

An excerpt from

In Your Dreams

by Michael von Glahn

That night, dreaming, I unexpectedly found myself in the Factory somewhere—the sixth floor, where the main conference room and Dr. Sam’s suite were. I peered both ways down the corridor. It was night, no one around. This wasn’t where I was supposed to be or particularly cared to be.

A wave of fire blasted from the main stairwell. It roared across the corridor and consumed the conference room, blowing out the windows and hurling burning debris into the sky.

I stood in the scorched room, charred carpet crunching underfoot. A blazing shape fell past the empty window frames, boneless limbs trailing. That was a human being—once.

OK, I was done. Check, please.

I opened my eyes in bed, in the Factory. I had a dream-date. Whatever that had been, it wasn’t Lian. Maybe I’d crossed wires somehow and ended up in some sick Malky shoot-’em-up freak-show dream. I didn’t remember him being anywhere even on the periphery of my thoughts. Maybe he was trying to hook up with me.

I sent a tentative probe out, just to let him know I had other plans, didn’t care to go on the Malky-o-Whirl tonight. Nada, no response.

Well, screw it, I had better places to be. I relaxed again, breathing deep and easily, reaching out to Lian.

Blurred figures scurried down a hallway, the emergency lights throwing pillars of illumination heavy with floating dust. A security door and the wall around it shook free of the surrounding corridor and heaved off into rubble. I tried to withdraw, to replace the scene with something innocuous, a meadow, my old bedroom as a kid.

Dr. Sam stared at me from across his desk, hands planted on the polished wood, eyes wide. He was flung into the air by a giant invisible hand. Everything went red.

I woke up again, unwound myself from the sheets, eased my breathing and heart rate back where they were supposed to be. That definitely wasn't right. Except for my run-in with Hank Rom, I hadn't had a nightmare, hadn't had *any* kind of dream of my own that I couldn't direct, in years.

It took me more than an hour to get to sleep again, and even then, I held myself out of REM state for awhile.

Lian was waiting for me this time, gliding back and forth on the swings at a playground in a park.

"Billy, Billy don't you lose my number," she scolded me, "cuz you're not anywhere that I can find you..."

"I tried to get here," I said. "Did you have any weird dreams, anything like a nightmare tonight?"

The look she gave said, *Nightmare? People like us don't have no steenkin' nightmares.* She dragged the toes of her boots in the dirt to brake herself. "No. I tried to find you, but couldn't—like you were awake or not in REM," she said. She looked around at her dreamscape. "Nothing weird here." She smiled crookedly. "Nothing but us."

I explained about the nightmare. Guiding my own dreams was a cornerstone for me; I possessed control in dreamland that I never had in the real world. If that was starting to slip away...

"Could I be losing my ability?" I wondered aloud.

That thought seemed to shake her a little. “No. After all, you’re here,” she pointed out.

“Yeah. Now. But for how long?”

I recalled the little meteor cratering my Julie Andrews dream mountains. Fireballs as a theme. Could I be picking up some kind of dream static from Dylan or one of the other pyros? Was it possible one of them had some latent weaver in them?

If this kept up, I might have to go to Dr. Sam with it, though I wasn’t real thrilled at the possibility that I might lose my golden-boy status if it looked like my talent was starting to drain away or go haywire.

Lian stood balanced on the top bar of the swing set, walking it like a tightrope.

“I think we’re alone now,” she observed. “There doesn’t seem to be anyone around. I think we’re alone now. The beating of our hearts is the only sound.”

I took the hint. Waking worries were for waking time. Dreamtime was too precious to waste. I leapt into the air and gathered her in my arms. She nestled there for a moment, giving me a coy smile, then wriggled like a fish and shot out of my grasp up into the sky. Head over heels and horny as hell, I sped after her.

A couple days later, the docs altered our routine, giving us weavers a hiatus from dream sessions with outside subjects. Dr. Sam referred to our new schedule as “goal-oriented team exercises.”

We’d done a week of directly competitive stuff with the other teams—sort of like paranormal dodgeball or capture-the-flag. But now each team was strictly segregated to its own floor for more specialized training and observation. The Blues and Reds were up on the seventh and eighth floors, respectively, while we stayed in our digs on the fifth. We ate meals in our team lounges rather than all together in the dining hall.

During the daytime sessions, independent of the other groups, each team had to overcome a series of obstacles in a sort of modular maze. The environmental variables changed constantly to throw us off. We might lose the lights halfway through, or a

couple strobes would cut in along with orchestral music blaring from speakers all around us (Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," for all you "Clockwork Orange" fans).

Random objects would fly at us from hydraulic launchers. As we advanced, Dov's head swung from side to side like a tank's turret, hunting the next target. A big cube hurtled toward us. Dov stopped it dead in midair and flung it back.

A pop-up target might appear from behind a couple more cubes (it was decorated like a cartoon bad guy: striped jersey, black mask, flat newsboy cap). Dylan turned it into a torch. I spotted a couple docs in silver firefighting suits back against the far wall and thought *I gotta get me one of those*. As weavers, Lian and I were really just along for the ride. About all we could do was provide extra targets to draw attention away from the useful members of the team.

Next, one of the docs might be sitting by a door we had to get through, a door with a green stripe and a combination lock. The test parameters laid out that anything with a green stripe had to be dealt with by other means than force—i.e. Dov couldn't smash it and Dylan wasn't allowed to crisp it. So Zoraida, her daytime med levels lowered a bit, had to sieve the combination from the doc's head.

This nonsense was all going on simultaneously with the other teams on their own floors. Considering the other teams each outnumbered us and had more movers and/or pyros, we should've been history. (In fairness, the others had a few added hurdles to provide challenges for their lightbenders.) But I gathered that the Greens (yay team) got through the course faster than the other teams more than half the time. We also tripped various alarms less frequently.

As Kermit and his buddies would've said: Hoo-ah. We rocked.

As things were being reset and replaced after one run, I asked Dr. Sam why Lian and I needed to be along, since we didn't contribute anything to the team's efforts.

"You don't exactly need to go through Parris Island to dream-jump," I noted with a yawn, feeling the powerful need for a nap.

“Granted. But the exercise is intended to promote teamwork. And you have the intelligence and intuitive nature to be a leader, James.”

“I also have the intelligence not to get in Dov’s way.”

Obligatory smile-flicker. “Force is not the only avenue,” he said. “Subtlety can gain far more ground at less cost.”

“Tell you what,” I said, unable to control another yawn. “Tell me which of you docs planned the next series. I’ll jump in their head and get the whole plan and we can skip all the special effects entirely.” I chuckled because my yawn had made him yawn and he practically sprained his face trying not to let it show.

“Don’t get ahead of the program, James,” he said. “We’ll have exercises for that, too.”

“That ‘new direction’ for Lian and me?”

“Exactly. But in due time, James. When we feel you’re ready.”

“Can’t wait, Doc.” Anything that would let me sleep.

Of course, sleep wasn’t always a refuge anymore. The damn holocaust dream kept recurring. I noticed that it got rolling most often at night, when I had my longest REM phase, but once or twice it popped up during the day when I was in REM for a couple hours as part of our group training, “debriefing” my teammates after they ran a series while I was separated from them in another room.

As far as I could tell, the dream’s pattern didn’t vary much, if at all. I decided to take advantage of that and explore the scenario in more detail. Maybe that would tell me where it was coming from.

Fire punched through the conference room. The main stairwell was obviously a no-go. I checked the emergency stairwell. Aside from plaster dust and fallen ceiling tiles, it looked navigable—but I could see fire-glow several floors down, so that wouldn’t take me to ground level. And I could hear fire billowing somewhere above, too. Yeesh.

Using both hands (and the fact that it was just a dream) I wrenched the elevator doors open. No car in the first one I tried, heat and smoke rising from flames roaring at the bottom of the shaft. The car in the second shaft was jammed one floor up, metal creaking and groaning. An explosion somewhere above rocking the building.

In sum: no way out. I glanced around, was facing just the right direction to see the burning corpse plummet past the gaping holes where the windows had been. OK, technically, that was a way out. But six floors up made it a fairly terminal option.

I remembered Dr. Sam and climbed over debris to get to his office. He slumped brokenly in the corner, already dead. I wasn't going to learn anything from him.

The next night, I ran up the emergency stairs (I did not want to be on the main stairwell when that column of fire caromed through it—a grisly death would have woken me up and wasted the whole episode). I flashed to double speed but the security door in the hallway was already down.

A pair of shadowy presences, indistinct human forms, loomed before Dr. Sam's desk. The doc stood on the other side, put down his PDA to lean both hands on the desk. Mouth moving, but no words, incomprehension on his face. One of the amorphous figures gestured and Dr. Sam's body hurtled up into a corner of the ceiling, then sagged to the floor, trailing blood and goo down the wall.

While I stood there gawping, the two shadows passed right through me, back into the corridor. Passed right through me! I shook myself and darted to catch up with them, just in time to see them split up. One charged up the main stairs to the floors above, while the other jumped the railing and *floated* straight down the middle of the open stairwell.

This was just complete bullsh—

Flame bloomed below and I threw myself aside an instant before the dragon's breath roared up the stairwell.

On several nights, I tried relocating to other parts of the Factory as soon as the dream sequence kicked in. Once, I sent myself to the commons in time for a fleeting

impression of whirling fire spewing in all directions from a blazing cyclone—and then I was awake. OK, note to self: the commons = DOA.

The same held true for the lobby atrium: everything an inferno.

After that, it was as if the dream didn't like me deviating from its programmed plotline. I tried sending myself to the next floor up, where the Blues had their rooms, but instead wound up in Dr. Sam's office, watching his soggy slide to the floor. Then I tried transferring out onto the lawn, but found myself in the blast-ravaged conference room, looking out at the lawn six stories below.

This was getting old. If there was some hidden wisdom I was supposed to glean from all this awfulness, I wasn't getting the message.

I turned away from the shattered windows and Dov pushed me with both hands, sending me toppling back into space.

Lian wasn't having any nightmares, nothing off-kilter in her dreams. After a couple tries, I managed to link briefly with Katie and Malky, found out the same held true for them. They each gave me a look that said, *Nightmares? What's with that? Weavers don't have nightmares.*

So even among us specials, I was special.

It's a fine line between psychic and psycho. I wasn't sure which side of that line I was on, but I needed to find out. I asked Dr. Sam if I could take some of the basic tests the program used for identifying people with precognitive talent. That certainly got his attention.

"Why?" he finally asked after subjecting his glasses to a very deliberate cleaning. "Do you have reason to believe you might be a precog?"

"Not especially," I hedged. "But I've been doing some undirected dreaming, just to see where things would go. Out of curiosity. Some of the imagery was... unusual, kind of future oriented. Well, could be anyway. I thought... I dunno, that maybe I oughta see if there was any chance... OK, it sounds pretty stupid out loud."

“Not at all,” he said confidently, apparently reassured that I was just engaged in some kind of teenage intellectual masturbation. “We can run the preliminary battery of tests, if you like. Perhaps you could keep a journal of your undirected dreams as well. Though in future, James, I’d prefer you consulted me before you alter your dream routine, just so that we can account for any changes in our data.”

“Sure, I’m sorry. It’s only been a couple days—two, maybe three.” OK, nine, but I wasn’t telling him that.

“All right. I’ll ask Dr. Sheila to administer the tests if you like.” He consulted a calendar on his PDA. “After lunch?”

“Great.”

Yeah, great. Now Dr. Sam thought his star weaver was a complete dork with delusions of precog grandeur.

Things didn’t get any better when I completely skunked the precog tests. You could drop an egg and I wouldn’t have been able to predict it would hit the floor. Whatever skewed gene let precogs see the future, I sure as hell didn’t have it.

“Thanks,” I said lamely when the test concluded.

“Not at all,” Dr. Sheila said, cutting and pasting a brief smile at me from across the table. She jotted a few notes and started packing things up.

What if I was just going nuts? I mean, as long as I could remember, that had always been one of the possible choices on the menu of my life.

None of this made sense: I wasn’t a precog, just a weaver. According to the buzz, there’d only ever been a single genuine precog through the Factory, a member of the Betas. The docs were always looking, but, for whatever reason, precognition talent was a lot rarer than any of the others.

Maybe I wasn’t dreaming the future. But whatever it was, where the hell was it coming from? I wondered if the catastrophic dreamline might be an anomaly along the lines of the Bookstore, a repeating scenario with no real-world source. If so, what did its

emergence say about me and what was happening down in the tangled roots of my brain?

That looped me back around to being crazy. Which wasn't something I could do much about.

OK, screw the test. If what I was dreaming somehow *was* the future—if it was a warning, if it was going to happen—what could I do about it?

I could do something that should have occurred to me much sooner. I brought Lian into my dreamland and had her hang around to see if the sequence would switch on with her present.

Unlike anybody else I could think of, she wouldn't look at me like I was losing it. Much.

We were waiting in our team's lounge. I'd tried shifting scene to the sixth floor, but ended up with us standing in the corridor, looking into the conference room as Dr. Sam and a bunch of the other docs reviewed monthly progress reports. It was bright daylight through the floor-to-ceiling windows. That was completely wrong, so I returned us to the lounge.

She sat on the arm of a sofa, throwing me a look that somehow combined patience and reassurance with extreme skepticism.

Then, without any ads or trailers, the dream kicked in. So Lian's presence made no difference. I felt one explosion through the floor, then another. She stood up, one eyebrow raised in question.

"Yep," I nodded.

I led Lian up the emergency stairs, keeping hold of her hand. She watched the whole thing play out: the fireball, Dr. Sam, the torched carcass falling past the windows. I was so preoccupied with gauging her reaction that I didn't remember in time and let myself get turfed out by Dov again. Terrific. That woke me up, meaning I needed to fall asleep and drift into REM again before I could compare notes with Lian.

I found her in her old room at home, posters everywhere, tapping her fist against her chin in thought.

“Always the same?” she asked, glancing up when I appeared in the doorway.

“Pretty much.”

“Every night?”

“Yep. More than once now, the last day or so. Getting insistent, you might say.”

“And Dov kills you?”

I’d been thinking about that, and about those shadowy figures. “Maybe not.”

“He throws you out of the building,” she pointed out reasonably.

“Let’s set that aside for the moment.” I sat down next to her. “Now that you’ve seen it, am I crazy?”

“If you are, we both must be. I tried changing some of it, jumping myself to another part of the Factory. Nothing happened.” She thought awhile. “You said you’ve been able to explore around in it?”

“Only bits of it. Other parts I can’t get to.”

“Well, I can’t even do that much.”

“Is it another weaver?” I wondered again, draping an arm around her, pulling her against me, needing that warmth.

“If it is, it’s not Katie or Malky. Neither of them could block me that way, much less block *you*.”

“So somebody outside,” I mused. Lian shrugged.

“If it’s real.”

“A weaver precog?”

“Who knows what’s out there?” she asked. “We’re in a zoo here.”

“Yeah, right.” I didn’t like the analogy, mostly because it was too accurate. “And it’s ‘Wild Kingdom’ out there. OK, so say it’s a warning. If a precog sees a tree fall in the forest, does the tree actually have to fall?”

She dug an elbow into my ribs. “Not funny,” she reminded me. “Somebody dies. Maybe Dr. Sam, too. Maybe you.”

I held her more tightly, rested my chin on the top of her head.

“So what do I do?” I asked. “I flunked the precog test. Do I tell Dr. Sam I think the Factory is gonna get trashed by I-don’t-know-who, some shadow-things I can’t really see? Because I dreamed it? He’ll trunk me to the eyeballs. Then if it really does happen, I’ll get barbecued in bed.”

We both pondered and mulled for a time, my hands sometimes straying because that helped me think, Lian sometimes removing my hands so I’d think about what we were supposed to be thinking about.

“If it is a warning, there’d be no point if you couldn’t do anything about it,” she noted finally. Score one for logic.

“OK, I’ll buy that. So let’s look at what the dream tells us—and what it doesn’t. I’m starting to think it’s like a map. And I have an idea about the Dov thing, too.”

“You mean him being an asshole for pushing you out a window?”

I shrugged. “The ‘asshole’ thing’s a given. I mean about me going out the window.”

So we crafted outlandish what-if plans together. Hey, if I was going bonkers, at least I had a girlfriend who was willing to humor me.

The next morning, before training, I found Dov in the weight room.

“Do me a favor. Practice your heavy lifting, as much as you can do. Not this stuff,” I added, waving dismissively at the weights. I tapped my temple. “This stuff.”

Dov raised the left half of his single eyebrow. “Why?”

“You’ll see when the time comes. Just do it, OK?”

“How much weight?”

“I dunno, 180 pounds maybe, tops. But held for a couple minutes at a time and more than once. Probably a bunch of times.”

Dov looked at me like I was crazy, but he was cocky about his talent and I knew he'd take the challenge just to be able to strut about it later.

"You're gonna owe me some steaks, man."

"Do this and I'll owe you more than that, OK?" I held out a fist and felt a firm tap against it without Dov's own hand moving from his pocket.

"Yeah, OK, McDreamy. Whatever."

"And skip the bedtime meds tonight. Fake it, you know? Maybe for the next few nights."

Dov and the other telekinetics spent nights sedated and secured to their beds with wrist and ankle restraints, a neck-brace and a bite guard just to be safe. The staff was worried as hell that one of the movers might activate their talent during REM sleep and start acting out their dreams in ways that could hurt themselves or someone else. Just a little stray mental push and they might swallow their own tongue or shove someone down a flight of stairs.

Dylan and the other pyros got the same treatment so they didn't trigger spot-fires in their rooms with a REM twitch.

Like the movers, their dreams were dim things, muted by drugs, gone like flash-paper burning the moment they opened their eyes. They woke up every morning stiff from the restraints, needing to work out their muscles before they could begin exercising their talents.

Nights were complete blanks, like death, for Zoraida and the other telepaths, who were tranked to the gills so they could sleep without everyone else's thoughts and dreams penetrating their subconscious minds in a sleet of emotions.

I once tried jumping into her dreams to see if there was some way I could help her any, but there was nothing there to link to. It was as if she didn't exist. Creeped me out for a week. I couldn't look at her without imagining that she was some sort of vampire, an undead shell with the soul scooped out, no reflection in the mirror. How could someone live without *dreams*?

The weavers were the only ones the docs encouraged to dream, and, along with the ghosts, the only ones who could safely sleep unfettered and free of meds.

“What’s going on?” Dov asked.

“Maybe something, maybe nothing. But if it happens, you’ll wanna be awake,” I assured him.

He grunted doubtfully.

I found Zoraida buried in an armchair in our team lounge, gazing out a window. I don’t know if she really saw what was outside. I don’t even know if she saw the window. I hunkered down to eye level with her.

“Zori. Don’t take the rest of your meds tonight. It’s important.”

She squinted, trying to bring me into focus. “Yes, it is,” she murmured at last.

“Can you do that? Without the docs knowing?”

A gradual nod, as if she were falling asleep. *That* didn’t bode well. “OK,” she said.

I was probably certifiable, ready for my return engagement at Sylvan Lake. Still, just in case there was something to my apocalyptic visions, I had to warn the other teams. Might as well make a fool of myself in front of everybody, not just my own team. But we were still in a training lockdown, segregated from the others, each group working on its own floor.

I knew the answer, but had to make sure.

“Zori, can you communicate with any of the other telepaths?”

She shook her head slowly, black hair sifting in front of her eyes like a curtain in a breeze. “No. You know that. We just hear. We don’t ... *send* thoughts.”

“But if you thought about something, would the other telepaths hear it, feel it?”

She seemed to drift back into Zoney Zori mode, staring blankly.

“Maybe.” She blinked in slow-motion, peered around as if she’d never seen the lounge before. “If they were trying to think about me ... right then. Maybe.”

“OK, Zori. Do something for me, please. As much as you can, think about something bad happening here soon. Something very bad.”

Her dark eyes swam up toward mine, another slow blink.

“Bad?”

“Very bad, as bad as you can imagine. And soon. Maybe even tonight.”

“Oh-kayyyyy,” she sighed, eyes straying, drifting away. “Bad bad bad...” she lilted, sinking deeper into the chair.

Zoraida was my very iffy fallback. I figured my best shot was to connect with the other teams’ weavers in a dream. But it wasn’t like just calling someone on the phone: To hook up in dreamland, sometimes you each had to pick up your respective phones and punch in each other’s number at the same time. If Katie or Malky weren’t also trying to communicate with me, or if they didn’t happen to be in REM state when I was, I might never find a way into their dreams in time.

I gave Lian a meet-me-asap message to pass on in case she encountered either of them in her own dreams. Maybe one of them would be starting to have nightmares like mine, but that didn’t seem likely considering Lian still hadn’t had any of her own—even after she’d piggybacked with me.

Lian had alerted Dylan. He shot me conspiratorial grins all day. Training was a blur, especially since it was mostly physical and didn’t involve me much.

I sank into dreamland quickly that night. I put myself on a beach in Florida from a family vacation when I was 8 or 9, a little blue inlet with pine trees fringing sand so bright in the sunlight it hurt my eyes. But the setting was pleasant, nonthreatening. I stepped into the shade, shadows carpeted with bleached brown pine needles underfoot.

“Katie!” I shouted. “Malky! We need to talk!”

There was no answer. Abruptly, I was wading out in the middle of the inlet, sparkling little waves lapping at my waist. I took a step, feeling the soft sand between my toes, but the water wasn’t slowing me up—then I stood in the middle of an amusement park midway, a Ferris wheel spinning in a blur like a buzzsaw ahead of me.

OK, this wasn't planned. I'm letting things slip. I stayed long enough to call out for the other weavers again and wait for a reply, just in case this was some gateway dream from one of them. But the rattling roller coaster that corkscrewed past over my head seemed familiar, another fragment from childhood, so it must have been all me still. The Ferris wheel spinning like mad wasn't encouraging.

Night. Running through thick wet bushes, forcing a path between trees. Wet and humid, a summer night after a thundershower. *Chasing or being chased? Where's this from? I am definitely not guiding well tonight.*

I shoved myself onto the curving street to the Bookstore, the puzzle place that defied everything I'd learned about the origin of dreams—normal dreams at any rate, whatever *they* were.

This time, the Bookstore reared up over a row of whitewashed, half-timbered Tudor storefronts, nestled in and around a fairytale tree 12 feet thick in the trunk. Instantly, I was inside, scuttling up a wooden ladder through the furnished, completely hollow tree trunk.

"Malky! Katie!"

Something moved below me, at the foot of the ladder. *Don't look down and it won't see you,* my brain warned me with childlike illogic. I looked down.

A roiling column of flame erupted from the main stairwell at the Factory, blasting straight into the main conference room and spewing the inside of that space into the night sky as incandescent confetti.

I stood in the charred shell of the room, looking out at the darkness through the eyeholes of a giant skull. A twisted figure plunged past the empty window frames, a limp black ragdoll plaited with burning hair and clothing.

Fuck, why hadn't I thought of it before? With Malky and Katie not responding, I tried to cast myself toward somebody else on the other teams who wouldn't be sedated. Pictured the big round head, the granny glasses.

"Shaun! Wake up! Wake your team up now!"

I had a momentary impression of him turning toward me in startlement, then—
Shadow-figures flitted and darted down a corridor dappled with emergency lights. A pinwheel of fire cycloned across the commons, liquid flames jetting in every direction.

I couldn't tell if I'd gotten through. I focused on the beach, trying to get back.

Dr. Sam stood with his hands pressed to the top of his desk, mouth half-open, eyes growing big as headlights. He slid down from a corner of the ceiling, leaving a wide runny smear of blood, brains and shards of bone.

Christmas morning when I was 5. My grandma's kitchen. I couldn't get anywhere, I wasn't in control anymore. Again.

Dov planted both hands on my chest and pushed. I whirled, tottered on the edge of the window frame and started to fall—

Damn! I woke up tangled in sweat-chilly sheets, a taste like pennies in my mouth. The dream had never felt so unstoppable, so much stronger than me.

The clock said it was after 1 a.m. I pulled my clothes on. Only time now to see to my own team; maybe I could get to the others afterward.

If anything really happened. If there was an afterward.

I met Lian in the hall and we tiptoed down to Zoraida's room. It was Sunday night, so the Factory was on minimal staff, just a shift of four security guards. Dr. Sam would be in his suite. No monitoring on any of the specials other than the usual vital-stats. Weekends, weavers could even dream without their brain activity being recorded; it was sort of meaningless when you thought about it, but gave us an illusion of privacy.

Zoraida was way out of it when we unstrapped her from her bed. I helped Lian pull clothes onto her.

"Come on, Zori. Up and at 'em," I said.

"If nothing happens..." Lian began.

“We call it a slumber party, try again tomorrow night.” I shook my head helplessly. “I’m leaning more and more toward me being crazy.” Zoraida’s head lolled onto my chest as I maneuvered her arms into the sleeves of the oversize cardigan her mother had knitted. We got her out into the hall and I supported her for a moment.

Lian spread both hands against my chest, stood on tiptoe and kissed me on the mouth, the first time she’d ever shown me any sort of affection outside of our shared dreams.

“Wake me up before you go-go,” she whispered. “Don’t leave me hangin’ on like a yo-yo.”

I fell into her eyes for a long moment, hardly breathing. Finally, I managed to say, “I really, really hate Wham.”

She brushed my lips with hers again and went off to fetch Dylan.

I half-carried Zoraida into the emergency stairwell and propped her sitting in the corner of the landing between the fifth and sixth floors.

“Stay here, OK, Zori?”

Pretty pointless to say that. She didn’t look as if she could lift her head off her chest, much less walk or even crawl. I hoped like hell her day meds would start wearing off soon.

I went back down and slid into Dov’s room, was relieved to see his eyes open and tracking me. I undid his restraints. He pried out the bite-guard and sailed a pitcher of water to himself to wash out the plastic taste.

“Don’t do any more of that,” I said, intercepting the pitcher in midair and holding it for him. “Save your strength. You’re gonna need it.”

I held the pitcher to his lips and he slurped down some water, flexing his wrists and rolling his neck to work out the stiffness.

“So what’s this all about?” he asked.

“I think something’s happening tonight.”

“Something like what?”

“Something like fire and explosions and people dying.”

He coughed water, spluttering and snuffing it out his nose. I thought I’d succeeded in startling him until his fit resolved itself into deep laughter.

“Shit, McDreamy. I thought maybe you finally grew some balls and had some kinda pussy party set up for us. But all you did was have some kinda ‘Die Hard’ dream, huh?”

Count to 10. Don’t try smothering him with a pillow—he’s a mover and can kick your ass. I should’ve told him when the restraints were still on. I might have had a fighting chance then.

“Whatever this is, it might happen tonight. If it doesn’t, fine, laugh all you want, asshole. But if it does happen, being strapped to your bed doesn’t put you in a real happy place, OK?”

“Whatever,” he chuckled, shaking his head. “At least it’s a change.” He pulled on jeans and his team T-shirt, laced on some sneakers. “So what’s the plan, McClane?”

The “Die Hard” shit was going to get old fast, but it was an improvement over “McDreamy.”

“You can open the security doors, right?”

“Sure,” he said, shrugging easily. “But it’ll show up on the board in the security office.”

“I doubt that’ll matter.”

It didn’t. A hollow boom sounded above us, followed a moment later by a second. The fire alarm started bleating, then cut off with strangled squawk. The floor trembled under our feet. Dov looked at me. No more grin.

OK, I wasn’t crazy. Yay for me.

All I had to worry about now was getting killed.