

Skeptic

By

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JOURNAL ENTRY 1

I knew that I had changed since the accident, become more introspective, but that wasn't it. Something was different but I couldn't put my finger on it. It seemed as if my senses were heightened like Peter Parker after he'd been bitten by the spider. I was a freak again...and the ancient past was as fresh in my mind, as if it had happened an hour ago, but that wasn't what was bothering me.

I guess I should clarify the difference between Spiderman and myself; when I say my senses, I don't mean my five senses. I couldn't climb walls and spin webs or for that matter do anything that Spiderman could do. I mean the inner senses we're all born with, that some people swear by and others bury so deep inside they never surface.

Call it ESP, psychic ability or whatever you want to call it, but there he stood, and I didn't know how to explain him. He was transparent and as I awoke, I could see him floating there...just above the floor...a split-second glimpse and then he vanished. I wanted to discuss this little episode with someone, but who? I'd kept pretty much to myself after the accident. Not that I was a big socialite before, but I had a small group of close friends and colleagues. Yet, considering how I made my living, they would throw me in the loony bin if I claimed to be seeing ghosts.

I suppose I could save it for one of my books. Terry, my agent, would like that; although, he would probably insist that I write it as happening to someone else. Indeed, my career depended on it. However, he would find it interesting. He probably would suggest the episode would be the perfect thing to break my writer's block. He had already presented me with a journal and suggested I start writing things down, in hopes of breaking it. I started writing a few lines but soon found myself staring out the same window I'd seen the specter standing by. The thought then struck me that strangely, the specter hadn't frightened me, and yet I felt he should have.

Perhaps, it's because of what I do; or the creed which I live by, that is, *everything can be explained in the recesses of the human mind*. I've spent most my life as a psychiatrist and so I believe that everything can logically be explained by delving into the psyche.

I, Frank McMiller, skeptic of the unknown, don't believe in ghost. I believe that people see what they want to see for various reasons, mental illness included. Was I sick again?

Let me explain. I worked as a psychiatrist until I started writing my books and then when they became popular I was invited to teach at an exclusive University entitled, Wellington. I've been there for the past year now. Over the years, I've written numerous books analyzing different cases specializing in people who "think" they see things (the key word being "think"). As I stated earlier,

most people that are prone to these episodes see things when under duress and can be treated with medication.

My writing career, along with my teaching salary, has enabled me to live comfortably having only myself to support. I enjoy the "alone time" my writing allows me. The press has given my books rave reviews but labeled me as, "rather an odd duck" because of my need for solitude (and the fact that I don't do well at press conferences).

My background as a psychiatrist hasn't exactly made me popular in the party circles. People always think I'm looking to find something wrong with them. Besides, at parties, people like to hear fairy stories not someone disprove them. But this all suits me fine, because as I said, I like being on my own and I'm not good at parties.

But what was I to do now? I'd seen something, something I knew was supernatural on one level or another. The past was fresh in the present. What did I do with it? Did this mean the house I'd lived in for almost a year was newly haunted? Was I now just two months after my accident able to see what had always been there? Was it the stress of everything the accident had created?

I had to admit I'd felt something crackle in the atmosphere of the house when I bought it, but who wouldn't? It was a house built 275 years ago. A sprawling country plantation built in 1735 and located just outside of Savannah, America's most haunted city. The house itself looked like something out of a gothic novel with

four columns lining the large front porch, three floors, 48 rooms and a garden you could get lost in. This was the house ghost dreamed of. However, I didn't ask the history of the house when I bought it and ignored the local gossip.

“What did I need this big of a place for?” They asked.

Privacy, so I could write, I explained when I took a leave of absence from the college two months ago, but that wasn't the real reason. I couldn't tell them the real reason. But I think of it every day when I wake and every night when I lay my head on the pillow.

JOURNAL ENTRY 2

The accident had inflicted minor physical damage. I'd swerved off the road and down an embankment hitting my head on the dashboard and fracturing my ankle. My ankle had since healed, leaving me with a slight limp and frequent ache that I babied by using a cane.

My head, I thought, had healed as well, although; my mind couldn't stop trying to find an explanation for what I'd seen earlier. And a strange and frightening theory began gnawing at my brain. Indeed, the very reason I had bought the house.

JOURNAL ENTRY 3

I decided to test this theory and headed for town to look for a book on the history of my house. Hopefully that included a few ghost stories. The sunny attendant at the book store, who introduced herself as Beverly, claimed that she'd read all of my books. She was caught off guard by my request but recovered herself and managed to locate my items.

I suppose I deserved this response. Before my accident I'd spent half my life treating patients with supposed "ghost experiences" and speaking at various colleges on a well of psychiatric disorders that can cause these disturbing episodes in people. I clung to the belief that most things could be explained by some weakness in the human psyche.

Now with my own new ghostly visitor...I wasn't so sure. That's why I'd taken up residence in one of America's most haunted cities. I had to be sure. If my theory was right a lot depended on what I had to prove.

Beverly found several books that included stories of haunted places in Savannah, not surprisingly my home was on the list. I thanked her graciously and left in a hurry, leaving her staring after me. I suppose at 40 my hair streaked with gray and stone-cold blue eyes hollowed into a pale face, I looked something of a specter myself. The effects of the accident had taken their toll.

JOURNAL ENTRY 4

Upon returning home I began to thumb through the books, looking for any information on my house. I was surprised at the information I did find. The three-story antebellum mansion had been built only two years after Savannah was founded by a Mr. Fred Carlyle. At 30 he inherited money and built the sprawling mansion. He passed down the mansion to his posterity, who later operated their own plantations selling cotton and tobacco, until the civil war. The house had been passed down through generations until finally ending up with a distant aunt, who lived as a spinster, in the place until her death and my acquiring of the property.

Various specters had been sighted around the place by people living in the house at the time, a slave girl crying in the corner of the downstairs kitchen, a woman wearing a black dress descending the staircase, a girl bouncing a ball on the front porch but there was no mention of the specter I had seen standing by my bedroom window. Frustrated, I snapped the book shut. Suddenly, there he was. I stumbled out of my chair, backing away.

Trying to regain my courage I demanded, "Who are you? What do you want?"

A malicious smile spread across his aged face and surprisingly, he responded to me, "What difference does it make? You don't believe in me anyway. I don't exist, right? 'Apparitions

are often a figment of people's imagination; attributed to some sort of chemical imbalance.' I believe I'm quoting from your last book."

My book? How could he know about my book? This thing before me that stood transparent and floated above the floor must be a delusion. One that I could not stop myself from responding to.

"What do you want!" I bellowed. The presence then moved close enough that I could feel his coolness on my skin. The rising goosebumps on my skin left no doubt that he was real in some form. His dark hollow eyes focused on mine.

"I know your secret," he whispered. And then without laying a hand on me, he hurled me over a chair.

By the time I recovered and regained my balance, he was gone. I grabbed my cane and hobbled as fast as my ankle would carry me out of the room. My *secret* he claimed! What was going on? Specters of the mind couldn't throw you across the room. I hobbled out to the front porch and stood there gulping down deep breaths of the fresh air. The world outside seemed unaffected by what had just taken place. The sun beamed down brightly and the dogwood trees were in full bloom. Perhaps these visions were all inter-connected due to the strain I was under. I decided a walk in the garden would help me relax.

My favorite thing about the house when I purchased it had been the gardens. They consisted of wide brick pathways leading through a maze of hedges and trees, very artsy. Benches were

scattered here and there along the maze. I sat down to ponder my situation when I heard footsteps approaching through the maze. Unable to move, I sat frozen as the steps moved closer. Finally, bracing for confrontation, I stood and squared my shoulders. It wasn't who I expected.

"Good grief, Frank, what the devil's going on around here? I've been trying to call you all day! Don't you answer your phone? I even tried your cell," My literary agent spurted.

Relieved, I mumbled an apology.

"Are you okay?" Terry asked, his serious brown eyes observing my tension.

I murmured that I was fine.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," I said patting his back, "Relax. You need to smile more." Knowing I should offer him some explanation, especially since he'd driven the 15 miles out of the city I offered, "I've been getting headache's lately and I forgot to charge my cell. The house is so big Terrance, I never heard the downstairs phone ring."

Terry scanned my face doubtful about my excuse, "Let's go have a lemonade, Frank."

JOURNAL ENTRY 5

I was sitting on the front porch sipping my lemonade, when Terry returned from the bathroom, " Did you know your phone cord was disconnected? You only have one house phone, right?"

"Yes," I replied. "I need quiet to write. I must have taken it out while I was writing and forgotten to reconnect it."

"So, then you're writing again?"

"Yes," I lied.

"Ah, whose latest haunting experience are you going to disprove this time?"

"I'm working on a special case."

"Really? Is it top secret?"

"It's private until it's finished."

"Now come on, Frank. We've never actually been close, but I am your agent, and you've always let me know what you were working on before."

"I don't want to discuss it," I said firmly.

Terry's eyes were thoughtful for a moment and then he responded, "I'm going to head back into town. You sure you don't need anything?"

"No thanks."

Terry studied me a moment longer, knowing that I was his meal ticket and that he couldn't afford for me to go off the deep end. He seemed to come to terms with whatever he concluded and replied, "I'll see you later, Frank." He bounced down the stairs to his

car. Upon reaching his car, he turned toward the house in order to say a few last words to me and his expression froze.

"Frank, do you have someone staying with you?"

A chill passed over me, "No."

"Hmm, I could have sworn I saw someone standing by the attic window."

"You're not seeing ghosts are you, Terry?" I managed, forcing a weak smile. "Maybe you should come in for a consultation."

He smiled back, "No just shadows." He paused for a moment, staring at the window, then hopped in his car and drove off.

I felt the blood drain from my face. That was too close.

I bounded out of my chair and hobbled up the stairs to the attic, pulled out my key and unlocked the attic door.

"What the hell are you doing by the window!" I shouted at her.

JOURNAL ENTRY 6

"Nothing, Nothing!" She clamored, scooting away from me and rubbing the bruises on her right arm. I locked the door behind and approached her.

"Suzana," I pleaded, "if they know you're here, they'll come. Do you want that?"

"No," she said recovering. "No, I don't."

"Okay," I said gently. "Then you have to keep hidden. Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat?"

"Why do you lock me in the attic?" She asked bluntly. "Why can't I go downstairs?"

"It's better this way. You have to trust me," I replied.

"I do," She swore, attempting her most innocent look. But I could see that under her mask she thought I was insane. Sensing my disbelief, she sat submissively on the edge of her bed. "Could you bring me a drink of water?" She pleaded. I exited into her bathroom and came out with a glass of water.

"Look, I'll fix you some lunch," I replied. "Would you like some lemonade?" She nodded. "Why don't you open the window facing the back of the house and get some fresh air? I'm not expecting anyone else for the rest of the day."

"I already tried the windows, their stuck," she explained, staring at the floor.

"I'll open one for you." I heaved, pulling open the musty window.

I left her room, locking the door. I returned a few minutes later with the lemonade. Placing it on her night stand I observed her. She was 19 years old and beautiful, I thought... and mine. I loved her intensely. I'd loved her since the first time I'd laid eyes on her just two months ago. Did she love me? Well, she barely knew me. Maybe once she got to know me.

"Suzana," I spoke. "I saw him today. Have you seen him?"

The frightened look returned in her eyes, "Who did you see?"

"The man I told you about. The one I saw the night of the accident. His presence is getting clearer. Soon I'll be able to make out his features."

"He'll hurt you," She threatened. "You'd better let me go."

"You know I can't do that," I kissed her cheek, she flinched and turned away. Pulling her into my arms my hands clasped her oval face, "Don't be mad, Suzana. You know this is for the best."

She glared at me, her green eyes flashing, her loose dark curls falling gently around her thin shoulders. My arms encompassed her small frame beneath the nightgown I had bought her. "Why don't you get dressed?" I suggested.

"Why?" she murmured sarcastically. "Are we going somewhere?"

"Suzana, you know the answer to that question."

Giving up she seemed to go limp in my embrace. I lifted her gently and carried her to the bed pulling back the covers and

tucking her in, "Perhaps you should rest, I know you've been under a strain." She didn't answer. I proceeded to the door, "Things will get easier when you accept your situation. I'll send your lunch up in the dumbwaiter." I locked her door and hobbled downstairs. How I loved her. How I wished I could set her free, but I knew if I did, she'd leave and I couldn't let her do that.

I returned downstairs, sent her lunch up in the dumbwaiter, and then went into my library to think about what I'd seen. In spite of the history of the house, the presence I'd seen was dressed in modern day attire and there was something else about the specter that I couldn't seem to bring forward in my mind.

Suddenly it was there...familiarity. I knew the man who'd appeared to me and he was not someone from the distant past, but someone from the recent past, and it made perfect sense why he knew my secret. I was amazed. How could I not recognize him? Repressed memory? Was I trying to forget? I knew now what must be done. Suzana I guessed, by her response, had seen him too and was very afraid of him, or maybe just of me...I didn't know anymore. I heard someone stumbling down the stairs. Could Suzana have gotten lose? I rushed to the stairway but found nothing. No one was coming down the stairs.

Was I losing my mind? I needed a drink. I reached for the decanter of brandy in the library but found it empty. I'd have to go into town. With the valium I'd put in her lemonade, Suzanna would be asleep for awhile. It was safe to leave. And then it suddenly dawned on

me what I would have to do in order to rid myself of the apparition. I glanced painfully upward toward Suzana's room.

It must be done, I thought.

As much as I loved her it was getting too risky keeping her as I was. I'd seen the way she looked at me. She was getting more and more paranoid by the moment. So, I made a list of supplies to get in town that included brandy, rope and a pickaxe.

JOURNAL ENTRY 7

I returned quickly enough with the supplies I needed. Downing the brandy, I hurriedly made my preparations hoping to get everything ready before the effects of the valium completely wore off. Suzana needed to be in a relaxed state for what lay ahead or she might put up too much of a fight. I had a second glass of brandy for my nerves and then I went to work. I took the pickax down to the basement and laid it across the wooden floor. According to the historical claims, somewhere beneath the wooden floor lay a trap door that opened up into a pit. A pit that was used as a prison for the patriots in the revolutionary war. Many died below. Tonight, I would find it and it would again be used as a tomb.

JOURNAL ENTRY 8

It wasn't long before the pickax caught on something. I pulled the plank up and underneath lay the handle for the trap door just as the story claimed.

"Truth is greater than fiction," I laughed to myself, pulling off the remaining wood.

I reached down and took the handle of the trap door and swung it wide. It landed with an unearthly thud and a bone chilling coldness caressed me and wrapped around my spine. Was it that cold beneath the earth? Well, it didn't matter because the occupant of this tomb would not be complaining. I stood there for a moment, entranced. Then I realized I must go and prepare Suzana.

As I turned to leave, I felt a cold chill surround me and a voice from out of the pit whisper, "Help us."

I fell forward, tripping over my pickax, and stumbling up the stairs. When I reached the top, I was panting and struggling to gain control of my frayed nerves. I surprised myself by laughing at my predicament. It was a high-pitched fevered sound that reminded me my nerves were on edge.

But I knew why I laughed. Frank McMiller, renowned author and skeptic, who'd diagnosed many patients of paranoid delusions was being haunted by ghosts? Could it be possible they existed?

Well, I thought, isn't that the reason I bought the house? To find out?

I decided to rest for a moment, for the task at hand, I would need all the energy of my heart. I sat on the stool in the kitchen and rested. I reassured myself that what had taken place was not my fault. I had not sought Suzana out, she had come to me.

My mind went back prior to the accident, "Professor McMiller," she had said upon entering my office. "My name is Suzana Chase. I was in your psychology class today. You probably don't remember me."

She was wrong, I had. She was a strikingly beautiful girl and hard to forget. She continued, "I know that you seem to be of the opinion that ghosts and other phenomenon don't exist, but I'm here to attest to you that they do."

I remember smiling at her and her naïveté. She was young and young people tend to be of the mindset that loves drama and adventure. She evidently had the kind of mind that fed on stories of the unknown rather than their rational explanations. She didn't understand that in stressful events the human mind can invent many things in order to relieve its occupant from the turmoil and trauma that it is going through. She also obviously wasn't aware how open the human mind was to suggestion.

Instead of arguing with her, however; I simply replied, "So where is your proof?"

She then smiled, happy that I was going to at least listen to her theory, "You said that these things occur under stressful events. But what if the person is not stressed?"

"Well, then I would suggest some type of mental illness, like schizophrenia," I replied.

She asked, "Do you know a Madelynn Carrington?"

My face went white. "I did once," I replied cautiously.

"I'm her daughter." She replied. Then seeing my shock, she looked uncomfortable and turned and left my office.

JOURNAL ENTRY 9

I sat in shock and repeated the name that had once been so dear to me, but that I had not spoken in years, "Madelynn

Carrington." Maddy had been a believer in the appearance of psychic phenomenon, a "ghost chaser" as I used to call her. I had nicknamed her Daphne, because she had beautiful red hair and green eyes like Daphne on *Scooby Doo*. I was in love with Maddy Carrington and she was in love with me. What happened is part of my secret. The part I can't tell anyone. Did Suzana know about my secret? I wondered nervously. Sliding all the papers off my desk and stuffing them into my briefcase, I hopped out of my seat to catch up with Suzana. I couldn't risk her telling anyone my secret. But would Maddy be foolish enough to tell her? I raced down the hall in search of Suzana. She wasn't down the first corridor so then I turned left and almost collided with another student. I apologized quickly and continued on my way down the corridor. I reached the door exiting the building before I finally caught sight of her. Her long black hair blowing in the breeze. She looked like a witch capable of possessing any man she chose.

I stumbled out the door and finally caught up with her, "Miss Chase, you said you had proof."

"I do," She said. "My mother was proof. I have it as well." I began to shake, although trying to appear calm. She knew. "I'm not going to tell anyone your secret. I just wanted to let you know."

"Thank you," I whispered, although I was not comfortable with her knowledge of my secret.

She turned her beautiful green eyes, lingering over me for a second, "Are you alright?"

"I guess I'm just in a state of shock."

"Let's get some coffee," she said, "around the corner."

"That would be great," I replied. We stopped off at the coffee shop and ordered two coffees.

"I've read some of your books," She began.

"Really?" I said in an attempt to regain my composure. I'm flattered."

She laughed. "I enjoyed them, although; I would have to disagree with your reason for why people see phenomenon and have psychic experiences. I believe like my mother with good reason, that ghost really do exist and I think that deep down you know it too."

I didn't say anything. Then I finally replied, "I heard about your mother. I'm sorry. Breast Cancer is a terrible thing."

She replied, "Her death was not peaceful. It's been a tough year."

"I did not know she had a daughter."

"She married shortly after you two broke up. A guy she'd known for a long time. They had been writing even when you were dating. She was young when I was born."

"Yes," I said, "she must have been."

She smiled, "My mother liked you a lot. She spoke very highly of you. She said if ever I needed help, I was to go to you."

"Are you in some sort of trouble?" I asked, concerned.

"Not exactly," she said then changed the subject. "I just wanted to get to know you. She told me many things about you and then before she died..." She stopped mid-sentence and asked, "Are you married?"

Surprised, I chuckled. "No"

"Kids?"

"No, I live alone and unfortunately, I am not popular in the social crowds. I spend so much time doing research for my books."

"I see," she said. "That would explain why you are single. You are very attractive."

I laughed again at this, "You are sure to get a good grade now."

She smiled slowly while her green eyes observed me intensely, "I have something else to tell you, but I think it should wait. I'll come by your house tomorrow. " She quickly picked up her coffee and left before I could ask her how she knew where I lived.

Now looking up at her room I didn't know how I was going to do what I had to do. What I knew must be done.

JOURNAL ENTRY 10

Climbing the stairs, my feet felt like lead, so I took another shot of vodka which seemed to replace the courage I lacked. When I arrived at her door, I took a deep breath, trying to maintain my nerve for what lay ahead, and then plunged the key into the door. The door opened into the dimly lit room. The shades being pulled down, my eyes were immediately drawn to the bed where I assumed she lay in a deep sleep from the valium I'd put in her

lemonade. I went to the bed and sat on the edge, straining my eyes against the shadows of the afternoon that threatened the room.

"Suzana," I called.

Touching the pillow and expecting to feel her soft dark hair, I was shocked to find the bed empty. I quickly threw open the door of the bathroom, but there was no sign of her. The untouched lemonade rested on the sink. My eyes then flew to the back window, I rushed to it and pulled up the shade revealing a missing screen. Fear invaded my body as I noted the steepness of the roof and pictured her body torn and bruised lying on the grass below. The roof was too steep to descend without equipment.

Then a memory of her flashed into my head. She was sitting on my front porch smiling and drinking a lemonade.

"There's a lot of things you don't know about me. Like, that I go rock climbing every weekend. I'm very good at it. I've been training for years."

The memory faded. That explained how she'd escaped. I needed to catch her before she got too far. It wasn't safe for either of us. I rushed to the window facing the front of the house and opened it up surveying where she might have escaped to. I was amazed Terry had noticed her considering the window was all but covered by the branches of a large oak. Suddenly, there were footsteps on the front porch and then a loud knock at the door. I froze, undecided. Should I answer or pretend I wasn't home? I

needed to find Suzana now! The pounding on the door became louder.

Then a voice yelled loudly through the door, "Frank, it's Janice! You've got two minutes to answer or I'm calling the police!"

JOURNAL ENTRY 11

The decision had been made for me. I couldn't risk the police, so I quickly hobbled down the stairs and answered the door. Janice's perfectly powdered face and red lips greeted me with a glare, "Where have you been? You've hardly called the past two months! What's going on with you? I know you said after your accident that you needed some time. And that we agreed that I should date other people, but I assumed we'd still be friends! We've dated for a year! What the hell is going on with you, Frank! I've been trying to call you all week!"

"I'm sorry," I muttered hoping that would pacify her and she would leave, but I knew it wouldn't.

She studied me for a minute, which gave her time to release the anger out of her system and ask meekly, "Well, are you okay? You have wood chips all over you."

"Yes," I stuttered. "I've been doing some remodeling." There was silence between us and I hoped it would make her leave.

"Well, I'm dating again. I took your advice."

I felt a sudden pain in my heart, but nodded, "Good." Then I had to ask, "Who is he? Do we know each other?"

"No," she said "he's an attorney; name's John Brown."

"Oh," I said "Well, Janice, I hate to rush you off, but I have to get cleaned up. There's a shrink conference on campus tonight."

"Oh," She replied staring at my cane. "Can I drop you somewhere?"

"No," I said, "it's a late-night thing, so I'm driving myself."

"With your ankle?" She questioned.

"It doesn't hurt anymore." I lied

"Oh," she replied.

I looked at her olive skin perfectly matched with deep, beautiful brown eyes. She was of Hispanic descent and had a slight Spanish accent which thickened when she was excited or angry. Her tall curvy frame looked shrunken by my words. Everyone in my department said she was perfect. At 35 she could probably have any man she wanted. Why she had chosen me over the past year I

never knew. Her make-up was always perfect, her figure was perfect, her brown hair that went just past her shoulders was perfect, but I knew her. She wasn't perfect and that was what I loved about her. I knew that she bit her nails when she was nervous, was a terrible driver with a list of accidents, kept a messy house and could never remember where she left her keys, but all those things just seemed to make me like her better.

She was the campus librarian and she definitely could be responsible for filling the campus library with young college boys claiming they were there to study. I was sure she was the one for me and that we'd always be together until I'd met Suzana, and then everything had changed. I had told Janice that maybe we should see other people. That I needed some time to think after the accident. I lied and told her it had made an impact on my life. The real reason was that having her out of the picture made it easier for me to keep Suzana. She had looked heartbroken. She understood how I might need some time, but not why I wanted her to see other people. She was angry at first and called me a few choice names. Then she reminded me that she was 35 years old and didn't have time for casual dating. I knew the story from other women I'd dated, their biological clock was ticking, but with Janice there had never been any pressure on our relationship for commitment. We both just seemed to know it was going somewhere and felt at peace. Until, that is, Suzana entered the picture. Now I wondered if I would ever feel peace again. Instead of this gut wrenching, intense

love. That I would die if I didn't have her in my life. Maybe I was crazy. Suzana had begun looking at me as if I were. And now Janice had the same puzzled look on her face.

"Well," I said to Janice "it's been good to see you."

"You to," said Janice. "Call me if you need anything."

I said I would and shut the door. I felt so rude. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My once tanned skin looked pale and shrunken. My mind returned to Suzana. How could I love someone so intensely who had come into my life and destroyed it? But it wasn't Suzana's fault what she had done to me. If anything, the fault was mine. I had to find her.

JOURNAL ENTRY 12

As soon as I saw Janice drive away in her car, I hobbled out the back way. I knew that Suzana was on foot, and knew that I was the only house for 10 miles. I reasoned that her best bet for escape was to hide out in the garden until nightfall and then head for the main road. The woods were thick, and I didn't think she would stray off the path for too long for fear of getting lost. It would be dark soon, I thought, and the idea struck me that perhaps, if I hid further along the path when she came by, I could catch her. She knew I wouldn't let her leave. It seemed to be the best possibility. So, I went back and got in my car and made a show of leaving. I drove until out of sight of the house and its gardens. I parked in a grove of

trees then backtracked through the woods into the edge of my garden, and positioned myself behind a bush along the trail, sitting on a rock to wait. If I was going to catch her....the element of surprise was my best bet.

JOURNAL ENTRY 13

It had probably been an hour when darkness descended, and I noticed a shadowy shape coming along the path. I crouched ready to strike, when I did, it wasn't what I expected. For one, it wasn't her. It was him, my shadowy friend. I took a step back, not wanting him to hurl me into the bushes. His face looked luminescent in the moonlight.

"What do you want?" I managed bravely.

"Where is Suzana?" He questioned.

"I don't know." I said honestly, frightened because I was conversing with a being I could see through."

"I will find her," he said.

I snapped, "What we did could not have been prevented! It was your fault! Do you hear me? Whatever the hell you are! It was your fault!"

"Are you talking to a figment of your imagination again?" He sneered. His eyes darkened with rage. "I saw the tomb you were digging. I know what you are going to do. Does Suzana know what you intend? I don't think she would approve."

"Shut up." I said.

"Ah, she has escaped?"

"No." I muttered not wanting him to know she was out there alone.

"Really?" he whispered. "Then why are you out hiding in the woods?"

"Leave me alone!"

"I know your secret," He said with an evil smile and then vanished.

A wave of nausea hit, but I managed to contain myself and sat back down behind the bushes taking some deep breaths. Minutes later, once again, someone was coming along the path. It had to be her. This time I peered out from behind the bushes before I leapt. My guess was right. It was her. I stepped out blocking her path. She let out a scream and turned to run but was not quick enough. I grabbed her arm.

"Where are you going?" I said.

She struggled against me. I was holding her on her bruised arm. "Please let me go! you're hurting me!"

I changed my hold to the other arm but didn't let go. "Let's go back. We have to do it tonight."

"No," she said "Please, why won't you let me go."

"You know why," I said. Taking her in my arms, I pulled her close and stroked her hair. "You know I love you."

"Then why are you keeping me locked in the attic!"

"You know why."

"It's about the secret isn't it! I promise I won't tell!"

"It's more than that."

"I thought you said you loved me! The night when I came to your house. You said you loved me. You said you'd always take care of me. You said you'd always be there for me." She pleaded, boring into my eyes with guilt.

"That's what I'm trying to do!" I shouted.

"By locking me in the attic? That's your version of love!" She shouted back.

"That's my version of protecting you."

"You don't know what you're getting into." She warned.

"I'm beginning to have a good idea." I spouted back.

"What about Janice!" she shouted "She'll figure it out. She's smart."

I was stunned, I didn't even know she knew about Janice.

"I saw her come by today, when I was hiding in the garden... she drove by. You forget, I knew about you long before you knew about me. My mother remembers. Don't you think I checked you out before I came to the university? Don't you think I observed your every move before I confronted you? I wanted to know how you'd respond to everything I had to tell you. And now..." her words trailed off.

"And now?" I asked.

"I wished I'd never seen you! You are crazy!"

"Let's get back to the house." I took her arm and forced her back to the house.

When we approached the house, I opened the doorway and pulled her in. Suzana looked cold and tired. Even though it was April, there was still a chill in the air at night. I looked at her long and hard, wondering if I could trust her. I decided I would have to take the chance.

"I'll put a fire on, you go and get cleaned up, and then come down here and we'll talk."

"You're not going to lock me in the attic?"

"No, maybe you are right. Maybe I am crazy. But come down when you're done, we have some unfinished business to attend to. He's looking for you."

JOURNAL ENTRY 14

I was stoking the fire when the doorbell rang. I cautiously opened it and Janice appeared before me, her arms folded across her chest.

"I saw Jim Thomas, there is no shrink conference tonight and you never remodel. Why don't you tell me what the hell is going on!"

Deciding my number was up I said, "You'd better come in."

We sat in front of the fire. She was staring at me and noting the fact that I hadn't yet changed my clothes. I was trying to figure out where to begin and how much I should tell her when Suzana walked in, wearing my bathrobe and towel drying her hair.

"I used your shower. You know you need to fix the drain and I don't like the shampoo you use. If we're going to be living together..." her words faltered when she saw Janice.

I felt incredibly uncomfortable, but I didn't know what to say.

So instead, I just sat there like a bump on a log until Suzana spoke, "Hi, I'm Suzana."

"I see," Said Janice.

"Everything makes sense now! I think I should go!" She stood up and walked towards the door muttering to herself.

"Remodeling, I should have known you can't remodel! Those are the ugliest, damn orange pillows on your couch that I have ever seen!"

"I'll see you out." I said figuring this was the explanation I'd let her believe for now.

She turned on me. "You should have told me the truth! So was I getting too old, Frank! You like them young obviously!"

"You don't understand." I replied before I had time to think.

"Of course, I don't," she said her Spanish accent coming into play. "That's what all hormonal pigs of men say, 'You don't understand.'" She had begun to cry, when Suzana entered the room and interrupted the argument.

She spoke loudly, "Excuse me!" And at her appearance Janice completely shut up and started fumbling for her keys. "I said, I'm Suzana, Suzana Chase...Frank's daughter." Janice dropped her keys.

JOURNAL ENTRY 15

I stood in the living room by the fireplace beside Janice, who seemed to be trying to recover from her shock of thinking I was

having an affair with a student. She sat sipping the ginger tea Suzana had made, before she left us alone.

"Are you going to be okay?" I asked gently.

"Yes," Janice said. "It was just a shock that's all. I saw her with you and I thought, well, I thought...mid-life crisis I guess. When did you find out you had a daughter?"

My eyes closed for a moment, remembering when Suzana had come to my house. It was the day after our coffee that she showed up at my house. She had gotten the address from one of my colleagues, told them some fib about an assignment she just had to turn in. She must have been very convincing or perhaps the fact that she was pretty, they usually didn't give out that information.

She showed up at my door with dessert and said, "I told you I'd come again."

"How did you know I'd be home?"

She laughed, "I memorized your schedule."

"Oh," I said, unaware I had one. "Would you like to sit out on the porch?"

"Yeah," She grinned.

"I'll get some milk to go with the apple pie you brought." I did this and sliced it up on the porch and settled us each with a piece. Thinking as I did, that I had looked over my class rolls and although I had noticed her in class, I hadn't found her name. Perhaps, it was a mistake of some sort. So, I mentioned it to her.

"Oh," she replied. "You won't find it. I'm not enrolled. I didn't say I was enrolled. I just said I was in your class. Sort of stopping by." She said.

"I see," I said, but I didn't.

"You see, I wanted to meet you."

"Okay?" I said still unsure. "Are you in some kind of trouble?" I asked once again. She then took the last bite finishing off her pie and walked over to the far column of the porch looking out at the garden.

"I have something to tell you."

"All right," I said taking a huge bite of pie. Totally unprepared, for what I was to hear.

"I'm your daughter."

I choked on the dessert. And thus, I related the story of our first meeting to Janice. She hung on every word. I felt like Oprah.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Janice asked when my story was finished.

I was silent.

"There's something else isn't there? Something is wrong," Janice asked warily.

"Yes," I said deciding honesty was the best policy at this point.

"What can I do?" she asked.

"I can't tell you about it right now, but I need you to promise not to let anyone know about Suzana being here.

"Of course," she replied.

"You're going to have to trust me. Can you do that after all that's happened?" I asked hopefully, realizing that I loved her and couldn't lose her."

She hesitated. "Yes."

"All right then," I said, "You're going to have to leave."

"Leave?" She said.

"Right now. It isn't safe."

I walked Janice to her car and kissed her a long kiss goodnight and holding her gently asked, "Are you going to be okay?"

"Are you?" She responded challenging me, in her usual Janice way. We had met when I returned overdue library books and ended up arguing over the fines. Sufficient to say, Janice won, but she still took me out for coffee. It started from there. Janice got in her car and leaned out the window. "Her mother, she said, "you loved her?"

"Very much."

"Why didn't you stay?"

"I don't know." I said.

"Why did you leave in the first place?"

"This is where you're going to have to trust me. I promise I'll give you an explanation of everything when this is over."

"I'm glad I have you back." She smiled.

I approached the car and knelt by the window and took her hand. "I love you. When this is over let's get married."

She smiled, and her face lit up, and for the first time in our relationship, she was at a loss for words. "Okay," she said.

"And by the way," I said, "You'll have to stop dating John Brown."

"I'll give him a call when I get home," She said and winked at me as she pulled out of the driveway. When I saw she was gone, I headed to the garage to get the body.

JOURNAL ENTRY 16

"It has to be done," I commanded.

"I know, but I just don't know if I can do it!" She responded.

"If you'd taken the valium this would have been a lot easier, because you'd have been much more relaxed when I awoke you."

"I thought you were poisoning me! You were acting crazy! What kind of person locks their daughter in her room for two months!"

"I'm scared, I was trying to protect you."

"By locking me up?"

"By hiding you where no one would think to look! What if Terry had seen you roaming through the house the way Janice did?"

"Terry wouldn't hurt me."

"I know, but how many people do you want to know that you're here? If word gets out...murder has been committed, you know!"

"I know. I know." She moaned.

"That's why he's here. I'm going to ask him what he wants."

"I don't think you should. I know what he wants. He wants revenge."

JOURNAL ENTRY 17

We headed down to the basement together. She stood at the foot of the stairs and eyed the open tomb.

"I can't go down there," she said and eyed me nervously.

"Suzana," I said "he needs to be buried. Under the tarp in my garage is not a resting place, and I can't very well take out a cemetery plot. If word gets out to his friends that we have him, they'll just send more people. We've got to put him in here, where no one can find him, until the time is right."

She pulled her dark hair back from her face and took a deep breath "Alright, but you can bring him in from the garage."

"I already did. How's your arm?"

"It's just bruised. I told you after the accident I wasn't seriously hurt."

"Good, because I'll need your help to lower him down into the pit."

We hooked him up to a pulley and lowered his heavy tarp-wrapped body gently down into the tomb until we heard a thud at the bottom. And then as quickly as I could, I shut the trap door. I was surprised at how cool and collected Suzana had been. Apparently, this was nothing compared to what she had been through before. There's a comfort. My only child I thought, 19 years old, still a baby.

After everything was sealed up, except for the new wood floor I would have to purchase to replace the one I'd torn up, we put the tools away and turned to head upstairs. There he was standing at the top of the stairs descending toward us. Suzana screamed in terror.

"There you are," he said, "I've been looking for you both." We backed up against the wall of the basement. He looked down at his imposing tomb, "I suppose you think you shall be rid of me now."

"Maybe not immediately," I said. "But you'll fade away soon enough. If not, you'll form a strong attachment to the basement and stay in this particular area. We've buried you deep in the earth. That's the way it works."

"I thought you didn't believe in that mumbo jumbo," He said, suddenly frightened.

"I didn't, but a woman I loved did, and she taught me many wise things. I'd forgotten all she said until I found Suzana."

I saw the rage on his face. And he lunged for Suzana who was cowering behind me whimpering. I pushed her further behind me and he disappeared into the tomb.

"Let's get out of here," I said, "before he returns."

JOURNAL ENTRY 18

When I awoke the next morning, the sun was shining brightly. And for the first time since the accident there was no ghostly image standing at my window. Instead, my daughter stood there looking out.

"You ever going to get up?" She asked.

"I guess, all the stress...I'm a little tired."

"I know," she said, "but we've got to work on *plan B* now."

"*Plan B*," I repeated with a thumbs up.

"I'll make coffee," she offered. An hour later we sat at breakfast together, both dressed and ready for the day.

"Do you have any idea who they are?" I asked.

"Nope," she replied.

"What about why they're after you?"

"Maybe."

"Well, are you going to tell me?"

She sighed and looked at the wall, "I think I have something they want."

"Yeah," I replied, "What is that?"

"Second sight," she announced. "Yeah, you know all those things you preach against? Don't you remember? I told you my mother had it. I have it."

"You know, since I met you, my secrets are increasing," I said.

"You don't want to talk about it?" She asked.

"Is there any other choice?" I responded.

"Not if we're going to find out what's going on here."

"Do we have to mention him?" I whispered, looking around.

"He won't come around." She said. "Don't you remember what my mother told you? If a ghost is haunting you there is usually a reason. The deeper you bury the body in the earth the harder it is for them to surface. That was a pretty deep hole we put him in. He may surface around his body, but he won't come here. You see, before he was just under a tarp, in the garage. "

She was brave like her mother I thought, filled with her paranormal logic, and talking about it as if it were perfectly normal. I was going to have to make a change in my lifestyle. First of all, I could no longer claim I was a skeptic of paranormal activity. After everything I'd seen, I'd be a hypocrite and I had Suzana to think of now. She needed me to believe her, and believe what she was saying, and strangely enough I did. I wished that I had believed her mother. The relationship could have worked if I'd just listened to her, but I was a stubborn fool. I hadn't told Suzana yet, but Madelynn had been researching this house when we were dating all those years ago. That was why I had purchased it. It had to do with my secret.

"Suzana, there's something I want to ask you. Why didn't your mother tell me about you when you were born?"

Suzana looked uncomfortable, as if afraid to hurt my feelings, "You know...you two had split up, and you had taken a teaching job over in Europe for a year."

"I know, but why didn't she contact me after you were born?"

"Because of the secret, she didn't think it would work," She said.

"Yes, I guess that makes sense, so why did she tell you now?"

"She didn't have a choice. She figured I needed someone and you were it. My father..." she looked at me cautiously, "the man she married after I was born, Kellen Chase, adopted me. He died in an accident a year before she died."

"Was he good to you?" I asked.

"Very," she said. "I loved him very much and so did my mother."

"I'm glad she was happy," I said in sincerity.

"She never forgot you," she replied. "When she finally told me about you, she said you would always be her first love, and that was special even if you loved someone after. She said that your first love would always hold a special place in your heart."

I couldn't hear this without smiling. Was she just trying to make me feel better for all those years I'd lost with her, or was it really true? I suddenly decided it didn't matter. The fact that she'd said it meant something to me.

"If I'd known," I said.

"I know," she said. "My mother still should have given you the chance." She took my hand and squeezed it. "But we have now."

"Yes, we do," I said, "And what a *now* it is."

"I know," she laughed. "It's a mess. And another thing, Janice was right, those pillows on your living room couch, the orange ones, are hideous."

"They were my mothers," I defended.

JOURNAL ENTRY 19

After breakfast we sat in the library together. "Let's try to figure out when this all started," I said.

"When I was about 8 years old, I started seeing things like a puzzle, pictures and images of things. They would just flash across the screen of my mind. I would see them like when you watch a movie, and it's there playing in front of you. Well, picture that happening in your head," Suzana explained.

I resisted the attempt to offer her medication and said quietly, "Continue."

She gave me a defiant glance, knowing I was analyzing her. "I didn't tell anyone for a while. I didn't really understand a lot of what I was seeing. It was just flashes of different images for a while. Then, one day, I saw something really upsetting."

She paused here and instead of saying in my usual shrink voice, Can you tell me about it? I asked, "What was it?"

"I saw a man on the floor, writhing in pain. The scary thing was, I recognized him. It was our neighbor."

"So, what did you do?" I asked

"I told my mother. She believed what I told her and knocked on the door of the neighbor who lived next to us. No one answered, but the back door was open. So, she went in, and she found Mr. Johnson on the floor writhing, just like I'd said. He'd had

a heart attack. She called an ambulance, and he was eventually okay."

"Did Maddy tell them about you?"

"No, she said she was just stopping by selling Avon, and happened to hear Mr. Johnson screaming for help. She wanted to shelter me from the strange looks she'd received when she was a child. Strangely enough, after that, the visions went away for a while until about 6 months ago, when I saw something.

"What did you see?"

"The guy in the basement. The one we murdered."

JOURNAL ENTRY 20

"Except he wasn't murdered," I replied.

"No," she said, "He was alive. He was walking by a lake with someone. I couldn't make out his face. They were arguing about something and started shoving each other. The man we murdered became enraged and shot the other man. Next, I saw him with two other men leaning over a table. One man spread a map out and pointed to a place on it. He pointed to a red dot on the map. I wasn't sure where it was. I couldn't figure out what the vision meant. I didn't know any of the men, and I couldn't make out where the red dot on the map lead to. I couldn't get close enough to it to see. Eventually a few weeks later, that vision went away, and a different one took shape."

"I saw a large group of people gathered somewhere then suddenly; they were screaming. Someone started shooting, because they started falling. And I was there, but I couldn't do anything. I couldn't stop it and in the middle of the vision, there were three masked men."

I had to interject at this time. "You know," I said, "I wish you would quit saying, 'The one we murdered.' We didn't murder him."

"Then why don't we go to the police?" She pleaded.

"For a crime that hasn't happened? That would look really good. Plus your face would be on TV and one of those three criminals would recognize you, it would all be over then. We've

been over all this before. You were the one to convince me not to go to the police remember? No, we have to wait and figure this out. Tell me again why that guy we murdered-" I said sarcastically, "We'll call him Rolland, since that was the name on his badge, came after you?"

"Because I knew who he was. He saw me at the community swimming pool and approached me. I think he was trying to pick me up."

"Gosh, he's got to be in his fifties."

"He said I looked cold and asked if I'd like to borrow his towel. I told him that I was fine, but he continued to stare at me."

"Pervert," I mumbled, clenching my jaw. I kept cursing myself for having not been there to protect her all those years. But she'd had a father, and from what I understood, a good father, but still I felt I should have been there.

"Do you want to hear the rest of the story or should I just leave you alone with your guilt?"

I realized I'd left her for a moment and quickly refocused my attention back to her.

"A moment later, I recognized his face from my vision. I flinched, and he must have seen it. In fact, I'm sure he saw the fear in my eyes, because he quickly recoiled and said he was sorry to have bothered me. It was like he knew that I knew. That's why I had to leave. I tried to follow him once and he caught me. It was in a public place so he just put his hands on my shoulders and said, 'I

think you're lost.' I told him that I knew where I was going even though I was shaking like a leaf."

She continued, "I quickly stepped out of his grasp and into a corner grocery store. He watched me for a minute and then left. Anyway, I awoke one night and found him standing outside my window, looking up toward the second floor where my bedroom was. It spooked me pretty bad. So, I decided to come and find you. I figured I had nothing to lose. I could meet my real father and decide if what my mother said was true."

"And what did your mother say?"

"That I could depend on you."

I smiled. "And she was right," I said. I smiled even more. Then I asked her, "How do you think he found out you were here?"

"That is a good question," She said and explained that the only person she'd told was her friend and neighbor, Michael Barton. She had told him that she would be gone for awhile and asked him to feed her cat. He lived next door and they had been friends since the 7th grade. He asked where she was going and she'd told him, to check out The University of Wellington.

"I told him I didn't know when I'd be back," she paused.

"Give Mike a call and ask him how the cat is doing," I said.

"And also, if anyone has been by looking for you. Here, use my cell." I watched her dial the number and then walk in the other room. A few minutes later she returned.

"Mike said no one came by at first , but then he remembered a man on the sidewalk one day, when he was locking up the house after feeding the cat. He asked when I'd be home. Mike said he didn't know. The man said that we'd met by the pool and wanted to know if I was still interested in that secretary job he offered me. Mike told him that I went to check out the University of Wellington. He thanked him and left. Mike knew I needed a job after mom died, if I wanted to attend the University in the fall, so he felt comfortable telling him where I'd gone."

"That's how he found us," I said.

She shivered, "You mean he'd been trailing me all that time?"

"Yeah, and he finally decided to make his move the night you came to my house. Somehow, he knew there were only the two of us here. That's why he rang the bell and when I answered, forced his way in with the gun."

"It's a good thing I heard the commotion in the hall and hit him on the head with a log from the fireplace. I intended to just knock him out. I was so frightened, I must have hit harder then I realized. I didn't mean to kill him. Maybe, I should have let you call the police."

I sighed, thinking back. "No, you were right when you told me that if we contacted the police this story would hit the media, and his friends would come looking for you."

I told her, however; that it would have helped if she'd told me the whole story from the beginning. From what she'd said, I thought she was running from the Mafia. I remembered feeling frantic. I felt like an army would be coming to scoop her away and we'd better leave town fast. If I had driven slower when the ghost of Rolland Peters walked in front of my car instead of swerving, we wouldn't have slid down the ravine and crashed into the big boulder at the bottom.

"Yes, but you had me, and luckily I was able to get the car out of there."

"Yes," I said. "You're a very able-bodied driver for a 19-year-old."

"It's amazing what you can do under duress," She replied.

"Do you think the doctor bought my story about falling down the stairs?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "but using the excuse of 'looking for a cane for you' up in the attic, in order to lock me in, didn't increase my trust of you."

"Hey, I did need a cane," I pointed out.

"Sure, but you didn't have to lock me up in order to hide me."

"I thought you would try to leave in order to protect me. I needed time to heal and think this through. I'm so glad you weren't hurt," I said taking her hand."

"We were both lucky," She reminded me.

She was a brave kid, I thought. She had guts like her mother.

JOURNAL ENTRY 21

"Who do you think these men in my vision are?" She asked out of the blue as we sat at dinner. "Do you suppose this Rolland Peters guy told them about me? If that's his real name."

"I don't know. But, that's what it said on his badge, *FBI Rolland Peters*. Whatever's going down, we are in deep trouble," I moaned. "Are you sure you're telling me everything?"

"Don't you trust me?" She whined, sounding like a true 19 year old.

I hesitated, "I do. I just can't understand why an FBI man would come after you just because you looked at him funny."

"He thought I knew something. I could see it in his eyes. He was plotting something illegal."

"Have you had anymore visions lately?" I asked.

"No," she said, staring down at her plate. "When do you think it will be safe to leave the house, and what are we going to do about the body down there?"

"First of all," I replied, "it's not going to be safe until this is over. Second of all, like I said before, when this is over I will have Sheriff Pollard take a walk down the basement with me and exhume that body from the tomb."

"Will he believe your story?" Suzana questioned.

"He's known me since I was a kid. We grew up in the same neighborhood. And I think he'll believe my story, but we have to provide some evidence."

"Why did you buy this house?"

I smiled sarcastically, "I liked the hardwood floors and the chandeliers." Then I shrugged. "I needed some privacy."

"That's what you've told everyone, but you don't have to lie to me. I've kept your secret."

"Okay," I said. "I needed to test a theory."

"What theory?" She probed.

"I needed to see if it would happen again, in this house. And it has. I figured with so many ghost stories surrounding this place....."

"Oh, if only your skeptical groupies could hear you talk."

"Actually it turned out great, because when you showed up I had the perfect country setting to use as your hide out."

She gave me a wide grin, which also reminded me of her mother. She was beautiful, however; it was her own beauty. She didn't look like her mother, although; she did possess my dark hair. Feeling a need to change the subject I asked, "So, what do you want to study in college?"

"You mean I'm going?" She asked.

"With me as your dad you get free tuition." She grinned even wider at this.

"First though, maybe we should do some remodeling and updating to the house."

I raised my eyebrows.

"You know just get rid of those orange pillows," she said with a smirk.

"They were your grandmothers!" I defended once again.

JOURNAL ENTRY 22

I awoke the next morning with trepidation. I wondered how long I was going to be able to hide the body in my basement. I wondered how I would ever know if it was safe for Suzana. Things weren't progressing, and I couldn't keep her locked up here forever. Soon she would want to get back to her own life. My question was answered at breakfast.

Suzana burst into the kitchen, "I don't know where or when, but it's happening today. I saw the same vision of people falling and gunfire. I have that prickly feeling I get when something's about to happen."

I nearly dropped my coffee but somehow managed to gain my composure and ask, "What do we do?"

"I don't know," She replied, frustrated, "but I can't just sit here. You have to take me into town."

"Take you into town?" I said. "You must be crazy! Keeping you hidden has been my goal!"

"I know," She answered. "But now is the time. I need to walk and be around people. It always makes things clearer."

"But what if they find you?" I replied.

"I don't think the other two men I saw know who I am, but I might recognize them." I took a minute to sip my coffee, an obvious stall tactic, which Suzana saw right through as she impatiently asked, "Well?"

I looked at her excitement for a minute then realized I'd lost the fight, "Alright, get dressed. We'll go into town in an hour."

JOURNAL ENTRY 23

It was high noon when I parked my car in the small town 10 miles from my house, preparing for some form of showdown.

"Well," I asked, "Where do we begin?"

"I don't know," she sighed. "Let's just walk around and see what kind of vibes we get."

"Vibes?" I replied, "Great." We strolled casually, as casually as you can when you're trying to find 'vibes'.

When we reached the local bank, Suzana exclaimed, "Nothing's working! Let me buy you lunch. I just have to withdraw some cash." I nodded ascent.

We entered the bank and took our place in the usual long Monday lines. Just like everyone else, who after the weekend, was low on cash. I saw my agent Terry up ahead of me and thought about cutting in but I didn't want to have to explain Suzana, so I stayed where I was. Suzana stated that she needed a withdrawal slip and for me to hold our place in line. She walked over to the table they were on and began filling one out. Suddenly, she looked up, and her face went white. I watched as a look of horror spread across her face. I left my place in line and rushed over to her.

"It's happening here!" Her voice quavered, "Now!" Suddenly the bank doors opened. Three masked men entered; carrying machine guns and shooting in the air. People screamed and hid behind whatever they could find.

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JOURNAL ENTRY 24

The crowd screamed and moaned until a voice with a north eastern accent yelled those familiar movie lines, "Quiet! Listen up and nobody get's hurt. Everybody down on the floor. Now! Tellers come around to the front where I can see you! Hands in the air!" I tried to think of something unique about this criminal so I could give an accurate description, but the only thing I could tell was that he was tall, broad shouldered and wore a ski mask. The other two had different builds, but their faces were also hidden behind ski masks.

"Now what we want is a nice calm crowd and that way nobody get's shot. Now, there seems to be a rumor circulating around that this little bank, in this small rinky-dinky town, happens to be home to some big accounts. In fact, I heard that on any given day, 5 million dollars is guaranteed in house. Let's hope for your sake that rumor is correct. Who has access to the vault?" No one moved. "Alright, I'll start shooting people until I get an answer." He yanked a screaming woman off the floor and put the gun to her head just as a bald man raised his hand,

"No, please...I will get you what you want," The bank manager complied.

"Oh well, that would be so nice and obliging of you," continued the criminal with the north eastern accent. "I just love southern hospitality. Everyone's so helpful down here. He then turned to his partners in crime, "If anybody moves while I'm gone;

shoot first, ask questions later." The crowd moaned and the bank manager escorted him to the back of the bank while the other two goons kept an eye on the crowd. And I wondered how many bank robber movies this guy had watched before he attempted this.

"What an original line. This guys really sharp," I whispered to Suzana. "Are you okay?"

She nodded and whispered back, "We have to think of a way to alert the police."

I admired her determination but felt that perhaps if we just held still they would take what they wanted and leave. I wasn't a martyr. As long as they didn't hurt anyone, they could have my money, which amounted to \$20,000. I had spent most of it buying my house.

A teller who was lying on the floor next to us whispered to Suzana, "There is an alarm on the leg of the desk you're lying next to. It is a silent alarm. Can you reach it?"

"No," I said to Suzana "let them take the money."

"I see it. I think I can reach it," whispered Suzana as she began to inch her way toward it.

I watched her slowly moving her hand toward the desk button. "Suzana no!" I whispered. I watched the masked men eye the room. "They'll see you."

She continued on. She was almost to the button when one of the men shouted, "Hey what are you doing!" She froze, and he quickly came over and pulled her up by the hair, she screamed in

pain. I jumped forward and the man hit me in the shoulder with the butt of the gun, causing me to collapse.

"Stand down," He said to me as he shook Suzana. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Nothing," Suzana cried. The man looked her over. "Well, you're a hot little thing aren't you."

About this time the mastermind criminal came back into the room, "The van is loaded in back with the money. Let's blow. What are you doing with her?"

"I found something I liked on the floor of the bank."

"Yeah, well bring her along. We'll use her as a hostage until we get where we're going."

"No!" I shouted.

"Shut up!" The gunman said, taking another jab at my already throbbing shoulder.

I writhed in pain.

"Stop!" Suzana shouted. "Don't hurt him, I'll go with you!"

"Look," said the mastermind. "Nobody move and nobody get's hurt. When we get where we're going, we'll drop this girl off, and she'll be back in Mayberry in no time. Unless, you don't wait that 15 minutes we're asking for before you call the police. Then you'll have to scatter her ashes."

Suzana winced as the guy twisted her arm, but I was amazed at her courage when she said, "Don't worry, it will be all right. Just do what they ask." They escorted her out the back of the bank.

As soon as they left the bank, the bank manager moved toward the desk to press the silent alarm. I was on him in a flash and popped him one right in the eye, knocking him to the floor. "Nobody touches that button for 15 minutes."

I looked across the room and met Terry's questioning gaze, "She's my daughter." I announced to the room. He looked surprised but nodded in understanding, and walked toward the button and posted himself as guard. I knew I could trust him. I leapt to my feet and headed for the door.

"Wait!" yelled the bank manager, "You'll need this. I slipped a tracker in with the money so that we could follow their movements. This will help you locate them." He handed me a device. "The other one goes to the police, which I call in 15 minutes." I gave him the same questioning glance Terry had given me.

"I have a daughter," He replied.

I hobbled to my car parked a distance away and jumped in. I had no idea what I was going to do, but I knew if I lost her now, I might never see her again.

JOURNAL ENTRY 25

My shoulder throbbed with pain, but my adrenaline was pumping and I knew I had to find her. What was I going to do when I did find her? I asked myself. *Excuse me, would you mind giving my daughter back?* I didn't have a weapon so the element of surprise

was going to have to work for me. They would probably dispose of her soon. She would not be allowed to live if those masks came off. Once they were out of town; her value would be diminishing.

JOURNAL ENTRY 26

The tracking device told me they were going south. It also told me these guys weren't professionals, allowing themselves to be tracked, which made them even more dangerous. A cornered animal is much more desperate.

I crept behind on route 17 at a safe distance until I spotted the van I was tracking several yards ahead of me. Luckily, darkness was descending upon us, and if I stayed my distance, I would appear as just another car on the road. I tried to call the police and realized my cell was dead.

Their van drove the speed limit, I assumed, not wanting to call any attention to it. An occasional cop car passed us both along the two lane, fairly empty highway. I was looking at my gas gage and hoping I wouldn't have to stop. Suddenly, they turned off the lonesome highway onto a dirt road. My guess was that they had another car waiting up ahead incase their van was identified in the robbery. My hunch was right.

I turned out my lights and slowly turned onto the dirt road, keeping a distance behind them, and parked my car in a grove of trees. I could hear them further ahead; loading the money into a different car. There was no sight from Suzana. Had they already disposed of her? I crawled through the brush and found a place I could observe and try to figure out what to do about the situation. These three men had guns. How could I compete with that? Then I

saw her, she was escorted from the van and placed into the car. A neutral colored Honda Accord. She was obviously having some kind of argument with the man escorting her to the car. I felt my blood boil. I wondered what I should do next. I wasn't James Bond. I was a middle age man with a bad ankle. Perhaps there was a way, if I could just get them alone.

As if an answer to a prayer, one of the men exclaimed, "I'm going to go take a leak."

Here was my chance, I followed him into the woods and when his back was turned to me, I hit him with the hardest rock I could find. He went down. I took his gun and pulled him into the brush.

"One down, two to go," I said to myself. I quickly jumped back into the brush and made my way to the car some distance away. The two men by the car were getting nervous.

"What the hell is taking Rick so long?" The dark haired, north eastern accented man complained. My worst fears were confirmed...the masks were off. She had seen their faces. I needed to take action now or it would be too late to save her.

I heard the dark haired man again, "I'm going to go and hurry him up. We don't have all day."

The other man responded, "Good idea Joe, we've got to get moving and cover as much ground as possible while it's dark." Joe left as the other man climbed into the car with Suzana. My fatherly

instincts took over and I worried what he might do to her, so I figured I'd better take care of him next.

As I approached, the guy in the back of the car didn't even notice me. He was too busy staring at Suzana. He had his arm around her and I felt my stomach churn. I knew I should keep calm and take advantage of the element of surprise but my temper was blazing. I yanked the door open and grabbed him by the shirt, and pulled him out of the car, pressing my gun against his head.

Suzana screamed, "Don't shoot him!"

JOURNAL ENTRY 27

The alarm in her voice made me check my rage, and I pulled the gun away from his temple. Her face was pale. This was enough time for the goon I was standing over to kick me in my damaged ankle. The last thing I can remember was falling to the ground and hitting my head. Everything went black.

JOURNAL ENTRY 28

When I awoke I lay dazed and confused amidst some trees. The tracking device lay on the ground in front of me crushed. My head spun as I leaned over and vomited. My precious Suzana was gone. I'd never see her again unless it was to identify the body. I stumbled to my car. I leaned over and threw up again. And yet, I thought, she hadn't wanted me to shoot that man. Why? My mind reeled, trying to figure things out, and it didn't like the conclusions it was forming. The man with his arm around her in the back seat; he was gently caressing her cheek and she...had been smiling. Had she deceived me? Was she part of this robbery? Why did this man she was involved with have such a hold on her? Nothing seemed to make any sense. Was she in some kind of trouble? Obviously, if this were the caliber of friends she had.

I felt helpless. I had to do something to alert the police...but I had no clue where they were headed now. I suppose I could tell the police what kind of a car they were driving, but they would probably change it now. Besides, I didn't remember the license plate. And then another thought crossed my mind, why had they left me alive? It must have been Suzana's doing that I was still alive. I was sure. She must have been in on it. She wasn't worried about me going to the police, because she knew I wouldn't. I couldn't tell them she was involved, and she knew it. I had just found her, my daughter, I couldn't send her to prison. So she knew that they were

safe. And if they were ever caught, she could claim she was an innocent victim. She had made sure her part in it was covered either way. She was smarter than the group she was with. She knew that I would keep quiet hoping she would contact me, and I could make her see reason. Turn herself in. I was a shrink! I would think I could save her!

When would I see her again? *Never*, I thought. I had been played. Yet, never was sooner than I thought.

JOURNAL ENTRY 29

I drove straight to the police station. I told them that I had found an empty van along with their smashed tracking device, and that I hadn't been able to locate them. They saw the exhaustion in my face, and realizing that it was my daughter who had been taken as hostage, told me not to worry. They had blocked off all state borders and would find her. I thanked them and headed home. All I wanted now was to drink and sleep and try to forget the days events. I had lost my daughter twice today. Once when they took her and again, when I realized she was already lost. I drove up to my house, unlocked the door, and turned on the lights. In my living room, two angry looking men sat in chairs. Suzana stood by the mastermind, a gun pressed to her temple.

JOURNAL ENTRY 30

"Welcome home. Have a seat." He motioned to the chair by the fireplace. "Until things cool off and we find a way out of this mess. We're your new house guest."

I watched with some satisfaction as an angry looking Rick, sat with a bag of ice on his head. Evidently recovering from the blow I'd given him.

"Please, let me fix his head." Suzana begged, looking at me.

"He'll live," Snapped Rick.

"Let her! What do you say, Joe?" The man who'd kicked me and knocked me to the ground yelled. It seemed he had some feelings for Suzana, which strangely comforted me.

Joe looked thoughtful then spoke to me, "Don't try anything."

Joe followed us as we entered the tiny downstairs bathroom and stood outside the door.

"Leave the door open," Joe warned.

Suzana responded coolly, "Have you seen the size of this bathroom? There's no window, where are we going to go? I can't get the medicine cabinet open without shutting the bathroom door."

Joe muttered, "Fine, but don't take to long."

Suzana shut the door and tended to the cut on the back of my head by wrapping it in gauze.

"I'm sorry about your head," She said.

"Don't worry about it. Why should you feel responsible?" I replied sarcastically.

"It's not what you think," She whispered. "I'm not involved in this."

"Oh no?" I responded skeptically.

"No," she replied. "The vision...why I saw it...it all makes sense now."

"Explain," I demanded.

"I couldn't let you shoot that man, because I'm very close to him. We grew up together. His name is Michael Barton. He's the neighbor who was watching my cat, remember? I couldn't let you kill him. I love him. He's been my friend since 7th grade. I had no idea he was involved in this. But it all makes sense now, the reason I saw the vision was because someone I loved was involved. The man, Rolland, that we killed...he was staring up at my window because he had been over next door to threaten Michael."

"So you're going to marry this Michael...this criminal!" I spurted.

"No," she said. "I don't love him like that. I love him like a brother."

I sighed, this was all too complicated, I didn't know what I believed. My head hurt and sensing my need she handed me some Tylenol.

"I've known him longer than I've known you. He's the reason you're still alive. He moved your body and told them you'd gotten away!" She countered.

"Then get him to turn himself in," I pleaded.

"He can't," she said. "He needs the money."

"For a sick grandmother? No doubt," I spouted.

She looked pained. "No," she replied. "Gambling debts. He owes those men he's with, and if he didn't pay them they were going to kill me. That's where I fit into this. The man I saw Rolland kill in the vision was Mike's cousin. He was only going to take him as hostage, but he fought back and Rolland shot him. That plan backfired and he needed a new hostage until the job was done. He didn't know I'd seen a vision and assumed that I was just a close friend of Mike's. That must have been why he was standing in front of my house, he could make Mike nervous enough to do the job and when it was over..."

I finished for her, "We would both be dead."

She was silent.

"Then why did he tell Rolland you were at Wellington? Why did he make up that story about Rolland wanting you for his secretary? Why didn't he warn you?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "Maybe because he figured he could take care of it himself. He's a good friend and I trust him!" She stated firmly crossing her arms against her chest.

"Maybe so," I responded, "but things aren't adding up! He's not being straight with you!"

Joe shoved the door open, "His head fixed yet?"

"Almost," she answered.

"Hurry it up," Joe warned and slammed the door shut.

"Why would they want Michael to rob a bank?" I whispered.

"Because he knows all about security systems. He used to install them in banks. He knew how to get the safe open even if the bank manager hadn't been there. When Rick saw me lying on the floor of the bank, he knew that I would be the perfect hostage. He would be able to keep Michael in check if I were there."

"You can't help him," I whispered. "You've got to get yourself out of this. I don't trust him."

"I can't," She whispered. "They'll hurt him. He won't let them hurt me."

"He's one man against two! Suzana, it's too late for him."

"I have to help. I'll get rid of the other two. Will you help me?"

"What's taking so damn long in there?" Rick exclaimed, pushing open the door.

"He's done," She said.

"Good, now how about mak'in some coffee?" Rick demanded. Joe nodded, and Michael shook his head.

"Might as well get comfortable. This is where we're going to be until things quiet down."

"Well girl," Rick said, "How about getting some of that coffee?" She nodded. "Any funny business and dear old dad gets it." He said with a laugh. As he pressed the gun to my back.

It's strange the things you notice under duress, and I noticed the redneck twang to Rick's southern accent. Well, a Rebel and a Yankee Joe. How did all these men hook up I wondered? How they met no longer mattered. The situation was now serious, and I knew if I didn't take drastic measures Suzana and I would not come out alive. My survivor instincts kicked in.

Suzana pushed the door open and entered the kitchen, which was at the very back of the house. Suzana made the coffee and I sat in a chair next to Rick, his gun on me. Suzana handed me a cup first.

"No thanks," I said, and slid it over to Rick making sure to drop it on the floor in front of his chair.

"You stupid cripple," he snapped. "Pick that up."

"Sorry," I said, and bent to pick it up. Instead, I flipped his chair over, grabbed him by the neck, and with all the strength in my body, strangled him to death.

JOURNAL ENTRY 31

Suzana looked pale and shaken.

"He won't be moving this time," I said.

I quickly took the second cup of coffee from her hands then I took the rat poison from underneath the kitchen sink and dropped it in the cup.

"Take a couple of deep breaths," I said.

She did and managed to regain her composure. Then headed into the living room with the coffee. She handed the cup to Joe who blew on it and then took a sip. A few seconds later I heard the cup rattle to the floor and with a startled look, he fell to the floor. And then it was over. I entered the living room and found a pale Suzana standing over his body.

I took her hand, "It's over."

Michael stood watching with a look of relief. Suzana rushed to him and embraced him.

I smiled, "I'll call the police now. Michael, I'm sure if you explain your side of the situation the police will go easy on you."

As I walked into the entryway and reached for the phone, I heard a gun cock.

Michael then spoke, "I can't let you do that."

JOURNAL ENTRY 32

I put down the phone and looked at him, confused. Suzana was beside him staring at the floor.

"It will be okay," I tried to comfort him. "I will pay for you to have a good lawyer."

"No, you don't understand. I won't be needing a lawyer."

"Suzana?" I asked, confused.

"I didn't want you to get hurt, Frank." She responded.

"Things just got complicated."

She grew more hysterical and her accent began to change developing a thick southern intonation that made her sound as if she were raised in the hills.

"But then those borders was blocked off and there weren't no way out. This is my only chance, Frank. I can't blow this. I have to do what I can to take care of my own."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, completely baffled.

Suzana huddled close to Michael. "Frank, it's time to come clean. The man, Rolland Peters, that we killed was an undercover FBI agent who'd gotten wind of our bank robbery plot. He thought you were in on it too."

I felt the blood leave my already aching skull and thought I was going to be sick again.

Mike spoke up, "Now that the other two are gone the money is ours, Suzana. We're gonna make a new life, honey." He

kissed her gently. Never taking his eyes off me. "No one knows what I look like and everyone will assume Suzana, your poor daughter, is dead. Course we'll have to disguise her appearance a bit until we get out of the country. But the only witness to the truth is you, and I think your death will be a suicide, consumed with grief over the loss of your newly found daughter."

JOURNAL ENTRY 33

Suddenly, the doorbell rang distracting his attention. And I swung a lamp off the entryway table at his head, knocking him to the floor. We struggled and Suzana screamed. I was banging his hand that held the gun and attempted to shake it loose when it fired. I eventually, knocked him out. When I looked up, I saw Janice in the corner shaking. She had heard the screams and blown a hole in my front door with her handgun and let herself in. I had no idea she carried a gun in her purse. There was a lot about this woman I didn't know. It was then that I saw Suzana on the floor. She had been shot. She was shaking in shock.

I yelled to Janice, "Call an ambulance."

I crawled over and took Suzana's hand. I didn't care that she had betrayed me. She was my daughter.

"I just wanted a different life," She gasped.

"I would have given you that," I felt the tears stream down my face.

"You would have for awhile," She smiled. "Until you found out that I wasn't your daughter."

I felt another wave of shock.

"I ran errands for Madelynn before she died. I got things she needed, cleaned her house, did her laundry. Sometimes she just needed to talk, and we'd talk for hours. That's how I found out all the information about you."

I sat up and took her hand still clinging to denial. "Shhh... don't speak. You had your reasons. Maybe you were angry at me for not being around." She started to laugh a twisted sick sound.

"You are a true skeptic aren't you? You don't even want to believe my dy'in words. Didn't you hear me? Michael and I wanted a new life! I'm not even psychic. The first time I'd ever seen or heard from the undead was in your basement. Before, I was just playing along," she cried. More tears began to roll down her face.

"I don't even know who my real parents are. I been in foster care since I was four. I went from home to home. Most of those homes were poor mountain families in Asheville, North Carolina. They just wanted us extra kids as an income."

Then she softened, "They wasn't bad people. But the foster kids that come into their house was. I learned that real quick. Survival."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I don't need your sorry. Don't want it. I learned how to survive and take care of me." The tears then again began to roll.

She continued, "You see, those boys I let you kill, they's my foster brothers. They's a few years older then me, but I met them when I was 12. We was raised together in the same home until we was 18. Joe's from up north. I don't know how he ended up in Asheville, but he did. I didn't meet Mike til' I was 18 and outta foster care. You see, they decided in case they had any problems with the bank robbery it would be good for them if they had a

hostage. They didn't want to have to hassle with some hysterical victim, hinder their getaway, so they implanted me. Of course, if a stranger showed up in a town of this size there'd better be a reason. So you were picked to be my fake daddy. You would vouch for me."

I listened in stunned silence trying not to convey the horror I was feeling as she continued, "Mike didn't want to share the money with the other two. But I couldn't kill my own brothers." She laughed hysterically. "So, I had you do it," she laughed again. "It worked pretty well don't you think? "

I stared at her, feeling sick as I watched her different personalities emerging, but then I realized the one she'd shown me for 2 months was not really her. This one was her. A poor abused mountain girl. My heart went out to her.

"Just so you know. I loved Madelynn. I never hurt her. She was so kind to me. She taught me how to speak really well and all the social graces. She was the first person to trust me. Even you locked me in the attic because you thought I'd run. You didn't trust me and I was using my best manners." Suzana paused and looked reflective as if she was seeing something that wasn't there. "I really did like being your daughter though. I wish you had been my father. Maybe things would have been different."

I watched the tears now stream freely down her face. I should have said something to comfort her, but all my years of

training as a shrink failed me as I was caught up in my own grief. All I could think of was that the joy I'd felt at having a child was gone.

"Then I never had a child?"

"Michael Barton is your child." She said. And then she was gone.

I looked over at him and started to sob. Janice knelt beside me and put her arms around me. I could hear the wail of sirens in the distance.

JOURNAL ENTRY 34

Terry came by as I was sitting on the porch. "How you doing, Frank?"

"Fine," I said, "I guess your wondering about your book, huh? I'll try to get it in at the end of the month. It's going to be different then it ever has before."

Terry smiled, "I'm not here about the book, Frank."

"Is there a problem?" I asked."

"No," Terry smiled. "I just came by to tell you to take your time and get some rest."

I looked at him, really looked at him for the first time. He was a tall, good looking African American man, but the thing I noticed about him that I'd never noticed before was that his eyes were filled with kindness. Why had I never gotten to know him before?

"Sometimes you just got to let people in, Frank. Not everyone is out to get you." He put his hand on my shoulder and I extended my other hand and we shook hands. "Call me if you need anything, Frank."

I smiled, "I will."

JOURNAL ENTRY 35

My next visitor was Janice. She came up on the porch and stood there looking me over, "Well, you look pathetic." She moaned. This made me smile. "So, you gonna sit there all day feeling sorry for yourself?"

"No. You here to fix the hole you blew in my front door?" I smarted back.

"Terry called me and told me about the bank robbery. I was worried about you. You expect me to just sit at home and twiddle my thumbs?"

"No," I smiled.

"Good," she said. "Now let's go see what you got to eat in your kitchen. We need to fatten you up. You're too damn skinny and I don't want to marry a skinny ass man." She took my hand and led me into the kitchen, chatting all the way.

JOURNAL ENTRY 36

We were in the middle of eating our dinner out on the front porch when a police cruiser pulled up. My friend, Sheriff Bill Pollard, got out.

The Sheriff tilted his hat in a greeting, "How you doing, Frank, Janice?"

"Hi Bill," Janice responded.

I looked at Janice, did she know everyone?

She whispered, "We used to date." Then she paused and explained, "Before you."

I raised my eyebrows.

"I just wanted to let you know that the FBI is doing the autopsy on Rolland Peters and they will want to know the full story of what occurred. I'll be a character witness for you if there are any problems," Bill continued. "But most likely it will be ruled in your favor, considering he burst into your home without a warrant."

Rolland Peters, FBI, he had access to all kinds of information including my childhood medical history, which explains why he knew my secret. I realized.

"Our favorite inmate is spilling all kinds of beans about the bank robbery trying to cut a deal. He says they were going to drop Suzana in disguise at the next bus station, so she could head out of town. They each had cars waiting there and were going to split up. Until you threw a wrench in their plans. When you fell and hit your

head, Suzana schemed to be rid of the other two. They hid your body. When Joe and Rick returned and told them that you had gotten away, the other two panicked because they knew you had seen their faces. Suzana suggested that they go and hide out at your place until the border patrol left and then they could dispose of you and make a getaway. She said she would continue to play the hostage and that would keep you under control. She and her boyfriend figured they would get you to do their dirty work for them," the sheriff sighed.

"Strange how some people are okay with murder as long as someone else does the dirty work. It appears that our inmate was most confident when holding a gun. He had no physical or combat skills like the other two," The sheriff explained.

"Yeah, and what about Michael Barton?" I asked. "When will his trial be?"

"Michael Barton?" The Sheriff questioned. "I don't have a Michael Barton. You mean Keith Stowe?"

JOURNAL ENTRY 37

Janice stood next to me as I dialed. "Yes, information? I'd like the number for a Michael Barton, out of Asheville, NC. Do you have one? Great." I wrote the number down and hung up the phone. "He exists," I beamed.

JOURNAL ENTRY 38

The plane landed and I felt my stomach land with it. Janice held my hand. "It's going to be okay," she whispered.

"What if we don't like each other?"

"Your father and son, you have to," she replied. "Besides, he agreed to meet you."

"Yeah, but his adoptive father is still alive. The one who raised him and whose name he took," I said.

Janice smiled, "People always have room in their hearts for love."

"I hope your right."

"I usually am," She smiled.

JOURNAL ENTRY 39

I had decided if I was going to marry Janice, I needed to lay all my cards on the table. So, I told her my secret.

"I used to see things, people, who were dead." I began. "But none of my visions ever made any sense. So, they put me on medication. It didn't help much. I found my mother in her room crying one day and I asked her what was wrong. She moaned, 'Can't you get better? You're killing me!' I didn't know then, but I found out later that she didn't want me to turn out like my father, who hadn't died in the war, but in a mental institution. And one day, I came home, and my mother had killed herself. I guess she wanted me to be normal, not a freak like my father and she couldn't take losing me as well. After my mother's death, I went to live with my grandmother and never spoke of my visions or visitations again and in time they went away."

"When Madelynn and I were together I told her about all this. She tried to convince me that it was possible that I had a gift, but because of my mother's death I couldn't or wouldn't deal with it. I didn't want to reopen an old wound. I wanted to keep that part of myself shut down. That's what drove us apart. My stubbornness. She was researching this house when we split up. So, when I came to Wellington I'd heard about her death. I thought about it for a long time, and figured I owed it to her to finally face up to my fears."

So, I bought the house and waited to see what would happen." I paused, "What if my son is some kind of freak like me?"

Janice put her arms around me, and for the first time since I'd known her, she was speechless.

JOURNAL ENTRY 40

I waited nervously at the restaurant. We agreed to meet on neutral ground. Although, later he'd told me he'd like me to meet his father.

I saw a young man around 19 coming to my table. I stood up. His hair was black and shaggy. His blue eyes matched mine, but the face was his mothers.

"Hi," I said. "I'm Frank and this is my fiancée, Janice." I extended my hand.

He nodded to Janice and took my hand and shook it and smiled, "I'm Mike."

"So, you're going to College here?"

"Yeah," he smiled again, "I'm studying to be an Engineer."

"An engineer," I smiled, relieved. "Not interested in the psychic world?" Janice kicked me under the table but amazingly kept quiet, allowing us time to talk.

"No," he laughed, "I'm afraid I don't have mom's gift or understanding for that."

"Awesome," I said.

JOURNAL ENTRY 41

The trip went well, and Janice with her gift of gab, managed to talk Mike into coming out for our wedding. He'd actually said he was looking forward to it, and maybe staying for the summer. I felt a sense of pride along with relief at meeting him.

On the flight home Janice took my hand. "Darling," she said, "I been thinking about you and how you have been honest with me and told me all your secrets. Well, I think I need to tell you something."

I looked at her and waited, always amazed at what secrets Janice kept. "I see a psychic."

I smiled in relief, which she took to mean that I was mocking her. I'd had enough of secrets lately.

"No," she said "she's really good. She told me all about you before we even met. In fact, I think you should see her. I think she can help you with your little problem." And then she patted my hand and I knew that I'd better listen.

JOURNAL ENTRY 42

Surprisingly, there were no strobe lights and no darkened rooms. We just sat at the kitchen table with cookies and milk looking at a perky blonde psychic named Jane.

"So," Jane said. "I understand your problem as you've explained it to me. Now let me tell you how I can help. First, I'm going to meditate for a minute and see what comes from the spirit world."

I waited for something weird to happen but Jane only closed her eyes and then a few seconds later she looked at me.

"There is a woman coming through. Her name is, Myra."

"Yes," I said startled, "That is my mother."

"She says that you've been blaming yourself for her death all these years. It wasn't your fault. She was robbed and murdered by a man who made it appear as a suicide. His name begins with an 'R', I'm hearing a Robert or Rolland. She says you knew him, but it doesn't matter because he is no longer living."

Both Janice and I almost fell out of our chairs. No one knew about Rolland Peters except for us, the sheriff, and the FBI, who were keeping the story quiet. According to Sheriff Pollard the FBI was finding that Rolland Peters had been involved in lots of illegal activities, that if known to the public, would reflect poorly on the bureau. It would probably be best if the story was completely hushed up, and he quietly disappeared.

Jane continued, "She also said that your psychic visions never bear fruit because they are things that have happened in the past not the present. That's why you have the gift of being able to see those who have gone before. She says she loves you and she likes Janice."

This pleased Janice.

"She gives you her blessings for the marriage. She also says before Janice moves in; please take those hideous orange pillows off the couch. She says she had to keep them because they were a wedding gift from her mother-in-law."

At this point, I burst into uproarious laughter, much to the shock of Janice and the befuddled Jane.

JOURNAL ENTRY 43

So many life altering things had happened in such a short time. I knew the truth about my mother and was relieved from the guilt of her death. My secret was out, in book form, but it had made the best-seller list and Terry couldn't stop smiling. Best of all, I'd discovered I had a son. And things had changed. I decided I needed people in my life and was in no way short of them. I was now married to Janice. Terry came over for dinner once a week, and my son was staying with us for the summer. Janice suggested I should write these events down so I would remember everything and not be so skeptical in the future. Skeptical! Me? I knew she was right, so I have, and the thought occurred to me that perhaps, I was finally normal. I smiled at this, as I sat on the porch and watched the ghost of a slave girl skip up the steps, well at least as normal as I could be.