

**MEMORY
DUNGEON**

R·T·W LIPKIN

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To Mnemosyne and Lethe
Warning: approach both with caution

Chapter 1

MEMORY PALACE

YOU'LL NEVER FORGET anything again.

Because at the Memory Palace, your memories are preserved forever.

Imagine revisiting your favorite memories over and over again. They'll be as vivid and vital as they were when you first made them.

Imagine having the comfort of knowing that the memories of your loved ones will be preserved not just for them but for future generations as well.

Here at the Memory Palace we'll store your memories safely, efficiently, and with ease.

Come in for a free consultation today, sign up for our simple uptake procedure, and leave a mere two hours later with all your memories simply, accurately, and permanently stored for you. Be assured that our services are always discreet and confidential. Your memories are safe with us.

Keep your memories current with our economical update plan, choosing weekly, monthly, or bimonthly sessions to make sure your memories are up-to-date, fresh, and at the ready.

What are you waiting for? Your memories are waiting for you. Come in to the Memory Palace and get started on preserving your precious memories today!

* * *

Are you looking for a *real* getaway?

Also available at the Memory Palace are our hugely popular Weekend Lockers.

Need a vacation from your responsibilities and worries? The Memory Locker is your ticket to the most amazing weekend of your life!

The Weekend Locker will hold on to the burdens of your daily life for you while you enjoy a carefree, relaxed, fun weekend, free from your everyday troubles and cares. A lockered weekend is relaxing, rejuvenating, and invigorating. It's your chance to be the person you want to be, unburdened by anything and everything that's bothering you. You'll be free to be the person you really are. To live out your fondest dreams.

We keep your everyday life stored safely for you while you enjoy yourself, and after your weekend, your memories are returned to you complete and intact.

What are you waiting for? The weekend is almost here. Sign up for a Weekend Locker today!

* * *

Special rates available for the 3-in-1 package:

- (1) For your peace of mind: Full initial uptake at the Memory Palace.
- (2) For your pleasure: One Weekend Locker.
- (3) For your savings: Two months of free storage at the Memory Palace.

* * *

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Chapter 2

“I’M NOT EXACTLY sure,” Colin said. “It’s in the locker.”

“Wasn’t that expensive?” Vivi said, brushing her wavy dark blond hair back from her shoulders. He was sure he’d seen someone else execute this exact same gesture, but he couldn’t place who that was. He tried for a moment, then stopped. Probably in the locker.

“Just for the weekend,” Colin said. “It’s not that pricey.”

Vivi stared at him and took a sip of her frosty blue cocktail, one of the Peacock’s specialties. The crushed ice in her drink resettled itself, making a sound that Colin thought was almost like music, and as it wound its way around the heady spices of Vivi’s perfume, Colin could taste it.

“What would you like?” Colin said.

Colin knew what he’d like, although he wasn’t really sure it existed. But after this weekend he’d find out.

“Another drink?” Vivi said. She ran her fingers around the rim of her glass, the ice collapsed into the fluid, and the music that Colin had just heard turned into a cacophonous jumble.

The server arrived with fresh drinks. Colin handed him his glass, which he’d hardly touched, but he didn’t want it on the table anymore. It felt like a reminder, although of what, he wasn’t sure. In the locker, almost certainly.

He looked over at Vivi, who seemed to be interested in everyone in the Peacock but Colin. Why the hell had he chosen her for his lockered weekend? He couldn’t remember. Ah. That was a clue. Vivi herself was in the locker. Hell. What had he gotten himself into? And why had he?

Colin put a hand on the table, a prelude to putting it on Vivi herself. Picking up the signal, she reached over and put one of her hands, still cold from having touched her icy glass, on top of Colin's.

Why had he chosen Vivi? There had to be a reason. Maybe a hundred reasons. Or a thousand. If he'd known her for a while—for a long time, even—he had no memory of it. She was bright and new. Maybe that had been the point. To get an untainted perspective.

He took a long pull on his drink. He'd ordered the tasteless, powerful stuff. Expensive. Effective. Vivi put her hand under Colin's thigh. He put his hand under her thigh as she moved closer to him.

Colin twisted his torso and leaned over to whisper in Vivi's ear. "Let's go." He nipped at her earlobe.

"In a moment," Vivi said.

Later, after they'd had sex twice and after Vivi had fallen asleep, Colin went back over the evening. Wondered if Vivi was on her own lockered weekend. If he knew her. If she was in the locker.

Colin lay in bed, looking up at the nondescript ceiling. A memory flashed into his field of thoughts. He was a kid, lying in bed, afraid of when the next fight would break out downstairs. He was always holding his breath, steeling himself for the inevitable. He'd distract himself by making shadow plays on the walls and ceiling. Sometimes the plays were about two people harming each other. Sometimes the shadow figures embraced each other. Or they were fanciful animals, happy, playful, unconcerned. Or mauling, then killing, each other.

Were these his memories?

As he was falling asleep, shadow figures pranced across his fading awareness. He sank under their spell.

Colin kicked off the covers. The room was too warm. He let his arm drop down over the side of the bed. Imagined what it might look like, but his eyes stayed closed.

Had he broken many hearts? he wondered. Probably. Hadn't everyone? Yet the idea was painful. As though his own heart had been meddled with. As though irreparable damage had been done.

His dreams were too vivid. He got up twice to shake them off, drinking what seemed like gallons of cold water to wash away the images, the sensations, the lingering moods.

Finally he slept for several hours. He woke up when he heard the shower. Vivi was no longer in the bed.

He sat up, awake, pain shooting through his head.

Last night had boiled itself down into a small, dense particle, ready to be discarded.

His comm alerted him. Time to go.

Chapter 3

“FILL THIS OUT and I’ll be right with you,” Deryn said.

“Sure,” said the young woman. She was there with an older woman, probably her mother. The mother, if she was the mother, was peering around the room and fidgeting.

Deryn had seen a lot of this sort of thing—an adult child and an aging parent—in her two months at the Memory Palace. Either the parent or the child—sometimes both—was concerned that important memories were being lost, were about to be lost, or would be gone altogether once the parent, you know, declined . . . forgot . . . died . . .

Cynfor had filled Deryn in on the death aspect when she’d applied for the job. That had been an odd day. She’d gone to the Memory Palace to maybe buy a weekend getaway—she’d saved up for it—and ended up with a job. She’d never done the lockered weekend even though she could have it at a 12 percent discount now that she’d worked there for two months. If she stayed for a year, the discount would be 50 percent. Maybe she’d do the getaway then.

But there was something about the job itself that was even better than a lockered getaway. Deryn wasn’t sure what that was, but perhaps, she thought, it had something to do with being involved with so many other people’s memories that your own kind of faded off into disinterest.

“Here,” the young woman said, handing Deryn back the scroll where she’d filled out the necessary information. The name on the form was Meg Sheppard. Deryn checked over the rest of the form.

“Come with me, Meg,” Deryn said, looking at the older woman.

“This is for my daughter,” the older woman said as the younger woman stood up. “Meg. Go with the nice lady.”

Deryn had to suppress all her reactions. First, that it was the daughter, not the mother, who was subscribing to the initial uptake, monthly updates, and long-term storage, and second, that Deryn had been called a “nice lady.” Well, maybe she was nice sometimes. Really nice, not fake nice like she was being right now. Part of the job. Part of any job, she guessed.

Deryn took Meg into the uptake room, which was basically an eight-by-ten closet containing a supposedly comfortable chair—Deryn had never sat in it—and the necessary equipment and nothing else. Not even a window or a picture on the wall. Couldn’t have distractions.

“This is all my mother’s idea, you understand,” Meg said to Deryn, as if she had to explain, or excuse, herself.

“If you don’t want to do this, you don’t have to,” Deryn said.

“My mother will know,” Meg said.

“You’re a grown-up,” Deryn said. “You can do what you please.” She wasn’t a salesclerk at the Memory Palace—she was a technician.

“It’ll make Mom happy,” Meg said. She was trying to smile, but it came out like a tortured grimace.

“You’re under no obligation to make your mother happy,” Deryn said.

She herself wouldn’t think of doing something just to make her mother happy, and certainly not this. The monthly updates weren’t so bad but the initial uptake of memories, which Meg was about to undergo, was a long and occasionally uncomfortable, and, every so often, painful, process.

“I thought you were here for your mother,” Deryn said, still not setting up the equipment. Meg, a petite young woman wearing a dark suit and with her head of obviously lush dark hair pulled back into a severe twist, was standing as far away from the chair as possible in the small space. Deryn wasn’t going to rush her or force her or even encourage her. This had to be your own decision. Not your mother’s. Not Deryn’s.

“Oh?” Meg said. “Mom’s Synced.”

“Ouch,” Deryn said. She was doing a lousy job of keeping her reactions in check.

But . . . SyncFeed? That was beyond extreme. The SyncFeed process involved an implant, an unpleasant, extreme, excruciating, and quite risky procedure. SyncFeed had almost gone out of business at least twice in the last few years after several clients had had serious problems and five had died, yet the company somehow managed to survive every incident. The only “good” thing about SyncFeed was that most people preferred the Memory Palace, so, in a backhanded sort of way, SyncFeed brought them business.

“Yeah, ouch,” Meg said, agreeing. “Sometimes I’ll see her standing in the kitchen. Just standing there. Holding her head. Tears running down her face.”

“Hell,” Deryn said. She’d heard of things like this, but never from someone with direct knowledge.

“Hell,” Meg said, laughing a thin, nervous laugh. “Quite hell. This is much better.”

“I can’t argue with that,” Deryn said. “But, still, you don’t have to do this.”

“What if . . .” Meg looked at Deryn, then shook her head.

Deryn wasn’t sure what to do. No one had ever come this far and then backed out, and in fact she’d never so much as tried to discourage anyone before. But this was different. Meg was being coerced into this and, well, it wasn’t right. Yet Meg was suggesting something that Deryn had never even considered, so it took her a few moments to make up her mind.

“Sure,” Deryn said. “You’re not paying for this, are you?” She’d hate to see Meg throw her credits away on what was going to amount to nothing.

Meg shook her head. “No. Mom’s paying for it.”

“Is she—”

“She’s got all the credits in the universe,” Meg said. “More.”

“All right,” Deryn said, wondering where Meg’s mother got her credits from. “We’ll have to fill up the time, though. This part usually takes maybe two hours, although it could be longer.”

“I brought a book,” Meg said, holding up her scroll.

“You were prepared.” Deryn was delighted. She hadn’t really influenced Meg. Meg had already decided that she was going to pretend to have her memories extracted, stored, and updated and Deryn was just helping her out.

“We might as well sit,” Deryn said, gesturing toward the procedure chair. Meg sat on the floor. She probably didn’t trust Deryn, or maybe she didn’t trust anyone. With a mother like that—forcing her daughter to do something unnecessary and at times brutal—trust was no doubt in short supply in Meg’s life.

Deryn sat on the floor, too. She wouldn’t dream of sitting in that chair. People had *cried* sitting in that chair. Screamed. Sobbed. Fainted. Pleaded for it to end. That was probably why Deryn hadn’t done the getaway, although that was a different procedure entirely, one she wasn’t trained in.

Meg was leaning against the wall and reading her scroll. She really had come prepared. Deryn closed her eyes. Thought about her boss, Cynfor . . . just the chance to talk with him for a few moments . . . that was the real reason she’d taken the job. To be near him.

Two hours and twenty-eight minutes after Deryn had taken Meg into the uptake room, Deryn got up—had she fallen asleep for a while?—and said, “Meg. I think it’s safe to go out now.”

“You won’t tell her, will you?” Meg said, rolling up her scroll.

“Don’t worry. It’s our secret,” Deryn said, smiling a real smile. She felt refreshed, renewed.

“Thanks,” Meg said.

Deryn opened the door, looked down the empty corridor, and let out a breath. There was no one there.

In the waiting room, though, Cynfor and Meg’s mother were leaned over across a table from each other, their heads nearly touching,

and speaking in such low tones that Deryn couldn't hear what they were saying even after she was standing right next to them.

A cold shard of fear raced through Deryn. Did Cynfor know what she'd done? Or, rather, what she *hadn't* done?

Chapter 4

AFTER TWO YEARS of painful, sometimes unbearable, and always argumentative, sessions, Harrison Woods's therapist, Mila Ramsey, dropped her first mention of the Memory Palace.

"Are you suggesting that I *preserve* the memories of the incident in order to get cured?"

Woods knew, though, that he'd never be cured. He'd been shot and had nearly died, and Robson, his partner of over a decade, *had* died.

"It's something different," Mila Ramsey said.

Mila was maybe ten years younger than Woods and his first impression of her had been one of disbelief. *She* was going to therapize *him*? Yeah, right. But the chief had recommended her—had *insisted* on her—so Woods had no choice in the matter. Standard procedure. Get shot while your partner was being blown into a thousand shards and you were forced into years of therapy. Sometimes Woods thought he'd rather be shot again.

"Oh, you mean that weekend thing," Woods said.

"Something like that," Mila Ramsey said. Woods decided to focus on her earrings, which were overlarge and sort of swirled about her neck and cheeks.

"Robson did a lockered weekend," Woods said.

"Really?" Mila Ramsey said. "Then you know something about the Memory Palace's other services."

"I don't know a bloody thing," Woods said. "Robson didn't have a chance to tell me. Being murdered tends to cut off that kind of communication."

"Now, we've discussed this at length," Mila Ramsey said.

She was able to be forceful and commanding while also being almost sympathetic. Or seemingly so. Woods had never imagined that

she cared about him at all. She was doing her job. He understood that. In the same way, he didn't care about her or what she thought or said or believed. This was a job, like any other. The job of doing his time in therapy so he could keep the chief happy and remain in the only job he knew how to do. The job that was his anchor, even if that anchor had been thrown into the fathomless depths and he was swallowing saltwater by the liter.

"We have," Woods said.

"And?" Mila Ramsey waited.

"Robson was *killed*," Woods said even though Robson had been murdered. But Mila Ramsey had some kind of a beef with that word, so he was supposed to never say it. As though that would change what happened, or change *him*.

"That's better," Mila Ramsey said.

"For you," Woods said. "Not for Robson."

"About the Memory Palace," Mila Ramsey said. She was not going to drop this. She never dropped anything. She was a summa cum laude graduate of the school of relentless doggedness.

"What about it?" Woods said. "Are you suggesting I do a lockered getaway so I can have a day or two where I forget about what happened?"

"Something like that," Mila Ramsey said.

He took his eyes off her earrings and focused on the painting on the wall behind her—an abstract depiction of either a crab having a seizure or a flower that'd been trampled on. Woods had never come to any firm conclusion about it.

Was he supposed to be able to figure out what Mila Ramsey meant? He didn't know what she meant. But he was supposed to guess. That was part of the Mila Ramsey methodology. Lead him down some obscure and unfamiliar path and make him come up with the right answer. Sometimes he did just that. Like today.

"You mean that the Memory Palace has a service that's more, uh, thorough, than the locker?"

“I do,” she said.

“Like a vault,” he said. “Not just a locker.”

“Exactly,” she said. “It’s even called that. The Memory Vault.” Maybe she’d put a gold sticker on his chart today since he’d done such an admirable job of pleasing her.

“No,” Woods said, mad at himself for accidentally getting it right.

“No what?”

“I have no interest in it,” he said.

“Don’t you want to be cured?”

“No,” Woods said, immediately regretting this admission. Mila Ramsey had roped him into it somehow. She was very clever. He resisted rubbing his left shoulder, which hurt like hell. Then he resisted crossing his long legs, which the chair he was sitting in didn’t properly accommodate. He’d already given her enough ammo to take back to the chief and get him assigned to desk duty.

“Of course I want to be cured,” Woods said as visions of sitting at a desk and having to fill out forms all day rushed across his mental screen. But he really had no interest in being cured, and Mila Ramsey must’ve known it. She knew him well, despite his efforts to stay apart from his therapy while he was also “baring his soul”—her expression—to her, a person he suspected had no soul. Not one that he’d ever gotten even a minor glimpse of, anyway.

“Really,” Mila Ramsey said.

She shifted in her seat, which movement indicated that she disapproved of him and knew he was lying. After two years, he knew all her moves. And even though she’d never told him one thing about her personal life, Woods knew about hers. Knew that she and his chief had an on-again, off-again *relationship* and knew that it was currently on-again. Knew that she’d once had been and maybe still was the lover of Cynfor, the creep who ran the Memory Palace. Knew that she had other lovers as well, although he didn’t know who they were.

Woods had to be very, very careful.

“I’m much better,” Woods said even though he was actually much worse. Robson’s murder plagued his dreams every night and the images had become more, not less, graphic with time. And the chief had forbidden Woods to get anywhere near the still-unsolved, ice-cold case, so all his work on it had to be done while looking over both shoulders, behind his back, underneath his desk, and around every corner.

“Really,” Mila Ramsey said, shifting again.

“Really,” Woods said. Maybe the chief would let him change to another therapist. One he didn’t want to strangle.

“I want you to go see Cynfor over at the Memory Palace,” Mila Ramsey said.

“Okay,” Woods said. Strangling the ever-sleek Mila Ramsey wouldn’t be satisfying enough. But shooting her would be too fast. He wanted her to suffer. She seemed untouched by everything. He’d always known that her sympathy was a put-on.

“Here’s the information.” Mila Ramsey handed Woods what seemed to be some kind of appointment card. When Woods looked at it, he saw it had tomorrow’s date and ten a.m. written on it.

“You mean you’ve made the appointment for me?” Woods put the card on her desk and stared at her. He wondered what the chief and Cynfor saw in her. She was beautiful but it was a cold, hard beauty. Razor-sharp. Mean. How had she ever passed the therapist qualification exam or whatever it was she had to do to get her license? Wasn’t a therapist supposed to be the very model of compassion?

“I did,” Mila Ramsey said. “I knew you’d want to go.”

“All right,” Woods said. He was being told to go, so he’d go. His assignment. The session clock on Mila Ramsey’s desk had ticked down to the last few seconds. He picked up the card, said, “See you next week,” and left.

He spent the rest of the day researching the Memory Palace, which search, as it turned out, was a frustrating enterprise. If the place had a Memory Vault—and not just the Memory Locker that everyone knew about—there was no information or chatter about it on the meshwork.

That night Woods fell asleep, lulled deep into his subconscious by the hum of the city while he was sitting in the only chair on the small terrace of his two-room apartment.

You should try it, Robson said to Woods's subconscious. *Like a second chance, a new life.*

Chapter 5

PAGE SHEPPARD WAS on her way back to the Memory Palace the day after her daughter Meg's procedure. Page's original plan had been to wait until Meg had gone back for at least one update, maybe two, but Page's curiosity was too great. She couldn't help herself even though her self-control was the stuff of legend. She controlled not just herself, but everything and everyone else in her wide-ranging purview.

Although she'd failed to control her other daughter, Petra, and she wasn't going to make the same mistakes twice. Once was bad enough.

Page crossed the street and searched for a bench. She had to sit down. These were the sorts of thoughts that made the Sync turn acidic. But it was necessary—it was *vital*—that she have every single thought and memory and idea and subconscious flickering recorded, stored, and preserved.

“Are you okay?” A woman with a black-and-white dog on a leash had sat down next to Page.

“Leave me alone,” Page said, squinting as the fearsome streaks surged through her head.

“I'll just sit here with you for a while,” the woman with the dog said. The dog jumped up onto the bench and sat between the woman and Page.

“I'm fine,” Page said as the streaks subsided a little. She exhaled, blinked her eyes.

“Cerberus has that effect on people,” the woman said, petting the dog, who had only one head and not the three that the mythical Cerberus possessed.

“You named your dog Cerberus?” the ever-critical Page said. “The guardian of the gate of Hades?”

“I only found out afterward,” the woman said, “and by then it was too late. That was his name. He likes it. But, you know, someone else named him. I got him at the shelter.”

“He seems like a good dog anyway,” Page said. She half turned and petted Cerberus’s one head. She liked dogs and hadn’t had one since she was a child. They were too much work.

“Yes,” the woman said. “He likes you, too.”

Page couldn’t deny that Cerberus’s presence had eliminated the effects of the SyncFeed upload. She felt fine now. Maybe she would get a dog. She rubbed the back of her head, mussing her perfect, in-place hairdo.

“SyncFeed?” Cerberus’s woman said.

Page nodded. Nearly everyone who had SyncFeed had the same persistent sort of itch in the back of their head where the implant was. And no one could stop themselves from rubbing, scratching, or otherwise messing with it. The gesture was an instant giveaway that you were Synced.

“That’s interesting,” the woman said.

Cerberus put his front paws on Page’s lap and Page stroked his head again. She was relieved that she wasn’t being quizzed.

How can you afford it? Was it painful? Do you think everyone would want SyncFeed if it were more reliable? What about those clients who died? Aren’t you afraid? How often do you access your Feed? Page had heard all these questions and more. She never answered any of them, but if someone asked her how much it cost and she understood that they could afford it, she told them.

“I have an appointment,” Page said, but she didn’t want to leave Cerberus. She stroked his head again, giving special attention to his ears.

“I didn’t mean to keep you,” the woman said. “I’m glad you’re feeling better now.”

A squirrel ran out from under the bench where Page, Cerberus, and the woman were sitting, and Cerberus took his paws off Page’s lap, stood up, and jumped down off the bench.

“He loves chasing squirrels,” the woman said as Cerberus pulled on the leash and led the woman toward the squirrel and into the park behind the bench.

Feeling like she was a kid again, Page got up and half walked, half jogged the rest of the way to the Memory Palace. The mythical Cerberus might be a sinister presence guarding Hades, but the actual Cerberus had been a panacea for everything that was bothering Page.

Cynfor met her right after she got off the elevator. He must’ve seen her in the camera at the entryway.

“Page,” he said as they hugged. “So unexpected. Good to see you.”

Page wondered, not for the first time, if Cynfor would consider marrying Meg. Meg needed someone like him—tall, good-looking, sturdy, dependable, and a fabulously successful businessperson. Wealthy, although not as wealthy as Page herself was. Well, setting them up with each other—that could be next. But that wasn’t what she was here for.

“I couldn’t wait,” Page said as Cynfor led her through the maze of corridors behind the reception area.

“Of course not,” he said, although he sounded perturbed. He ran his hands back through his head of thick black hair. Page thought he needed a haircut, or at least a trim, but she didn’t say anything. This was not the moment to be critical, at least not out loud. She was here for a purpose.

Cynfor opened the door to his huge corner office and Page went in first. The office was inside but it felt like you were outside. The window seams were nearly invisible, giving the effect of the room’s being perched on top of the city, in the clouds, almost. The synergy of serenity and danger created an effect both soothing and frightening.

“Please, sit down,” Cynfor said. “I’ll have tea served in a moment.”

Page sat in the chair at one side of a low table. She’d taken the seat of power. Cynfor waved his hand over a sensor before he sat on the sofa, the place where usually the more subservient person would sit. Yet Cynfor didn’t seem at all subservient. He’d be in charge no matter where he sat, even if he’d sit on the floor or lie on the floor. He exuded a calm,

unquestionable power. Page herself exuded definitive power, but hers was hardly calm. More like an oncoming tornado.

A moment later, a severe-looking woman came into the office. She was carrying a shimmering tray with a tea service on it and she leaned down and placed it on the low table.

“Iola, I can’t be disturbed,” Cynfor said as she stood up.

“Certainly,” she said.

As Iola walked out of the room Page noticed her upright posture and aura of rigid self-control. Meg could be more like that. Page would make certain to mention it to her.

Cynfor poured the tea, lifted the tray of tidbits, and offered it to Page.

“No, thank you,” Page said. She never ate except at mealtime.

Cynfor took one of the whatever-they-weres and ate it, then ate another. Then put the plate down. Page looked at Cynfor, measuring him. He was muscular and solid. Not really lean but not overweight. He had big hands and a ropy neck. His very presence reeked of authority and rightness.

Meg really could do no better than this. And he must’ve been in possession of billions of credits, Page thought. She was tired of supporting Meg even though she could well afford it. She could afford anything. She could afford to buy out the Memory Palace and not even miss the credits it would cost.

“Show me,” Page said after she’d had a sip of the aromatic jasmine tea. The thin china cup made an unexpected, echoing clink as she put it back on its saucer.

Cynfor took a scroll from his inside jacket pocket, unfurled it, manipulated the screen, tilted his head in what was a surprisingly attractive manner, did a few more things with the screen, then said, “Excuse me for a moment, Page. There seems to be a problem.”

He got up and left Page alone in the suspended-in-the-sky office. She’d have to wait a little longer to find out what was really on Meg’s mind. What Meg was actually doing, thinking, planning, and feeling.

What she wanted, what she feared, who she hated, what she dreamt about. What her true feelings were. Everything.

Page had waited this long and waiting a few more minutes wouldn't matter, really, although she was not amused that there was a problem at all. Cynfor had known she was going to be there this morning and he should've had Meg's initial uptake array ready and waiting for her.

Page walked over to Cynfor's desk, thinking she'd look over what was on it, learn whatever she could about the formidable presence behind the Memory Palace, but as a hawk flew by outside, she remembered something Petra had once said to her, back when she still lived at home and they were still talking to each other, arguing with each other.

I'm not doing it. You can't control everything. You can't control me. Even if you think you can. I won't let you.

Page felt the back of her head. The pain surged in a great wave through her skull, her neck, and down through her chest and into her solar plexus. She tried to grip the top of Cynfor's desk as she collapsed, but missed, and struck the back of her head on the sharp right-front edge of the glass surface as she fell onto the cold gray stone floor.