

**THE WORLD IS UNDER THREAT...**



**FROM A WEAPON  
LAUNCHED IN 1944**

**THE  
SECRET  
FIRE**



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The Secret Fire  
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# Day Five

# New York

25 June 2007

The hidden drawer opened at Robert's first touch.

For a split second the room seemed to twist and roar about him, buckling and cracking, as if the walls of the world were caving in. Robert raised his arms over his head, pushing his chair violently back from the desk, knocking it over onto the wooden floor. He stood staring at the drawer, breathing hard.

Voices rustled at the edge of his mind: *go no further*, they whispered. *Stop now*.

Hatred echoed around him. For an instant, he had seen a bloodless face, stark-eyed and vengeful, floating in the darkness that had descended on him. A familiar face.

'You're dead!' Robert hissed in anger.

Outside the window was a fifty-foot drop to the street below. There couldn't be anyone there, and he was alone in the apartment. No one could be whispering to him.

Robert slowly lowered his arms, peering into the darkness outside. Wraiths of mist swirled and eddied in random patterns. No apparition there now. He stood still, listening intently, blood rushing in his ears.

The face was that of a man Robert had fought to the death, two and a half years earlier, a servant and soldier of the Enemy. The memory still haunted him, nightly, in terrifying flashes: trapped underground, a stark sense of loathing rumbling around him like slow thunder . . . For a moment Robert was back there, and he tensed again, ready

to defend himself, fists clenched, feet firmly planted, hyper-alert to his surroundings.

Nothing. Silence.

He'd seen pale skin, a halo of white hair, piercing eyes . . . it was a face he knew, yes, and yet it was different. There was something else to it that he couldn't name.

Robert brought his breathing under control, allowing himself to relax slightly.

He let his eyes roam over the desk he had been working at, the abandoned workspace of dear, crazy, loving Adam, his friend, whom the Enemy had destroyed.

His eyes returned to the hidden drawer, now open. Was this what Adam had wanted him to find?

Robert and Adam had been friends at Cambridge University twenty-five years before, rivals in love through the years since, co-conspirators in existential games, mostly of Adam's devising, colleagues and competitors in the international news business. They'd been two halves, perhaps, of a single man. Air and fire were Adam: spontaneous, daring, ungraspable; earth and water were Robert: grounded, reliable, unstoppable.

Each in turn had sought and won the hand of Katherine, the blue-eyed, raven-haired penitent spy who was now Robert's wife.

There had been darkness over the decades. Adam had tipped over into madness in the 1990s, clawing his way back to the light with Katherine's and Robert's help. And throughout, they had been watched over by their mentor, a man charged with guiding them even when they rejected him: Horace Hencott, an Anglophile American and sometime academic, a wartime colleague of Adam's grandfather. He was an octogenarian mage, the overseer of their individual psychic gifts, which each of them had denied, espoused, fought with, lost and regained over the years.

It was Horace who had brought them to their darkest game nearly three years earlier, a contest with real risks and real victims, the one that had claimed Adam's life. The Enemy had tried to detonate a doomsday device in Manhattan. Millions of lives had hung by a thread, millions more had faced unbearable suffering. Robert had succeeded by the skin of his teeth in stopping it, at terrible cost to others, and to himself.

But, as Horace had said, the snake was never killed, only scotched. The Enemy had been angered, and would be back, working through new avenues, through new souls, aiming at new targets. It would have to be fought again.

Robert, still agitated, stepped forward again to Adam's desk. On either side were stacked the last of the files Horace had instructed Robert to go through after the events in Manhattan, seeking to understand just what Adam had been focusing on in the final months before his death.

Robert was sure Adam had left a message, a series of clues. With Adam, there had always been one more game to play, one more riddle to dragoon his friends into solving, one more chance to organize a party, a scavenger hunt, or another shot at self-discovery.

Robert stood, hands on his hips, staring down at the most recent batch of papers and photographs he had been examining. It had been his *obsessive project*, as Kat had called it, part of the recovery process Horace had devised for him after 2004: track down and gather together all the research papers and writings Adam had accumulated over his years in London, Miami, Havana and elsewhere, as well as in New York. See what he had learned about himself, and about the Enemy. It was a way of making peace with Adam's memory, and with the things Robert had done.

Robert raised his eyes and peered into the hidden drawer

that he had not noticed until this evening, until a glimmer of light, like a sunbeam reflected on water, had fallen on it repeatedly as he'd worked. A shard of ghost light, from God only knew where.

Snatches of words formed in his mind: *Mar . . . regret . . .* Robert shook his head, dismissing them, banishing the last echoes of the vision. Focus.

He reached inside the drawer.

It contained a sealed envelope. As he took it out, the air grew colder around his neck and shoulders. Robert felt eyes upon him, and he shivered.

The letter was addressed to him in Adam's handwriting. Robert took a paper knife and slit it open.

*Dear Robert*

*I cannot be saved. Forget me.*

*But if you are reading this, it is because you have survived, which means that you were able to defeat the Enemy.*

*Know this: If you defeated it, it will be back. It will try other ways to achieve its aims. It is patient, but it will never rest. And it will want revenge – personal, ad hominem, brutal revenge – against those who stopped it. It will come for each of you, to destroy you.*

*Who is the Enemy? It is a single force, with countless names – a force of unspeakable evil, in this world and the next. It is otherworldly, but it works through beings in this life. There is one servant of the Enemy in particular, named Isambard, who is the most powerful of all. Expect him to come for you now. Creatures like Isambard are the instruments of hell in this world. They are drawn to suffering, seek to create more, feed and grow stronger on it, induce us to cause more of it under their tutelage.*

*One force, many names.*

*In your old neck of the woods, where you grew up, the Enemy's*

*servants are called the Lantern Men, the dark spirits with their mesmerizing lights who lure men to their deaths in the lonely, shallow waters of the Fens.*

*In other times, in other places, its servants have been called the Clouded Mirror, the Shadow Brotherhood, the Fraternity of IWNW. This last – IWNW – is the name under which we met its soldiers in Manhattan. It refers to one of the places where the Enemy first won servants to its side: a priestly Egyptian city, later called Heliopolis by the Greeks, where spiritual masters first turned from the light, choosing instead the Enemy's path to power: the infliction of suffering on others.*

*The Enemy is all around us. It is alive to our every thought, yearning in every instant to dwell in the physical world, to incarnate in this life. It constantly seeks servants and victims, and it can reach us everywhere. It lives on our fear, our hatred, our cowardice, and feeds it all back into us, in a never-ending cycle. In one sense, it is ourselves. We can never hide from it, not in the end. Even death may provide no sanctuary from it. It must be fought, again and again.*

*Robert, you don't know yet what you are. You have started down a road that must lead you back to your own people, to the gifts and nameless arts you were brought up to despise, to the powerful Fenland witches, to the cunning men and wise women from whom you spring, and from whose world you were always shielded.*

*Go back, to go forward.*

*I've set aside some historical records, some potential discoveries and troubling anomalies for you to peruse. In part they concern my own family: my grandfather Harry Hale, whose rooms I occupied at Trinity College; and his brother, Peter Hale. The good people of the Club of St George, off Fleet Street, will provide my papers to you, on receipt of a note from me (enclosed) and a suitable code word. The word you must give them is the name of your favourite weather event.*

*There is a date to be mindful of – June 30, 2007. A full moon, and a ‘blue’ moon in London, the second in the month. I don’t know why, but I have seen it.*

*My love to Katherine, always,*

*Adam*

The letter, finally, was what Robert had been looking for. He smiled tightly at the choice of password. *Georges*. That was typical of Adam. *Georges* was the name of the hurricane that had been raging near Miami on the night when Katherine had chosen Robert to be her second husband. In succession to Adam.

He put the letter back in its envelope and stowed it in his jacket pocket. *June 30, 2007*. Five days away.

Katherine would be driving over to Adam’s old apartment building shortly to pick Robert up. He stared out into the darkness, defying the mist to form again into the face of a dead man. Nothing. He turned out the lights and went downstairs.

She didn’t come.

Puzzled, Robert wondered if she could have forgotten. It would be uncharacteristic. He called her cellphone, but it kicked over to the answering service. Could she have parked instead in the building’s underground garage? She’d done so before, though not since winter . . . After standing in the street for 10 minutes, he went back inside and took the elevator down, to see if she was there.



An unnatural, bone-numbing chill exuded from the concrete floor and pillars of the parking garage, and Robert's breath formed a cloud in the air before him. The smell of motor oil pricked at his nostrils. Water dripped from a leaking pipe. Again, he felt himself watched. He scoured the shadows of the cavernous underground chamber, hairs raised on the back of his neck, nervous and wired, looking for his wife. The car was there, but she was not. It was one o'clock in the morning.

Overhead, a neon light began to buzz and flicker, then went out.

He heard a footfall behind him. His eyes strained to pierce the blackness.

'Kat?'

Just beyond his field of vision, at the very edge of perception, Robert could feel someone drawing closer, the air thickening behind him. He felt heat at his neck, by his ear, in his face, like breath, soft and warm.

*Robert, he heard. Come to me.* An image formed in his mind of a childhood scene, parents and cousins and grandparents, in black and white . . . he realized it was a photograph, one he had glimpsed as a boy. The family he had never known, the ones he had been kept away from. *Margaret . . .*

Instinctively he ducked. He felt air displaced above his head, something heavy, right to left. A body crashed into his, and Robert lashed out with his elbow. He heard a cry as boots scuffed the concrete floor behind him with a metallic echo. Then his kidneys exploded with pain, and Robert dropped to his knees.

There were two or three of them. No words spoken. He heard the click of a flick knife opening. Robert rolled to his right, ducking his head, his heart hammering. In the darkness, he collided with a pillar, hitting it hard with his

shoulder. He used it to lever himself upright, hands up above his face, fists formed, his back to the concrete column. He couldn't see his attackers. But he was too angry to be afraid.

A steel-capped boot slammed into the pillar beside him, and Robert stooped instinctively in the blackness, grabbing the ankle and twisting it hard to his right. A shriek of pain rang out and a body hit the floor.

Robert felt a hand grab his hair, and a fist drove into his solar plexus. He fell to the ground, his chest in spasm, straining to breathe. He was thrown onto his back.

Then the darkness thickened, and he knew nothing more.

# New York

## *Later that day*

Robert forced himself to move. Gritting his teeth, he made one more effort and drove himself upright in the hospital bed.

A jagged, jarring musical phrase shrieked in his mind, over and over again, as his head swam and waves of pain consumed his body. Electric guitar. Words he couldn't grasp. Something about a helter-skelter ride.

*Katherine. Where was Katherine?*

His left arm gave way at the elbow. Tubes and sticking plasters tugged at Robert's skin as he wrestled to right himself. His chest was burning, and through pain-clouded eyes he saw that blood had seeped through his dressings, making a pattern on his flesh. Barbed lines.

Blackness rimmed his vision, and a shrill, piercing note grew louder and louder in his head until it threatened to split his skull. Robert saw nurses descending upon him, forcing him back down. *John*, he heard. *John Doe. John Doe's awake . . .*

'My wife! I must see my wife!' he shouted, struggling.

Out of the corner of an eye, he saw a syringe being readied, adjustments being made to a drip-feed.

'Don't sedate me!' he roared at the top of his voice, oblivious to how it sounded to those around him. A shriek? A croak?

One of the nurses leaned closer, her lips forming words: 'Where is she?'

'I need to get out of here.'

‘There’s no way . . .’

The room swam. When it came back into focus, a doctor in her forties was leaning over him, and Robert realized he was flat on his back again.

‘Sir? Sir. We need to know your name. What is your name?’

‘Where’s Katherine!’

‘Katherine?’

‘Where’s my wife?’

‘What is your name, sir? We don’t know who you are. We don’t know about your wife. No one was with you when you were brought in. You had no ID. You were found in the street. Do you understand? Your name. Tell me your name.’

Robert fought a sudden, narcotic rush, as whatever drugs they were giving him kicked in.

‘Robert . . . I have to get out of here.’

Her words were fading, the room receding.

‘You’re not going anywhere, Robert. You’re lucky to be alive.’

*Hate*, he heard, in whispers around him. *Hate crime* . . .

Minutes or hours later, he came to. A deep ache filled his body. He was made of lead, sinking into the bedsheets, incapable of moving.

The jangling, shrieking guitar began again. Something about an endless spiral, going round and round. What was the song? What did it mean?

He saw himself running endlessly up spiralling steps, reaching the top of a fairground slide, sliding down, reaching the bottom, climbing again to the top, spiralling down on a kind of rough, thick hessian mat . . . It was a visit to the fair in Peterborough: towering pink candyfloss and sticky, sweet

toffee apples . . . a gypsy fortune-teller who frightened and fascinated him, her dark long hair falling in a thick coil over one shoulder . . . He was maybe six years old. Other worlds, suspended rules, out past bedtime . . . sharp electric and neon lights in the dark night, and across from the fairground, over the river, the silent white towers of the cathedral, unmoved, unmoving.

The song faded.

He had to get up. Christ, Katherine. Where was she?

He braced himself, then lifted a leg. His stomach and chest screamed at him. Despite new dressings, he could see whatever had been cut into his torso had bled again.

‘Nurse!’

He shouted at the top of his lungs.

‘Help me!’

A woman with kindly eyes in a floral topcoat came to check on him.

‘I’m checking myself out,’ he said. ‘Now.’

‘I don’t know if you . . .’

‘I can do it, and I am. Please unhook me, or I’m taking all this gear with me.’



Katherine was not at home when he got there. He’d hoped against hope that she would be. Her cellphone was still off, or out of range.

Now, head swimming, staring at himself in the mirror of the bathroom, Robert saw what had been done to him, and understood the whispers: *Hate crime. Hate.*

His attackers, the ones he feared were now holding Katherine, had carved a symbol onto his chest.

It was a Nazi swastika.

Anger and revulsion rose in his throat. Then he let out a defiant roar.

‘I know who you are!’ he shouted. ‘You can’t have her!’

His vision blacked over. Holding onto the bathroom sink to keep his balance, Robert struggled to stay conscious.

Police. But . . .

He’d learned from Horace that the authorities could often make things worse. That some things were simply not understood . . .

He was too weak to try reaching out to Katherine mentally. The skills he had developed, since learning of his true nature in the summer of 2004, were beyond his reach right now.

It had been a shattering thing to learn.

Robert was heir to a powerful tradition he had been brought up to shun, that of the East Anglian *nameless art*. There were aunts and uncles who possessed the power. But seeking a better life for him, one free of superstitions and dangers from another age, Robert’s parents had brought him up to disbelieve in all such things, to unwittingly bury his own nature. He was to be no witch. An unknowing psychic of immense potential, he’d grown up a rationalist, a deep sceptic, a practical, earthbound soul.

In 2004, Horace had lifted the scales from his eyes, forcing him to undergo an awakening of his gifts so strenuous that Horace himself, the old man had said, could not have survived it. Without Robert’s forcibly ignited powers – through seven ordeals in as many days – they would have been unable to defeat the Enemy.

Then afterwards, the great array of powers – bursts of great physical strength, the ability to bend fragments of time and matter to his intention, a capacity to see into the very stuff that he and the world were made of – had abandoned

him as quickly as they had come, and had since only returned in fleeting and mercurial snatches.

He chose to call Horace. But before he could do so, his cellphone buzzed. It was Katherine's number.

Robert snatched the phone up.

'Kat?'

There was no one there. He looked at the phone again. It was a text message, all in capital letters.

**STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING OR SHE IS DEAD.**

Below the letters was a hyperlink. It opened up a video clip, which loaded quickly to reveal the old converted brick warehouse in the Red Hook neighbourhood where Adam had stored his papers, a few hundred yards from Robert and Katherine's own Brooklyn apartment. The camera zoomed shakily to the top of the building, just as two figures in black, their faces masked, threw a figure off the roof into the street below. The figure wore a red summer dress, the one Katherine had been wearing the previous day. The figure had long black curly hair, like Katherine's. The clip ended before it hit the ground.

'No!'

It had to be a mannequin, someone else in her dress. Anything.

Robert frantically called Katherine's number. Answering machine.

'If you hurt her, I will hunt you to the end of this world and any other stinking hell that you crawled out of,' he shouted. 'Do not hurt her!'

A wave of pain broke over him. Robert poured all his willpower into staying upright, remaining conscious, fighting.

He made his way into the living room and looked out

across Brooklyn towards the warehouse. He could see nothing on the roof now. He and Kat had binoculars in the house, but in his current state he couldn't reach the shelf where they were stored.

His thoughts came in jagged spurts. Could he drive over there? He had no car, it had to be still at Adam's place. Unless the kidnappers had taken it. Run? He could barely walk.

He forced himself to focus. They wanted leverage over him. It would make no sense to kill her, or their leverage would be gone. It was all in the threat.

Robert pulled his clothes back together as well as he could and strode to the elevator, mind filled with purpose, painkillers in one pocket, unused as yet. He didn't want to numb his mind. He marched through the lobby and out to the car park, past their empty parking space, into the street.

It was a humid, overcast day. The Manhattan skyline was almost invisible in the haze. Robert pounded along the stone-flagged streets of Red Hook, past derelict, weed-choked lots and nineteenth-century warehouses given over to garden centres and art studios, theatrical stores and community groups.

Sweating and cursing, he came to the building he had seen in the video clip. The camera had been pointing at the south face. If there were anything . . . He looked up at the roof. They had to be long gone, the video had to have been shot while he was still in hospital . . . Robert scoured the grounds where she would have fallen. Nothing. He found nothing. No witnesses, no one to ask. Katherine was nowhere.

As he walked back, his mind racing, he called Horace. He had to, though the old man had almost entirely shunned

him for the last year. Robert didn't understand why, or what he had done to merit the sudden frost. But he remained Robert's only mentor, the only one he could turn to. A retired academic and sometime businessman, Horace had been in the OSS, the predecessor of the CIA, during the Second World War. There couldn't be a more hard-nosed mystic in existence, yet a mystic he was.

# London

*25 June 2007*

Horace Hencott stepped away from the noise of the black-tie cocktail reception at Australia House and slipped out onto a quiet balcony where he could talk.

Gazing down at the great curving thoroughfare of Aldwych in the cool evening air, Horace drew in a deep breath and slowly expelled it through his lips, clearing and calming his mind. The final days of a cycle begun decades earlier were finally at hand.

‘Tell me what happened, Robert.’

Horace listened carefully to his protégé’s account.

‘You must get to London.’

‘No. I have to find Katherine.’

‘You will not help Katherine by looking for her in New York. You’ll help her by getting on a plane to London, going to the Club of St George, and finding the material Adam described to you. They will only give it to you.’

‘Katherine . . .’

‘All roads lead to England in this matter. She is a tough girl, she can look after herself. I’ll try to track her, but you have to follow the trail that Adam has left for us.’

Robert was angry now.

‘Horace, I need to find her.’

‘There are flights tonight. Get moving. Immediately.’

‘Where are you?’

Horace ended the call.

‘Trust me, Robert,’ he whispered to himself.

Horace put away the cellphone in the inner pocket of his

dinner jacket, made for him at Poole's on Savile Row in the early 1950s, and looked out bleakly into the London night.

If Robert realized Horace was in London, not in New York, he would in all likelihood refuse to get on the plane, and go on looking for Katherine in America. They couldn't afford that.

At last, soon, there would be resolution. Down below, on the site of a holy well at the very heart of London, past and present would braid and unbraid, and redemption would be possible. But redemption for whom?

Already Horace could feel the gathering storm. His adversary was out there, yearning to complete the game, dying to live again. Horace turned the name over in his mind, pronouncing it in the French fashion, as he had heard it from the creature's own mouth, in Paris in 1944. *Isambard. Eezabmar* . . . The cold green eyes. The colourless accent. The close-cropped white hair.

Horace could see, and he could not see.

He knew that Isambard was coming back. He knew that a knot in time, one that Horace himself had helped to tie sixty-three years ago, was starting to unravel. He knew that the consequences were terrifying if the knot tore apart, and he knew he didn't know how to stop it.

He knew, too, that things he bore in private shame – decisions he had taken as a younger man, in desperate times, with little experience – were at long last forcing their way to the surface, like splinters ejected from deep under the skin. The past was no longer to be buried or denied.

There was a man called Peter Hale. There was a woman called Rose. Ghosts, both, of his service in World War Two. A time of fear, of betrayal, of lost love. A time of victory so costly as almost to kill the victor.

Snatches of piano music and cocktail chatter wafted from the reception out into the night air. Horace looked down at Aldwych, and into history.

The Thames had lapped closer in Saxon times, when the Strand was the shore, and west of the River Fleet a dozen streams and rivulets had run across the marshy land below him, where traders and their families had made their homes, outside the walls of the crumbling Roman city that had been Londinium.

Lundenwic, the Saxon settlement had been called, more than a thousand years earlier.

*Saxon* . . . a glimmer of hope flashed across the dark, and faded before Horace could grasp it. He screwed up his eyes in frustration. There were dead zones in the landscape of what was to come, places he couldn't see, powerfully shielded and camouflaged. They were to do with Robert's past, and with his own, and for all his power and skill, accumulated over many decades, Horace couldn't penetrate them. *Saxon* . . . he marked the sensation, noted it, let it go.

Looking closer in time, Horace saw the medieval bridges over the Aldwych streams, in the area then sometimes called London Fen, leading up from the Thames to the meadows of Holborn. One creek ran into the Thames at the bottom of what was now Essex Street, a stone bridge over it built by the Knights Templar in the time of Edward III; another stream joined the Thames between Catherine Street and Wellington Street; a third, called Ulebrig, later the Ivy, joined the great river at Cecil Street.

He saw the streets stretch and grow as time flowed, the streams and springs covered over and forgotten except in names: Holywell Street, a narrow road of bookstores and inns; the wooden houses of Wych Street, slums around Clare Market in the time of Dickens, torn down in their turn at

the start of the last century to make way for the elegant crescent of Aldwych as it now stood.

Though the streams were gone, two islands remained, surrounded not by rushing water but by torrents of motor traffic, each graced with a church: St Clement Danes, resting just east of Australia House, also built above the sacred spring; and St Mary-le-Strand, where a maypole had stood, an echo of London's pagan past, until as recently as the eighteenth century.

Horace scanned backwards and forwards again, looking for the crack in time, the point when time slipped.

It was a faculty that had come with painstaking progress, achieved over more than fifty years since leaving the OSS, towards the ultimate goal of all those of his kind: Horace sought the prize known as the Great Work.

To achieve the Great Work was, simply, to attain a fabled state of consciousness, a perspective both in time and outside it, both individual and universal, that gave transfiguring powers to whoever achieved it. It was the most powerful, most dangerous, most transformational state a human being could achieve. It was to be sought for only one reason: to benefit one's fellow man. Although Isambard had taken another route . . .

Horace was close to achieving the Work. He also knew that he would never attain it without a final ordeal; and he saw that the ordeal was about to begin.

He looked away from his inner world out again onto Aldwych.

Then he saw the crack in time, and the world shattered. Horace saw what might have been, what might still be.

All was black, covered in cinders.

London a smoking ruin. South-east England a grey, ash-strewn wasteland, as far as the eye could see.

Two emaciated men, twitching and shrieking like hyenas, clothes ragged and torn, their feet unshod, ran up a slope of blackened bricks where St Catherine's House had once stood. They were pitiful, insane. Fleeing something. One turned and hurled a brick in defiance at unseen pursuers, shouting incomprehensibly.

Horace looked for the source of their fear. Then he saw it, edging slowly past the ruins where St Clement Danes had stood, creeping from the remains of Fleet Street onto the devastated Aldwych. A platoon of soldiers in black uniforms, pointing their rifles edgily at the piles of rubble, advanced slowly towards the men, nervously scanning the pestilential, boiling horizon.

The two fleeing men hurled more bricks, taunting them, perhaps trying to draw them towards their location. Perhaps just mindless with hunger, or pain. Horace heard a northern English accent, perhaps Tyneside.

There was a burst of sub-machine-gun fire. One of the men hollered hoarsely and fell dead, blood spurting from chest and throat wounds. The other screamed as his legs shattered beneath him.

The troops stopped firing. The platoon leader surveyed the scene through binoculars, then signalled instructions, and they moved on in the direction of a blackened, devastated Trafalgar Square.

The wounded man's cries grew shriller, then slowly weaker. He was calling for his mother.

The soldiers' armbands and helmets bore the mark of the swastika.

A hand fell on Horace's shoulder, jolting him from the appalling vision.

'There you are! Ready to go down to the basement?'

Horace's companion, who had joined him on the balcony, was a high-ranking diplomat at the Australian High Commission. Horace's purpose in attending the reception had been to visit the waters of the holy well below Australia House, which were never shown to the public.

Horace breathed hard, trying to compose himself.

'The basement?' He tried to banish from his mind what he had just seen. 'Yes, yes, of course.'

Horace stepped back into the reception, shaken and afraid.

## New York

Back at the apartment, Robert's body went into spasms. Vomiting, then dry heaves.

How could he get on a plane? He could barely drag himself to the next room.

In his distress, he tried reaching out mentally again to Katherine.

Nothing.

Then, through sheer effort of will, he hauled himself into the shower, protecting his chest wounds as best he could, and rinsed the sweat of fear from his body.

When he had finished, doubting Horace even as he trusted him, Robert dressed and called a car to JFK.