

Shiloh managed to force herself to spend another hour on the book, and used up the rest of the day between puttering around the apartment and warming up on her clarinet. Jake was predictably punctual, and she greeted him at the door with a sigh of relief.

"Bro-ther, am I glad to get out of there," she declared as she closed the door against Bart's protests.

"What's going on, Shi?" Jake's narrow blue eyes searched her face solicitously. "It's been a while since I've seen you this edgy."

Her deep, frustrated sigh spoke volumes. "I don't know. I really have no idea. I just feel restless, you know? I'm in a really lousy mood. I haven't been able to concentrate on my work; I haven't been sleeping well. I even find myself getting short-tempered with Bart. What's your diagnosis, Dr. MacKay?" She tried to change to a more playful tone. "Is there any hope for me?"

"Don't ask me. I'm just a pediatrician. If your problem is colic or chicken pox, I'm your man. This stuff . . ." He shrugged resignedly.

"I'm afraid I'm not nearly so practical. Give me a fictional problem any day; I can fix that up in 70,000 words." They were to his car now, and Shiloh set her clarinet on the floor of the back seat and climbed into the front beside him. "I just hate feeling this way. I wish I knew how to snap myself out of it."

"It's how you are, Shi. You've always had these moods. You'll get over it. This too shall pass, and all that," he added with a reassuring grin.

Shiloh fell silent the rest of the drive, responding minimally to Jake's stories about some of his young patients. Antonio's was Shi's favorite pizzeria; Jake didn't need to ask where they should go. Once inside, she directed her energy into scrutinizing the menu.

It never took her long to decide. "I already told you what I want -- pepperoni. And maybe mushrooms."

Jake frowned. "You always want pepperoni, and you know I don't like it. Let's get sausage this time."

"Hey," she protested, "I thought the whole purpose of this was to cheer me up. How do you expect me to get cheered up on sausage?"

"Even *Italian* sausage?" Jake gave her his most pathetic look.

Shiloh was unmoved. "No, that won't do it. It's got to be pepperoni."

"Okay, how about this: we'll get two small pizzas, yours with pepperoni and mushrooms, mine with Italian sausage."

"Jake, you know I can't eat a whole pizza myself, even a small one."

"So take what's left over home and have it for breakfast tomorrow."

Shiloh thought for a moment. "Okay, try this: one medium with sausage, pepperoni on one fourth of it, no mushrooms, you take the leftovers."

"Fine." Jake looked at his watch. "You know, the sad thing about all this is that it won't take them as long to make the thing as it took us to order it."

As it happened, there was nothing left of the pizza, and at last they were on their way to the club. "This is great," she muttered. "I'll be belching into my clarinet all night."

"You're the one who insisted on pepperoni," Jake chided playfully.

"Oh, be quiet. Say, I did remember my clarinet, didn't I?"

"Yes, it's in the back seat."

"Oh, yeah. Good." Shiloh was silent for a moment, staring blankly at the city lights around them, her fingers tapping her thigh in rhythm to the music on the car radio. "You know,

Jake, I thought maybe this gig with the band would help me; lift my spirits or whatever. But so far all it's done is just give me a way to spend my time."

Jake glanced over at Shiloh and carefully considered what he would say next. He hated it when she got in these moods. He was never sure what the right response was. He suspected that all she really needed was a sympathetic ear. But he was a doctor; he was used to diagnosing an illness and treating it, and his inability to fix her problem made him feel that he was somehow failing her. It was just that so much of her pain was so deep and so private. As close as they were, as close as they had been for so long, he knew that there were aspects of her loss that she didn't share with him. Try though he might to draw her out, there were certain things she kept hidden, and that made her state of mind even more of a mystery to him. At the moment he was keenly feeling his inadequacy, but she seemed so lost that he decided to make an attempt at some friendly advice. "So what are you saying, Shi? You feel like your life is missing something?"

"I don't know. I have a good life here. I'm not dissatisfied with that. I'm thankful for the blessings God has given me; I really am. Like I said before, I feel restless. I'm bored."

"Then do something about it."

"I thought I was doing something, playing with the band. But that hasn't helped so much."

"No, Shi," -- Jake was treading on dangerous territory now and he knew it -- "I was thinking that maybe you should do something different."

She regarded her friend with cautious interest. "Like what?"

"Look, Shi, think about how you spend your time. You work alone in your apartment. When you aren't working you're holed up alone with your cat in your apartment."

"Come on, Jake. You're overstating the situation. I do not spend all of my time alone. You and I do stuff together."

"Okay, sure," he conceded, though his voice held little conviction. "You and I get together now and then."

"And there's the band and the poker club --"

"-- which involve the same people --"

"-- and I like to go to baseball games -- "

"-- with Missy and me, or maybe Gil and Vicki -- "

"-- and I go to church -- "

"-- services, yeah, but you never do any of the social stuff."

"How am I supposed to do that, huh? It's all couples." She sighed in exasperation. "It's all couples, Jake. I don't fit in. The college and career group is a decade too young for me; the widows group is three decades too old. I've fallen through the cracks. There's no place for me." Disgruntled, she turned her head and stared unseeing out her window.

He wanted to help; now it seemed he had only made matters worse. "We always knew you were in a class by yourself," he teased, nudging her gently with his elbow.

Shiloh turned back to her friend, regarding him soberly. "I know you mean well, Jake. I appreciate your attempts to help and I love you for caring, but what do you want me to do? And please," she warned, "don't tell me you think I should start dating again."

"No, no, no, I'm not talking about dating," he quickly assured her.

"Because there's no point to that."

"I understand."

"At our age people tend to be looking for a relationship with more stability and permanence. If I go out with a man more than a couple of times, he starts to get ideas."

"So?"

"So I don't want that! I'm not interested in getting married again. Ever."

"Okay, Shiloh, I know," Jake said in the soothing voice he used to calm his young patients when they were frightened. "That's not what I was talking about anyway. I just think maybe if you expanded your social life a bit it might help, that's all."

It was quiet in the car for a few moments. "I've been thinking about Garth and Andrea a lot the last couple of days." She spoke quietly, reluctant to make this confession.

Jake remained silent, allowing her the opportunity to continue. After a moment, he decided she required some encouragement. "Anything in particular?" he asked gently.

She shook her head. "Not really. Things keep happening that remind me of them. It makes it hard to concentrate on anything."

Jake quickly searched his memory but could come up with nothing helpful. "It's not . . . an anniversary of something . . . is it?" he asked carefully.

"No."

"Maybe it's spring fever. Maybe you've been working too hard. You should get out, take walks, enjoy the nice weather." It was ineffectual, he knew, but he needed to offer her something in the way of a practical solution.

"I suppose. Don't worry about it, Jake; I'll snap out of it eventually."

She would, he knew. She always did. As depressing as she could be at times, and those times were relatively rare, Shiloh was the most resilient person he had ever known. He made allowances for the dark moods because he understood the reasons for them; he knew much of what she had suffered. And he was always amazed at how far she had come in the last six years, when she had lost both Garth and Andrea within three months of each other. He shuddered inwardly as he wondered if he would have had that inner strength, that ability to survive when there seemed little reason to keep going. Although there were times when he would look at Shiloh, listen to her and realize that she wasn't quite whole, probably never would be whole again, his admiration for her was limitless, almost as limitless as the deep affection he had for her. And that was why he was always there for her, would always be there for her, even when he could tell that she considered his advice to be at best useless, at worst annoying.