and Naughton had that flamboyant mustache. It was a superficial resemblance to begin with, one Archer played upon. He must have felt safe in latter years."

"Safe enough to return to the scene of the crime," Benedek pitched in. "Guy had a lot of gall. Hanging around people every day who might have known him. Twenty years later or not, there's always somebody who figures it out, like Max Rasputin. Knew him at first sight. Lucky for him Sherlock Jonny was on the case."

"The important thing," Jonathan reassured her hastily as he retrieved the snapshot, "is that your husband was never a killer. He was too good a friend to someone who didn't deserve his loyalty, perhaps, but he didn't kill Doctor Frederick."

"A real identity switcheroo," Benedek added. "Once he was caught, the real Archer talked a blue streak. He'd played on your husband's sympathies. Insisted he hadn't meant to do it and that it had shocked him off the path he'd been following. He wanted to make a clean start, and they'd put him in prison. He said he made a really good act of it, and Harry fell for it."

Karen's face softened. "Yes, Steven was always a sucker for a hard-luck story. Sometimes I had to crack down on him for it." She gnawed her bottom lip. "Poor Steven--I mean...Harry? I'll always think of him as Steven, even if it wasn't his real name. He was an accessory, wasn't he? An accessory to murder."

Jonathan hadn't looked at it that way until after the arrest. He was sure that if her husband were alive, he might be involved in a police investigation, but he was dead, and McKellen was a policeman with an imagination. Not only had he suspected something might come of the séance and had placed his call to Jonathan from the ground floor of Meyer Hall, he'd even taken a moment before the paramedics had arrived.

"You'll talk to Karen Archer?" When Jonathan had nodded in the affirmative, he had gone on. "Now some might say her husband had committed a crime, abetting a killer. I'm not sure what he could have done at the time; it's obvious the real Archer would have killed him in a heartbeat if he hadn't played along. He wanted a scapegoat. He didn't stay in touch, and the real Naughton didn't know where he'd gone. He should have reported it, and that was a crime, but the man is dead. I'm not going to pursue it. There may be some publicity." He cast a warning glance at Benedek, who had a tendency to hover. "But Mrs. Archer is guilty of no wrong and she's still mourning her husband, who, by all accounts was a good man in spite of one misguided act."

Benedek hesitated, but Jonathan was pretty sure he had his Benny pegged. "I won't make trouble for her," the journalist had admitted. "There's enough good stuff without that." He could do creative things with a story--Jonathan had witnessed that more than once. Although Doctor Moorhouse eyed Benedek suspiciously, Jonathan only smiled. There lurked a heart of mush under the opportunistic exterior, and Karen Archer had triggered it.

"The detective says there's no point in pursuing charges, Mrs. Archer. They have the real Kenneth Archer in custody and he said enough in front of witnesses that I doubt he'll get away with a thing."

"He killed Steven, didn't he?" Her voice quavered. "After all Steven did for him, he killed him."

"Steven saw the best in him," Jonathan reminded her. "But unfortunately, it was only a tiny part of what made the man. Yes, he did kill your husband. I'm very sorry."

"It wasn't your fault. None of this would have come out if not for you." She took a deep breath and composed herself. "At least I don't have to live with the knowledge that Steven wasn't the man I thought he was. A name is nothing. He's still the man I loved."

"Karen?"

The voice was faint and distant, but clearer than the last time. All three of them turned and saw the ghost of Steven Archer--the real Harry Naughton--materialize in front of the fireplace.

"You meant you weren't Kenneth Archer last time," Jonathan blurted. "When you said 'not'. Didn't you?"

The ghost's head bobbed obediently. "I could never tell before. Now it doesn't matter. It's over."

"Oh, Steven," Karen breathed. "I can't bear it."

The spirit drifted closer. "Yes, you can, sweetheart. You can bear anything. I know it's hard, but you have so much life in you. Remember me kindly. I may have done the wrong thing, but I did it for the best of reasons, for the love of a friend."

"He was never a friend, Steven," Jonathan said sadly. "I'm sorry. He made you think he was."

"I know that now. It frees me." The ghost bowed his head. "I'm sorry for that. But I'd rather have taken a chance on a friend than refused, no matter how it came out." He edged up to Karen and stretched out his hand. "Karen, Karen, I have to go now. But I couldn't go without saying goodbye."

She reached out to him, and he enclosed her fingers the way he had the first time. "Steven," she breathed, then gasped as he faded away until he wasn't there any longer.

Jonathan was afraid she would fall apart, but she was made of sterner stuff. She threw back her head and gulped hard a few times, then she controlled herself. "I can't let him down," she said in a near whisper. "I can't. Not when he could take that kind of risk and never count the cost." Abruptly she donned a polite hostess face. "Thank you for coming to tell me what happened."

Jonathan ushered Benedek out with a few formal words of farewell.

As they had last time, they stopped on the sidewalk beside Benedek's rented car. He had driven because Jonathan's arm was in a sling.

"Well," said Jonathan inanely. "That's over."

"Yep, and now you can go back to your classes and grading your papers and giving your tests," Benedek said cheerfully. A rather spurious cheer, Jonathan thought.

"Instead of ducking bullets?"

Benedek actually winced.

"It's only a flesh wound, Benedek."

"Yeah, but it could have hit you right between the eyes, if Alvarez hadn't grabbed for you."

"But he did. I'd just realized Naughton was really Archer, and you were putting yourself right in his face. What else should I have done? Let him *shoot* you?"

"Yelled, 'duck!'" Benedek retorted, outraged. "You're supposed to be *safe*. You're a *college professor*, not Rambo, remember?"

"Charles Frederick was a professor, too," Jonathan reminded him. "Nothing's safe, not really. We just do what we have to do. What's wrong, Benedek?"

"Wrong?" Benny waved his hands wildly. "What could possibly be wrong? You decide to play super hero and dodge bullets. You're crazy, Jack."

"I'm okay. You're okay."

"That's a book," Benedek said wryly. He was definitely off his stride. Fussing and hovering, and now this. Not a guilt number. Benedek didn't play that game. But something was bothering him. Surely not Jonathan's very minor injury.

"Three months," Benedek burst out suddenly. "Three months and not one word. Out of sight, out of mind, right, JJ? Here you are, happy with your -pithecus of the month, laying low in hopes that I'll ignore you and stay away, and instead, along comes Benedek, and you play head duck in the shooting gallery. Don't worry about it.

It's finished. We got the bad guy--McKellen got him, really. So now you can go back to the classroom and forget about it all over again."

Jonathan stared at him. This was so unlike Benedek. Was it really those three months without contact that disturbed him? Why hadn't Jonathan called Benny to compare notes, even to say, 'hello, how are you?' He'd relished the academic life without interruption, convinced he was enjoying himself, until he had suddenly realized how flat he'd felt. How boring life had become. Had Benedek really been 'out of sight, out of mind'? And what did that say about Jonathan? How did he stack up against Karen's husband, who had bent over backward to put his friends first?

Suddenly, Jonathan didn't like himself very much.

"Benedek, you can't be serious?" It was a lame complaint, nowhere near what he really felt, and he was sorry he'd said it as soon as he'd opened his mouth.

"Well, that's what you'd like to think." Benedek pasted on a bright, cheerful grin.

"It's not like you tried to contact me, either, is it?" The minute he asked the question, he wanted to call it back. What a defensive attempt to pass the buck. Hadn't there even been a call or two that he hadn't returned, right in the middle of last term's finals?

"I'm sorry," he said quickly. "That wasn't fair."

Benedek stood there, feet planted as if they were about to grow into the concrete, the most utterly nonchalant expression on his face. He didn't concur that it was unfair, although his agreement was written all over him. But Jonathan realized he was hurting, whether over Jonathan's slight, or his injury, or a combination of both factors. It was probably the shooting that had provoked all this, although there was more to it than that. Karen's husband would have taken a bullet to save someone, too, and called it common humanity. It didn't mean a commitment existed--at least that must be the way Benedek looked at it right now.

Jonathan drew a regretful breath and plunged on. "When Doctor Moorhouse came in to talk to me about this whole mess, she looked...she looked the way she did when she came in to tell me you'd died, when you were investigating the Fitness Factory. I was so relieved to find that you hadn't really died and *that* wasn't the reason there had been no word from you, that I almost missed what she'd really come about. And even before she came in, I was thinking about how much I missed it."

"Missed what?" Benedek asked warily.

"Missed you bursting in to disrupt my life. Saying, 'Relaxovision, Jack,' and dragging me off to meet wall feelers and visit haunted hotels. Benedek, I am sorry. I can't have it both ways, that I want you around only on my terms. That's not fair to you, and it's not even fair to me. Worst of all, it isn't even true. Yes, I have my academic responsibilities, and I love academia. But chasing shadows--that's the seasoning in my life. I don't think I can ever go back to the life I had before I met you in Fartham, and if I did, it would be a much less colorful world. It wouldn't be the same if you weren't there. I learned a major lesson from this." When Benedek opened his mouth for one of his glib responses, Jonathan plunged on before he could speak. "So, next time I get caught up in all this," he gestured vaguely in the direction of Georgetown Institute, "perhaps you'd better come along and drag me away by the hair."

"Caveman stuff," Benedek ventured with a tentative grin. "I can handle that." The tension that had vibrated his body like a drum stilled and slow contentment filtered into his eyes.

"I thought you could."

"Now about my article," Benedek continued in such a shameless voice that Jonathan knew he was forgiven. Benedek wouldn't dwell on it any longer and would probably prefer to act as if the entire conversation had not taken place. Jonathan would let him off the hook because it had been uncomfortable to him, too. But he wouldn't let himself off the hook as easily. He remembered the ghost saying he'd done it for the best possible reasons, for the love of a friend, and he resolved to learn from the experience.

"What about your article?" he asked warily.

"Well, I've got a major headline here. 'MacKensie sees a ghost'. Come on, Jon-boy, you have to admit this one. No weaseling out of it with 'shared delusions' and seeing what you expect to see. This was a genuine, floating-through-walls, transparent spirit, and you can't deny it, not in a million years. Or Malcolm's contact with

Doctor Frederick either. Real, JJ. Every bit of it. Come on. Come on." He nudged Jonathan's good arm with his elbow. "I've got you this time, haven't I?"

Jonathan looked at his friend and felt a smile start. "Yes," he said ambiguously. "That you do." And he turned to climb into the car.