

Delia Hunter popped her head back inside the door as she exited the house. “I’ve got some stuff to do this afternoon; I’m taking the jeep, Mom.” She announced, “See you,” closing the door to cut off any reply

She jumped into the jeep waiting in the driveway with a trailer attached. She patted the duffel bag on the passenger’s seat. Starting the engine, she put the jeep into gear smoothly and drove off.

Kate was waiting outside her house with an overnight bag sitting next to her. As Delia drove up, she dumped the duffel bag into the back of the jeep. Kate tossed her bag into the back and slipped into the passenger seat.

“Morning.” Kate greeted her friend. “It was darn convenient of those school officials giving us a teacher workshop day.”

“Exactly. Fasten your seatbelt.” Delia announced. “It’s going to be a bouncy ride. I understand half the state of Connecticut is under construction.”

Kate pulled the belt around her in the front seat of the jeep. “Do you have your route planned?” Kate had pulled out a map and started to unfold it.

“I mapquested it a few days back. With stops, it should take us nine or ten hours to get there.” Delia checked her rearview mirrors and pulled into traffic. “There’s a printout in the bag at your feet as well as some snacks and tunes.”

“Well prepared.” Kate observed while glancing into the bag.

“That’s me!” Delia teased as she threw a quick scout salute.

Kate slipped a CD into the in-dash radio. “I can appreciate that.” She commented as she tilted the seat back and prepared to enjoy the great weather and the drive.

“So your mom was okay with your taking off for the weekend with the car?” Kate asked sometime later.

“And yours was okay with your coming with me?” Delia turned the question around.

Kate grinned. “Well, let’s just say she didn’t think we were alone in the car. I figured what she didn’t know....and all that.”

Delia grinned back conspiratorially and winked. “Well. Let’s just say mom knows all about it...or will in a couple hours.”



# Phantastic Dreams

By Jill Irving and Michael Robinson

The day was a crisp spring day redolent in the freshness of growing things and hints of the flowers to come. Trees which had started to burgeon with the liveliness of springtime edged the thick black sweep of road before the travelers. *Ventura Highway* was playing on the radio nearly drowning out the droning vibrations of the jeep. Delia was thinking the jeep would need a tune up when they got home. Kate thought the vehicle needed shocks, but she'd just about gotten used to the nearly constant bouncing with each slight bump in the road.

"So are you planning on telling me the point some time during this drive?" Kate finally asked, breaking Delia out of her meandering thoughts.

"Well, there's this thing that I wanted to go to...for my dad..." Delia stopped mid-sentence.

"Thing? Excellent! I love 'things'" Kate jested. She turned and looked at Delia who seemed to have slipped off again. "D?"

"Sorry...mind wandered." Delia glanced over at her companion. "It's been doing that a lot lately."

"What's up Delia?"

"I'm not sure I know where to start. Or what I really want to say." Delia stopped again.

"How 'bout starting with what this thing is?" Kate suggested.

Delia shrugged her shoulders, "a ceremony."

"More specific, please."

"You sound like Jacqueline." Delia grinned. "It's for my dad..."

Kate waited.

"He was due to be promoted. It didn't come through until after..." Delia stopped again and bit her lip.

"After he died?" Kate reached out and put her hand on Delia's shoulder.

"His unit is back from Iraq, so the CO is having a posthumous promotion ceremony."

"Why isn't your mother coming?"

"She threw away the notice. I wasn't supposed to see it. She didn't want me to come to it."

"So you stole the car."

Delia nodded. "I left a note where she'll find it around dinner time."

"You realize there will be hell to pay when you get home?"

Delia laughed bitterly, "Can't see how that would be much different."

Kate turned and considered her friend. "I didn't realize it was that bad."

Delia continued to stare at the road ahead of her.

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After several stops and driver changes, they arrived at Fort Meade. The sun was just starting its slow descent when the jeep pulled up in front of a storage unit used for base personnel. Delia jumped out of the jeep before Kate had fully stopped it and walked to one of the bins. She stared at the padlock for a moment or two before reaching for it.

"What's the matter?" Kate asked.

"Trying to remember the combination." Delia turned back toward her companion. "I guess I didn't mention that there was some stuff of my dad's in storage that we're bringing back." She pointed to the trailer. "Hence that."

"I figured there was more to it."

"You know, they might just saint you when this trip is over." Delia shook her head and started dialing the combination.

"Saint Kate...has a nice ring to it," Kate smiled and pondered it for a moment then walked over to the bin next to Delia.

Kate watched as Delia flipped open the lock and pushed the door up. Inside the unit were several trunks, some boxes and sporting equipment. "This was all your father's?"

"Mostly. When we were getting ready to move, Mom just couldn't deal with all his stuff. She was going to sell or throw it out. I made arrangements with the Gunny to store it for awhile. I wanted to go through it myself when it hurt a little less."

"Gunny?" Kate was confused.

"Gunnery Sergeant, frequently they are administrative assistants to base commanders. Max was. He rented this space for me so Mom wouldn't know about it."

"Really?"

Delia turned back to Kate. "Look, Kate. I so appreciate you coming with me. And I realize that I'm probably not making it easy. I will probably owe you both a huge thank you and apology when this is all over..." She sighed "there's still a whole lot I'm not ready to talk about. Details, explanations, may or may not come as we go along..."

"It's ok. If and when you're ready....I can tell this is really hard for you." Kate reflected.

"Let me just say OH YEAH!"

"Okay." Kate nodded her head and looked back to the bin. "So, are we taking all of this?"

"No. I don't recognize everything; I think some might be Max's." She put a couple boxes aside.

"Won't your mother notice this stuff when you get home?"

Delia grinned evilly. "I'm only taking what will fit in the barn."

“You’re stall will be full.”

“Nah...the exercise equipment will be useful in the dojo.”

Kate looked around as Delia started picking up a heavy trunk. There was no one in the area. She focused her mind and started lifting some weights. Delia just looked at her for a few moments.

“My mind is a whole lot stronger than my arms.”

“Whatever floats your boat!” Delia commented taking her own glance around the empty storage area.

“I have to float a boat?!” Kate exclaimed in mock surprise.

“Only if it’s filled with Mint Chocolate Chip.”

“Mmmm.”

That drew chuckles from both of them.

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Later they pulled up in front a light blue house set slightly away from the others on the street. The street lamps cast shadows across the house, but there were welcoming lights in the windows.

“Is it impertinent to ask where we’re staying?” Kate asked as they sat in the jeep shutting things down.

“Of course not. This is the home of Colonel Frost. He was my father’s CO.”

“Commanding Officer, right? I’m getting the hang of this military lingo.”

“Yes. He and dad were friends, I think. Jeff was really nice to me when I visited. He and Max were anchors for me when...dad...died.” Her voice broke for a moment.

“Sounds like he was your friend too” Kate observed quietly.

“Yes, I guess he was. When I told him I was coming, he offered me his guest room.” She looked back at Kate. “I can’t really afford a hotel room, let alone two.” She let out a nervous laugh. “Guess I should have mentioned we’d be sharing a room.”

“Is that a problem?”

“I don’t know.” Delia shook her head as she got out of the jeep. “Kate, this is all new to me. I can count on one hand the number of friends I’ve had over the years. Only one of them was female. Now one of my better friends is lesbian and truthfully I just don’t know the rules.”

Kate walked over to Delia and slipped her arm around her. “There really aren’t any rules. We just make it up as we go.”

“How do you know what is right?” Delia asked leading Kate to the door.

“You talk about it. For instance, sharing a room with you doesn’t bother me.”

“I going to screw up now and again” Delia told her seriously, “it’s part of my charm.”

“Charm? Is that what you call it?” Kate responded tongue-in-cheek as she stepped up to the door.

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“**D**elia” a woman threw open the door before they knocked. “I’m so glad you made it.”

“Thanks Trish.” Delia said walking into the woman’s embrace.

“How was your trip?” She asked hugging the girl tight.

“Fine.” Delia stepped back and turned slightly to include Kate. “This is Trish Frost, Col. Frost’s wife. This is my friend Kate.”

“A pleasure to meet you.” Tricia held out a hand to Kate. “I’m sorry your mother couldn’t make it, Delia. It’s too bad that she has to work.”

“Her schedule is pretty unpredictable.” Delia evaded.

“Have you girls eaten?” Tricia closed the door “Jeff and I ate earlier, he had a meeting tonight. I can make you some soup and sandwiches.”

“We ate thanks.” Kate answered.

“Well then, let me show you the guest room.”

“I really appreciate you letting us stay here.” Delia told her as they headed upstairs.

“Nonsense. I wouldn’t hear of anything else.” She pushed open the door to a large room with a double bed. “There’s a bathroom through that door all to yourselves.”

Delia walked in and put her bag on the bed. “This is great. Thank you.”

“You girls make yourself comfortable. I need to go visit with one of the officer’s wives. She’s feeling a bit under the weather. I’ll wake you around 7:30 for breakfast. Have a good night.”

“Thanks, we’ll see you in the morning.” Kate said as Trish closed the door.

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*Delia was speaking in riddles. More importantly, she seemed to be flying. Okay, maybe it was more like floating. Still it was unusual for Delia. When the guy with the cheese on his head showed up, it got really odd.*

*He said, “I do not wear the cheese, the cheese wears me.”*

*A phone was ringing, Mrs. Hunter answered it. “Mom...why are you calling so late?”*

*For a moment all that could be heard was Delia’s blabbering about the walls falling down and the sky raining fire.*

*Mrs. Hunter shrieked, “No Mother, it can’t be...” Then she was crying.*

*There was another man; he appeared behind the cheese guy. He was speaking, but there was no sound. He was see-through...not like seeing his insides but like seeing the picture on the wall behind him.*

*Delia and her mother were gone now...so was the guy with the cheese. Mr. See-Through was floating around the house. The house had changed too, before it had been a ranch, but it morphed to one remarkably like Col. Frost's house.*

*Before long the house had morphed into a different building with many tables and chairs. The transparent guy was in front of a podium. There were others around, all in uniforms, all injured. Nothing made any noise. Then they were all gone.*

*Kate found herself walking along the ground in the desert. Only the hot sun surrounded her, but she could just make out Mr. See-Through up ahead. After a few minutes, she saw a box sitting on the ground. It was small and made of a golden wood shined to a high-gloss. As Kate picked it up, it simply slipped through her fingers like water.*

*Ahead there was a bright light, Mr. See-Through was walking towards it, but couldn't seem to get any closer. There was an anchor holding him in place.*

*Kate yelled out "Cut the rope"...*

"What rope?" Delia asked flipping on the bedroom light.

"Huh?" Kate blinked her light-blinded eyes. "Um...must have been a dream."

"You too?" Delia asked sitting up against the headboard.

"You had one?" Kate asked sitting up beside her friend. "Did it have a guy wearing cheese?"

Delia just looked at Kate with her patented Are-You-Insane look.

"Guess not..." Kate muttered.

Delia started to grab her book off the side table, but stopped and turned to Kate. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"You really had to think about that, didn't you?" Kate smirked at her.

"I'm trying!" Delia came as close to a whine as Kate had heard.

"Yes, you are!" Kate grinned. She pulled the blankets back up and shifted back into a comfortable position. "I think I need to process this one a little before I talk about it. Can we just shut off the light?"

Delia flicked the light and settled herself. "Yeah, I can do that."

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**D**elia was showered and dressed when the knock came on the door to wake them. She was wearing black slacks and a gold-toned blouse.

"You look nice."

"I didn't tell you to bring something nice to wear, did I?" Delia was a little flustered.

"No. Fortunately I believe in being ready for anything." Kate hopped out of bed and slipped into the bathroom.

Ten minutes later she popped her head back out and looked at Delia sitting by the window reading. "I don't suppose you'd let me do your hair and makeup?"

“No.” Delia said simply.

“Didn’t think so. I’ll be a few minutes longer.”

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Half an hour later they were at the breakfast table with Jeff and Trish Frost. He was wearing his dress uniform, and Trish was wearing blue silk.

“Did you girls sleep well?” Trish asked getting up to bring them breakfast.

“Fine, thanks.” Delia answered reaching a hand to Jeff. “Hi, Jeff. I can’t thank you enough for letting us stay here. This is Kate.”

“Hi Kate. I’m glad you came down with her. Although I’m sure she would have been fine, I’m glad she didn’t have to drive all this way alone.”

Kate grinned as she sat down. “We couldn’t have that, could we?”

“No. Well girls, I need to go setup; the ceremony will be at 09:30. Trish will bring you over.”

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Delia and Kate entered the Officer’s club with Trish. There were several families sitting a few of the tables closest to the podium.

“Déjà vu” Kate whispered.

Delia looked over at her and raised a brow, but said nothing. The three of them sat at a table with another family.

“Delia!” The woman at the table gushed reaching out a hand. “I…” she stopped herself mid-sentence and just squeezed her hand.

“It’s good to see you Maria. I’m glad Manny is home safely and able to attend.” Delia spoke into the awkward silence.”

Manny Garcia had just stepped up behind her and tapped her shoulder. As she turned, he enfolded her into his embrace. “I can’t tell you how sorry I am…Your father was the finest man…” His voice was gruff with emotion.

Delia held him for a few moments and made soothing noises until he slowly released her. “Thank you Manny.”

A man in dress uniform with a lot of stripes stepped behind the podium. He waited at attention as Colonel Jeffrey Frost came in and took his place. As he prepared to speak, Kate had a strange feeling. She tried to focus her mind on the feeling, but she could only get the slightest ‘ookie sense’.

“We’re here this morning to honor a great man and a fallen comrade. Jack Hunter was the epitome of what it meant to be the best of the best. He gave his best for his country, his men, his community, and everyone who touched his life…and so it is with great pride and sadness that I posthumously award Jack Hunter with his Major’s Oak Leaves.” He gestured to his assistant, who stepped forward with a small box. As Gunnery Sergeant Max Willis opened the box, Jeff signaled for Delia to step forward. “Delia Hunter, Jack’s daughter and successor, is here to accept on his behalf.”

Applause broke out around the room as Delia stepped forward and took the wooden box with the Gold Oak Leaves of rank.” Max and Jeff saluted her before she strode back to her chair. The other military in the room stood and saluted as well.

Delia sat the box on the table and showed Kate the oak leaves. Kate found herself more interested in the wooden box itself.

“Vuja De” she whispered under her breath.

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Later, outside several men approached Delia. Kate observed from a distance. They all seemed to know and like Delia.

“Deal! It’s good to see you. I’ve wanted to tell you that you should be so proud of Jack. He saved all of our lives...” Douglas Martin enthused as he held Delia’s hand.

George O’Donnell rested his hand on her shoulder. “Deal, we all feel your loss deeply.”

“I know” she responded, hoarse with emotion.

George ruffled her hair and marched back to his wife and baby.

Douglas dropped an arm around Delia’s shoulders. “I’m glad you were able to come, Deal. I’m glad Col. Frost held this ceremony and pushed the promotion through.”

Delia stopped and looked at him carefully. “You knew?”

“Jack came to me the week before we were due to leave. The paperwork had just come through on the promotion. He was to stay behind and head to the Pentagon. They were going to assign us another commander, someone we’d never worked with. Jack had led us for a couple years by then. He knew that the change could make the difference between order and chaos when going into combat, life and death. He begged Jeff to bury the paperwork until we were gone; he figured it would be waiting for him when we all got back. He knew you and Amelia would be so proud.”

“He knew about it before he left.” Delia repeated barely able to understand what she’d heard. “He could have stayed in the States. He chose not to.”

“It was all just bad timing, he said.” Douglas explained.

Delia clamped her hand around box in pocket in a white-knuckled fist. She took firm control of her thoughts and whispered. “I really need to go now, Doug. Thanks for...telling me...everything.”

Kate watched Delia approach. “I’ve got a bad feeling about this” she said.

“Huh?...what?...oh...about what?” Delia asked distractedly.

Kate shrugged her shoulders. “Twice now I’ve had this strange sense of something not being right. Combined with the dream I had...”

“Are you girls ready to go back?” Trish asked catching up to them.

“I guess so.” Kate answered watching her friend retreat inside herself.

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“I could say that you’ve been quiet...but that’s hardly new.” Kate began when they reached the guest room. “But you do look abnormally pensive and just a touch pale.”

Delia unclenched her jaw and shook her head to clear it. She chuckled a bit tensely, “you’ll find this shocking I’m sure, but I’m not ready to talk about it.”

“I could die of not surprise.” Kate said sarcastically.

“More irony...I think you need to tell me about that dream now.”

Kate lifted her eyebrows “you think so?”

“I know, I know...but you said that you were getting a sense of something being wrong and it was related to your dream. All of this” she gestured her hand around her “has to do with me. I think on a need to know basis...”

“Okay, I get it, Ms. Keeper-of-Secrets. It was like this...” Kate described the dream in detail.

When the recitation ended, “What’s with the guy with cheese?” Delia asked.

“I’ve seen him before, I think.” Kate shrugged it off “he’s not important. But the box in the dream...it’s exactly the same as the one your father’s oak leaves are in.”

Delia pulled it of her pocket. “You’re sure?”

“Yes.” Kate took it from Delia’s hand. “And the room that the ceremony was in...that was in my dream. The men too...they were wounded, but they were the same.”

“The transparent man, you saw him in a ranch, right? With mom and me there?”

“Yeah, I’ve never seen the place before.”

Delia reached into her pack and pulled out her scrapbook. “Kate, look through this and see if you recognize anyone in it as Mr. See-through.”

Kate considered Delia for a few moments before taking the album and examining it. After a few minutes, she stopped at a picture. “You knew I’d find him there.”

“It seemed likely.” Delia sighed as looked over Kate’s shoulder.

“It’s your dad, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Delia replied. “What does it mean?”

“I never understand my dreams right away. Usually they give me only the vaguest ideas of what is going on. And Delia...they are almost always about the supernatural.”

“I guess it’s share time now.” Delia announced. “I had a dream last night as well. It was like this...”

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*The sky was burning and the walls were falling. Some men were yelling for Jack not to go back into the building. Others were yelling for help. In slow motion he entered the building.*

*Delia was at the building yelling too. “Dad, you can’t die; I need you” she yelled over and over again until it was more of a chant.*

*Three men ran out of the building prior to the whole building collapsing. None of them were Jack.*

*Delia screamed "DAD!" and ran to the building.*

*He came out then. None of his men went to help him. Delia went to him, he was starting to float. She put her arms around him.*

*"You can't go away. I'll be alone."*

*Jack said nothing; he simply nodded his head and held on more tightly to Delia.*

*No one spoke to them as they walked past; everyone was tending to the wounded or mourning for the casualties. Suddenly they were back at home. They walked up to Amelia who was crying. She barely glanced at Delia before she ran back to her bedroom.*

*"What am I supposed to do now?" Amelia whined.*

*"But Mom, he's right here..." Delia yelled after her.*

*Suddenly Delia was with her friends in Farmingham. They were in trouble, she needed to help them. Each time she went to help them, Jack started to float away. She had to run back and grab him. Jack's eyes were sad. Still he said nothing and waited for her to decide...*

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**I**'m no expert at this...but that was a heck of a lot more clear than mine." Kate said.  
"It's similar to the dream I had when he died. Only he didn't come out of the building then." Delia told her.

Kate sat looking at the picture for a few moments. "D, is that how he really died?"

Delia responded "from what I've been told, pretty much."

"Your dream was prophetic or something." Kate turned to her. "Have you ever had any other dreams like this?"

"No. Last night was the second and it seems linked."

"You should have told me last night."

Delia took the album from Kate's hands and sat down. "You say that like it was easy. You didn't tell me about your dream either."

"But..."

"Kate, I dreamt about my father dying. It was all I could do not to bawl like a baby."

"You cry?"

"When I heard my father died, I did..."

Kate put her hand on Delia's shoulder. "Only then?"

Delia shrugged off Kate's hand and went to put the scrapbook in her pack. "I was a little busy after that."

“I think we need to do a little research...but I think I understand what is going on.”

Delia turned back to her. “You have an occult library hidden in your pack?”

“No, I was hoping we could use the computer downstairs and you could let your fingers do the walking.”

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“If someone told me a year ago that I’d be Googling ghosts, I would have called them *linsane*.”

“What’d you find?” Kate asked, looking over her shoulder.

“It says here on C.J. Carella’s site ‘Ghosts are the restless spirits of dead humans. Usually when somebody dies her soul moves on to the next stage of existence, whatever that may be. For an unfortunate few, things don’t work out that way, and they are stuck in our dimension. Most ghosts are tormented by some event in their lives, or feel they have unfinished business in this world.’”

“Does it say how to find or recognize one?” Kate asked.

“No, but there is a link here to a Wiccan’s site.”

“Looks like there is an incantation ‘to see the unseen’, but we need a few things for this to work.”

“Candles, fresh sage, and a focusing crystal” Delia read. “I think we can find this stuff here. Trish has an herb garden and has always been a bit new-agey. I’m sure she’s got candles and crystals.”

“Okay, let’s see what we can find.”

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“How’s your Latin?” Kate asked.

“About as good as anyone else whose been taking a dead language for three years, I guess.”

“That makes it better than mine. I’ll light the candles as you hold the crystal and read the incantation. A candle needs to be lit at the end of each stanza, so nod your head when you get there.”

“Okay...are you sure this is a good idea?” Delia looked up from the printout they’d made.

“Do we have another choice?”

“I’d hate for something bad to happen here, to the Frost’s house.”

“That’s why we’re doing it outside.” Kate reminded.

“I can just hear the riot act they’d read if the gang knew what we were doing.”

“Since when has that stopped you?” Kate demanded.

Delia laughed. “Never. I just wanted to make sure you were aware that there could be consequences.”

“Somehow I think the consequences of continuing to be haunted in my dreams are worse than a few gripes from the know-it-alls at home.”

“So you really think my father is stuck?”

Kate picked up the lighter. “D, I think you are keeping him stuck.”

“What?”

“Read the spell!”

Delia read the Latin as Kate lit the candles. After a few moments, Delia stopped and put down the paper. Each of them blew out a candle and said “As we will, so mote it be”.

“Should something have happened?” She asked.

“I don’t know. We may not know until we ‘see’ something odd.”

“Well, this is a great plan” Delia remarked.

“Quit being Ms. Sarcastic and let’s go see us some ghosts.”

Delia sighed, but got up to follow Kate.

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**I**n front of the officer’s club, there was a large oak tree. As Delia and Kate approached the doors of the building, Delia saw him.

“It worked.” She whispered in awe.

Jack Hunter sat beneath the tree watching them draw near. His eyes were sad as he watched his only child advance.

“Dad!” She yelled running to him, but her hands passed right through. His lips moved, but there was no sound.

“Guess the spell only allows us to see.” Kate muttered, “should’ve thought of that.”

“Dad, why didn’t you move on?”

He ran his hands over the captain’s bars on his shoulders. Then he pointed to the south.

“What’s he pointing at?” Kate asked.

“Our house was that way.” Delia responded. “Because of Mom and I?”

He made a cross over his heart, as one does when making a promise.

“He promised to come back, didn’t he?” Kate asked.

“He promised.” Delia muttered. “Dad, I’ve missed you so much...I’ve been so lonely.”

Jack nodded his head and reached out his hand until it would be touching her face.

“Why did you leave us? You could have stayed!” She croaked as her hands unconsciously clenched together in a fierce grip. “You promised and you left me alone...”

Jack dropped to his knees before her, his head bowed low.

Delia looked at him in a way she never had during his life. The high color in her face from her anger drained to a pallid white. "I'm sorry I kept you here, daddy. I love you so much...sometimes it just tears me up inside. I didn't know..." She slumped to her knees in front of him. "I forgive you." Her eyes filled with tears. "Please be at peace."

His head came up and he gave her a watery smile through his own tears. He blew her a kiss, placed his hand on his heart and pointed at her. Then he stood and simply disappeared.

Delia remained on her knees sniffing for some time. Kate came over and squatted down beside her, resting her arm across Delia's shoulders. "I can see now where you get your stubbornness," she smirked. She quickly changed to a warm comforting smile and squeezed Delia's shoulders, "things should be easier from here." As a poem started to take form in her mind, she recited "Peace of the Mind; stress be gone. Peace of the Heart; your love is one."

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**I**n the jeep later, Kate finally broke the stifling silence.

"So how much do we tell the others?"

"Surprisingly, I'm not ready to tell the others what happened here." Delia told her.

Kate chuckled "blow me over with a light wind."

"Do you mind keeping it quiet?"

"I think I can handle that. Over the years I've found that sharing the weird stuff can just get me into trouble."

Delia looked carefully at her friend.

"What kind of trouble?"

"The kind with wrap-around arms and padded walls, the kind I have no interest in repeating." Kate explained, her inner vision taking her far away.

Delia nodded. "I didn't know" she said in a quiet voice.

"You aren't the only one with secrets..."

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\* Quoted from the Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game Core Book, written by C.J. Carella.