



STEVE FEASEY

CHANGELING

DISCOVER THE BEAST WITHIN

CHANGELING

Trey felt the demon on his back and threw his entire weight against the tiled wall behind him, knocking the breath out of the nether-creature. He spun on the pads of his right foot and raked a huge, rending tear across the demon's throat, turning his own head to try to avoid the hot fountain of black gore that spewed on to him from the demon's already dead body.

The piercing squeal of the train's brakes against the rails as the driver executed his emergency stop knifed through Trey's head. He quickly looked up and saw that the people in the final carriage of the train were staring back towards him in wide-eyed horror as they glimpsed what appeared to be a giant werewolf standing on the platform of a London Underground station . . .

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STEVE FEASEY

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For Zoe, who held my hand on the roller coaster and didn't insist that we ride the merry-go-round again.

And for my father, for all the books in the toilet. I miss you.

1

Trey Laporte opened his eyes, wincing against the assault of the late-morning sunshine on his retina. Sitting up in bed, he clutched his hands to his head as a mortar shell of pain exploded inside his brain. Bright stars lit up behind his eyelids, making him feel sick to the stomach. He sank back on to his pillow with a groan and stared up at the ceiling, which shifted and swirled slightly under his scrutiny. Saliva filled his mouth again and he concentrated hard on not vomiting, wishing that these feelings would go away.

He realized that he had no recollection of going to bed last night. He struggled to remember, small tight lines creasing his forehead as he tried to piece together what could have happened to cause him to wake up feeling like this. But there was nothing.

After dinner he'd played Pro-Evolution Soccer on the X-Box with Wayne in the common room. Wayne was his usual inept self and Trey soon got bored of thrashing the pants off him. At nine o'clock he'd called it a night and gone back to his room to listen to his MP3 player. He'd walked into the room, locked it behind him and then . . . nothing.

He couldn't remember a single thing from that moment onwards. It was as if someone had hit the delete button at the precise moment he'd entered his room, and erased everything from that point until now.

He lifted himself up off the pillow again. A fresh wave of nausea rolled over him, causing a hiss to escape his lips. His mouth was so dry that his swollen tongue felt sticky against the roof of his palate. He needed a drink of water. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, his eyes shut against both the sunlight and the fireworks that detonated inside his skull whenever he moved. He was naked. This fact bothered him because he never slept naked. He fished under his pillow and pulled out his pyjama shorts. This was just too weird. Trey forced his eyes open and bent down to pull the shorts on when he saw his shoes. His favourite shoes. What the hell . . . ?

There was a sharp knock at the door.

Trey ignored the knock, and the pain, and the sickness that consumed every molecule of him. He had saved for *weeks* to be able to afford those trainers, and now they were lying on the floor ripped apart as though someone had taken a large carving knife and slashed at them in some frenzied attack. He leaned forward to get a closer look at the mess and gasped as the rush of blood to his head caused a balloon of pain to burst behind his eyes.

'My shoes! What the . . . ?' His voice cracked as he tried to speak, and his throat felt painfully raw. The pain pulsed through his oesophagus in waves, and he instinctively reached up a hand to touch the flesh around his throat. He swallowed, wincing at the pain that even this simple act caused. Standing up, he desperately looked around for something to drink, and saw properly for the first time the chaos that had become his bedroom. He turned in a slow circle, his mouth hanging open in utter disbelief as he took in the destruction and disorder that was all around him.

He shivered and became aware of the cold for the first time. Looking over his shoulder, he stared at the window, which was hanging at an impossible angle from the buckled metal surround. Large gouges could be seen on the frame where the white plastic had been scored away, revealing the shiny

metal underneath. The window itself was intact but appeared to have been torn away from the top hinge so that it hung outwards at a drunken incline. His eyes shifted to the wall to the side of the opening, where great rents had been made in the plaster, as if someone had taken a garden fork and raked it along the surface.

How could he have slept through this? How could anyone have slept through this?

The entire room had been wrecked. His possessions – he had so few good things that he kept them tidily arranged and cared for – were scattered around the place, many broken and destroyed. His head was slamming into his chest and he felt a sudden urge to scream out in anger. He wanted to cry. He wanted to kill someone. He wanted to find whoever had done this and –

The knock on the door was repeated, louder this time, and he turned to look in its direction. His eyes fell on the key that was still in the lock on this side. He walked over and twisted the door handle, expecting to feel the door give and open. He stepped back when it refused to budge and stared suspiciously at the white glossy surface. Reaching forward again, he took the key between his thumb and finger and slowly turned it clockwise, the lines on his forehead deepening at the sound of the bolt sliding free from the plate in the door and receding back into the body of the mechanism. He let the door open an inch or two. Turning his head, he looked over again at the window, noting that the key was still in that lock too. His heart shifted up a gear, and he looked about the room again in dismay, unable to even begin to try to piece together what had happened here. A desire to throw up came over him again.

The damage to the window looked as if it had been done from the inside . . . and yet he had been in the room asleep. Surely he would have woken up at the sound of all of this carnage going on around him.

Trey slowly turned around and went back over to the bed. He picked up his ruined trainers, ignoring the daggers of pain that stabbed at his brain, and sat on the mattress, staring down at the ripped leather-and-rubber jumble that had so recently been his prized possession – the best pair of shoes he had ever owned.

They look like some kind of dissected animals, he thought, and he was reminded of the frogs that they had been made to cut apart in a biology class, their tough outer skins sliced open and then peeled back to reveal the gory interiors. The laces that he'd spent so long getting just right – he'd rethreaded them three times so that the bars would not be twisted – were now a ruptured, shredded mess.

'Trey?' Colin Wallington's voice came into the room. 'Are you all right, Trey?'

The door was pushed open a little further and Trey heard the gasp.

'Oh my God. What have you done?'

Colin Wallington stepped into the room. He was a tall, skinny man with black slicked-back hair and greedy eyes that never stayed still. These, coupled with a thin, hooked nose, gave him an unkind, bird-like appearance, that had earned him the nickname of Vulture from the children in his care. He walked into the centre of the room, gawping about him in disbelief and shaking his head. He turned to stare at Trey with a look of rage.

'What have you done here?'

'Are you mad?' Trey croaked. 'I didn't do this. Why would I do this to *my* room and *my* stuff? Look at these shoes!' He held them up for a second before realizing that he was still completely naked. He pulled the quilt over his lower half and reached for his pyjamas again, pulling them on over his legs beneath the covers.

Trey noticed that Colin was shaking as he stood, rooted to the spot, some galvanizing current running through his entire body anchoring him in position. He was clenching and unclenching his left hand as he looked at the teenager.

Trey had never seen the head care worker of Apple Grove Care Home so angry in the three years

that he had been there. Colin was a hurtful, spiteful man, who seemed to derive some sick kind of pleasure from belittling the children in his care, but as far as Trey was aware he had never physically harmed anyone in his charge. Instead he was an insidious bully who relied upon harsh and unkind words to hurt the kids he didn't like. Trey had never seen him as worked up as he was now, and was fearful that the man might actually be on the point of hitting him.

'Do you have any idea how much trouble and extra work you have caused me with this little stunt?' Colin asked through clenched teeth. A tic had started up above his left eyebrow, causing it to twitch repetitively. 'I'll have to file a report, get someone in to fix that window and—'

He stopped and sniffed, his face contorting into a gargoyle-like caricature of disgust, the tic still merrily dancing to some unheard tune over his eye.

'What in God's name is that stench?'

He bent and picked up the tattered sweatshirt at his feet. Smelling it and deciding that this was not the source of the reek that filled the room, he dropped it and eyed Trey suspiciously. 'What have you been *doing* in here, you disgusting little turd?'

Trey could smell it now. It was an oily, metallic smell, which reminded him of rotting leaves and freshly turned earth. But there was something else lying within the odour that was not so easy to identify. A brownish-orange smell, which, although strangely familiar to him, just eluded his attempt to identify it.

He stopped. Brownish-orange smell? What on earth was he thinking? You don't see odours, you just . . . smell them.

But that was exactly how he envisioned this smell that permeated through the room, as a rich, gravy-like colour, with slowly pulsating globes of orange moving around within it – but even *color* wasn't the right word to describe the feeling he was trying to pin down. It was more like a *memory* of a sensation, some innate sense that he had either lost or never used before – like being blind from birth and trying to describe how you *see* the sky in your mind's eye.

Frowning, he shook his head, trying to rattle loose these strange thoughts and clear them out.

'Are you listening to me?' Colin said, pointing a shaking finger at him. 'This,' he said, staring around him again, 'is too much. Even for you. I thought that we were beyond the anger issues that you brought with you when you came here three years ago. But clearly you need to be reminded of how to behave like a human being again. I'm going to refer you for a little *holiday* in the APU. Remember your last stay there? I'm sure you'll feel right back at home once you're on a ward surrounded by a whole gang of other psychopaths. Pack your stuff – you'll be leaving for the Tank today.'

The Tank was a referral centre for the Adolescent Psychiatric Unit where Apple Grove sent kids that had gone off the rails. Self-harmers, kids who were at risk of suicide, violent and abusive children were all sent to the APU. The unit itself wasn't so bad, but before you got there you had to go to the Tank, where the approach to keeping you quiet was to fill you so full of drugs that you became one of the living dead. Trey had been sent there five months after his arrival at the home when his refusal to communicate with anyone, coupled with beating up a boy named Matthew Cotter, was deemed serious enough to warrant a visit. What the care home failed to realize was that Matthew Cotter had been the cause of Trey's refusal to talk and that he had been flushing Trey's head down the toilet every day for all of those five months until the day Trey had snapped and fought back, putting the bully in hospital with a broken nose.

'Colin, I've already told you,' Trey said, with a wince. Just talking was extremely painful. 'I didn't do any of this. Why on earth would I? You can't send me to the Tank for something I didn't do. Just listen to me. I don't know how—'

'I don't want to hear it, Mr Laporte. Now pack your stuff.'

'But.'

‘Pack your stuff . . . NOW.’

‘*Whatever.*’ Trey glared at the care worker with utter contempt. ‘I’ve only had those shoes a week. He kicked out at one of the trainers, lost his footing and fell back on the mattress again, where he sat scowling down at the floor. He was feeling progressively more unwell; he ached all over as if in the early stages of a virus.’

‘I think I must have been drugged,’ he said meekly, shaking his head at how lame that sounded. ‘Someone must have slipped something in my food or drink and then managed to break in here after me and do all this.’

‘Oh yes, that’s right, maybe Belinda or one of the other carers dropped some Rohypnol in to your tea while you weren’t looking so that they could come in here and smash the place up. Then, unseen by you, they carried you back in here and locked the door from the inside. Perhaps they’re hiding under the bed right now? Come on, Trey, credit me with some intelligence, will you?’

A deep sea of resentment rose up within Trey at the injustice of the whole situation. He clenched his fists and tried to control the anger that was building up inside him. He was the one who had been wronged here. It was *his* room and possessions that had been violated and destroyed, and here he was being accused of that very act. The brown-orange smell seemed to be getting stronger, and he felt the need to bellow his fury at the world. He was vaguely aware that the smell seemed to be coming from him, and it was coupled with an uncomfortable itching feeling in the base of his spine, which quickly grew into an unbearable ache.

There was another knock at the door.

‘Not now,’ shouted Colin. ‘We’re not finished in here yet! I won’t tell you again, Trey. Pack your stuff.’

Trey doubled over in pain as the spasms increased in intensity. His whole body felt incredibly hot and the itching ache had spread so that all the skin on his body had become a source of exquisite agony. His stomach rolled and he gagged. ‘Colin, I’m telling you, I . . . ungh—’

‘Oh, how convenient,’ the care worker sneered. ‘We get to the point where only the truth will fit the facts and you get ill! What? Do you think this little act will save you from being sent to the Tank? Well, think again.’

The soft, hesitant knock on the door was repeated, and when it opened Wendy Travers’s head appeared around the door jamb. Wendy was a young woman with a kind face and a laugh that erupted from her whenever she was nervous or embarrassed – which was often. She was by far the nicest care worker in the home, and Trey admired how she always went the extra mile for the younger children, especially those who were new to the care environment.

‘Wendy, love, not right now, please. Young Trey and I are trying to get to the bottom of what has happened here and he appears to have rather fortuitously come over all peculiar.’

Wendy quickly took in the mess of the small room before turning her attention back to her boss. ‘I’m sorry. It’s just that it is rather important, Colin.’

‘So is this. So if you would be so kind as to leave us alone, I’ll deal with whatever it is when I’m finished in here.’

Wendy chewed her bottom lip as she considered this, the small frown on her forehead deepening. Eventually she took a breath and announced, ‘Trey’s got a visitor. There’s a gentleman in reception who says that he’d like to see him. He says he’s his uncle.’ Wendy smiled up at Colin apologetically before looking over in Trey’s direction. The look on her face was difficult to decipher, but Trey thought that she looked deeply uncomfortable and more than a little scared.

Trey slowly straightened up. The waves of pain that had so quickly escalated started to recede as he took in this announcement. He looked for a clue in Wendy’s face to see if she was playing some kind of a trick on him – although it would have been completely out of character for her to do such a thing.

– but her features merely mirrored his own puzzled expression.

Trey had no family. He was an orphan whose only living relative, his grandmother, had died three years earlier. After her death, the authorities had tried to find any extended family to ascertain if there might be someone willing to take him in, but none could be found, so he'd ended up in care.

Trey never had visitors, and he made a point of not being around on visiting days so as not to have to witness the buzz of excitement that took over the care home when the children knew that someone from the outside world was coming to see them. Today wasn't even a visiting day.

'What should I do?' Wendy asked. 'He was very insistent and said that it was a matter of the utmost urgency.'

Colin paused for a second and looked over at the fourteen-year-old boy in his charge. 'Ask him to wait in the contact room, please, Wendy, and tell him that I shall be in shortly.'

He turned back to Trey as the door clicked shut, an unpleasant sneer playing across his thin, meaty lips. 'Well, well. What do you know? Some long-lost relative riding in on his white horse to rescue little orphan Annie. You'd better put some proper clothes on, if you can find any in this chaos. Wait here until I find out what this is all about.' He gestured with his thumb towards the window. 'And don't think for one second that you have heard the last about this little caper,' he said.

He turned and left the room, kicking the ruined trainers out of his way as he left.

2

Trey stood up and moved over to the door as soon as Colin had shut it. He pressed his ear to the surface, listening intently for any noise on the other side. Colin called out to somebody and was answered by the sound of approaching footsteps. Strain as he might, Trey couldn't make out the details of what was being said in the corridor outside his room. It didn't matter; Trey knew that Colin would be asking whoever it was to keep an eye on his room to ensure that he stayed inside and didn't come out. He pulled some clothes out of his dirty washing basket and threw them on as quickly as he could. He stalked around the room, trying to come up with a plan. Leaving by the door was out of the question, and all the windows in the home were security windows that would open only a fraction of the way. Trey stopped and turned to look at his window again. The security of this window had been well and truly breached. If he climbed out of the ruined mess he could make his way around the back of the building and re-enter at the staff entrance. There was a numerical keypad to gain entry, but as the kids in the home knew the combination. He just had to hope that it had not been changed in the last week or so.

He clambered out of the window, being careful not to cut himself on the jagged edges of the metal frame, and dropped down into a rose bush that happily did the job instead. Ignoring the pain in his hands and legs, he looked about him. He didn't expect anyone to be in the grounds, but it wouldn't do to be caught sneaking around like this. Stooping over and keeping low so that he would not be spotted, he ran along the back of the building. At the front he used the parked cars as cover, darting between each one until he was standing outside the staff door. He paused to get his breath back for a moment and then entered the four-digit code into the keypad; the buzzing sound that resulted indicated that the code was still good and that the door was now open. He pushed his way inside and crept forward, scanning the corridor for any signs of staff members.

Trey stood outside the rear entrance to the contact room. He glanced up the hall to ensure that nobody was coming and placed his ear against the cold, glossed surface of the door, trying to hear what was going on inside. The contact room was L-shaped, with doors at either end so that families could be brought in from one end and children from the other. This way, if the meeting went very badly, the two parties could be ushered away in separate directions with the minimum amount of fuss. Trey hoped that Colin and the visitor claiming to be his uncle were at the other end, and the lack of any voices through the door he was listening at seemed to confirm this. He pushed very gently against the metal hand plate, holding his breath and grimacing up at the hydraulic damper at the top of the door that hissed as he pushed against it. Slipping through the small gap that he had created, he entered the room as swiftly and silently as he could, relieved this time when the damper did its job properly and gently brought the door to a close without a sound. He'd guessed correctly – this end of the room was empty – and he silently made his way to the corner of the L so that he could listen in on what was being said.

Colin was in the middle of his usual welcome speech in which he recounted facts about the number of children that the home had helped and how proud he was to be part of such a worthwhile establishment.

Unable to resist a peek at the mysterious visitor, Trey dropped down on to his haunches so that he could ~~peer around the corner with one eye, certain that he would not be spotted if he kept as low as possible.~~

The visitor stood with his back to Trey and appeared to be admiring the view of the garden through the French windows off to his left while Colin prattled on. Wendy was also in the room, leaning against the wall just inside the far entrance and trying to distance herself from the scene as much as possible. She played with a loose strand of her hair, curling and uncurling it around her index finger between casting furtive looks at the stranger.

‘. . . for the delay, but we’ve had a minor crisis that needed to be sorted out and weren’t expecting any visitors. Mr . . . ?’ said Colin, extending his hand in greeting and walking towards the man in the centre of the room.

Trey noted the way that the care worker’s fingers wilted as they extended from his outstretched palm and instinctively knew that Colin Wallington’s handshake would be a limp, impotent affair.

The man in the grey suit turned round to face Colin for the first time. He was a little over six feet tall and was athletically built beneath his well-cut suit. His head was perfectly shaven; the pale dome reflecting back the light from the tungsten bulbs set into the ceiling above. A black and grey neat goatee beard framed his wide mouth. Despite the low level of lighting in the room, he wore black sunglasses that obscured his eyes and reflected back a smoky image of his surroundings as well as the man standing in front of him. Trey guessed that he would be considered handsome by women, and a quick glance over at Wendy’s expression as she stared at the tall visitor seemed to confirm the suspicion.

In his right hand the man held a horn-handled umbrella, but he made no attempt to transfer this to his left in order to take up the proffered handshake.

‘Please, call me Lucien,’ the man said.

He turned his head slightly and appeared to glance towards the corner behind which Trey was hiding. The briefest hint of a smile played across his features. He seemed to be looking directly at Trey, although it was impossible to be certain with those mirrored lenses covering his eyes. Trey withdrew his head and held his breath.

There was a long pause as if the stranger was considering how to continue. Eventually he said in a loud voice, ‘You know, Trey, it really must be very uncomfortable being hunched down like that for any period of time. I think that it would be better for everyone if you just came out and joined us. It really is rather rude to spy on people.’

Trey shook his head in disbelief at what had just happened. The man had had his back turned to him when Trey had snuck in, and the boy was certain that he could not have caught sight of him in the mirrored reflection of the room thrown back by the windows to his left. He weighed up his options: he could leg it back to his room and pretend that he didn’t know what Colin was on about if he was asked, or he could face up to being caught and find out who this stranger was.

The frown on Colin Wallington’s face fell away into an angry scowl as Trey sheepishly stepped out from around the corner. The care worker opened his mouth to say something, but then thought better of it. He gestured for the boy to come towards them before turning back to their visitor with a sickly smile, but the man calling himself Lucien was no longer looking in his direction. Instead the mirrored lenses were now firmly fixed on Trey.

‘As I was saying . . . Lucien,’ Colin continued, ‘we really were not expecting you. This is not one of our designated visiting dates, and while we can, under special circumstances, arrange for visitation rights outside of these times, we do have a strict policy that requires a twenty-four hour notice of intent – so that we can prepare properly. In addition, as we have no way of knowing that you are who you say you are, we would need to run the appropriate checks before visitation rights could be granted.’

I'm sure that you will understand that as the head care worker at the home I would be neglecting my duties if I did not adhere to these rules.'

Trey watched as Colin folded his arms and plastered a 'What-can-you-do?' smile on his face.

A silence filled the room which would have been complete were it not for the low hum of the extractor fan set in one of the windows.

The stranger stood, unmoving, for what seemed like an age, and Trey could feel his eyes drilling into him from behind the dark glasses.

Eventually the man claiming to be Trey's uncle slowly reached into his suit jacket and retrieved a folded sheet of paper and a passport from the internal breast pocket. He held these out for Colin to examine.

'I have brought a birth certificate and a passport to prove my identity, Mr Wallington. And as I have explained to your charming assistant, Miss Travers, I would not have come and imposed myself on you in this manner if it was not of the utmost necessity to do so.' He slowly reached up and removed the glasses from his eyes, folding them and placing them in the top pocket of his suit.

When he turned to look back at Trey the boy felt an involuntary shudder run through him to the core.

The man's eyes were, well, *freakish*.

The irises were a light honey-brown interspersed with tiny flecks of ochre that became more dominant towards the centre of the eye, until eventually the lighter spots merged into a central ring around the black of the pupil. Trey was torn between the desire to step closer and look into these fascinating pools of colour and the more powerful wish to turn away and escape their insidious glare. Much to his relief, the tall man switched his attention to Colin.

He stepped forward, handing over the documents. Trey, unable to take his eyes off him, was amused when, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Colin take an immediate step backwards in response.

'Please, feel free to contact whichever authorities you consider necessary,' said the tall stranger, pressing the ID papers into the care worker's hands. 'I fully understand the difficult position that you have put you and your establishment in by simply turning up unannounced in this way, but I merely wish to have ten minutes with my nephew here. I have some very important information that I must share with him.'

'Believe me, Mr . . . ' Colin's nervous fingers fumbled open the back page of the passport to reveal the stranger's details. 'Mr Laporte, I truly do wish that it were as simple as that. But there are strict protocols in place that . . .'

Trey subconsciously filtered out the rest of Colin's speech as his mind began to try to make sense of what he had just heard. It surprised him to hear his surname associated with this man standing in front of him, because whoever this mysterious stranger was, there was one thing that Trey was absolutely convinced of: this man was not his uncle.

' . . . rules are there for the safety of the children in our care. I'm sorry, but I really have to insist on you leaving now.' Colin finished and held out the papers at arm's length to return them to their owner.

The man calling himself Lucien Laporte calmly accepted the papers and returned them to his jacket pocket. He sighed and drew himself up to his full height, fixing his gaze on an invisible spot somewhere above the care worker's head. A hard, humourless smile crept slowly across his lips as he took this in and considered how to proceed. Finally he turned to look at Wendy, the smile genuine now, and displaying teeth that were perfectly white and set in a face that was at once both alarming and handsome.

'Miss Travers – Wendy, isn't it?' he said in a calm voice. 'I wonder if you would be so kind as to get me a glass of water. It would seem that my visit has been fruitless, and I would appreciate a drink before I take the long journey back home.'

Wendy flushed red and self-consciously reached down to straighten the hem of her skirt, and for one horrible moment, Trey thought that she was going to curtsy. ‘That won’t be any trouble, Mr Laporte. I’ll just pop down to the kitchen.’ She stopped at the door to look back worriedly in Colin’s direction before leaving.

The door slowly closed with a soft thud. A fly had got into the room and was noisily attacking the glass of the windowpane as it sought a means of escape. Its buzz-tap, buzz-tap attempts at freedom punctuated the silence that now filled the room.

‘Mr Wallington,’ the stranger said, ‘I am not an unreasonable man, and I have explained to you the situation. I fully understand the position that I am putting you in, but I have just driven for two hours to get here and all I request of you today is ten minutes alone with Trey. After that I will leave and you can make whatever checks you must in order to establish that I really am who I say I am.’ His eyes dropped momentarily and he examined the handle of the umbrella in his hand. When he looked up again, he spoke in a low, conspiratorial tone.

‘I know that you have a great responsibility to the children in your charge, Mr Wallington. And I can give you my word of honour that I would never do anything to undermine the trust that has been placed in you to carry out those responsibilities. I also know that you have the authority to grant me my request and I appeal to your better nature to allow me this audience with my nephew.’

‘I’m afraid that I simply cannot allow—’

Lucien cut him off with a gesture of his hand, and Trey saw a sudden intensity in his eyes that made them blaze in their sockets, like a fire suddenly flaring up upon finding a source of fuel to feed upon.

There was a perfect *stop* then. A complete and absolute cessation of *everything*. Trey involuntarily held his breath at the strangeness of the moment. An utter silence pressed in upon the room. The whir of the ventilation fan ceased, and when Trey glanced over to see the cause of its sudden silence he spotted the little fly lying dead upon its back on the windowsill. Trey’s mouth had gone completely dry, and he thought that the sound of his ragged breathing must have been audible to everyone in the room in this terrible silence. He looked over at the tiny dead creature again and felt peculiarly unhinged by the sight of it lying there. He swallowed, hoping that he might be able to raise some saliva by doing so. Turning his attention back to the two men, he noted the look of abject fear on Colin’s upturned face and Lucien’s voice sliced through this strange void.

‘I am an immensely rich and powerful man, Mr Wallington, and while I choose not to wield these influences like some bludgeoning weapon, I think that you should know that I have considerable sway with a broad range of those *authorities* that you alluded to earlier. I believe that they may be extremely interested to know some of the more *intimate details* about the head care worker of this establishment.’ He leaned forward so that his nose was almost touching the hooked beak of the smaller man, his eyes steely as he continued.

‘I am sure, for instance, that they would be extremely interested to find out how you have been embezzling funds from the care home’s coffers into a bank account set up in your wife’s name. They might also be disturbed to find out how young James Longton really broke his arm on the field trip to Cheshire last year.’

Colin Wallington stared back at his accuser, a look of utter horror on his face.

‘What the . . . ?’ he stammered.

‘Perhaps of most interest to them would be—’

‘Uncle Lucien, that’s enough,’ Trey said. ‘I think that you’ve made your point.’ Trey looked over at the care worker, who seemed to be unravelling before his very eyes.

There was a long pause. The nod that eventually came from the tall stranger was barely perceptible, but it seemed to Trey that the light that was ignited behind those oddly coloured eyes had already dimmed, leaving them none the less fascinating, but reassuringly less frightening than they had been.

only moments before.

Trey had long dreamed of seeing his nemesis reduced to a state of crippling wretchedness, but witnessing Colin cringe and flinch at each of these revelations, the look of fear and revulsion in his eyes, had been too much even for him. He felt his own face burn in embarrassment for the man and could hardly bear to look at him.

Behind him, he heard the fan click back into operation, followed by the familiar buzz-tap of the little insect throwing itself once more against the window. He could almost sense the molecules in the air resume their random collisions with each other as the Pause button that had been activated upon the universe was switched back to Play. He flicked his eyes towards the window, and the sight of the fly bouncing off the glass again caused icy fingers to trace their way down his spine. The creature had been dead. He held his breath and listened to the minuscule sound of its headlong charge into the glass. It wasn't possible. What had just happened was not possible. He shifted his gaze back to the man called Lucien. Whatever he had just witnessed had been something to do with the visitor – he was certain of that.

Colin Wallington was covered in a film of sweat. He appeared to Trey to have become visibly smaller than he had been before this confrontation. The usual overconfident sneer was nowhere to be seen.

'Who are you?' Colin asked.

'I've already told you my name, Mr Wallington. Now perhaps you would be so kind as to leave the two of us alone for a short while. Young Trey and I have important matters to discuss.'

The care worker hesitated before replying in a small voice, 'As you say, Mr Laporte, I do indeed have the power to grant this meeting. However, I cannot force the boy to speak to you against his wishes, so the final decision must be Trey's.'

He turned to Trey, a look of desperation on his face. Trey couldn't decipher whether the man was appealing to his better nature by urging him to agree, or simply willing him to refuse the meeting to help him to salvage some small victory from the whole affair. In any case, he didn't much care what Colin hoped he would do; he had worries enough of his own at this precise moment.

'Well, Trey? Are you happy with me leaving you in the company of this man, your . . . uncle?'

Trey looked from Colin to the tall, bald-headed stranger. He was certain that if the man meant to do him any harm he could quite easily have done so, regardless of how many of the care staff might or might not have been present. Because of this, and because there was something about this unnerving visitor's manner that suggested that it might truly be in his interest to speak to him, he nodded his assent.

'Sure,' he said. 'Why not?'

'Excellent,' Lucien said, at once reverting to the clipped, businesslike tone and manner that he had assumed during the initial introductions. 'Thank you, Mr Wallington. I appreciate your help in this matter. Now, if you would be so kind, my nephew and I have a lot of catching up to do. Oh, and could I possibly ask you to change my order with the delightful Wendy? I would much rather have a nice cup of tea, if that is not *too* much trouble.'

Colin pushed with irritation at the displaced strands of his hair that had escaped their slicked-down confines and went to leave the room. Stopping at the door, he turned, smiling uneasily. 'If you need any help, Trey, Wendy and I will be just along the corridor in the kitchen fixing our *guest's* tea.'

Lucien waited until the door had completely shut before turning to face Trey: his smile was open and genuine. Trey had the same feeling of being completely disarmed that he was sure Wendy had felt when that look had been directed at her. He shook the well-manicured hand that was being offered to him.

'Well, young Trey Laporte, where should we begin?'

3

‘How about you begin by telling me who you really are, *Uncle Lucien*?’

That smile came back to his visitor’s face, and he motioned for them to sit down on the sofa.

‘My name really is Lucien, but my surname – as you have already deduced – is not Laporte: it is Charron.’

‘But the passport and the birth certificate . . .’

Lucien waved a hand in the air. ‘These things can be bought for the right price if you know the right people, Trey. It was my hope that by having those things with me that we would have been able to avoid that disagreeable scene that you were just forced to witness.’ He shifted in his seat so that he was completely faced Trey. ‘My apologies for that – it must have been rather unpleasant for you.’

‘Those things that you said about Mr Wallington. Were they true?’

‘I never tell lies, Trey. I may choose not to answer all questions that might be put to me, and I might even substitute one truth for another, but I don’t lie. So, yes, all of those things were true.’

‘You lied about your name.’

The stranger inclined his head as if considering this. ‘No. I told him that my name is Lucien. The papers that I handed to him had my photograph next to the name Lucien Laporte, but I never told him that that was what I was called.’

Trey considered this, but was uncomfortable about the ambiguity of Lucien’s argument.

‘What happened in the room just then?’ Trey blurted out.

‘How do you mean?’

‘You held up your hand and everything . . . everything stopped. That fly over there,’ Trey nodded in the direction of the window. ‘It died and then it . . .’

The quizzical look on Lucien’s face caused Trey to flush a deep shade of red. ‘Sorry, I’m not making any sense. It’s just that I thought . . . I thought that . . .’

‘You thought that fly over there was dead?’

Trey shook his head. Everything that had happened to him already this morning had clearly had more of an impact than he had imagined. He was making a fool of himself, babbling on about dead flies to this strange man.

‘How could you possibly have found out all those dreadful things about Colin?’ he eventually asked.

Lucien frowned, considering how to answer this question. ‘All men have secrets that they hide away. Some men try to keep them hidden in the deepest, darkest recesses of their being. But these secrets lie in wait, biding their time until they are eventually uncovered, and then they emerge, the fangs bared, ready to pierce the hearts of those that have kept them imprisoned for so long.’

‘You haven’t answered my question.’

‘It is not an easy question to answer, Trey. Not in the short time that we have available to us now. Let us just say that I have a gift for peering into the more clandestine areas of a man’s make-up. Like looking through a window to see what happens in the locked room beyond.’

Trey turned to look at the man sitting next to him. Something about the way that he’d referred

locked rooms had been deliberately employed to strike a chord with him. His intense stare was mirrored unflinchingly until, with a slight raise of his eyebrow, Lucien broke the silence.

‘Is everything OK, Trey?’ His eyes softened again and that boyish smile played across his face.

‘It was you, wasn’t it? You were responsible for trashing my room and destroying my possessions last night, weren’t you?’ Trey stood up, looking down at the man on the sofa. Lucien peered down at the material of his suit and picked at an invisible fleck of something on his trousers.

‘Your Mr Wallington may have been wrong about a number of things, Trey, but I am afraid he was completely correct in his assumption as to who was responsible for the events that took place in your bedroom yesterday.’

‘You’re lying,’ Trey insisted, his voice wavering. ‘If you had nothing to do with it, how come you know anything about it?’

‘I’ve told you already, I don’t lie. You yourself have just told me what occurred in your room last night. Sit down, Trey, please.’ He nodded back at the seat next to him.

Trey closed his eyes and blew out his cheeks. His head was whirling with everything that had already gone on, and he was struggling to keep himself together. He wanted nothing more than to return to his bed, crawl under the covers and wait until everything simply went away.

Lucien looked at him and smiled sadly. ‘I imagine that you are feeling very frightened and confused right now. And that you are looking for some answers to the things that have happened to you since and during, last night.’

‘And you can provide those answers?’

‘A great many of them, yes. You see, I know—’

Trey exploded, ‘Don’t say you know how I feel! Right now you have no idea how I feel. You don’t know anything about me.’

Lucien looked up at Trey with a look of genuine concern. He glanced at the clock on the wall above the door and, making his mind up about something, nodded at the boy.

‘You’re right, of course,’ he said. He paused before continuing cautiously. ‘However, not all of what you have said is correct. You and I have indeed met before, but you were a very small child and would not remember the encounter.’ He placed his hands upon his knees and leaned forward slightly. When he spoke again, his voice was calm and clear, but filled with a passion that had hitherto been absent.

‘You see, I knew your mother and father. Indeed, we were great friends – your father and I worked together for a long time. It was important, perilous work of the kind that forges eternal bonds between people. When you were born, your father rightly decided that he could no longer continue with our work and we drifted apart for a while. I visited your parents when you were three years old and I had never seen the two of them so happy. My fear was that my presence would inevitably blight their happiness, and as I have said, I was too fond of your father to allow that to happen. So I vowed that I would not interfere with their lives again. I kept that promise as best I could, asking for your father’s help only in cases of extreme need.’

He paused, considering how to continue. ‘For the happiness that they knew during those early years of your life, I am forever grateful that I maintained my distance, but I earnestly believe that had I not put such a distance between us, they might still be alive today. I feel somewhat responsible for their deaths, and even more responsible for your safety. That is what I am doing here today, Trey. Please believe me when I say that I have kept a constant vigil over your welfare, and that I would not have hesitated to become involved in your life earlier had there been any signs that you were in imminent danger.’

He stood up now and placed his hand on the boy’s shoulder. ‘But what happened last night has changed everything. You are now in the danger that I have just alluded to, and I am here to keep you

from harm.'

'I don't understand any of this,' Trey said.

'I know. But we are running out of time. Our odious little friend Mr Wallington will be back very shortly, and then there will be no way for me to protect you and to tell you all of the things that you really have to know about yourself and the dangers that you are in.

'I want you to have something.' Lucien reached into his trouser pocket and opened his hand, revealing a silver chain and pendant. Picking up the chain, he held it up so that Trey could see properly. The chain was very long, so that, as tall as he was, Lucien still had to hold the end high above the boy's head in order that he could see the ornament hanging from the bottom links.

The pendant was actually a small silver clenched fist. Trey reached up to hold it so that he could examine it more closely.

'What is this?' he asked.

'It was your father's. He would have wanted you to have it. And to wear it. Please, allow me.' Lucien leaned forward and placed the chain around Trey's neck. He stood back, smiling at what he saw.

Trey looked down at the chain hanging down the outside of his T-shirt. He'd never worn any jewellery, and it felt heavy and odd to him. The pendant seemed to be hanging too far down; resting just above his navel.

'Why is it so long?' he asked, toying with the silver amulet.

'Because it needs to be. You don't want it coming off . . . ever.' Lucien's gaze was unnerving, as if trying to drill home the significance of this last statement.

'Now, I suggest that you tuck it into your T-shirt and try to forget about it for a while.' He reached for his umbrella and glanced at the expensive-looking watch hidden behind the folds of his cufflinks and sleeves.

'Trey, I must ask you something that is the key to what will happen next. It is a simple question, but, like all questions of that type, requires a deep and clearly considered response. Know that your answer will have a profound effect on your life from now on and that dire consequences may result if you make the wrong choice.' He stopped to look over Trey's shoulder at the door and seemed to be listening for something.

'What are you—'

'Shh,' Lucien cut him off with a raised hand, and then, seemingly happy with whatever it was that he had discovered, switched his attention back to the teenager.

Placing both hands on Trey's shoulders, he looked down at the boy and spoke to him with the same intensity that he had when he had spoken of Trey's parents.

'Trey, we have no time left. As of last night, your life has changed forever. Things will happen to you that you cannot hope to deal with on your own, and because of these things you are in terrible danger.' He stared into Trey's eyes. 'I need you to tell me something. Do you believe that you can trust me and that I am here to help you?' he said.

Trey looked up at the stranger's face, hoping to find some clue that could help him make sense of what was going on. He shook his head. He didn't believe that the man had any intention of hurting him, and yet . . .

Sensing his apprehension, Lucien bent forward until his face was on the same level as Trey's. 'Your father loved you very much, Trey. Whether he had some inkling of what was to become of him, I don't know, but shortly before he died he asked me to promise to do something if anything should happen to him.' Lucien smiled sadly. 'Do you remember the nickname that your father had for you when you were a child, Trey?'

'Yes. He used to call me Little Loop. My grandmother told me.'

A flicker of confusion crossed Lucien's face, but was instantly replaced by a broad smile as he took in what Trey had said.

'Little Loop. That's very good. It's lost a little in translation though.'

'Lucien, what has all this got to do with—'

"Protège mon petit loup" – those were the words that your father said to me that evening. He told me that if anything should happen to him, I was to protect his . . . little loop. And I agreed that I would. That is why I am here tonight, Trey: to keep a promise that I made to your father that night all those years ago. So I have to ask you again, do you trust me? Are you willing to place your life in my hands, knowing that I will allow no harm to come to you while there is an ounce of strength left in my body?'

Trey's hand involuntarily felt for the small silver fist beneath his T-shirt and his fingers closed around the hard, solid shape. He looked at this stranger and considered everything that he had told him so far that day. He did believe that Lucien was there to help him in some way, and there was no doubting that the man seemed to sincerely believe that Trey was in some terrible danger. But the question seemed an impossible question to answer. He needed more time. Everything was happening too quickly.

Lucien gently squeezed the top of his shoulders, urging a response from him. 'Please, Trey. We do not have much time left. There are . . . forces at work that spell great danger for you. Even as we speak they are moving against us. Will you trust me and let me help you as I promised?'

'Yes, Lucien. I do believe that you are here to help me and I do trust you. But—'

'Good man . . . and thank you.' He grabbed the boy's arm and, gently lifting him to his feet, propelled him towards the door. 'Come on, we are leaving this place. We need to go now, or this moment will be lost and I fear that another, *much* more unpleasant scene will ensue.'

They left the room, turning to their right, and hurried down the corridor away from the direction of the kitchen.

Trey's mind was a mess of tumbling thoughts and emotions. One second he'd been sitting listening to Lucien telling him things about his parents, the next he was being physically propelled through the corridors of the care home as if his very life depended on it.

'The front door is the other way,' Trey said, glancing over his shoulder.

'Indeed it is, but the emergency exit is this way.' Lucien was walking extremely quickly, and his long legs made it impossible for Trey to keep up without jogging along beside him. He was still being steered by Lucien's firm grip on his upper arm, and he felt an urge to break free and run back to the safety of the home.

Sensing the boy's apprehension, Lucien released his grip on Trey's arm. 'Almost there,' he said in a hushed tone.

They turned left into a short corridor and approached the emergency exit at the back of the building. Trey could see that the electric wire linking the push-bar mechanism to the alarm had been cut, its two ends dangling beneath the machinery.

Lucien slowed slightly and, reaching into his top pocket, pulled out his sunglasses and placed them over his eyes. With his other hand he reached down to the umbrella that he was still carrying and released the pop-stud that had been keeping the material neatly twisted around the stem.

'What are you doing?' asked Trey incredulously. 'It isn't raining outside, Lucien.'

'I'm afraid that I have a rather rare skin complaint that does not allow me to come into direct contact with sunlight. It really is rather irksome, but if I don't take the necessary precautions, I'm afraid that the results are somewhat unpleasant.' Kicking the push bar of the door with his left foot, he opened up the umbrella, ducked under its shade and exited the building all in one swift movement.

Parked six feet away was a jet-black Lexus. With its heavily tinted, almost black, windows, Trey

thought that it looked like some giant malevolent beetle just waiting to leap upon any unsuspecting victim that was foolish enough to roam too close to its waiting maw.

Lucien, who had kept the hand not carrying the umbrella firmly in his pocket since they had emerged from the building's interior, had depressed the key fob as they approached; the *chee-choo* sound of the alarm deactivating was followed by a satisfying clunk of the door locks being released.

'Front or back, Trey. I really do not care, but please be quick.' Lucien approached the driver's door and Trey decided he would be more comfortable in the back. He hesitated, his fingers resting on the handle. He looked up at Lucien, and, shaking his head at the stupidity of what he was about to do, opened the door and jumped into the back seat. He fastened his seat belt while looking out of the window to see what Lucien was doing. His heart pounded in his chest and he felt extremely hot and clammy, as the blood raced around his body carrying the fight-or-flight chemicals to every cell within it.

Outside, Lucien switched the umbrella to his left hand and, opening the door with the other, very quickly threw himself into the seat while simultaneously discarding the opened umbrella on the road outside the car and closing the door. For the first time since they had met, Trey saw that the man's impeccable self-composure had been allowed, momentarily, to slip. He was breathing hard and a slither of sweat snaked down the flesh on the back of his neck.

As Lucien sat in the chair for a minute to compose himself, Trey watched in horror as large, angry blisters started to form on the top of Lucien's head and the backs of his hands. They grew at an incredible rate, increasing their diameter five- or six-fold in the mere seconds that he watched, filling with a light, yellowish-white fluid until the area around them looked pinched and sore. Trey had seen how quickly Lucien had entered the car and knew that those areas of skin could not have been exposed for more than a fraction of a second.

'Lucien, your skin . . . it's . . .'

He watched as the man in front of him gingerly touched the angry welts on the top of his head with the tips of his fingers. 'I know. It's this . . . condition. I don't react very favourably to the sun. Don't worry, they'll be gone shortly.'

'I don't think so. They look bad. You'll need a doctor. I think—'

'Trust me, Trey. I am an *extremely* fast healer.' He removed the sunglasses and placed them on the passenger seat by his side. Starting the car, he began to pull away from the curb and away from the institution that had been Trey Laporte's home for the last three years. 'Now, we need to make haste.'

'This looks like a drug dealer's car,' Trey remarked carelessly. In the rear-view mirror he saw Lucien's cheeks rise and his eyes crinkle in what he guessed was a smile.

'Does it, indeed? Then I will certainly have to change it. The remote control for the television is in the lift-up compartment on your right. Feel free to watch what you like.'

'I'm too wired to watch TV, Lucien. I think I'd just like to sit in peace for a while and try to work out what the hell I have just done.'

Lucien nodded from the front, and they drove in silence for the remainder of the trip, mile after mile of countryside speeding past Trey's window as he gazed out from the rear of the car. He could feel his eyes start to drop and he blinked them open in frustration, shaking his head in disbelief that he could even consider the possibility of sleep after everything that had just happened. But the adrenal dump that was taking place in his body right now was making him suddenly extremely weary. He felt his eyes blinking shut again and looked up to see Lucien regarding him in the rear-view mirror.

'Sleep is a good thing,' Lucien said. 'We've got a long journey ahead of us, so, please, sleep as long as you like. You are quite safe now. Trust me.'

Fighting the sudden waves of exhaustion that seemed to simply roll over him, Trey suddenly remembered that he had left the home without any of his possessions.

'My stuff . . .' he mumbled.

~~'Shhh, now. I will arrange for all of your personal items to be collected by one of my people.'~~

Everything else – we will simply buy as new.'

Trey looked around at the luxuriant car interior. 'Are you rich, Lucien?' he asked.

'Yes. Disgustingly so.'

'Where are we going?' His eyes fluttered as he fought to stay awake long enough to catch the answer.

'We are going to my apartment in London. You are coming to live with me, Mr Laporte.'

And with that, Trey gave himself up to the creeping sleep that encroached at the edges of his consciousness like some amorphous fog, and placed himself in the charge of Lucien Charron.

4

'Trey, wake up. We are here.' Lucien was leaning back between the gap in the two front seats and gently shaking Trey out of the sleep that he was in.

'Unghh, where are we?' Trey said. His neck ached from the uncomfortable sleeping position that he had adopted against the car door. He opened his eyes and looked out of the window on to a bleak open space of concrete pillars and sickly-coloured fluorescent lighting. Twenty or so cars were parked in various bays, their colours difficult to make out under the garish green hue of the strip lights.

'We're in the underground car park beneath my apartment block. You've slept the entire journey here,' Lucien said.

'I'm sorry . . .'

'Please, there is no need to apologize. You have been through an awful lot in such a short space of time, it's understandable that your mind would want to rest. Come along.' Lucien climbed out of the front seat. He moved around the outside of the car, then, like a chauffeur, he deferentially swung back the rear door on Trey's side and made a grand sweeping gesture with his other arm. 'Your new home awaits.'

Trey climbed out, suddenly feeling very wary of his surroundings. The underground car park smelled of acrid exhaust fumes, and even the smallest sound was transformed into a harsh echo as it bounced around the walls. The sickly feeling of fear welled up within him again as the stupidity of his actions suddenly crushed in on him. He jumped slightly at the sound of the car locking behind him, but when Lucien spotted this he didn't comment. He simply turned his back on the boy and walked towards an elevator set into a wall on their right.

'Do come along, Trey,' Lucien said over his shoulder, pressing a small button in the wall next to the doors. 'We live on the top floor.'

Trey walked over to the doors as they slid open. His mind slowly cleared of the sleepy fog that had dulled it moments before. He was fully alert again now and on edge as he got into the small lift compartment. Lucien stabbed at the uppermost button, and the doors slid shut on the pair.

'I am guessing that you are hungry?' Lucien said.

Trey hadn't even thought of food, but the mere mention of it caused his stomach to groan noisily and twist as though some parasitic beast living within him had suddenly been awakened. 'Ravenous could eat a horse with a soup spoon . . . but I feel sick at the same time,' Trey replied. The tall man next to him laughed for the first time since they had met. It was a deep, wonderful sound that seemed completely at odds coming from such a stern, alarming-looking individual. Trey found himself smiling in spite of the creeping worry-worm that wriggled and gnawed away inside of him.

He's not what he says he is, the worm whispered. Run now while you still have a chance.

'Well, I can't promise any horse tonight, but I am sure that we can find something that will satisfy your appetite.'

The lift finished its ascent, the metal doors sliding open to reveal Lucien's apartment. Trey stood in the opening and stared, wide-eyed, at the opulence of the room before him. It was a huge room that he guessed must have been at least forty metres in length. The white walls were crowned with a dark blue

glass suspended ceiling that hung impossibly above the entire space and reflected back an image of in its surface. Rugs broke up the expanse of cream carpeting that stretched from the lift to the far side of the room, where huge floor-to-ceiling windows allowed the last of the early evening sunlight in, filling it with a golden hue. They could see the towering form of Canary Wharf rising behind some of the buildings that faced them from across the other side of the river. Everything inside the apartment was so *big*. Three doors were uniformly arranged along both side walls, which, in turn, were lavishly adorned with works of art and tapestries. Trey's eyes were drawn to a giant tapestry in the centre of one wall: the scene sewn into its surface in silken thread showed mounted huntsmen that had cornered a white stag. A lance pierced the animal's heart; the creature's head was twisted in agony as it died in its pursuers' hands.

In the centre of the room, encircled by large obsidian stones, burned a log fire, its smoke being gobbled up by a polished metal hood hanging from a suspended column in the ceiling.

Standing next to the fire, perfectly still and upright, was a tall, powerful-looking man. A large, unsightly scar dominated the right side of his face, and it appeared to have healed poorly, the scar tissue pulling the flesh in on itself, giving it an ugly, puckered appearance. His hair was black, with hints of grey, and was cropped close to his head, lending him a distinctly military air. He was wearing a dark blue suit that, like Lucien's, looked expensive, the cut of his clothing enhancing his muscular frame. He nodded at Trey, his head barely dipping in acknowledgement, before his gaze turned back to Lucien.

'Welcome back, Lucien.' The man spoke in a broad Irish accent. He strode across the room towards them, crossing the threshold of the lift, and Trey had to stop himself from taking a step backwards in response.

'Nice to meet you, young man,' he said in a voice that sounded as if he gargled with bleach every morning. He held out a hand in greeting.

Trey wasn't at all surprised to find that the man's hands were tough and callused: hands that had been used for hard work. He was, however, surprised by the warmth of the handshake, as his hand was gripped firmly and covered by the man's other hand.

'Trey, this is Thomas,' Lucien announced, looking from one to the other. 'He is my right-hand man and he helps, among a whole host of other things, to keep my businesses running smoothly when my attentions are elsewhere. He'll do his best to make sure that you are comfortable here, and if there's anything that you need, I'm sure that Thomas would be happy to try to get it for you.'

'You call me Tom,' the Irishman said, glancing at the other man from under his eyebrows. 'Thomas, indeed! The first thing that'll start to infuriate you about this great long streak of I-don't-know-what is his unrelenting formality.' He released Trey's hand and stepped back, cocking his head to one side, his eyebrows raised high as if expecting an answer to some unspoken question. When none came, he turned his back on them, walking away and shouting over his shoulder, 'Well, are the two of you coming in, or are you going to stand in the lift all night like a couple of *eejits*? I suppose you'll both be wanting something to eat?' he said, disappearing into the furthest door set into the right-hand wall.

Lucien ushered Trey into the room and gestured towards a brown leather recliner facing the fire. 'Make yourself at home, Trey. I shall go and ascertain what culinary delights our housekeeper, Mrs Magilton, has left for us. If you'd like to watch something on the television, feel free.' He bent down towards the chair and picked up a remote control with a large blue LCD display which he handed to Trey. 'If you press this button,' he continued, 'the TV slides up out of the floor over there.' He gestured to an area on Trey's left. 'Beyond that, I really don't have a clue how it works, but I'm sure that you'll work it out in no time.' He smiled and exited through the same door that Tom had just used, leaving Trey on his own.

Trey watched him leave before staring round again at his fabulous surroundings. The place

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