

Once again psychic detective, Monifa Livingston, must battle a virulent nemesis from Book II, who's now claiming a half-human/half-alien identity. But this time around, Monifa's faith is gravely tested when the battle with her nemesis turns into spiritual-warfare with strange-flesh!

STRANGE FLESH and the CIRCLE of CHAMESH: Book III The Psychic Detective

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Book III: the PSYCHIC DETECTIVE

***STRANGE FLESH:
and the Circle of Chamesh***

Inspired by an *Old Testament* Event

By

Gloria Taylor Edwards

Book III: the Psychic Detective:
STRANGE FLESH & THE CIRCLE OF CHAMESH
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The Back Story...Book II: the Psychic Detective, SINS of the PARENTS (inspired by true facts about female serial killers). Reminiscent of his late father and grandfather, Central Virginia minister, Clinton Hawkins Wells III, follows a prolific but flawed path in life. When Wells' illicit lover—another minister and a political appointee—disappears, the lover's daughter hires private investigator, Monifa Robertson, to find her mother. Monifa discovers that several other Central Virginia ministers connected to Wells have also disappeared; in fact, throughout Central Virginia, people are turning up missing or the butchered victims of a serial murderer with a unique modus operandi. When Monifa's fiancé—investigative journalist, Baker Livingston—hears titillating information about the disappearances and murders, he decides to pursue a story on the identity of the serial killer. But he disappears, too. Monifa seeks spiritual advice from a radical Yahwistic minister named Malakyah Sulieman who offers to accompany her on a search to find Baker...a search that leads them to a house filled with dozens of mutilated corpses and a hidden (but very much alive) *femme fatale* carrying a bloodied machete. Using her gift of prayer and discerning (spiritual magick), Monifa defeats the femme fatale and saves herself and her fiancé. But, the femme fatale fakes her death and goes on to prepare for her *next* encounter with Monifa!

“There were tyrants on the earth in those days, **AND ALSO AFTERWARD**, when the sons of Elohim [fallen angels] came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty ones who are enemies of Yahweh—men, which from even the days of old were known as men of an infamous name.” **BERESHITH (GENESIS) 6:1-4, Book of Yahweh: the Holy Scriptures**

“...And angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication and going after **STRANGE FLESH...**” **JUDAH 6, Holy Name Bible**

“...Isaiah the prophet cried out, ‘Though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand on the seashore, only a **REMNANT** of them will be saved...’ Romans 9:27

PROLOGUE

Rock Island - Virginia Beach, Virginia - Present Day

CURLED UP IN THE WARM SAFETY OF HER HUSBAND'S ARMS, Monifa Livingston drifted off to sleep.

Malakyah, Messenger of Yahweh.

Monifa's eyes popped open. She scowled at the ceiling, ruminating over the genderless voice that had just invaded her sleep. And now, the words: *Malakyah, Messenger of Yahweh* echoed through her brain. Her thoughts went back to four years ago when she'd last time seen her friend and spiritual-advisor, Malakyah Suleiman; he'd been helping *her* when he encountered a vicious, female murderess whose ambiguous identity, (even after demise), troubled Monifa. After his fateful encounter with this *femme fatale*, Malakyah hadn't been seen again—dead *or* alive. Now Monifa wondered if hearing his name in her sleep could be a subconscious reaction to the nagging questions and guilt she felt over Malakyah's disappearance. Yes. That's all it was: thoughts of Malakyah invading my dreams, she thought.

Having settled on this, she was ready to get back to sleep, when vivid images invaded her mind's-eye: *a teen-age girl with a comely long-jawed face, velvet-teal colored skin, pink full lips, and bushy, shoulder-length auburn hair; the girl had a dour, suspicious expression in her eyes; and then...the girl's facial image morphed into the image of a naked young female with her wrists and ankles bound in chains...the female held her bound wrists up with the palms forward, and one hand had the word 'Help' written on it, while the other hand bore the word 'Me'; the naked female image dissolved into an exotic woman with waist-length, straight black hair and slanted eyes the color of gun-metal...the woman's aura reeked of sulfur...alongside the exotic woman's image, the silhouette of a man sitting lotus-style appeared and spoke: "The woman is STRANGE FLESH...half-demon, half-human. She's the hybrid-offspring of a fallen-one named Baal'Shod! She's a blood-*

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sacrificer...and she wants to sacrifice the girl to help her settle some unfinished business with YOU. You must see her TRUE image and discern her TRUE name, or she'll destroy you and everyone connected to you!" When the man's voice went silent, the exotic woman appeared again...now she had a set of razor-sharp, blood-stained incisors extending from her open mouth, and she hissed: "Watch out because I'm coming for you...bitch!"

Shrieks jolted Baker Livingston from his sleep.

Monifa heard the screams, too. But she didn't realize they were hers until she felt her husband gripping her shoulders and pleading with her to wake up.



CONCEIVED THROUGH INCEST, Monifa Robertson Livingston was born to her teenage-unwed mother in 1979.

To protect Monifa from her lecherous father / grandfather, Monifa's teenage mother had placed her with a Social Services agency, hoping her daughter would grow up in something she couldn't provide for her at the time: a *healthy* home environment. But Monifa was never adopted. Instead, she was raised in a succession of foster homes, never knowing her birth family (until she looked them up during her twenty-seventh year of life) and feeling isolated from everyone around her. She was an intelligent, extremely introverted child who subsequently grew into a fiercely independent '*I'm-keeping-my-personal-business-to-myself*' adult.

But, shortly before her thirteenth birthday, Monifa started having vision-dreams and experiencing what she called mind-pictures about future—and sometimes past—events that she had no interest in, and in most cases, scenes flashed across her child's mind's eye that she couldn't understand. Around this same time, she also discovered that, occasionally, when she touched another person, or someone touched her, mind-pictures about that person would leap into head. Sometimes she even felt, and actually smelled, things connected to these mind-pictures.

Monifa was a highly intuitive child, and she quickly realized that

other people didn't have these strange abilities. She grew ashamed of her abilities and vowed never to discuss this peculiar part of herself with anyone. (Later, she attributed this shame to her having been raised in mostly fundamental-religious foster homes that declared psychic abilities to be a form of witchcraft.) But what worried her even more than having unusual abilities was her *inability* to control them. She couldn't *will* them up, nor could she suppress the dreams, visions and mind-images once they started. And this frightened her.

When she turned twenty-seven and sought out her birth mother, Monifa finally shared this part of herself with two people: her mother and her former employee. Afterwards, her mother, her employer—as well as her mother's other two daughters and husband—all died horrible deaths; deaths that Monifa saw coming when her psychic senses revealed that her birth family was living under a death-curse. After losing so many loved ones, Monifa decided she'd never again divulge her special abilities to anyone... *including* her husband. And this was easy to do because of the inconstancy of her gifts, as she often went long periods of time without a single psychic message or image bombarding her thoughts and mind's eye.

After the death of her mother, Monifa spent several months going through a deep, dark depression. She spent weeks surfing the Internet for information about the plight of pregnant teenagers in the U.S.; and, based on what she discovered, she hoped to appease some of her grief by doing something meaningful in honor of her biological mother. Painful memories, or not, she never wanted to forget the hard sacrifices her mother made for her. And so, two years after her mother's death, Monifa started volunteering her services to a local organization called the Big Sisters Alliance (BSA). Each school year, the BSA referred a teenage girl for Monifa to tutor and help with school studies. She also participated in BSA's quarterly meetings, which often brought her in direct contact with troubled teenage girls.



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The morning after Monifa's screams had awakened her husband from his sleep, she was reading the newspaper at her breakfast table when an article about a girl who'd gone missing caught her attention:

Virginian Pilot & Ledger Star: Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Statewide News; run-date: January 20th

TEENAGER FROM HAMPTON ROADS GOES MISSING FROM COUNTY NEAR RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, by

Vanessa Spencer, Staff Writer...Lisa Johnston, a fourteen-year old from Norfolk, Virginia has been reported missing by her family. Saturday morning, during a visit with relatives in rural Powhatan County, Virginia, Lisa took the family's dog for a walk. When the dog returned home alone, Lisa's relatives placed several unanswered calls to her cell phone before contacting the police. The police confirmed that Lisa is missing under suspicious circumstances. Lisa is bi-racial; she has shoulder-length curly brown hair and brown eyes. She weighs 140 pounds and her height is 5'4". She was last seen wearing a black parka, blue-jeans and black suede boots. Lisa's parents, Bobby and Wanda Johnston, say their daughter loves the outdoors. But they are worried that she may have been outside last night when area temperatures dipped below ten degrees. Anyone with information on Lisa Johnston's whereabouts should contact the Virginia State Police at 1-800-555-5555.

Reading this news article brought back vestiges of bizarre words and mental images that had invaded Monifa's sleep. And now she wondered over the connection between her dream-visions and Lisa Johnston's disappearance. Suddenly a deep sadness—a painful feeling of personal loss...of someone's grief—settled over her. Monifa sensed then that Lisa Johnston's parents would never see their child again. There it was again...her discerning gift

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inserting itself into her psyche. Tears welled in her eyes, and she whispered a prayer for the Johnston family. When her mental-prayer ended, she sensed something morose pass through her spirit, and she shivered, thinking about *other* families that could soon be grieving the loss of a loved one to the icy-finger of *death-by-violence*.

EPISODE 1

Powhatan, Virginia

“MY SOURCES ARE TELLING ME that a male-subject I can use to help bring my plan together is making a road trip soon. So I’m thinking that’ll be a good time to get into his head...*and* his life.”

What *sources*...what *plan*? Peter Bowker wondered. But he dared not ask what was really on his mind, so he remained silent. It had been eight months since he met Winter Lebron; and the last six months had been spent sharing his paranormal work *and* his bed with her. And so, by now, he had grown used to the knowledge that his beautiful research assistant had a personal agenda that she didn’t intend to share with him. Therefore, it stood to good reason that she, on occasion, mentioned things that made no sense to him. Somehow he always knew when not to ask for more information than she cared to share.

“So I’d like you to persuade Leland to join you for a trip to that resort we talked about in West Virginia.”

“What reason should I give for wanting to go to the West Virginia resort?”

Winter pondered the question a few seconds. “You can tell him you want to discuss that preposterous thesis your colleague wrote about religious beliefs in West Virginia.”

“To me that *was* preposterous.”

“Yeah. But, if you remember, when we discussed the thesis during a staff meeting, Leland liked it.”

“That’s because he’s a die-hard church-deacon. He likes anything that promotes Christianity.”

“Then use *that* reason to hook him into taking the trip to West Virginia.”

Peter didn’t reply. As usual, whenever Winter made an ambiguous comment about something she was doing, or planned to do, he never bothered asking her for an explanation. He simply did whatever she wanted done. Then, to appease his ego *and* his previously unsatisfied addiction to sex, he focused on what he

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considered the *major* perk in their relationship: plenty of wild, unbridled sex that often included others who – knowingly *and* unknowingly – became a part of her personal agenda. However, on occasion, (when he allowed himself to dwell on it) he'd feel contrite with thoughts of what his religious mother would've said to him if she were alive. She'd say I've been pussy-whipped by a witch-woman who'll carry my soul straight to hell, he thought.

"If Leland agrees, that'll give me a chance to kill *two* birds with one stone?" Then she giggled.

Peter hated it when she giggled. He suspected she thought it sounded sweet and made her appear demure; when, all the while, her true persona was quite the opposite. In fact, every time she giggled around him, Peter found himself thinking of the repulsive wicked witch of the West from the 1930s movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. He took a second to allow the witch's image to dissipate from his thoughts before venturing: "What do you mean by a chance to kill two birds with one stone?"

"I mean that, while we're traveling with Leland, we'll *coincidentally* run into my male-subject. Then we can try that group-technique I taught you. This way, we can experiment on my male-subject *and* on Leland."

"I see."

"It'll be fun to tamper with my male-subject's head. But I think Leland Ritchie will make a more *challenging* guinea-pig."

"Why's that?"

"Because he's one of these debonair, high-class Black men with some letters behind his name, so he's got his head stuck up his ass...like he's infallible. Yeah...he's a head-case I'll definitely enjoy experimenting on."

Peter felt a tinge of jealousy over hearing his beautiful assistant voice her venomous interest—albeit experimental—in another man. He considered what he'd learned about Winter's habits and concluded that, following in the tradition of her numerous other sexual conquests, his colleague Leland Ritchie was nothing but *one* more temporary fascination for Winter.



Route 60, West Virginia

It was an hour after sunset when freelance journalist, Roger Handley, realized he'd been driving non-stop for more than three hours.

The road he traveled on—the noted Brookfield Highway—was a picturesque seventeen-mile drive along historic Route 60 into White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. White Sulphur Springs was Handley's destination route to the scenic Olive Branch resort in the Allegheny Mountain-area of West Virginia. He was visiting the resort to research its history for a freelance story he planned to write for his former employer, the Mid Atlantic Daily Newspaper. But on this chilly December evening, as Handley maneuvered the deserted route, the dusk-dark landscape of rolling hills and plateau country didn't offer much of a scenic diversion from the monotony of long-distance driving.

Sighing, Handley glanced in his rearview mirror and saw the faint headlights of another vehicle on the road nearly a half a mile behind him. When he put his eyes back on the road, his car's engine died, forcing him to come to a pattering stop. He cursed under his breath, flipped the ignition off, and then back on again. A loud scraping sound came from under the hood. He paused a few seconds before trying the ignition again. Nothing. The engine was dead.

"Shit!" Handley declared, and slapped the dashboard. He was about to try the engine again when bright lights suddenly flooded the back of his car. He turned and stared through the back window at the luminous headlights streaming from a vehicle that had pulled up behind him. "Maybe this person will give me a jump," he mumbled, getting out of his car. As he walked toward the passenger-van idling behind his vehicle, a man with bushy black hair flecked with gray, a pronounced forehead and leathery-chestnut skin, stepped from behind the wheel of the other vehicle.

"Roger Handley," Handley said, extending his hand to the man.

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“My car broke down, and—”

“I’m Leland Ritchie,” the man interjected. His deep-set somber eyes were locked on something in the night sky, and he didn’t notice Handley’s extended hand: “What is *that*?”

Handley turned and looked up, and flinched.

In the second or two it had taken Handley to greet the man, a cigar-shaped sphere of shimmering, brilliant blue-light had appeared in the sky; and now it hovered about twenty feet above Handley’s automobile. “What the hell!” Handley exclaimed gazing up at the sphere, which measured approximately ten feet in length and four-feet in width.

“Do you know what that is?” Leland asked. His eyes were glued to the sphere-light.

“I have no idea,” Handley replied. “It...whatever it is...it just came from out of nowhere!”

Making no sound, the sphere of light quickly descended; now it hovered a few feet off the road directly in front of Handley’s automobile. The light’s flickering brightness brought a mesmerized frown to Handley’s moon-shaped face. “*Jesus...Mother of Mary!*” he muttered. In his thirty-two years of life, he was certain this was the most bizarre thing he had ever seen.

Now two more passengers: a striking, statuesque olive-skinned woman with waist-length, coal-black hair; and a tall, narrow-faced man with a sharp-nose, a full-beard, pasty-pale skin and piercing gray eyes, exited Leland’s vehicle and gawked at the globe of light.

“Are you sure it wasn’t there when your car stopped?” Leland asked.

“I *know* it wasn’t,” Handley replied, gazing at the pulsing, shimmering light. “I was driving along when my engine suddenly went dead.” Handley put his attention back on the bushy-haired man. “You can call the State Police and let *them* figure out where that thing came from. All I want is to get the hell out of here. Do you have some jumper cables I can use to get my car started again?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have any cables,” Leland answered. He extracted a cell phone from his coat jacket, saying: “But you’re

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welcome to use my cell phone to call a towing service.”

“Thanks. But I’ve got a cell phone,” Handley said. “And when I tried to call my girlfriend a few miles back, I couldn’t get a signal out here.”

Leland looked at his cell phone and noticed that a signal wasn’t registering on the display. Still, he punched in 9-1-1.

Handley watched, anxious to see if Leland would be able to get a call through.

The lighted window in Leland’s cell phone went dark. “Well…” Leland said, frowning, “looks like I can’t get a call through, either.” He put the phone back in his pocket. “Tell you what, we’re headed to the Olive Branch Resort, and—”

“Hey…that’s where *I’m* going!” Handley declared.

“Then why don’t you ride with us?” Leland said. “According to my map, it shouldn’t be anymore than ten or fifteen miles down the road.” He paused. “And maybe, the closer we get to the resort, we’ll finally get a signal on our cell phones.”

“Yeah, that’s a possibility.”

“But I think we need to report that thing in the sky to the authorities.”

“I agree,” Handley said. “But I hate to leave my car out here with that thing.”

“If you want to ride with us, I don’t know what else you can do. I’m sure it’ll be all right ‘til you call a tow truck.”

“I guess you’re right,” Handley said.

“If we *don’t* get a signal as we get closer to the—” Leland stopped talking when he noticed his female passenger hedging past him towards the sphere-light in front of Handley’s vehicle. “Winter…don’t go any closer to that thing!”

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Winter said. “Wonder what it is.”

“I don’t think *any* of us will be able to figure that out on our own,” Leland replied.

“But…it’s so…it’s so magnificent!” Winter declared.

“You can think it’s magnificent,” Leland said, looking at Winter.

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“But I don’t like the looks of that thing...so please get back inside the van.”

Leland’s male passenger tugged at Winter’s arm. “Leland’s right,” he said. “I think we should get back inside the van.”

Winter didn’t move. Instead she stood, as if hypnotized, gazing at the light.

Handley opened his mouth to say something; when a pale blue tentacle of light burst from the sphere of light, he was shocked into silence. Within seconds, the bewildered expressions in Handley’s and Leland’s eyes turned vacuous

An hour later

Leland Ritchie’s Express Cargo van was designed to seat up to eight passengers; but when Roger Handley looked inside, he noticed that the second seat was filled with luggage; so he climbed into the third seat beside Leland’s narrow-faced, uncomely male passenger who introduced himself as Dr. Peter Bowker. When Handley asked what medical field he was in, Bowker laughed then replied that he was a religious philosopher at the University of Richland in Virginia.

Leland’s stunning female passenger sat in the front passenger seat, and when Leland introduced her as Winter Lebron, she turned around and gave Handley a heart-stopping smile, revealing a set of pristine, pearly-whites. To Handley, she appeared ageless, with gray-iridescent eyes bright with mischievous glee. “Glad to meet you, Roger Handley,” she cooed.

Certain that he’d never seen anyone—especially someone as lovely as *this* woman—with such pronounced incisors, Handley caught himself staring at Winter’s mouth. “Um-m-m...that’s a lovely name,” he said, hoping his compliment would detract Winter from noticing him staring at her lips. “I’ve heard of people named after the seasons, *summer* and *spring*, but I’ve never met anyone named *Winter*.”

“Well then, meet Winter...the *season!*” Peter Bowker declared. “And may none among us experience the *iciness* of her other-

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worldliness.”

For a nanosecond, there was complete silence; then Winter giggled.

Handley considered Bowker’s comment rather strange. He looked at Leland through the rearview mirror; when he noticed a guarded look in Leland’s eyes, he wondered what Leland thought of Bowker’s mocking comments about Winter.

During the remainder of the trip to White Sulfur Springs, the occupants of Leland’s vehicle talked about themselves and what they planned to do when they arrived at the resort. They even discussed the isolated road they traveled on. But no one mentioned the peculiar event that had brought them together: the cigar-shaped sphere of blue-light in the road.

That night, when they were alone in their room at the resort, Winter told Peter he’d done well on his end with the group-technique she’d taught him. “Our experiment went smoothly,” Winter said. Then she presented Peter with her gorgeous smile—a smile that nearly stopped his heart the first time he saw it. “*And...thanks to the way things went during the experiment, my plan was successfully launched.*”

Peter was anxious to know about this mysterious plan Winter kept referencing; but, as usual, he didn’t question her. He figured she’d clue him in when she was ready. And when Winter extracted a few sex toys from her suitcase and slowly peeled off her clothes—and *his*—his commitment to a no-questioning policy in their relationship was expressed in more ways than he could’ve imagined.

Later that night, Winter finally told Peter who her plan targeted, but she didn’t reveal the plan itself. At this time, the name meant nothing to Peter. However, Winter’s apparent need to keep the actual plan a secret intrigued him. But he was committed to the *no-questioning policy* in their relationship. So he’d wait it out. Besides, he felt certain he’d find out *exactly* what she was up to soon enough; because she was going to need him to help with something

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connected with her mysterious plan. Over the past several months, he'd noticed that when it came to her selfish agendas, she *used* him to do the things she didn't want to do.



Ashland, Virginia one week later...

It was near midnight when a taxicab deposited Leland at his home. He barely managed to stagger up to the porch and unlock his front door.

Leland considered himself a staunch Christian and a family-oriented man, and other than an occasional glass of red wine with his dinner, he rarely drank alcohol. Even though his mind was fuzzy from too much liquor, he knew he was suffering from the affects of what his alcoholic grandpa would've called a *sin-filled helluva-good-time*.

Leland's good-time had consisted of a week-long sexual dalliance with the beautiful Winter Lebron at the Olive Branch Resort in West Virginia, and was capped off with an all-day meeting-orgy at Peter Bowker's home in Virginia—an orgy that had included several members of Peter's paranormal support group. At the outset, Leland was certain the drinks served at Bowker's home were spiked with some mind-altering drug; still, he had downed so much liquor that he lost count of how many drinks he'd consumed.

And so, this night, Leland was glad his wife was out of town for the week visiting her ill mother. Otherwise, she'd have been perplexed, and extremely disappointed, to see him in this inebriated condition.

By the time Leland made it upstairs to his bedroom, he was so dizzy he nearly passed out. It was all he could do to make it to the bathroom and release his stomach contents. Then, hoping to sleep off the fever and chills and aches roiling over his body, he stripped off his clothes and fell face-down into his bed.

The next day, when Leland's daughter stopped by to drop off his

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seven-year-old grandson, Isaiah, for his weekly dinner at his grandparents, Leland was in bed, still trying to recuperate from his week of revelry. When his daughter noticed that her father was not up for preparing a meal, she headed into the kitchen to fix dinner for him and Isaiah.

As soon as his mother left the room, Isaiah placed his hands on his Leland's head and massaged his temples; then he massaged his grandfather's chest, and prayed out loud: "God I'm askin you to send healin for every bad thing that's touched my granddaddy." After a few seconds, he added: "Thank you, Lord." Then, rubbing his grandfather's shoulder, he added: "Now you can go back to sleep, granddaddy. But first, you thank the Lord for healin you. I'll wake you up when momma finish cookin...okay?"

Leland gazed at Isaiah through eyes bleared with tears, and whispered: "Okay...son."

The next morning, when Leland woke up, all he could remember (or chose to remember for the time-being) of his hedonistic time with Winter Lebron was that he'd been intimate with her, and she'd told him that she looked forward to continuing their physical relationship.

Disgusted with himself, Leland dialed Winter's cell phone number. She answered; and her voice was husky with delight when she told Leland she was glad to hear from him. Then he told her he'd made a terrible mistake when he slept with her; that he loved his wife and he wasn't interested in having an intimate relationship with any woman other than *Mrs. Leland Ritchie*.

When he ended his call with Winter, and she said good-bye, Leland realized the delight he'd initially heard in her voice had been replaced with a venomous tone.



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Bethesda, Maryland-Midnight...

After an hour of arguing (initiated by Roger Handley), followed by nearly thirty minutes of frantic love-making love (also initiated by Handley), Handley and his girlfriend, Delia Dunbar, had fallen asleep when a flash of brilliant blue light penetrated the closed mini-blinds in their bedroom.

Handley's eyes fluttered open, and he stared at the window. Another flash of light came, followed by a muffled rumbling sound. "Must be storming outside..." he whispered, and rolled over onto his side.

"What-cha say?" Delia mumbled back, never opening her eyes.

"Nothing," Handley replied. His girlfriend's back was turned towards him, and he gently pulled her closer, wrapped his arms around her midsection, and buried his face in the base of her neck.

Minutes later, they were both asleep again when Delia rolled onto her back, separating herself from Handley's embrace.

Handley's eyes popped open, and his mottled brain tried to figure out what had startled him from a deep sleep. When he discovered that he couldn't move any part of his body except his face muscles, his confused expression instantly turned frightened. Even his vocal muscles were frozen. Gradually, through sheer determination, he managed to release several deep-throated grunts. His back was turned to Delia; and when he heard no response from her, he emitted several more crude, pleading groans.

Delia didn't move. She slept peacefully on while her mate grappled in vain for her attention.

Handley lay on his side staring pitifully into the dusky darkness. His eyes were drawn towards the window when he noticed something entering the room *through* the closed window! Inside the room, the elongated silhouette floated like black-liquid from the window and hovered above him.

By now, Handley's eyes were saucers; and fear like nothing he'd ever experienced before gripped his mind and frozen body.

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Now the black-liquid intruder hovered directly above Handley; and a pale-blue tentacle shot from its mid-section, slapping a suction-fingertip onto Handley's forehead. Instantly Handley's vocal cords opened up again and he emitted a short, high-pitched scream before he lost consciousness.

Still...Delia slept on, undisturbed by her mate's nightmarish plight.

The next morning, other than a slight nosebleed, Handley had no tangible proof of what he'd experienced during the night. And so, after sharing what he could remember of his night-terrors with Delia, they concluded he'd simply had a nightmare...*end-of-story*.

One week later...

Handley told his girlfriend that he had an appointment with a university professor in Virginia named Dr. Peter Bowker, and he'd be gone for two days. When Delia asked what the meeting was about, Handley angrily responded it was none of her business. Delia pouted until he finally told her that Dr. Bowker was a professor who taught religious philosophy at the University of Richland in Virginia. Handley said he planned to interview the professor for a news story he was researching.

"But I don't understand why you have to stay for two days," Delia said.

"I've got to drive all the way to Virginia for this assignment, Delia," Roger replied. "So the professor invited me to stay overnight at his home."

Delia commented that it still didn't make sense to her. Then she left the room, still pouting.

What Handley didn't tell his girlfriend was that he'd already made one trip to Bowker's home in Virginia. And now, for his upcoming visit back to Virginia, Bowker's beautiful assistant wanted him to join their paranormal support group.



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When Winter Lebron first noticed Lindsay Clarke, the fifteen-year old homeless prostitute had already been estranged from her drug-addicted, single-mother for more than two years. After observing the luck-less teenager wandering the streets, Winter approached her and told her she wanted to help her.

“Why?” Lindsay asked.

“Because I see something in your aura that tells me you have a spiritual gift that needs nourishing,” Winter replied.

Lindsay eyed Winter. “What’s an aura?”

“Come with me and you’ll learn about auras...*and* about yourself.”

“What do you know about me?”

“That you have a gift of seeing.”

Now Lindsay really *did* eye Winter. But she was curious, so she went with Winter; and Winter took her into Peter Bowker’s home and introduced her to the support group.

In Peter’s spacious home, Lindsay occupied a bedroom so tiny that the only furniture—a twin bed and a dresser, minus a mirror—took up the entire room. And, instead of lotions, perfumes and cosmetic items that usually clutter a teenage girl’s dresser, Lindsay’s dresser was covered with vitamin bottles, several bags of cotton balls and a box of band-aids.

And now, several months later, Lindsay still hadn’t learned anything from Winter about auras, *or* about herself and her *gift-of-seeing*. If anything, being around Winter seemed to have halted the unfamiliar images and unprovoked impressions that had bombarded her psyche since she was twelve, and old enough to understand that this part of her was too strange, and different from what so-called *normal* people experienced in their minds. And, if anything, Lindsay felt trapped in an existence with a woman she feared, yet needed; a woman who’d taken her off the streets, weaned her from the drugs she’d craved for years, and made sure she was clothed, fed and had a warm bed to sleep in. But these creature-comforts hadn’t come without some price to Lindsay’s health—because, despite the numerous vitamins Winter forced her

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to take, Lindsay's energy-level appeared to grow weaker each day.

Now Lindsay sat—legs crossed lotus-style and a despondent expression on her comely, long-jawed face—on her bed daydreaming about what her life might be like if she had a family that loved her. So far, her sorrel-colored skin didn't give away the hard life she'd led; but the ravaged, forlorn look in her melancholy eyes *did*.

Down the hall from Lindsay's room, Peter often shared his lavish bedroom with Winter. And when Winter was there, the room reeked of exotic incense and the stereo often broadcast moody-sounding classical jazz that reverberated throughout the house's second level.

Lindsay's daydreaming was interrupted when she heard Winter come upstairs and firmly close the door to Bowker's bedroom. After several minutes of dead-silence, instead of burning incense and music, monotone chanting issued from the room, causing Lindsay to anguish over what usually happened when Winter concluded one of her bizarre chanting-sessions.

Nearly ten minutes passed before Lindsay heard Peter's bedroom door open again.

Winter appeared in Lindsay's doorway, her arms folded behind her. "Last night," she said, her tone icy, "I heard about you complaining to one of the ladies in the support group. Your ungratefulness upset me so much I had to meditate to calm down."

Lindsay's face skewed into a frown. "I didn't do no sucha thing, Ms. Winter!"

"You're an *ugly* bushy-headed little liar!" Winter snarled.

Tears pooled in Lindsay's eyes. Suddenly conscious of her unkempt appearance, Lindsay tried to smooth down the massive curly-locks of shoulder-length auburn hair on her head.

"I've told you about complaining. You should be glad I take my precious time up caring for you."

"I *am* glad, Ms. Winter," Lindsay whimpered.

Winter continued as if Lindsay hadn't spoken. "Don't you know,

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if wasn't for me begging him, Peter would *never* have allowed a piece of trash like you to even stay in his house?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"In fact, the people in Peter's support group—including Ms. Anna, whom you complained to—would never have accepted you if it wasn't for me asking them to please give you a chance."

"Yes, ma'am."

"So why were you complaining, Lindsay?"

"All I said was I wish I knew why my mind-pictures stopped...and maybe...maybe, if I'd learned—"

"That doesn't sound like you're grateful for what I've done. It sounds like you're just complaining!"

Lindsay's eyes filled with fresh tears.

Winter flashed a wide smile that lasted long enough to reveal the outline of her pronounced, pearly-white teeth. Then she brought her hands from behind her back and walked into the room. When Lindsay saw the syringe in Winter's hand, she cringed.

The second Lindsay felt Winter's long-nailed, icy finger-tips caressing the crevice of her neck, a deep tremble rippled from her head to her foot. Winter released a soft hiss, as if the tremble excited her. When she was on the streets, Lindsay had learned to numb herself to the brutal, careless things she allowed other people to do to her body. But she hadn't learned yet how to numb herself to Winter's syringe icy touch! But she didn't dare scream. She'd tried that a few times before, and Winter had throttled her into a brief unconsciousness. Besides, as Winter always reminded her: no one—not even Peter—would dare try to rescue her. So there was no where she could go and no one she could cry to for help. She resolved that all she could do was endure Winter's strange abuse until Winter finally killed her, or tired of her. Today she found herself hoping for death.



Fort Washington (Prince George County), Maryland

"Is it snowing in Maryland?"

"Not yet. But, according to the last weather report, *it's* on the way." A pause, and then: "So what time is your train due in this evening?"

"Around six-fifteen," Monifa Livingston replied to her husband.

"So...do you have to go back on Monday?" Baker asked.

"Yes. But I don't expect to be here any more than two or three days next week."

After a few seconds of silence, Baker said: "I'll be glad when you finish this case. It's kept you away from home for several days at a time. And that's never happened since we've been married."

Monifa sighed. She was tired and not up to yet another heated discussion with Baker about her decision to continue working for the Satterfield Investigative Agency.

"Well..." Baker said, in the wake of Monifa's silence, "...have you given any thought to how long you plan to continue working in Maryland?"

"Ummm...can we talk about this when I get home?"

"We sure can."

"So can you pick me up at the train station this evening?"

"I'll try. But I've got four stories to edit before I leave."

"Oh...in that case, I don't mind getting a taxi."

"You shouldn't have to do that. Like I said, I'll try to finish up so I can get to the station on time."

"Don't worry about it, honey. I don't mind getting a taxi."

"I don't want you to do that. I can pick you. But you might have to wait a few minutes."

"Okay." After a brief pause, Monifa added: "I miss you."

"I miss you, too, baby."

"I'll see you in a few hours."

"I can't wait."

After hanging up with Baker, Monifa turned back to her computer and noticed that, while she was on the telephone, an e-mail from her friend, Delia Dunbar, had arrived in her inbox. "I

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haven't caught up with Delia in weeks," she whispered, clicking on the message, which had no subject-line.

"Hey, girlfriend," the message began. "Long time since we last talked. Hope all is well with you and your handsome hunk-of-a-husband. I'm e-mailing you because right now I don't feel capable of talking about this over the phone. I'm afraid if I hear myself saying this stuff out loud, I'll start bawling like a baby—that's how bad a state I'm in these days. Despite all the stuff that's happened, it's had to face the fact that Roger has turned out to be an irresponsible, abusive drug addict! Now before you tell me to forget Roger and go on with my life, know that I did leave him a few weeks ago—but I COULDN'T forget him, so I decided to move back in with him. Besides, I think his head is messed up because he's under the influence of this man he met a month ago named Peter Bowker. That's why I feel obligated to stick around and help him. So, after hearing me out, I'm hoping you'll ask Baker to talk to Roger for me, while you look into Peter Bowker's background. It all started last month when Roger drove to West Virginia to research a freelance assignment Baker had given him. (Tell Baker thank you for looking out for Roger.) Roger told me that after his car broke down on the highway, he met these people from Virginia who gave him a lift. He said they all liked each other enough to exchange phone numbers. For some reason, Roger didn't want to tell me any of this until recently. But a few days after he returned from his trip, Bowker called and told him that the night they met, they all witnessed a monumental supernatural event. And Bowker suggested they meet to discuss this. Roger said he didn't know what Bowker was talking about, but he agreed to meet him anyway. So Bowker gave Roger directions to his home in Ashland, Virginia, and Roger drove there the next day. I didn't see Roger again until three days later. But he did

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call the second day he was gone to say he was all right. When he returned home, he said he was having these strange dreams. You know the ones I'm talking about—when you can't move or talk, and you feel this presence in the room with you. Over the next three weeks, Roger made regular trips to Peter Bowker's home in Virginia—in fact, sometimes he went twice a week. During this time, according to Roger, strange things were happening to him at night when he went to sleep. Sometimes he'd wake up with a nosebleed, and other times he'd wake up with bruises on his body. On several occasions, he told me this shadow-thing came into the room and paralyzed him while he slept. And when he woke up, he realized this shadow-thing had been doing sexual-stuff to him while he slept. I told him that he needed to see a doctor. But he ignored my advice. Then Roger started complaining that he was always tired. He was also drinking a lot and having weird blackouts. Some times he couldn't remember where he'd been or what he'd done for days at a time. When I confronted him about his drinking, that's when he started slapping and pushing me around. But I let that go because he didn't really hurt me. Besides, he was only abusive when he came off a drinking binge and his nerves were all jangled up. His freelance work slacked off, the bills piled up and our phone got turned off. The electricity bill was so far behind that it finally got turned off. It took my entire paycheck to get our lights back on. Next he started leaving the house, not telling me where he was going. Once he was gone a whole week. He'd call every other day to say that he was all right. But he never told me where he was staying. (I think he was in Virginia hanging out at Bowker's house and didn't want to admit it.) When he finally came home, I called his sister and told her how he was drinking all the time and he'd stopped working. She came to the house and laid him

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out for not taking care of himself and their parents' home (which, by the way, she let him have since she and husband already had a nice place). She told him he was acting like a bum. And if their parents were alive they'd be devastated to see him in this condition. When she left, he told me I'd embarrassed him when I brought his sister into all this. Then he slapped me. I told him if he ever touched me again, I'd call the police and take out a warrant on him. By this time, Roger was thin as a rail and I wondered what was happening to him when he disappeared during his so-called missing-time trips, so I decided to search his car. I found strands of long black hair on the shoulder rest in the front seat. I also found a tube of lipstick in the back seat, alongside what looked like crack pipes. So now I had to face the horrible fact that Roger was using drugs and cheating on me. Imagine how I felt Monifa—me, a drug-free woman who assumed she was in a loving, monogamous relationship with a man who shared the same moral beliefs. Roger continued driving to Virginia to see this Bowker person, and when he returns, he's always filthy, exhausted, hung-over, and hateful-acting. By this time, he couldn't afford a cup of coffee, and we were buying food and paying what bills we could with my income. So I concluded that Bowker wasn't just supplying Roger with money for gas to drive back and forth from Maryland to Virginia, he was also giving him money to buy drugs (and women, too). Then, as if he wasn't already treating me bad enough, he started threatening to kill me. I know I called the police at least three times because of his threats. I couldn't make him leave because this is his house. The last time the police came to the house, I refused to take out a restraining order on him. But this time he did agree to leave. The police told us if we couldn't work things out, to stay away from each other—then they gave him a ride to

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his sister's house. Two days later, he was right back here doing the same stuff: cussing and threatening me, then he'd run off for a few days, (probably to Virginia), return and beg me not to leave him. If Peter Bowker wasn't in the picture, I don't believe Roger would've turned into the horrible person he's become. So, after reading all of this (sorry for sending such a long message), I hope you'll want to help out your old college friend by investigating Peter Bowker. Right now, all I know about him is that he's a professor at the University of Richland in Ashland, Virginia. If you want to talk to me, please don't call me at work because I'm not allowed to accept, or make, personal calls from here. The phone is still turned off at the house, so you can't call me there, either. My cell phone is also turned off, but I plan to pay the bill this Friday when I get paid. But I hope you won't wait 'til Friday to contact me—I'm hoping you'll hit me right back. As you can see, I'm struggling right now. And I can't go back to my parents for help. They told me they aren't going to help me until I finally leave Roger alone. After reading all this, you probably feel the same way. But even if you think I'm a fool for sticking with Roger, please email me back and at least let me know that you're praying for me. Give Baker my regards, and I hope to hear from you soon."

Monifa thought about the differences between her and Delia's lives.

The two women had met more than twelve years ago when they both attended Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Despite their differences—Delia, an attractive but emotionally-challenged extrovert from a well-to-do family that lived in the suburbs of Maryland; and Monifa, a gorgeous, introverted *closet*-clairvoyant who had been abandoned by her birth parents and raised in a series of foster homes in inner-city Baltimore—they had become close friends. And after college, they stayed in constant contact with

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each other. And during holiday seasons, Monifa was as much a fixture at the Dunbar's home as their blood relatives. After Baker came into Monifa's life and met Delia, he introduced Delia to his colleague, Roger Handley.

Anyone knowledgeable of the two women's backgrounds would have assumed the odds of being the *most* successful in life pointed more in Delia's direction. But, whereas Monifa graduated from college and landed gainful employment with a prominent Maryland-based investigative agency, Delia—who was a few years older than Monifa—dropped out of college and went on to work a succession of dead-end jobs before finally landing a steady job as a hotel clerk. And, whereas Baker pursued Monifa until she agreed to marry him, after Roger's parents died, when he left his company-job to pursue a freelance writing career, he also left Delia and moved back to his native Maryland; and Delia followed him, despite Baker's warning.

Now Monifa looked over the pile of work on her desk, then closed her eyes and tried to force the heightened intuitive part of her brain into focusing on Delia. After a long moment, when nothing about Delia came into her psyche, Monifa opened her eyes. "Delia..." she mumbled, closing her friend's email message, "what you need to do is *leave* this headed-for-nothing-but-disaster relationship with Roger and get on with your life." And she was certain that, even though Baker was fond of his friend Roger, he'd tell Delia the same thing. She continued her one-way conversation: "And *that's* what I'm going to tell you the next time we speak." Then she turned her attention back to the stack of work on her desk.

The next morning, Monifa e-mailed Delia a crisp response asking Delia to call her *collect*. She ended the message with a 'reminder note' that included her home, office and cell phone numbers.

Several days passed with no response from Delia. But, along with her Big Sister Alliance commitments, Monifa's hectic work schedule kept her so occupied that she never noticed.



Mid-Atlantic Daily – Virginia Beach, Virginia region...

Forty-year old (often mistaken to be in his early thirties) Baker Cornell Livingston was the youngest African American editor at the Virginia Beach office of the conservative *Mid-Atlantic Daily*—a respected, trendy mainstream newsmagazine with offices in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington DC. During the course of his fifteen-year career in journalism, Baker had received several distinguishing awards, earning him the security in easing up some on his copious work schedule. Still, he worked tirelessly at editing daily news-breaking stories and churning out his popular syndicated column, '*Livingston-on-Point*'.

Baker stayed on top of his demanding work because he made it a point to fuel his mental prowess by analyzing an array of informational resources. And so, true to his journalistic habits, after turning on his computer, Baker started each work day reading headline stories from online newspapers across the country, *and* abroad. This is how he ran across the following news story about his former colleague:

Montgomery County Courier: Bethesda, Maryland Metro News; run-date: February 5th. **MAN'S BODY FOUND BURNING IN BACKYARD**, by Larry Bradshaw, Staff Writer...On Monday, the partially burned body of freelance journalist, Roger Handley, was found in the backyard of his home in Bethesda, Maryland. Sources close to this investigation state that the lower half of Handley's body was still burning when First Responders arrived on the scene. The same source says that medics observed a fresh, three-inch laceration on Handley's forehead and bruised blood collecting around Handley's right ear.

According to reports, Handley shared his residence with his thirty-year old girlfriend, Delia

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Dunbar. Police incident reports state that prior to Handley's death, the police had responded to several domestic dispute calls at Handley's residence. Montgomery County police detective, Steven Gilliam, would not confirm what sources close to the investigation revealed: that the police are looking at Dunbar as a person of interest in her boyfriend's death. The source also revealed that Dunbar's parents had her admitted to the mental unit of a Bethesda, Maryland hospital where she is currently under suicide watch.

At the time of his death, Handley was thirty-eight years old. Handley's parents are deceased. He is survived by a sister who resides in Montgomery County. A memorial service for Handley is scheduled for Saturday, February 9th at Mount Shepherd Baptist Church in Glen Echo, Maryland."

As he read the news story, a deep frown creased Baker's lemon-colored forehead. "Sounds like Roger had some turmoil going on at home," he whispered to himself. "That's probably why he wasn't returning my calls about those free-lance assignments!" He dialed his Editor-in-Chief's extension. After sharing the news of Roger Handley's death with his boss, Baker called Monifa.

Once again psychic detective, Monifa Livingston, must battle a virulent nemesis from Book II, who's now claiming a half-human/half-alien identity. But this time around, Monifa's faith is gravely tested when the battle with her nemesis turns into spiritual-warfare with strange-flesh!

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