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THE RIGHT TIME

The trouble with prophets is that if they're accurate, the news won't do you any good, and if they aren't accurate, they're no good. Unless, of course, they're more than just prophets...

WALTER BUPP

Illustrated by George Schelling

"Don't let the old goat rattle you, Pheola," I said as we rode the elevator to the penthouse. "He'll try. Just remember, he is the one who has to say O.K. if we are to give you some training."

Her eyes rolled and she moaned softly, clinging to my arm. "Oh, Billy Joe!" she whispered. "I *don't* want to fail you!"

Maragon has some pretty creepy types in his office and the receptionist that day was no exception. She was one of those twitchy hyper-thyroid clairvoyants that he likes to test.

"Don't tell me," the receptionist twitched proudly as we came in. "I know!" She got up from behind her desk and led us to the Grand Master's private office.

I intended to make her guess whom I had with me, but that didn't bother her. "Dr. Walter Bupp and Pheola Rountree," she announced smugly. Clairvoyants live in a condition of perpetual thrill with their powers.

Maragon's penthouse office has glass walls on two sides. He was prowling back and forth in front of his desk, sharply lit by the bright sunlight that streamed in. His gray shock of hair glistened, and his bushy eyebrows shaded his face. He radiated impatience, from the grinding of his square jaw to the fists he had rammed into his hips.

"Lefty," he greeted me, "do they all have to *look* alike? Where did you get *this* scarecrow?"

I could feel Pheola stiffen. I guess no woman, no matter how plain, likes to be reminded of it.

"Same place you dig up those twitchy CV types you have spooking up your outer office," I snapped. "There's nothing the matter with Pheola that three square meals won't cure in a month!"

Maragon grunted. "And just what wonderful power do *you* have, young woman, that makes it worth while for the Lodge to fatten you up?" he demanded.

She had plenty of spunk, I'll say that for her. "I have the power of prophecy, and the gift of healin'," Pheola said, squinting at him.

He barked a laugh at her and went across the thick carpet to sit in his swivel chair. It was a beauty of dark green morocco that matched his Bank of England chairs and leather sofa that was against one of the walls. "What's your favorite prophecy, young woman?" he wanted to know.

Pheola smiled over at me. "Oh, no!" I groaned, but she nodded.

"Billy Joe and I are gettin' married," she told Maragon.

"Billy Joe?" he asked, scowling at me across his desk.

"That's me," I said. "Don't ask me where the name comes from."

"I couldn't care less," Maragon grumped. "Is it true? Are you going to marry this bag of bones?"

I could feel my face getting red. "Not that I know of," I said.

He swung around in his chair to face her. "Young woman, someone has told you how much the Lodge is interested in precognition. You wouldn't walk in here claiming the power if you didn't know we want to find it, and rarely can. But you certainly came ill-prepared. Going to marry Lefty, eh? Why, you can't predict the right time!" He banged his fist on the big slab of walnut. "You're a fake!" he said.

"I *ain't* a fake!" Pheola protested. "We *will* get married!"

"Drag her out, Lefty," Maragon said wearily, with a limp wave of his hand.

"Come on, Pheola," I said, taking her arm with my right hand. I saw no point talking with him any further.

"Lefty!" Maragon exclaimed.

"Yes?"

"You used your right arm! You can't *move* it!"

"I can now," I told the old goat with relish. "Pheola told you she was a healer. Well, she healed me a ... a couple days ago!"

He went for the jugular: "Have you ever done anything like that before, Pheola?" he demanded.

"Mostly small ailin'," she said, squinting and backing away from his desk defensively. "Never nothin' as big as findin' the weak spot in Billy Joe's haid. But I *told* you I had the power of prophecy and the gift of healin'."

I suppose her degree of humility decided him. "She can stay," Maragon said. "Look into this healing thing, Lefty. But, for the love of Mike, don't waste time with her precognition."

Pheola moaned, then keened, and waved her hands in front of her face, as if to ward off a swarm of bees. "My healin' won't do you much good, you nasty old man!" she said in a shrill voice. "You'll git a pain, *sich* a pain," she insisted, pressing her hand to her heart. "It will like to kill you, and it nearly will!"

Maragon laughed at her again. "A young witch!" he proclaimed. "I'll bet you scared half of Posthole County into fits with dark remarks like that. Take her away, Lefty!"

Pheola didn't break her silence until I showed her into the apartment adjoining mine in the Chapter House. The Lodge Building is a hundred stories high, and most of it is devoted to offices that we rent out to doctors, lawyers and the like. We only use a part of the place—there just aren't that many Psis around—and save a few floors for apartments for members permanently assigned, as I am, to Lodge duties.

Pheola stood stiff and unseeing in the apartment, her fists clenched at her sides, plainly in no shape to appreciate her rooms. They were in the usual good taste I always associate with a Psi decorator.



"How could I let you down, Billy Joe!" she said to me, as soon as the door to the corridor had closed behind us.

"Oh, stop it!" I snapped, giving her a shake. "Weren't you ever wrong in a prophecy before?"

She squinted to see me better. "Does it make you hate me?" she asked. "Yes, I've been wrong lots of times," she admitted. "But not about marryin' you. How does he know I'm wrong?"

"He doesn't," I growled. "He just doesn't believe in precognition. What little we see of it in the Lodge is so erratic that you can't count it as a proven Psi power."

"Then maybe I *am* right," she pressed me.

"Not if I can help it," I said sourly. "I'm in no mood to get married. Mostly I want to give you some advice. O.K.?"

She made cow eyes at me. "You know you can, Billy Joe," she said.

"Well," I snarled, "my first suggestion is that you cut out this 'Billy Joe' stuff. My name is Wally Bupp. You can call me Lefty if you want to. I'm not your darlin' Billy."

"I tole the truth and you hate me for it!" she said hotly. "I was afeered of that."

"Afeered!" I sneered. "All that corn pone and chitterlin's dialect! You can cut that out, too, can't you? Wasn't that just part of your local color?"

"Sort of," she admitted, switching to the neutral American dialect. "Yes, I can cut that out, too, Lefty."

"Good. I'm willing to take a couple of chances with that old goat, because I believe in you. I saw you in action in Nevada, and you sold me that you have some Psi powers. We'll work on your healing, as Maragon suggested. But I want to have your precognition tested. Just keep your mouth shut about it here in the Lodge, do you hear?"

She nodded.

"All right," I said. "I'll have to make some arrangements, or Maragon will have my scalp. In the meantime, why don't you fix up so we can go out to dinner?"

She gave me a look of adoration that would have curdled fresh milk. "Oh, Lefty, I'd love that." And then her face fell. "But I don't have a thing to wear!"

I don't think she was exactly a moocher. She *didn't* have anything to wear, when I thought of it. "Sure," I said more mildly. "Well, that's the good part of getting some training here. The Lodge will take care of your needs. Just call the girl on the desk and say you need some clothes. She'll send somebody over from one of the department stores."

Pheola's eyes grew round. Ordinarily she squinted when she wanted to see anything. "What should I get?"

"Start from the skin and work out," I told her. "Tell the department store you'll be working in an office, and that you'll need a couple of cocktail dresses and wraps for evening, too. Get lots of shoes. O.K.?"

Was it ever!

I had an idea that clothes would be quite a change for Pheola. I had met her only three days before, in a Nevada gambling house. She'd made for me like a lode-star, called me her Billy Joe and announced that I would be her next husband. I'll tell you, that was a shocker. I'm not about to marry anybody. She was as tall as I was, which isn't so very much for a man, skinny to the point of emaciation, wearing a "borrowed" dress that didn't fit, and had that unmistakable slatternly look that you associate with white trash. On top of that, she was vain enough about her bucktoothed and pointed-nose features to keep her glasses in her purse, and as a result she went around peering at you from a distance of eight inches to make sure you were the right guy.

But she had Psi powers. She had been hot as a firecracker predicting the roll of dice on the gambling tables, the very dice that I was tipping with telekinesis. Much more important to me

personally, she had announced that she was a healer, and on my dare had "laid hands" on me, and brought my dead right arm to life.

My obligation as a Lodge official was to bring her to the Manhattan Chapter for measurement and training, no matter what the Grand Master felt about the reality of her powers of precognition. Maragon had been about as obstreperous as I had figured. We have a lot of trouble working together, probably because he resents my TK powers. He's good at it, but I'm a good deal better. That's why I'm a Thirty-third Degree member of the Lodge.

Leaving Pheola's new home, I went next door to my own apartment and checked in by phone with Memorial Hospital. Fortunately, I was not on call, and could take a few steps to find out how much PC Pheola really had. I went down to the forty-third floor, where we have our laboratories, and let myself into the data-processing center.

They don't like me to do that. That place is under full temperature and humidity control, and every time an outsider barges in the whole system does nip-ups.

Norty Baskins came scurrying away from a card sorter. "What's this!" he exclaimed. "Oh, it's you, Lefty." His face went solemn with his effort, and I felt a twinge in my ear lobe. I returned the grip, tweaking his ear the same way. He began to smile, realizing that I had felt his lift and was returning it.

"You shouldn't be in here, Lefty," he said. "You know the rules."

"And I know this is the time to break them, Norty," I said. "I've got something really rare for you."

"Rare?"

"This time I've really got one," I insisted. "A precog who can call things with pin-point accuracy."

"Not again, Lefty," he said, disgusted. "Aren't you getting a little tired of striking out on that prediction? You've brought half a dozen flops in here in the last year."

"Not Pheola," I said. "Listen, Norty, I want this girl measured."

"I thought you said she was pin-point accurate," he sneered. "And what does Maragon say?"

I waved a hand at him and walked over to sit on one of the lab stools. He went to the sorter and pulled cards from the bins, joggling them up into one solid stack that he put back in the hopper. But he did not press the "start" button.

"You know, Maragon," I told him. "This girl is hot, and then she's cold. But there is so much accuracy when she's right that I think there's some future to training her. What I want out of you is a measurement of how great her accuracy is."

Norty snorted. "When Maragon doesn't believe it?" he said. "No thanks." He started the card sorter, filling the room with its clatter.

I drew a pair of dice from my pocket. I'm never without the ivories. They are the original instruments of my TK skill. That's how Maragon found me, unconsciously tipping dice in an alley crap game. I threw them out on the table next to the sorter, when the cards had gone through and it fell silent. They came up with a four-three natural.

"Maragon!" I snapped. "You know he doesn't think enough of *your* TK to have your training extended. Well, you and I both know we have done wonders for your grip. Just because he's Grand Master doesn't make him right all the time. I want you to test this girl, and I think she has as much right to the facts as you have to the training I've been giving you under the table all these months!"

"Blackmail," he said sadly. "Extortion!"

"So I'm extorting some work out of you," I agreed. "The only question is whether you will pay."

"What do you want?" Baskins asked glumly.

"I want you to make this woman predict a series, a number of series, and I want you to use your computers here to tell me on what basis her accuracy varies. You can do that, can't you?"

He nodded, staring at the dice on the table. "If I wasn't so sure you can help me develop my TK, Lefty," he said, "I'd never do this. All right, sneak her down here and I'll get her to PC some weather information for a month or so."

"Weather?" I said. "Why the weather?"

"You'll see when I show the results," he said. "Roll those dice again. I swear I felt your lift that last time."

I made a few other calls around the building to catch up on what had been going on while I was

in Nevada. Our formal organization is lousy, because Maragon is a one-man show. You just have to rely on gossip, what the CV's pick up and what leaks by telepathy, to know all the internal politics of the Lodge. I wouldn't want you to think that Psi's are more devious or Machiavellian than normals, but sometimes they act it.

By the time I reached up to tap on Pheola's door, it opened in front of me, and a stylishly dressed young lady came out, smiling, with Pheola standing in the doorway behind her.

"Lefty!" Pheola said happily.

"Is this your fiancé?" the girl said to Pheola.

"No!" I said. "I'm her chiropractor, and I'm about to straighten out some vertebrae in her neck!"

Something about the way I said it made the girl from the department store scuttle down the corridor. I glared at her back, went into Pheola's apartment and shut the door.

"What were you telling her?" I started, and then I knew there was no point to it. I waved an irritated hand and kept on talking.

"When will your clothes be here?"

"Some things for tonight in about an hour," she said meekly. "I got quite a lot. Was that all right?"

"If you keep shooting off your puss about our getting married, you won't last long enough to wear them all," I threatened. "Can you find Room 4307, or will I have to take you down?"

"I can find it if you want me to, Lefty," she said.

I was sick of being her darlin' Billy. "Then find it," I said. "Ask for Norty. Tell him you are my PC. Do what he tells you. I'll pick you up around seven o'clock back here. All right?"

"All right."

"And stop telling people we're going to get married!"

She didn't answer that, so I let myself out and went to my own apartment, sizzling.

The phone was ringing as I came in, and I walked over to press the "Accept" button. The screen lit up to show me a lined and wrinkled face framed in scraggling hair streaked with gray.

"Hello, Evaleen," I said to her.

"This is dynamite," she said in a graveyard tone. "In the gym, in about ten minutes?"

I could feel my eyebrows rise. "Sure," I said, and before I could foolishly ask her what it was all about, she cut the image.

It isn't that our phones are tapped. Maragon doesn't need that. But in a building full of telepaths, any conversation is going to be peeped if you carry it on long enough. And who can keep his mind closed while he's talking? It's hard enough when you're silent.

I rode directly down to twenty and let myself into the locker room. By the time I had changed into my gym suit, Evaleen Riley's ten minutes had elapsed, and I went into the gym.

If she wanted to be careful about our conversation there was no point going directly to wherever she was working out, so I wandered.

There was the usual dozen or so TK's there practicing with the weights, as well as twice as many who thought they were TK's trying to get the milligram weights to wiggle. About half of them were clustered around one table where a member from one of the other chapters was showing off by heaving at a two hundred and fifty gram weight. He was seated in the classic position, his elbows on the table, his fingers supporting his temples, and was concentrating fiercely on the weight.

He wasn't really up to it. I could see sweat starting from his brow as I watched him over the heads of the others at the table. Suddenly he dropped back, exhausted.

"Not tonight, Josephine!" he gasped. The man at his right, another stranger, chuckled, reached over to touch the weight with his finger tips and then TK'd it cleanly off the Formica. It was nice work, for a middleweight.

I looked in at a couple other workouts before wandering over to where Evaleen sat by herself in a corner. She was concentrating on a series of pith balls the size of peas that weighed from a tenth of a gram up. She was either so absorbed in what she was doing, or pretended to be, that she gave no sign of hearing me come up behind her. One of the balls before her struggled off the table top, and I could hear her breath hiss with the effort. Cheating a little, I felt for her lifts and gave her some help. One after another the balls floated up and sank back. She was utterly charmed—or pretended to be.

"Great going, Evaleen," I said, but she swore at me in Gaelic, an affectation, because she comes

from Minnesota.

"You'd slip up behind me and help, eh?" she said hollowly.

"Get a touch, Evaleen," I suggested. "Have you tried it?"

"No," she said sullenly. She's good at that. Her dark hair is streaked with gray. She lets it hang down straight and whacks it off with hedge shears or something when it bothers her. Her face is lined and wrinkled far ahead of its time, and I swear, from the color of her teeth, that she chews betel nut. Somehow or other these PC witches have to act the part.

"Go ahead," I insisted. "Touch the first ball with the tip of your finger, Evaleen." I showed her what I meant by leaning over her shoulder. "That's right. *Now* lift!"

The pith ball rose smoothly several inches, and she held the lift for ten seconds or so.

"You were helping," she accused me in her best graveyard tones.

"Never," I said, truthfully. "Don't feel that it's cheating to get tactile help. I just saw a two hundred fifty gram middleweight over there at the other table run his fingers down a weight before he lifted. We all do it. It helps the grip."

"*You* never do," she accused me.

"On the big ones, Evaleen, sure I do. I'm a little sneaky about it, but I usually get a touch. Try a bigger ball."

I looked around the gym while my encouragement helped her. No one was paying us any special attention, and I saw none of the better known telepaths in the room. That didn't mean too much, for any number of the TP's in the Manhattan Chapter had good range.

Evaleen was getting good lifts on the one-gram ball when I slipped her the question: "You said it was dynamite," I said, and closed my mind to the thought.

Her lift broke. "I'm worried about the old goat in the penthouse, Lefty," she said in a low tone. It didn't make any difference. She might as well have shouted if a TP were peeping her. I took up for her with the pith balls and had them hopping up and down discreetly, just as though she were still working at her lifts with my coaching.

"You been life-lining again?" I hazarded, largely because of what Pheola had said about Maragon's having a heart attack.

"Yes, and he's going to be sick—I feel it very strongly."

"Die?"

"He'll outlive me," she said, more glumly than ever. I knew she could not predict past the span of her own life.

"And how long is that?" I needed.

"You can count my time in years, but not enough of them," she said, irritated that I had asked her about her own span. I knew I shouldn't have said it. She had read her own future and found it wanting. "But death hovers close in it," she went on. "You know I don't get clear pictures, Lefty, just a feeling. Death is very, very close. And you are in it."

"And who else?" I pressed her.

"No one I ever met," she said, telling me another limitation of her powers.

"Perhaps I can cure that, Evaleen," I said, letting the last ball drop. More loudly I added: "You get better every day. You could qualify for the second degree if you can do as well under standardized conditions."

"Yes," she agreed. "We've talked enough. You will act on it?"

"Oddly," I said, "I already have. You confirm what another PC says. I'll have you meet her."

"You will not," she said. "I can't stand PC's!"

"Now try that big one," I said, pointing to a small brass weight of two grams on the table.

She touched it and it lifted. She cried out in pleasure. "That's my best!"



"You were never that mad when you were lifting, I guess," I said. "Big emotions make big lifts. Fall in love—you'll do better still."

"First decent argument for getting tangled with one of you men I've heard yet," she lied. Wild as her looks were, she'd been a favorite around the Chapter for years.

I patted her on the shoulder and went back to the table where the big weights were being lifted and showed off for a couple minutes. The inevitable hour of shop talk and demonstrations followed as soon as the out-of-towners found out who I was. They don't meet a Thirty-third every day, and face it, I'm a TK bruiser.

After enjoying some slaps on the back, I took my shower, changed back into my clothes and went to find Pheola.

She had just finished her shower and had gotten dressed as far as her slip when she let me in.

"What an awful man!" she greeted me.

"Norty?"

"Yes! He doesn't believe in me a *bit!*"

"I don't either," I grinned. "Remember, you're the fake who says we're getting married."

"We are, too!" she said, sulking. "He made me tell him a thousand things," she added, going over to her couch where three dresses were draped. "What should I wear?"

"The blue one," I said. "Blue-eyed blondes should wear blue." I was stretching a point. "What did he make you PC?"

"All about the weather," she said, somewhat muffled as she slipped the dress over her head. I helped her with a zipper and a catch. "About thirty cities, Lefty. He made me tell him the temperature and the barometric pressure every hour for about a month! I never did anything like that before."

"Um-m-m," I said, as she fooled around getting her hair in some sort of shape with a clip. It was straight hair, and not much could be done with it. "Were you right, though?"

"Yes," she said, convinced. "I was very sure. Lefty, I *want* to do it, for you!"

"Sure," I said. "Let's go."

The Lodge has good food, but you get tired of hanging around with a bunch of Psi's, so we went on the town and found a good spot for dinner. What with rubber-necking at the big city, it was some after ten o'clock before we got back to the Chapter House and rode up to her apartment.

Pheola was bubbling happily about our evening. As she keyed open her door, I pushed her into her place and came in with her.

"For a couple who are going to get married," I said, grinning at her, "it's time we made a little love, Pheola."

She squinted myopically at me, not sure if I were serious. "I thought you weren't going...." she started.

"I'm not," I assured her. "I'm talking about our special kind of love. Know what I mean?"

She shook her head doubtfully as I took her wrap and hung it in the closet.

"Let's face a couple facts," I said, as I led her to the sofa and we sat down. She squeezed up close to me, so that our knees were touching. "I believe in you. I've told you that I have seen you predict the future. More than that, I have felt you cure me. But precognition is hard to prove, and if we are going to get you into the Lodge, I think we had better stick to Maragon's advice and work on your healing powers. It's Maragon you'll have to convince. He's the last word."

"I know," she said, wriggling her skinny knees against me. "And it scares me."

"Maybe it should," I said, trying to draw away a bit. "Your life won't be your own once you have been admitted to one of the degrees. But life in a Psi society has its compensations.

"Now, look at it this way," I went on. "Whether you meant to or not, you have staked your reputation as a PC on a prediction that our Grand Master will suffer a heart attack."

"He *will!*" she cut in.

"Sure. I even know a PC who agrees with you, in a misty sort of way. Now, think. You're a healer. If you can heal what you predict, it would make a big hit. Can you?"

Pheola's pointed features focused in a frown. "I'm sorry, Lefty," she admitted, "I don't even know what a heart attack is."

"That's what I thought," I said, getting up to switch on the hi-fi. It gave out soft music—lover's music, I guess it was meant to be. "But I'm a surgeon, you know that, don't you? And I can teach you something about hearts. The question in my mind is whether you can learn to handle what you know."

"I don't understand, Lefty," she said, holding out a hand to draw me back to her side on the sofa. I let her have me back.

"That's what I meant by our kind of love," I grinned at her. "Remember when you cured my arm the other night? You said you found a weak place in my head."

"That's what I did, darlin'."

"Can you find that place again, now that it's not weak?"

"Maybe," she decided.

"Try to," I suggested. I swung my feet around on the sofa and lay with my head in her lap. Pheola bent down over me and stroked my forehead with her fingers.

"Darlin' Billy!" she whispered. "Yes! *Yes!* I *can* feel it!"

I'll say she could. My thrashing right arm pretty near knocked her buck teeth out, and she retreated from my nervous system.

"You know what you did?" I asked, when the pain inside my head subsided.

"Not really, Lefty," she admitted.

"You have a kind of telekinesis. It's the lightest touch of all, but you applied it directly to my nerves. Perhaps you have some unconscious way of stimulating my synapses, making my nerve centers fire. I can't figure it out exactly. But my question is this, can you feel your way all around inside my body?"

She recoiled a little. "That sounds awful," she said.

"I thought you were in love with me," I insisted, looking up at her down-bent features. "Do you really have reservations about me?"

"No, Lefty. I love all of you."

"All right," I said, reaching up to stroke her cheek in time with the music. "See if you can feel your way—lightly, now—down the same path in my left arm."

She could, but not quite as lightly as I would have liked. We played with it until nearly midnight, by which time she had used what I can only call her sense of perception to feel her way through a good part of my nerves and viscera. Some of it was exquisitely painful, but from observing my flinching when she hurt me, Pheola pretty quickly found out how to ignore the synapses that fired pain through my brain.

At last I raised my head from her lap. "You're doing great," I said. "Do you feel tired?"

She shook her head. "Just excited," she breathed. "What a funny way to get to know you!"

"Then we'll try one more thing, baby," I said. "Come on next door to my place. There's some stuff over there I want you to work with."

I thought Pheola might boggle about going into my apartment, but she came readily enough. I guess a PC has some pretty strong notions about what is going to happen next.

Just to keep the mood the same, I turned on my hi-fi and drew the loveseat up in front of the desk in my study. Pheola found a way to sit closer to me than I would have imagined possible while I fished a set of weights out of a drawer and laid them on the polished teak.

"Here's how it goes," I said to her, and TK'd the weights off the wood one at a time. Anybody else would have gotten bug-eyed, but Pheola just squinted to see better. Finally I made the big weight cross the room, go behind us, and then come back to its place on the desk. She had never seen a demonstration of trained ability, and to her it was so much magic.

"You've been doing the same thing, Pheola," I told her as I put an arm around her shoulder. "Only you've been doing it first to my nerves and later to my insides. Now let me see you do it to this little ball."

She looked at the little sphere of pith, similar to the ones that Evaleen Riley had used for practice, but nothing happened.

"I can't feel it," she protested, "It ... It isn't you, Lefty. I'll never feel anything that isn't *you!*"

"Don't get mystical," I snapped. "You did some healing before you met me, and I don't suppose

you were in love with every one you helped, were you?"

"Of course not."

"Try again."

"Nothing," she said, and the pith ball did not budge.

"Now watch this," I said, and popped the little ball into my mouth. "Feel for it," I insisted, pushing it into one cheek where it did not interfere with my speech.

She closed her eyes. "Where is it?" she demanded. "Did you swallow it, Lefty?"

"I either swallowed it or I kept it in my mouth," I said. "Feel for it!"

"There!" she gasped. "It's in your mouth!"

I rolled the piece of pith on to the top surface of my tongue and opened my mouth so that she could see it. "Agh!" I said, pointing at my tongue. I gestured again, and her face paled as the little ball left my tongue and floated in the air before my face. Suddenly her lift broke and it fell wetly onto my hand, in my lap.

I leaned over, put an arm around behind her neck and kissed her. It was a most sedate embrace. "There," I said, "that performance alone will get you into the Lodge. Now do you believe you're a TK?"

She gave a little shriek. A ladylike "Eek!"

"It's not that awful," I said. "A lot of Psi's can do it."

"You *kissed* me!" she said, paying no attention to my question.

"Sure," I agreed. "And you managed your first lift." I picked the pith ball up in my fingers, showed it to her, and laid it on my palm.

"Feel my hand first," I suggested. "Then lift it over onto the desk."

She looked, wild-eyed, at the pith, shaking her head.

"I'll kiss you again," I suggested.

The little ball came away from my palm, floated erratically around, crossed over to my desk and dropped with a soft smack to the teak. She came to me like a tigress. I don't know why I expected a repetition of our first innocent kiss—I knew she had been married once.

I claim good marks for getting her back to her own apartment immediately.

For the balance of the week I saw very little of Pheola during the day. The hospital kept me busy with TK surgery, and I was practicing scalpel work with my newly-strong right arm, now that I had two hands to use. I'd be something more than a TK surgeon yet.

Pheola had a couple more sneaky sessions with Norty Baskins in the data-processing center, but for most of the time, she told me, she wandered around the part of the building the Lodge had retained for its own uses, meeting Psi's of various powers and more or less soaking up the flavor of life in the Manhattan Chapter. In the evenings we found a new place for dinner each night, and then came back to her place or mine to practice with the weights. Pheola would never be the bruiser that I was—so very few are—but she worked her grip up to several grams, which is quite respectable.

By that time I felt she was ready for a course of sprouts in the human heart. I used my drag at the hospital to bring her over with me for a cram course. We had a plastic model of a heart there, about four times life size, that was built in demountable layers for lecture and demonstration purposes. By the end of the second week, Pheola was able to work her sense of perception around inside my heart, based on what she had learned from the model, in surprisingly good shape.

"I guess you are in good health, Lefty," she told me late one night in her apartment. "Your valves feel just like the model, and your arteries are clear and good. I'm so glad for you."

"Clean living," I assured her. "And careful choice of grandparents. Now, my fat and sassy friend," I said. "I want some of your witchcraft." That fat part was something of a joke, for she would always be lean and rangy. But Pheola had put on a good ten pounds since we had first met. The weight was going to some rather pleasant spots to observe, and outside of her mess of buck teeth, she wasn't turning out to be such a bad-looking chicken. For one thing, she had race-horse legs, and that's never bad.

"Witchcraft, Lefty?" she said, getting up to go into her kitchen to pour some more coffee.

"You said Maragon was going to have a heart attack," I reminded her as I followed her in to where the cooking was done. "O.K., my skinny PC. How soon? Exactly when?"



She stopped pouring, set the percolator down and looked at me solemnly. "In two weeks, about."

"Hm-m-m," I said. "But it won't kill him?"

She picked up her cup and led me back to the sofa, sitting down before she answered me. "Not exactly," she said. "I don't want to talk about it."

That's what all the witches say when you try to get them to do any life-lining. "Have you told me all that you know?" I demanded.

Then she did a funny thing. She got up, went to the chest against the wall where her purse lay, and got out her glasses, racking them up on her long thin nose. She looked at me closely. "No, not all I know. And I don't aim to," she said. She made no move to come back to sit with me.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but this is Lodge business. I know that you're not a member yet, but you soon will be, and you might as well learn right now that you are subject to Lodge discipline. Tell me what you know."

"No!"

They all have to learn it sooner or later. I rammed a good stiff lift in under her heart, and saw her knees buckle. She gasped, and then the lights went out.

Pheola was beside me on the loveseat when my consciousness started to straggle back. Her hands were soothing my brow. That isn't where it had hurt. She had struck back, only twice as hard as I had managed. Fool around with somebody who had a good grip on my nervous system, would I? I was lucky to be alive.

"Oh, darlin'!" she gasped, as my eyes opened. "You hurt me so, and before I knew it I had done it to you! Forgive me, Billy Joe! I'll *never* do that again!"

"Better not," I groaned, trying to get my breath. "They'll carry me out in a pine box next time."

"I am so sorry," she said, beginning to cry.

"Then tell me," I said. "What else do you know?"

That only made her cry harder, but between sobs she got it out. "He won't die the first time," she said sniffing. "But the *next* attack will kill him."

"Soon after the first?"

She nodded. "A couple days," she said. "I wish you hadn't made me tell it."

"Good thing I did," I growled. "You're as nutty as a fruitcake. Maragon won't die. I've got it on good authority."

"I'm *right*!" she insisted.

I took it to Maragon the next morning. The city was shrouded in a low layer of cloud, and his glassed-in penthouse office was gloomy with the morning. He motioned me to sit down. I dragged one of his Bank of England chairs through the ankle-deep pile of his rug and set it down next to his big desk.

"I have a progress report on Pheola, Pete," I told him.

"That skinny one you brought back from Nevada, Lefty?"

I nodded. "She's not quite so skinny, thanks to my expense account," I said. "And she's ready to

qualify."

"Not on PC," he said, hot at once.

"That remains to be seen, Pete. The lab has been tracking her predictions for better than two weeks now, and in a couple more weeks Norty will give us some stix on her scope, range and accuracy."

He glowered at me, his bushy brows down about his eyes. "I thought I told you to concentrate on her healing," he said.

"I have," I told him. "But I saw no harm in seeing what she is like with precognition," I said.

"Flat on her face, that's what she's like," he said testily. "One of these days I'll have to convince you that what I say around here goes, do you hear?"

"One of these days," I said. "But not when you're being a sour old goat. You're just sore at her because she said you'd have a heart attack."

"Nonsense!" he bristled.

"I've had Evaleen Riley doing a little PC work on you, too," I confessed, and saw his face get dark with anger. "Now hold your tongue, you old goat. I'm trying to help you," I cut in, to keep him from bellowing at me. "Evaleen is worried, too. But she's a little more cheerful than Pheola. She doesn't think you'll die."

"Well," he growled. "That's nice. I won't write my will."

"Stop acting like an old goat, you old goat," I snapped at him. "I'll give you a prediction of my own: You'll be sick enough to die, but we'll find a way to do something about it."

"Well, now *you're* a PC!" he huffed. I like to think I have a little, now and then. It's ever so short in range, and highly erratic, but I have had my flashes.

"Just one thing," I said to him. "As a surgeon who has done a lot of heart work, I want you in the heart clinic on the day these witches say you're going to be sick. It will certainly make a lot of us feel better, and the worst that can happen is that you can tell both those witches they don't know the right time."

I didn't get to first base. "Now I'll tell you something, Wally Bupp!" he said loudly. "I was fool enough to pay attention to what that witch of yours said, and I've had a complete checkup. The heart people can't find a thing the matter with my heart. The devil you say! I won't go near your hospital. Now get out of here and don't give me another word about the PC powers of that fraud."

I let a week go by after that, not quite able to figure out what I should do. One night, after a dinner that Pheola had cooked for me as part of her transparent scheme to convince me she was God's own gift to Lefty Bupp, I raised a question with her.

"You are still sure," I said, loading the dishwasher, "about Pete Maragon?"

"Yes," she said. "He'll have a heart attack."

"All right. Exactly when?"

"The nineteenth. Thursday," she said.

"We've got to pin point this thing," I said as we went back to her living room. "Do you think you are ready to do some serious diagnosis?"

"Of the Grand Master?" she asked me.

"Sure. I can get you into his office without too much trouble. What I want you to do is feel around inside his heart. The sawbones from the clinic can't find anything out of line, and I think you can. Can you PC that?"

She smiled at me. "Of course," she said. "You'll take me there in the morning."

I did, of course.

Maragon gave us an appointment when I assured him that I wanted to show him some aspects of Pheola's healing powers and that PC wasn't going to enter into the discussion. His spooky clairvoyant let us in with a knowing smile and we found the old goat pouring over some papers in front of him on the big slab of walnut.

He was really quite nice to Pheola. "Well, well, young woman," he said, "Lefty tells me that you are coming along."

"I hope so, Mr. Maragon," she said.

"Well, Lefty," he said, after he had shown us both into the handsome chairs he had drawn up in front of his desk, "you were going to have Pheola give me some kind of a demonstration."

"Sure," I said. "First off I want you to know that she can qualify as a TK. Her healing powers are a subtle form of that. But as proof, she'll give a demonstration with weights."

I drew the carrying case from my pocket and laid four pith balls on his desk, as well as a ten-gram standard TK weight.

"Ten grams?" he said, interested.

"Maybe," I grinned. "We haven't tried this outside our own company. Pretty big emotional quotient here, you know."

He shook his head. "It has to be reproducible, Lefty," he said, but in a kindly tone. "Let me see it, Pheola."

She was really pretty good, and the pith balls behaved quite well. The first time around, the ten-gram weight stopped her cold, but by laying it on my palm, she got a good grip and thereafter was able to make it perform.

"Very nicely done," the old goat grumbled. He hadn't expected anything of the kind. But I was only half through with him.

"Now," I said. "The more important part of the demonstration. Do you object to a little minor pain?"

"I certainly do," he growled, bringing his bushy brows down.

"Well, the only way you can tell that Pheola is able to employ her TK within you is to give you a little sensation. It will only be some twinges," I said.

He wanted to argue about it, and I dragged the conversation out until I felt a little tug on my ear. Pheola had completed her scan of Maragon's heart.

"Oof!" he said as she hit him lightly in the diaphragm. Then she made his hands jump, first one and then the other. None of it felt real good, I could see, from the flinching and lip biting that was going on across the desk.

"That's enough!" he exclaimed as she went to work on his throat. His hand flew up to massage his larynx. "Quite convincing, young woman. But what is it good for?"

I laughed at him. "What are most Psi powers good for?" I asked him. "All that we require for membership is that a person be able to display them under standardized conditions."

"Yes," he agreed. "Yes, I guess that's so. Well, I gather you'll be ready to go into your act at the next Chapter Meeting, then?"

Pheola nodded. "I hope so," she said.

"I do, too," the old goat agreed, getting in the last word. "It would be nice if you could figure out what to do with your ability to snap my nerve-strings!"

We were silent in the ride down the elevator to our apartments. I took the chance that Pete wasn't having us peeped, and spoke as soon as we were in my study.

"What did you find out, Pheola?" I asked her.

"I could feel something, Lefty," she said. "When you had the heart model over at the hospital, you showed me the coronary artery, you remember?"

"Yes."

"There are two little bumps in his artery, one about three times as large as the other."

"Bumps?" I said, frowning. "I'm not sure I know what that means, Pheola."

"Well, remember how I told you that your own arteries were nice and clear?"

I nodded.

"His coronary artery isn't like that. It's sort of caked and crusty. And I think some of that coating has broken away in a couple spots, and they are like scabs on the sores, only they aren't hard."

This was as close to a classic description of coronary clotting as I figured I would get in nontechnical terms. What her words mean to me was that Maragon's coronary artery, as in many men his age, was somewhat choked with deposits of cholesterol. In a couple places the deposit had broken away, exposing the raw surface of the artery. But instead of scar tissue forming to heal the open spot, clotting had taken place. And if either of those clots broke loose, and plugged one of the minor arteries in the heart, we'd see a coronary attack as that part of the muscle was starved for blood and died.

The information was useless, in a medical sense. There is no surgery for the condition. There was, however, something untried that could possibly be done.

"Where is it going to happen?" I asked her. "The heart attack?"

"In the hospital," she said.

"And what will I have you do?"

She frowned for a moment. "You want me to cure it," she said. "I'm not sure I understand how."

"I do," I said. "That's enough. From here on I just want to work a two-horse parlay. The old goat can't help but be convinced by the demonstration you are going to give him. The thing that I want is for him to agree that your PC powers exist at the same time. We'll whipsaw him good."

In the morning, after the first surgery was over, I went downstairs to the heart clinic. Doc Swartz was in his office. He's the best heart man at Memorial, and I figured that Maragon would have gone to him.

"What's up, Lefty?" he asked as I came in to his office and shut the door against some of the smells of the hospital. "How is your scalpel work coming?"

"I'll be doing my own cutting any day now," I said. "I came on another errand."

"So?"

"Did you give Maragon's heart a checkup in the last couple of weeks?" I asked.

"None of your business," he smiled. "You know I can't talk about my patients."

"This is Lodge business, Doc," I protested. "I know you aren't a Psi, and thus aren't subject to our discipline, but I think it's time we exchanged some information."

"Exchanged?"

I nodded. "You know—or do you know—that I've been working with a girl, giving her some training."

"No," he said. "I don't hear much about the Lodge. You folks are pretty tight-mouthed around Normals."

"Sure," I said, not wanting to appear uncomfortable about it. Doc was all right—he never showed any resentment that he didn't have Psi powers. Quite sensibly, he was satisfied with his own normal skills. "Well, this girl is a very delicate telekinetic," I told him. "She is the one who brought my right arm back to life. She's good."

"She must be," he agreed. "I know that stumped every neurologist over here."

"Right," I said, "She has been exploring the insides of Maragon's heart."

"What!"

"Sense of perception—light TK touch—anything you want to call it. I can get her to demonstrate, if you insist. But you can take my word for it. She can feel her way around inside your body the way you can feel your way around the outside."

"And what is her diagnosis?" he said, irritated now. *He* was the heart expert.

I told him about the clots, and he nodded as he got the picture. "A classic description," he agreed. "But what can we do about it? Clots like that are next to impossible to break down. If they flake away in too big a chunk, they can kill."

"I know," I agreed. "But there is more to the story. Pheola is a precog as well. She says that one of the clots will break loose on the nineteenth, and that Maragon will have an attack. I want to make sure he is over here, in a hospital bed, with you on hand, when it happens."

"You Psi's!" he said. "Do I have to take this seriously, that this woman can tell the future?"

"Yes, you do," I said. "One of our other PC's confirms it."

"That just doubles the creepiness," he said. "How can I manage it, even if it's true?"

"Tell the old goat that more detailed examination of his EKG makes you want him in for observation. Even Maragon listens to doctors. Tell him whatever it takes to get him to bed that morning. You might even bring him in the night before."

Doc Swartz shrugged. "I guess I'll have to play your game," he decided. "But this had better be good!"

I never did learn what Doc Swartz told the Grand Master, or how much the old goat suspected. But I learned from my hospital sources that Maragon was scheduled to enter the heart clinic the night of the eighteenth for "tests."

I let Pheola set the timing for us, and we showed up at his room around ten on the morning of the nineteenth, shortly before Pheola predicted his heart attack would occur.

The old goat was sitting up in bed as he was being examined by Doc Swartz and another sawbones. Leads from the EKG led from his chest and wrists. He fired one scorching glance at the two of us.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Get out of here!"

I shook my head. "Not me," I said. "I'm an accredited surgeon at this hospital."

"What about her?" he growled, pushing Swartz away from him. "Get that witch out of here!"

"A diagnosis is about to be made," I said, bringing Pheola to his side. "And it would help if you shut up for a couple minutes."

He turned angrily to Swartz, but I had him pretty well cowed, and he shook his head. "We could use some help, Mr. Maragon," he said. "There are some anomalies in your EKG that this lady's Psi powers may help us resolve. I should think that you, of all people, would want...."

"Oh, shut up!" he grumped. "You are ganging up on me. Go ahead," he snapped at Pheola. "And get it over with!"

His gown had been pushed down from his shoulders for Doc Swartz's stethoscope work, and the mat of graying hair on his chest was exposed. Pheola laid a hand on his chest—she seemed to have a better feel after a touch, just as I do with the weights. There was a dead silence in the room as she stood there, eyes closed, and slowly ran her fingers over his rib cage. After some minutes her eyes opened, and she came back to my side.

"Still the same," she said. I nodded and looked over at Swartz.

"Well," Maragon growled, "have you ill-assorted characters agreed on a diagnosis?"

"In a sense," I told him. "It's nothing that every doctor in this room couldn't have guessed at without bothering to examine you. You're sixty years old, and you've got sixty-year-old arteries. That's all."



"Great," he said, reaching for the thin blanket that covered his chunky legs. "Then I can...."

He stopped, and a spasm crossed his face.

It went away, and he slowly turned to face Pheola, a sort of angry consternation coloring his features. "You witch!" he whispered. Then the pain hit him much harder. "My arm!" he said.

There were doctors around him in a flash. He was still wired to the EKG machine. "That's it!" the technician said. "The T-waves have gone inverted!"

That meant damage—typical coronary damage. They chased us out, and we sat in a kind of death watch in a waiting room, while Pheola cried softly.

"Stop it," I said after a while. "Simply because you could foretell it doesn't mean you caused it!" But it was no use.

In the afternoon Doc Swartz came out to tell us that the attack had been mild. "Do you suppose Pheola could make another diagnosis?" he asked. "We'd like to know exactly what is going on in there."

I looked over at her. Her eyes were red, and her pointed nose showed too frequent use of her handkerchief, but she nodded, and followed us back to Maragon's room.

Maragon was resting quietly, and didn't have a word to say as Pheola ran her hands carefully over his chest. It was the only time I could remember when the old goat hadn't had some sharp word for me.

Pheola opened her eyes and led us out into the corridor. "The smaller bump is gone," she said. "The other one feels very soft. It sort of sways every time his heart beats."

"Absolute quiet," was Doc Swartz's answer. "There's a chance that clot will dwindle, erode, and harden up. But obviously we want to keep him as quiet as possible to make that take place."

"You had better know," I said quietly. "Pheola predicts it will break loose in a couple days and kill him."

"How accurate is she?" he said, looking sideways at where my witch stood crying.

"We'll get some ideas on that yet today," I told him. "Evaleen Riley, another one of our PC's, doesn't agree on the death part, and she's pretty good."

I turned to Pheola. "We had better go over to see Norty Baskins," I told her. "We *have* to know if you're right or not."

"I'm right," she said, wiping her eyes.

Norty was ready for us. "Well," he said, as we came in, "Lefty was right about you, Pheola. He said you were a rare one, and so you are."

"I *was* right, wasn't I?" she said, beginning to feel good and bad at the same time.

"Some of the time," Norty agreed. "When you are right, you are the sharpest PC this lab has ever tested. But that's only a rather small part of the time. When you're wrong, you're really wrong."

"So he may *not* die!" I said. "What did I tell you?"

"Show me!" she demanded.

"All right," Norty said. "Take a look at this. You remember giving me all those predictions about temperature and barometric pressures?"

"Yes," she said.

"We've drawn a couple moving weather maps," Norty explained. "Just the pressures on these. They cover the thirty-day period for which you PC'd. One of the maps shows the actual isobars as they were recorded by the Weather Bureau. The other moving map is the same isobars as predicted by you, Pheola. We'll run the two maps simultaneously on a screen. The black lines are the actual readings. The red lines are your predictions."

It was sort of like watching an animated cartoon. The map started with an overlap of red and black and then you could see each high and low pressure area work its way across the country and out to sea. But there was a difference. After a couple hours, on their time scale, Pheola's map differed from the actual, and the difference grew greater for a while, and then narrowed. Suddenly the red and black lines were identical.

The cycle repeated several times in the thirty-day period.

"What you see," said Norty, "is that she is right for a few hours and then wanders off, sometimes for several days, but wanders back and gets right again. The timing of when she is right is rather random—there's no regular periodicity to it, and as a result, we can't see how to predict when she is going to be right and when she is not."

"I have a thought for you," I said, when Norty had shut off the projection. "It's sort of like two sine waves that intersect now and then. One of them has bigger amplitude than the other, or their periodicity is different. Can't you feed this dope to your computers and find out what kinds of curves would represent the coincidences?"

He gave me a suffering look. "Don't you suppose I tried that? I get indeterminate solutions—the machine can't find any curves that answer the data."

Pheola got her own answers out of that. "Then you don't know whether I am right about Maragon or not."

"We know that you may not be right, that's something," I reminded her. "Come on up to the apartment. This calls for some thinking."

Pheola protested that. "Please, Lefty," she said, "this has got me all shaken up. I'd like to be alone for a while. Will you come and get me for dinner?"

"Sure," I said.

Pheola was in better spirits by dinner time, and didn't exactly pick at her food. At any rate, she was ready to talk when we finally got back to my apartment.

"Did you understand what I said to Norty about the sine waves, Pheola?" I asked her.

She shook her head. Her education had not proceeded to calculus, and her trig was too far behind her for quick recollection of what sine waves were.

I drew some sketches of overlapping sine waves for her to explain what I thought was going on. "You are making predictions on this one path, and actual events are on another path, do you see?" I said. "When the two paths cross, the events that you predict and actual events are the same, and at those times you're right."

"I know," she said. "I thought about it all afternoon. I didn't want to say it to Norty, but when I was giving him all those numbers, there came times when it was a little fuzzy, and I wasn't so sure."

"And what did you do?"

"I guessed—because it would clear up right after that, and I'd be sure again."

"Can you explain the fuzziness?" I prodded.

She shrugged. "It's like a fork in the road," she said, holding her two index fingers next to each other. "And there are *two* pictures for a while."

You may not have noticed it, but your index finger is not straight. It curves in toward your middle finger so that you can hold all the tips together if you want to. And when Pheola laid her two index fingers together, they curved away from each other at their tips. I got a flash and went immediately to my phone.

"Hello," I said to the O-operator cartoon. "Get Norty Baskins. If he's asleep, wake him."

Norty was quite upset about being awakened.

"I have a suggestion for your machine," I said to him. "Try it in three dimensions. Instead of sine waves, visualize it as two coil springs that are all snarled up in each other. Each has a different pitch, perhaps different diameter. But at certain points the coils touch each other, and at those times she is right."

"In the morning?" he said weakly, rubbing his eyes.

"Nonsense," I said. "We'll meet you down there."

The trick in getting decent answers out of computers is to ask them sensible questions. It took us nearly until dawn to get the question right. And then we got a very sweet answer. There were two helices all right, as an explanation of how Pheola could be right and then wrong. I had my own idea about what the helices signified, but that was unimportant beside the fact that we were now able to predict at what times in the future the helices would coincide. It was at the time of their intersection that Pheola would be right in her predictions.

We did a little extrapolation. "Well," I said to her, "it's nice to know that you're going to be wrong tomorrow and the next day. Maragon isn't going to die."

"I'm sorry ... oh, I don't mean that!" she apologized. "But I did so want to be right, and now I know I'm just what he said, a fake!"

"Not all of the time," I reminded her. "But this gives me confidence in what I want you to do at the hospital today."

We grabbed a little shut-eye. Fatigue cuts into TK powers as much as it cuts into any other human ability, and I wanted Pheola to be at her best. But around lunch-time we dropped over to see Doc Swartz, and I explained to him what I thought Pheola could do for Maragon.

"I doubt that clot has had time to get any better," he said. "If Pheola examines him now and finds it as big as ever, and still soft and flexible, I think we should entertain your idea."

Pheola made a trip up to Maragon's room, and returned. "Just the same," she said. "He looks so tired."

"He's not so bad, better than he looks," Swartz said stoutly. "And you can still feel the clot?"

"Yes."

He turned to me. "Pheola," I said. "Now the question is whether you can help break it up. Maragon's blood stream is not eroding the clot. Perhaps it has a sort of envelope of firmer fibrin around it, something that keeps it from breaking down. The question is whether you are sensitive enough, and have enough control, to get a good grip on the clot, and start breaking it up by tearing away at its surface. It certainly has very little mechanical strength, and you have several grams of TK in the lab. What do you think?"

The whole idea scared the devil out of her, but we went back to Maragon's room together, where she felt for the clot with a new outlook on the problem. After some minutes she nodded, and we went out in the corridor to put our heads together.

"I think I can do it, Lefty," she said. "But what if something goes wrong?"

"It won't," I said. "Evaleen Riley says that he isn't going to die, and I believe her."

"O.K.," said Doc Swartz. "I'll put it up to him."

"I'd put it this way," he said to Maragon, when we had gone back into his room. "We can keep you here in bed for a while, but sooner or later you are going to feel well enough to leave, and we won't be able to make you stay. The first time you do anything that gets your heart going a little faster than it does lying here, that clot will break loose and kill you."

"The big thing," I reminded him, "is that Evaleen can't find that you are going to die. That argues that we are going to succeed."

"And this witch?" Maragon asked, moving his head slightly to indicate Pheola.

"No reading at all for the next couple days," I said. "She's a periodic PC."

"I'll bet!" he said. He was beginning to feel better. "Well, go ahead."

Pheola went over to his side, carefully pulled the blanket down, and with help from the nurse, drew his gown down from over his hairy chest. She laid hands on him and stood there for many minutes with her eyes closed.

"I'm doing it," she said at last. "I have sort of peeled off the top, and I can shred it away, a little at a time."

"How long will this take?" Maragon grumbled, already beginning to sound more like his old self.

"A couple hours," she said. "And hush!"

At Doc Swartz's suggestion I stayed there with Pheola. "She depends on you, Lefty," he whispered.

Toward the end of the two hours they were giving Pete anti-coagulant injections. "No sense letting another clot form just as soon as Pheola breaks up this one," Swartz said. "This way we have a good chance that the open wound will form some scar tissue. Sure, the artery will have lost some flexibility, but the danger of another coronary will be past."

They consider the first six days the danger time. At the end of that period Pheola confirmed that the open sore was gone and that both areas of clotting had been repaired by Maragon's body's own restorative processes. They let him out of the hospital at the end of another week.

I went to see him with Pheola the first day that he spent back at his desk. He didn't seem in any way changed by his ordeal. I suppose, when you live as close to all the manifestations of Psi as Pete does, that very little can surprise you.

"Well, young woman," he said to her, getting up to bring her one of his Bank of England chairs. "The sawbones tell me I have you to thank for my life. And better than that, they feel there are a number of delicate TK's around who can be trained in your diagnostic techniques. This ought to be quite a thing in preventing coronaries."

"Thank you," she said. "I was so frightened that I would let Lefty down a second time."

"A second time?" he said.

"I was wrong about your dying," she reminded him. "I'm wrong so much in my predictions. I guess I'll just have to forget about that."

He looked over at me. "What about it, Lefty? Can we consider Pheola a PC, or is she merely a TK?"

I grinned at him. "She is probably the most accurate PC in the Lodge," I said to him. His eyebrows went up, and Pheola shook her head.

"Accurate," I repeated, "if you'll let me define accuracy."

"Define it."

"According with some definite series of future events," I said. "That's my definition."

"But I thought you said she's only right now and then," Maragon protested.

"I said a 'definite series of events.' Unfortunately, the series of events that Pheola predicts are in a different space-time continuum," I explained. "You have to consider that we are passing through time in a helix. The events that Pheola predicts are in a different helix. The two helices are all snarled together, and at certain times our coil of time intersects her coil. Then she's right, because events in the two continua are the same. We can predict when she's going to be right for our helix, which is a small part of the time, but that part we can use."

He gave me an owlish look. "Philadelphia lawyer," he said. "No other PC is geared in to the same space-time continuum that Pheola predicts, I suppose, so that means there is no way to test whether she was right or wrong about events in that other time."

"None," I agreed. "But my theory is the only one that holds any water, so far. It works. It permits us to predict when Pheola can predict. I claim she qualifies for the Tenth Degree."

"Maybe so," he said. "Well, young woman, welcome to Membership in the Lodge." He held out his hand, which she took. "Tell me," he went on, "what's the next big thing you predict?"

Pheola smiled over at me. "Lefty is going to take me to the orthodontist this afternoon," she said. "He wants me to have my teeth straightened before we get married."

I'll say one thing for her, right or wrong, she never got off the loud pedal on *that* prediction.

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