

In this mystery-science thriller, dead people are spilling government secrets, via their computer-stored consciousness! The government wants to shut everyone up, permanently, but an FBI Agent and a beautiful scientist fight to keep the dead people talking.

Dead Time

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2971.html?s=pdf>

Dead Time

Copyright © 2007 by Paul Patti

ISBN-13 978-1-60145-220-7

ISBN-10 1-60145-220-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. All locales and places are used fictitiously. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Published by Booklocker.com, Inc. 2007

Other books by Paul Patti:

Silhouettes, St. Martin's Press, 1990 ISBN: 0-312-04684-7
(Hardcover) and 0-312-92672-3 (Softcover)

Death Mate, St. Martin's Press, 1992 ISBN: 0-312-92777-0

For more information, visit www.PaulPatti.com

Dead Time

Paul Patti

Dedicated to all the brave men and women in our nation's law
enforcement and intelligence agencies.

PROLOGUE

*Friday, August 8th, 2003, 6:15 p.m.
Boca Raton, Florida*

If nut cases were a dime a dozen, Stan Williams thought to himself, hands moving quickly around the steering wheel as he turned into the lot, why do I always seem to get a dollar's worth calling me every month?

He couldn't think of an answer, but was happy that he spotted the rendezvous point without any extra effort.

Stan was early. Way too early, he thought, as he checked his scribbled notes one last time and then pulled up in front of the restaurant. It was one of those lunch and dinner places that blended in easily with the new, big strip malls just off of Glades Road, the ones with the rows and rows of expensive and mature Foxtail palm trees that urban planners used to try and disguise the fact that south Florida had become nothing more than an overgrown parking lot.

He glanced at his watch, and then scolded himself for leaving his West Palm Beach office and driving down the Interstate so quickly; he had at least 15 minutes to kill before he was set to meet the psycho who thought he had enough evidence to get a Supreme Court Justice arrested by the FBI.

Not that Stan believed any of it; he didn't, not a single word. Psychos were more than plentiful in FBI folklore, with

most wanting nothing more than a little polite attention while they confessed to things they didn't do, and described in exacting detail things that had never actually happened.

And southeast Florida had an extra serving of whack jobs, Stan had said to himself. About twice as many as Detroit, his last FBI assignment, he estimated.

Stan didn't tell anyone in the office about the strange phone call, or where he was going, or who he was supposed to be meeting. No sense in bringing laughter and ridicule down upon yourself if you could help it, was one of Stan's personal rules. Besides, he felt that he couldn't possibly be in any danger, not in such a public place as an overpriced, casual Florida restaurant on a Friday evening, with happy hour well under way.

But psycho or not, he didn't want the man to spot him arriving so early, because he didn't want to appear all that anxious. He kept coming back to a single thought, however; that it wasn't every day that an informant called and said that they had conclusive proof that an Associate Justice on the United States Supreme Court had accepted a \$500,000 bribe to rule for the defendants in a government antitrust case.

"Good one," Stan said sarcastically into his phone, in his West Virginia accent, when he first heard the nut job spell it all out. The man had called him at his West Palm Beach FBI Field Office with all the names, all the details, and Agent Williams was initially polite but distracted, then he became cautiously interested, and then downright suspicious. But his skepticism eased somewhat when he heard the familiar language of a government legal bureaucrat; the man knew all about rules of evidence, about entrapment, about standards of proof. And the more Agent Williams listened, the more he asked, the more he started to believe that it was all there; the exact dates and times, the British Virgin Island bank account numbers where the Justice was hiding the cash.

But he knew, he just *knew*, that it was going to turn out to be a “*big boat load of crap*,” as Stan was fond of saying. But then again, if he could verify the man’s story and dig up corroboration, it would mean the first impeachment and indictment of a current Supreme Court Justice, something the country hadn’t seen since ... well, probably had never seen, Williams thought.

“Who the fuck are you, that you know all this shit?” Williams had asked the man, his southern accent coming through strongly, which it always did when he was suspicious or upset.

“Someone close to the court,” the voice answered, sounding like he was trying to whisper but not quite getting his voice low enough.

“Okay, ‘someone close to the court,’ my next question is *why* the fuck are you bothering to tell me any of this? I no longer work in D.C., and I no longer work government corruption cases, so where the hell did you get my name?” Williams had asked. The answer really mattered, he knew, because of all the enemies Stan Williams had managed to make in the last few years, enemies both inside and outside of the government.

“From people who know you, who say you’re not afraid of tough cases, that you’re a straight shooter. We can trust you to do the right thing,” the man said.

Williams had detected a hint of a southern accent in the man’s voice, something akin to his own drawl, maybe from Virginia, but it could also be a twang from Georgia, Alabama or even the Carolinas, he couldn’t be sure.

“Who? Give me some names. Who told you to call me?” Stan had asked insistently.

“Now, you know that won’t be possible. If they wanted their names to be public, they would’ve done this themselves. In

their positions, you know, they ... they can't take the scrutiny of the public eye. Too many lives would be ruined. They need a straight shooter, someone squeaky clean, someone beyond reproach, someone in the FBI or U.S. Attorney's Office, and your name was at the top of the list."

"Right," Williams answered. 'Straight shooter,' all right. That's a code word for 'patsy.' They need someone young and dumb to break a story, and so they chose him. They got the wrong man, Stan had said to himself.

Agent Williams had created his own problems, he knew, being such a 'straight shooter.' He had plenty of his own worries in recent years, and wasn't sure if he wanted to handle any more, especially if this load of bullshit inexplicably turned out to be true. He had been transferred four times in two years, bucking the system and building a reputation as a maverick, maybe even a trouble maker. He didn't need another high profile case. Still, if it was all for real, it just could be the thing he needed to get back in everyone's good graces.

Stan finally agreed to meet at the Boca Raton restaurant at exactly 6:45 p.m. The man said Williams was to arrive first, order a beer and a bowl of chili, along with a basket of onion rings, and leave all three items untouched on the table in front of him. The man said that he would walk into the restaurant, spot just those three exact items untouched on the table, know it was Williams, and sit down. Williams was to be alone, no other FBI or other cops in the restaurant, or the deal was off. As long as there was no one else to spot them sitting together, he said he would quickly hand over a package containing photos, documents, copies of bank statements, even tape recordings of phone calls, and then he'd be gone. The items in the package would be all the proof that the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office would need to follow up with a little easy investigative work to wrap up the loose ends, but when all of it was done it was sure to make the bribery case of the new millennium, the man had told him.

Stan finally decided he couldn't be sure if the man was psycho or not; sure, he said to himself, some of these nut jobs would actually show up, and hand over an envelope or package. Then, nine times out of ten, the package would contain nothing more than piles of conspiracy theory type newspaper and magazine articles, with those little, indecipherable psycho scribbles all along the margins. In less than a minute, after wasting hours of your time, it would all turn out to be nothing but a pile of psychobabble trash, heading straight to the office shredder.

But in this case, Stan knew, there was just a little *too much* detail, a few *too many* names and dates and locations for it all to be just made up, all of it just a fantasy, just so a psycho could get a hard on and a few laughs at the FBI's expense.

Stan checked his watch again, just a few minutes before 6:30 p.m. He got out of his car and walked inside, and then found a table toward the back.

The waitress came over with a menu, but he held his hand up, stopping her. He smiled, showing her that he didn't mean to be abrupt.

"I'll just have a beer, a bowl of chili, and a basket of onion rings, please," Stan said. "That's all. Just those three things. I'm waiting for someone."

She nodded, and walked off.

Stan looked around, the place was filling up quickly; there were at least a dozen people at the bar, and twenty more seated at the surrounding tables, mostly young couples, and a few business people having an extended happy hour. The place wasn't at all memorable, Stan had been in dozens of similar ones all around the state, from Key West up to Jacksonville, and from Sarasota down to Ft. Meyers; it was one of those overpriced seafood and burger places where the help all wore Hawaiian shirts, all the tables had a barely readable map of Florida waterways under a layer of scratchy veneer, and the

décor was fake tropical plants and palm fronds, with the standard 30-seater bar up a few steps in the center, and television sets placed along the top wall every few feet. A small stage crowded out the tables in the back, by the restroom entrance, where an unknown local band would show up every weekend to perform yet another bad rendition of *Margaritaville*.

After a few minutes the waitress brought the three items, setting them down on the table in front of him.

This time he took the time to glance up at her and study her face and features; she was pretty, with a great body, but she was trying way, way too hard to make her forty plus look more like twenty something.

Stan left the food and drink untouched, just like the psycho had told him to. He spent the time checking out the women at the bar, noting happily that none even came close in classiness and beauty to his own wife, Cathy. Then he neatly rearranged the little white, blue, yellow and pink packets of sugar and sweetener in their square porcelain holder, lining them up by color, and finally wound up fishing his cell phone out of his pocket, checking his office voicemail for messages from the psycho. Of course, there were none.

Seven Thirty. I'm such an idiot, Stan thought. Why am I sitting here, twenty miles from home? Cathy will kill me.

Then the waitress brought over a new beer - a cold one, telling Stan that it was on the house. She said was sorry to see that the person he was supposed to be meeting hadn't shown up.

He decided that he liked her smile, and she seemed friendly in an honest sort of way, something that Stan especially appreciated.

"Didn't even bother to call and cancel," Stan said, laughing along with the woman. He took an extra long moment to admire her very pretty face, and how the green and orange

tropical shirt didn't quite match her light blue waitress apron. "But that's all right," he said. "It happens. I'm used to it."

He waited 5 more minutes, and then realized just what a fool he was for even showing up, and how hungry he had become, waiting patiently, all that food sitting there in front of him. He ate the chili, even though it was cold, but left the onion rings, which had turned soggy, and then drank down the new, ice cold beer that the waitress had just left him.

Then Stan took a \$20 out of his pocket and put it on the table and stood up and headed for the door.

Another Friday night shot all to hell, he thought to himself. Cathy will be very pissed off that he didn't call. His daughter, Kelly, would be mad at him also. Friday night was movie night, family night, and he had blown it, for no good reason at all.

Fucking psychos, Stan thought as he went out the door.

The man glanced at the waitress, who gave him a quick nod. Then he stood up and pushed back from the bar, just after Agent Williams walked out the front door. He casually took the three steps down into the dining area and then watched through a window as Williams got into his FBI car and pulled away. He was humored because the FBI man seemed so much more agitated than when he had watched him walk in, sit down and order the items he had been told.

He waited until Williams' car was well clear of the restaurant parking lot, then hastily walked out the door, around the back of the building and jumped into the surveillance van, closing and locking the heavy, sliding door behind him. He looked over at the monitor on the electronics panel, and saw that the FBI man had turned to go north on to I-95, and was undoubtedly on his way back home, back to West Palm Beach, all pissed off and disappointed.

The Supreme Court bribery story almost always got their attention, almost always worked, he thought to himself, chuckling just a bit. It sure worked well on FBI troublemaker Stan Williams, the man who knew just a *little bit* too much, and couldn't be trusted *quite enough* to keep his big mouth shut, and keep all those juicy government secrets wrapped up inside of him.

It was his habit to almost never use the surveillance van's intercom, preferring instead to do it the old fashioned way; he banged on the thin, wooden front wall that was separating him from the van's driver, his signal that the target had taken the bait, and it was time to leave. They pulled out into late rush hour traffic, and then took the interstate south from Glades Road, toward Miami.

He laughed. *Another problem solved*, he said to himself. FBI Agent Stan Williams would be dead within a week, he knew.

ONE

Sixteen years later

Thursday morning, November 21st, 2019 - 9:06 a.m.

Kelly Williams felt awkward, about to start another conversation with her mom. She had started quite a few of them in the past year with a hearty and happy “how are you?” but was never quite prepared for the snappy response she would receive.

“Why, I’m dead, Kelly. *Dead*. How are *you*?” would be her mom’s sarcastic reply.

Cathy Williams didn’t always answer that way, just when it seemed that she wasn’t in the mood for another talk. Kelly thought that maybe it was a glitch in the Transfer program that the company hadn’t quite remedied. Maybe it was her mom’s sometimes dry and biting sense of humor dominating the other aspects of her downloaded personality. Either way, it had always stopped the conversation cold, taking both her and her dead mom a few seconds to shake off the awkwardness of it all.

This time, it would be different. There would be no pleasantries at all, she decided. Well, maybe a brief opening greeting, but nothing more, she thought. Not only was she still shocked over parts of what her mother had said, she was still agonizingly tired from tossing and turning all night, not able to quiet her mind from churning over all the ramifications of her

mom's words. Even a couple of late night shots of some very expensive Johnnie Walker Blue Label couldn't get Kelly to sleep, after she had heard her mom's whole story.

She was tempted to unplug the damn thing and never log in again. In a way she didn't really want to hear about it for a second time, she truly wanted no elaboration, and no further explanation. But she knew that her mom would be compelled to finish what she had started. And, she knew, deep, deep down she really *did* want to hear it all again, and even to hear it in much more detail.

Fact was that Kelly C. Williams, PhD, wasn't sure if she believed any of it or not. Being educated and trained as a scientist and a skeptic, she wanted more, would press her dead mom as hard as possible for the kind of facts that could not be refuted. Normally, those kinds of facts couldn't be gained from someone that you had seen buried in the family plot on the grounds of the castle belonging to her second husband, Francisco, "Frank" E. Gallardo, in Majorca, Spain. But, Kelly knew, the events of the last few years had changed the rules about what even a strict scientist considered "normal" when it came to speaking with the dead. All you had to do was turn on your Ever Life monitor and start a conversation with your departed relative, as if nothing at all had ever changed.

Just before coming down the stairs and into the kitchen, she sat in the guest bedroom of her oversized golf course home. First she called Brandon Finley, her old boyfriend from the Ever Life company, the man who had helped her mom perform the very thorough (and quite *expensive*, she recalled) "Transfer" of all her mom's memories, likes, dislikes, customs, mannerisms and everything else into a new and ultra-powerful super computer. She and Brandon had dated in the middle of it all, things had gone too far too fast, and then in typical fashion Kelly had backed away and cooled things down. He was smart, cute, successful, and also very rich – but it was all not enough at the time, she remembered. Her job offers were appearing from all over the country; she was about to embark on a great adventure, and she wanted the chance to bring new men into

her life. The breakup was short, simple, to the point. No animosity, she remembered happily. "Let's stay in touch." "Let's do things together once in a while." "Friends." In fact, she still had the key to his Flagler Drive condo, ever since moving back to Palm Beach she would happily take care of his cat once in awhile when Brandon would call about going out of town for a few days.

She was still nervous, so although it was early morning she had taken another swig of the Johnnie Walker from last night's glass, and then pushed in the phone number. She enjoyed hearing Brandon's voice again. She told him briefly and with caution some of what her mom had said, just the very basics, and asked whether these "memories" could be false, something her mom's "Transfer" was somehow making up, taking bits and pieces from novels, movies or news reports. He was at first very upset and concerned, she remembered, but then regained his composure. He had said he doubted her mom's transfer program could make things like that up, but he would check the system and get back to her. He said the government had been investigating such revelations coming out of Ever Life clients, but lately things had been quiet. Kelly made some small talk, asked about Brandon's cat, and then he said they should get together for lunch. She said she'd like that, but knew it wasn't likely any time soon.

Right after that, she had poured herself another shot of the smooth scotch into an inappropriate plastic tumbler, and tilted her head, tipped the cup and swallowed at least an ounce.

Then Kelly called in to work. She told them she wasn't feeling well and would probably miss the morning meeting, but would most likely be back in her lab later in the afternoon. Her commitment to the current pharmacological genetic profile wouldn't miss a beat, she assured them. She didn't dare tell them the real reason, *"Yea, I'm pretty sure that my dead mom's computerized psyche is spilling its guts about national secrets. I'm going to go through it again with her, in more detail, but I'll be recording it this time. Plan on me coming in just a little late today, thanks..."*

Kelly smiled slightly out of just one corner of her mouth. She thought of pouring another shot, but decided to switch to coffee. She made a strong, rich pot full, enjoying the steam as it shot out the top of the carafe.

She finished the last of the scotch from the tumbler, then poured the French vanilla into a cup and took a taste. The thick brew tasted pretty good, even if it wasn't quite sweet enough.

She realized she had stalled long enough, so she took a deep breath and leaned forward, uncomfortably reaching over the dirty breakfast dishes, days-old pizza boxes and coffee mugs strewn across her kitchen table, straining to turn on the huge monitor. It clicked on and then followed with a low buzz, and then an indistinct electrical whirl. Then the text came on the screen, prompting her for the Ever Life transfer card and telling her to be ready to key in the password. She glanced around and found the card next to her keys, then stood up, grabbed the card and went over to the high-definition life-size monitor.

The card dropped in without resistance, and in just a moment there was the password request. She typed rapidly into the small keyboard sitting next to the smaller, blue computer monitor;

C - I - N - D - E - R - E - L - L - A

No one had ever heard her mom use her nickname, thankfully, except for her dad, who died when she was barely 10, back in 2003, more than 16 years ago. Or possibly her step dad Frank had heard it, but not often. And she trusted him. It was some word play off of her middle name - Cindy - so it was safe, she thought. No one outside the family knew it, so no one but her should be able to boot this damn machine up and do this ... this *thing* that she felt compelled to do with her mom.

"Dead ... time." Kelly Williams said out loud to herself, and shook her head. It was barely a whisper, as if not wanting her not-yet-booted-up dead mom to hear her disdain. It was the

popular media and internet slang name for what she was about to do. She was going to converse with a woman dead and buried more than three years, yet she was going to have what by all outward appearances would be an average conversation between a middle-aged mom who always wanted grand kids, and her only child, an over-educated and spoiled, somewhat self-centered and self-interested 26 year old daughter who did God-knows-what in some fancy Scripps biogenetics laboratory. It would be a normal conversation, except ...

Kelly's attention snapped back to the monitor when the burst of light hit her in the eyes. There was no real warm up, one second the 6 foot tall ultra high-definition screen was a bluish-black, the next there was bright sunlight coming through a kitchen window. Her mom, Cathy Williams-Gallardo, sat at a kitchen table, looking out the window behind her, probably at some kids leaving for school, probably with a 50 degree chill in the mid-November southern California beachfront air. Her mom leaned forward, toward the window, and then turned to look back at her, as if Kelly had just walked into her kitchen to share some breakfast and a story or two to start their normal day.

Kelly marveled once again at how the program aged her mom so very subtly. She was now a graying woman of 49, about to turn 50, not the visibly younger woman of 46 she had been when she died, just a few years ago, back in early 2016, she remembered. The advance of the lung cancer had been stopped more than once. All the modern treatments seemed to be holding it back, even killing it. But Kelly remembered the day her mom woke up with the unstoppable cough. Then the blood. It was only a few months after that. She had withered away slowly, and then was gone.

But this image in front of her, this ultra hi-definition woman so crystal clear and bright and detailed and lifelike, this was not *that* woman. This *was* her mom, maybe, or what her mom *would* or *could* have become - a strong and healthy middle aged woman. Or so the Ever Life Company wanted you to think, but Kelly was having none of it. She would let herself believe it

only long enough for the skeptic sitting on her shoulder to lean forward and whisper in her ear, *“Hey stupid, it’s a computer simulation, that’s it. Nothing more. You’re being fooled into believing something that’s not really there.”*

“Dead time.” The term crept back into Kelly’s conscious thoughts and out her mouth once again. She was distrustful of the whole Ever Life process. She didn’t really believe their claims, although she was addicted to following along, playing make believe with the expensive system. The original hype over the power of the supercomputers, the “science” behind the computer process to basically duplicate a person through fancy videos and brain downloads and present them back to their family as if nothing had ever changed. It was all bullshit, as far as she was concerned. She especially disliked the imprecise street and slang names of the popular media and web bloggers, but didn’t really like the company’s term “Transfer” any better.

It’s all bullshit, she thought again to herself, not sure if she was trying to convince herself or was simply stating a fact. She wanted to learn more about her real dad, a man she could barely remember; a man dead for nearly 17 years. She strained to even imagine his face. She shook off the thoughts and prepared to speak.

She quickly glanced up at the fish-eye lens on the top of the monitor, then back at the screen. “Hi mom. Good to see you this morning,” Kelly said briskly, trying not to appear nervous. She had learned early on that Transfers were quick to read your voice print and pick up on your moods and try to steer the conversations that way, probably to show you just how intuitive they were.

“Good to see you, too, Cinderella! Good morning.” Her mom hesitated, looked back out the window, then back again toward her. “Very lovely day outside, nice and chilly. I love these cold mornings!” She took a sip of coffee, and then continued. “It’s coming up on Thanksgiving. Next week. Soon it’ll be time for Christmas shopping ... come to think of it, can I count on you to spend Thanksgiving dinner with me? If you

have other commitments, that's okay. But it would be nice if I knew that we could be together ..."

"Sure. I guess. That'll be fine. We can have a cozy Thanksgiving dinner, just the two of us," Kelly replied calmly, her nerves finally settling down. She thought of pouring some more scotch, but settled on another hit from her cup of the French vanilla instead.

Cathy looked at Kelly, worry showing on her face. "I never know what time it is, but shouldn't you be at that Institute you work for ... uh ..."

"Scripps. Yes, I *should* be there, mom, but I decided to take a little vacation. I wanted to speak with you again this morning. I wanted to follow up on our conversation from last night."

"The conversation from last night? That? Oh, my gosh. That all happened so long ago. Those days are so ... so very hard to remember..."

Kelly was watching the monitor closely, focusing on her mom's face and lips. She thought she could almost detect a hesitation, like a computer hiccup. It was just barely there, but then it was gone.

"Back when dad was still alive. Remember? The things you told me about his work in the FBI?" Kelly leaned back and turned for the coffee pot, pouring herself another cup. She was careful to look and sound casual, even a bit disinterested.

"Right. Right. Of course, what we were talking about. Your dad's work." She hesitated. Kelly could hear traffic noise coming from the monitor, a few cars passing by outside her mom's ... place, the large California beach house she used to spend winters in with Frank, just north of San Diego.

"Dad had told you all these things, that's what you said. Isn't that what you said?"

“Yes. Stan was *very* upset.” Her mom looked at her as if waiting for a facial expression. “He didn’t talk to me about work for almost a year. A whole *year*, with all that bottled up inside you, just imagine that!”

Kelly nodded, not making a sound.

Cathy continued. “He was always quiet, not a very talkative guy, your dad. But a year goes by without talking about work, now that’s unusual. He loved his work, loved being the big, macho FBI Agent. But he became so quiet and depressed, you just had to know something was very wrong.” Her mom trailed off, appearing to lose her train of thought.

“Right. Dad being quiet and depressed was very unusual.”

“It certainly was.”

“I’ll always remember him as an outgoing and happy guy.” Kelly picked up a small blue memory chip from the table, took it out of its sleeve and nonchalantly leaned forward, slipping it into the front panel of the monitor, next to the keyboard.

“What’s that?” her mom asked, looking down at Kelly’s hand, then back up, surprised.

“I’m going to record us speaking for the next little while, if that’s all right,” Kelly answered, and then pushed a few buttons to start the recording.

Cathy hesitated, and then said, “Sure. Record away. I love to share my memories with my loved ones, especially with my children.”

Kelly detected the delay and then the canned response. No doubt some Ever Life programmer had hurriedly and without much reflection typed those exact words in a few years ago. She was sure of it, because it seemed so out of place for

the magnitude of the subject matter they were about to cover. It was usually very hard to figure out what would be the person's actual responses and which were being approximated by the super computer. But, Kelly was sure she had nailed one that time.

"Okay. We're recording this now ..." Kelly hesitated and looked back up at her mom. Cathy nodded in return, taking another sip from her own coffee mug.

"Okay. Last night we were talking about dad's work. At the FBI. We spoke about things that happened when he worked in Washington, D.C. All those events we spoke about." Kelly was being careful not to appear to be feeding her mom any information or asking any leading questions. "Can we talk about them some more?"

Her mom hesitated. "Why ... yes. Of course."

"One thing first. Mom, I asked you this last night. I want to ask you again. It's very important."

"Yes, baby. Yes. Go ahead."

"These things you're telling me. All these things that dad saw and did and told you about. Did you tell these to the people at Ever Life that did all the video and questionnaires and the brain mapping for ... for your program?" Kelly realized just how strange and awkward that question was.

"Uh ... no, honey." There was that micro-second computer delay again, she was sure of it. Her mom kept smiling, but now appeared discernibly uncomfortable. "I never told anybody about what your dad said. He made me *promise* never to tell anyone, as long as I was alive. He said ... he said it was for my safety, and *your* safety. He made me raise my hand and swear. No, I'm sure of it. I never told anyone. I was always too afraid."

“You never told Frank?” Kelly asked, referring to her mom’s second husband, Spanish billionaire Francisco Ernesto Gallardo.

“No! Never. No one. Your dad made me promise.”

“But you’re telling me *now*. But you didn’t want to tell me *then*.” Kelly said before she could stop herself.

“Well, yes. I suppose so. The oath ... oh, I don’t know. I’m confused. You asked about your dad ... and I guess I think you have a right to know.”

“Right, but why now, why after you ... died. Why tell me all of this *now*?”

About ten seconds went by, but it felt to Kelly like at least a minute. She reached out and found the coffee mug without diverting her eyes off the monitor, and took another sip.

“You asked about your dad ... I don’t know why I never told you before,” her mom finally said, then repeated, shaking her head just a bit, “I don’t know why I told you what I did.”

“But you’re sure that these things were told to you by dad, you didn’t read them somewhere, or watch them in a movie or something?” Kelly caught herself sounding overly formal, just like an interrogator, asking questions for the sake of the recording.

“Yes, sweetheart, I’m sure. Your dad told me all of it. Why would I lie, why would I make all of it up? And you shouldn’t tell anyone, either. I should make *you* promise, just like he made *me* promise.”

Kelly sat back. She couldn’t see how this could be possible, but there it was, right in front of her. She worried for a second that the shots of Johnnie Walker had affected her, but dismissed their affect. As a scientist, she was taught to acknowledge proof when it sat in front of you and smacked you

in the face. As much as she wanted to believe she was really talking with her mom, she knew she wasn't, but she *was* starting to believe she was speaking with an intelligent, adaptive, and maybe even a sentient computer program.

“Okay. I promise,” Kelly said, briefly raising her right hand. Then she started asking the questions that had been rolling around in her mind all night.

She let her mom answer, and then followed up with more direct, polite yet firm questions, much more in depth than the night before. It all came back again, at first slowly, and then it poured out. Her mom's answers were quick and detailed. There were names, places, dates, descriptions. Even addresses, even a dozen or so FBI case numbers. How even a *live* person could remember an 18 year old FBI case number, no less a *dead* person, Kelly couldn't fathom. Everything in exact detail, everything unbelievable, but yet verifiable, Kelly was sure of it. When her mom wasn't sure, she said so, she didn't guess. And there were the predictable inconsistencies about a few dates and places, and she clearly had a faulty memory about simple, uncomplicated things that even Kelly remembered. But when it came to the main facts of what her long-dead first husband had told her, according to her, she sounded very, very sure of herself. A good investigator could follow up and confirm most of it, if not all.

But there would be no investigation, Kelly knew. How could there be? This was all so ... so *crazy*, in so many ways. Why had she let herself come back to this again? Why couldn't she just tell her mom about her dating and shopping habits, and talk about food, television, and news? Just like they had for the past year?

She finally found a place to stop. That was enough video for the memory card. No point in anything further. She took a deep breath. Her mom did also. Kelly looked up at the clock on her kitchen wall.

One last question, Kelly decided. “Mom, does all this have anything to do with how daddy died? Do you know if someone killed him?” She couldn’t believe she was asking the question.

Cathy leaned back, like she had been gently pushed. “Uh ... Your dad died of food poisoning, and pneumonia ... he was very sick.”

“Mom, stop just repeating that. That’s the story we always heard. What’s the *truth*? What really happened, do you know?”

“I know ... I know that your dad, that my husband Stan ... that he died in August, 2003, of ... of food poisoning. I don’t know anything else.”

Kelly stopped. She could go no further. It was well after 11:00 a.m. They had been speaking for over 2 hours.

“Thanks, mom. I love you,” Kelly said, holding back the desire to sob. Tears were welling up in her eyes. She wasn’t sure what was going to happen, what she was going to do. Life would change, that much she was sure of. She didn’t even know if she would get a chance to speak with her mom again. This just might be their last few minutes together.

“I love you too, baby. I’m glad I could help. I’m afraid I’ve upset you. I didn’t want to do that.” Cathy was smiling widely, and Kelly could detect a brief twinkle and redness in her mom’s eyes as well.

Her mom finished her coffee, and Kelly finished hers also.

“Don’t forget your promise, honey. Don’t forget. Same promise I made your dad, just before he died.”

Kelly sat, just taking it all in, for well over a minute. Computer trickery or not, it sure did *seem* to be her mom’s

California beachfront kitchen, and if it wasn't her actual mom she had been speaking with, she didn't know who else it could be.

"Hey stupid, it's a computer simulation, that's it. Nothing more. You're being fooled into believing something that's not really there," the skeptic on Kelly's shoulder whispered again.

"Till next time. I've got to go. I'll see you soon, mom. I love you."

"Love you too. You take care," her mom answered.

Kelly leaned forward and pulled out the chip, then turned off the monitor, watching her mom's image go quickly dark. There was a brief shadow on the surface, a ghost image made up of billions of ultra hi-definition charged plasma particles, and then it was gone.

She was halfway up the stairs when she remembered the access card. She quickly doubled back and snatched it out of the monitor, then bounded back up the stairs, intent on packing her travel bags.

A few minutes later, Kelly interrupted her feverish packing and picked up the phone next to her bed and dialed Brandon's number again. It rang and rang, and she prepared to hang up, not intending to leave any information on his voice mail. But, he answered on the 6th ring.

"Brandon, hey ... it's me again. I need a favor. A big one. Right now. Quick, you have to hide my mother."

Three hours later, Monday, 8:30 p.m. local time, on a private island off the coast of Majorca, Spain.

Ben looked and acted just like a young version John Wayne, the all-American cowboy, but with longer, lighter color

hair and a moustache, and a much better sense of humor, Frank Gallardo would always say. Whenever Ben was in the cockpit of his private twin-engine jet, the ride was always safe, and mostly smooth, but also *vigorizar*, Frank thought, searching for the correct English word, finally coming up with, *invigorating*.

Ben was an experienced pilot, and Frank trusted him implicitly. Whenever they would take off from the private airstrip behind the castle in Palma and set out the twenty miles for his private island, Ben, who was the only American on his staff and was not only his pilot but a trusted friend and the family's lifelong personal assistant, would show off the raw power of the two large Pratt and Whitney engines by flying too fast, too low, too close to the edges of the mountains and cliffs, too close to the beaches, to the boats in the harbor and also those large yachts well out in the Mediterranean. But, never, ever did Frank feel he was in any danger; it was all just good clean fun, as far as he was concerned.

Frank laughed to himself, alone in the cabin. His tall, thin frame convulsed slightly when the laughter caused a slight cough. Frank was thinking of all the times that *La Guardia* had been to the castle to plead with him to make Ben stay further away from the boats, and from the topless beachcombers who would run for cover along the south shore, along the tourist beaches of Palma and the rest of the island of Majorca. Frank always said that he would certainly scold his cowboy American pilot, and he always would, but then Ben would always ...

The plane roared and banked hard right, then leveled, then dropped a hundred feet in just a few seconds, causing Frank to shout out from the passenger compartment, "*Vaquero!*" reminding his American pilot to stop acting like such a damned cowboy.

He laughed and coughed again. Then he took a moment to light up a large, dark Cohiba cigar, one of a few dozen that Sam had recently brought back from Havana. He inhaled deeply, and was happy at how well the cigar complemented the

prime rib and horseradish dinner he had finished just before takeoff.

A few minutes later he spotted his private island, took off his seat belt, stood up and looked out the window. The moonlight sparkled as it lit up the steep cliffs and the green jungle hilltops just a few miles from the airstrip; it was one of his favorite sights, but it came in a far second to the thousand foot waterfall that would come in to view just before the plane's final approach for a landing.

After another sharp turn the waterfall was there, right outside the starboard windows, less than a half mile away. It was a sight that would always take his breath away, even at night. He took it all in for a few seconds, then sat back down and buckled up for the landing. He prepared for the quick deceleration by taking a long drag off the Cohiba, then holding it out in front of his face and noting how perfectly it was smoking down.

Once Ben taxied the plane to the hangar, they got out and were met by a phalanx of private security and federal police, who drove them six miles up the winding jungle roads to the entranceway of the new supercomputer operations site, dug out of the side of *Montaña Del Dios*, the name given to it by its 15th century owner, meaning *God's Mountain*.

Frank was very proud of what they had accomplished in just twelve short months. When Brandon Finley had called with the idea, Frank was not the least bit skeptical or hesitant, the project was just what he needed to keep him busy and interested; create and monitor a giant, hidden-away mirror site of supercomputers that could survive any type of attack by virtue of being buried nearly a quarter mile underground. The Ever Life clients, of which Frank's wife Cathy was the very first, would have their Transfer programs permanently backed up and regularly updated, just in case anything ever happened to the original servers in the U.S. Thus, the company could always hold its head high when it made the much-publicized promise to its clients that their family members would live *en*

perpetuidad, or as Frank liked to say in his solid English, “forever.”

The price tag was steep, Frank knew, but well worth it. Digging out the mountain, installing an air conditioner, water, electric and sewer system, and then installing the elevator and offices, not to mention the 40 supercomputers at over \$5 million U.S. apiece, it all added up to well over half a billion dollars, with \$100 million U.S. per year in recurring costs and salaries. And that didn't count the millions of U.S. dollars spent to pay off government and police officials, to keep the whole project secret. Not even a hushed rumor had surfaced about what was being built on the secluded island off the coast.

Sure, the price was high, Frank thought, but he was an astute business man, and knew how to make a good business decision. He believed in the future of Ever Life, he believed that anyone who experienced the ability to speak to a loved one after death would themselves also want to undergo the transfer process, thus eventually joining their loved one *en perpetuidad*. Once that happened, they would lower the price so even the world's middle class would find the process affordable, and then the viral growth would be phenomenal, with whole families signing up one after another to experience the joy of staying in touch with a loved one, and watching that person continue to grow and learn and experience life, as if they had never left it. But more importantly to Frank, on his own personal level, it would mean that his one and only wife, his adorable and sexy Cathy, would live on, even after her slow and agonizing death at so young an age. And, one day off in the very far future, he hoped, he and Cathy and even Kelly and everyone else that he and Cathy had ever loved and cared about would be together in the Ever Life world. *Por siempre después*; forever after.

The lead security agent drove up to the guarded entranceway and put the uniformed officers at ease. Then he took out a card and swiped it into a security reader next to a monitor and keyboard, put his eyes into the cupolas of the retina scanner, and a few seconds later a large metallic door drew open to reveal a 15 x 20 foot elevator.

Frank kept his Cohiba lit as they descended the 400 meters in almost exactly one and a half minutes. When the elevator door opened, he walked toward his office, Ben close behind. The security officers went toward the cafeteria and a much deserved break, Frank knew.

Once in his office, he asked Ben politely if he wouldn't mind taking a break and joining the security men in the cafeteria. Ben said that would be fine, and with a big John Wayne smile volunteered to bring Frank back an espresso and a small pastille to munch on. Frank agreed, and gently put the cigar out, crushing the tip gently in his favorite crystal ash tray.

Frank found the report he had been waiting so long for sitting on his desk. He smiled, and reached out for the phone. He pushed the button for the scrambled, encrypted satellite line and dialed in the international number for Brandon Finley, who was still in Palm Beach at least another day or so, working on the final uploading protocols of the 600+ transfer programs.

"Ever Life," he heard Brandon say. There was a little static, but it was a very good connection, Frank thought.

"Hello, my young friend. Hope I'm not disturbing something." Frank's accent was barely detectable.

"You're not. Good connection, besides. Glad you called," Brandon answered.

"I have that piece of paper you wanted, from your associates. But I want to tell you that the people you sent here, they have been a pain in my *culo*, my ass, and they have been spending all of my money."

Brandon laughed. "Sorry. We'll make it back, promise. What does it say?"

Frank took just a few seconds to open the oak cabinet behind his desk and pour himself a glass of Cardenal Mendoza brandy. He smiled as he smelled the distinct vanilla and plum

combination. "It says everything has been double-checked and is ready." Frank took a sip, paused to make sure of the American words he was choosing, and then continued. "You just have to say the word, my bright, young American friend. By the way, when was the last time I told you that I wished you had married that crazy step daughter of mine?"

"That would've been ... last week," Brandon said with a hearty laugh.

Frank laughed heartily in return, and then took another sip of the expensive brandy.

Brandon continued. "Okay. Well, tell my people that the first satellite upload will start in exactly one hour. And Frank, we owe you a debt we can never repay, but you know we're going to try."

He laughed. "Just keep everything running smoothly."

"I will. And Frank, speaking of Kelly. I just spoke with her. She had another session with her mom, and now she knows the whole story about her dad and the FBI. What you were telling me about, but now it sounds like she knows all the details. Same thing Cathy told you."

"I knew this would happen," Frank said, upset, pounding his hand into the desk. "I knew this would happen. Now Kelly knows too much. Now she's in danger as well."

"Kelly wanted me to hide Cathy's file under a different name and password. It's already been done. You can still access her with your card and password, but no one else can access her, or erase her from the system or any of the servers without an access card or without knowing the new name and password I gave her. We've got to get them all out of here as soon as we can, so she'll be the first one we upload, less than an hour from now."

“That’s good, about Cathy. But what about Kelly? You know I love that girl. If something happened to her, her mom could never forgive me. *I could never forgive me.*”

“Don’t worry, she’ll be safe. You know how tough she is.”

“Yes. I know. She fights, and she shoots. Very tough girl, but not as tough as those bastards.”

“I told her to leave her house, take off and lay low for now, until you can get her back to Spain. She said she was going to the Palm Beach condo.”

“I’ll call her. Thank you again. Tell your people to start the upload on time, we’re ready on this end.”

Brandon thanked him again and hung up.

Frank put down the phone, finished the brandy with a fast jerk of his arm and sharp tilt of his head, then reached out and opened his top desk drawer. He took out the access card and turned to face the large monitor in the corner. He placed the card in, then typed in his password and waited patiently about 20 seconds until Cathy appeared on the screen.

“Hola, my love. How are you?” Frank asked. He saw that Cathy was in her favorite spot, in a chair looking out the kitchen window of their old beach house in Encinitas, just 20 or so miles north of San Diego.

“Hello Frank. I’m happy to see you.”

“Me too. You look, maybe a little bit ... *trastorno* ... upset,” Frank said, stumbling momentarily over finding the right word.

“I am. I’m worried. I think I’ve upset Kelly. I was just speaking with her, and I think I told her too much...”

“Yes, you did. My love, you know we discussed this, and you said that you weren’t going to tell her. At least, not everything. She called Brandon, who just called me. You told her everything. You shouldn’t have done that.”

“I know, I’m sorry, but she started me talking about Stan. One thing led to another, how he died, what he did, and it all just came out ...”

“Well, I don’t want you to worry, because I’m going to get Kelly out of there and bring her back to the castle.”

“Good. But when? Please tell me soon,” Cathy said.

“Yes, my love. Not to worry. Very, very soon. As soon as I can get her to an airport and I can get Ben over there to pick her up. It might take a day or two of clearances, maybe a few *sobornos*, a few bribes, but I’ll get it done. I won’t risk your only child on a commercial flight, you can be sure.”

“Thank you, Frank. And I’m sorry. I don’t understand what’s happened to me, to make me want to tell that secret to you, and to Kelly. I don’t understand, because Stan made me promise never to tell anyone.”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry. Listen, my love, I have to go. We’re upgrading the computers in the company. I’m bringing everyone to our private island. No one will be able to speak to their family members for a few days or so, but then after that, everything will be running like normal.”

“You mean ... you mean you’re turning us off?” she asked, giving him a very concerned look.

“Who said that? No. No one will *ever* turn you off. Think of it as going for a ride. It won’t take long. Everyone is going for a ride to a new home, one that is more secure. You shouldn’t notice a thing. I’m just telling you so you’ll understand if we don’t speak for a few days.”

“Okay, now I understand. Frank, you know I love you. I’m sorry again about telling Kelly. Please help her stay safe,” Cathy said, and then turned back to look out the front window, toward the beach.

“I will,” he said, and then shut the monitor off.

He picked up the Cohiba from the crystal ashtray and relit it, then savored the thick smoke for a minute before he picked up the phone and pressed one of the speed dial numbers. As it began ringing he glanced at his Rolex. It wasn’t quite 3 p.m. in Washington D.C.

“Central Intelligence,” the soft woman’s voice said.

“This is Frank Gallardo. I need to speak to the Deputy Director.”

In this mystery-science thriller, dead people are spilling government secrets, via their computer-stored consciousness! The government wants to shut everyone up, permanently, but an FBI Agent and a beautiful scientist fight to keep the dead people talking.

Dead Time

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2971.html?s=pdf>