

The Great Selkie

a *Real Ghostbusters* Novella by

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Preface & Disclaimer

When I first began writing RGB fan fiction, the genre was still in its infancy — in point of fact, I believe I was the first one to have “gone public” by publishing the stuff in my multimedia fanzine. When I wrote my RGB stories (including a novel that has lain unfinished for 10 years), only a year and a half of the Saturday series and most of one season of the syndicated show had aired. Thus, there were a number of things that later became “canon” to some readers of which I was completely unaware (including the second movie). In my revisions, I attempted to take some of these details into account, but let’s face it: being an animated series written by a LOT of writers operating with very minimal “bible” facts, the show sometimes contradicted itself (not to mention the movie, i.e., the Sta-Puft Marshmallow Man, being an incarnation of Gozer, was sent back to Gozer’s dimension when the streams were crossed and the gate closed; it was *never* put into the containment unit). In the latter seasons, it presented stuff I found almost too painful to watch. It didn’t stop me from loving the original concepts (with the exception of Slimer; I still don’t care for him/her/it), but it sure as heck made me wish for the good old days. If I ever finish the novel, it’s also going to prompt me to ignore one specific “canonical” fact... but that’s a story for another time.

My original ideas for RGB stories came to me in a batch of about eight, if I’m not mistaken, one of which (never written) was entitled “Alexandra’s Ragtime Band.” Intending to write it before “The Great Selkie,” I had developed the character of Alexandra, a musician, for use in that story and this. However, I cannot claim either credit or blame for the specifics of her existence, other than her name and occupation. That she should be related to one of the guys was dictated by my husband, J.R. (based on what we had and hadn’t seen of the guys’ relatives at that point); the more peculiar specifics of that relationship came about as the result of a Not-So-Random-Character Generator Program I’d written as an aid in devising throw-away characters for use in my writing (you know, the Guy on the Street, the Bartender, the Cop, the Rebel Cannon Fodder). She met with somewhat mixed review when I published this story in *Shadowstar*, but I decided I’m gonna stick to my guns and keep her the way she is. Besides, it’s not my fault; it’s the computer’s. And J.R.’s

It was difficult to tell which was causing more noise, that night: the pounding surf on the Connecticut shoreline or the thunder from the storm that had moved in from the west shortly after sunset. One standing on the rocks above the beach would have had a hard time hearing himself think, much less be able to make out any sound less bombastic than the din being caused by nature’s display of bad temper. At any rate, no one in his right mind would have been out, given both the late hour and the weather, but on this particular beach, a single man-shaped figure stood, seemingly

washed up by the waves that crashed in, one upon the other. He remained there briefly, featureless in the dark, looking up at the house beyond the rocky break.

It was a relatively unassuming place, this house, in truth the former summer cottage of a modestly wealthy New Yorker who had either died or lost interest in it some years ago. The yard, such as it was, was ill-kept, the result of long months spent without tending while the house itself stood empty. But the place was occupied now, a recently-attained status betrayed by the small car parked in the drive and a heap of moving boxes piled with the trash. A light was on at the front porch, but otherwise, the place was dark, again a sign that the hour was late and those with common sense were asleep.

That wisdom, however, meant nothing to the figure on the beach. The sounds of his motion lost beneath the roar of the elements, he climbed — almost *slithered* — up the wet rocks, his destination the curtained French doors that faced the seaward view on the cottage's ground level.

On the other side of those doors, a woman tossed fitfully, her sleep disturbed by the thunderclaps and the gusts of wind rattling every pane in the house. Rolling over, she glanced at her bedside clock. She noted that the hour was nearly three when a flash of lightning cast a long, dark shadow across both the clock and her bed.

Startled, she gasped; her head whipped toward the doors to see the man-shape she had come to dread and had earnestly hoped would not appear on this cold and inclement night. But he was there, standing just outside, dripping water on the already wet flagstones, staring at her with eerily green and glowing eyes that were marginally brighter than the pallid glow that clung to his body like the light of a deep sea eel.

“Give me the child,” he said, his low voice clearly audible despite nature's noise.

The woman cringed, an attempt to take refuge in the bedclothes. “Not again,” she whimpered to whoever would listen. “Please, no, not again!”

The man-form was not affected by her words, if he heard them at all. “Give me the child,” he said again, more forcefully, his hands reaching out in threatening demand. “Give him to me!”

The woman shivered and tried to plug her ears in hopes that shutting out the sound would shut out his unwanted presence as well.

Her attempt failed. The intruder flung himself against the glass. Like the suckers of some strange sea-creature, his splayed hands seemed to adhere to the panes, which he then shook in a display of naked fury. “Give him to me!” he shouted, his voice louder than the thunder. “*Give him to me!!!*”

“Go away!” the woman shrieked, flinging the nearest object at hand — her pillow — at the doors. “For God's sake, just go away and leave me alone!”

But the man-shape would not listen. He flung back his head, raised up his fists, and, howling with the wind and lightning, struck the glass—

—and some miles away, in New York City, Egon Spengler sat up in bed, gasping for air and damp with sweat as yet another thunderclap rolled off into the distance. He sat there, eyes open yet seeing little in the darkness, certain he had heard the sharp sound of breaking glass followed by a woman's scream.

A flicker of lightning from outside drew his attention to the large window at one end of the Ghostbusters' communal bedroom. The blinds that should have kept out the light were banging in the wind; someone had obviously left one window ajar. Frowning faintly, he slipped out from under the covers, put on his glasses so that he could

navigate the dim room without mishap, and went to close it. As he did so, he noticed a drunk on the street below lamenting the loss of a bottle he had just dropped, a combination of circumstances which could easily explain the sounds that had apparently intruded on his dreams and wakened the physicist from an already unsettled sleep.

Could easily explain them, that was, to anyone but Egon. Being the dedicated scientist he was, he had long ago learned that the obvious answers weren't always the right ones, especially when they left certain vital questions unanswered — like why he'd also heard a woman screaming. Not *imagined* it; there was no doubt in his mind that he'd *heard* it, just as he had no doubt that there was a reason behind the disturbingly similar dreams he'd had every night for the last week, all ending with a woman's increasingly terror-stricken scream. Yes, there was certainly a cause for this strange phenomenon; he just wished he could figure out what the heck it was. For the moment, he hadn't a clue.

He closed the window on the mourning wino, shutting out the rain and muffling the thunder as he let the blinds fall back into their proper place. He glanced about the darkened room, first at his rumpled bed, then at the illuminated clock near the door. The latter proclaimed the time as 3:01 a.m., much too early an hour for him to consider staying awake. With that decision made, he went back to his bed and crawled under the covers. His head was less than an inch from the pillow when a close and singularly deafening clap of thunder sent him bolt-upright once again.

When his heart stopped pounding, he sighed, "That does it," and gave up.

He wasn't especially happy with the situation, but given the choice between rude awakenings at the smallest noise and foregoing sleep for the remainder of the night, he was definitely inclined to take the latter option. *Besides*, he told himself as he reclaimed his glasses, *three in the morning is a wonderful time to get things done without interruptions*. He kept telling himself that as he slipped out the door and closed it behind him, sure that if he repeated it long enough, he'd believe it — though he had a sinking feeling that if he hadn't convinced himself of this so-called reality after eight straight nights of repetition, he never would.

His partners shared similar opinions, which they expressed the next morning in their own individual and inimitable fashions.

"I don't like this," was Winston's reliably pragmatic but concerned opinion, voiced as he finished the breakfast his insomniac colleague had prepared for them when they'd wakened, somewhere around eight. "It just isn't normal for someone to have the same dream night after night after night, is it?"

"Not for normal people," Peter opined around a mouthful of toast and coffee, "but then, *normal's* always been a relative term, in Egon's case." He shook his head and clicked his tongue as he appraised his blond partner rather more sympathetically. "Pardon my bluntness, but you look like hell, Egon, ol' buddy."

"Winston's got a point," Ray chimed in as he studied his tallest colleague. He had to agree with Peter on this one: Egon *did* look like hell, from the dark circles under his bloodshot eyes, the unusual grayness to their usually vivid blue irises, the exhausted pallor on his long face, the manner in which he was nursing his coffee (the sixth cup Ray had seen him drink in the last half-hour), and the listless way in which he was staring at the untouched egg on his plate, which obligingly stared back. Alone, any one of these conditions wouldn't have been cause for undue concern, but lumped together, Ray found them worrisome. "Are you sure you aren't keeping anything from us, Egon? Something that might be bothering you enough to cause these dreams?"

"If I am, it's nothing I'm aware of," the physicist admitted candidly. "If this *is* all the result of some suppressed psychological problem, I can't for the life of me imagine what it could be, considering the nature of that dream."

"I can," Peter piped up as he swallowed the last of his toast and claimed another piece. "Faceless phantoms prowling on the doorstep, women screaming for it to go away, haunted seaside cottages — it's imagery telling you that all work and no play makes poor Egon a basket case." He aimed his butter-knife at the sleep-deprived scientist, using

it to add authoritative emphasis to his gesticulation. “You, Doctor Spengler, need a vacation, a few days away from all the spooks and spuds and lab experiments.”

Venkman was obviously certain of his conclusion, but neither Ray nor Winston could think of a similarly certain rebuttal. Egon, however, regarded him with mildly skeptical amusement. “That’s a pretty simplistic diagnosis,” he observed dryly. “Actually, it hasn’t been as bad as all that. These early mornings have given me the chance to make significant progress on my modifications to our aura analyzation system....”

“Early mornings?” Winston echoed. “They’ve been middle-of-the-nights, if you ask me.”

“Which proves my point,” Peter insisted. “When you can’t tell the difference between night and day, it’s time for a vacation.”

Egon wasn’t buying it. “You’re just saying that ‘cause *you*’re the one who really wants time off.”

Despite all the things that could be said about Peter Venkman, it could not be said that he would deny the truth when it was shoved under his nose (except, perhaps, when the truth concerned his relations with women). “And why not? We’ve been stuck in this crummy city for months without a break. A few days by the sea might do us all some good, clear our heads an’ all that.”

“Maybe we *do* need a break,” Ray willingly conceded, “but I don’t see that it really has anything to do with Egon’s nightmare.” He pondered both his fair-haired friend and the situation for a bit. “You don’t suppose this could be a case of involuntary clairvoyance, past-life intrusion, or repetitive race-memory syndrome, do you?”

The physicist shook his head. “Race-memories are primal by their very nature, and there’s nothing primitive about these dreams. I may not be able to remember any specific details very clearly, but I’m sure they’re taking place in a relatively contemporary setting. And this certainly isn’t a past-life intrusion, not unless you accept the possibility of transsexual reincarnation — which I don’t.”

“Spoilsport,” Peter snorted amiably.

“What about this clairvoyance thing Ray mentioned?” Zeddemore asked. “Could you be in contact with someone else and not know it?”

Egon shrugged. “I suppose, but I’ve never showed any degree of psionic ability before, not unless you count being a favorite target of the Bogeyman when I was a child, and I’ve always suspected that had more to do with the emotionally unsettled nature of my childhood. Even if this *is* a manifestation of psi ability, why would it show up now, when there’s no apparent cause? Nothing has happened to trigger such images, but I still get the same dream night after night after night after....”

A voice from below interrupted. “Hey, guys!” Janine — who had just arrived for work — called. “There’s someone down here who wants to see you, right away.” Her not-so-subtle emphasis on the words *right away* prevented them from stalling.

“Janine,” Peter scolded as he trooped down the stairs to the ground floor, ahead of his colleagues, “how many times have I told you to hold everything but the urgent calls ‘til *after* we’ve eaten breakfast?”

Their receptionist wrinkled her nose at him. “If you aren’t finished by now, you should be — and I told her the office doesn’t open until nine, but she kept insisting it’s important and I sure as heck don’t want to make anyone wait outside in this neighborhood, all alone, so I thought it wouldn’t hurt.”

At the utterance of the word *she*, Janine gestured in the appropriate direction, toward a woman standing at the far end of her desk. Tall and willowy with long blonde hair, pale skin, and blue eyes, their potential client had about

her the unmistakable aura of one distraught: her features betrayed a recent and significant lack of sleep, she was visibly uneasy — one might even say fidgety — and her clothing gave one the impression that she had dressed very hastily, with not a moment to spare. Nonetheless, she was strikingly pretty, enough so to make Peter forget his petty annoyance over being called to work so early in the day.

“And you thought right,” he contradicted himself smoothly, putting on his best charming manner as he stepped forward (and gave Janine a serious case of stomach upset with his bold-faced dissembling). “I’m Doctor Peter Venkman,” he introduced with his most winning smile. “And how may we help you, Miss—?”

“Egon!” the woman interjected, the sound almost a cry of relief. Without hesitating, she ignored Peter’s outstretched hand to slip past him and literally throw her arms around the physicist just stepping off the staircase, who thoroughly surprised everyone by hugging her back.

“Alex!” he exclaimed once he’d sufficiently recovered from his own surprise to break the woman’s near-stranglehold. “What are *you* doing here?”

“You *know* her?” Janine asked tentatively, almost afraid to ask, considering the most likely explanations she could think of for this sudden, inexplicable, and unabashed display of affection the usually phlegmatic physicist was displaying toward the woman. From the look on her face — horrified suspicion — she was plainly prepared to be crushed by the response she feared was coming, one that would doom her to certain spinsterhood.

“Of course.” The nonchalance of Egon’s reply did nothing to ease Janine’s worries, nor her dread of being faced with serious competition. “I’ve known her all my life. This is my sister, Alexandra.”

“Your *what*?” The startled question came from several mouths at once, with widely varying qualities of expression ranging from incredulity to utter relief.

“I didn’t know you had a sister,” Winston admitted while their relieved receptionist was silently thanking the Powers That Be and Peter was scraping his jaw off the floor.

“Twin sister,” Ray corrected, apparently the only one who was not surprised to discover the woman’s identity. “Gosh, it’s nice to finally meet you, Alexandra,” he welcomed, holding out one hand in greeting.

Venkman had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment (that being the revelation that Spengler had any relation who was so traditionally attractive) to speak. “The one born two weeks before you? Jeeze, Spengs, the least you could’ve done is showed us pictures of her, instead of letting us think all your relatives are... well, you know, kinda weird or geeky looking.”

The blonde woman favored the psychologist with a most peculiar expression. Ray, however, was puzzled. “I thought you told us you haven’t seen her in years ‘cause she was teaching music at some little private college in The Middle of Nowhere, Minnesota.”

“I did,” Egon readily replied. “And last I heard, that’s where she still was. What are you *doing* here, Alex? Isn’t in the middle of the term — and didn’t we agree that you were better off avoiding cities and population centers...?”

“We did,” she interrupted, quite deliberately — almost uncomfortably — before he could elaborate on that very puzzling statement. “It’s a long story, and I’m not sure this is the time to go into it. I didn’t come here just to visit. I need your help — professionally.”

“—and two days after I moved in, this... *thing* started showing up every night, usually somewhere around two or three in the morning,” Alexandra explained once they had adjourned to the considerably greater comfort of the second floor rec area. Janine set about making coffee while the others settled down to listen to Alexandra’s tale.

The slender woman continued as she had begun: reluctantly, with the air of one unaccustomed to conversing with anyone outside of classroom or office environs. As she spoke, her eyes touched only her lap or the furnishings; to all appearances, she would have been happier without the audience of strangers. She cleared her throat before resuming the tale, thanking Janine when she offered her a cup of coffee. “It does the same thing every time it comes: It stands outside the terrace doors in my bedroom and keeps demanding I give it the child.” She paused to shake her head, her expression one of singular puzzlement. “But I haven’t the slightest idea what it’s talking about! I’ve never been married; I don’t even have a boyfriend, much less any children. It obviously wants something from me, but I don’t know what, and nothing I’ve tried so far has been able to get it to go away and leave me alone.” She shuddered, clearly recalling an incident that had thoroughly frightened her. Despite his usual calm detachment when confronted with matters emotional, Egon extended her a hand in a gesture of comfort, which she took and clung to, gratefully.

Ray, who had been listening raptly, spoke up, his tones thoughtful. “Well, this explains a lot,” he mused.

Both Venkman and Zeddemore stared at him. “It does?” the former asked, unable to see what it explained, much less how.

But Stantz remained positive. “Sure it does. If nothing else, it certainly explains why Egon’s been having the same weird dream every night for the last week. Twin-bond telepathy. Happens all the time.”

“Between identical twins it does,” Peter pointed out. “But between fraternal ones?” He shook his head. “Oh, it happens, but it’s a lot more rare. You’ve got a better chance of ‘em both coming out with blond hair and blue eyes than with any sort of psionic bond.”

Ray shrugged and politely refrained from pointing out that the siblings in question did indeed both display recessive gene coloration. “Okay, whatever you say — but do you have a better explanation?”

Peter shifted position uneasily, realizing he’d just nibbled on a few of his toes. “Uh... well... no.”

“Then I rest my case.”

Winston steered the conversation back toward their guest and the subject of more immediate importance. “So, if this trouble’s been going on since practically the first day you moved in, why did it take you ‘til now to go to someone with it?”

“I was hoping it was nothing but bad dreams, at first, brought on by the stress and exhaustion of moving cross country,” Alexandra confessed quietly. “But last night, when the thing broke the glass on the doors, I decided it wasn’t a dream, that it wasn’t going to go away on its own — that it was time to get some help.”

“And it was,” the black man agreed, trying to sound reassuring since she was so obviously distraught. “But I don’t know that you’ve come to the right people to get it. This guy sounds like some sort of sicko prowler to me, a case for the police, not the Ghostbusters. What makes you so sure we can deal with it?”

An indefinable something in Alexandra’s posture and expression communicated even more acute discomfort. She glanced first at Winston, then at her brother, then at the resident ghost, who had appeared shortly after they’d retired to the rec room and had been hovering near her shoulder, staring at her with unnerving intensity ever since she’d taken her seat on the couch. Hesitantly, she returned her gaze to Winston. “Well,” she essayed slowly, “for one thing, human prowlers don’t have a glowing green aura around them, whether they’re sick or not. And...” Her voice caught; she coughed lightly and took a sip of her coffee to clear her throat, her eyes again flicking in Slimer’s direction. “...I ...ah

...seem to have this little problem when it comes to ghosts and things of that sort.” She looked down at her lap, studying the depths of the coffee cup she held with deep and single-minded intensity.

Zeddemore blinked at her, confused. ““Little problem?”” he echoed, completely at a loss.

“She’s what you might call a psychic magnet, Winston,” Egon clarified so calmly, it was plain he had given this explanation quite often in the past. “If there’s any paranormal activity in an area she happens to be in, she’ll inadvertently draw it out and attract it to her. It’s a gift she was born with.”

“Some gift,” Janine quipped, not unsympathetically. “Things like that must run in your family, Egon,” she added, recalling the more *outré* parts of Spengler family history they had encountered in the past.

“Is that why Spud face here can’t take his eyes off her?” Peter asked, despite the fact he was guilty of the same offense.

The physicist nodded. “Undoubtedly. As you can see, it isn’t by necessity a hostile form of attention, but it can get to be extremely annoying, especially when it happens at... shall we say *inconvenient* moments.”

As he shifted position to view her from another angle, a particularly noxious glob of ectoplasm that had been collecting on Slimer’s underside dripped off, missing Alexandra by a mile and instead splatting right on top of Peter’s head. “I can see how it would be,” the psychologist grumbled, throwing the culprit a smoldering glare. The little spook backed off, though not very far.

“That’s precisely why we found her the job at Dickinson College,” Egon went on. “It’s in a psychically ‘clean’ area, one with virtually no PKE activity to speak of...”

“...but with more than its fair share of the most parochial-minded people on the face of this Earth,” Alexandra half-muttered, her delivery somewhere between simply sour and seriously annoyed.

Hearing the remark, Spengler frowned at his sister. “It took a lot of effort to find a place like that, especially without the sophisticated detection equipment we have now. And you were supposed to *stay* there, Alex, for your own good. I thought you understood that.”

This time, her cough was much stronger; she glanced up briefly and very nearly squirmed. “I do — or did. But I wasn’t given much of a choice,” she added before he could argue, letting go of his hand. “The Administration was pressuring me to quit, and considering the way everyone was treating it all like some sort of gossip-sheet scandal, I could tell that most of the faculty and half the town agreed with them...”

“Scandal? What scandal?”

She winced without bothering to look up.

Peter clicked his tongue. “Oh Egon, Egon,” he teased, wagging one finger at his partner. “Hiding the family’s dirty laundry? And after you had the rest of us believing that your relatives could do no wrong...!” He clucked reprovingly. “No *wonder* you didn’t talk about her...”

Egon glared at him, quite prepared to take exception with that unsolicited remark, but before he could say anything, Alexandra screwed up her courage and leapt to her own defense. “It’s not dirty laundry,” she insisted, “at least not to anyone but those narrow-minded, empty-headed, social-climbing, appearance-conscious cretins at Dickinson. I didn’t even *do* anything!”

“Then why were they pressuring you to quit?”

From her reaction, the woman preferred the thought of disappearing to giving her brother an honest answer. Though she was tall, she somehow managed to seem very small, small enough to fall between the cushions of the sofa and safely out of sight. “You don’t want to know, Egon, believe me,” was the advice she offered.

He didn’t take it. “I most certainly do. If you were being unfairly maligned....”

She shook her head. “You won’t like it.”

“Let me be the judge of that.”

“I think I know you well enough by now to be able to tell when you will or won’t like something—”

“*Alexandra...*” Every syllable was so meticulously enunciated, she knew she wasn’t going to be left any choice but to explain.

She sighed, hesitated, considered lying, then resigned herself to the inevitable. “All right — but remember, you’re the one who insisted on hearing it. They didn’t want me to leave because of anything *I* did,” she said unhappily, eyes still averted. “They wanted me out because of *you*.”

That was, quite simply, the last explanation anyone listening had expected. “*Me?*” Egon was eventually able to sputter. “Why would they want to fire you because of me? *I* certainly didn’t do anything....”

“Didn’t you?” The question wasn’t sarcastic; it was honest. She looked up, then elaborated when the only response she heard and saw was a roomful of blank faces. “Come on,” she said, a trace of exasperation showing, “you’ve got to admit that what you people do for a living isn’t exactly what most people would call *normal*.”

“Maybe not,” Peter agreed puckishly. “But it certainly isn’t dull.”

“Which is undoubtedly the reason you’ve become such darlings of the tabloid and gossip-column set.”

“Hey, now,” Winston defended, “everyone knows you can’t believe ninety-nine percent of what shows up in those rags.”

“You and I and anyone else with half a brain knows that,” she conceded with a nod, “but to someone with a size two mind and a size twelve class-consciousness, the fact that your appearances in the tabloids outnumber your mentions in more reputable professional publications ten to one doesn’t exactly invest you or your business with much in the way of serious scientific credibility.”

Ray nodded soberly. “Yeah, I know what you mean. But that’s the way I guess it always is when you’re trying to break new ground: ‘reputable’ people always accuse of being a crackpot or dangerous, or both.”

Egon frowned. “I still don’t see what this has to do with me being the cause of you leaving Dickinson.”

There was distinct irritation in Alexandra’s sigh. “Of course you don’t. You didn’t have to live with the people there day in and day out. You never even *met* them — you did all your research and made all your calculations from a strictly scientific angle, so how could you possibly know what they thought about *anything*, much less know their opinion of your... ‘business?’” She uttered the last word with a sort of deprecating disapproval that all the others, Janine included, had come to know very well indeed.

Peter made a sound somewhere between a sigh and a whistle, the long-suffering resignation of one who has grown used to an unpleasant and undeserved fate. “You don’t actually swallow what those gossip sheets print about us, do you?” he asked, not wanting to believe that such a narrow mind could reside in that beautiful body.

To his relief, she shook her head. “I don’t. But *they* do.”

She didn’t need to offer a more elaborate definition of who “they” were. “You mean they actually fired you because they thought *I* was giving them negative publicity?” To say that Egon found the notion appalling was a gross understatement.

Alexandra shifted position uncomfortably. “Well... not exactly. They thought you were bad publicity for the school, yes, but they didn’t really *fire* me...”

Janine snorted indelicately. “Forcing you to quit’s pretty much the same thing. There’re laws against that sort of thing, y’know. Didn’t you try to fight ‘em?”

The blonde woman’s nod was unhesitant. “At first. You see, everything had been going just fine; I’d been there for over eight years without any trouble. No one cared who I was or who I was related to. Dickinson’s such a small town, so far from any big cities, and the whole place revolves around the college. I don’t think anyone ever even noticed the coincidence between my last name and one of the Ghostbusters’ — except some of the students who’d seen that movie — until a few months ago.”

“Only a few months ago?” Ray sounded quite perplexed. “But we’ve been in business for over six years. What made them suddenly put two and two together and start making a fuss about it?”

She sighed. “A promotion. The head of the music school was going to retire at the end of this term. Everyone knew the administration intended to promote someone from inside the department. I didn’t really think anything of it until a rumor started that they were going to offer me the position.”

It was Peter’s turn to frown in confusion. “That doesn’t sound like the sort of thing people start saying about someone they consider the town disgrace.”

“It wasn’t,” Alexandra agreed. “I was actually very flattered and excited by the whole thing — until Doctor Foster, one of our senior faculty members, got wind of it. He’d been there for almost thirty years, and he figured if anyone in the department deserved that promotion, it was him, never mind that’s he’s only five years from retirement. *That’s* when the smear campaign began.”

“And the administration bought it?” Winston seemed unwilling to accept it.

But Alexandra shrugged. “I couldn’t believe it either, at first. But I guess that until Foster started making an issue of it, most of the college board hadn’t even considered the possibility of the actions and publicity of a person’s relations reflecting badly on the entire Dickinson reputation. Once they did...” She made a listless but pointed gesture, like one tossing something undesirable out the window.

“And the rest is history,” Peter concluded for her, with unusual compassion.

Winston was no less sympathetic, but he was less inclined to accept injustice without fighting back. “But they can’t get away with that,” he insisted. “You can’t be held responsible for what other people do, not unless you put ‘em up to it. You have rights—”

“So do you, Mr. Zeddemore,” she said quietly. “But prejudice has a tendency to make people selectively blind when it comes to seeing just who qualifies for the law’s protection and who doesn’t.”

The truth in that observation was one Winston knew only too well. He conceded her the debate with a slight, rueful nod.

Egon, on the other hand, was not disposed to let the subject drop so easily. “You still shouldn’t have lost your job because of it,” he said. “You should’ve told me about it, or at least gotten help—”

“From who?” she asked plainly. “Not anyone at Dickinson. Once you’ve stepped outside the limits of their cliques — or have been kicked out — they won’t give you the time of day, much less any professional help or common courtesy. And like I said, the whole town revolves around the college. If your name is mud on campus, it’s worse than mud in town.”

The physicist contemplated that information for a moment. “You might’ve asked Father, then. He was the one who pulled the strings to get you that position, if you recall.”

From the look she gave him, Alexandra considered that remark nothing sort of insane. “Are you crazy? You know as well as I do that Father *never* believed my problem was real, any more than he believed you were ever haunted by the Bogeyman. He always thought we were both pulling stunts to get attention, and the only reason he went along with your ‘solution’ of settling me in Minnesota was because it gave him an excuse to send me someplace where I wouldn’t be another family embarrassment. And you *know* what he thinks of your business and the kind of press it gets. He’d’ve sided with the idiots at Dickinson before he’d have done anything to help, because people our age aren’t supposed to believe in ghosts and phantoms and all that sort of ‘nonsense.’ Besides,” she added before anyone could say a word, “after the hell those dimwits put me through, I didn’t *want* to stay there any more. *Anything* had to be better than spending another minute living in a town full of self-centered, self-righteous, condescending, pin-headed snobs!”

Peter blinked at her, surprised. “You consider having a green-eyed monster crawling outside your windows at night an improvement?”

She flushed slightly. “No, but....”

Egon sided with Peter. “The history of the entire Eastern seaboard is filled with accounts of paranormal activity; all of New England’s literally dripping with PKE manifestations.” He sighed. “I wish you’d at least consulted me before making a decision about where to move, Alex. There have to be dozens of better places you could’ve picked.”

“Not in the middle of the semester,” she interrupted with a resigned shake of her head. “I needed a job, and there was no way I could stay in Minnesota another week, not with the whole town treating me like I was the two-headed sister of some alien mutant — no offense, Egon,” she added with an apologetic smile.

“None taken,” she was reassured.

“I was seriously considering moving back home or asking Aunt Evelyn if I couldn’t stay with her for a while when Marshall College in Connecticut offered me a position as a Professor of Music History and Theory. It seems they’ll be losing their current instructor in a few weeks, and they’d heard I was free....”

“So soon?” Ray was flabbergasted. “News never traveled that fast when *I* was working in academic circles.”

Her enigmatic smile was difficult to interpret. “It still doesn’t — at least not without help. The administration at Dickinson was so desperate to get rid of me without tarnishing their own reputations that they went out of their way to advertise the fact that I’d be available to anyone in the market for a music history or theory instructor. The people at Marshall are in dire need ‘cause their professor is resigning permanently instead of just taking a few months for maternity leave, the pay they’re offering is good, and they aren’t asking any questions about *why* I’m leaving Dickinson in the middle of the term, so I accepted. And I haven’t regretted the decision — until last night.”

“Which is really what we should be talking about,” Peter piped up at his amiable best, hoping to impress the lady with his concerned attention to the more important business at hand. “Isn’t it?”

“He’s right,” Winston agreed. “Instead of asking a lot of pointless questions about why she’s here, we should be working on her problem. Which is figuring out what this creep is that’s been bugging her, and what we can do about stopping it.”

“Exactly,” Venkman beamed, glad that someone supported him, even though Egon looked to take exception with Zeddemore’s use of the term *pointless*. “If you’re right about the green glow, then this thing of yours isn’t any ordinary prowler — but the Big Question is: what *is* it?”

From the silence that followed, it seemed that no one had a clue. Then, quietly, Ray spoke up, his voice a sing-song recitation. “*Then in came he to her bed foot/ and a grumley guest I’m sure was he/ saying, “Here am I, thy bairnie’s father/ although I be not comely.”*”

Everyone stared at him.

“I beg your pardon?” Egon was first to respond.

“Say what?” Winston offered.

“Grumley?” Janine echoed, puzzled.

“That’s very nice, Ray,” was Peter’s opinion, “but I don’t think this is quite the time for a poetry reading.”

“It’s not poetry,” the occultist informed him. “It’s from a song, *The Great Silkie*. “*I am a man upon the land/ and I am a silkie in the sea*” It’s all about a supernatural sea creature called a silkie — or more commonly a selkie — and how he returns to a human woman to claim the child he fathered.”

Alexandra — who had been staring at Stantz mutely since his initial recitation — found her voice. “Of course, the old Child Ballad. I’m surprised you’re familiar with it, Doctor Stantz. Not many people have even *heard* of the Child Ballads, much less are able to quote from them.”

Ray blushed at her warm approval. “Well, I’ve always kinda liked old folksongs, and I did my master’s thesis in parapsychology on the accuracy of the Child Ballads in terms of occult references. They’re just full of ‘em — demons and ghost and supernatural critters.”

They had completely lost Winston somewhere around Ray’s mention of the song’s title. “Child ballads?” he said, confused. “You mean, we’re talking about some sort of children’s song?”

Though Stantz didn’t laugh outright, he couldn’t help but chuckle at his colleague’s logically erroneous assumption. “Hardly. The Child Ballads are a collection of English and Scottish folksongs assembled by a Harvard scholar named Francis Child back in the mid-1800’s. He put together one of the biggest folklore collections in existence, too — we’ve used it once or twice in our research, in fact, since it’s still at the Harvard library.”

“So was this guy some sort of occult expert?”

“Not actually, but a lot of a country’s myths and legends show up in its music, and the British in general seem to have had more than their share of supernatural folk tales.”

Peter — who was frowning at the way Alexandra was looking at Ray, raptly and with a small smile — interrupted. “So you’re saying you think this thing that’s been keeping Alexandra up at night is a... what’d you call it?”

“A selkie,” Egon provided, having been pondering the matter deeply ever since Ray had first mentioned it. “And from the information Alex has given us, I’d say he’s hit the nail right on the head. All the details of her experiences — and what I may have seen of them in my dreams — point directly to that conclusion.”

“They do?” Janine blinked. “Would you mind explaining it to the rest of us? Just what the heck *is* this thing, anyway?”

“A mythological sea-creature, sometimes called a selkie, or a kelpie by those who don’t understand the difference, since selkies and kelpies are actually two entirely different creatures, which—”

“Egon.” Peter’s interruption was blunt. “The point?”

It took the physicist a moment to pull himself back on track. “Ah... yes. As I was saying, selkies show up primarily in Scottish folk stories, usually as a sort of equine water sprite, but more often as it does in Ray’s song: as a shape-changer that appears seal-like in the water, but takes on the form of a human male on land. According to the legends on which the song was based, the selkie population is maintained only through interbreeding with human females who are seduced while under the selkie’s mind-control influence. Afterward, they bear male children who, after they’re weaned, are then claimed by the father and taken back to the sea.”

He paused, scratching his chin; his eyes unfocused with thought. “Actually, it’s all a rather fascinating form of genetic control, insuring that population doesn’t deteriorate due to a seriously limited gene pool.” He paused again, his eyes refocusing on his sister. “You haven’t... ah... encountered a selkie before this, have you, Alex?”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” she sputtered back, blushing redder than Ray had, and much more prettily. “I’ve only been here a week — and you know perfectly well there’s no seashore in Minnesota!”

“Not precisely, although Lake Superior would be considered a fresh-water inland sea in other cultures, and the Great Lakes have, for other purposes, been defined as an arm of the ocean....”

“Maybe, but Dickinson isn’t within fifty miles of Lake Superior....”

“And selkies are strictly saltwater creatures, if you accept all the legendary accounts,” Ray added in defense of the lady, who, from the look she cast him, was exceedingly grateful for his intervention.

Peter fumed enviously. “I don’t get this,” he had to admit. “If selkies only appear to women when they need to make more little selkies, then why is this one knocking on Alexandra’s door and asking for a kid she never had? Wouldn’t he be more likely to come around with the selkie equivalent of roses and chocolates, and play nice to get onto her good side?”

“That *is* curious,” Egon agreed. “Perhaps he’s actually searching for a previous tenant?” He turned to his sister for confirmation.

But the blonde woman shook her head. “The house used to be some businessman’s summer cottage. He had a wife but no children, and she died twenty years ago. Not only that, but the place has been completely empty since the old man died, five years back. I suppose it’s possible his wife was seduced by a selkie when she was still young enough to have children, but any baby she would’ve had certainly couldn’t be called a child, any more. And if it happened more than twenty years ago, one would think the selkie would’ve given up looking for him, by now.”

“Maybe he’s just the persistent type,” Janine quipped drolly, her blue eyes slipping meaningfully in Venkman’s direction. “You know, the kind of creep who can’t take no for an answer. Why else would he be bugging you night after night?”

“Because selkies appear for other reasons, too, Janine,” Ray answered grimly. “In a lot of the more common legends, selkies show up to warn people who are about to drown — or, more often, to lure them into *being* drowned.”

“And do you think this may be one of the nastier types?” Winston asked, not liking these implications any more than Alexandra, who had gasped softly, frightened by this hitherto unknown but potentially deadly fact.

“It’s possible,” Stantz admitted regretfully. “Especially if his original reason for coming *was* to claim a child who isn’t there any more. Selkies have been known to turn on people who somehow cause them harm, usually by enticing them into their own deaths.”

Alexandra swallowed nervously, no more enamored of Ray’s hypothesis than Ray himself. “But there *is* something you can do to stop him,” she said hopefully, glancing from the occultist to her brother. She didn’t like either man’s expression. “Isn’t there?”

The four partners looked at one another, Peter and Winston silently asking the others if it could be done. Ray shrugged uncertainly; Egon’s expression was enigmatic, then sympathetic. “We’ll do everything we can, Alex,” he said gently, which, for the moment, appeared to be enough.

It took less time for them to make the trip from Manhattan to Connecticut than it did for the four ecto-eliminators to get ready, mostly because Ray and Egon (and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Winston) were determined to find every scrap of information available on selkies before they left the greater resources available to them both in the city and in their own library. The search took several hours, which Alexandra spent getting acquainted with a very curious Janine. Between all the questions she had to ask, the redhead helped the blonde musician fend off Slimer’s attentions, which were involuntary, and Peter’s, which were not.

Being late autumn, it was nearing a singularly gray dusk by the time they arrived at Alexandra’s rented house, a charming little stone cottage that was a far cry from the Dragonwyckish structure Venkman had unconsciously expected from the moment he’d learned the lady was a Spengler. While Peter and Winston started unloading their more cumbersome gear from the back of Ecto, Ray followed Alexandra to the house to begin the preliminary investigation. The only obvious evidence to show that something out of the ordinary was afoot were the piles of personal possessions removed from their packing boxes but not put away, as if their owner had been repeatedly interrupted in her attempts to settle in, which was indeed the truth. There was no sense of order to the place as of yet, no indications of anything but a life in a state of turmoil far greater than that brought on by a mere relocation of living quarters.

The natural starting point was, of course, the bedroom where the intruder had last been spotted, and it was there that Alexandra took Ray and her brother to begin their work. Bits of shattered glass were scattered across the tiled floor; the white curtains had been torn from their rod over the french doors, and the whole room was damp with sea-spray and rain and was bone chillingly cold. Neither Egon nor Ray had removed their jackets, but when they entered the room Ray couldn’t help but notice a brief but definite shiver slither up his tallest partner’s spine.

“Everything okay?” the occultist asked nonchalantly when Alexandra stepped out of the room to show Peter and Winston the way.

The physicist nodded. “Just... not what I expected.”

The auburn-haired Ghostbuster cocked his head curiously. “Then this isn’t what you saw in your dream, last night?”

“No, it’s *exactly* what I saw in my dream last night,” came the puzzling contradiction. “Which is why I didn’t anticipate it. Alex and I were close as children — we sort of had to be, in self-defense, since it was us and Mom against our father and older brother — but there was never any indication of a psionic link between us. I can’t imagine why there suddenly would be now.”

Ray shrugged. “Who knows? Unexplained episodes like this sometimes happen between people who are close during times of extreme stress or danger — and maybe you didn’t notice it then because you were too busy sticking up for one another. I wouldn’t worry about it, Egon. It’s really kinda nifty, when you think about it.”

“It’s certainly intriguing from a scientific standpoint,” the elder man had to agree, “though I think it would be best if we postponed any study indefinitely. Alex has been through enough parapsychological stress lately; I don’t think she’ll be in favor of the idea of further examination until we’ve solved her current troubles and given her time to settle in.”

Stantz agreed, so the notion was shelved while they proceeded to study the environs with both natural and manufactured sensors. Finally, when no evidence was forthcoming, Ray sighed in frustration. “I don’t get it. Selkies are supernatural critters, no doubt about it. Even if one had been around only as recently as a week ago, we should still be getting residual readings from it. Are you sure you retuned the meters to pick up the right paranormal frequencies?”

Spengler nodded, though he, too, was frowning at the data being given by their PKE meters. “I’m positive. I’ll double-check if you want, but I’m sure I did it right the first time.” Without waiting for Ray to answer yes or no, he removed a small tool from one pocket and went to work examining his meter’s recalibration for a living rather than spectral entity.

On the threshold, Peter shivered, looking perplexed and wishing he hadn’t already taken off his coat. “Did I hear you guys right, or did I miss something important? It sounded to me like you said you weren’t getting the sort of readings you should be getting if this Thing That Goes Crash in the Night really is a selkie.”

“That’s exactly what we said,” Ray admitted. He didn’t look at all happy about it.

Venkman grimaced. “That’s what I was afraid of.”

Winston was in full agreement. “But if it isn’t giving off readings like a selkie, then doesn’t that mean it *isn’t* a selkie?”

“That would be the most logical conclusion,” Egon confirmed.

Peter’s grimace became even more profound. “Well, that’s just great! I thought you two were *positive* you had it all figured out before we left New York!”

“We *were* positive,” Ray shrugged, “based on the information Alexandra gave us. It isn’t *our* fault if the thing won’t cooperate and play by the rules.”

“Does this mean you don’t have any idea at all what this... creature is?” From her tone of voice, Alexandra was very much hoping someone would say no and thus reassure her.

Ray was perfectly happy to oblige her. “Not exactly. We know enough about it and its habits from what you’ve told us to at least narrow down the choices, but this *does* open up a lot more possibilities.”

“How many is a lot?” she was almost afraid to ask.

His response was apologetically ill-at-ease. “You don’t want to know.”

“Hey,” Winston piped up from where he stood, looking out the unbroken seaward window toward the shore several hundred feet away, “does this critter come to visit on a regular schedule, or does he show up whenever he feels like it?”

“There’s no exact schedule,” Alexandra replied, “although he does seem most inclined to come around very late at night, usually long after I’ve gone to bed. Why?”

“Cause I think maybe he’s gotten curious about all the commotion going on up here, and he’s come to take a look.” He pointed toward the dusk-dark beach.

The others joined him at the window and peered in the direction he was indicating. The exterior light was feeble, coming mostly from the house since the sun was now set, but the man-shape on the beach was clearly visible as it paced back and forth across the rocky shoreline, exuding a faint and greenish radiance. Egon watched it briefly, then resumed his work on his PKE meter with markedly increased urgency, as if struck by sudden inspiration.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a pair of binoculars handy, would you?” Ray asked Alexandra as an idea of his own came to mind. “I’d like to get a closer look at it, see if it really *is* our selkie.”

She shook her head. “I own a pair, yes, but I’m afraid I haven’t the slightest idea where they are in all this mess.”

“Why bother?” Winston wanted to know. “Why don’t we just go on out and confront the guy face-to-face?”

“I don’t know if we can, or should,” Ray opined. “Selkies are notoriously shy.”

“Shy?” Peter echoed, thoroughly incredulous. “*Shy*? Since when does the word ‘shy’ describe critters that have a reputation for seducing innocent young ladies?”

Alexandra blushed furiously; Ray ignored his partner’s unfortunately apt wisecrack in her defense. “Just look at the way it’s pacing,” he noted, “like it wants to come up but is afraid to. If we go marching out there in force, it’ll probably head back into the sea and stay there until Alexandra’s alone again.”

“That’s a good point,” Winston admitted. “We can’t solve the lady’s problem if we scare it away so that it won’t come anywhere near us.”

“Maybe not,” Peter felt compelled to agree, “but we don’t *know* it’ll be scared. Heck, for all we know, that’s just some beach-bum looking for junk to sell.”

“At night, at this time of year, and glowing green?” Ray gave him a drolly skeptical look that he had learned well from watching the psychologist over the years. “Get real, Pete.”

Venkman grumped. “I should get real? Hey, I thought *you* were the guys who just said it isn’t a selkie...”

“Oh, yes, it is,” Egon interrupted suddenly enough to make the psychologist (who was standing beside him) jump.

Ray frowned at his tallest partner. “But the readings—”

“—weren’t right for a *living* selkie,” Spengler agreed. “But for a *dead* one...” He held out the meter so that Stantz could see the sensor display. “Even once he showed up, I was still getting nothing on the new settings, but when I returned to the standard spectral frequencies, the needle practically flew off the scale.”

Ray whistled, appreciative of both his colleague’s quick deductive reasoning and the information the meter was now providing. Peter and Winston and Alexandra blinked at one another, feeling like racehorses left light-years behind at the starting gate. “Are you trying to say,” the woman was first to venture, and hesitantly at that, “that what’s been bothering me isn’t a selkie but the *ghost* of a selkie?”

“I’d say that about covers it,” Ray beamed, pleased to find her so quick on the uptake.

Peter and Winston exchanged uninterpretable glances. “Well,” the latter said after a moment, “at least that’s something we *know* how to deal with.”

“Yeah, but only if we can get close enough to trap the thing,” was Venkman’s less optimistic opinion. “Is Ray right, Egon? Is that whatever-it-is staying away from the house ‘cause it knows all of us are up here?”

The physicist shrugged. “I don’t know for certain, since we don’t have much information about this specific ghost, but it’s a reasonable hypothesis. In life, selkies habitually shy away from groups of humans, showing themselves only to lone individuals. Since this particular selkie’s been behaving as if he was still alive in other respects, why not in this one, too?”

Peter seemed oddly reassured by that answer; Alexandra did not. “But won’t that make your job impossible, then?” she wanted to know. “How can you catch the thing if you can’t get close to it?”

“We don’t know that we can’t,” her brother corrected. “We just know that it’s unlikely to come close to us as a group of its own free will.”

“Which isn’t such a bad thing, if you think about it,” Ray added most pleasantly.

A small frown creased the blonde musician’s brow. “Why not?”

The occultist grinned. “Cause as long as we’re around, that critter won’t be coming by to pester you. I’d call that a pretty good side-effect, wouldn’t you?”

She thought about it a moment, then smiled back in grateful relief for his timely and welcome observation. Behind her, Venkman saw their friendly exchange and grumbled unhappily.

“So where do we go from here?” Winston asked, still watching the selkie pace the shoreline.

“It might help us formulate a viable plan of action if we knew more about this particular ghost,” Egon reflected. “Why it’s haunting this property, whether or not it’s disturbed any other houses in this area, things of that sort. Considering its behavior, it may be trying to complete some action it never finished in life, and if we know more about it, we might be able to arrange the proper circumstances to allow it to disperse peacefully.”

“Not if what it didn’t finish involved dragging somebody out to sea with it,” Peter noted darkly, finding the specter’s pacing more aggressive than aggrieved. “Are you sure it isn’t showing up here just because it’s being attracted by this psi-magnet ‘gift’ of hers?”

“Positive,” was Spengler’s immediate reply. “Supernatural manifestations may be drawn into the open by it, but the talent itself can’t create ghosts that weren’t already there. Even if the selkie *was* stirred out of dormancy by Alex’s presence, this place had to have been haunted by it long before she came to live here.”

Alexandra — who had cringed when Venkman brought up the matter of her unwanted “gift” — let loose a sigh, grateful to have been absolved of any direct responsibility for her current quandary.

“Okay,” Winston said, accepting these explanations as fact. “Question still is, what do we *do* about it?”

Egon had an answer at the ready. “I believe an examination of local records might reveal useful information, give us a better idea of how to approach this specific ghost. It’s too late to check them tonight, but since Alex will be safe so long as she isn’t alone, I suggest that at least some of us stay the night and investigate more thoroughly in the morning.”

His sister approved and none of his partners objected, so that was precisely what they did.

Since Ray and Winston had by far and away the best manners for dealing with unknown small-town public officials and Alexandra's house was too small to accommodate four guests, what with the master bedroom being currently uninhabitable, it was decided that they would spend the night at a motel in town while Peter and Egon remained at the cottage to provide protection against the selkie. Peter was delighted by the arrangement, until he found that Alexandra was more interested in catching up with her sibling than paying attention to his charms, so he reluctantly retired earlier than usual, with the promise that he would be awake and ready in an instant if help was required. When he was gone, leaving the twin siblings in the homey kitchen, Alexandra looked after him and sighed.

"I think I understand now why he's the one who shows up most often in the tabloids," she said with a bemused smile. "Is he always this...?" Words failed her.

But Egon knew exactly what she meant. "Most of the time. But I wouldn't take him too seriously, Alex. Peter throws himself in the path of every attractive female client we get, not because he honestly believes himself to be God's gift to women, but because he's searching for validation." He gestured ambiguously, aware that he was wandering into areas of expertise in which he had little professional experience, and therefore felt uncomfortable offering conclusive observations. "Just treat him kindly, and I'm sure he'll be ecstatic."

Her smile became slightly crooked. "From the way your friends talk, one would think you've never really mentioned me in their presence. I hope it's just a case of your usual absent-mindedness, Egon. I'd hate to think you're starting to agree with Father..."

"No!" The denial was instant and irrefutable. "Would I still be in this business if I was? No, it's just that we don't tend to talk about our families much at all — it's a bit of a sore spot for all of us. Ray's parents are both dead, and his brother and sister think about as much of his choice of career as Father thinks of mine. Peter's father was hardly ever at home, his mother died when he was still rather young, and he hasn't any siblings. Winston's probably had the most normal family life of us all, but even his father wasn't happy with his line of work, until we were able to convince him that what we do is *real*, and necessary. The subject never came up, I guess, at least not more than very casually. I haven't deliberately avoided talking about you, Alex; it just never occurred to me that they would be interested in hearing about someone they'd never met, and possibly never would."

Alexandra pondered his words for a time, then sighed again. "Well, I can't say I blame you — because I'm guilty of the same offense. If I *had* been a little more open about my family background, maybe the faculty at Dickinson would've had time to get used to the fact that my brother is a Ghostbuster before Foster made it look as if I'd been deliberately hiding it because it had to be too awful to admit."

She studied him and the candid expression in his nearsighted blue eyes. In that respect they were different, she noted idly, wondering why she had been born with perfect eyesight, while Egon's had needed correction virtually since birth. The doctors had said it had nothing to do with the unusual circumstances of his delayed entrance into the world, which had often prompted Alexandra to question if it was therefore an odd example of the balance of the universe, congenitally dimmed eyesight in trade for the exceptional brilliance of the mind that lay behind the physical imperfection. She hadn't thought about it in years, but seeing her brother again made her consider the puzzle anew, then set it aside in favor of more important musings. "Are you honestly upset with me for moving here without asking you first?" she eventually asked. "Because if you say yes, I'm going to be terribly disappointed."

But he shook his head. "No — well, perhaps a little, but only because old habits die very hard. I just want you to be safe and happy."

She sniffed cryptically. "Well, I may have been *safe* at Dickinson, but I certainly wasn't happy."

"Then why didn't you say so in the first place? Crumbs, Alex, if you'd just opened your mouth and said you thought the place was awful, I would've kept looking until I found someplace better..."

She waved her hands in vigorous denial of his protest. “I know, Egon, I know, and I’m sorry I’m making it sound like it’s all your fault. It’s not. Really, Dickinson *was* a nice place to live, and I genuinely enjoyed my work there — until that damned Doctor Foster ruined everything. I’m not upset with you because you didn’t try hard enough, or because you wanted to protect me from myself — no more than you were ever angry with me because I was responsible for attracting the Bogeyman to our house when we were little.”

The physicist’s face suddenly went slack with shock; he had to shake himself visibly before he could speak again. “Have you been thinking that all these years? That *you* were responsible for attracting the Bogeyman so he could get into my bedroom? Oh, Alex....”

His deep voice was replete with sympathy, but she would have none of it. “And can you say it *wasn’t* my fault? We didn’t know any other kids who had the same problem, he never bothered me or Justin, and if *I* didn’t draw him there, then what did?”

To her astonishment, Egon had a ready answer. “The portal in my closet.” When she looked at him, her expression filled with confusion and disbelief, he explained, in detail, what he and his partners had discovered several years before during their two encounters with the physicist’s childhood nemesis. “You had absolutely nothing to do with it,” he finally concluded. “As a corporeal being, the Bogeyman was *not* a likely candidate for your inadvertent influence — a fact we should have taken into account earlier concerning the selkie — and since he could only enter our world through closets containing portals, it was only a matter of fortune — or misfortune — that mine happened to hold such a door. And you certainly weren’t around the second time, when he broke free. We can’t blame ourselves for being the victims of primal forces or for being born with gifts we never wanted, Alex. All we can do is make the best of the life we’re given, positive and negative. I couldn’t ever hold you accountable for something that was *never* your fault.”

For what seemed a very long while, Alexandra was silent, digesting what her brother had said. Eventually, she looked up at him with a wistful smile. “You know, for someone who was so silly he just *had* to wait an extra two weeks before being born, you’re awfully profound.”

“And for someone who was too impatient to wait another two weeks for the proper due date, you’ve managed quite nicely.” He returned the smile with a sparkle of mischief in his eyes. “Only profound, not intelligent?”

She laughed. “You don’t need to hear anyone say it to know you’re a genius, little brother. And you think your friend Peter is insecure!” They shared their amusement over her comparison for a time before she turned quiet and somber again. “So, tell me the truth: Do you truly believe you can deal with this selkie ghost, or was I foolish for coming here?”

The physicist leaned forward across the table and took her hands in his own. “You’ve never been foolish, Alex — impulsive, perhaps, but not foolish. And yes, I truly believe we can deal with your intruder, one way or another.” Unwilling to spoil her relief, he didn’t add, *I just wish I knew how.*

Ray and Winston stopped by early the next morning to see if anything untoward had occurred during the night. Happily, the selkie had kept its distance, giving both Alexandra and her brother the first decent night’s sleep they’d had in a week, though Peter woke grumpy, stiff from sleeping on the floor. Although she was encouraged to go with those headed back into town to scour records, ask questions, and get away from the unsettling surroundings of her cottage, Alexandra refused, saying that she would not be driven from her own house again, especially not when she had plenty of work to do getting ready for the new job she would soon be expected to begin.

So, after Ecto-1 had rumbled off again, Egon went down to the rocky beach to check for physical evidence of the selkie’s visit and to take PKE readings while Peter stayed in the house — “To make sure the lady isn’t left alone,” was his ostensible reason, though not a one of his partners believed it.

If he had any hopes of using the time and situation to get Alexandra's undivided attention and thus impress her with his stellar suaveness, he was sorely disappointed. No sooner were the others out the door than she settled down amid the mess of file boxes, papers, and musical instruments in various states of crating that was to be her in-home office. She immediately went to work putting order to the chaos. After his initial attempts to be charming failed, Peter decided to try a different approach, one that might be more to the woman's liking.

"Do you really play all these things?" he asked, sticking his nose into a large coffinish crate that, under the canvas wrappings, contained (to his relief; his profession had prompted several more gruesome suspicions as to the contents, and Alexandra *was* a Spengler, after all) a small antique clavier.

"Some," she said softly without looking up from the papers she was trying to sort. "My major instrument is violin, I minored in French horn, and you have to be at least marginally proficient with a keyboard just to get through the theory and composition studies. But if you'd like to hear what the clavier sounds like — from a *decent* performer, that is — ask Egon to show you, sometime. He's really a much better pianist than I am."

Peter's eyes came perilously close to literally popping out of his head. "You've got to be kidding," he said, unwilling to believe it. "Our Egon, Mad Scientist Supreme, Lord of the Techno-Wizards, and High Exalted Keeper of the Sacred Fungi plays the piano?"

Alexandra couldn't help but smile at his reaction. "Beautifully. I guess there are some things about *himself* he doesn't talk about with his friends," she laughed, referring to last night's discussion, of which Peter had no knowledge. "When we were little, Mom thought it would be a good idea if we were both exposed to culture as well as science — we never would have been if Father'd had his way — and given a choice between dance classes and piano lessons, Egon decided to learn piano. It turned out he had a natural talent — he was certainly born with the fingers for it; I only wish! — and he actually enjoyed it, since it helped him develop and maintain the sort of manual dexterity that's very useful to a scientist and engineer. He's really very good — unless he's completely given it up, that is. I hope he hasn't, but I don't know."

But Peter did, recalling the Kurzweil keyboard in one corner of the physicist's lab. A rather expensive piece of musical equipment, Peter had recalled protesting loudly when Egon had bought it, supposedly to use in calibrating pitch-sensitive gadgetry. Venkman had argued that, since they weren't likely to ever form a firehouse band, a cheap half-size board would have done just as well, but Spengler had counter-argued that the Kurzweil instruments produced the truest pitches, had adjustment, enhancement, and computer-link capabilities lesser versions did not, and could produce a much larger spread of tones than a dinky three-octave board. Peter hadn't been happy with the expenditure, but he'd caved in under the burden of the physicist's logical arguments, as well as Winston's and Ray's support. He recalled that there were headphones plugged into the thing — to keep it from disturbing the others while he was working, Egon had explained — but given this little morsel of information, Venkman had to wonder if it wasn't there for other reasons, as well.

Thinking back to their college days — when he and Ray and Egon and a twerp named John Stassen had shared an old house to hold down living expenses, a place that had come furnished, complete with an ancient upright piano — he remembered times when Egon had stayed up all night, trying to complete a particularly difficult project. Not always the soundest of sleepers — especially when he knew he should've been cramming for exams rather than trying to catch a few z's — Peter could have sworn he'd heard the piano being played, very softly, in the wee hours of the morning. The physicist, naturally, had denied everything, but now, Peter had a strong suspicion that it was a diversion Spengler had employed — and perhaps still did — to clear his mind and help himself think through knotty problems when he was locked away in his lab. He'd have to ask Ray about it and keep an eye open from now on, just to see if he was right.

Unaware of the thoughts going through his mind, Alexandra had continued. "Most of the instruments are just a part of my collection — the physical connection to music history, as it were, since history and theory are my specialties. Someday, I may get around to learning how to play them, though I don't think I'll ever have the time until I retire."

“It’s quite a collection,” Peter breathed appreciatively, happy that he’d at least gotten her talking. He peeked under the cover of another largish thing that he thought might be a harp. He heard her grunt, looked up, and saw the woman trying to move what must have been an especially heavy box from under the spinet piano to a stack she was trying to make near her desk. “Here, let me do that,” he volunteered, seizing the opportunity, and the box.

“That’s all right, Doctor Venkman,” she assured him, even though she let him carry the burden. “I’m used to hauling around heavy instruments...”

“...and I’m used to running around New York with a fifty-pound nuclear accelerator strapped to my back, so this isn’t any imposition. And please, call me Peter.”

Briefly, the blonde hesitated to accept his assistance or his offered familiarity, having heard more than her share of come-on lines, but he did seem sincere, and she remembered her brother’s suggestion: “*Just treat him kindly, and I’m sure he’ll be ecstatic.*” “If you really don’t mind, I *would* appreciate the help. Things *have* been just a little too hectic lately, if you understand what I mean.”

“Oh, do I,” he said, rolling his eyes in amusing exasperation. “And I don’t mind at all.”

So Alexandra let him move that box for her, and the next few, and, taking advantage of his eagerness to cooperate with anything she suggested, soon had him rearranging all the heavier items in the room. He was so happy with the apparent success of this new and novel approach toward winning her attentions, it took Peter the better part of an hour to realize how skillfully he was being used.

He was in the process of hauling the floor harp (which he had also uncrated) into Alexandra’s bedroom when Egon returned from the beach, looking quite typically distracted in thought. “There was definitely something supernatural down there last night,” he reported, completely oblivious to Venkman’s grunts and groans as he struggled to maneuver the instrument over the hearth rug and into the corner its owner had indicated. “There were no physical traces left behind, of course — any ectoplasmic residue would have quickly been washed away by the surf — but the residual readings were very strong. I have no doubt whatsoever that it *was* a selkie — but I wish I knew why it’s so fixated on this one house, other than a possible attraction to your psi-magnetism.”

“Are you sure it’s just this house?” Alexandra asked. “Did you — no, perhaps the harp would be better in that corner, Peter — did you check anywhere else but here?”

“Yes, for about a half-mile along the shore in either direction. There wasn’t so much as a flicker of a reading. Whatever his reasons for coming here, this ghost is linked to this specific site.” He paused to reconsider something in his readings, stepping aside to let Peter (who gave his partner a lethally poisonous glare for not even lifting a finger to help) drag the harp into its new corner. “There may be something about the house itself that’s attracting it. If you don’t mind, Alex, I’d like to take a closer look at your attic and cellar.”

“Be my guest. Is there — do you really think the harp works over there? Maybe I ought to have you move it back into the study...”

“I’ve got a better idea,” Venkman wheezed before she could quite finish the thought. “It can’t be good for the furniture, having the wind and rain and everything blowing into the room through all this busted glass. I noticed you’ve got a caretaker’s shed out back. Why don’t I go see if there’s something in there we can use to patch up these holes ‘til you can get the door fixed?”

Alexandra blinked her big blue eyes at him most guilelessly. “That wouldn’t be too much to ask, would it?”

This time, however, Peter wasn’t fooled by her innocence, any more than he was fooled by the same act when her brother pulled it on him. “Not at all,” he said, meaning it thoroughly since it would get him out of the back-breaking hard labor he’d been stupid enough to get himself roped into. “Believe me, it’ll be a pleasure.”

At the threshold to the corridor, Egon glanced back at his usually more contrary partner. “I didn’t know you enjoyed work like this, Peter,” he observed drolly enough to make the psychologist grit his teeth. “Perhaps I should mention this change of heart to Ray and Winston when they’re ready to start that firehouse renovation project they’ve been talking about for the last six months.”

“You do that, Egon,” he was warned in Peter’s ever-so-pleasant manner, “and I’ll make you eat that PKE meter.” Though he was certain the threat was merely in jest, Spengler was intelligent enough to recognize the wisdom in silence, though he smiled to himself once his back was to his dark-haired colleague.

Since Alexandra had not gone into the cellar since taking occupancy of the cottage, her brother decided to start his search there. The entrance was outside, at the back of the house; once she had opened the padlock on the stairwell doors to allow her brother access, she went with Peter to open the work-shed.

It took her somewhat longer to find the key for the shed lock, since, unlike the cellar key, it had not been clearly marked and was only one of many of a similar type on a ringful that had been left behind by the previous owners. Once the door was open, they found the shed filled with a dim and dusty collection of tools, yard-keeping equipment, old storm windows, screens, and various junk that plainly had not been touched in years.

“Do you think you can find anything useful in here?” the musician asked from where she hung back just outside the entrance, disinclined to enter the cobwebby mess within.

“No problem,” Venkman assured her, though he wasn’t at all certain; he merely figured that spending half an hour poking through the shed had to be an improvement over spending another half-hour wrenching his back and busting his gut moving heavy boxes and rearranging pianos. “I’ll come up with something and have that door fixed in no time.” He paused to grin at her. “Trust me.”

She hesitated briefly, then responded with a smile. “Thank you, Peter. If you don’t mind, then, I think I’ll head back to the house, in case Egon needs me.”

The psychologist was sorely tempted to say, “Please, by all means, go, before you find some anvils for me to move,” but he was still sufficiently intrigued by and attracted to the lady to realize what a stupid move that would be. Instead, he said, “Of course I don’t mind,” in his most winningly pleasant tones.

Alexandra wasn’t quite sure whether or not she should accept his comment at face value, knowing that *had* indeed taken advantage of his foibles when it came to women, but she saw no reason to do otherwise. Once again smiling her gratitude, she returned to the cottage.

While they were gone, Egon moved down into the cellar, which was as dark and dank a place as the shed was dim and dusty. As with any underground chamber left damp and unaired for years, it had the strong stink of mold to it, strong enough to prompt the scientist’s hobbyist curiosities into wondering what unusual mycoid varieties might be found in this seaside environment. He allowed himself to ponder that question only briefly; answering the puzzles concerning his sister’s predicament was currently a far more important matter.

All he saw as he descended the stairwell was a door at the bottom, lit only by the sunlight spilling down from above; beyond the grimy window set into the door, all was dark. There was an old-fashioned light switch to the right of the entrance, presumably meant to activate the fixture directly over the lintel, but he could see without trying that flipping the switch would do no good whatsoever: The bulb in its socket was obviously broken. Undeterred, he unlatched the door and with some effort — for its hinges were visibly rusty — pushed it open.

The cellar itself was even more dank-smelling than the stairwell had been, and darker. The light admitted through the open doors revealed several moldering boxes near the entrance, a decaying basket or two, and three broken

chairs, but nothing paranormally out of the ordinary. The PKE meter produced not a peep of reaction, at least not from his present location, so, mindful of the low light and potential unseen obstacles, Egon moved inside.

Halfway through a painstaking examination of the room, the meter finally reacted, showing a fairly strong residual psychokinetic reading from an as-yet undefined source somewhere ahead of him, concealed in the darkness. He was in the process of adjusting the meter to locate the specific point of origin when he heard the sound of someone descending the cellar stairs. “Alex?” he called without looking, knowing that her curiosity would draw her back as soon as possible. “Is there a way of getting more light in here? I could find a switch or an overhead fixture, and I need both hands to use the meter proper—”

The device in question just then gave him a solid bearing on a new and even stronger non-residual PKE source, directly behind him. As he turned around, expecting to find Alexandra and perhaps something she’d brought with her, he saw instead a man-shape standing at the foot of the stairs, faceless in the dark, dripping water — real or spectral, Egon didn’t know — and staring at him with pulsating green eyes.

For several heartbeats, they stood there, studying one another. It was the selkie who finally broke the silence. “You — you are not the one!” it said in a raspy, angry, almost unintelligible inhuman voice that sounded like gale-driven waves pounding a rocky shore. The softly gleaming creature was clearly unhappy to have found Alexandra’s twin here rather than Alexandra herself. “You are not... you... she — you trick me!” It snarled this last accusation with unmistakable fury before backing off and retreating up the stairwell with the unnatural grace of a slithering eel.

Startled though he was by this unexpected daytime encounter, Egon had enough of his wits about him to go after the fleeing specter, wishing he’d brought along a proton pack. He shouted to attract the others’ attention, but got out no more than the word, “Alex!” when, much to his surprise, someone flung back one of the stairwell doors, hard. It hit the physicist smack on the top of his head, forcing him back down the steps, and — as was undoubtedly intended — knocking him unconscious.

As fate would have it, Alexandra was already on her way back to the cottage when she heard her name being called. Since was approaching the building from an angle that did not allow her to view the back of the house in advance, she saw nothing of what had happened. When she arrived, she noticed that one of the two well doors was shut; curious, she threw it back again and saw Egon lying at the bottom of the staircase in what looked to be a most uncomfortable position; the red of blood was clearly visible in her brother’s pale hair.

Distraught, she had taken one step down into the well when, from the open door behind her sibling, emerged a horribly familiar figure shining a pallid green even in the midday sunlight. She gasped and was about to scream for Peter to come help when the thing hissed peremptorily, freezing the sound in her throat. Terrified, she backed away, intending to run from the selkie as fast as she could; in her haste, she tripped on the top step and fell. She was about to scramble to her feet and flee when she felt a disgustingly cold and clammy *something* touch her cheek. She wrenched her head away, still unable to make a sound; she started to crawl as best she could, but before she had moved more than a few feet, the chilly touch returned, this time grasping both sides of her head so strongly, she had to choose between looking up or having her neck snapped. *Can ghosts really be this solid?* something in her wondered for a fleeting second.

Rather than be hurt, she let her head be twisted toward her attacker, but resolved not to look at its face; she closed her eyes and stubbornly refused to open them. The selkie shrieked his anger at this tactic, though he did not let go. Alexandra permitted herself a brief feeling of triumph. This creature could attack her and drag her away, but he could not make her see what she did not want to see, and lure her to death against her will.

The selkie’s silence seemed to concede her this victory. She felt the icy hands release her, but was not so foolish as to open her eyes just yet, knowing that this might well be a trick. She was beginning to hope that the creature had given up and left her in peace for good when the sound of someone in sudden, excruciating pain reminded her that she was no longer the only one affected by this unwanted visitor. Without thinking, she opened her eyes to glance toward

her injured brother, and just as quickly regretted the reflex. Whatever he had done to Egon to produce that awful sound, he had done it knowing that Alexandra would respond just as she had, and it gave the creature — who was standing in the stairwell between the two siblings — the opportunity he had been seeking. The instant they opened, he caught her eyes with his own, held them, and fixed her with a stare so penetrating, she could not look away.

“Yesssssss,” the selkie whispered, its voice now as seductive as the gentle lapping of waves at low tide on a sandy summer’s beach. “Come with me. Come with me...”

“Do you think the guys’ll be happy with the stuff we found in town?” Winston asked Ray as they drove up the bumpy road that led back to Alexandra’s cottage, having spent the entire morning and part of the afternoon scouring the local library and records hall for information.

“Why not?” his companion replied quite equably. “It answers a lot of questions, gives us some of the ideas we were looking for...”

“Yeah, and shoots a few other things right out the window.” The black man shook his head and clung to the dashboard as Stantz swerved the car to avoid a particularly nasty pothole near the end of the drive. “I dunno, Ray, I don’t think they’re gonna be too happy when they find out that we’ll have to do this the hard way.”

The occultist refused to be anything but irrepressibly positive. “C’mon, Winston, you’ve got to have a little optimism. Look at it as a challenge, not an obstacle.”

Zeddemore snorted softly. “Ray, didn’t your mother ever teach you the difference between *optimistic* and just plain *dumb*?”

“Sure, but — hey, who’s that heading down to the beach with Alexandra?”

Winston glanced in the proper direction as they pulled up alongside the house. He had to squint to get a decent look at the fellow. “You mean the tall, good-looking guy in the seaweed suit?”

It took them at least a full second to realize what Winston had flippantly observed. When they did, they shouted in unison, “*Seaweed?!?*”

“That’s got to be the selkie!” Ray cried, no longer maneuvering to avoid potholes, which caused considerable problems for Zeddemore, who was trying to climb into the back seat to get at one of their proton packs.

“What the heck is he doing here in the middle of the day?” the darker man demanded. “I thought this creep shows up only at night!”

“Looks like he decided to try a new tactic, for a change.”

“But why’s she going with him? And where’re Peter and Egon?”

“Not here, that’s all I know. Hang on!”

With that, Ray hit the accelerator and drove the car right off the gravel path and across the uneven lawn, headed straight for the rocks down which the selkie was leading Alexandra.

The creature — who was perhaps an arm’s length ahead of the woman, enticing her to follow him like the Pied Piper before a child, luring but not touching — looked in Ecto-1’s direction when he heard the tires squeal as they spun

in a desperate attempt to find traction on the loose gravel. Annoyed, he urged his victim on more quickly, desperate to bring her into the sea's grasp before the two Ghostbusters could intervene.

Ray hit the brakes just in time to stop them from flying over the precipice. The selkie was already at its foot, calling to Alexandra, who had safely come halfway down the stony face, despite the fact that her attention was riveted on the ghost and not upon the wet and treacherous rocks. The selkie used no words the men at the top could understand; his voice, in truth, was nearly lost among the sounds of the receding surf. Nonetheless, it retained its mesmerizing quality, which, with seeming ease, beguiled his prey into following him to what would inevitably be her doom.

"Alexandra, no, don't go with him!" Ray shouted the second he jumped out of the car. Without hesitation or thought for his own safety, he ran to the edge of the rocks and started climbing down after her.

Winston, being somewhat more level-headed than his occultist co-worker, finally laid hands on one of their accelerator packs before exiting the car, and thus was prepared to deal with the menace more forcibly, if necessary. Once out, he immediately took aim at the selkie, who, having recognized the two men as a threat to his plans, reared up like some angry sea-stallion preparing to attack.

"Oh, no, you don't!" Zeddemore declared, and, making sure both Ray and Alex were in the clear, he opened fire.

The selkie screamed the moment the proton stream touched him, a cry that was echoed in a sharp wailing gasp from his victim. As the ghost was pushed back toward the sea, the blonde woman wavered dizzily; she would have lost her balance entirely and pitched forward onto the rocks if Ray hadn't arrived just in time to catch her. The spell now broken, the selkie howled in rage, wrested himself free from the energy stream, and fled into the sea. The moment his ghostly feet touched the water, his appearance changed from that of a handsome man to something considerably less human, a strange hybrid of seal and horse. Winston saw the result of the transformation for only a second before the specter disappeared into the waves.

As Ray helped the disoriented Alexandra climb back up the rocks, Peter came running up behind Winston, thoroughly dusty and out of breath. "What's going on?" he asked, having seen nothing of the encounter before Winston had opened fire. "Someone throwing a beach party without inviting me?"

The black man's expression was wry. "Hardly. I thought we left you two behind so nothing'd happen to Alexandra. Where've you been, anyway? And where's Egon?"

A well-timed and familiar moan from the back of the house answered his question, which was more than Peter could have done. While Zeddemore went to help his injured blond colleague crawl out of the basement stairwell, Venkman just stood there feeling foolish, wondering what was going on and how he had managed to miss it all.

"That is one hell of a bump you've got there, Spengs, ol' buddy," Peter said solicitously a short while later as he helped the physicist position the ice-pack he'd made for him, a tacit gesture of apology for not being on hand when the selkie had struck. They were all gathered in the kitchen, from which they could keep an eye on the beach, lest the selkie return. Alexandra was sipping a cup of instant cocoa while Ray made coffee for his partners. "The broken skin's a little messy, but it's not bad enough for stitches, and I don't think you've got a concussion. What'd you do, anyway, take a swan dive down the cellar stairs?"

Spengler started to shake his head, winced when it made everything from the neck up throb, then closed his eyes and opted for a strictly verbal response. "No. When I followed him out of the cellar, the selkie slammed one of the outer doors right on top of me. I never even saw it coming."

“Clever critter,” Winston observed with a long-suffering sigh. “Just the kind we *don’t* need.”

Peter, who had wandered to the window to look out at the shoreline, clicked his tongue. “Y’know, guys, this whole thing is beginning to sound really strange. First this selkie won’t come anywhere near the house ‘cause we’re up here, then he pops up in the middle of the day, goes after Egon, bonks him on the brain with cellar door, and makes off with his sister. Either something weird’s going on around here, or this selkie’s completely off his nut.”

“That might be closer to the truth than you think, Peter,” Ray said as he brought coffee and cups to the table at which the others were seated.

Venkman frowned. “What, that the selkie’s crazy?”

“A little bit of that, but also that the story behind this is a lot stranger than we thought.”

Egon opened one eye to glance at the occultist. “Did you find some useful information in town?”

Ray nodded and took the empty seat between Winston and Alexandra. “It seems that almost a hundred years ago, back around the turn of the century, this property was owned and lived in by a young woman, Jessica Owens, and her son.”

“A hundred years ago?” Alexandra sounded quite unwilling to believe it. “That’s not possible, Doctor Stantz. I told you before, this house was built by some wealthy businessman only fifty years ago...”

This time, Egon opened both his eyes. “Previous occupants?” he said, more a statement than a query.

Ray nodded enthusiastically as he warmed up to his topic. “Yes, and listen to this: The woman was a local outcast, sort of a ‘scarlet letter’ case, since she had a son but had never been married. The other residents never had much to do with her, but the police registered a lot of complaints from her neighbors ‘cause it seems that the boy’s father kept showing up to try and take him away but the mother wouldn’t let him. People didn’t do that a lot, back then, take complaints like that to the police; usually they just tried to take it into their own hands. But some of their fights got pretty noisy and violent, kept the folks next door up at night, scared out of their wits — and usually in the middle of the night.”

“Whoa,” Peter interrupted, his interest suddenly piqued. “Sounds to me like you’ve found records of our selkie.”

“But this doesn’t make sense,” Alexandra confessed, her brow furrowed most prettily. “I thought you said the selkie was probably haunting this property because of some important task he hadn’t been able to finish in life.”

Again, Stantz nodded. “Exactly.”

“But if the woman resisted and wouldn’t let him have their son, wouldn’t he have just tricked her into drowning, like he tried to trick me, and *then* taken the boy?”

“Maybe, if he’d had the time,” Winston conceded. “But he never even got the chance. According to the records, Owens and her son died in a fire that completely destroyed the house. This one here was built right on its foundations, as a matter of fact, fifty years ago.”

“And not only that,” Ray continued before the others could do more than open their mouths or raise their eyebrows in surprise, “but when the authorities went through the rubble looking for their remains, they found a third body — a man, burned beyond recognition. The police thought it must be the father, since the neighbors had called them earlier that evening, complaining about the noise. As far as they could tell, Owens and the selkie had a big fight,

and somewhere in the course of it, someone started the fire, accidentally — or maybe even on purpose, given that selkies are terrified of it. Jessica may have tried to use fire to protect her son from the selkie, but the plan backfired.”

A long, uncomfortable silence followed that sad speculation. Eventually, Peter broke it. “So,” he said slowly, with unusual respect for the chilling notion of what had transpired beneath their very feet, “you’re telling us that what we’ve got here is the ghost of a selkie who was not only frustrated in bringing his kid home to his own people, but was also burned to death trying to get him away from his mother?”

This time, Ray’s nod was heavy. “Right. And according to legend, he’ll never be able to rest until he’s avenged himself on the person he feels is responsible for his death.

Alexandra shuddered. “And in the folksong, vengeance was achieved by prompting the mother’s suicide.” She suddenly wished she hadn’t said that, didn’t know what had happened here, had never come to Connecticut in the first place. “But why *me*?” she cried, not angry with Ray for bringing the truth to light, but rather at the cruel twist of fate which had landed her in this predicament. “No one’s ever claimed this property was haunted before now. I know, I checked before I signed the rental agreement”

Peter made a sound of wry amusement. “Sure, but that isn’t exactly the sort of thing I can see realtors admitting to when they’re trying to unload a house.”

“Not only that,” Winston added, “but there *is* this ‘psychic-magnet’ business of yours...”

“...and if the records are accurate, you *are* the first unmarried woman to have lived here alone since Jessica Owens died,” Ray concluded. “Any one of these things could have brought him here.”

Briefly, she weighed these matters, then frowned more deeply. “But if that’s so — even if he *is* mistaking me for Jessica — then why would he have attacked Egon? He couldn’t possibly think he’s partly responsible for the fire, or figured out he’s my brother and tried to use that to trap me?”

Ray shrugged. “Maybe....”

“Neither,” Egon corrected, setting down the ice-pack, his timbre utterly confident. “I believe he confronted me in the basement because he’d mistaken me for *you*, Alex.”

From their expressions, the others found that very hard to swallow. Venkman displayed the most difficulty. “Come on, Egon, don’t be ridiculous,” he chided. “Even a ghost can’t be *that* nearsighted.”

“Not nearsighted,” the physicist said thoughtfully. “But not all forms of spectral and supernatural life ‘see’ in the same way we do. Some perceive emotional states, others fix on attractive thoughts, still others discern auras....”

That explanation did nothing to enlighten Peter’s darkness; Ray, however, caught on at once. “I get it,” he crowed, delighted. “What you’re trying to say is that this selkie doesn’t see bodies or even souls, but individual psychic auras, the emanations we give off as a combination of physical and mental energy. When people are here in the house, in a group, the auras overlap and confuse him, so he can’t select the specific target he wants. When you went for that walk on the shoreline this morning, checking for PKE, it was probably enough to get the selkie’s attention and draw him back, even though it was daytime. And when Pete and Alexandra went out to the work shed and you were left here by yourself, he mistook you for her, thought she was alone, and came up to drag her off before anyone could return and stop him.”

“Precisely.”

Winston felt no more enlightened than Peter. “Is that possible?” he asked Stantz, sure the two scientists must’ve blown a mental gasket trying to unknot this puzzle. “I mean, aren’t auras supposed to be a mixture of thought patterns

and soul emanations and genetics and stuff like that? I could understand this critter making the mistake if the two of them were identical twins but they're not. Heck, they're not even the same gender...."

Ray's acknowledgment seemed almost overly enthusiastic. "Sure, but even so, brothers and sisters are actually much closer to one another, genetically speaking, than they are to either of their parents. Add to that an even low-level subconscious parapsychological bond, and it's easy to see how the selkie could have mistaken one for the other."

"Oh, sure," Venkman quipped. "About as easy to see as Mount Rushmore from the top of the Empire State Building. You're starting to sound just like Egon, Ray."

Alexandra looked from the occultist to her brother, confused. "Low-level parapsychological *what?*" she demanded, feeling like a patient who has just been told, in completely incomprehensible terms, that she has yet another vile and deadly disease.

Egon sighed expansively and replaced the ice-pack. "The twin-bond telepathy Ray mentioned yesterday. And it's just a theory, Alex. It would seem to me if there *was* a genuine psionic link between us, we would've noticed it years ago, but it's also the only rational explanation we've been able to devise for why I started having trouble sleeping at precisely the same time you began having problems with the selkie. They started exactly when you said he began appearing, and the descriptions you've given us of the attacks are a perfect match for the images I've had in my... dreams."

"Dreams?" she echoed, disturbed by the hesitance with which he spoke the word.

"Nightmares," Peter provided more succinctly, with sympathy. When Egon opened his mouth to deny the "exaggeration," Venkman refused to accept it. "C'mon, big guy, you *know* that's what they were. I'm not a psychologist for nothing; I'd know the signs on a complete stranger, and I sure as heck recognize 'em on my best friend. Maybe I'm the only one who hasn't gotten a close-up look at this selkie yet, but I've seen enough to know I wouldn't want him walking through my dreams — or outside my house — and I sure as hell wouldn't want him messing with my sister! If you ask me, you should head back to the city, get Janine to nurse that crack on your noggin, and let the rest of us handle this one."

"Maybe Peter's right, Egon," Ray said quietly. "This may not be the safest place for you to be, right now, especially not if you're hurt."

The physicist waved one hand in curt dismissal of the notion. "I'd hardly call a minor bump on the head 'hurt,' and much as I appreciate your willingness to stand between me and a creature who may mean me harm, I'm not about to let you deny me the right to do the same for my own sister. Besides," he added reflectively, setting aside the ice-pack again, "this incident does cast an entirely new light on things."

"It does?" Winston failed to see how, other than the negative lights already discussed.

Egon, however, was undeterred by his colleagues' doubts. "Certainly. It tells us, among other things, that this ghost is an aura-detector, is fixated on Alexandra, and moreover recognizes her — or what *seems* to be — specific aura."

"Yeah, but it also tells us that it knows without seeing when there's anyone else in the house with her, and that it won't come up so long as she isn't alone," Peter pointed out.

"Perhaps it would if *I* was the only one in the house with her," Spengler began, only to be shouted down by a round of rapid rebuttals.

"Egon, you can't!"

"That's crazy!"

“That knock on the head must’ve scrambled your brains, man.”

“Yeah, if you think you can pin down and trap a ghost this clever all by yourself when you’ve got a headache the size of Hoboken, you’re in worse shape than I thought.”

Peter’s remark, which had been last, had been all too accurate concerning the headache; it brought a wince to the blond man’s face, but did not lessen his determination. Ray saw this, and pressed the issue. “Come on, Egon, be reasonable. We can’t stay here with her forever. We already know that it was able to break free of just one proton stream without much trouble — it’s gonna take more than just one person to catch this thing and you know it.”

The look he directed toward Alexandra was sadly sympathetic. “Unless we can come up with a way to catch this thing by remote control — and just setting out a trap for it isn’t going to work — the only solution I can see is for you to move out and find a new place to live.”

Her face fell at the very suggestion. “But I can’t. I signed a year’s lease, all my money is tied up in moving expenses — and I don’t *want* to!” she added sternly when Ray looked inclined to offer her the money she might need to do it. “I spent most of my childhood trying to avoid obnoxious ghosts and getting into all kinds of trouble because of it, because no one but my mother and Egon ever believed me. And I was just told not-so-politely to leave a job and a home I’d finally grown to like because I didn’t have what it takes to fight a bunch of narrow-minded idiots who would’ve just as cheerfully barbecued my like a witch in Salem. I am *not* going to let the nearsighted, addle-brained, vengeance-obsessed ghost of some lecherous sea-creature run me out of a house I like when my own brother and his friends are in the business of getting rid of pests just like him!” She didn’t raise her voice appreciably, but for her, that declaration was as sincerely felt and forcefully voiced as the most fervent sermon ever delivered.

“And you won’t have to,” that brother told her, so completely assured of it that his remark elicited quizzical looks from all three of his partners.

“And, pray tell, how are we supposed to pull this off, Mister Boy Genius?” Peter asked, puckishly but not caustically. “We’ve already nixed your idea of trying to trap it on your own, and this seaweed-sucking specter won’t even come close to the place if the rest of us are in the house.”

“True,” Egon allowed, his assurance undiminished, “but since getting close enough to the selkie to use our equipment on it seems to be the primary problem, I believe I know exactly how to deal with it.”

Winston remained as doubtful as Peter. “How? If it sees auras like you say it does, we can’t just hide in the closets and under the bed and wait ‘til it comes into our sights...”

“Perhaps not. But you may recall that I said I’ve been working on our aura analyzation system these last few nights, when I couldn’t sleep. What I’ve been trying to develop is a sort of psionic white-noise generator, something we could use to mask our presences when dealing with aura-sensitive ghosts, or to aid in separating and singling out group entities. I hadn’t anticipated field-testing it quite so soon, but this would appear to be an ideal opportunity. Of course, given that there’s only the one device and four of us, the field would have to be split to accommodate each presence; that and maintaining it for however long might prove necessary would require a significant amount of power, but it shouldn’t take long for us to adapt the house’s electrical system to accommodate it. The greatest obstacle is the current lack of portability. We’ll have to confront the selkie here, in the house, or very near it...”

Peter threw him a crookedly sidelong glance. “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Egon’s return expression was blank. “I can’t imagine what...”

“Oh, nothing major — just that we’re here and that generator of yours in back in New York. Unless you gave it legs so it can make the hike on its own, one of us is gonna have to drive back to get it — and I can tell you right now that that someone won’t be me.”

“It won’t be,” the physicist agreed, “because you can’t go. Considering the age of the house wiring and its probable condition, it’ll take all four of us to make the needed adjustments to the electrical system. But,” he added, dismissing the matter with ease, “there shouldn’t be any problem in getting the apparatus here. It’s only an hour’s drive, and I’m sure Janine wouldn’t mind doing us the favor.”

Venkman, being far more experienced in the realm of male/female relationships, made a soft and subtly knowledgeable sound. “I wouldn’t count on it.”

“I just want you to know that you owe me one, Egon,” was the first thing the redheaded receptionist said when she arrived at the cottage almost three hours later, grumpy and decidedly put out. “Make that a *big* one. Do you know how hard it was to even *find* half the stuff you wanted, with nothing to go on but those terrible descriptions you gave me over the phone? They could’ve described half the stuff in your lab! Not to mention how much time it took to pack it all up so it wouldn’t break, and then get through cross-town traffic at the beginning of rush hour? And I won’t even *begin* to tell you how big a thrill it wasn’t, convincing Slimer to stay home when all he wanted to do was come along for the ride so he could play back-seat driver and mess up my new car....” She paused briefly, thinking. “On second thought, make that *two* you owe me. Or maybe even three or four.”

“Come on, Janine, don’t be such a spoilsport,” Peter suggested as he watched his partners unload her car. “We don’t ask you to do us favors very often...”

“Oh, no?” She sounded every bit as skeptical as she looked. “Who’s always asking me to pick up his laundry for him? And who always wants me to buy his special little goodies, take personal messages from his girlfriends, and balance his checkbook for him?”

His smile was winning in the extreme. “And was this so much more to ask?”

She wrinkled her nose at him. “If *you’d* asked me, I’d’ve told you just where you could stuff it. So don’t push it, Doctor Venkman, or I’m gonna get in my car again and take all this stuff right back home with me.”

“Stop giving her such a hard time, Peter,” Egon recommended, concerned that she might actually carry through on her threat. “I appreciate the trouble you went through, Janine, even if he doesn’t,” the physicist told her in a gentler tone, the sentiment genuine, and enough to elicit a smile from the irritated redhead. Her smile dimmed somewhat when she noticed the traces of blood still in the man’s blond hair, but something told her this was not the time to ask what had happened to put them there. “Thank you.”

“Don’t pay any attention to Pete, Janine,” Winston suggested as he headed up to the cottage with one of the more ungainly boxes. “We never do.”

“Yeah,” Ray agreed, shoving a heavy box into Venkman’s arms, which he had the choice of either hanging onto or dropping smack on his own left foot. Given the options, he hung onto the thing, albeit shakily. “The rest of us really do appreciate you, even if Peter doesn’t.”

She sniffed softly, somewhat palliated, though not entirely. “Well, it’s nice to know *someone* does.”

“I appreciate you, Janine,” the psychologist suddenly insisted as he continued to struggle with his unwanted burden. “And I’d appreciate you even more if you’d be nice enough to take this thing off my hands....”

“Don’t push it,” she advised, and followed the others into the house, leaving Peter in a fight to keep his grip on the box and maintain his balance as he made his way up the steps to the front door.

Egon started unpacking the equipment as soon as they had the first of the boxes inside, the parlor having been chosen as the best site in which to put the thing together. While Alexandra and Janine ferried the remaining bits and pieces from the car into the house, the physicist set about instructing his colleagues in just what needed to be done, and how. Work proceeded smoothly (save for Peter's periodic grumbles about being a psychologist, not an engineer) until Ray and Winston encountered what appeared to be a potentially major snag.

"I still think it'd be much easier if we only had to split the damping signal three ways instead of four," Stantz declared when he had reached that particular crucial juncture in his portion of the assembly work. "The power lines in this place are gonna be working overtime as it is, just trying to pull in enough juice to make this work, and the less of a strain we put on them, the better. We'd get better signal stability, too."

"Yeah, but if we do that, who do we leave out of things?" Winston pointed out, if a touch reluctantly. "Which one of us do we send away while the rest do the work and take all the risks?"

"I'll go," Peter volunteered with no trace of the dark man's hesitance.

Although Zeddemore was ninety-nine percent sure Venkman was joking in an attempt to lighten the mood, as was his habit, he felt obliged to take the comment on face value. "The heck you will. That selkie's a tricky little cuss — just look at how he managed to get away after I'd pinned him with a proton stream. I don't think we can take a chance of leaving *anyone* out of the fight."

"We won't have to," Egon interjected, the voice of calm reason. "Since as far as we can tell the selkie is psionically nearsighted — enough to confuse my aura's with Alex's — if we send her away from the house and leave me unshielded, it should make the same erroneous assumption, and come right to us."

"You don't know that." The statement came from the direction of the kitchen door, where Alexandra and Janine had apparently been standing and listening to the entire conversation.

Egon was not disturbed by his sibling's comment. "Perhaps not, but it's a perfectly sound hypothesis...."

"The hell it is! You have no way of knowing whether or not that creature really *is* psionically nearsighted, and for all you know, now that he's seen both of us face to face, he *can* tell the difference between your aura and mine, and won't make the same mistake twice."

"Alex, I don't think you fully grasp the dangers inherent in this situation...."

"I most certainly do, and I'm not going to let *you* be the bait to trap a thing that's been *my* problem, not when it could get you into very serious trouble!"

"Hey, that's what we live for," Peter drawled in his best devil-may-care attitude. "It's part of the thrill of the job — it's why we get paid the big bucks."

She was not amused by his flippancy. "But nobody's paying you for this — and even if I was, I'm not going to stand here and play the good little girl, and let you shuffle me off into some safe corner when I *know* what sort of risks you'll be taking. That selkie is *angry* — he's already hurt Egon, deliberately, he knows you can hurt him, and I don't think he's going to come back here without some sort of plan for dealing with any traps the four of you might have laid."

"You may be overestimating his intelligence," Ray noted quietly, not wanting to get her mad at him, too. "A lot of ghosts have a certain sort of animal cunning to 'em, which makes them very good at avoiding detection and getting away from people like us, but they usually aren't bright enough to make contingency plans before getting into any given situation. They're already dead; what've they got to lose? It's not like the selkie can know what we do for a living, and that we're sort of spectral 'jailors.'"

Winston nodded his agreement. “All we want to do is lure the thing up here, corner and trap him, and it’d be easier on all of us if we don’t have to worry about protecting you, too.”

“No one has to protect me,” she declared. “I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself.”

This was clearly becoming a dead-end argument. Realizing it, Egon sighed. “Alex,” he began.

But she was having none of it. “I don’t want to hear it,” she warned, turning to him, blue eyes ablaze with righteous indignation and stubbornness. “You *don’t* know that the selkie can be tricked again into thinking you’re me. This is my problem, my house, and you’re not going to make me leave it. Either accept it, or pack up your stuff right now and go back to New York. Those are your options.”

Every last one of the men was appalled. “You can’t be serious!” Ray said first. “You saw what happened before, what he intends to do with you — especially now that he thinks you’ve tricked him. If we leave, you’ll die...!” The strangled fashion in which the last word left his lips clearly bespoke his genuine concern for her safety.

“Don’t be foolish, Alex,” was her sibling’s opinion, offered with a concern even more deeply felt than Ray’s. “Why risk throwing away your life when you know very well it isn’t necessary?”

“Because I *don’t* know it isn’t necessary.” She looked him straight in the eye and for once spoke without the slightest trace of reluctance, her mind crystal clear and undivided on the subject. “Eight years ago, I let you and Father talk me into doing something else for my own good, and I hated every minute of it — oh, not the teaching and the life I led, but just knowing that I was a prisoner to a strange gift I couldn’t control and couldn’t get rid of. I know what *you* did then, you did out of love, Egon, but do you really know how it feels from my side, to be helpless to choose even so simple a thing as where you live?”

The physicist returned her gaze steadily, but for once, he could find no words of rebuttal which would not ring hollow with half-truth. She smiled faintly. “You know I’m right, little brother. It’s *my* problem, and this time, I want to *do* something about it, actively, instead of just caving in and letting myself be shuffled off to where it’s supposedly safe.”

Peter grinned. “You’ve gotta admire the lady’s guts,” he approved, winning himself a small nod of thanks from Alexandra and glares from the rest of his partners, save Egon. “Well, she’s right,” he defended. “It’s her house, it’s her life, and she’s got every right to want to be involved in this bust. I say we let her do it, if that’s what she really wants.”

Winston grunted. “Yeah, but you’d let her throw herself over Niagara Falls in a barrel, if that’s what she wants, too.”

The psychologist shrugged helplessly. “Hey, to each his or her own. And it’s not like we’re just shoving her out to deal with the selkie on her own; the four of us’ll be here to make sure nothing bad happens. Besides,” he added impishly, “what do you plan to do with Janine through all this? Pack her up in a crate and ship her back to Brooklyn?”

Though she didn’t much care for the wisecrack, the redhead agreed with his earlier sentiments. “I’ve been kinda wondering that myself,” she put in. “I’m *not* heading straight back to New York after all I did to get this junk up here, not without knowing whether or not this crazy scheme of yours is gonna work.”

“No, you can’t go back,” Egon insisted. “We need you here to monitor the property and let us know when the selkie’s coming. It’s vital that we be in the exactly prescribed positions at the moment of attack, or we may drive him off without catching him, and blow the entire plan. And if we do, chances are we won’t get a second shot at it.”

As she listened to him outline the job he had in mind for her, an expression of distaste crept across the receptionist's face. "Oh, joy," she drawled sarcastically when he was done. "Just what I've always wanted to do. Make that *five* you owe me, Egon."

"It's really essential to the operation, Janine," Ray assured her. "We'll only get one chance at this, so we have to make it work the first time."

"Which is why I have to be the bait," Alexandra persisted. "If one chance is all you'll have, then it *has* to be the best chance you can possibly get."

"But—"

Her brother got no more than that out of his mouth before she turned on him, her expression no longer angry, merely resolute. "Egon, you know I'm right. You once told me that you scoured the country looking for places where I could live because you wanted to give me a life where I didn't have to worry about people calling me strange or crazy or weird or evil because I kept getting pestered by every supernatural thing within a ten-mile radius. If you really meant it, and what you said last night, then don't make me leave now — because I'm sure this will never work without me. Don't ask me why, but I'm positive it won't."

For almost a full minute, the tall physicist did nothing but look back at his sister, weighing the truth of what she said against what he knew and didn't know about their current situation. Finally, without consulting the others, he nodded acquiescence. "All right," he surrendered, adding, quite sternly, "but either you do everything we say exactly the way we say it, or I'll tie you up myself and make sure you sit out in the car with Janine."

Their secretary harrumphed softly, not liking the manner in which her name had been invoked as part of a threat, however mild, but Alexandra smiled widely, sufficiently wamed. "I promise."

With very little deliberation, it was decided that the dining room — which was situated between the kitchen and Alexandra's bedroom at the rear of the house, and thus had both a seaward view as well as doors opening onto the terrace beyond — would be the ideal location in which to set their trap, as it provided both adequate power outlets and hiding places for the four Ghostbusters situated so that they would not be required to twist the aura-concealing field into an impossibly peculiar shape. Janine, who was given both a walkie-talkie and instructions on how to operate Ecto-1's PKE tracking systems (along with a spare proton pack, just in case emergency back-up was needed), put up only a token resistance before climbing into the modified ambulance and driving it to the site Egon had specified as the best from which to monitor both cottage and shore yet still be sufficiently distant so as not to alert the selkie.

It was well after sunset before everyone was ready. Just before taking his place, Peter made an unusually apt observation. "Has anybody considered what we're going to do if the selkie's been watching this place and *knows* we never left it?"

"Pretty unlikely," was Ray's feeling on the matter. "Remember, he doesn't see the same way we do, so he probably didn't even notice when Ecto pulled away, except that Janine's aura went with it. Once the system's activated, he'll undoubtedly think we just went away, too."

"But what if he doesn't?"

"Then he'll still see Alexandra's aura and be drawn to it, just like before. Whatever compulsion is driving him is awfully strong; once he thinks she's alone, I don't think he'll waste much time coming after her."

And he was right. Forty-five minutes after Janine had left and the paranormalogists moved into position, Janine signaled, letting them know that their target was on his way.

“Okay,” Peter allowed from his hiding place. “You were right. But does anyone have any ideas about what we’re gonna do if this *doesn’t* work?” Had an uninformed observer been watching, the conversation would have appeared most peculiar. A faintly nervous Alexandra was the room’s only apparent occupant, seated in a reading chair which had been placed at the room’s center once the dining table had been removed. Clearly, she was not speaking; thus, the discourse seemed to be taking place between a china hutch and an upright piano.

“No,” came the hutch’s — Winston’s — blunt reply, “so keep it down, Pete, or you’re gonna blow it. Here he comes.”

“Everyone make sure you target him the second he’s through the doors,” a bookcase in the third corner advised in a whisper that sounded exactly like Egon’s deep voice. “We won’t get more than one chance for a clean shot.”

The piano snorted. “Hey, you heard Winston,” Peter chided. “No talking—”

“Shh!” Ray’s sibilant hiss came from the sofa in the fourth corner, silencing everyone.

In the sudden stillness, all they could hear were their own heartbeats, the more distant sounds of wind and surf — and a slowly crescendoing shuffle, like the sound of seaweed being dragged across wet stones. Alexandra visibly steeled herself and tried not to look up, not to let the creature know that she was expecting him before he had crossed the threshold of the terrace doors. It was difficult, especially when she heard the click of the door latch being released, followed by the creak of sea-aged hinges. When the creaking stopped, she heard nothing.

Afraid that thing was forewarned, that it would refuse to cross the line separating inside from out, she could hold back no longer. Her head whipped about like a startled fawn’s just as the selkie stepped inside and was instantly bathed in nuclear fire.

To her horror — and, undoubtedly, to that of every living thing in the room — the selkie was not pinned by the proton streams, as they had hoped. Rather, in a maneuver that made the four eliminators think it had known precisely what to expect, the creature twisted upward, avoiding the worst of the accelerator attack as it headed — unbound by gravity, like any other wraith — for the ceiling, and safety.

“Blast!” Winston cursed, no longer inhibited by the need for silence. “The thing’s on to us!”

“It must’ve gotten suspicious after you took that shot at him on the beach,” Ray deduced.

“Or it saw Janine’s car parked outside and knew that not everyone had left. Keep on him!” Peter recommended as he fired ahead of the ghost to dissuade it from heading out the door. “Don’t let him get outside, or we’ll never trap him!”

“Stay down, Alex!” was Egon’s command, made after a hurried shot clipped the top of the high-backed chair in which she was sitting and another accidentally knocked one of the open terrace doors off its hinges.

“I’ll try—” she began when suddenly, as if struck by inspiration, the phantom selkie changed direction and purpose. Instead of continuing its attempts to flee, the sea-creature turned and headed directly for Alexandra. There in an instant, he immediately wrapped himself around her, almost like a child clinging to a parent for protection.

“Hold your fire!” Ray bellowed frantically as soon as he realized the specter’s intent. “We can’t hit him without hitting Alexandra!”

At once, the proton assault was halted. “Well, Ray,” Peter quipped with desert dryness, “what was that you were saying about ghosts being stupid? If this is an example of mere ‘animal cunning,’ he’d doing *real* good with it.”

Stantz frowned, more at the bad situation than at the psychologist's attempts at humor. "We have to do something," he insisted. "We can't just let that thing have her!"

Egon clearly agreed, although his fear for his sister's safety was ruthlessly restrained behind no more than the tightening of his jaw and the brightness of his eyes. He moved toward the selkie. "Perhaps if we—"

The moment he came within five paces, however, the specter hissed loudly and seemed to grow, like a snake still wrapped around its victim but rearing up strike at a would-be competitor. "Stay back!" it ordered harshly, stopping the scientists in their tracks.

"Can it hurt her if we don't?" Winston wanted to know.

"Do you want to be the one to find out?" Venkman asked, his logic both timely and unfortunately true.

Figuring that any attempt was better than none at all, Egon called, "Alex, get away from it, if you can. Run!"

But if she heard his advice, she didn't — or couldn't — take it. Instead, the woman rose to her feet quite slowly — *too* slowly, as far as those watching were concerned.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Ray near-whispered.

"Ditto," Peter concurred.

"Alex!"

She responded to none of them. Glassy-eyed, with her attention fixed solely on the handsome selkie-face mere inches before her, she turned to the open doors and walked toward them, her unhurried pace metronome-precise.

Winston reacted immediately. "He's gonna drag her back out there if we don't stop him," he said, prodding the others to action. "You guys are the ones with all the brains and the PhDs — you'd better come up with something, quick!"

Having shaken off his momentary torpor, Peter went with his instincts, which told him the direct approach — which, to him, meant bashing something but good — was an improvement over wasting time hatching more sophisticated plots. "Set up a crossfire at the door," he ordered. "If we can't get him to back off, at least we can keep him inside."

The suggestion appealed to Zeddemore's old Special Forces training; he happily complied, the others joining them with only slightly less alacrity. He was quietly pleased by the crackling power of the energy net as they carefully wove it across the terrace doors, certain it would stop any ghost in its right mind — until it became patently obvious that the selkie had no intention whatsoever of allowing the barrier to deter it. It merely shifted position around Alexandra so that she, not it, would be first to encounter the streams' destructive force. Still caught in the selkie's spell, the woman continued to move forward, slow and calm and totally oblivious to approach of her own annihilation.

"Stop!" both Ray and Egon shouted the instant it became apparent that the selkie cared nothing for the fate of its prisoner and, in fact, would gladly welcome anything to insure her demise. "This isn't going to work," the physicist said unhappily, watching his twin blithely cross the spot on which, only moments before, a wall of deadly energy had stood.

"Smart ghost," Venkman grudgingly commended. "How're we gonna trap it if we can't scare it or drag it off her?"

Ray's brown eyes flew wide open as inspiration struck like a comet. "We drag *her* off *it*," he answered most reasonably. Without waiting to explain, he suited action to words. Before any of his partners could react, the occultist ran after the beguiled woman and, in decent college football form, tackled her around the knees. Both of them went flying through the door and out onto the flagstone terrace, where they landed together with a painful-sounding *thump!*

His movement was so swift, he managed to catch even the selkie unawares, and their impact with the stone deck was so hard and unexpected, it broke the trance that had been holding Alexandra prisoner. The entire sequence, in fact, happened so very swiftly that it had the added benefit of momentarily disorienting the selkie, who back away from both the tackler and tackled in reflex confusion. Though the only light on the terrace was that coming from inside the house, the phantom remained visible in his own lambent luminescence.

"Get it!" Peter bellowed the moment the ghost was in the clear, and his colleagues did.

The selkie, furious over this unanticipated tum of events, shrieked loudly, making the whole area echo like a roomful of angry seagulls. The sound was so very loud and piercing, it caused every living being within earshot to recoil in pain, resulting in the very thing for which the selkie had undoubtedly hoped: The aim of its three attackers momentarily wavered, enough for it to break free of the proton-stream assault and head straight for Ray and Alexandra. The occultist took a hasty, very badly-aimed shot in hopes of at least driving it off; he missed by a mile and instead hit the branches of an overhanging tree, sending twigs and autumn-dried leaves flying across the terrace.

When the specter came at them, however, it made no attempt to snare either of its targets in a mind-control trance. Instead, it flew in circles around them, so fast that it was difficult to track, and so close to the living pair that no one could dare fire at the ghost without endangering the trapped humans. All the while, it kept up its shrill ululation of fury and frustration.

"Ray, do you think you can get one good shot at it?" Egon asked, seeing that as their only practical option.

Stantz didn't hesitate before answering. "It's too close, and it's moving 'way too fast. I can't get a bead on it."

"What about your trap?"

Ray fumbled about for a moment, then groaned. "It must've bounced away when I tackled Alexandra."

"Did I say this spook was smart?" Peter remarked, head shaking. "I was wrong — it's a genius."

"Just what we need," Winston grumbled. "What're we supposed to do now? We can't even fight fire with fire...."

Winston had meant it only as a cliché, but to Ray, it was the spark needed to again ignite inspiration — literally. "That's it!" he exulted, and started digging frantically through his pockets.

"What's it?" Peter wanted to know, completely at a loss. "You want us to start screaming like a bad heavy metal band and try to out-shout that thing?"

"No," Stantz replied, finally finding what he'd been searching for. "We should do exactly what Winston said: fight fire with... *fire!*" With that, he grabbed one of the branches he'd blasted off the tree and, with his other hand, pulled out the tiny butane lighter he carried for emergencies (a former Boy Scout was always prepared). Too fast to follow, he held out the branch at arm's length and ignited the lighter below it. Though the wood was too green and damp to burn easily, the leaves still stuck to it caught in a wink, creating a spectacular — if doomed to be short-lived — blaze that lit the entire terrace with more than mere window-spilled light.

The selkie reacted to the unexpected fire just as it would have in life: with utter terror. Howling as if remembering its own death, it backed off, not far enough to give the others a clear shot, but enough to give those it had

trapped more room in which to move and possibly defend themselves. It continued its unearthly wailing, the sound made even more piercing by its fear of the flame.

Alexandra clapped her hands over her ears in an attempt to shut out the wraith's cries; her eyes stung with tears of frustration. "Why don't you go away?" she shouted, at the end of her rope. "I've done nothing to hurt you! Why don't you just go away and *leave me alone?!?*"

The selkie's shrilling turned to an equally ear-shattering hiss that, despite its lack of articulate words, spoke volumes of disbelief. Anger giving it greater courage, it again moved closer to its prey.

Ray waved the burning branch in its direction; the selkie backed off, though not as far as before. Its cries intensified, like those of a hungry wolf nearing the final capture of an elusive foe. Although he realized that the fire would go out any second now, Ray was not about to give up and let the selkie have its way. As the branch he was holding began to go out, he groped blindly for new fuel, eventually laying hand on the only other sizeable bit of tree-debris within reach. He set fire to the unlit branch with the dying flames of the first, then threw the latter aside, directly at the specter. It moved aside to avoid the hurled embers, but only for a moment. Ray grit his teeth and thrust the now blazing branch at the creature; the selkie shrieked angrily, but this time did not retreat. It was then that the occultist decided to take the long shot, the one obvious approach they hadn't yet considered: negotiation.

"She's right!" he told the persistent creature, shouting to make himself heard above the din it was making. "She isn't even the woman you're looking for. Jessica Owens died almost a hundred years ago — in the same fire that killed you! This won't work, selkie! You won't get what you want this way, by destroying Alexandra. You'll *never* find your rest if you try to avenge yourself by killing an innocent person — and you know it!"

If the selkie heard him or even understood him, he gave no sign. The specter kept up its howling, refusing to retreat. Ray was trying desperately to think of something else to say or do, a better argument to offer when, as expected, the last of leaves were consumed. Before the flames could die entirely, the occultist anxiously cast about himself, looking for anything that might burn. The only potential fuel he could see was another fallen branch, but between him and it lay the infuriated selkie.

"Peter!" he called to the one nearest the coveted item. "Can you grab that branch and throw it—"

Before he could finish the request, a powerful wind blew up from a totally unexpected quarter, forcing those still living to brace themselves or be toppled by it as it swept the terrace clean of any debris. Peter, already in the process of bending over to fetch the branch Ray had wanted, had his hand upon it when the wind caught it and ripped it from his hand, incidentally knocking him off his feet. As soon as the area had been cleared of any possible fuel, the wind fell to more normal levels, as suddenly and unnaturally as it had risen.

"No," the psychologist answered dryly, his voice muffled by the uncomfortable fashion in which his nose had ended up pressed to the flagstones.

The supernatural wind had torn the barely burning leaf remains off the branch in Ray's hand; the wood itself smoldered smokily, but the actual flames were gone. In a last ditch attempt to protect Alexandra, Stantz pulled the butane lighter from his pocket and tried to ignite it, but, though it sparked profusely, it refused to catch.

Winston's, "Uh-oh," was an eloquent summation of everyone's reaction. With the fire gone, they fully expected the creature to react aggressively, perhaps by taking both of its prisoners to their deaths in the sea.

But for a long moment, nothing changed. The selkie maintained its distance and course; the stalemate continued.

Then, incredibly, the wailing stopped. The specter slowed its light-quick circles, not enough for anyone to take reliable aim at it, but enough so that those within its trap could more or less track its position and thus see its faintly glowing and only humanish face.

“The boy,” they heard it say, though the sound was more the sussuration of waves against sand than a living voice. “The boy?” There was something undeniably plaintive in the query.

“Gone, too,” Ray answered, seeing no harm in it. “He died with his mother, and you.”

The wisdom of that response was put into question a second after it was uttered, for the selkie resumed its shrieking, more loudly and piercingly than before. “Nice move, Ray,” Peter quipped as he tried to plug his ears. “Go and give it some more reasons to be mad at us.”

Stantz shrugged, a resigned, “Oh, well, it’s too late now,” gesture. Anticipating the worst, the four eliminators tightened their grips on their weapons (as if they honestly believed it would do any good, considering their batting average, thus far). Without warning, the phantom dove toward its prisoners, just barely missing them; it turned and then sped toward the house. Peter and Winston both fired at it, now that Ray and Alexandra were in the clear; both missed.

The selkie flew straight for the cellar doors, vanished through them, and, just as the humans were beginning to suspect they’d lost it for good, came screaming back, again rocketing straight for his former captives. Stantz tried to hold it off with an over-hasty shot; instead, he again fried several twigs off the already abused tree while the selkie, unimpeded, went directly to Alexandra, its long ectoplasmic fingers clutching at her clothes.

Disgusted — and not about to let the thing haul her off without a fight — Ray grabbed her shoulders and pulled back, so hard that he caused both of them to stumble and fall. As it had before, the selkie, seemingly surprised, backed off and hovered over them.

But this time, when Peter and Winston and Egon opened fire, the specter didn’t move, didn’t even try to break free. In fact, they all could have sworn that, just before it was sucked into the trap, the selkie looked at the three of them with an expression which could only be described as gratitude — deeply *sad* gratitude, but gratitude nonetheless.

“I don’t get it,” Peter admitted when it was all over while he collected the trap, Winston let Janine know the operation had been a success, and both Egon and Ray helped a very shaken Alexandra off the flagstones. “It was almost like... like the thing *wanted* us to catch it, all of a sudden. Why?”

“Who knows?” Winston shrugged. “I mean, who really understands the minds of ghosts — especially ones that were never human in the first place?”

“Maybe it was just getting tired of the chase,” Ray speculated, placing one hand on Alexandra’s shoulder to steady her after Egon had given her a hand up. As she straightened, something small fell from her lap and hit the terrace deck with an audible *clink*. All three looked down at it. It appeared to be a small drawstring bag made of rough green cloth.

“Yours?” Egon asked of his sister.

“Not that I recall,” she replied.

“Not mine, either,” Ray said as he bent to retrieve it, then opened it. All three peered inside, and gasped.

“What is it?” Peter wanted to know, his curiosity piqued by the expressions of extreme astonishment on their faces.

In reply, Ray spilled the contents into one palm, a handful of small round objects that glittered unmistakably in the light from the broken doors. The bag contained a minor fortune in antique gold pieces.

“Holy—!” Winston gasped, too stunned for more articulate words.

“Does this mean we get paid after all?” Peter queried, backing off with a grin when all three of his partners replied with disapproving glares.

“No, it means Alex gets to fix the damage we and selkie did to her house. Where did that come from?” Egon asked at his most intensely curious, no less surprised than Winston but in better command of his voice.

“I don’t have the slightest idea,” the blonde musician was honest enough to admit.

“But I do,” Ray confessed, sounding vaguely pleased with himself. The questioning stares from his companions were enough to prompt an explanation. “It’s all in the song. *‘Then he has taken a purse of gold/ and he has put it upon her knee/ saying, ‘Give to me my little young son/ and take thee up thy nurse’s fee.’*”

From the blank looks surrounding him, that did nothing whatsoever to relieve the others’ confusion. He grinned. “Don’t you see? From everything we know about them, selkies live by a very strict code of ethics. They trick young women into bearing their children for them, since there are no female selkies, but they always offer recompense for the time and effort the women spent caring for the boys ‘til they’re old enough to be taken back to the selkie home settlement — the ‘nurse’s fee’ mentioned in the song. Jessica Owens must’ve taken the gold her selkie offered, but somehow managed to keep him from taking the child — which the selkie probably interpreted as an even bigger insult than if she’d just refused to give him the boy out of motherly love. Apparently, she never spent the money, or never had a chance to before they all died in the fire. I guess it’s been hidden in the house ever since, and the selkie could sense where it was.”

“That would explain the second PKE source I found in the cellar,” Egon confirmed. “I completely forgot about it after the selkie hit me over the head with the basement door. It might even explain why he was willing to come out in the daylight, if he’d confused me for Alexandra and thought I was going after the gold.”

“But why would he give it to us now?” Alexandra wondered, her puzzlement only slightly lessened.

“Perhaps in payment for wrongfully harassing you,” her brother suggested, “or perhaps because he’d been just as confused as you were, having spent a hundred years not knowing what had happened to his son. He might’ve been glad to hear someone finally tell him the truth.”

“Maybe,” Zeddemore conceded, “but that doesn’t explain why he just gave up like that at the end, and let us trap him without a fight.”

“Sure it does, Winston,” Ray opined. “He couldn’t rest until he’d avenged himself against the person who dishonored him and killed him — but since she was dead, too, luring Alexandra to her death would’ve solved nothing, and only increased his dishonor. But sometimes, spirits are so powerfully bound to the place of their death, they can’t peacefully disperse even once they know vengeance is no longer an option. If he knew that, he had to have known that his only alternative to spending the rest of forever haunting this property was to let us catch him and do with him what we would. Even the possibility of oblivion had to seem more attractive to him than the prospect of being doomed to an eternity with no hope of rest.”

“Yeah,” Peter chimed in, hefting the trap. “He may not like the containment unit any better’n this stretch of beach, but after a hundred years or so, the change of scenery alone ought to be refreshing.”

“There,” Egon announced a week or so later, as, back at the firehouse, he closed the catch of a slender watch-like device about his sister’s wrist. Alexandra eyed it curiously for a while, then raised one eyebrow in a familial gesture silently requesting an explanation. Her brother obliged. “The field test we did on my aura-damping apparatus was so successful, I was able to refine it and condense the circuitry enough to make this considerably more portable version for you. With this, you ought to be able to go anywhere you want at any time without ever again having to worry about harassment from local supernatural entities.”

She studied the device once more with renewed, if slightly doubt-tinged, respect. “You’re sure it will work?” she asked, her doubts unallayed by the way in which Slimer was still staring at her, worshipfully, as he’d done from the moment she’d entered the firehall.

“Of course it will. But you have to turn it on, first.”

There was such a teacher-to-student chiding in his instruction, she could feel herself blushing in embarrassment. “Of course,” she agreed, then sought and found the appropriate button, which she pushed. She felt a pang of disappointment when she noticed that Slimer had not stopped staring at her, but passed quickly as his interest visibly waned, to be replaced by a considerably more characteristic curiosity over the sounds of someone — Peter, specifically — moving around in the kitchen.

The physicist seemed as pleased as she was. “Just don’t let the battery run down” he advised, “bring it around every so often so I can replace any worn parts and make sure it’s still functioning properly — and if you *do* have any new problems, call, for heaven’s sake! I’m sure that if Ray’s twin-telepathy theory is correct, it must only function at times of extreme stress, so I certainly can’t realize you’re having difficulties if you won’t *tell* me. And I don’t think either of us *really* want a repeat of that week from hell.”

She laughed, in full agreement. “Thanks, little brother,” she said, hugging him with relieved and delighted sincerity as the green ghost floated out of the room, having completely lost any interest in the woman. “I knew that if I waited long enough, you’d find a way to lick this problem.”

“Yeah, thanks a lot, Egon,” Peter piped up, sincerely sarcastic. He stepped into the kitchen arch, clutching an empty coffee pot in a hand that was thoroughly coated with slime. “Couldn’t you have at least waited ‘til I was out of the kitchen before turning that thing on?”

Spengler shrugged. “Is it my fault that Slimer happens to find you naturally irresistible?”

Venkman was not amused; Alexandra was, but she tried not to be overly obvious about it to save the man some small shred of dignity. “Very cute,” he grumbled, and reached back into the kitchen to grab a towel and wipe off the sticky ectoplasm. “How come you two’re decked out to kill?” he asked curiously, having noticed that his partner was wearing his best suit, and Alexandra was attired in a similarly formal fashion. “Are we dressing for dinner tonight? What’s the occasion?”

“Dinner at the Plaza,” the musician provided, “and we really should be leaving soon. It’s getting late.”

The psychologist frowned. “You’re going out to dinner at a swanky place like that with your own brother?” His nose wrinkled with distaste. “That’s a big mistake, if you ask me....”

“No one asked you,” Egon pointed out, a quip Peter found no more amusing than his last. “But if you must know, I’m actually escorting Janine, not Alex.”

Venkman heard the explanation and politely refused to believe his ears. “You? Going out with Janine? *Willingly?*” He clutched at his heart, his pantomime histrionically exaggerated. “Someone call an ambulance — I may die of shock....”

Spengler seemed incapable of understanding his reaction. “Why? I owed her a favor for helping us with Alexandra’s case, and this is how she asked to be repaid. All in all, I find it a perfectly reasonable request — and I don’t know where you’ve gotten this notion that I dislike Janine, Peter. I’m actually rather fond of her.”

“Oh, yeah, right,” Venkman drawled, his green eyes rolling in total disbelief. He was about to cite any number of occasions on which the physicist had apparently snubbed their receptionist’s attentions in favor of science, but was interrupted before he could get out the first example.

“Is everyone ready, yet?” the redhead asked as she came up the stairs, resplendent in a stylish green outfit and becoming hairstyle that made Peter think twice about her being interesting only as a competent office manager. “The reservations are for eight, it’s quarter after seven, and the cab should be here any minute.”

“I get it,” the psychologist said to Alexandra, figuring he had it scoped out. “As long as you were in town, they asked you to go with them. But you know, a lady shouldn’t have to see the Big Apple without an escort....” There was more than a hint of suggestion in his remark.

The smile she gave him was both wry and sweet. “Well, we’re not going out to see the city — and I won’t exactly be unescorted.”

“Let me rephrase that. No classy lady should have to out to dinner with her own brother and his date, especially not when he’s about as interesting as an accounting lecture.”

“But—”

The sound of, “Okay, I’m ready,” curtailed the discussion as Ray came hurrying down the spiral staircase from the third floor, also wearing his best suit and tie. “Sorry it took so long, but I couldn’t find any matching socks — come to think of it, I haven’t been able to find any all well, not since Peter started pilfering mine....”

“I did *not* pilfer them,” Venkman protested. “I only — borrowed ‘em, ‘til I get my laundry done. Are you trying to tell me she—” He pointed at Alexandra, sounding utterly aghast. “—actually agreed to go out on a date with *you*?” The same accusing finger singled out Ray.

“Yeah,” the occultist acknowledged blithely, blushing a bit since it hadn’t occurred to him that this was a date until Peter pointed it out. “And we’d better hurry up, too. Winston and Lydia are supposed to meet us there—”

“*WAIT JUST ONE DARNED SECOND!*” Peter bellowed as they all started for the stairs. Everyone froze.

“You don’t have to shout, Peter,” Egon told him helpfully, like a parent making the suggestion to an uninformed three-year-old.

The psychologist tried to adopt a slightly more reasonable (and less thunderous) tone. “Am I supposed to understand that all six of you made plans for a night out and didn’t even ask me if I wanted to come?” The question ended with a distinct whimper.

“They weren’t exactly plans,” Ray corrected, shrugging. “It only came up this afternoon.”

“*When?* I was around all day, and I don’t remember anyone saying anything about going out to dinner....”

“Of course you don’t,” Egon replied, perfectly unruffled by the insinuations of deliberate exclusion in Peter’s remarks. “You were taking a nap at the time, even though you were supposed to be doing the laundry.”

Though that observation was unarguably accurate, Venkman nonetheless reacted with a very miffed expression. Alexandra tried to mitigate the situation. “It’s really my fault, I suppose,” she offered diplomatically. “I’d thought I

might like to stay and have dinner here, since I don't plan on coming into the city very often, and since Ray and I had been having such a wonderful time discussing the Child Ballads, Janine thought it would be nice if we went with them to the Plaza. I didn't realize she and Egon had already made plans for this evening. And it turns out that I know Mr. Zeddemore's girlfriend from the year I spent at Julliard, and when he mentioned that we might like to see each other again.... Well, before I knew it, reservations were being changed, Janine and I were out shopping for a new dress, and everyone seemed to be coming along."

"Not *everyone*," Peter pouted, mortally wounded.

"I guess nobody remembered to mention it to you 'cause you weren't there," Ray confessed. "Sorry, Pete, we didn't *mean* to leave you out. Just got caught up in the excitement of finding out that Alex knew Lydia an' all that. You can still come along if you want to, y'know." His offer was undeniably genuine.

"Oh, right," the psychologist snorted sarcastically, "like the Plaza's the sort of place that'll just let you drag up a chair and change your reservations at the last second."

"They'd do it if we told 'em we're the Ghostbusters. They still owe us for helping 'em out in time for that big money wedding, last June."

"And be the only one there without a date?" He shuddered at the very thought. "No thanks. That's not the sort of image my adoring public deserves to see, and I wouldn't dream of disappointing them." He raised his chin dramatically, playing the martyr role to the hilt. "No, you guys just go on along without me. I'll be fine."

Egon accepted those remarks as he would tabloid headlines, with complete disbelief. "Are you sure?"

But Venkman was not about to accept what he perceived as charity. "Sure I'm sure. Someone around here has to be the self-sacrificing one, after all, stay behind to keep an eye on things, answer the phones, put business before pleasure, tend to the ectological needs of others..."

"There's the cab!" Janine called, hearing the honking horn from below. "Come on, let's get going or we'll be late!"

"...carry on the cause of parapsychological research, put the happiness of his friends before his personal desires, his own trivial, unworthy..."

"Good night, Peter," they said in unison, already on their way down the stairs.

"...selfish, unimportant, meaningless, petty, undeserving, self-centered, rotten, scum-sucking, insignificant..."

He kept up the litany for five full minutes, until Slimer did exactly what his name implied to shut him up.

The End