

Jackie's normal everyday life is quickly diverted to a new foreign destination when the wreckage of her fathers jetliner is found in the Atlantic Ocean nearly 51 years after he disappeared off the coast of Nova Scotia.


Cleared for Time Travel

By Shane Bryan

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CLEARED FOR TIME TRAVEL

**FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS,
WE'VE BEEN CLEARED FOR TIME TRAVEL!**

SHANE BRYAN

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CHAPTER 1

The sunlight shines through broken clouds, providing a spotlight that illuminates the land below my tires. Waves cresting on the ocean are given a grand illuminance by the sun's rays. Trees on the opposite side of the boardwalk whistle and sway as the breeze rolls off the crashing waves and up the sandy beach.

I could not think of a better summer day for a bicycle ride along the Atlantic Ocean. The salt air lands gently on my cheeks as wave after wave engulfs the beach's edge. I'm relieved to have a day off from adding legal documents to a computer server. I love my job, but some days it can be tiresome. This beach cruiser seems to pedal itself along the boardwalk as I head to my favorite spot for a late breakfast.

The Bluefin Café is bustling with locals sipping hot coffee, chewing over the latest gossip, and enjoying their breakfast. Located in the tree branches above, the birds sing a cheery tune, fluttering around the doorway as guests step in and out of the restaurant. Each bird is hoping for a scrap treat left behind by a departing guest. I hop off my purple beach cruiser and prop it up with the kickstand, making sure to grab my plum-colored leather crossbody from the front basket.

I walk up the weather-beaten steps while my dirty blonde curls sway in the wind. "Bluefin Café" stands out in bold teal and cream colors on the painted glass, accompanied by a sand dollar that shows the restaurant's opening hours. Once I close the door behind me, numerous familiar voices sound in my ears.

I wave to Rita, who is sitting at a table near the forward entrance. Rita owns the Grandview Clothing Company — although we mostly still

call it Rita's place — in the town square and is wearing her pink embroidered smock with her name on it.

Walking across the threshold, I stop at her table.

“Hi Rita!” I say. “I just had to stop and tell you that I loved your window display from the Fourth of July festivities. The fireworks were almost as beautiful as your window display.”

“Hello, honey!” Rita says. “Really? You liked it? I threw it together so fast.” Rita has always downplayed her true talent. Many designer stores in the big city would hire her if they saw her work.

“Yes! Your hard work inspires so many of us who walk by your shop. You brought the spirit of patriotism to life with the American flag and LED Christmas light fireworks. How your nephew, Ivan, made the individual light strands burst in sequential order made the windows pop, especially at nighttime.”

She blushes with enjoyment, and she continues eating her blueberry pancakes. I navigate across the aisle, finding that my favorite seafoam-colored booth is unoccupied. This specific seat enjoys a perfect view of the street, the boardwalk, and the beach beyond.

I set my belongings down and gaze through the large window, watching a baker's dozen catch the surf before the rush of tourists clogs up the water and the corresponding beach. There aren't as many locals enjoying the beach today since it's a little chilly this morning, but by this afternoon, our quaint beach will be turned into a colorful mosaic of umbrellas and beach towels.

The aroma of fresh-brewed coffee brings me back to the present. Turning, I can see the cooks flipping pancakes behind the counter and dancing around the stovetops and fryers with their music. Moments later, I am overcome by a familiar, cloying perfume as Ruby, the café owner, approaches me. An older woman in a promiscuous red cocktail dress, her auburn hair is teased in a French twist coated with enough hairspray to light a small wildfire.

“Jackie, can I rustle you a cup of fresh coffee?” Ruby towers above me in her red pumps, brandishing a steaming jug.

“Coffee? Yes, I’d love some.” I hand Ruby my pale blue cup, and she fills it to the brim.

“You want your usual, honey?” she asks, placing the now-full cup in front of me. Ruby never writes down her orders. Her memory is outstanding, and she sends everything to the kitchen using the electronic point of sale system.

I nod.

“Sure thing,” she replies, as she smiles and strolls away to place the order. I reach over and take three of my favorite flavored mini creamer cartridges from the bowl on the tabletop — pumpkin spice creamer. She’s always treated me like I’m her favorite niece, even though I’m just another regular in her café.

Sipping the delicious coffee, I think back to when Ruby bought this place in 1985, and how she quickly became a staple in Bluefin Cove, our little town in Maine. After the purchase was complete, the previous owners retired to Florida. Come to think of it, I just got a postcard in the mail last week from Alice and Henry, bragging about the sunshine and year-round fun.

Ruby brought many of her great-grandmother’s recipes to the café, like sweet and sour cinnamon rolls and lobster benedicts with crispy bacon accompanied by a generous scoop of red potatoes. Many more of her recipes have landed on the signature menu.

Her grandson, Harrison, has worked in the café since he was 16, starting as a busboy and quickly working his way up to assistant manager. When Ruby leaves for her vacation, at least four times a year, Harrison is in charge of the restaurant operations. She told me a while back that he will assume ownership when she decides to retire, as she couldn’t be more pleased with his hard work and dedication.

I always start my morning late — and already it’s nearly noon — with coffee and reading the news on my iPad. Sure, I have coffee at home, but today I feel like treating myself to some down-home Yankee hospitality and the chance to run into some of my neighbors.

Above the back counter, there’s a 32-inch television that constantly plays the great TV shows of the past. Ruby has the TV set on a classic rerun network, 24/7. Even when the café is closed, I can see the TV playing in the dark through the large, unblinded windows.

Still drinking my coffee gradually, I hear someone call my name in a rich Kentucky accent. I turn my head and it’s my dear friend Laurie Webb. Laurie works at the Heavenly Waves Nursing home as the lead nurse. The guests at the home truly love her kind heart and funky attitude.

“Jackie, I just saw you here and had to drop by,” she says, leaning in for quick and genuine hug. “What are you doing here all by your lonesome?”

“It’s so good to see you.” I gush. “Have you hired a new activities director yet?” The last person retired a few weeks ago, and Laurie has been filling in before her shift for an hour just to give the residents a bingo or trivia challenge. The winner gets a quarter, and that will buy them a soda from the vending machine.

“No, not yet. I have to make sure that the person is qualified and really cares about the residents.” Laurie declares. “I do have an interview next week.” While Laurie is a tough woman, she cares about her patients with true compassion. “I have to run. You enjoy your brunch and I’ll see you around.” She leaves me to sip my coffee.

For the next few minutes, I sip my coffee and read an article in the *Bluefin Journal* about the new library being constructed in the heart of the town square. Then the television stops mid-program and starts playing a breaking news alert about some plane crash that’s been found. But of course, they only give enough details to catch your attention.

I start looking around the bustling restaurant for Ruby or one of her staff. I see Ruby peer out from the kitchen, and I raise my hand to grab her attention. She hustles over.

“What is it, dear?” she asks, concerned.

“Oh, Ruby, could you please turn up the volume? I am trying to hear it.”

She nods and navigates herself over to the counter. Pulling the remote from a drawer, she clicks the volume button a few times so the sound grows louder.

“That good?”

I nod, and Ruby returns to entering orders in the computer and pouring out fresh coffee. I wait for the stupid commercial to finish while gripping my half-empty cup. Finally, the news starts, and I sit frozen, staring up at the television.

The breaking news bulletin plays again, and the camera pans over the news anchors, along with the show’s theme song. I tap my fingers on the table, irritated with the delay. Then the camera zooms in on a female reporter, her dark curly hair cut in a sophisticated bob. Her bright red lipstick is jarring against her pale skin.

“This is a breaking news story,” she says. “Thank you for joining us today. I’m Robin Reynolds. Over fifty years ago, the world was stunned when a brand new, state-of-the-art jetliner disappeared over the Atlantic Ocean shortly after take off. Rescuers searched for weeks after the disappearance, but all passengers and crew were presumed lost at sea within a few days after the plane disappeared from coastal radar.” The café is silent now, the other diners all glued to the broadcast.

The reporter is still speaking, but the video switches to an aerial view of a ship at sea.

“Well, that all changed today when the Navy Research Vessel, United States Ship *Lavon*, found the wreckage site while researching underwater sea life. We’ll be back with more in just a moment.”

The news switches to a commercial. Ruby walks over, places the steaming coffee carafe on the table before slipping into the booth across from me.

“Jackie,” she murmurs discreetly. “That wasn’t your dad’s airplane, was it? The story sounds awfully familiar.”

I purse my lips, trying to decide whether it’s just a strong coincidence, or if my life is about to change.

“I’m not sure; the reporter didn’t say what airline it was. Do you think it could be a coincidence?”

But before she can answer, the news anchor’s intro starts up again.

“Oh! Wait, they’re back, let’s watch.”

We both turn our attention back to the TV set. By this time, the customers are all chattering away again. Bluefin Cove is a small town, and when something from the past is dug up, the locals get excited. I can only imagine the fuel that this will add to the beauty parlor.

We both try to hear what the reporter is saying, but it’s difficult to make out her words, even after Ruby raises the volume.

“Folks, keep it down,” she finally hollers. “We’re trying to hear the TV, please!” Everyone hushes as the anchor continues her report.

“In 1971, Americonic International Airlines Flight Number 329 took off from John F. Kennedy International airport, destined for Rome. Twenty-five minutes into the flight, air traffic control lost all contact with the aircraft and its crew. The Canadian Coast Guard was dispatched shortly after to investigate the aircraft’s last known coordinates. This morning, the underwater robot, *Sea Flyer*, was searching the ocean floor about 150 miles south of Nova Scotia and came across a debris field. After assessing the area and determining it was safe to proceed, the navigators spotted remnants of an airplane, including wings, tail, engines and other debris. It was not until the submersible came around the other side of the tail fin that they discovered the registration number, N723AI, painted on the fuselage.”

The news anchor's voice continues to play, as the screen shows pictures of the aircraft before its disappearance.

“The Boeing 707 intercontinental jetliner was registered to Americonic International Airlines. Along with the registration number, investigators were also given videos and picture evidence from the discovery. Upon reviewing the evidence, they saw the unique red, white and blue stars painted on what was left of the horizontal stabilizer. The USS Lavon team is working to salvage the wreckage from the seafloor and take it to a secure hangar. This is a developing news story, and we will bring you more details as they become available.”

The channel flicks back to a 1970s show about big stars cruising the ocean on a lovely cruise ship. I turn to Ruby in shock.

“That was his airplane! My father's, I mean. That's it!”

Before Ruby can gather her thoughts for a response, my cell phone vibrates in my purse, one alert after another. Retrieving the phone, I see numerous texts from my little sister, Candice. Then my phone rings before I can read the messages.

“Hey, sis, did you —”

But she cuts me off. Candice shouts so loud I have to hold the phone away from my ear.

“SIS! Did you see the news? They found Daddy's airplane! Where are you? Are you home?”

Candice and I are the only family we have left. Mom and Dad were only children, and our grandparents died years ago. So, when big news happens in her life, she calls me right away as she knows I will guard her deepest secrets.

“I just saw it,” I told her. “I'm at Ruby's.”

“I'm closing up the shop for the rest of the day and heading to the house — I'll see you there!” There's a click as she hangs up. I lower my phone to eye level and see a blank screen.

“I better head home, Ruby. If I pedal fast enough, I should be there by the time Candice is.” I take a twenty-dollar bill from my purse and try to hand it over to Ruby. She denies my gesture and pats my hand.

“Oh, honey, it’s on the house. You better get on your way.”

I sling my plum purse over my shoulder and give Ruby a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Heading for the exit, I wave to a few people in the café who see me making the dash out. I trot down the creaking front steps to my bicycle.

My house is just ten minutes away. After tossing my purse in the basket, I start pedaling away from the café, then through the town square where our local farmers market is still in full swing. Of course, I need items from there, but I have no time to stop.

I ride along the shoreline, filling my lungs with fresh ocean air. I pass a few beachgoers, tourists and many pop-up shops. Bluefin Cove is a friendly community, where everyone knows each other’s secrets. Just as I shake my head, thinking about all the town gossip that’s swept through our little town through the years, I see Michelle.

She waves, and shouts from a small distance. “Where are you riding so fast?”

Faced with the time crunch, I slow down but do not stop fully.

“Hi! I’ve got to meet Candice at the house,” I shout back and give a wave while holding the handlebar with one hand. She waves back and smiles and we lock eyes for only a second and I continue on.

I ride past a series of massive eastern white pine trees that line the sidewalks. Each of them stands sentinel before a front yard. Tim and Michael, our neighbors, are conversing on their front porch from their rocking chairs.

“Whoa, speed racer. Why are you hurrying? Is someone chasing you?” Tim asks while Michael sips on a mug that contains tea with a shot of vodka. Tim and Michael moved here a year ago after they retired from

the crazy life of being a flight attendants for Southwestern International Airlines.

A few weeks back, Candice and I had dinner at their home for their tenth wedding anniversary. Michael cooked the most delicious steak that I have ever tasted, and Tim bought a French silk pie from the local baker in town.

“I’m meeting Candice!” I shout from the street, turning into my driveway. Not a moment later, I see Candice’s Buick pull in behind me. Mom passed away a few years ago, and since I don’t drive, she left the old Buick to my sister in her will. The motor turns off, and Candice steps out of the car. I lean my bike up against the house and swing my purse over my shoulder as I run to her.

“Can you believe they found it?” she blurts out, as I crush her in a sisterly hug. I turn towards Tim and Michael and wave. Candice waves as well and they return to their previous conversation.

“No,” I tell her. “Not even a little bit. Come inside, though. We’ll have tea and talk.” Even though it’s July, we still get a cool breeze in Maine — and hot tea is a great way to warm up and calm the nerves.

Candice unlocks the door — we’ve been living together ever since her husband was killed on the road during a winter storm back in 1999. He was a truck driver for 3B Trucking out of Portland, Maine. I follow Candice in and close the door behind me, and we both hang our purses on the coat rack and head for the kitchen.

The kitchen is filled with many memories. White lace embroidered curtains hang in the windows, the cabinets are a rich mahogany, and there’s white quartz countertops Candice and I had installed just last month.

The Craftsman-style house was built in 1951 by the town’s mayor. When he passed in 1972, Mom found the property in a real-estate advertisement and bought it the same day via the phone number posted

within the ad. She decided to keep the original details, including the expensive wood trim, fixtures, appliances and even some of the furniture.

I snatch the white tea kettle from the drying rack by the white porcelain farm sink and begin to fill it. After the water reaches the top, I step over to the stove.

Our old gas stove is older than the house itself, but it has never failed me yet. Turning the dial to open the gas, I strike a match and light the burner, and the water begins to heat up.

Meanwhile, Candice is looking through her phone, reading the news stories about the recovery of the wreckage. I grab two teacups from the tea cabinet, the sugar caddy and the Christmas cookie tin we use for fresh tea bags and place them all on the table.

I walk back through the entryway, retrieve my iPad from my purse, and return to the kitchen table to lay it down next to the teacup. A few moments later, the tea kettle whistles. I bring it to the table and fill both our cups with hot water.

After returning the kettle to the range, I take my seat, crossing my legs under the table. Candice grabs a tea bag out of the tin and places it in the hot water. She hands me my favorite flavor, English Elegance.

After I fix my cup, I open the tablet case and start researching the news for any new information. I navigate to the search window, and a variety of news stories pop up, but none of them say anything different from what I've already heard at the café.

One story catches my eye. There's a picture of an aircraft called Majestic Eagle. There's a link below the photo, and I hurry to click it. A website opens a different window that displays a video. Pressing play, I hear a voice I haven't heard in years.

It's a female voice, bitter with emotion. "We are very sorry to inform you that Americonic International Airlines has been notified by Navy personnel that the search and rescue has been discontinued indefinitely.

For further information, please contact the Americonic International Airlines family care team.”

The last time I heard that recording, and that same haunting voice, was when Candice and I were cleaning Mom’s mess of a room when she passed away. She’d saved the recording on a mini cassette player.

“Was that the recording from Mom’s cassette?” Candice asks me from across the table. I nod, continuing to read the story. The point of this specific article is to shine light on why the Navy called off the search so quickly.

I finish the article and turn to Candice. “Did you find anything?”

She puts down her tea. “Nope, not yet. They all have same thing about the USS Lavon finding the wreckage, but nothing else.”

I keep refreshing the screen, hoping a new story will develop — but no luck. After about an hour of us both scavenging the internet, I get up to turn on the kitchen television. It’s been about an hour and a half since the news story broke, and maybe there’s an update.

“Where’s the dang remote?”

I rummage in the drawer under the counter, finally locating it. The TV is an old one, and it takes a few moments for the dinosaur to come alive.

The moment it powers up, I flip to the news channel and luckily, we’re just in time. The story is about halfway through.

“The wreckage of Americonic Flight 329 will be housed in a hangar at the air base in Nova Scotia for the duration of the investigation. The wreckage will be under control of the National Transportation Safety Board, since the aircraft is American made and operated by a formerly US-based airline.”

Candice frowns in thought. “What do you think are the chances that we could go there and see the wreckage?”

I consider it. “Oh, my, I’m not sure. Probably very slim, I’d imagine”.

A few moments of silence follow. I'm trying to figure out who I would even call to ask about the wreckage or the newly reopened investigation.

Candice breaks my train of thought. "I remember Mom's stories about Dad leaving that day. She would go on about how handsome he looked in his freshly pressed uniform. I wish we could have known him better."

Tears are forming in her eyes. "How did Mom ever raise us on her own? The airplane disappeared on August 21, 1971. She had two young kids. I was a little over six months old, and Jackie, you were one and a half, right?"

I nod. "Yes. Well, the airline was very good to her, for one thing. She kept getting paychecks every week until the airline went bankrupt in 2002 after 9/11." I sit back down at the table. "Then there's the cans we collected, and we sold eggs for a while, right? It's incredible to see where we are now. I'm a data entry specialist at a law firm, and you have your own flower shop. Dad would be so proud of us."

Candice shakes her head. "But why did the airline go belly up? They were at the top of their game for so many years, even after the disappearance of dad's plane."

I look at the ceiling for a moment, collecting my thoughts.

"There were a bunch of terrible accidents after Flight 329. I think they had one every couple of years, then the recession just made things worse. Eventually, the CEO went on national TV in a televised hearing and declared they had no more funds to keep the operation going."

Candice continues typing on her phone, then holds it up for me to see. A video from 2002 begins to play.

"The airline that helped pioneer commercial aviation routes for more than seventy years is grounded tonight," the voiceover says. "As of today, Americonic has gone out of business." I remember seeing that on live TV when a news outlet did a special report on the airline.

We both turn back to our search engines. But there's very little about the disappearance of Flight 329. Even the public-access portal to the NTSB has very few details in its report.

I hold up my iPad for Candice. "Does it strike you odd that the NTSB only investigated for a few weeks after the disappearance and then closed the case? According to their website, there was a preliminary report that only has a short summary of the disappearance — and that's it."

"What does it say?" Candice asks. "Can you read it to me while I get a refill?"

I start reading. "On August 21, 1971, about 7:02 PM Eastern Standard Time, a Boeing 707-320B airplane, N723AI, disappeared from Boston center radar. After numerous Air Traffic Control contact requests, the controller, Bob Charlotte, contacted emergency services. The Canadian Coast Guard in Dartmouth rushed to the last known coordinates, 42 degrees north and 62 degrees west. No wreckage and/or debris were discovered at the last known coordinates. The aircraft was operated under the provisions of the Title 14 code of Federal Regulations, Part 91. The Boeing 707-320B operated under the airline Americonic International Airlines and was operating route 329, John F. Kennedy International Airport enroute to Rome Fiumicino Leonardo da Vinci Airport. The aircraft was a newer model, having been put into service on May 20, 1971. According to Boston center Air Traffic Control, the pilots acknowledged that they were ascending to their cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. No further communications were recorded until the Air Traffic Control, Bob Charlotte, requested contact. The recorded Air Traffic Control communications were retained in a secure lab for further examination."

I put down my iPad. "That's it. There's nothing else in the report."

Candice looks confused. "All that information we already know. The news and conspiracy theorists spouted that for years after the incident. Is there anything else online about the disappearance?"

I shake my head. “No, that’s it. The file states they closed the case on September 24, 1971.” I finish my now-lukewarm tea. “Hey, let’s order some food now, so it will be here by dinnertime. What sounds good? Chinese?”

“Sounds good to me! My usual, please. You want some money?”

“That’s all right, I got it this time.” I head into the entryway to get my debit card from my purse, then walk to the yellow wall phone in the kitchen. The landline is only there for our internet, but we house business cards on the holder below it. I pick up the business card for Harbor Noodle Company, the only Chinese restaurant in our little town.

As I reach for my cell phone, the screen lights up as it begins to ring. The caller ID pops up and says *US Government* under the phone number. The area code is not local.

“202? That’s Washington, isn’t it?” I express, looking over at Candice and pointing at the caller ID.

Candice gives me a warning look. “That must be a scam. Why would they be calling *us*?”

We let it go for a while, but then the phone stops ringing. I wait for a voicemail to come through on the machine, but there’s just a click. Whoever it was must have hung up when the recording started.

“Scammer,” I repeat. “I’m sure you’re right.”

Before I can say another word, the phone starts to ring again. And again, the caller ID displays *US Government*.

“What *now*?” Candice sighs. We hardly ever receive calls during the week, so this must be something important. Most of our friend’s text, and my boss only chats within the office messaging app.

“Should I answer it? Scammers don’t call twice in a row, do they?”

Candice vehemently shakes her head, but I can’t resist.

I take a deep breath, then slide the green button to answer. Holding the receiver to my ear, I listen for a few seconds in silence.

A deep male voice says, “Miss Jette, this is Agent Taylor, Badge Number 5102153411 from the United States Air Force Aviation, Research and Discovery department in Washington, DC. I need to ask you a few questions. Is this a good time?”

My eyes grow wide and my heart pounds against my rib cage. I turn to Candice, and she must see my shocked expression, because she puts her hand to her mouth covering it slightly.

Agent Taylor speaks again without changing his tone. “Miss Jette, this is rather urgent. Do you have a moment? If your sister is there, please ask her to wait outside your home on the porch.”

“Why does she need to wait on the porch?” I ask, then catch myself. “How did you know that we *have* a porch?” I motion furiously at the window, trying to indicate to Candice that she should look outside for unmarked sedans, like in the movies.

“Agent Taylor,” I repeat, “how did you know about our porch?”

“Our records indicate that the house at 1241 Oldham Avenue has a front porch with white rocking chairs, two to be exact, and a table with white carnations.”

Now I’m *sure* it’s a scammer.

“Mr. Taylor, I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, but I’m hanging up now. Oh. And they’re tiger lilies.” Not giving him the chance to respond, I tap the phone’s red button to end the call. I do miss the days where you could just slam the receiver on the wall as a statement of your frustration.

“Total fake,” I shake my head at Candice. “Probably a news reporter trying to get the inside scoop from the captain’s daughter.”

Not even a moment later, my cellphone rings on the table.

Candice looks down at the screen. “Uh, Jackie? It’s the government again.”

I refuse to answer the phone, so she does instead. She puts it on speakerphone.

“Hello?” Candice asks, cautiously. Whoever he is, the man recognizes her voice.

“Hello, Candice, this is Agent Taylor. Would you please hand the phone back to Jackie? I can assure you that I am not with the press and that I am a real agent for the government.”

Not believing him, I shout from across the room, “Prove it!”

There’s a long pause.

“Okay, ladies, this should prove it.” We move closer to the speaker, waiting. “When Paul Jette was declared deceased a few weeks after the disappearance, your mother received a check from the United States Government for an amount that provided enough money to move you all to Bluefin Cove.”

“*Pfff*,” I huff. “If you have that information, then you should be able to tell me the exact amount written on the check, I suppose.”

“Sure. The amount on the check was \$73,127.34 from the Treasury Department. Made out to your mother as ‘Enlisted Services.’”

I feel that he knows I’m testing him. Leaving Agent Taylor on the line, I race down the hall to pull out Mom’s bank books from the hallway hutch. I open up the ledger from her checking account. *\$73,127.34*.

Agent Taylor is still on speakerphone. As I make my way back to the kitchen, I can hear his voice. “Oh, and I might add, Miss Jette, that it was cashed on December 7, 1971, at Apache Central Bank in New York.”

I rush back to the table. “Hold, please,” I splutter, as I push the hold button on my phone screen.

When I speak to Candice, my voice is shaking. “There are only three people in this world who know the truth, and mom is dead. How did he know the amount and date when Mom cashed that check?”

We stare at each other.

“No reporter would know that!” Candice says. “I believe him.”

I press hold again. “Okay, Agent Taylor. You have our attention now.”

Agent Taylor clears his throat. “Candice, would you please let us have a moment?”

She looks at me and shakes her head, her face pale. “No,” I say, as forcefully as I can muster. “Whatever you have to say, you can say it to both of us.”

There’s a pause, then the agent continues. “Jackie, what do you know about your dad’s career with Americonic and the Pentagon?”

Stunned, I feel my jaw drop open. Staring at Candice, I reply, “Dad wasn’t in the military. I know he flew special missions to Korea since the airline had chartered flights there. That’s what the check was for.” Mom never said anything about Dad being in the military or government beyond that. “This is news to us, Agent Taylor.”

“Ladies, are you aware of the new information we have on your dad’s missing plane?”

“Of course. We saw the news a few hours ago. That a Navy vessel found pieces of the plane, or something like that?”

“That’s correct, ma’am. My team received word directly from the ship. Since the debris field is closer to Nova Scotia, the wreckage will be held there for the duration of the investigation.”

“Mr. Taylor, what does any of this have to with us?” I can tell my cheeks are flushed, and I put my hands to my face. “Are you calling all the victims’ families to notify them of this discovery?”

There’s a long pause. I’m sure he’s choosing his next words very carefully. For a while I wonder if he’s hung up. Then he replies, “You are the only subject I am permitted to speak with.”

Subject? What the heck? “Hold please,” I tell him, and put the phone on mute again.

“This sounds bad,” I say to Candice. “When did we turn into *subjects*?”

My sister looks down at the phone warily, like it's a scorpion getting ready to strike. "This..." she hesitates. "This could be bigger than we think."

I unmute the phone, and Agent Taylor immediately resumes talking. "Ladies, I feel that this would be better to discuss in person. I'll be in touch." He disconnects the call.

"Did he just hang up on us?" Candice gasps. "What the —"

"I don't know." I get up from the table again. "What I *do* know is, I'm starving. I couldn't eat anything today. Let's order food before it's too late." I finally place our order through the delivery app on my phone.

Once that's done, we move out to the front porch. I scan the area for any unsavory vehicles or unknown people on the sidewalk. After I feel the coast is clear, I take my seat next to Candice with the table between us. Leaning back in my white rocking chair, I muse, "What could Dad have done in the military? He was always too busy flying around the world."

"Well, exactly," Candice laughed. "He had the perfect cover. An Americonic pilot traveling around the world would fly right under the radar. I bet he was working with the CIA."

"No *way*. Like James Bond or something?" We both laugh at how ridiculous that sounds. "If I had to guess, he probably flew some important politician to a speech in Europe."

We talk until the food arrives, then bring it inside. Munching our way through our honey almond shrimp and sesame chicken with broccoli, we can't help but continue talking about our mysterious government "agent."

"Candice, what do you think he meant when he said that he only wants to speak with me?" I wonder out loud.

She shrugs, wiping some sauce from the corner of her mouth with a paper napkin. "You got me. I'm sure we'll find out tomorrow, and if not, we'll play hard to get and fish it out of him."

Once we're stuffed to the brim, we clean up the kitchen and move to the living room for a nightcap. The day has unleashed many questions, and my head is twirling. "Hey, you want to play a card game?" I ask, as I am sure that she is having the same motion in her mind.

"You're on!" Candice says and dashes to the card table in the den. "My fingers are feeling hot and in the groove. I hope you brought your A game." Removing the cards from the drawer, she stacks and shuffles them thoroughly.

The best part about playing cards is not the victory or the thrill of winning but the personal conversations between us. Candice has been so busy recently with her shop in town, and we haven't had any time for a card game in a while. Candice does have lucky hands tonight, as she beats me by nearly five thousand points.

Failing miserably to keep my eyes open, I decide to turn in for the night as does Candice. We check the door locks, close the window blinds and head upstairs to our rooms.

Melting into my soft Egyptian sheets, I check my tablet one more time before turning out the lights. There's a message from an unknown number. My heart starts to race a bit when I see the same 202 area code. It reads: *Hello Ms. Jette. This is Agent Taylor. I will be arriving tomorrow morning. I will let you know the time soon.*

I can't run to Candice's room fast enough. I throw on my housecoat, hurry across the hall, and bust the door open, not even bothering to knock. She's still watching television and before she can react to my dramatic entrance, I shout out, "He texted me!"

I read Agent Taylor's message out loud, but Candice looks confused. "Why is he making this long trip? And why so soon? Don't they have to plan things out far in advance?"

"I don't know," I admit. "You're right, the whole thing's weird."

Why does this stranger from the government want to meet us so urgently? Deciding not to worry about it, I set my alarm for 7 a.m. to make sure I wake up in time to get ready.

Returning to my bed, I close my eyes for the night.

CHAPTER 2

I toss and turn a million times that night. Finally, my alarm sounds, and I roll out of my bed, wishing I'd had a few more hours of slumber. I sit up straight and feel diminished as my usual waking time is 11 a.m. or later. Given how unusual the plans are for today, this is a one-time exception.

Slipping into my housecoat, I creep down the wooden staircase. I raise the tab on the coffee pot, remove the old coffee pouch, and throw in a new one. While the coffee percolates and sputters, I peer out the kitchen window. It's a ghostly, foggy morning.

Sitting in my big chair in the living room, I sip the hot coffee and slowly return to my normally caffeinated state of well-being. The news reports on television are the same as yesterday, with no new information. Flipping through the usual channels, I land on our little town's local network. I nearly spit out my mouthful of coffee. There's a photo of my dad on the screen, with the caption, *Local residents' father was the captain of the ill-fated jetliner.*

The reporter narrates a little brief about how we moved here after his death, along with pictures from last year's community gala to raise money for the animal shelter. I was proud of that gala. That night, we raised \$5,000 for food and medicine for the pups — and not a penny went into some greedy CEO's pocket.

The grandfather clock to my right begins to chime. 7:30 a.m. I hope Agent Taylor calls ahead to let us know when he'll be here.

"Morning," a zombified voice calls out from the bottom of the stairs. Candice waves and then heads for the coffee station. She grabs her coffee

and joins me in the living room. As we wake up, we start talking about what Agent Taylor might be telling us today.

About twenty minutes later, both Candice and I dress nicely and put our hair up so we'll look somewhat professional when he arrives. The time is now 8 a.m., and we still haven't heard from Agent Taylor. Candice proposes we go have breakfast at Ruby's before he arrives. "After all," she coaxes, "we won't be eating for a few hours at least once he gets here. Who knows how long he'll want to talk to us?"

"Sure, let's go." After a quick drive in the Buick, we arrive at the café. Clearly, it's not very busy. Granted, most of the locals don't get here until 10 a.m. for the senior special: decaf coffee, low-cholesterol eggs and a free ticket to the bingo hall.

"Hello Candice, Jackie! Girls, what's new, what's hip?" Ruby greets us, while walking us to my favorite table. Candice and I just laugh, since we're not sure what to say. We take our seats, but Ruby's still waiting for an answer.

Just like my aunt Jess always says, it's better to hide in plain sight. "We have a meeting today with a man from out of town. He wants to give us some information about Dad." Ruby nods her head and goes over the usual café talk about specials.

I'm glad that she doesn't ask us anymore investigative questions in exchange for our bland response. If even she did, we don't have the answers to tell her.

Then suddenly, it registers. Ruby stops mid-sentence. "Oh! What have you learned about the crash? Anything new?" In the meantime, she fills our pale blue coffee mugs and awaits our response.

"Not really," I tell her. "We're still in the dark. And since Americonic closed its doors in 2002, I'm not sure if we'll *get* any more information." I don't mention Agent Taylor, though. Somehow, that seems like too big of a risk to take with so little information. Ruby is summoned to another table while we open the menu flap.

Reviewing the menu, we both decide that our usual selection will do and talk about the people strolling by on the boardwalk. There aren't many tourists out on this chilly morning, but the usual folks from the Heavenly Waves Nursing home are out walking to get their blood pumping before lunch is served in the nursing home dining room, Poseidon's Hideaway.

I don't think I've ever been here this early to witness the residents on their morning routine. If I have, it was years ago.

"Who's opening the shop today?" I ask my sister, sipping my coffee. Candice owns the only floral shop in town. She named it Finding Floral, which I thought was brilliant.

"I'll get Grace to do it. That big order's due in a few days, and we have it all done, pretty much. Just a few minor details." She puts her coffee down when Ruby returns, and we tell her we want our usuals, which consists of pumpkin cinnamon pancakes for me and Candice's "Two by Two by Two": two eggs, two slices of bacon and two buttermilk pancakes. We can hear the cooks moving around in the kitchen as they start to get busy.

"I bet the Bluefin Bowling League is going to love your arrangement." The League has a championship banquet every year around this time, and it's Candice's fifth year providing the floral arrangements. Last year, she won a prize from the mayor's office for best original design.

Ruby brings over two large, steaming plates, and we unroll our silverware and dig into the food. While we're still eating, a rather tall and well-built man approaches our table.

I look closer and notice that he has the brightest blue eyes that I have witnessed. The black-skinned gentlemen could not be a day over thirty, as he had not one wrinkle on his entire face or neck. The heathered blue blazer fit well over his broad shoulders, and his dark jeans did not underrepresent his muscular legs either.

“Candice, Jackie, it’s so good to see you in person.” When he speaks, I’m expecting him to have a high-pitched voice as he is so young. But, to our surprise, his voice is deep and masculine. We both stare for a moment, enjoying his voice.

Oh. It’s him.

Agent Taylor takes a seat and orders a cup of coffee, though neither of us invited him.

I narrow my eyes and address him in a flat monotone. “Agent Taylor, nice to meet you and welcome to Bluefin Cove. You’ll have to imagine us on a warmer day.”

He smiles at my sarcasm and reaches into his coat pocket. Removing his credentials, he flips the little booklet open and shows it to me across the table and then to Candice to prove his identity, although I already knew it was him from the moment he spoke.

Once he replaces the ID, he leans casually back in the booth as though he owns the place. “I hope you both can forgive me for popping in here. I saw Candice’s car in the front parking lot and thought that we could start with coffee.” On cue, Ruby brings over his coffee, then rushes off to tend to other tables.

“How did you get here so fast? Isn’t Washington like 500 miles away?” Candice asks before setting down her fork. “And how did you know it’s my car?”

“I saw your motor vehicle records in your file. Not very many historic Buicks like yours on the road anymore.”

Taken back by his remark, I cannot help but think our so-called *file* has more information than just her motor vehicle records. And furthermore, why is that important enough to be in our file?

I jump in. “So, why do you have a file on Candice and me? Also, why do you need to know the make and model of her car?” The food’s aroma rises to my nose, but with how uncomfortable I am with Agent Taylor’s *file* on us, I can’t bear to eat another bite.

“Well, I have both of your case files here in my briefcase. As for how I got here, I drove that government-issued black SUV sitting out front. I have orders to stay here until further notice from my boss.” He picks up his coffee and takes a long gulp. “I have to interview you both today, and then I have no idea what I’m doing after.”

“Do you want anything to eat?” I ask. The guys practically drained his coffee cup; he must be starving.

“No, I’ll grab a bite later, after we finish. Would you all be okay if we started the interview right here?” He pulls out a notebook and pencil from the inside coat pocket of his blazer.

“Here?” Candice asks. “How stupid do you think we are? You must not be from a small town, Agent Taylor. This diner is Gossip Central Station.”

I shrug. “We might as well. People will have no idea what we are talking about.”

But Candice just shakes her head.

“Okay,” I concede. “Well, why don’t we meet you back at our house, Agent Taylor? I assume you already have the address tucked away with many more surprises in that Tumi briefcase?”

“Yes, I do. Let’s meet in twenty — I need to check in at my hotel. I heard the Bluefin Oasis is like a Hawaiian resort or something.”

Candice and I look at each other and giggle. “You may want to lower your expectations a little bit,” I tell him.

Agent Taylor puts two twenty-dollar bills down on the table, then shoots me a concerned look. *Oh. Now he probably thinks his hotel is a dump.*

“It’s a lovely hotel though!” I assure him. “Mrs. Winterling keeps the place in tip-top condition. You won’t be upset with your accommodations.”

“Thanks for paying, anyway,” Candice says. *At least my sister has some manners.*

We part ways and head back home, and Candice and I sit down in the living room, waiting for Agent Taylor to arrive. I flick on the television. They're still showing footage of the wreckage recovery operation. Salvage cranes are lifting large chunks of the aircraft out of the ocean and into a ship's hold.

The crane comes up with another load, and this time it's the flight deck section. It's remarkably still intact. "Is that —?" Candice asks, and I nod.

"The cockpit windows," I confirm. "Dad would have been sitting right there when it happened." At the thought, I can feel tears burning my eyes.

I hear a car door slam. I stand up and watch through the window as Agent Taylor walks toward the house. I head for the front door and open it, waving him inside.

"Make yourself comfortable," I say as he follows me into the living room. He immediately starts snooping around, picking up various objects and feeling them.

"It's not bugged," I remark. I'm starting to get annoyed at him touching all our stuff.

"You never know, Miss Jette." Apparently satisfied, Agent Taylor takes a seat in the opposite chair. He reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a thick file that's practically bursting with paperwork.

"That's all for *us*?" I gape. "What are we, a couple of criminal masterminds?"

He opens his file and glances at me. "Just doing my job, Jackie," he says curtly.

"Sorry, I don't mean to be rude. I'm more nervous than anything. There's a random stranger from the government in my living room who's about to ask me if I know anything about my deceased father." I rub my hands together nervously, then place them on my knees. I shoot a glance at Candice, who looks just as nervous as I am.

“Certainly.” He hands me a slim black file. “This is one of our numerous files on Agent Paul Jette, your father. I received clearance from my boss in Washington to inform you of this specific case so that you would believe what I’m about to tell you.”

“And what are you about to tell us?” Candice interjects. “Dad was in the CIA? Dad was a secret agent?” She giggles, but I can tell she’s anxious.

Agent Taylor raises one eyebrow. “Actually, your father had the gift of time travel.”

He pauses to let us absorb what he’s just said. “According to his handler, he hated time traveling, but he made good use of it to serve his country. I don’t think we would have developed nearly so much military technology without him. And honestly, the transportation industry wouldn’t be as safe as it is, either.”

“Get out!” I say.

“I beg your pardon?” Agent Taylor looks taken back.

“Do you really think we’re going to believe that? Do you have any proof?”

Candice places a hand on my knee. “Calm down, Jackie. I’m sure he has proof.”

Agent Taylor shifts uncomfortably on his chair. “Please understand, I know how this sounds. Believe me, I thought it was crazy when I was chosen for this assignment, but now you see why I wanted to have this conversation in person and not over the phone.”

“Hmmf.” I’m not convinced, but I don’t kick him out, either. “Please continue.”

“Thank you.” He straightens the papers on his lap. “I was sent here on special assignment, and the reason I wanted to speak with just you, Jackie, is because my boss wants to know if you possess your dad’s same gift. Have you ever experienced time travel in the past?”

“Your boss wants to know *what?*” I repeat loudly. “That’s absurd! That’s downright crazy! How can anyone know how to time travel?”

Without a word, Agent Taylor reaches into his briefcase and removes another sheet of paper from other files, which he hands to me. Candice leans in so she can read it with me.

I study the document thoroughly. It seems Dad was asked to assist the Civil Aeronautics Board’s Bureau of Aviation Safety, the predecessor to the NTSB, with the investigation of an earlier airline crash, one that went down in 1963.

Turns out, Dad learned a little more about himself when he touched a piece of the wreckage and ended up on an airplane to Cancún. “If the airplane crashed, how did Dad end up on the same aircraft? These documents are simply vague at best.”

“Well, the documents are written for people who understand the assignment. Please allow me to clarify.”

“Go ahead,” I concede.

“Thank you. When Paul would touch a piece of the aircraft debris, he would be transported somehow through time, ultimately ending up on the aircraft before the crash occurred. For example, the crash in Cancún, he was on board the aircraft and he witnessed three men attempting to hijack it with handguns and other devices.”

Candice jumped in. “If that was his first time acting as a time traveler, then how did he get back?”

Agent Taylor retrieves another document from his case. “According to this agent personnel file, your dad touched the same piece of wreckage as before. Luckily, the piece was located within the inner cabin area.”

I jump in. “Where did he end up?”

The document goes on to describe that Paul was found in the field where the airplane went down. He was asleep and was awakened by a farmer who was working there.

“How did he know where to access the piece?” Candice asks. “If the flight was being overtaken by armed assailants, surely they would not permit him to mosey around the cabin.”

Agent Taylor frowns. “Well, that’s what we don’t know in depth. Your father was very secretive, and he wouldn’t tell anyone how he made it to the exact piece. But every time he reappeared; it was always at the crash site in present day.”

I tilt my head to one side, skeptical. “And if the airplane crashed in the ocean? Where would he show up then?”

“That’s a good question, Jackie.” Agent Taylor shuffles through the papers in his briefcase, then pulls out another document. “Ah, here we go. On his second case, he was helping investigate a crash in the Atlantic Ocean.”

Candice leans forward. “Well, what happened?”

His eyes scan the document, probably checking that he isn’t saying anything classified. “Ah, here’s what I wanted to find. *‘Due to concerns from the classified agent, a special waterproof radio beacon will be added to the suit jacket. Once the suit contacts the water, the beacon has a range of four thousand miles and will alert ships in the area. Given that we know the coordinates of the crash site, a Navy vessel must be in a 25-mile radius. Once the beacon is received, such Navy vessel will dispatch a rescue chopper to pick up the package.’* That’s how he survived.”

“No.” I spat. “That is how he would be *picked up* in the ocean.”

Taken back by my remark, Agent Taylor frowns. “I’m afraid that I don’t understand your question, or rather, your statement.”

I uncross my legs to firm my position. “Agent Taylor, the Atlantic Ocean is freezing most of the year. How do you expect us to believe that our father could survive the frigid water while he waited for the rescue?”

I am growing particularly tired of his nonsense. The information he is providing sounds like the plot for a Stephen King novel. My temper

tries to get the better of me, but I still let him try and explain. “Please continue, Agent.”

Agent Taylor announced. “Whenever Paul touched a piece of the airplanes wreckage, he disappeared for twelve, sixteen, twenty hours or more. When he returned, he would somehow be in the exact location of where the plane had crashed.”

I shake my head. “I’m sorry, Mr. Taylor, but I don’t believe that.”

“Ms. Jette, if you would allow me to finish speaking before you interrupt me, then maybe you would learn something,” Agent Taylor barked.

Realizing that he was right put a taste like vinegar in my mouth. If he just had some proof of how Dad could survive in the cold water for more than the normal time it takes to freeze to death from hypothermia, then I would be satisfied.

Candice invites herself to ask the same question in a different manner. “Mr. Taylor, what I think that my sister is having difficulty with is, while Dad would wait in the near-freezing water for a rescue, how would he delay the hypothermia from taking effect? For example, was his suit similar to a wet suit, designed to keep heat closer?”

“Ladies, let me look for one thing. I know his personnel file had another page.” Digging around the now-unorganized file cabinet within his briefcase, he retrieves another paper. Instead of reading it to us, he hands it over to me.

I read it over while Candice reads over my shoulder. “These are design sketches?” I muttered. As I read further down the paper, I understand the sketch is for Dad’s suit, specifically a water suit.

I sat the paper down in front of me, now realizing that dad was given custom-made outfits for his mission. The specific suit would have a layer underneath, similar to a wetsuit, but this was more of a military grade.

Swallowing the vinegar, I relax my pose. “My apologies for doubting the information you presented.” I feel terrible for being such a witch to

him, but there are so many scammers in the world, and this whole ordeal is difficult to believe.

Moving on, I develop another question. “Why did the NTSB ask our dad to help with an investigation?”

Agent Taylor shares from another document — his briefcase resembles the never-ending storage capacity similar to the bag carried by a nanny with a talking umbrella. Turns out, Dad and a few of his classmates were invited to the Cancún wreck site for a learning assignment. The aircraft involved was a competitor’s prototype of the Boeing 707.

The pilot training class was allowed to learn from the mistake alongside with the officials from Boeing. Once again, the documents are a little vague.

“What did his classmates do when he vanished after touching a piece of the broken airplane?” I ask.

“I am not sure, and there is no documentation about conversations held upon his departure or arrival at the crash site, but what I do know is Paul was sent to the Pentagon after for questioning, when an employee for the Secretary of Defense was advised of what happened by an anonymous source. After nearly a week of being held, Paul was sent back to New York to resume his career as a commercial pilot.”

“Do you know what Americonic said when he returned?” I ask, as I’m sure that the airline was upset by his weeklong absence.

“No questions were asked.” His simple response to my question informs me that Americonic was in cahoots with the government. Any employer would have terminated the employee for much less.

I rise from my seat and walk into the kitchen. Before walking too far, I turn around facing Candice and the agent. “Does anyone else need something to wash this down with?” I ask. Both nod their heads. I grab a bottle of wine for my sister and me along with two glasses. Agent Taylor can stick with bottled water.

I make my way back into the living room and set the tray down on the coffee table. Once we fill our glasses, I nod at Agent Taylor to continue.

“Now, where was I?” he says. “Oh yes, after an investigation, Paul was hired to work on top secret assignments, many of which are still used today. The knowledge he gave us helped us ensure people’s safety and protected our national security. You can see now why the Pentagon has been so interested in you for all these years.”

“Just how long has the government been watching — I mean, *interested in* my sister and me?” I demand. “And more importantly, why did they wait until I was fifty-two years old to spring this on me?”

“Well, Mr. Jenkins has been keeping a watch —”

Before he can say another word, I interrupt. “*Who* did you just say? You did *not* just say Mr. Jenkins! That’s the name of the lawyer I work for.”

“That’s correct. When you lost your job in the late 1990s, Mr. Jenkins thought it would be a great way to keep an eye on you. Since you had no law experience, we could send you files, and you would never know the difference.”

“How did he access confidential law files?” I ask, knowing how important client confidentiality is.

“After your father disappeared in 1971, Agent Jenkins was advised to keep a close eye on you for the duration of his career, but he was not allowed to make a move until you did. He was tasked with becoming a lawyer and building a legit law firm to prepare for your arrival in the late 1990s.

Candice chimes in. “That seems like a lot of work for such a simple result.” By Mr. Jenkins becoming a legalized lawyer, Agent Taylor explained he was able to stay busy and draw a paycheck from the government and the law firm. What I still don’t understand is why they

waited all of these years to inform me. I asked Mr. Taylor for more clarification.

“He was under strict orders to document your existence and not engage with anything time travel related.” Agent Taylor adjusts his body. “When top-level agents received word of the USS *Lavon* locating the aircraft debris, my team and Mr. Jenkins were informed and advised that we were to *initiate and engage the subject*. Meaning you, Jackie.”

Now that I understand Mr. Jenkins a little more, I request Agent Taylor to tell us more about his role with our father. Turns out that Mr. Jenkins was assigned by high-ranking leaders within the Pentagon to be his handler in 1969 after Dad requested a permanent agent and not a bunch of different one’s week after week. Not familiar with the term, Candice gladly asks what that means.

“Handler is similar to a business manager. They handle the paperwork, meetings, flights, et cetera. He also worked at the airport and assisted with Americonic crew scheduling in New York. Handled travel arrangements from one assignment to another and advised Americonic on scheduling reroutes in order to get Paul to the site of a crash or to a nearby government building where the wreckage was being secured. Often, he would be rerouted at the last minute, even if it caused a delay to the airline’s operation.”

Candice nudges me. “Jackie, your boss was Dad’s handler back in the day! How cool is that?” Then to Agent Taylor, she asks, “Why are you only interested in my sister? We’re both related to him.”

At this, he looks grim. “Actually, you’re not. You’re adopted, Candice.”

Candice raises her eyebrows and bats her eyes, confused. “What? No, I’m not adopted.”

Agent Taylor pulls out a blue folder, from which he removes a golden yellowed paper which appears to be ancient as the paper appears brittle. I snatch it from his hands careful not to tear it.

“What kind of cruel joke is this?” I say before I start to read it.

Not amused, Agent Taylor says, “The piece of paper is the original 1953 birth certificate for a Candice Carter. Born to Charles and Christine Carter.”

Together, we scan the document confirming his words. “He’s right. Look, the birth parents are different. It’s not Mom and Dad’s names,” Candice says.

I grow defensive with Agent Taylor again. “How do you expect us to believe that this brittle crumbling paper is real and not something that you or your team forged?” By this time, he had taken out another paper with similar yellowing though not as brittle. He handed it to us, and it had *ADOPTION CERTIFICATE* titled across the top. As we read the page, the listed parents were Paul and Beverly Jette, while the birth parents were marked as deceased.

“So, Candice was born to a couple in *London*? On July 23, 1953? How do you explain that? What happened to those people?” Beside me, Candice says nothing. I think she’s too shocked to speak.

Agent Taylor pulls out yet another document and reads. “Agent Jette returned to the present day, 1971, with a six-month-old baby girl. Upon his return, an investigation commenced, and it led to the determination that while Agent Jette was on assignment for information on a 1953 crash outside of London, he saved a passenger from the crash.”

“If Dad saved me, why could he not save the other passengers from a tragic demise?” Candice asks as tears form in both of her eyes.

Agent Taylor face is grim and the next words from his mouth are admirable. “Paul was forbidden to save anyone. He was to observe and document only, as the government feared that a paradox would happen.”

“Paradox?” I murmured as I am not familiar with that word.

“It can be a confusing word, so I will break it down,” he says confidently. “A paradox is when a person time travels and changes the course of history. For example, if you went back and tried to prevent

Patient Zero from getting the Spanish flu, you might succeed in saving that patient, but then you could catch it or someone else. History will always find a way even if you try and change it. That is the theory, and the government did not want to confirm that theory as it could jeopardize worldwide safety and security.”

“I was born in 1953! What the *hell*? How do you just drop that on someone?” Candice shouts and storms off into the kitchen. I hear the refrigerator open as the glassware in the door slot clinks together. I lift from my seat and see her with another bottle of wine through the window above the counter. She pulls out the cork and doesn’t even bother to pour it into a glass. Taking a three-second gulp from the bottle, she replaces it in the fridge and returns to the living room. “Okay, I’m back.”

“I have a larger file with more information about your birth family back in Washington. We can plan to view it in the future if you wish.”

Before he can continue, his phone starts to ring. He tells us to wait a second, and he answers the call. “Hello, this is Agent Taylor. Yes ma’am, I’m here now. Everything is going as projected. Is that right? Roger. I’ll advise them. Goodbye.” He hangs up the phone and turns his attention back to us.

“Who was that?” Candice asks, then she hesitates. “Wait, can I ask that?”

“This is not the movies, Miss Jette.” He smiles thinly. “That was my boss. She says they’ve just received the first shipment of the wreckage at the hangar in Washington.”

“I thought the wreckage would be stored in Nova Scotia,” I clarify.

“The larger pieces, yes. But these are small fragments that we can run tests on.” He pauses for a moment and then says, “Actually, one of the tests we’d like to run is on *you*.”

“Oh, I get it. You want me to touch a piece and see if I time travel, right?”

He nods. “Would you both be able to accompany me to Washington tomorrow?”

“No way!” Candice hates long drives, and I feel the same way. It would take us all day to drive to Washington.

But Agent Taylor has other ideas. “No, no. I’ll have a private plane chartered. The closest airfield is twenty miles away. Then, when I bring you both home, I’ll drive back.”

“You mean that old, abandoned airfield, outside of town? That place belongs in an episode of *Murder, She Wrote*. How can you land a jet there?” I ask.

“The pavement’s still in good condition. The Coast Guard uses the landing strip for practice at least three times a month.”

Agent Taylor gathers his things, and we agree to meet the following morning at 10 a.m. sharp. I walk him to the door, while Candice retreats to the kitchen.

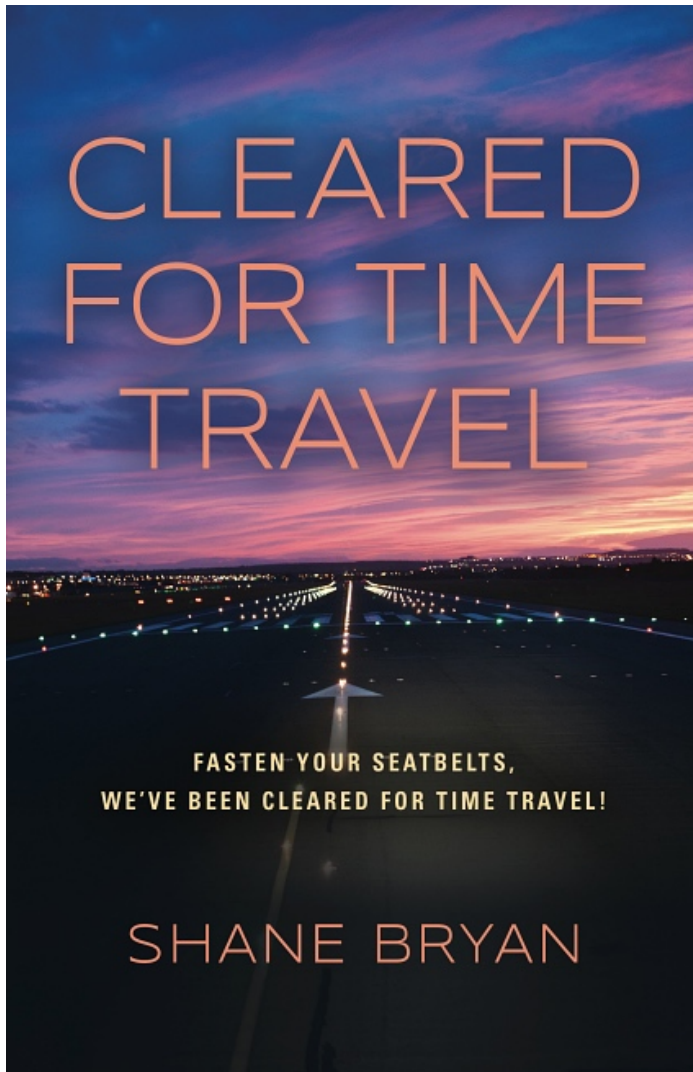
When I go back and join her, I find her hunched over the kitchen table, crying.

“Oh, Candice,” I say, sitting down next to her and rubbing her back. “It’s a lot, isn’t it?”

“Dad took me twenty years into the future. He saved me from maybe dying in that crash with my biological parents. How can I *not* cry?”

“You’re not mad at him?”

“Not one bit! I’m just happy that I got to live and be your sister.” She wipes her tears, and we go back to the living room, and reminisce about the documents and information presented by Agent Taylor over the day.



Jackie's normal everyday life is quickly diverted to a new foreign destination when the wreckage of her fathers jetliner is found in the Atlantic Ocean nearly 51 years after he disappeared off the coast of Nova Scotia.

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