



*Unbound (preview)*

By Jim C. Hines



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**Unbound**

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## Chapter 1

**T**ed Boyer—hunter, fisherman, vampire, and general pain in my ass—was gone.

Dirt and gravel crunched beneath my sneakers as I crossed the empty lot where his yellow double-wide trailer once stood. A rectangle of flattened earth, marked with twin stripes of cement, marked the site of Boyer's former home.

There was no sign of the secret basement he had dug to hide his coffin and store his blood supply. Wherever Boyer had fled to, he wasn't planning to come back.

"There are weeds starting to poke through the dirt." Short, heavysset, and stronger than five humans combined, Lena Greenwood looked as tired as I felt. She crouched on the cement and touched one of the tiny green shoots. "He left at least a week ago."

There had been a time, back when I was a field agent for the Porters, when I would have been thrilled to see Ted gone from Marquette, and preferably gone from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Let someone else take on the responsibility of checking in on him and blowing the bomb in his skull if his blood tests ever showed he had gone back to feeding on Boy Scouts.

But Ted was a lifelong Yooper, stubborn as hell and determined to live out his afterlife here in Marquette. I had resigned myself to sharing the peninsula with him until one of us was dead and buried for good.

"Do you think he left willingly?" Lena asked.

I shrugged. Ted didn't exactly have a lot of friends, and he had collected a decent list of enemies over his lifetimes. If one of them had used the chaos last month as cover to come after Ted, he could be dead by now. Deader. But why would they bother to haul away his trailer and his truck? More likely, he simply wanted to get away before all hell broke loose.

Some would say hell had broken a month earlier, when my home town of Copper River ended up in the crossfire of a three-way magical battle between the Porters, the *Bì Shēng de dú zhě*—a group thought to have been wiped out more than five hundred years ago by the aforementioned Porters—and an army of mindless ghosts fighting to return to this world to kill...well, pretty much everything.

At least thirty-four of my friends and neighbors, had died in that battle. Then there were the Porters and werewolves who had fallen trying to protect Copper River in a battle that promised to be merely the precursor of things to come.

"Keep looking." I crouched by a pile of fossilized beagle shit, half-hidden by weeds. I stared at that pile as if the droppings that turned this part of the grass into a minefield, as though I could use them to divine where Ted had gone, but all they told me was that we were too late.

I continued to search. Cigarette butts littered the ground by the woods beyond the driveway, where Ted used to work during the night, skinning and butchering whatever game he brought back. I found a couple of old beer cans by the trees.

"Isaac..." Lena studied my face, then shook her head. "Never mind."

Anger tightened my jaw. I knew what she was going to say, and I didn't want to hear it.

The manager of the trailer park said Ted had simply vanished. He had left an envelope full of cash to pay off his bills, which was more than I would have expected from Ted. More likely, he had simply messed with the manager's mind to make him believe everything was squared away. That would better fit Ted's style and budget. "I need to find him."

"How? By staring at dog crap all day? This must be a new school of magic I hadn't heard about. My lover, the fecomancer."

On another day, I would have smiled. That was before I had lost a fourteen-year-old girl to the Ghost Army. A girl who was potentially more powerful than any libriomancer in history, with the possible exception of Johannes Gutenberg.

A girl who had been under my care and protection.

Jeneta Aboderin had the ability to perform libromancy using electronic media. The rest of us needed printed books to shape our magic. We could reach into the pages to create anything from futuristic laser pistols to fizzy lifting drinks from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, as long as we had a physical copy of the book.

Jeneta could pull the mockingjay pin from *The Hunger Games* out of her smartphone, and carried an entire library around on her e-reader. Nobody fully understood how she did it, nor did we know the limits of her power.

I searched the dirt driveway next. This was my third time studying the dark patches of oil that had leaked from Ted's old Ford Bronco. I knew a Porter who could have used that stain not only to track Ted's truck, but to bring it to a screeching halt wherever he might be. Or there were books whose magic could help me to find him myself...if I had still been a member of the Porters.

If Johannes Gutenberg hadn't locked my mind to prevent me from ever using magic again.

I closed my eyes and fought off a now-familiar surge of despair.

"There's nothing here," Lena said softly.

"I know." I took a long, slow breath, trying to ease the walnut-sized lump in my throat. "We'll have to find someone else to help me. Ted isn't the only one who can touch people's minds."

"Would you really want that man messing around in your nightmares?"

"I saw her, Lena." Two nights before, I had jerked awake, my body dripping with sweat, my hands reaching helplessly for power I no longer possessed. For two days that memory had stalked me, taunting me from every corner.

"Jeneta?"

"The woman who took her." The name darted into view like a dragonfly and vanished again before I could grasp it. "I know who she is, but something's blocking the memory. I need help. Someone who can help me remember."

Wisps of black hair hung over Lena's red-veined eyes. Her lips pressed together with worry and helplessness, along with a dash of skepticism. It was an expression I had come to know well over the past month.

She wore a snug green T-shirt with the sleeves and collar cut off. The words "Tree Hugger" were written in yellow block letters across her

chest. She was armed with a pair of curved wooden swords—Japanese bokken—thrust through the belt of her cutoff jeans.

Heat flared at my hip. From inside the rectangular metal cage clipped to my belt, Smudge watched the road like he was expecting a horde of zombies to claw up through the pavement and devour us. Faint red flames rippled across the fire-spider's back. A layer of fire-resistant black fiberglass on the side of the cage prevented him burning holes through my pants.

Lena moved to the opposite side of the lot while I returned to the relative safety of my car. The protective enchantments on the black TR-6 convertible were stronger than anything I could have prepared myself, even when I could still manipulate magic. I waited by the passenger door and searched for whatever had set Smudge off this time.

There were no zombies, only a lone man carrying an aluminum baseball bat. He had a good five inches and fifty pounds on me, and a scowl like I'd just pissed in his Budweiser. "What are you folks snooping around for?"

Normally I would have tried to talk my way around this guy, making up a story that explained our presence without raising suspicions. But I no longer had any reason to care about keeping a low profile, and in the words of a coworker, my give-a-shit gauge was stuck on Empty these days. "Ted Boyer. Have you seen him?"

He rested the bat on his shoulder, wrapping both hands around the black-taped handle. "Ted said there might be people nosing around in his business, looking to give him a hard time."

"Do you know where we could find him?" Lena hadn't touched her weapons. Against a man armed with a bat, she wouldn't need them.

"What I know is that you'd better get the hell out of here by the time I count to five."

I reached into the car, popped the glove box, and pulled out a gun. The man's eyes went huge. "Do you know where Ted Boyer went?" I repeated.

He shook his head. "He wouldn't say."

"And did Ted ask you to threaten anyone who came along, or was that your idea?" I pulled the trigger without waiting for an answer. Lightning spat from the barrel, spinning a cocoon of electricity around his body. He collapsed face-first in the grass, the bat dropping to the ground beside him.

"Isaac, what the *hell*?" Lena ran toward him.

“The gun was on setting one.” I blinked away the afterimage of jagged light. Ozone bit my nostrils. “He’ll be fine.”

I had created my sidearm from a novel called *Time Kings*, back before Gutenberg locked my magic. Disguised to look like an ordinary revolver, the shock-gun had a two-stage firing mechanism. First it shot a tiny ionized pellet toward the target. A split second later, it brought the lightning, which could deliver anything from a light stunning burst to a full-on, Earth-shattering kaboom.

“You’re sure about that?” Lena was checking the man’s pulse and respiration. “You checked to make sure he didn’t have a pacemaker before you electrocuted him? Reviewed his medical records for any preexisting conditions?”

I felt like she had reached into my gut and tied my intestines in a knot. “He looked healthy...” That was a stupid excuse, and I knew it. “Is he all right?”

“He seems to be, considering you just *shot him with a lightning bolt*.” She brushed her fingers over the singed spot on his shirt. “What were you thinking?”

“That he didn’t know anything, and we didn’t have time for this.”

“Oh, do you have plans tonight? Another exciting evening of hiding in your office with your books and shutting away the rest of the world?”

I wanted to apologize and I wanted her to keep arguing with me and I wanted her to leave me the hell alone. I didn’t know *what* I wanted anymore, except to find Jeneta and fix the things that had gone so damned wrong.

I circled around to the driver’s seat. “There’s nothing here. Let’s go.”

Like a paroled felon, Ted was supposed to let the Porters know if he moved, but I no longer had access to the Porter database. He might not have bothered, trusting them to be too preoccupied with the Ghost Army to worry about a lone vampire. If so, he’d better pray he found a black market magic user to deactivate the bomb in his skull before anyone else noticed he was missing.

I unclipped Smudge’s cage and let him climb onto the dashboard. A stone trivet protected the dash from his heat. He watched me closely, his body low against the trivet. For a big black-and-red spider with a penchant for setting things on fire, Smudge could be surprisingly expressive. He wasn’t worried about random strangers with baseball bats anymore. *I* was the one making him anxious.

Tension drained from my body, guilt and exhaustion replacing anger. I let my head thump against the steering wheel. I should apologize. For scaring Smudge. For snapping at Lena.

For a lot of things.

“We’ll find someone else.” Lena sat down beside me. “You’ve got other vampires who owe you favors, not to mention the Porters—”

“None of the Porters are allowed to talk to me,” I reminded her. “I’m not exactly on the best of terms with the undead, either. The last time I asked them for help, I got several of their people dusted, including a rather powerful ghost-talker.”

“The Porters are searching for Jeneta too.” She didn’t say anything more, but those seven words carried the weight of hours of previous arguments.

What could one librarian with no magic of his own do that Gutenberg’s people couldn’t? The Porters had magic and a worldwide network of hundreds of libromancers and other magic-users to help them track Jeneta down.

To which I always replied, “*Then why haven’t they found her yet?*”

I gunned the engine and got the hell out of there.

Driving into Copper River meant passing one reminder after another of the damage the Ghost Army had done to my home. The Porters had repaired much of the destruction, hoping to bury evidence of werewolves and wendigos and magic. They couldn’t bring back the dead, but they had rebuilt homes and rewritten memories.

Sometimes I wished they had rewritten mine. To the right was the drugstore, where Becky Luhtala’s body had been found behind the counter. A block away was the intersection where Phil Gutzman had died when his truck collided with a metal dragon made of magically animated mining equipment.

Every road conjured memories of metal insects, their serrated pincers tearing my skin, or white-furred monsters smashing through doors and windows. I remembered every detail save the identity of the one responsible.

By the time I reached my street, my neck and shoulders were tense as steel. I felt like I was driving through a war zone. This was where the trees had turned against my neighbors, crushing roofs and ripping through homes. A dryad named Deifilia, another servant of the

Ghost Army, would have tortured and murdered everyone on my block if Lena hadn't killed her.

Despite everything the Porters had done to erase the damage, "For Sale" signs had appeared in five different yards.

My own home was untouched. From the outside, the dirty aluminum siding and metal roof showed no sign of anything unusual.

It was another story entirely once you stepped inside. Books, maps, and haphazardly organized printouts covered the kitchen table. My laptop sat in the center, a single orange LED blinking wearily. It looked like the laptop had gotten drunk and vomited up a copious amount of paperwork and sticky-notes.

I returned Smudge to his tank, a large terrarium sitting on the edge of the kitchen counter. I dropped a pair of crickets in with him, replaced the lid, and turned on the heat lamp. He raced over to dig a little nest in the obsidian gravel in the center of the light.

Lena grabbed a package of Twinkies from the freezer. She took the majority of her sustenance through her tree, and as far as anyone could tell, her human diet had absolutely no effect on her health or physique. She took shameless advantage of that fact. Though why she preferred her Twinkies frozen was a mystery. She tore open the package and held one out to me.

"I'm not hungry." At the edge of my vision, a red light blinked at me from my phone's base unit, signaling a waiting message.

Lena followed my attention, and her forced cheer vanished. "You don't have to listen right now."

"Yes, I do." We both knew who the message was from. I considered deleting it, but I owed them at least this much. And the longer I waited, the longer that blinking light would taunt me. I jabbed the button.

The machine beeped, and then a woman began to speak in a British accent. It was a voice I had come to know as well as my own. "Mister Vainio, this is Paige Aboderin again. I know you said you'd call if you learned anything more about Jeneta, but it's been weeks since we last heard from you."

Buried somewhere on the kitchen table was a copy of the paperwork Paige and Mmadukaaku Aboderin had signed earlier this year, giving their daughter permission to spend the summer at Camp Aazhawigiizhigokwe. Another form allowed Jeneta to work with me as part of a "summer internship" at the Copper River Library, an internship

that had mostly involved sitting around in my back yard practicing magic while I tried to understand her power.

“We’ve hired a private investigator to look for Jeneta. He has copies of everything you’ve shared with us, but he might be calling you to follow up.”

Jeneta should have been safe. Camp Aazhawigiizhigokwe was far enough from Copper River to keep her out of the fighting, and the Porters had assigned a field agent named Myron Worster to keep an eye on her, just in case.

They had found Worster a day later, wandering aimlessly through the Detroit Metro airport with no memory of who Jeneta was or where she might have gone. He recalled picking *someone* up from the camp, but the details were wiped so thoroughly from his mind that not even the strongest Porters had been able to retrieve them.

“I’m hoping to come back to Michigan by the end of the month,” continued Paige Aboderin. “We think...we hope the police might do more to find her if we meet with them in person again.”

They had flown out immediately following Jeneta’s disappearance. Paige stayed in Detroit, while Mmadukaaku rented a hotel room here in Copper River so he could talk to everyone who had seen or interacted with Jeneta in the days before her disappearance.

Every time I spoke to them, it got harder to lie, to pretend I knew nothing about what had happened to their daughter, or to try to reassure them that Jeneta would be all right.

They never blamed me. Even though I was the reason Jeneta had come to Copper River. I was the Porter assigned to work with her, to try to understand her magic and teach her to control it.

I was the reason the Ghost Army had found her. Whatever she became, whatever they did with her power...

“The investigator thinks Jeneta is still in Michigan. We know she didn’t get on any departing flights.”

No, we didn’t. We knew only that the airport had no record of Jeneta *boarding* a flight. Given her magic, and the power our enemies commanded, that meant nothing. She could be anywhere in the world.

I forced myself to listen to Paige’s slow, precise words. I could easily imagine her standing at the front of a classroom, lecturing her college seniors about poetry.

“Mmadukaaku believes—” Her voice broke. “He said there could have been a mistake when the coroner was identifying the bodies in Copper River last month. He thinks our daughter might have been buried.

I'm planning to look through all of their reports and photographs. I hoped you might be willing to help. You're familiar with...with what happened, and Mmadukaaku said you read faster than anyone he's met."

She sounded as determined as ever to find her daughter, but the strength in her words had grown brittle. I couldn't imagine how hard it must be to go to bed each night without knowing. To pour every resource you had into trying to find your child, knowing it might not be enough to bring her home. To admit it might be too late to save her.

This was the first time I had heard either of them acknowledge the possibility that Jeneta could be dead. They might be right. But if so, it hadn't happened during the attack on Copper River.

"Please call if you learn anything at all." She left her number. I had memorized it weeks before.

The message ended. The machine saved it automatically, along with the rest.

"It's not your fault," said Lena.

I sat down at the table, started up the laptop, and dug out a wrinkled list of all departing flights from Detroit Metro Airport on the day Jeneta vanished. Tiny check marks covered the list, along with notes about my conversations with flight attendants, pilots, and a handful of passengers I had managed to track down.

There were too many possibilities, particularly when you looked at connecting flights. I had no way of knowing the Ghost Army's plans, and without more information, no destination was any more or less likely than the rest. All I really had was an eight-second clip from a security camera, showing Jeneta swiping an enormous cinnamon roll from the Starbucks shop in the airport.

I studied one of the printouts, a grainy photo showing Jeneta reaching for the roll. She wore the same clothes she had at camp, and I didn't see that she had brought any luggage, though it could have been outside of the camera's field of vision.

Jeneta had her phone in her other hand. The people around her appeared dazed, staring in random directions at nothing in particular, suggesting she had used magic. Or that whatever had taken her was able to use her magic, which was far more frightening.

"How long since you've eaten?" asked Lena.

I looked at an airline map, trying to match the location of the Starbucks to terminals with flights that departed after these images were taken. "I grabbed a sandwich at lunch."

“You mean this sandwich?” She picked up an abandoned plate from beside the sink and poked at a sad, barely-touched stack of bologna, cheese, and lettuce on wheat bread. “I’m ordering pizza. You’re going to eat some. End of discussion.”

With a sigh, I set the map aside and pulled a book on self-hypnosis from another stack. I had picked it up yesterday morning from the library. Torn scraps of paper—makeshift bookmarks—protruded from the top like tiny white feathers, each one marking a technique I thought might help me to retrieve the elusive memory from my dreams. None had worked yet.

I needed to hack my own brain. I *knew* I had seen the face of our enemy, the person or thing behind the Ghost Army, but that image had been cut out of my thoughts, leaving only a ragged-edged pit filled with frustration.

Had our enemy hidden themselves from me, or was this a side effect of the invisible padlock Gutenberg had snapped through my mind to stop me from using my magic? I was only aware of one person who had successfully bypassed one of Gutenberg’s locks, and I wasn’t quite ready to try that technique. Not yet. I preferred to save do-it-yourself trepanning for a last resort.

“Did you want bread sticks too?” Lena asked.

“Whatever.” I stood and fetched Smudge from his tank. “I’ll be out back.”

If I stayed inside, I’d end up taking my frustrations out on her. Better for both of us if I spent this time alone. I would have left Smudge behind too, if not for the fact that his presence repelled the mosquitoes.

A ring of oak trees transformed the ground into a wrinkled tangle of roots and dirt. If they grew much more, the roots would start to undermine the foundation of the house. Lena’s oak stood at the center of the circle, a queen protected by her guardsmen.

Her tree bore the scars of last month’s battle in the form of broken branches, gouges in the bark, and blackened streaks of dead, cracked wood.

It was here Lena had killed the dryad she called her sister. She had stabbed Deifilia with her sword, pinning her to the central oak. She stayed with Deifilia as she died, as the tree slowly enveloped her body, a reclamation that was simultaneously touching and horrifying.

And it was here that rabid minds of things long-gone from our world had clawed at my thoughts. Where I had lost the ability to distinguish fiction from reality. Where I had seen...something. *Someone*.

I stepped between the outer trees. The air within was warm and still. The grove muffled the sounds of the outside world, though I had never figured out exactly how or why that worked. The leaves turned the sky a deep green.

What had the Porters been doing for the past month? They had all but vanished after completing their repairs to the town. I wasn't exactly getting their newsletter anymore, and the few friends I had tried to contact said Gutenberg was threatening to personally turn anyone who spoke to me into a garden gnome. I suspected they had somebody keeping an eye on Lena and me, possibly from one of the now-vacant homes on my street, but beyond that, I knew nothing.

Given the letter Bi Wei had written to the world, revealing the existence of magic and the Porters, they were probably busy increasing security on their archives or transferring the books to other locations. How many Porters were busy working damage control when they could have been out looking for Jeneta, or coming up with ways to stop the rest of the Ghost Army from entering our world?

I understood Bi Wei's reasoning. The Porters weren't just hunting Jeneta and the ghosts. They were looking for her as well, and for every surviving student of Bi Sheng. The more Bi Wei did to divert the Porters' energies, the safer they would be.

I touched a pale scar running down the side of Lena's oak. The bark peeled back, revealing a red cloth-bound book. I gently slid the book free, then sat with my back against the trunk of her tree. Smudge scurried from my shoulder to stalk a purple-tinged moth.

With a sigh, I opened the book and began to read. The first section of the book was in Mandarin, and had been block-printed onto the rice paper pages centuries ago. Lena had penned the rest by hand.

Bi Wei and her fellow students had used books like this to preserve themselves after Gutenberg's attack five hundred years earlier. Bi Wei had given this one to Lena in the hope that it might preserve her as well.

Lena Greenwood was literally magic brought to life, having been "born" from the pages of a lousy fantasy novel called *Nymphs of Neptune*. The nymphs in that book were little more than sexual wish-fulfillment for overly hormonal teenaged boys. The nymphs were written to mold their personalities to the desires of their lovers.

Years after her creation, Lena had found and fallen in love with Doctor Nidhi Shah. They were together for years before they learned the

truth about Lena's origins. By then, Lena had become exactly what Nidhi fantasized about: a magical superheroine, strong and clever and powerful.

Enter Isaac Vainio, magic-using librarian. Lena's relationship with me had introduced an element of conflict into her existence. For the first time, she wasn't defined solely by one lover, but was shaped by us both. Pulled between our overlapping desires, she discovered choice. It was the closest thing she had known to true freedom.

Nidhi and I both struggled with the ethical implications of our relationship. Nidhi might not have known Lena's origins in the beginning, but she *had* been Lena's therapist. She had chosen to begin a romantic relationship with a former patient. Had Lena been human, that choice could have cost Nidhi her license. As it was, she had been severely reprimanded by the Porters, something she hadn't admitted to me until recently.

Lena was what she was. Not even Gutenberg could change that. If not Nidhi and myself, she would have no choice but to find someone else, perhaps someone who would use her as cruelly as her first lover had.

Lena said she had pursued me deliberately, knowing me well enough to guess at my desires, and choosing to let those desires shape her. But the fact remained, she was bound to the two of us, and when we died, the person she had become would die with us, subsumed by whoever she became next.

This book from Bi Wei might change that. If it worked, the things Lena had written in these pages would one day define her, allowing her to choose for herself who she would be.

But the basic tenets of libriomancy still applied. A book had no power without a reader. I had read this book almost every night for the past month, trading it back and forth with Nidhi. We had no way of knowing if our efforts made a difference, or if the book could truly change Lena's nature, but it was the best hope she had found.

I rubbed my eyes and tried to focus. Every time I opened a book, part of me expected to touch the power humming within the text, waiting to be used. Instead, the book was dead, a stiff corpse of paper with dried ink for blood.

"That image is too damn depressing, even for me." I thumped the back of my head against the tree, as if the impact might reset my mood or jar loose my missing memories. When that failed, I turned the page and started reading.

I had gotten through about fifty pages when I heard footsteps beside me. I dropped the book and yanked my shock-gun from its holster,

even as my brain pointed out that Smudge would have alerted me to any true threat.

“A librarian should be more careful with rare and valuable texts.” Nidhi Shah stopped a short distance before the grove and nodded pointedly at the fallen book. She wore a black blazer over a blue shirt, with a necklace made up of interlinked copper disks the size of silver dollars. The cuffs of her black trousers brushed blue sneakers. She must have come straight from the office. I hadn’t realized she was working weekends now.

While I picked up the book, she entered the grove and sat down across from me, crossing her feet at the ankles. I could feel her studying my posture, the tension in my neck and jaw, the way I had jumped when I heard her approach. Nidhi had been my psychiatrist for years, and even though that relationship had changed, old patterns continued.

“Lena told me about Ted,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

“I can’t blame him for running. A lot of people—and non-people—have gone into hiding to wait for things to blow over. Trouble is, I don’t think it’s going to. Not this time.”

“Gutenberg likes to say most people have no concept of change. Our ‘short-lived perspective and poor intergenerational memory’ create the illusion of stability.” She twisted a braided silver ring on her right hand, a gift from Lena. “How long do you think you can continue—”

“Don’t.” I stared at the dirt, fighting to keep my temper under control. “I’m not a Porter, and you’re not my therapist.”

“I know that.” A hint of pain and reproach edged her next words. “I don’t *have* any Porter clients anymore, remember?”

More than half of Nidhi’s client base had been magical, from a werewolf with crippling anxiety disorder to libromancers who played God so often they started to believe in their own divinity. But in the eyes of the Porters, Nidhi was part of my family. The lover of my lover is my... I don’t know exactly how they classified her, but they had kicked her out the same day they did me.

“If I was your therapist,” she continued, “I’d probably talk about how you’re grieving for your lost magic. Or maybe point out that your insistence on blaming yourself for what happened to Jeneta suggests an unrealistic sense of power, as well as an overly developed ego. I’d also start you on at least fifty milligrams of Zoloft.”

This wasn’t our first time through that particular script. “I’m not suicidal, and if I’m a little depressed, I’d say I’ve got good reason. Right now, the last thing I need is drugs messing up my brain.”

“You think depression hasn’t already done that?” she asked gently.

“If anything screwed up my head, it was Gutenberg.”

“Oh, good. Then we agree your head is screwed up.” Her delivery was perfectly deadpan. She waited a beat, then sighed. “How long has it been since you laughed?”

I shrugged.

“Lena says you’ve been having trouble sleeping, and I can see that you’ve lost weight. How are things going at work?”

“I’ve read the *DSM-V*. I know the diagnostic criteria for depression too,” I snapped. “This is different.”

“I’ve read *Gray’s Anatomy*. That doesn’t make me a surgeon.” She sighed and stood to go. “Oh, I almost forgot what I came out to tell you. I’ve found someone who might be able to help you uncover those dream memories.”

I set Lena’s book aside—carefully this time—and jumped to my feet.

“I haven’t worked with her in a while, but I’ve been keeping up on her research. Best of all, she’s only a few hours away.”

“Who is it?” When she didn’t answer, I folded my arms. “Come on, Nidhi.”

“First, put that book away and come eat. Then I’ll tell you.” She headed toward the deck.

“Since when do therapists use blackmail?” I called out.

She turned around and cocked her head. “Like you said, I’m not your therapist anymore. See you at dinner.”

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