

'They came across space from another solar system
and monitored us by means of an alternate dimension.

To stop them, one must...

ENTER
THE
PARALLEL
CHAMBER

DAVID GATESBURY



Paul Weingarte, a physics professor, regains consciousness in an alternative dimension with no memory of his past, and stumbles upon a strange spacecraft. He is captured by alien Greys, but manages to escape and is instantly transported to our present world. Striving to remember his identity, he's pursued by aliens planning to enslave humanity that use an alternative dimension to monitor our society undetected. In order to stop them, he must enter the Parallel Chamber.

Enter the Parallel Chamber

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monitored us by means of an alternate dimension.**

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CHAMBER**

**CHAMBER
BATTER
THE**

DAVID GATESBURY

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Chapter 1

AM I A GHOST

Walking across an open field toward a distant building of monumental size on a hill, I felt drawn to an eerie glow and a high-pitched hum coming from beyond it. Dazed and out of kilter in this mysterious limbo, I found myself drawn to this building for reasons I didn't understand until stopping to stare at the sky in wonder. Fast-moving, angry clouds gave a foreboding impression that something unnatural was happening, and in the shifting clouds I saw a faint crisscrossing grid of green laser beams. Sometimes I could barely see a curious net spanning the open sky, but other times I could distinctly see vivid intersecting green lines, and I asked myself what the origin for these lines could be.

Disoriented and lost in this solitary existence, I'd seen houses and other buildings strangely left open with no doors connected to their entrances, leaving me to think I may be Earth's last human inhabitant. Moving up a long-running grassy slope, I tracked across a gloomy landscape devoid of life, and I pondered an inexplicable scene I'd witnessed minutes before at a church where I met the most extraordinary beings. This horrifying ordeal left me bewildered and unsure if I was on an earthly plane, and as much as I can't describe it as a religious experience, the incident occurred at a house of worship.

Rational thinking proved elusive, for it was as though I was trapped in the dark corners of a ghastly nightmare, and I asked myself, *Where is everybody, where are all the people?*

Stricken by a persistent throbbing at the back of my head, the aching pain gave me unwavering concerns about my mental state. My thought processes shallow and inconsistent, I had trouble forming a conclusion about the predicament I was in. Amid this confusion, an inborn impulse made me consider that the whole world had undergone some abnormal transformation. Doom and despair gave me paradoxical thoughts and a haunting premonition that the end of the world will soon be coming, or may have already come.

Feeling insignificant and diminutive, pressing uncertainty kept me wondering about the strangeness of my surroundings. I sought redemption in the creepy stillness about me and for believing I was a mere shadow of the being I once was, and I asked myself, *Am I a ghost?*

While drawn to that distant glow, I lost sight of the building I targeted when climbing the bulging hill, but that agitating high-pitched hum kept finding my senses. Whenever I tuned into it, I couldn't help thinking this noise was only in my mind, but I wasn't sure, and coming to the crest of this grassy hillside, I noticed a statuette crowning its peak. The statue's image was that of a man riding a horse perched on top of an oblong pedestal base with engraving that read 'St. Louis'. The rider of this prancing charger looked like a robed crusader of nobility, and clad in armor while holding high an inverted sword symbolizing a cross, he appeared to be leading the way into battle.

Stopping in my tracks, from this high elevation on the hill I turned to observe a panoramic view, gazing in wonderment at the mysterious green laser netting sprawling across the sky. Momentarily caught up in thoughts about this green meshwork, I had no idea what these lines represented. It crossed my mind that this fabric of green lines in a bulging bubble shape may be a breaker or parting separation for something I didn't understand.

Suddenly struck by an unbearable pain at the base of my skull that made me wince, I was unable to stand the overwhelming pounding inside my head. I avoided touching the area, but placed my hands squarely against the statue's base, relying on it for support until the intolerable pain diminished.

The pain passed and I resumed my walk toward the enormous building that now lay in plain sight, and light beyond the structure hung eerily over its impressive limestone facade to create a great halo. The silhouette it cast obscured the features of two huge statues of women holding provocative poses before robust, archaic pillars, and a wide marble staircase ran down between them. Strangely enough, I had an odd belief I'd been here before, and I continued walking while focused on that hum in my head. Yearning to learn what produced the

luminosity behind this building, I started toward the left side of it, which was the building's right side in how I approached its front. I took to walking alongside the building next to a long running exterior wall before coming to a cluster of pine trees, and light filtering through the bristling branches of these evergreens grew in intensity.

My eyes squinted as I brushed back a low-lying branch to stand transfixed, astonished by the sight of a massive but sleek, flat black V-shaped spacecraft in a far-reaching, sunken clearing. Every bit as big as a jumbo passenger jetliner, the level, streamlined body of this ship had narrow wings, and a sweeping convex tail. Beneath this craft's aerodynamic design were three tall, bulky supporting legs made of high quality chrome steel. An array of recessed lights beamed down from the spacecraft's sprawling undercarriage, and near the center of the ship was a large, circular domed crystal in shades of orange that stood out. The area beneath the ship appeared as bright as Dodger Stadium for a night game, and there I saw a gathering of people dressed in bright blue, slim-fitting uniforms with a thin belt and silver buckles.

I immediately made the distinction that these weren't ordinary people, but slender alien Greys of short stature with enlarged brainpans and huge, black glossy eyes. My next thought was that they must be filming a movie based on science fiction, but there weren't any cameras, and I soon inferred I must've stumbled upon a real alien spacecraft!

Astounded by this spectacular discovery, while moved by the design of their awesome ship, I felt great excitement and joy. I began moving down the slope for attempting to communicate with them and to let them know I'm friendly. I felt as though caught up in amazing surrealism, and wandered among their congregation while wondering what they thought of me. Finding their huge eyes fascinating—teardrop shaped black pools, a glossy gel that beckoned me, I kept studying those large, glazed eyes staring back at me, and pointed ears were set close to their heads. The pale skin of these grey celestial visitors was so smooth, with two hard-to-see holes for nostrils, and an inconspicuous mouth they kept tightly shut.

Enthralled by the presence of intelligent beings from another world, they acted just as surprised and curious about having met a human being. Motioning with my hands to draw them near, they moved about me cautiously, keeping their distance, as if suspicious of my intentions, looking like harmless copies of one another.

Noticing a commotion in the crowd, emerging from this unusual assembly were three briskly animated beings of the same race dressed in tight-fitting black uniforms and flowing red capes with high collars. Trotting forward to confront and encircle me, their inhospitable conduct made me think I'd walked into a volatile situation, and I saw that each of these three wheeled a wand in their hands.

Sensing danger, the hostile look in their eyes projected grim intimidation for having met up with an intruder, and this encounter intensified the hum I heard in my head. One pointed his wand at me and there was a flash as an electrical charge burst forth to deliver a piercing sharp pain that shot through my body, and my knees gave out as I collapsed!

Lying paralyzed and convulsing in the midst of these alien specters, I fought for a breath of life as this crippling electrical charge was like nothing I'd ever experienced before. Doing all I can to remain conscious, a rising fear of death came over me as these three formidable foes in red capes stood over me in domineering fashion. Those huge, cold, black eyes watching over me, staring me down while studying my reaction, they looked confident in seeing I posed no threat to them.

I tried raising my head, only to lose in the effort and slumped back to lie flat on the ground, and their attention turned elsewhere as they joined in a strange chant with the others. Horrifyingly powerless while coming in and out consciousness, my inability to move gave me no chance for escaping this nightmare. Having experienced a great shock that left me drained and heavily perspiring, I kept fighting to recover and regain some semblance of self-control for being able to move under my own power.

Thinking I was sure to die if I didn't get up off the ground, it took every fiber of my being to dizzily rebound and I gathered strength for striving to rise to my feet. The red caped figures were surprised to

catch sight of me standing, and hesitated before converging on me. Some of the others in blue uniforms had their backs turned to me, and taking this as a line of escape, I frantically plunged into this crowd as their indiscernible chanting ritual continued.

Nearly stumbling in my desperation to throw myself forward for breaking through this mob, I pushed and plowed my way through these fantastic creatures before clumsily staggering into a clearing. Finding myself encircled by a huge number of them, in trying to distance myself from the red caped aliens I'd run directly beneath their ship and now surrounded, I saw no way to escape!

Suddenly bathed in a bright orange light coming from that crystallized dome attached to their ship that nearly blinded me, I squinted while using my hand to shade my eyes. The light pulsated before flashing to a dazzling yellow, and then to a stark, brilliant white light, and I turned to nearly stumble into a pair of humans in a trancelike state—a black couple. The pair stood blank faced before me, the man tall and stocky with an athletic build, the woman short and thin, and they looked unaware of goings-on.

In an instant, plunged into silent, blinding darkness that left me stunned, the second I could see again I bolted into the trees in a stumbling run. Running breathlessly in serpentine fashion to dodge well-spaced trees, I ran a long distance, and beyond a silhouette of black earth I saw the glow of distant streetlamps.

My legs worked their hardest to carry me up a gently rolling slope, and thinking I couldn't endure this pace much longer, I hoped I was free of the aliens. The pounding of my heart and the constant inhaling and exhaling of my lungs made me think my chest might burst.

Doing all I can to elude them, I uttered out loud, "I can make it."

Exhausted to where I had no choice but to stop, when halting, the strong thumping of my heart continued. Drawing deep breaths of air, my chest heaving as perspiration expelled from my body, I leaned forward to place my palms on my knees while my stiffened arms helped prop me up.

Looking back, I saw nothing, and believing I'd escaped from them, I had a difficult time grasping what had just transpired, as

everything had suddenly gone through such an abrupt change. Rehashing the incident in my mind, it seemed as though I'd walked in on a group of aliens who had just begun performing a ceremony or ritual. The chanting aliens had me encircled with nowhere to run when they suddenly disappeared, and I'd fallen into black silence before seeing an open path for escaping. Having experienced so many other insane predicaments, I had no idea where I was or what I was doing here, but for now, this didn't seem as important as having escaped those alien creatures.

I still saw their images in my mind—those big, bulging, teardrop shaped eyes studying me, and getting flashback images of the African-American couple I'd seen, I hoped they'd escaped too.

The faint sound of a car horn broke my train of thought, *Could this mean I'm back—had I somehow returned to the world I once knew?*

Focused on the streetlights up ahead, I just now realized these lights were proof I'd made it back, and I eagerly darted in the direction of the sound of automobile traffic. Keeping a steady trotting pace, at the crest of the hill I saw what looked like a wide thoroughfare, and I glanced back once more, feeling secure when seeing none of the aliens following me. Soon reaching a four-lane stretch of asphalt with street lamps on both sides, there were lights in the windows of buildings, and electric signs in the distance. A block away, I saw the taillights of a car and even further down the street the brake lights of what I thought to be a late running bus, but I had no idea what time it was.

Thinking it must be late evening into night, and looking into a clear starlit sky I no longer saw that luminous green crisscrossing grid in angry clouds. Startled by a car horn, my heart skipped a beat as bright lights flashed from behind me, and a motorist swerved to avoid hitting me, and I then heard the driver shouting obscenities out the window.

Eager to warn others about the alien ship I'd seen, I raced to an expansive hotel reflecting English architecture and Old-World charm. A wrought iron fence enclosure surrounded a near-full parking lot, but there wasn't a soul in sight, and I passed an electric sign, its glowing

white background enhanced black fanciful writing that read BERKSHIRE INN. I ran for the hotel's double door entrance, the upper halves of these doors holding diamond-shaped stained glass, and burst into a lavishly decorated lobby. A young custodian of Latin American descent guided the motion of a vacuum sweeper, the sound of the motor's suction drowning out my entry.

Turning my eyes to the desk, I saw the night manager remove his eyeglasses while giving a curious stare, and rushing breathlessly toward him, I said the only words I could get out, "Get help."

"You want me to call the police?"

Still breathing hard, I nodded while leaning against the counter, and watching him press the phone's touch-tone dial, I then overheard bits of conversation.

"I'm not sure," said the clerk, "let me ask him." Placing his hand over the receiver, he asked, "Were you assaulted?"

Overexcited at the opportunity to express what happened, I stammered before blurting out, "They...they tried capturing me."

"Uh, yeah, you'd better get a car over here right away," uttered the clerk, and he turned away, covering his mouth before signing-off with a few last words.

I had difficulty calming myself when trying to explain what happened, but I knew I'd have to pull myself together or I'd never be able to convince people of what I'd experienced.

The clerk pushed the telephone aside, "The police are on their way, and I'll have to ask that you wait here at the desk until they arrive."

Still relying on the counter for support, I nodded yes, and drew another deep breath of air before exhaling.

"Ramon," the desk clerk called to the custodian working the vacuum sweeper to get his attention, and when this didn't work, he loudly repeated himself, "Ramon!"

Having caught his attention, the manager motioned for him to stop vacuuming the carpet, and the roar of the vacuum sweeper died. Then the clerk announced, "I need for you to stay up here by the desk for a few minutes. I've just called the police for this gentleman and they'll be here shortly."

Pushing the vacuum sweeper to one side, the custodian casually came around to sit down on a red velvet couch with gold printing, and extending his arms out, he gave me a look-over.

“What’s up,” he asked from his relaxed position while the clerk tended to paperwork. “Why do you need the police?”

My words came slowly, “A ship landed out there—hasn’t anyone else reported seeing it?”

“You mean a spaceship—a flying saucer?” and the custodian smiled.

The clerk interrupted him, “Let’s let the police handle it, huh, Ray.”

He replied with a grin, “Heh, if we’re getting invaded I need to know. I wanna get home to tell my people about it for organizing a welcoming committee.”

Letting out a short chuckle, he crossed his legs, “So where did you see this spaceship?”

I tilted my head to one side, “Out there.”

“You mean in the park?”

Just now understanding it was a park where I’d faced these beings, I added, “Yes.”

Detecting a grin on the manager’s face, I’d been slow in realizing my story did nothing more than to amuse these two. I further understood that the police weren’t likely to take me serious either, but I also knew I must try to convince them of what I’d seen. Just as I decided I’d better save my breath for the police, two officers arrived, one African-American and the other Caucasian.

“Oh, man,” said Ramon, grinning ear to ear, “I’ve gotta see this.”

“Okay,” said the shorter, paler skinned of the two, Voellmer on his nametag, “who called?”

“I did,” replied the night manager, pointing in my direction, “this man asked that I call the authorities for help.”

I tried to remain calm, “I was nearly captured by aliens in the park.”

The African-American officer whose nametag read Davis, the more rugged of the two with a broad mustache, kept a straight face when saying, “You do mean illegal aliens, don’t you?”

His partner chuckled, and the custodian burst out laughing, slapping his hands together.

“I mean aliens out of a spacecraft, there must have been others who’ve reported seeing a spaceship, and the park is crawling with them.”

“Little green men or what,” remarked the custodian with a snicker.

“Ray,” began the desk clerk, “let’s not get this guy so mad that he comes back and busts out a window.”

“They were grey-skinned, short and slim, had an enlarged brainpan, no hair, and huge, black eyes.”

“How about giving us your name,” said Davis.

The strangest feeling came over me as I couldn’t think of a reply and suddenly beset by this overwhelming problem, I blurted out, “You don’t believe me.”

“It’s not that,” replied Davis, “we simply need a name for our report.”

“Do you have any ID?” asked Voellmer.

I felt the back of my pants where my wallet should’ve been, but there was no wallet there.

“How about continuing this conversation outside,” requested Davis, his hand reaching for my arm, and fearing they were going to arrest me, I backed off.

He spoke to me in a reassuring voice, “Everything’s cool, we’re not going to arrest you, we merely want to continue the interview outside.”

I felt apprehensive about trusting them, but expecting they’d resort to force if I didn’t go with them, I thought it best to cooperate.

They’d parked their patrol car just outside the hotel entrance, and Davis rest his forearm on the car’s roofline while leaning against it, facing me. “Look, you say you saw these things and it’s not our place to argue with you, but I have to admit, it sounds like you’re going off the deep end here.”

His partner interrupted, “You look like somebody coming down from a high. Have you taken any amphetamines, downers or any drugs at all?”

Unable to express myself well, I shook my head no.

Then Davis asked, “How’s about giving us your name, and we’ll get in touch with your folks.”

Voellmer examined my arms for needle marks, then folded his arms, “If you don’t want to give us your name, how about an address, maybe we can drop you off someplace.”

My mind drew a blank and grappling with the fact that I couldn’t conjure a name or address bothered me enormously, but the harder I tried to concentrate the more confused I became.

Davis tipped back his cap, “Well, if you go back inside this hotel we’ll have to arrest you, so I suggest you stay out of trouble and go someplace to sleep it off.”

“I know I saw an alien spacecraft.”

“Awe, man,” Davis began, “this is a major metropolitan area, why is it you’re the only person to report seeing this thing?”

Receiving a call on their radio, Voellmer opened the passenger door to listen to the message, commenting, “You can tell us you saw a flying saucer, but you can’t give us something as simple as a name. It’s only natural that we’d think you’ve taken a hallucinatory drug. How can you expect us to accept your story, do I write down in my report that a nameless individual saw a spaceship land in Forest Park?”

Davis pulled down the bill of his cap, “You look like a pretty harmless person, so why don’t you take my advice. You’d be wise to get off this property because if you bother these people again you’re going downtown, and I mean no more mister nice-guy.”

Watching them leave the lot in their car, I thought what they’d said made sense, for how could anyone accept such a story from a person who couldn’t even remember his name. Unable to scratch beneath the surface of whatever life I had before, I believed myself a broad-minded person who could think on several levels, and yet, my thinking had no order of progression. My ability to draw from an idea and expand it into a sequence seemed like a great task, as it didn’t take long for my train of thought to crumple into confusion.

I began walking with this absurd identity crisis bringing on despair and insecurity, and struggling for answers, I placed myself

under great mental strain to remember a name. The notion that I didn't have a name made me doubt my very existence before this night, as though I may have been born only yesterday, but I didn't believe that possible. The only other memories I had were such bizarre happenings, even more outrageous than my experience with the alien ship.

Trying to rationalize and remember clouded the memory of these aliens, diminishing the incident in the park, but I couldn't forget the zapping power from that wand that took me down. For a moment, I thought the blast of electricity from that wand may have blotted out my identity, and there was also the idea that the bright crystal light from the ship's undercarriage had somehow erased my memory. However, I wasn't convinced either one of these instruments caused my memory loss or my inability to reason, because I remember walking the earth alone for an undetermined period of time prior to stumbling upon that spaceship. The sheer loneliness I felt then was so profoundly crushing that there were moments when I believed I was the last human being on Earth and all other life-forms had ceased to exist.

At the time, everything reinforced the idea that I was dead, and now unquestionably knowing that wasn't true, I admitted to myself that I didn't feel whole either, as everything still seems so puzzling. Thinking back, an overwhelming feeling of desertion or abandonment came over me before I stopped at a church to investigate what I'd perceived to be a light inside, coming through a stained glass window. I soon encountered strange beings in the church, recalling glittering white veils clad in dark hoods and robes, and I remember one of them asking me my name while I stood before them. That individual referred to me as 'Man with no name', but I was so mixed-up and confused then that I couldn't focus, making it now difficult to remember exactly what went on there. My mind would not yield answers, as I was unable to unlock a memory before that outlandishly mysterious occurrence at the church.

Without realizing it, I'd walked many blocks into the heart of a big city where I came across a well-lit glass enclosed building that took up an entire city block. Seeking shelter and a place to rest my

weary legs, I saw people freely entering and exiting this building, and I took it on myself to enter its interior. Once inside, I saw people of all walks of life, and almost everyone appeared prepared for travel, carrying suitcases, handbags, and backpacks.

I turned to gaze at a reflection keeping pace with me in the window, and a weird sensation came over me, for I didn't recognize the unshaven face I wore! Carefully examining the eyes, nose, and stubby hair growth, by my own touch, I knew this face belonged to me, but I still saw nothing familiar about it. Deeply disturbed by looming uncertainties, I wondered if my problem could be far bigger than I imagined.

Deeply troubled and confused, the intensity of a headache increasing, I saw a broad sign on a wall that read GREYHOUND. Understanding I was in a bus station, I went to a water fountain and gulped down water until I was breathless. Seeing a young girl across the way sleeping comfortably with her head in her mother's lap, I thought I could shed some of this mental fatigue by resting on a bench. Deciding to lie down, I adjusted to a suitable position with the side of my head lying on my forearm to keep pressure off the tender spot on the back of my head.

My worrisome problems worked on my tired mind until I gave in to my need for rest, and I dozed off into a deep sleep...

Chapter 2

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

In my sleep, I saw everything grow dim and dark, shadows stirred while imagery took the form of a cloaked figure, and in its flowing contour I recognized the rim of a hood. Where there should've been a face I saw a glittering white veil following the curvature and profile of the face behind it, and it throbbed as the thing breathed. Imagining it coming closer disturbed me, then the gruff voice of a woman penetrated the veil, "Man with no name, you must leave here now."

The veil then held still as the image began to fade, but the voice came across sterner, and more direct, "C'mon buster, this ain't the Ritz."

Feeling a strong nudge, my eyes opened to a blinding light, as daylight outside the glass came as a stark change from when I first stretched out on the bench. I used my hands as visors, blinking and squinting while my vision adjusted, and another firm nudge caused me to scramble to my feet, standing there while trying to comprehend what was happening.

"Whoa," said a stocky woman with a wide face and frosted hair in a blue uniform, holding one hand on her hip while the other gripped an upright mop handle. I believed she'd used the mop handle to awaken me, and then she commented, "You're going to have to find somewhere else to sack-out."

Seeing all eyes were on me, I thought it best to get out of the building before I got into trouble, stopping by the rest room and splashing water on my face before exiting the building.

The identity of this strange hooded person I recalled in a dream remained a compelling mystery, but the image was still very much alive in my mind's eye. Recalling conversing with this individual at a church, the memory came across as a real and genuine experience that happened before I encountered the aliens at their spaceship. I felt distressed when in this individual's company and the experience left

behind a lingering feeling of impending doom. Remembering few details of that nightmarish meeting tormented me, and while uncertain about the location of the church, I kept on trying to recall events that eluded me.

I couldn't get away from the idea that my head injury was the cause for my fragmented memory to fully recall the past, causing me to stop on the sidewalk in the light of day. Standing there, running my fingers through my hair, by now the tenderness at the base of my skull had somewhat receded. Detecting a slight irritation beneath the surface of the skin behind my left ear that itched a little, I ignored it.

In the distance, the sun's gleaming reflection off the curvature of a towering stainless steel monument caught my eye, and I said, "The Arch." Having recognized the unique design of this landmark helped me to establish that I was in St. Louis, and as bad as things appeared, I realized I'd retained geographical information. Exercising some degree of logic while remembering certain facts, my inability to recall my name continued to plague me.

My eyes fell upon a newspaper stand where I took an interest in the '*St. Louis Post Dispatch*', the headline covered a proposal and a plan for expanding The Callaway Nuclear Power Plant. A color photo of the facility on the front page attracted my attention, holding unknown significance for me. Examining the plant's cooling tower that in a strange way resembled an hourglass, it seemed somehow familiar to me, and I conjured the idea I may have visited the site sometime in the recent past.

I'm able to recognize these landmarks, but still can't recall my name or address, and I'm not even sure if St. Louis is my hometown.

Not knowing my identity gave me a feeling of loss and great frustration, and I wandered aimlessly for a time, my spirit weighed down by the hopelessness I carried. My mind running through all sorts of scenarios to grasp the reason for my feeble-mindedness, and although my thinking was taking me nowhere, I couldn't stop pondering these things. Sometimes feeling pain at the back of my skull, I asked myself if this head injury could provide a logical explanation for all these weird experiences. Is it possible I'd lost consciousness as the result of a seizure brought on by a blood clot in

the brain, or is this all an illusion linked to a mental disorder I have? I also considered I may have suffered a skull fracture after having been in a car accident, leaving me out of touch from reality.

Aware that my energy level was falling fast, I couldn't recall the last time I ate, and an ever present hunger drew strength from me. Distancing myself from the downtown area, I traveled south into an older section of the city on the outskirts of an industrial area, pressing on without direction or any set goal.

Walking along a busy boulevard, I saw a small metal sign attached to a light pole that read, 'Soulard Farmer's Market', and an arrow pointed southward. Beginning to get hunger pangs from lack of nourishment, I sought this market, prepared to beg to get a handout, and before long, I saw the farmer's outdoor marketplace. Stands for merchants ran in long aisles beneath a sprawling roof cover, and I saw a colorful assortment of ripe fruit and vegetables attractively displayed to allure the shopper's eye. Passing by wooden boxes stacked in front of a booth, I saw chicken wire encased live poultry. Approaching the center of this far-reaching complex, I came across an indoor facility that housed a butcher shop, snack bar, and a variety store. I came out on the opposite end of the shops and started down another outdoor aisle that ran out at another busy boulevard where I viewed the bustle of pedestrians and passing automobiles.

Standing there, distressed by hunger, I listened as a short, elderly, white-haired woman ordered fruit from a stout merchant wearing a T-shirt. The vendor's dark hair and stocky build were a giveaway that he was of Italian descent, and his face had five o'clock shadow. I then observed a scrawny but strange looking man wearing a dingy blue and white plaid sport coat leaning with his back against a pole that supported the overhead roof. Needing a shave, he had choppy red hair with a rosy complexion, and his brown, pinstriped pants were shabby, his shoes grubby and worn.

The scruffy stranger stared at me in an unfriendly way that raised my suspicions, and I didn't know what to make of him, but I thought him up to no-good. He approached me and in one quick move, gripped my arm to jerk me around so my back faced those people standing nearby, revealing a knife that he placed against my chest.

Seeing twisted hatred in his eyes, I gave no resistance, and I smelled his foul breath, “You cuttin’ in on my territory, boy—I catch you panhandling around here and I’ll lay you wide open.”

Fearing he might thrust the knife into me, I watched his shifting eyes scanning about as I shook my head no. He then added with a wink, “Stay here and keep a look-out, and I’ll cut you in on a deal.”

Reluctant to disagree with a man holding a knife to my chest, I nodded yes.

He put the knife away and relieved to no longer see the weapon, I watched curiously as he moved to the stand opposite the one worked by the fruit vendor wearing a T-shirt. He gave attention to various flowering plants arranged in rows at the aisle’s end along the sun-drenched sidewalk attended by a woman in a broad brimmed straw hat. The man in the plaid sport coat pretended to show an interest in her display, examining small plants in individual containers until turning his head abruptly to look at the fruit vendor.

The stout merchant’s eyes glanced my way as he bagged fruit the elderly lady had ordered, and finished the transaction by making change for the woman.

“Careful, it’s a little heavy,” he told his customer as he handed her a bulging brown paper bag loaded with fruit.

The eyes of the man in the plaid coat targeted the woman’s dangling tan purse, moving suddenly to snatch it and the strap broke when he knocked her down. The bag containing produce tore open and fruit spilled out, and the thief made a mad dash across the boulevard carrying the purse while dodging traffic!

“Hey, you stop!” shouted the vendor, and then his eyes turned to me.

Awestruck when realizing he thought us to be a team, I saw him coming around the counter to confront me, and a chase ensued as I began running in the direction of the butcher shop. As soon as it dawned on me that I was running in the wrong direction for escaping the market, I stopped. Seeing him now fast gaining on me, I ducked under a vacant counter and scooted across a wooden shelf. His hand caught my ankle, and gasping at the idea that he’d caught me, I

gripped the end of the shelf that gave me pulling power, kicking until I was free of his hold.

Sliding on my stomach to get to the other side, I was quick to come to a standing position to move along the edge of a dock where crates of grapes were stacked. Finding it difficult to stay erect while walking this narrow ledge, I spread my arms horizontally apart to hold my balance. At the most awkward moment, when knowing that falling off the edge was unavoidable, I dove into a huge trash dumpster situated between two big trucks. Wading through a heap of decayed and spoiled vegetation to reach the far end of the dumpster before climbing out, the lingering stench of garbage remained with me.

“Stop that thief!”

Avoiding onlookers, I ran into traffic and darted down a narrow alley where trash men blocked the way ahead with their truck, and I saw the determined vendor closing in, his blubber quivering in his T-shirt.

He yelled, “Stop him! Thief, stop him!”

His words caught the attention of the garbage collectors, who looked at me, and I veered to a tall fence that was the backdrop for a kiddy playground. As soon as I started climbing, the vendor caught hold of my belt to stop me from going over, and my strength exhausted, I could no longer resist and dropped back into the alleyway.

He pinned me against the fence and I spoke breathlessly, “I’ve done nothing.”

“Maybe not,” said the vendor, “but your buddy snatched a lady’s purse back there—I saw you together making plans.”

“I never saw that guy before in my life.”

“So why’d you run?”

Energy suddenly flushed from my body, my knees buckled and all turned black....

When coming to, I was lying on the alley’s brick pavement with the vendor standing over me, and as this strange numbness lifted, my senses returned. Weak, but aware of movement all around me, I

became conscious of perspiration gushing from my body and I saw police officers had arrived on the scene.

“Don’t try getting up,” a policeman told me.

“What’s your name?” asked another officer.

Looking up in a clear blue sky, I gave no reply.

“I think he’s faking,” said the vendor, obviously angered over the incident.

Soreness at the back of my head caused me to readjust in the way I rested my head, and I soon noticed an ambulance backing down the alley. A paramedic came to my side dressed in white and knelt beside me while preparing to check my pulse, “Having any chest pains?”

I shook my head no.

“Are you a diabetic?”

“No.”

“Can you give me your name?”

I shook my head no, and then I saw him holding up his index and middle finger, “How many fingers do you see?”

“Two,” I replied.

“Do you have any identification?” asked the officer.

Remembering I didn’t, I said, “No.”

Police officers huddled and I heard one mention to the other that the woman who’d had her purse snatched had no injuries and she’d been careful not to carry any valuables in her purse. I picked up enough of the conversation to understand that because I’d lost consciousness, if they jailed me without first making sure I required medical attention I’d be a liability to the authorities.

After a short examination, the paramedic joined the others to convey his thoughts, and then he returned to me, “We’re going to take you down to city hospital for further tests. I want to make certain you haven’t experienced a stroke, seizure, or heart attack.”

The vendor stood staring down at me, “How do you know he’s not faking?”

They maneuvered me onto a stretcher, loaded me into the ambulance and in fifteen minutes we arrived at the hospital. There, an Indian or Pakistani doctor came to check my vital signs, his brown eyes peering into mine as I lay on an examination table.

“I’m Dr. Gerald Bullens, and what is your name?” he asked in slightly broken English.

“I... I don’t know.”

“The paramedic said you blacked out, when was the last time you ate?”

“I don’t remember.”

“When you blacked out, is it possible you struck your head?”

I raised my brows, “I may have.”

“Sit up and open your shirt.”

Continuing with his examination, after listening to my heart and lungs through his stethoscope, he noticed a slightly bruised spot on my chest. Seeing it made me think of the aliens, as this was where I received the burst of energy from the wand one of them carried.

Not giving the bruise much attention, he carefully examined my eyes and ears.

“Until I’ve seen the results of further tests, I think we can rule out diabetic shock. Tell me exactly how far back can you remember?”

“It seems like only a day or two. I can’t say for sure.”

“They said you weren’t carrying any identification on you, yet you don’t strike me as a transient individual. Why don’t you check your pockets again?”

I began going through my pockets, this time checking my shirt pocket, and in it I discovered a stationery receipt from Powell University—an order form for several electronic components.

The doctor studied the receipt, “Powell University is a prestigious college. Does the name mean anything to you?”

“No, not really... Doctor, I think I have amnesia.”

The doctor grinned, “An interesting diagnosis.” Then he used his fingertips to gently massage my scalp, “There are few causes for someone to succumb to amnesia. The most common is from a head injury, but memory loss can also be brought on by mental shock.”

Feeling his fingers touch on a sensitive spot on the back of my head, I jerked away to get out from beneath the pressure he applied there. Then the doctor commented, “That’s quite a knot you have back there. It’s likely you’ve taken a blow to the base of the skull and that may well be the cause for your amnesia symptoms.”

He turned to make notes on a pad, “I’m going to phone Powell University and see if they have any clue to your identity. To be certain you haven’t received a concussion, I’m going to arrange for x-rays, and the nurse will draw blood for analysis. It may be that you’re a colleague of mine, so we had better do a thorough job.”

After listening to my story about the knife-wielding purse snatcher, the doctor spoke to the authorities on my behalf and they left me in his care. Following his examination, he was kind enough to arrange for me to get a meal in the cafeteria.

Later, a nurse with a kind face told me that people from the university were coming to see me and she gave me a chair in admitting near the emergency entrance. Under the watchful eyes of two young women at the admitting desk I made time pass by thumbing through magazines. The wait bored me, and the weight of a full meal eventually caused me to doze off...

Chapter 3

MAKING PROGRESS

Dazed and disoriented, I followed a concrete pathway along an outdoor mall until a building's wide-spaced entrance came into view, and I noticed the entranceway had no doors attached to it. In my stunned mental condition, I could not grasp the reason for this bare, open space where there should've been two sets of double doors. Walking further, my only companion was perplexing silence and a disturbing stillness, and the pathway ran out at a wide boulevard vacant of cars and people.

My uncertainty peaked by the fact that the houses I passed by had no doors connected to their entrances. Having no explanation for the world to be the way I perceived it, I knew gripping despair, as I never felt so terribly alone, and I thought, *Where are all the people?*

A peculiar feeling came over me as I began to question whether I had died, and my marching feet took me a long way until a gothic church came into view. Detecting a glow through the stained glass windows, my expectations for finding life drew me to its open entrance where there were no doors, and gold light streamed from its interior.

Suddenly having concerns for the unknown, fearful suspicions stirred within me for the strange fate that awaited me inside. Holding the belief that I may be on the verge of meeting my Creator, my soul filled with wonderment and I felt awestruck but compelled to face up to my heightening fears.

A weird sensation overtook me, and snatched from the threshold of the church, a nurse's hand rocked me until I awoke wide-eyed and in a cold sweat.

"Are you all right?"

I inhaled a deep breath of air, "Yes, I'm fine."

Smiling, the nurse had a calm tone in her voice, "People from the university have just arrived."

The prospect of these people knowing me lured me from my seat to the admitting desk and I saw a stunningly attractive woman in the company of two men, but none of them looked familiar. Showing poise and sophisticated mannerisms, the female had a slender, shapely build with silky dark hair, and an alluring face. I noticed she held her arm snug around the arm of a man with steel, wire-rimmed eyeglasses, neatly combed sandy hair, cleanly shaven even features, wearing a well-tailored three-piece suit. Watching them converse, I thought the arm-and-arm couple may be married. The other man in their company, tall, thin, and balding, wearing a gaudy turquoise necktie and a slightly wrinkled blue suit, he looked conservative in black framed eyeglasses. Taking hold of a manila folder resting on the counter, he removed x-rays from it and awkwardly used the overhead light to study them.

Their faces didn't jog my memory, but inasmuch as I did not recognize these people, I hoped they knew me, and I felt uncomfortable with how this desirable woman's bright eyes made contact with mine. Sensing concern from the look she gave me, she moved away from the man she accompanied to approach me, and I avoided her stare by looking down at the magazine I held in my hand.

Her well-groomed companion moved to restrain her, and she directed her words at me when saying, "Paul, don't you know who I am?"

I had no clue my name was Paul, and even though I suspected she was addressing me, I wasn't sure, so I turned away without giving a reply.

The tall man wearing the black framed eyeglasses who'd arrived with the couple was now watching me, and said outspokenly, "Now we discussed how we're going to handle this if he didn't respond to you, Julia. I don't think we ought to pressure the professor, and if it is amnesia, the condition rarely lasts longer than a day or two."

He took possession of the manila folder with the x-rays and signed off for them, "Thank Dr. Bullens for me and tell him I'll be in touch."

Placing the manila folder under his arm, he then came over to address me in a friendly manner, "If my face doesn't look familiar,

don't feel bad, we've met but a few times. My name is Roger Scheibel, I teach psychiatry at the university, and it may bring some comfort for you to know that this young lady is your wife, Julia."

This came as a big surprise, as I felt mesmerized by this woman's presence and while looking deep into her eyes, it almost seemed like a dream come true.

"This other gentleman is your boss, the dean of Powell University, Richard Collins," and he referred to the man with sandy hair, whom I'd originally assumed to be my wife's husband.

Scheibel placed his arm on my shoulder as we advanced to the door, "I think the sooner we get you around more familiar surroundings the quicker your memory will return."

I stopped, and with a straight face, turned to him, "Excuse me, but under the circumstances, don't you think it important to tell me who I am?"

Laughter broke out, and Scheibel replied, "Of course, a critical piece of information to bring up at this junction. You are Professor Paul Weingarte, and you head the department of science and physics for the university." Then he commented, "Not exactly the kind of question you'd expect to hear from a physicist, now is it, however, I think your past will start coming back to you rapidly once you've returned home. You'll have to exercise patience, as I've only encountered a couple of cases of amnesia and there's little anybody can do except to get you around people and places you have familiarity with."

We moved outside to a late model, gray Mercedes Benz, the dean drove the automobile, and Julia sat in the front passenger seat, while Roger Scheibel and I sat in the back.

Sitting behind Dean Collins, I heard him say, "I need to stop by the university for a minute."

Scheibel announced, "I've canceled all my appointments for the afternoon, Richard, so I'm able to give this situation my undivided attention. I think it would be a good idea for Paul to see the university. After all, he's spent a good many years teaching there and seeing it might unlock some memories for him."

We weren't in the car long when I heard Julia remark, "What's that odor, I've smelled it since we got in the car."

Roger leaned forward to respond to her question with soft-spoken words I couldn't discern, and Julia reacted by pressing the window control button on her door to partially lower her window. Dean Collins lowered his window a few inches, while at the same time glimpsing the view in his door mirrors.

Feeling embarrassed, I knew as well as anybody did that the stench came from the clothing I wore, picking up the odor from when I dropped into that dumpster at the farmer's market. Although I had no recollection of Julia, I kept admiring her, and I couldn't help feeling jealousy and resentment for Dean Collins because she'd been so cozy to him from the outset.

Their actions prompted me to wonder, and in my mind I thought that if she's married to me, shouldn't she be sitting in the backseat with me? At the same time, she seemed cold and distant toward me, making me question why she didn't show more affection for the return of a missing husband.

Stopping in front of the university's main entrance, the dean stepped out of the car, "I won't be long."

On this sunny day, students were seen moving briskly on foot to and from the university, and some congregated on a broad set of marble stairs. I gave close attention to the main entrance, and its ivy-covered facade reminded me of Windsor Castle with its towers. There were two sets of tall double doors, and focusing on how the doors swung open and then closed with the flow of passing students, I recalled a memory. Like in a strange dream, I remembered coming across a very similar entranceway, but the entrance I pictured in my mind was bare in how it was vacant of any doors. In pondering whether the entrance to the university was the same one I was thinking of, I softly mumbled in making a comparison in my mind, "There are doors at this entrance."

Scheibel gave me a curious look, "I didn't hear what you said, Paul, are you feeling okay?"

When I didn't respond, he said in a supportive way, "We'll have you home in a few minutes."

Looking at the expression on my face, Scheibel remarked, “You taught here for a number of years, do you remember anything about the university?”

“Not really.”

Details of a fuzzy dream weren’t worthwhile mentioning, and suspecting they might be withholding information from me, I thought it may be best to keep anything I remembered to myself. It was bad enough to be in this preposterous predicament, but after having said something that everybody thought laughable back at the hospital, I intended to keep my thoughts to myself.

The dean returned a few minutes later, and after starting up the car, we took up with the flow of traffic for making our way to another destination. While driving, I heard him say, “As soon as I drop you off at home I’ll have to return to the university—I’m sorry I can’t stay on to be of further help.”

I thought Julia wore a look of disappointment, and sensing the need to get her attention, I asked, “Do we have any children?”

“We have a daughter, Connie, and she graduates from high school this year.”

“It’s funny finding out you had a life when just a short time ago I felt so alone in the world, I couldn’t even remember if I had a name... How long was I missing?”

“Well, that’s hard to say,” began Scheibel, “you’ve spent much of your time working on some project over at the school without anyone keeping track of your whereabouts. Some have speculated that no one’s seen you in over forty-eight hours, and being that you weren’t carrying identification suggests someone may have mugged you. Electronic parts listed on school stationery you were carrying made the dean think the person they had at the hospital was you.” Then Scheibel directed his words to Julia, “Was the professor’s wallet ever reported found?”

“No.” said Julia, keeping her head straight and her eyes scanning the view ahead.

“Do you have any idea where you were when you received that head injury?”

“No, but that knock on the back of the head caused me to think the strangest things—like being in a weird dream, and for a time I believed I was the last human being in existence.”

“The last human being in existence, how interesting,” commented Scheibel.

On our right, well-constructed masonry apartment buildings reflected fine architecture from the twenties and thirties. To the left, I saw a far-reaching stretch of land and on a hilltop, nestled in a clump of trees, a large building of unusual design looked strikingly familiar.

“What is that building over there?”

“That’s the Art Museum,” replied Scheibel. “Do you remember it?”

I hadn’t given a reply when Julia remarked, “It should look familiar, you can see it from our house, and you’ve been there enough times that you should remember it.”

I felt reasonably certain the Art Museum may have been the structure I’d seen just before discovering the alien’s spacecraft. Choosing to withhold this information until I had a better chance of convincing people of what I’d seen—who’d take stock in such an outlandish claim made by an amnesia victim?

Gazing at scenic, rolling grassland, I commented, “It’s a big park, isn’t it?”

Scheibel remarked, “Forest Park is sort of a dinosaur from the 1904 World’s Fair, one-third larger than Central Park—over thirteen-hundred acres. I’d like to test your memory by asking, do you know where Central Park is located?”

“In New York,” I responded.

“It’s amazing how certain things remain intact when one suffers from memory loss—you’ve retained character and personality traits, language and I’m sure the ability to write.”

Julia placed her arm on the back of the seat while turning to speak to Scheibel, “Paul is a big contributor to the Science Center and Planetarium.”

“Then you and I have a lot in common, Paul, I’m active with the Muny Theater at the park and I’ve always taken an interest in the history of our fair city.”

Dean Collins engaged the blinker for signaling to turn right, and he braked while steering to turn down a residential street.

The sight of a huge, gothic church at the corner made my eyes widen, and I shouted, “Stop the car!”

The dean completed his turn off the main boulevard before steering the car to the curb and I immediately jumped out and ran to the church’s main entrance. Overcome by the fact that this was the church in my dreams, I stared at its closed doors barring me from entering, and I yanked hard at the door handles, but they didn’t budge.

The others were quick to join me and Scheibel studied my expression when asking, “What is it, Paul, do you remember something?”

“I don’t know,” and experiencing a sense of urgency for getting inside, I jerked at the doors once more, but they held firm. “I’ve been here before, but these doors weren’t here—the church was open.”

Standing back, studying the doors, I became spellbound while imagining the interior of the church, thinking I had to find a way inside.

Julia asked, “Paul, what is it you’re thinking about?”

“Something unbelievable happened inside this church, but these doors weren’t here then, there were no doors here at all—the entrance was open.”

“These doors have been here for decades,” insisted Julia, “as far back as I can remember. They’ve been here since they erected this building.”

“What do you remember?” asked Scheibel.

“That’s just it, I’m not exactly sure. I haven’t been able to put everything together because between the time I received my injury and the time I ended up in the hospital certain things occurred which I don’t fully understand. I remember coming here in a semiconscious state, and because I can only remember bits and pieces of what happened, the memory of it is all fuzzy and jumbled.”

I turned to them, “No matter how hard I try to remember, it’s like my mind is suppressing memories and I can’t scratch beneath the surface.”

Scheibel noted a large sign on the lawn which read, UNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, then he looked at Julia, “Are you of this faith or have you ever attended this church?”

“No, never, as far as I know he’s never even seen the inside of it—we’ve passed this church thousands of times, but have never gone inside it.”

“Whatever you’re trying to recall will come back to you in time, but it’s possible this particular episode may not be as consequential as you now perceive it to be. You’ve obviously passed this landmark many times, and recognizing this church may be just the beginning of the process of remembering. I think it’s best to accept this as an indicator that you’re on the way to recovery, but for now we need to get you home.”

Reluctantly returning to the car with them, I glanced back at the church twice, hoping to remember more, the glittering white veil of a cloaked figure kept coming to mind.

We stopped in front of a modest house just a few doors away from the street corner that had sparse bushes lining the walk, driveway, and property line, but it looked unfamiliar to me. A brick two-story home with a frame front porch and two supporting columns for the overhead balcony, it looked downsized by comparison to some of the others on the block.

Julia pointed to a dark green Chevrolet Impala parked in the driveway, “That’s our car.”

Approaching the door, Scheibel said, “You practically live right next door to the park, how nice.”

As Julia worked the lock with her door key, I looked back to the church steeple, and then focused on the even more distant Art Museum on a far hill.

“I told you we can see the Art Museum from our house,” announced Julia, “and I can’t tell you how often you’ve walked your daughter over to the zoo.”

Julia, Scheibel, and I entered the vestibule, but Dean Collins stopped at the doorway.

“As much as I’d like to stick around and see what progress is made, I have important business back at the university that requires

my immediate attention. Roger, I hope you'll keep me up-to-date on Paul's condition, and Julia, you know where to reach me if you need anything."

Before going, Dean Collins turned to me, "Paul, with the way your mind works I'm sure you'll come around in no time at all."

I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was about Dean Collins that rubbed me the wrong way, but watching him leave, I held suspicions about him. It didn't help to see Julia latching on to him the way she had, especially when knowing she's supposed to be my wife. While at the same time, it seemed funny to feel jealousy about a woman I felt I'd only just met.

Putting this thought aside for looking over a home tastefully decorated, the entry was hardwood, beige plush carpeting ran throughout the other rooms, and much of the furniture was handsome antiques, but nothing looked familiar.

"Still no bells," remarked Scheibel, watching for a response.

My brows twitched as my eyes scanned the layout of the house, but I remembered nothing, and they decided to take me on a house tour with Julia leading the way. After covering the living room, dining room, and kitchen on the first floor, we returned to the vestibule to ascend the stairs to the second floor. From the top of the stairs, walking down an open area with my hand riding on the banister handrail, I had the opportunity to look into each bedroom. I noticed our daughter's bedroom at the rear of the house, but movement halted when I peered at the bathroom doorway where there was a cast iron bathtub.

"What is it, Paul?" asked Scheibel, viewing my curious expression.

Moving closer to the bathroom, I scanned its interior, but felt unable grasp what my mind was driving at, and my eyes fell upon the bathtub again, then to the claw feet supporting it.

"I thought I remembered something."

Scheibel looked over my shoulder, "It's odd that you'd choose the bathroom to make your first recollection, but we spend a great deal of time there, and these fixtures are rather unique."

Julia stood behind us, listening as Scheibel moved into the bathroom, and he leaned against the wall, folding his arms. “You didn’t, by chance, tackle a plumbing project in here recently, did you?”

“No, that isn’t it,” I uttered while trying to remember.

“Paul’s not one for doing house chores, unless it’s electrical. He’s a wizard when it comes to electricity and a mathematical genius, but if the sink is stopped up or the pilot light on the water heater needs to be relit, you can forget it.”

“Perhaps you took a fall here—maybe your head injury occurred here when no one was home,” and Scheibel looked to Julia for help but she merely gave a subtle shrug.

“No, it didn’t happen here.”

“If you’re sure it didn’t happen here, then where do you think it happened?”

“I don’t know, but I have this vague memory of waking up in a dark room. What comes to mind here is seeing a woman standing in the doorway wearing a robe,” and looking at Julia, I added, “I think it’s you.”

Scheibel smiled, “We’re making some encouraging progress already, and you’ve probably seen Julia in her robe on many occasions.”

Whatever memory was linked to the bathroom seemed significant to me, but trying to recall the event did little to revive the past. However, for the first time I was beginning to have faith that my memory was starting to return to me...

Chapter 4

ELUSIVE WISPS OF MEMORIES

The three of us returned to the first floor, and Scheibel suggested, “I can't think of anything more therapeutic than thumbing through the family photo album. Do you have one handy?”

“They're in a cabinet in the dining room,” Julia remarked. “We can sit at the table where there will be plenty of room.”

Julia led the way into the dining room, and went to a bulky cabinet to gather two photo albums, placing them on the table. I sat at the head of the table, Scheibel took the chair on my left, and Julia took the chair on my right. She opened one to reveal baby pictures, one showing me holding a baby in my arms, and one taken of our daughter at eighteen months of age brought a smile to my face.

She held eye contact with me, “The expression on your face tells us your memory's opening up.”

I nodded as my mind touched on remembrances of a wonderful period in my life, “I can't really say I remember, but seeing oneself holding my newborn child touches a nerve. This is our baby, isn't it?”

“Yes, this is Connie.”

Seeing a warm glow on Julia's face stirred my heart, and gazing into her eyes, I saw her cold disposition beginning to melt. Her eyes then turned away, telling me something was troubling her, and even though I couldn't yet relate to us as being husband and wife, it bothered me to think there are marital problems.

Roger looked at Julia, “Where is your daughter at now?”

“She's out with a boyfriend, but I expect her home soon. Why don't the two of you continue and I'll make some coffee. How do you like yours, Roger?”

“I prefer mine black.”

Noting that she didn't ask me how I wanted mine, I wondered what she'd bring me.

Resuming my study of the photographs, I took amusement in seeing our daughter growing up in stages. I saw changes in myself

and in others as fashions and fads changed with the times, and there was something definitely familiar in how the face of our daughter's matured.

"I'm picking up flashbacks of my life."

"You're a pretty lucky fellow, considering you were drifting about without a memory or any identification, but the past is certain to return with more frequency. Every case of amnesia, no matter how similar, is unique and connecting circumstances may help or hinder recovery, however, it's only natural for the mind to recall events in our life. There are rare documented cases of people going off and starting a whole new life."

"How well did you know me, Roger?"

"We met at a social affair, and we knew each other well enough to give a hello or make small talk when meeting at the university, which was rare."

"I was hoping you could tell me something about myself. Do you know if Julia and I are what you'd consider happily married?"

"On that, I couldn't say, but the dean and Julia have given me the impression that you were somewhat of a solitary person, dedicated to your work. On a couple of occasions I saw Julia at faculty gatherings and she excused your absence by saying you had research you were catching up on."

Julia returned with a tray and placing it on the table, proceeded to pour us each a cup of coffee, the phone rang, and she returned to the kitchen to answer it.

Bringing the rim of the cup to my lips, I sipped the dark, rich liquid and just then, my eyes caught sight of a photograph of two people whom I recognized. I remembered this couple to be my parents, who died in an automobile crash six years ago, and seeing their images brought back childhood memories that I would have preferred to leave forgotten.

Julia returned to sit at the table and while she and Scheibel engaged in conversation, I recalled a lonely childhood. Enduring a strict upbringing as the only child of teachers and intellectuals, I showed brilliance in mathematics at a young age, as the tribulations of a well-planned education took root. It helped that I was a natural

analytical thinker, as I had little difficulty navigating through concepts and ideas. My father taught geometry and trigonometry and sternly poured knowledge into me, using what I saw as tyrannical methods to make the math sink in. Years of being under his dominance instilled in me a thirst for knowledge, but left a deep feeling of insecurity. He remains the most insensitive individual I've ever met, and I wondered, as I may have done in the past, if he'd given me constant drilling to compensate for his own failures of achievement.

My mother gave me little love, counseling me as though I was one of her pupils, approving and even encouraging the course of action my father took with me. I had no friends, sometimes longing for a brother or sister to ease the loneliness, but things never changed, and I often wondered if they adopted me. What was most important to my parents was to see me excel at my subjects, and I disciplined myself at a young age, burying myself in books and mastering complex mathematical formulas. In some ways I could see how my parents influenced my character traits for making me a shallow, self-absorbed individual. Of course, this could play a part in the problems of a marriage, and I wondered if I was just now, for the first time, realizing this.

Having finished the first photo album, I opened the second and in one of the first photos I saw a girl standing and laughing in a bikini that caught my eye. Too thin to rate as a bathing beauty, yet I saw something striking in the happiness shown in her face and the way her long wavy hair hung in the breeze. Finding it hard to turn my attention away from this particular photo, my curiosity caused me to ask, "Who is this person?"

Julia's reaction was to cover the photo with her hand, "I hate that photograph—it's me."

Roger chuckled, "That didn't look anything like you."

Julia then removed her hand, "That picture was taken before we married, when Paul and I were going to school at the University of Michigan, which is where we met."

After further scrutinizing the photo, I gazed at her for a moment, thinking how much she'd improved with age, filling out to gain a fine,

shapely figure. I then turned to comment to Roger, "Strange as it may seem, I remember her best as I see her in this photograph."

Julia gave me a curious look, and then turned away.

Scheibel finished his coffee, "Did you see anyone else whom you recognized?"

Continuing to scan photos, I replied, "I recognized my parents."

Julia held a somber expression, "They were killed in an automobile accident five or six years ago."

"It's understandable and only natural that you'd recognize those closest to you, and these memories will help serve to link you with others, and gaps will gradually close. By the way, I thought you said your daughter would be home soon?"

"That was Connie that called, and she'll be home a little later than expected."

Then I saw a photograph of a distinguished looking middle-aged man whom I recognized, and I squinted while moving in closer to focus on his face. He stood alone in the photograph wearing a white lab coat with a photo ID attached to it, looking like a doctor or a research analyst. Wearing a kind, casual smile with hair combed straight back, I believed him to be of German descent, and I asked, "Who is this?"

Julia looked at the photo, "That is Joseph Heisler, a man you worked under for four years in a Los Alamos, New Mexico research program." Then Julia sounded off with what I recognized to be a German accent, "Yah, dis is someone whom I think you might recognize." Then she returned to her normal speaking voice, "He must've come over to this country after the Second World War, had this strong German accent, and he may have been a member of the Hitler Youth Organization. I think you told me you heard he died some time ago, but he was someone you had great respect for."

Sitting there gazing at this man's features, his image struck a chord with me, but my failure to resurrect any memories of him stopped me from linking him to my past.

Scheibel took a look at his watch, and then turned to Julia, "You know, we've made some progress, but it might help if the two of you two spent a little time alone here together."

“Do you really think that’s a good idea, Roger, he doesn’t even know me.”

“That may be, but regardless of his state of mind, he’s the same man he was, his character traits have remained intact, and I’m hoping that seeing his daughter will serve to jolt his memory.”

Scheibel clasped his hands together and leaned forward, “Paul, I want you to spend some time at the university tomorrow, keep your duties light, and just try to pick up on your former daily routine. I’ll see to it that Dean Collins has someone look after you and I’ll drop by to see how you’re coming along.”

“You don’t have a car, Roger, how are you going to get back?”

The university is only a few blocks away, and I can walk there in fifteen minutes.”

Scheibel came to his feet and moved toward the entry hall with Julia and I following him, as if neither one of us was looking forward to spending the evening together.

Again, I felt hard-pressed to make known my sighting of the spaceship, but lacking the confidence to convince anyone of what I’d seen, I hesitated.

“Paul,” began Scheibel, “you have such a serious expression. Is there anything you wish to discuss with me before I go?”

“There is, but it can wait. It’s nothing important.”

He then turned to Julia, handing her his card, “My card has my home number, as well as the number of my answering service, and they can reach me anytime.”

Julia was obviously uneasy, and as soon as Scheibel stepped out the door, she abruptly turned to me, “I’ll be right back.”

“Roger,” she called out for him, closing the door behind her, and I thought this may have been to keep me from hearing what they said to each other outside the house. Still yet, I heard her voice carry as she called out his name again, the sound coming through a nearby window left open a few inches. Unable to make out the words she spoke, I viewed them from the open window while bringing my ear closer to pick up their conversation.

I heard Scheibel say, “I see. I knew something was wrong and that complicates matters because you can provide the best help for

him, and what you've just told me gives him reason not to want to remember. You'll simply have to make the best of the situation until he comes around, I don't see any other way of handling it."

Their conversation ended and when Julia returned to the house I moved from the window to take a casual pose, reading guilt or suspicion in her eyes. Although I didn't know what the problem was, it disturbed me to think she was withholding something from me that may undermine my ability to establish my identity.

"Do you want more coffee?" she asked.

"No thanks," and again sensing she was uncomfortable being alone with me, I couldn't help wondering what I'd missed in her conversation with Scheibel. Watching her clear off the dining room table, the moment seemed awkward for the two of us.

She turned to me, "Paul, I think you'd feel more relaxed if you took a shower and had a nap, a shave wouldn't hurt either, that's if you think you're up to it." Then she placed her hand on the photo albums, "Viewing the pictures helped you to remember our daughter, so why don't you take time to look at them again later."

Julia led the way to the stairs and then the phone rang, so I waited on the stairs while she answered it, listening to what she said to the caller. She cut the conversation short, telling the party on the opposite end of the line that she'd call them back, and returned to climb the stairs. I followed, finding her legs and ankles appealing, and then waited at the top of the stairs while she entered the bedroom, rummaging through some drawers to gather fresh clothes for me to wear.

Looking down the hall to the bathroom, I had this dim, gray vision of Julia standing in a bathrobe, her hair dripping wet, and a look of distress on her face, but then the image faded.

She placed the change of clothes on the nightstand, "Your shaving gear is in the medicine cabinet, and you look tired, so try to get some rest."

Taking the photo albums from me, she left them on the corner of the nightstand alongside the stack of clothes. Just then, the phone rang and she answered it, raising her voice a few decibels to respond to the

caller, “Connie, I thought you’d be home by now. I want you to get home as soon as you can.”

She hung up the receiver, and turned to me, “I’m taking the phone so if someone calls it won’t interrupt your sleep.”

Julia left the room with the phone, and I began shedding clothes in preparation to take a bath, wondering why she’d been short and impatient with me. As I undressed, I collected thoughts about her distant behavior, going over those instances suggesting there was trouble between us.

I sat down on the edge of the bed, reviewing in my mind the photograph I’d seen of Julia wearing a bikini, and it stirred up a memory I had of her. It seemed almost as though the incident was from a past life, and as I concentrated, the memory came back to me with vivid detail. We intended spending a pleasant evening together on an isolated country road using a powerful telescope I’d built to study the planets. Under a clear twilight sky, I arranged the instrument, placing a chair beside it to look through the telescope lens while zeroing in on planet Saturn. It wouldn’t have taken me long to find the celestial sphere except that she kept kissing me on my neck. She didn’t have any interest in seeing Saturn, but I thought it important for her to see the most beautiful planet in our solar system in the hope of arousing her interest in astronomy.

This must have been happy times for us because she was in this great giggly mood, and believing we shared a special devotion for each other, I knew even then that I loved her. Once I had the focus adjusted for viewing Saturn, I secured the lens so it wouldn’t move, and I then had her take my place in the chair so she could view it.

I ushered her into position for aligning her eye with the telescope, “It’s not going to stay there for long.”

She laughingly remarked, “What do you mean it’s not going to stay there for long?”

“Well, it’s more so that the earth is revolving and rotating on its axis as it orbits the sun, so it’s not going to remain in the lens’s sight for very long.”

The spectacle of Saturn in the blackness of outer space dazzled her, and she awed at the detail of Saturn's rings. She unconsciously placed her hand on the telescope, "I think I can see its moon."

I calmly replied, "Saturn is the second largest planet in our solar system, second only to Jupiter, and it has many moons. Of course, it's Saturn's complex ring system that makes it stand out from the others. Jupiter and Saturn are gaseous giants, primarily made up of hydrogen and helium, so they have no solid surface a spaceship can land on."

When she stopped looking in the lens, it shown in her expression that she was moved, "It was beautiful, but also weird and mysterious, like looking at some strange alien being."

I kept watching her reaction, and then she said, "It wasn't quite sharply in focus."

"It seems that way, but that's because it's almost eight-hundred million miles away from Earth."

"How incredible, that's fantastic."

Afterwards, we kissed, and I felt the moment draw us closer together, but if we were so much in love then, why is she now acting so distant?

In the confines of the bathroom, I soaked in the tub in a frozen state while rehashing what we'd talked about at the dining room table, reviewing in my mind the pictures I'd seen. This stimulus spurred ambitious thinking to conjure more bits and pieces of a forgotten life, urging me to carry on the forever perplexing fight to recall previous events in my life. I began to think about the man in the photo who Julia referred to as Joseph Heisler, and those vague, distant wisps of memories awakened thoughts touching on elusive experiences. It seemed I wouldn't be free of the Heisler's image until I recalled who he was and how he fit in my life, but unable to revive further notions of the past left me unsettled...

Chapter 5

THE INVENTIONS OF A VISIONARY

After bathing, I felt refreshed, and finding shaving cream and a razor in the medicine cabinet, I removed the whiskers from my face. Seeing a more familiar reflection in the mirror, I got fully dressed and stretched out on a neatly made bed to ponder all these puzzling events as my mind kept struggling to remember the past. Unable to sleep, I reached for one of the photo albums, and coming upon the photograph of Joseph Heisler, I made a conscious effort to recall how I knew this man. A memory transpired to form a link back to my college days, and as this chapter in my life opened, it was as though a wall collapsed in my mind.

When in my last year at school I'd been encouraged by University of Michigan faculty members to enter a program sponsored by the federal government. High ranking universities across the nation were offering a series of tests to participants whose education followed a certain curriculum connected with science and physics. Rumors persisted how the Department of Defense arranged these tests to attract young scientists into research for the military.

A physics professor named Julius Englehardt induced me to pledge participation in the tests, using my own intellect to dupe me into joining the program. Believing Englehardt had miscalculated in how he'd presented a theory before the class, I made a point of openly challenging his reasoning. I felt convinced at the outset of our debate that I could prove him wrong and agreed to a wager. If proven right, he would allow me to skip the semester finals for the highest grade, but if proven wrong, I'd have to donate a week's time doing unspecified chores for Englehardt. When he delivered embarrassing evidence that he was the wiser, I had to uphold our agreement, and this resulted in my application to enter this testing program. I'd always suspected that old Julius instigated a well thought scheme to rope me into those tests because from the first moment he'd heard about this program he'd tried to enlist my interest in it.

Before beginning the exam you had to fill out a simple questionnaire to rate your character and personality, and in my estimation this was to gain insight into a person's trustworthiness. Actual testing began on a Monday with twelve students participating, the questions were relatively simple, and I breezed through them. When testing began on Tuesday, I saw just ten participants, but the questions were much more difficult, and by Wednesday, I saw only five in attendance. On Thursday, I saw the test questions turning progressively tougher, as more students dropped out of the competition, and by the end of the day, just two participants remained.

On Friday, the two of us were introduced to mind-bending problems that dealt with metaphysics and philosophy accounting for phenomena of the universe. Many questions were phrased as a formula or mathematical equation. I had passed over three equations based on theoretical physics and after finishing the test, I saw I had only one hour left to double back for solving those last three problems. The other student had finished and turned in his test papers, prompting me to wonder how he finished so fast. Allowed to use scratch paper, I jotted down two of the questions, resorting to reconstructing the questions to grasp solutions for them. There remained but one last equation and in my mind, it could never work the way they presented it in the test, and to bring it into perspective I rearranged the placement of elements and added a component. Going so far as to change the question on the test paper to show how I completed my calculation, I then turned in the paperwork, questioning whether I'd failed by having done this.

I didn't hear anything concerning the test for almost a month, when one of the faculty members interrupted one of my classes to instruct me to return to the classroom where I'd taken the test. Entering the room, awaiting my arrival was the man in the photograph, Joseph Heisler, and he sat at one of the tables, and within arm's reach on the table was an open carrying case.

He asked me to sit down, we shook hands, and he spoke with a slight German accent, "My name is Joseph Heisler, and you must be

Paul Weingarte. I understand you wish to follow a career in teaching as a physics professor.”

“That’s what I’ve been shooting for.”

“Well, I’m here to offer you an alternative choice, but if what we discuss here doesn’t interest you, you can always follow your teaching career. We are looking for intelligent, young people, like yourself, who rate at the top of their university for physics and science who may be interested in working on scientific projects for the United States government. Our research laboratories are in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the Defense Department and the military oversee most of these programs. For reasons of national security, those who enlist cannot disclose what the work is about. We require a long-term commitment, a minimum of four years, during which time you’ll be restricted in your movements. For instance, you won’t be allowed to leave the country without special permission first being granted, so you have much to consider here.”

Heisler continued, “Paul, you’re here because your test results show you have a particular knack for understanding physics and mathematics, which is exactly what we’re looking for to take part in these programs. You’ll be making a contribution to science, working with other brilliant scientists who might be involved with NASA in jet propulsion, maybe designing a new rocket to one day take astronauts to Mars.”

“So, I take it I did OK on the tests?”

Heisler’s expression turned serious, “You did better than just OK, as your tests came back with remarkable results. Some of the questions were indirectly involved with work I’m conducting, while one dealt specifically with a problem that has had us stifled, and we were fishing for another way to approach this obstacle. To reach the correct answer you rearranged elements in the equation and added a component—your response was eye-opening to say the least.”

I couldn’t help breaking a grin, “What more can you tell me about these so-called projects?”

“Not very much, for to delve deeper into these topics and discuss them further I’m required to get your signature on these papers.”

He rummaged through his case to produce papers which he placed before me, and one I read had an FBI warning of prosecution for divulging information.

“To make this short, you’ll be under lawful prosecution for discussing with people anything that you and I talk about. These are secret and highly sensitive projects we don’t want leaked to the public. A couple of these are release forms which will allow us to access personal information about you as part of your clearance. Should you decide to join this program you’ll be investigated and it is likely your parents will be investigated, too.”

I paused before asking, “Do my parents have to sign anything?”

“No.”

“If I sign, am I committing myself to anything?”

“Only to the FBI’s warning that you won’t discuss or reveal any information pertaining to what I’m about to tell you.”

My curiosity compelled me to sign the papers and after doing so, I watched Heisler witness them, and then he said, “It’s only natural for an agile mind like yours to have a ravenous appetite. However, I’m restricted on how much information I can give you, but I’m going to give you a little more information than I allow most candidates to have... Have you ever heard of the name Nikola Tesla?”

“I once did a paper on him—Tesla pioneered modern electrical engineering. He was a Serbian-American, one of our most influential inventors, whose experimentation made advancements in the field of high-voltage. His patent for alternating current and distribution powers our homes and appliances, which helped establish the commercial electricity industry. He made contributions to X-ray radiation, radar, robotics, and computer science and he patented the design for the induction motor which powers standard electric motors for the world over.

“He was a visionary who in 1899 proposed some unsettling theoretical ideas about using conductivity of air to carry worldwide wireless power transmissions arched through giant electrical transformers. He devised the Tesla coil—a high potential magnifying transmitter which can increase the voltage from a standard wall outlet at 120 volts to more than 500,000 volts. I remember once reading

about a mechanical oscillator he'd invented—an 'earthquake machine' the size of an alarm clock, producing a high frequency resonating vibration that made buildings tremble."

Heisler grinned, "He was an eccentric genius, a man before his time, and a rival of Thomas Edison, but he never gained the notoriety Edison had, probably because he didn't invent the electric lightbulb. In 1943, nearing the end of his life and in the midst of World War II, Tesla designed a powerful Death Ray and other extraordinary weaponry to help the allied effort. At the time he introduced these inventions, the tide of the conflict was already turning against the axis powers, and the allies were reluctant to pour money and resources into these new weapons. Tesla's response was to take the plans he'd drawn up and shelve them with other inventions he'd introduced before their time, placing them in a storage chest where they remained for years. The plans resurfaced during the height of the Cold War and the United States government took charge over them as circumstances generated an interest in their validity.

"Plans found in that chest spawned two projects. One began research on an electronically energized Death Ray discharging concentrated beams of particles carrying millions of volts of electricity through the air. This weapon could transmit an invisible high frequency electric current capable of stopping tanks, targeting and destroying enemy aircraft and incoming missiles 250 miles away. We found the Death Ray design challenging in that we could not conceive of a satisfactory power source to sufficiently energize the instrument. We're currently developing an ultra-band generator to project the rapid impulse needed to create such an energy source. The second project came in the nature of an electronically charged force field. It came in a form of light plasma, one that could potentially destroy or deflect a wide range of energy waves trying to pierce it, including the repercussion of exploding shells. You probably know that plasma is the fourth state in the phases of matter, among solids, liquids, and gases, but is different and unique.

"Tesla's Death Ray creation has shown promising results and has evolved from its original design. Funding for it took a big boost during the Reagan Administration when they were attempting to bring

life to the Strategic Defense Initiative Program. It's very likely that work connected to the Tesla Death Ray will continue for some time into the future, as our research shows it may one day provide a land based missile defense shield for the country.

"We've also seen changes in Tesla's force field in that we've begun to envision it in an entirely different application. One experiment brought us close to finding a specific purpose for this force field in that we saw the possible potential for its electromagnetic properties to open the door to another dimension. For decades, we've lived under the threat of a nuclear attack, as the number of nations acquiring nuclear technology and the means to deliver it have steadily grown. Going back as far as the Truman and Eisenhower years, our military has sought new ways to defend against nuclear warfare and the destruction it leaves behind.

"We believe we can use Tesla's force field for developing a protective sanctuary for the President and perhaps for other political and military leaders when Washington is under the threat of nuclear annihilation. In our work we've sought to find a way to isolate these prominent figures from a potentially devastating strike."

"Wait a minute, your giving me the distinct impression you've already discovered the doorway to another dimension. Where does it take you?"

"Nobody knows, we couldn't risk allowing anyone to enter it, but I'll tell you this much, when performing a major test we never expected such a strange phenomenon to occur. Having produced a portal to another realm for a little over an hour, we hardly had adequate time to determine what we'd actually accomplished, and the end results caused such uproar. Our laboratories were located back east at the time, and our equipment consumed such a vast amount of power and energy that the entire northeastern seaboard, including New York City, underwent a blackout. At the time, the federal government blamed the power outage on a solar flare, but following that experiment the Department of Defense had no choice but to move us to Los Alamos.

"As fantastic as it may sound, we had in a sense artificially created synthetic space to give shelter and refuge from a nuclear

explosion. Needless to say, I can never repeat that experiment again, at least not without finding an alternative power source, as for some reason it was terribly difficult to restore power to those municipalities. Even now it's hard to believe, but I think the test drew from such a broad energy field that we actually extracted energy from the earth's magneto sphere—our electromagnetic field. However, there's no evidence to confirm my theory.

“Someone as bright as you are, who has a thirst for scientific knowledge and understands how the laws of nature can be written down in a language of mathematics, is destined for bigger things than teaching. The military has a strong presence in the Death Ray Project, and you'll have little chance of finding a place of prominence in that program. On the other hand, you have the scientific insight to take a leadership role on the Tesla force field project, and I believe you'll offer fresh ideas for something that has vast scientific importance.”

As thoughts about Joseph Heisler faded, I wasn't sure exactly of what importance or significance this memory had, mostly because I couldn't recall anything else about him. However, just to be able to recover a memory of any kind inspired me to concentrate for remembering more about those college days.

Dwelling on college experiences resurrected wispy images from the past, leaving me restless and causing me to finger through the photo album again until I caught sight of that bikini photograph of Julia. After looking at it for about a minute, I closed the photo album and placed it on the nightstand. Lying flat on my back on the bed, I gazed at the ceiling while pondering the bikini photo that lingered in my mind and I began to recall school days at the University of Michigan. I remembered that, having mastered a high-level of mathematics, I had many schools offering me scholarships. I chose Michigan State so I could place some distance between myself and my parents, as I'd always felt the need to break away from them to be on my own.

Thinking about the image of Julia in that photo, when we were in college I had long suspected her of seeing someone else, a muscle-bound football player named Gary Schuster. I'd seen them together at different times, seeing enough to make me think she was flirting with

him and going out with him behind my back. She was the only love interest I'd ever had, but even though we'd made passionate love, I couldn't be quite sure that her feelings for me were the same as I felt for her.

Julia often tried to persuade me to get chummy with the crowd she ran with, but I'd always come up with an excuse to avoid participating in their gatherings. She once mentioned about going to the basketball game with some friends, and asked me to come along, and suspecting she'd given her phone number to this Gary, I thought something was in the works. Calculating that I wasn't the least bit interested in sports, I knew she'd invented the idea of going to the game merely to give her an opportunity for seeing this Gary. I almost said I'd go just to throw a wrench in her plans, but instead told her I had a mound of dirty clothes I needed to get to the laundromat.

Trying not to let the situation irritate me, I tried convincing myself that I'd taken our relationship all too seriously, as it obviously didn't have the same meaning for her as it did for me. Probably lying at the core of the problem was that I'd lived such a shallow, obscure life, telling myself that just because we shared a tender moment it didn't mean we're considering taking marriage vows. Before I met Julia I was content drifting in my own little world—a person who has to over rationalize everything, but she changed that by giving purpose to my life. When I was in her company her bright eyes captivated me, and my heart brimmed with warmth I'd never known before. I was a different person, and I wanted her to belong to me because I felt I belonged to her, and I perceived her and me as a couple.

Meeting Julia gave me my first taste of life, and I needed to learn if what I saw in her eyes was real. She led me out of a lonely existence and made me feel wanted. Unsettling thoughts stirring inside me made me question my trust in her, but she wasn't property I owned, and yet I had to know if the affection we'd shared held any true importance to her. My blood boiled at the idea of her spending time with this big oaf, and this streak of jealousy made me obsessed with finding out what she was doing tonight. I hated the idea of spying on her, but fearing I may be losing her, that's exactly where

my thinking was leading me, for I had to know if her feelings for me were genuine.

Pinpointing the time of ten o'clock as the earliest hour she'd be returning to her dormitory, I thought I could wait there and watch how their evening ended. Perhaps she'd return with friends and all my worries will have been for nothing, but I simply had to know if she was going to go out with this guy for learning how she felt about him. Unable to shake the temptation to go, at 9:45 p.m., I started for her place driving a rust-eaten '65 Dodge Dart with ratty seats.

Parking around the corner on a dead-end street, I felt hesitant, but Julia meant so much to me that it didn't seem like the sun would shine tomorrow unless I knew I could trust her. Determined to see this through, I surveyed several buildings clumped together near the location of her dorm before coming around on foot to the front of the building. Noticing the dormitory to the left of hers had no lights on, evergreen bushes lined beneath the front first floor windows gave me an ideal spot to hide and view Julia's living quarters.

Moving to overgrown shrubbery spaced out from the building's corner, I crouched and brushed away debris and dead needles to give me space to sit on dry earth. Only a short breezeway separated these dormitories so I had clear view to the entrance of her residence. Distinctly hearing the chatter of voices, the talk and lively laughter of a group of females coming my way, and they entered the living quarters where I'd taken refuge near the window. I felt nervous until they completed their entrance, their words muffled into silence, but then the light went on in the apartment behind me to shower the evergreen bushes with light, and I ducked low.

Paranoid with fear that I'd be exposed, I sank even closer to the ground so the bushes would provide cover for me, but the light luckily went out as the girls must've went into a backroom. I had no business prowling around out here and realizing how embarrassed I'd feel if the police showed up and confronted me, I'd never be able to explain what I was doing here. They'd think me a nerdy, perverted peeper, and detain me for hours.

Remaining in a crouched position for some time, I was thinking about leaving when I heard a car pull up outside of my field of vision.

I heard a car door slam shut, and then another, and peering out between the bushes, I soon saw a girl approaching in a brisk walk wearing slim-fitting white slacks who could've been Julia. Seeing this young woman in silhouette form, her hair worn different from the way Julia normally wore hers—pulled back and set in balled-up fashion behind her head, whereby Julia's was usually loose and free. From this angle and in such dim light, I couldn't be sure, but then a brawny built guy emerged wearing a bright orange muscle shirt, and I recognized Gary—it was them!

Watching him pin her against the building, they kissed while rustling passionately in the dim moonlight, Julia giggled as her leg bent upwards until her knee met his thigh.

Hardly able to bare this degradation, I sank while lowering my head, wiping away tears streaming down my cheeks, and thinking, *Are you happy now—you mean nothing to her.*

The memory that had surfaced faded away, leaving behind crushing depression. Even though the incident happened a good many years ago, I remembered well the emotional pain it brought me as though it had just occurred. I knew I loved this woman, but at the same time I had growing suspicions, making me wonder if by recalling this episode I was preparing myself for a shock. For now, I had no wish to recall anything more about my past, and closing my eyes, I soon succumbed to sleep....

Chapter 6

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

A few hours later, an annoying, high-pitched hum ringing in my left ear filled my head and woke me. I'd been dreaming just before then, reliving the terror felt when that alien pointed a wand at me and a burst of energy it discharged delivered excruciating pain to bring me down. Last recalling the aliens peering down at me with those huge teardrop-shaped eyes, I was glad to escape that horribly bizarre dream. Expecting I had a headache coming on, this annoying hum in my head drove me to get up from the bed, and looking out the window, I saw darkness had fallen on the land.

Leaving the bedroom to move into the hallway and on to the bathroom, I heard the faint sound of a television or radio playing downstairs. Dark shadows made conditions just right to rekindle a memory locked-in the recesses of my mind. It was the same memory I'd flirted with earlier when Roger and Julia were with me, and I saw Julia standing in the doorway of the bathroom draped in a bathrobe. Wrapping a towel around her head, she appeared upset, as though bothered about something. A candle in the bathroom offered a flickering glow, and I now remembered how at this particular moment in time we had no electrical power, the entire city of St. Louis was in a blackout.

The memory came to life as Julia spoke in a shaken voice, "Paul, I just received a shock while taking a bath."

"Are you sure, the electricity's been out for hours, so how can that be?"

"I know what it's like to receive an electric shock, and that's what happened."

"Did something fall in the tub," I asked, stepping into the bathroom to see the flickering flame from the candle on the vanity, its soft glow lighting up the bathroom.

"Well, if something had, it should still be there now," Julia remarked in a perturbed way before walking away.

I looked around, seeing nothing in or around the tub to account for her claim that she'd received an electrical shock, thinking how this power outage left the metropolitan area in a blackout and authorities baffled. I went to the window to gaze at the outside world that was a black abyss, then pondering our dependency on electricity and how primitive our technology is. With all man's scientific advances, when our electrical service fails it's as though we've gone back to the Stone Age.

Returning to the present, I recalled power company officials could not determine the cause for that mysterious blackout which lasted for twelve hours. For some reason these thoughts made me think of the Callaway Nuclear Power Plant outside St. Louis and in my mind I viewed the plant's cooling tower, concluding that I must've visited it sometime recently.

That bothersome high-pitched ringing in my left ear intensified as I stood in the hallway, but I was still able to pick up the sound of the television playing downstairs. I finally gave in to plugging my ear with the tip of my little finger, twisting it before withdrawing it out in hopes of releasing pressure built up in the ear canal, but it didn't help.

Coming downstairs, I gained a broad view of the living room, seeing Julia sitting on the couch facing the television, the lamp on a nearby end table was on. While a noisy commercial ran, Julia sat comfortably and did not respond to my presence as I casually approached her from the staircase. The program came back on and noticing she was viewing a nature documentary, I stood before her, but she ignored my presence by not saying a word.

I initiated conversation by saying, "I've got this annoying buzz in my ear, and I was wondering if we have any aspirin in the house?"

When she didn't reply, I gave attention to her spaced-out, blank faced expression, looking as though she was in suspended animation. I then waved my hand in front of her eyes, but she gave no reaction. Perplexed by her trancelike expression, I kept studying her features, trying to figure out why she should be in this condition. A chilling feeling then came over me as I had a brief flashback to return to the time I stood beneath that alien spaceship and nearly collided with two black people standing zombie-like before me.

Straightening up, I suddenly grew fearful for having a revelation... *The alien Greys must be near!*

That irritating buzz in my ear remained constant as my eyes flashed to the window and there I saw a stark silhouette figure of an enlarged, egg-shaped head cast from outside onto the window curtain! A tingly cold chill ran up my spine as I made the distinction of a high collar, and my adrenaline flowed just as the alien moved from view.

Alarmed and alert, I tried shaking Julia, but her condition went unchanged, and an unexpected creaking from the kitchen made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. My eyes locked on the impenetrable darkness beyond the doorway leading into that room, and even though I couldn't see anything stirring, I had little doubt they were already in the house.

Expecting they'd have no problem seeing me standing in the light, I held concern for Julia, but fearing another confrontation with red caped aliens, I knew there was nothing I could do to help her. Watchful of the kitchen door while seeking a line of escape, I slowly backed up to the stairs. Reaching unsuccessfully behind me to grab the top of the stair's upright handrail post, my hand finally found it, and I began making my way up the stairs at a steady pace. My hand sliding on the handrail as I climbed step-by-step while keeping an eye on the kitchen doorway, I stopped before reaching the top of the staircase.

Crouching hunched over near the top for continuing to view the living room, I rested one side of my bottom on the edge of a step while gripping one of the spindles tightfistedly. Squatting and stooping over further to extend my view of the downstairs, and my eyes scanned the area down below while mainly keeping watch on the kitchen doorway. Julia hadn't moved or even blinked an eye, and except for the television playing, I heard nothing, but was certain she and I weren't alone in the house.

From out of the kitchen sprang a Grey, its baldhead set in a striking red collar and cape, the large head swiveling to survey the room with those big, black eyes! A protruding wand rising from the cape in an outstretched hand caused me to rear back, and fearing they must be swarming the house, I wondered how I could elude them.

I quietly rose to ascend the rest of the way up to the second floor, then to realize I had no avenue for escape, and I also thought how I was abandoning Julia. Thinking how the wickedly fierce energy in their wands could instantly incapacitate a person, and expecting they'd arrived in numbers, I saw no way of saving or protecting her.

Unable to understand why these beings were after me, I'd taken but a few steps from the stairs before glimpsing back, and on the wall were stark shadows of them creeping up the stairs. The stairs creaked, and they stopped, their large heads turning as if they were communicating, then the electricity was cut-off and the house fell into complete darkness!

My heart pumping hard, I withdrew to my daughter's bedroom at the rear of the house where I remembered a window overlooked the roof covering the back porch. Groping about, a dim glow from the room's only window projected a faint oblong shape across the floor which enabled me to see my way. Retreating to the window, I noticed it ajar, but when seeing a looming shadow outside coming in close, I stepped back.

Taking a position beside a shoulder high chest-of-drawers that had a top cluttered with a collection of slanted picture frames, I instinctively grabbed hold of a short metal lamp with a heavy ceramic base. The room darkened as a figure came to the window to peer inside, and I thought the lamp didn't make for much of a weapon, but it was all I had. Feeling my heart pounding in my chest, I stood still, holding the lamp upside down and raised as though ready to clobber the intruder.

The creature slowly lifted the window to gain entrance to the room, and standing ready, I raised the lamp even higher over my head. Watching it step over the windowsill to set foot into the room, the distinguishable red cape draped behind it slid across the window ledge, then flopping against its backside when it straightened up. As soon as it came to a standing position, I struck at it, clubbing the thing over the head countless times until it dropped to the floor. Releasing the bent and twisted lamp, I saw the alien at my feet as a lumpy clump on the floor, and believing others were fast closing in motivated me to hurriedly exit by the window.

I stepped outside onto the porch roof with one leg to straddle the windowsill, taking a hard look about before taking to a standing position on the coarse shingles. Staying close to the exterior wall of the house, the porch roof had the same pitch as our home's gable roof to slant down from the center to the sides. I stabilized my balance by catching hold of the eaves or main roof's overhang extending above me and descending with the angled slant of these roofs, I moved downward toward the edge of the porch.

Making short steps for reaching the end of the porch roof, the head of an alien suddenly sprang out from the roof above me!

When casting his wand in my direction, I caught hold of his wrist, and we locked-in a struggle to control the aim of the wand with him fighting stubbornly to hold on to it. Our fight for controlling the wand resulted in a bright flash igniting to impair my vision, and I gave a hard jerk to pull him off the roof, and he fell on me with his flowing cape fluttering. We were entangled as the two of us rolled down the porch roof together to crash into the earth!

The impact of the fall knocked the wind out of me, but I'd landed on top of the creature, squashing him. His facial expression showed agonizing pain with red blood oozing from his mouth, and expecting to come under attack by more of them, I came to my feet to limp into the dark of night. Minor injuries obtained from the fall wouldn't allow me to move fast, but I soon took to a stumbling run before coming to a row of hedges running along a low fence. Without slowing down, I made a flying leap to clear the fence, catching the overgrown branches of a bush before landing in an ungainly somersault roll and recovered to take to a hobbling run.

I made it to the sidewalk to see the driver's door open on a white automobile parked on the opposite side of the street, and recognized a neighbor sitting behind the steering wheel. I called out to him, "Help me!"

My eyes widened when noticing he was in a fixed, frozen, rigid state, and I veered away from the car, making a run for the main cross street up ahead where traffic was moving smoothly. The sight of the gothic church at the corner caused me to hesitate, but then a compact,

blue-gray Toyota pickup truck turned onto our street coming toward me.

The irritating ringing in my left ear abruptly ceased as I tried flagging down the driver of the pickup, its lights shining directly at me. Not knowing if it would stop, I stepped to one side to give it room to pass, and as it did, I heard a feminine voice call out, "Dad!"

I watched the truck pull over to the curb, and although I didn't recognize the young man driving, the blonde-headed girl in the passenger seat I knew to be my daughter Connie. She came running around the pickup to greet me and delivered a big hug.

"I'm sorry I'm late getting home," she said, pausing in giving me a funny look. "You do know who I am, don't you?"

I nodded while catching my breath, and nervously looking back to the house, I saw the lights were on again, leaving me to think about whether Julia was safe.

Connie studied my expression, "For a second I wasn't sure if you knew me or not, so you are okay now, your memory has returned?"

Then noticing the neighbor in the driver's seat of the white automobile closing his door, starting his engine and preparing to pull out, I took a deep breath.

"I'm much better now than I was a minute ago."

"I saw some friends of mine who said they heard you'd been reported to have amnesia, and that's when I first phoned home to see if you were all right. I would've been home much sooner, but we had friends who had car trouble, and we couldn't leave them stranded on the side of the road. You do remember Jeff, don't you?" she asked, a curious expression on her face as she watched for my reaction.

"Not really, but I'm remembering things fast," and remaining watchful of the house as I shook Jeff's hand, I added, "I didn't even know who your mother was a few hours ago."

Connie had a confused look on her face as she watched me wipe the sweat from my forehead with my sleeve.

"What are you doing out here, and why are you so out of breath?"

"I'll explain later, but right now let's go in the house and make sure your mother's not in any trouble."

We started together for the entrance to our home and coming up the steps, I paused before trying the door handle to look for any sign of life. When opening the door, I saw Julia just as I'd left her, watching the television from a comfortable pose on the couch.

She looked surprised when seeing me enter, "How'd you get outside? I thought you were upstairs sleeping."

"I'll be right back," and I went to the back door to look out in the yard to see if the alien was still lying injured in the grass, but saw no sign of him. Returning to the living room, Julia was scolding Connie for coming home late, and I rushed past them to shoot upstairs while hearing my daughter's reply.

"Why do you always have to treat me like I'm a child, I'm eighteen."

Making a brief inspection of my daughter's bedroom on the second floor, I saw no evidence of aliens having been there either. I found the lamp missing, the window closed, and when coming downstairs to the first floor all eyes were on me, as though looking for an explanation for my strange behavior.

"Paul, why are you acting so paranoid?" asked Julia, examining my facial expression and mussed hair.

"Many things are coming back to me now, and although I'm not yet sure how I acquired amnesia, what I am recalling is so fantastic that I've just got to tell somebody. I witnessed a V-shaped spaceship in the park where there were aliens congregating, and ever since then these alien beings have been trying to capture me. Just a few minutes ago they were in the house and I climbed out of a second story window to escape them—that's why I was outside."

Julia looked at me with a stupefied expression, "Paul, you're far worse off than I ever could've imagined. I'm going to call Roger Scheibel."

I nodded in agreement, "Yeah, its best that Roger hears this, too, but there's so much of this I can't explain. I know it sounds outlandish, but I'm telling you there are aliens stalking me, and I had to fight them off to gain my freedom."

Julia was on the phone dialing Roger, and Connie looked unhappy when turning to Jeff, "You'd better go."

Jeff acted as though he wanted to hear my explanation of what occurred, and I felt disappointed when Connie coaxed him into leaving.

Trying to figure out why these alien creatures singled me out to come after me, I kept wondering how they learned where I live. Quickly summing up that they'd be returning, I had no wish to stay in our home a minute longer and I interrupted Julia's phone call insisting that Julia, Connie, and I leave the house immediately. Julia remained calm, and suggested that we go over to Scheibel's home where I could tell about these experiences I'd had. Hoping to convince him that aliens from another world were after me, I thought he seemed like a man with enough intelligence to grasp that what I'm telling is based upon true experiences...



Paul Weingarte, a physics professor, regains consciousness in an alternative dimension with no memory of his past, and stumbles upon a strange spacecraft. He is captured by alien Greys, but manages to escape and is instantly transported to our present world. Striving to remember his identity, he's pursued by aliens planning to enslave humanity that use an alternative dimension to monitor our society undetected. In order to stop them, he must enter the Parallel Chamber.

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