

THE ALIEN STRANGER

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Kayla walked down the hallway glancing at doors. When she came to room 222, she opened the door and entered a room full of empty seats except for a girl of African descent sitting in the middle of a row. Kayla continued towards her.

“Hi. I’m Kayla.”

“I’m Wanda Sue; how do you do?”

“I do the best I can. Do you mind if I sit here?”

“Be my guest.”

“Are you majoring in psychology or sociology?” Kayla asked after she sat down next to Wanda Sue.

“I’m studying them and economics. What’s your major?”

“I just finished two years at LCC. I’m still not sure what I want to major in.”

“Maybe this class will help you figure it out.”

“I just want to be more in self control of my life, but it’s difficult when the world is against you.”

“I’m not against you. I’m sure you’re not against me just because of the color of my skin, and I feel much more acceptable now than I would have in the past.”

“Yeah,” Kayla replied, “but it’s getting warmer. When chaos reigns, it’s everyone for their self.”

“That’s also an economic issue,” Wanda pointed out.

A muscular fellow about six feet and four inches tall entered the room and took a seat behind Wanda Sue. He leaned towards Kayla. “Hi, I’m Bard Sucrets. What’re nice girls like you two doing in a class like this?”

“I’m here to learn,” Kayla replied. “Why’s an all-American tight-end doing here? Why didn’t you turn pro?”

“Hey, you’re a fan. I like that. I figured I needed another year to find my sweetheart. I need this class to help me figure out how to overcome my shyness.”

Wanda Sue twisted around grinning as she faced him. “I’m Wanda Sue, looking for someone like you.”

He grimaced. "Well, you seem very nice. I'm sure we'll have plenty of time to get to know each other, but I shy away from poets."

Kayla eyed him. "I'm Kayla Chalet, not looking for a fray, but what can I say?"

"Hey, show me the way for a nice fish filet and I'll be a poet some day."

The room soon filled with students and an elderly gray-haired man standing up front.

"I'm Professor Overly," the professor said after every student became seated. "This class is a mixture of sociology and psychology. They link with personality. I start with the question: Why are some of us more straightforward while some of us deflect with humor?"

Wanda Sue raised her hand. He pointed at her.

"Being straightforward is bravery; being humorous is defensive."

Kayla noticed Bard eyeing the ceiling. He raised his hand. The professor pointed at him.

"Humor sure helps relieve the stress when things aren't going well."

"Good answers: Humor is directly related to emotion and does help relieve stress, but it can also be a means of avoiding responsibility. It can also be a means of attack, as a weapon to release frustration on somebody or some issue of concern. This class aims at better ways for society to communicate for us to be more in harmony with common goals. We compete by being in control of our destinies, but if forces are too much for the individual to overcome, then we need to join hands to struggle for a common cause . . ."

After the class was over, Kayla became aware of Bard following her out of the room. "Kayla," he said, "it's my twenty first today. Where's a nice place to have dinner to celebrate with someone as nice as you?"

"I'm a waitress at the Valley River Inn. It's the Sweetwater On The River restaurant. I think the fish filet is tonight's special. It could turn you into a poet. Why don't you ask Wanda to join you there tonight?"

"You are going to be there, aren't you?"

"I sure will, from four to after midnight."

“Thanks. I’ll bring Wanda if she wants me to; even though I heard she is a socialist.”

“She does seem very social. Do you know where the Valley River Inn is?”

“I have GPS. Do you need a ride somewhere?”

“Thanks, but I have my bicycle. I live right across the river from the inn.”

He smiled. “You ride a bicycle, go to school and work past midnight. You seem very ambitious and I don’t blame you if you don’t appreciate my joking around. I sincerely apologize.”

“It’s okay. I’m not offended, but I am not rich, don’t have a scholarship, and I want more out of life than just money.”

“I respect you for that and I’m serious. I’m sure hoping to see you tonight, but I need to be careful not to break team rules. I might be tempted to have a drink or two to get over my shyness, which I really do have a problem with, honest.”

He didn’t seem shy, but she decided not to press it. “I’ll make sure you’ll be seated where nobody recognizes you. Just don’t celebrate too much, okay?”

“I won’t. Hey, aren’t you missing an earring?”

Kayla touched her right ear. “It must have falling off. It didn’t connect very well.”

“Here, take these.”

“Are they real diamonds?” she asked while gazing at the earrings he held in his hand.

“Na, I was jogging along the bike path to get in shape for spring training and some guy at Alton Baker was peddling them. What the heck; I had twenty bucks to spare for the poor fellow.”

“Aren’t you going to give them to your sweetheart that you’re sure to meet after you learn from this class how to overcome your shyness?”

He smiled. “You never know. Maybe I’m already on my way.”

“You’ll know. See you later.”

“Please take these earrings with no strings attached. It’s no big deal. I just don’t have any use for them and I’ll get the real ones when the occasion arises.”

“Okay.” She reached out her hand and he gently placed the earrings in it.

“Thanks,” he said.

“Thank you,” she said as she turned and walked away. After all, diamonds are a girl's best friend even if small and fake, and an American tight-end would soon be able to afford the real ones.

Kayla walked out to where she had left her bicycle in a rack visible to Franklin Boulevard. After putting on her new earrings, she walked her bike down to the traffic light and pushed the button. When the light turned green, she rode her bike across the six lane street, past a duck pond and entered a narrow driveway that became a bike path leading to an open field and a bike bridge over the Willamette River. She decided to cross over to take the north side path to Valley River Inn instead of the south side path straight to her home.

Across the bridge she immediately entered a wooded area. Along the winding-up-and-down path stood a tall slim, raggedy bearded guy with long dangling hair. He thrust his arms forward while blocking her way. She managed to break before hitting him, catching her fall with her left leg and left arm.

“Hey babe, can you spare a couple dollars?”

“Sorry, I left my purse at home.”

“It's a nice hot day for a swim, don't you think?”

“Where, in that river; are you crazy?”

“Let's have a little fun.”

“No thanks. I'm in a hurry. I need to get to work.”

She raised her bike, but he grabbed her arm and prevented her from leaving.

She reached for her iPhone in a pouch strapped to her side, but he grabbed the phone away from her and threw it.

“Nice earrings rich girl; I'm sure you can spare them.”

“Take them. You can have them.”

“You also need to slow down and have some fun. I'll show you how, babe.”

She felt the impact of his push as she fell to the ground hard on her back with him on top of her with his hand covering her mouth blocking it from screaming. She pushed with all her strength, but to no avail, as he pushed hard and ripped open her blouse.

“Please,” she was finally able to cry out in fright, “don't hurt me.”

He went limp. She managed to push herself away from under him and get up on her feet.

"Is he dead?" she asked the fellow she suddenly noticed standing a few feet away, being about five feet six inches tall, the same as her.

"I only sedated him. He will wake up in about five or ten minutes."

"Who are you?"

"I am a stranger."

"Thanks stranger. Can you call the police?"

"I can call the police, but I prefer not to."

"Why's that?"

"I am not a citizen here, and I could be arrested and detained for not having proper ID."

"You're an alien too?"

"That is correct. I am an alien stranger."

"Well, alien stranger, it was sure nice of you to save my life."

"I saved your life because I need your help. This body I have grown needs proper nutrition. The leaves, blackberries and grass are healthy enough food to sustain it, but I desire to experience more of what life here on Earth offers. Money provides a more interesting adventure with freedom to explore the wonders of the world."

"You poor thing . . . I don't have any money on me, but I'm a waitress at a restaurant. You can have a free meal on me."

"I will escort you to where you need to go if you do me a favor."

"What's that?" she asked, not wanting to believe the worst.

"Will you sell this diamond and gold necklace? You can keep one half of the money you are paid for it."

In his hand was a shiny gold-like necklace with diamond-like stones. She eyed it with doubt, but she decided to play along. "It's very nice looking. How much do you want for it?"

"I am not sure of its monetary value. I just need enough money to enjoy my stay here. People here tend to respect other people more if they have money to spend."

"Yeah, you got that right. They want it for sure."

"Where are you staying?" She figured it wasn't a real diamond and gold necklace, but what the heck.

"Where I locate is a secret I do not even want you to know. I will find you at Alton Baker Park whenever you visit it. Your diamond earrings will reveal to me your presence."

“Yeah, they will: to you and everyone else, but why there? You must visit it often.”

“It is a very nice park, once owned by the Baker family, who was once owner of the Register Guard newspaper, and they were well connected with the University of Oregon.”

“You sure know the history of the area. Why’s that?” She wondered if he was an educated friend of the Baker family.

“The more I know the more I am able to blend in with the community.”

“Well, the park is just up ahead. I’ll be okay out of this wooded area. Is this time tomorrow okay?”

“Anytime is okay. I will be watching out for your presence day and night.”

She was somewhat puzzled as to why someone as well dressed as he was and knowledgeable of history would be in the woods peddling jewelry, but she was eager to be on her way.

He held in his hand what appeared to be her phone. She took it and said, “Thanks a lot.”

She was about to get on her bike when she heard, “I am looking forward to seeing you soon, Miss Kayla Chalet.”

With one foot on the bike peddle and the other on the ground, she sat a few seconds puzzled before finally turning to ask how he knew her name, but he was nowhere in sight.

She was soon out of the wooded area moving beside the river through Alton Baker Park. The path up ahead was mostly between the river and an expressway. She soon passed Valley River Inn to continue on her way home to change clothes for work. Her blouse was not only ripped. Her skirt had rubbed against the dirt.

Fortunately she did not live far from the restaurant. She continued past it up the trail about a block, crossed over the river on a bike bridge, continued west around a large grassy field and took the first right turn leading to the street where she lived apart from the main traffic. It was an old house that her mother had been renting for about ten years.

She gloated as she took notice of how she appeared in the mirror wearing the necklace and earrings as she combed her hair neatly in place.

When she arrived back at Valley River Inn, she locked her bike to the rack and climbed the steps to her right on into the

inn where she met up with the host and manager, her mother, in charge of the restaurant.

"You're late," her mother said while staring. "What did you do, go shopping? That sure looks like an expensive necklace. Are those earrings real diamonds?" She winked. "Did you meet someone special?"

"Someone tried to rape me."

"Oh dear, are you okay? Did you call the police?"

"I didn't call the police, but I'm okay. I should call the police. I think he's on drugs and is very dangerous. I also need to do something for someone who saved my life. I should be back in about twenty; okay?"

"Yes dear. Go ahead. I'll take care of it, call the police and cover for you if you don't make it back in time."

She walked out the front door of the Valley River Inn, crossed the street to the large parking lot and entered the Valley River Mall. The necklace and the earrings seemed to invite plenty of attention from shoppers in the hallway. As she walked up to the counter at Harry Richie's Jewelers, she lifted the necklace up over her head from around her neck and handed it to the clerk. "I have to ask: Is this worth much?"

He eyed it. "It sure looks like real silver and gold, a lot more expensive than anything we have."

He eyed her. "Are those real diamonds on your ears?"

She shrugged.

He held the necklace in his finger tips. "It's heavy enough." He shined a small flashlight on the necklace. "It looks real; could be worth a lot."

She took off the earrings and handed them to him. "Please, check these out, too."

He examined them closely. "I think they're real. I'm just a clerk, but I can have them priced in a couple days if you don't mind leaving them. They're recorded on the security camera."

She stood bewildered. "I'll leave the necklace."

He wrote up a receipt, signed it and handed it to her.

After more examining of the earrings and necklace, he stared at her. He shook his head, jestingly. "They could be worth twenty years. Where did you get them?"

"An alien stranger gave me the necklace. He said he needed money to buy food. Do you think it's stolen?"

"Probably, if they're real diamonds and gold, but why would he hand something this valuable over to someone he doesn't know?"

"He didn't seem to know what it's really worth."

"He probably didn't know what he or someone else actually stole. There's probably a nice reward. We should notify the police."

"He saved my life."

"How did he do that?"

"He sedated a guy attempting to rape me."

"Are you sure they weren't in cahoots?"

She sadly paused. "That makes sense, but still, why would he trust me with something so valuable?"

He shrugged. "Maybe he does know what they're worth, is desperate for a fix or something. Maybe he waited for someone he thought he could fool to trust him. He could be wanted by the police and was a little cautious of being reported. Do you know where to find him?"

"It's his secret."

"There you are. How about the earrings? Did you get them from him too?"

"No. Someone in my class at the university gave them to me. He said he bought them from a peddler in the park."

"There you are again."

"My mother said she'd call the police. They should soon be at the Valley River Inn if not already."

He reached for the phone as she turned to walk away. The implications of the conversation were troubling. She was not eager to speculate on them.

Kayla, back at the inn, handed the earrings to the desk clerk while asking, "Can you keep these in a safe place for me? They might be expensive and I don't want to lose them here at work."

"They do look expensive. You wore them on your way to work, riding your bike; why do you think it's risky to wear them here?"

"They'll attract too much attention."

"They probably already have, but I have just the place for them."

"Not your pocket I hope."

“Nope, they’ll be right here when you get off. I’ll make sure of it.”

Back in the restaurant Kayla stood alone beside a table as a tall, slim man approached her.

“Miss Kayla Chalet, I’m Detective Bentley. You’re mother said someone tried to rape you. If you can provide some details, I’ll look into it.”

“I rode my bike across the bike bridge near the university and was stopped before reaching Alton Baker Park. He had long hair and a beard.”

“I was told someone gave you some jewelry that might be valuable and stolen.”

“You know that already?”

He nodded.

“Yeah, I thought he saved my life. He said he’s an alien stranger and doesn’t want to be caught and deported. Do you think he was dealing drugs and took the jewelry for payment?”

“That’s an interesting question. You must pay attention to the news.”

“Yeah, there has been a spike in drug trafficking. That rapist seemed to be on drugs. The guy with the jewelry must have supplied him and took the stolen jewelry for payment, not knowing its real value.”

“He’s sure a person of interest. Describe him and I’ll check him out too.”

“He’s about my height and weight, blondish, blue eyes, well groomed, and not at all like the rapist. It didn’t make any sense that he’d be camped out in the woods. And he somehow knew my name.”

“He knew your name? Are you related?”

“He did, but I never seen him before. I’m sure we’re not related, even though my dad did fool around.”

“He must know you from an associate. Where did you get the earrings?”

“You’ve really been informed. . . A football player in my class gave them to me. He said he bought them from a peddler in the park. It must have been him, but still, he shouldn’t have known my name.”

“I don’t think we have anyone with that description on the wanted list. He is probably a distributor from out of town. I’d

like to follow up on some possible connection with those earrings. Do we have your cooperation?"

"You sure do." she blurted out and then hesitated with a stare of concern. "Do you think the football player gave that guy my name?"

"It's a possibility. How else would he have gotten it?"

"Why would an All American football player be involved with selling drugs?"

"It happens. They get hurt, use a pain killer and become addicted. Is the football player the tight end?"

She grimaced. "This isn't good."

"I'll try to keep your name out of the investigation."

After detective Bentley availed a plan to her and left the restaurant, her mother walked up to the table.

"Go ahead and take the night off. I called Betty. You can work one of her shifts on your day off."

"Okay, but a football player plans to celebrate his twenty first. He might be showing up with a tall slim colored girl. We were in class together. He told me he doesn't want to get noticed and kicked off the team, but someone should keep an eye on him. He might be doing drugs, but I could be run out of town for fingering him."

"Thanks dear. I'll let Betty know. She'll know how to handle it . . . Did he give you the necklace and earrings?"

"He gave me the earrings."

"He must be serious. Are you sure he's on drugs?"

"I hope not."

Kayla was now free to wrestle with her thoughts, wondering about the interest and knowledge Detective Bentley had in the alien stranger. Was she just part of a bigger investigation already going on?

Up and Over to Float Away

Kayla was back sitting alone, waiting for others to show up for class when Bard entered the room.

“You need someone to look after you,” he said while seating himself in the chair next to her.

“I guess someone informed you,” she said as a few more students entered the room.

“The waitress taking your place seemed very concerned. So did the detective. What about your parents? Do they know?”

A few other students entered the room and seated themselves here and there.

“My mother works there. My father left us a long time ago. After I became too old for child support, I needed to help pay my way. Two years of community college out at Lane was affordable. A few summer classes will keep me going.”

“You seem very willing to go it alone no matter the risk.”

“When my dad didn’t work, he was out drinking and fooling around before coming home to abuse my mother. She had to work, leaving me to learn how to take care of myself.”

“Sometimes life doesn't seem fair, but it could toughen us up for something better. I grew up on a farm, helping to take care of it. Football at school was rough, but I gave it my all, and the jokes of one of the coaches relieved the tension. I enjoyed trying even harder. I really believe in being responsible. I’m truthful and careful not to play with fire unless I know what I’m doing.”

“Do you fear commitment?” she asked as the seats were nearly full of students, including Wanda Sue sitting nearby.

Bard grimaced. “Why do you need this class? You’re already a head shrink.”

Kayla noticed Wanda Sue giving Bard a thumbs-up.

“If you already know everything,” Kayla replied, “how can you learn anything?”

He grinned. “You must be as wise as Socrates. He said he knew nothing. They said he was the wisest of all.”

“I know I know less than he did. Why do you fear commitment?”

“I don’t. I’m serious. I accept responsibility for my actions because I care, not just for myself. I respect you for asking me tough questions. Did I pass the test?”

Bard and Kayla had become the center of attention. The question Bard had just asked seemed to draw even more of it.

“I just need to know more about you if we’re going to be friends.”

“I can’t blame you for that. Ask me anything you want.”

“Why do you fear commitment?”

“You’re persistent . . . Come to think about it, my dad fooled around and ended up paying child support to someone he didn’t marry. I guess he wanted to make sure I didn’t make the same mistake.”

She nodded. “You will be very deserving of the millions you make playing a very tough game. I do respect you for the dedication of your goal in life. I’m sure your sweetheart will be very fortunate if she can pass the test.”

Some of the other students clapped.

“I see you’re wearing the earrings.”

“I had them checked out. They seem to be real diamonds. Do you want them back? I’m sure your sweetheart would be thrilled to have them.”

Her words drew even more attention. Wanda Sue even reached out her hand as if to receive the earrings.

“Wow, you are a brave girl, and honest. No, keep them, but be careful and don’t get robbed while on your bike.”

A few groans were heard.

“You’re right. I should only wear them for special occasions. Thank you.”

After class, she hurried to the door.

“What’s your hurry?” she heard Bard ask.

She turned to face him. “I need to do something before going to work.”

“What’s that?”

“Sorry, I can’t talk about it. I’m late; I need to go.”

“Really, it must have something to do with yesterday. Be careful. Is that at Alton Baker?”

“I need to go. See you tomorrow.”

She turned away from his concerning stare and hurried to her bike where she noticed Bard walking close by. She met up with him at the traffic light on Franklin Boulevard.

“Need to get into shape,” he said, “My teammates are outdoing me, and they want very much to go all the way this year.”

When the light turned green, she crossed the road on her bike and noticed Bard jogging right behind her. There was a slight down slope to the bike bridge where she managed to get ahead of Bard by about a half a block distance. She took the south side path instead of crossing over to the wooded area and noticed Bard taking a short cut by leaving the bike path in favor of a field, grassless for no water in the dry part of summer.

She continued west until she came to the bike bridge next to the overpass connecting to Coburg Road. She got off her bike and pushed it up a steep path leading to the bike bridge where she got back on her bike and crossed over straight into Alton Baker Park.

She locked the bike to a bike rack and walked over to a picnic table, sat on the bench and waited about ten minutes before seeing the alien stranger walking along the trail towards the bike bridge. She pointed at him. A man came up from the river to the path behind the alien stranger. The alien stranger seemed to be lost, turning his head this way and that to check out the area. He continued his way west, but quickly stopped. Another man was approaching him from the west. He turned to go north, but another man was also waiting in that direction and yelling, “Stop, we’re the police. We need to ask you a few questions.”

The alien stranger ran fast up the winding stairs for walkers to walk across the bridge. He continued to cross over. About half way across it another man waiting along the rails of the bridge turned and stepped in front of the alien stranger. Suddenly the alien stranger went up about ten feet over the railing and down into the river. He splashed hard into the water and came up appearing unconscious to then sink and float down the river.

Kayla recognized the fellow who appeared to heave the alien stranger over the bridge. It was Bard. She made her way to her bike wondering why Bard was on the bridge and why he heaved the alien stranger into the river. She had a crush on him, but now he seemed more like her dad. He surely had a lot of strength to heave someone that high in the air, but showing it off at the expense of someone's life was not a good sign. She figured it was him taking drugs that give him so much strength to toss someone that high.

He was soon in the company of a couple policemen, and she suspected he could now be in trouble with the law. While other policemen hurried to search the river and possibly save a life, Kayla felt helpless, sorry and didn't feel the need to stick around. She hadn't wanted to believe Bard was mixed up in drug peddling. Life events had again disappointed her.

She continued west on the east side of the river and managed to stay out of the way of searchers attempting to locate the alien stranger. She stopped occasionally when coming to a clear view of the river, but she was not able to see the alien stranger.

It seemed an unusually long shift at work. Although she had plenty of customers to keep her busy, she couldn't get the earlier event out of her mind. She worried about Bard getting into trouble with the law, and she felt guilty for being a part of it, even though it was his own doing.

The next day Kayla opened the door of the classroom and saw Bard sitting alone.

"Why'd you toss that guy into the river?"

"I didn't; he jumped."

"Is that high a jump possible?"

"No; not even without me holding him. He nearly took me with him. I'm in big trouble. I'm indefinitely suspended from the football team. My lawyer wants to talk to you."

"I only know what I saw."

"The police seem to think we're part of a drug ring and we wanted to keep him from talking. They have it on camera. Once they find the body, I'll likely be charged with homicide and you could be charged as an accessory."

"Maybe he's not dead."

"There's no way he could have survived that current of cold water."

“There’s no way he could have leaped that high.”

“I didn’t throw him. Nobody can just throw that much weight that high.”

“Maybe they could if they were on drugs.”

“I don’t do drugs and I didn’t toss him in the river.”

Kayla took a seat far away from Bard. She wanted to believe him, but she also feared being hopelessly involved in something she would have no control over.

When the class started filling up with students, Bard got up and left. Kayla felt the angry stares from Wanda Sue and a few other students. She figured the word was spreading fast on campus, especially with the involvement of an all-American who could be a key to winning a championship. She wondered if she should drop the class or stick it out. At the moment, her decision was in favor of the former alternative.

After the class, Kayla sat saddened by the angry stares she received from students leaving the room. Even Professor Overly appeared saddened. When Kayla started to make her way out of the room, Wanda Sue was standing in the doorway facing her.

“What have you gotten Bard into?”

“I don’t know. I’m just trying to take control of my life and he insisted he wanted to be part of it.”

“Well, it’s going around you’re big trouble.”

“Well, maybe I shouldn’t have been born. At least I’m not a socialist.”

“Take care,” Wanda Sue said as she turned and walked away.

Kayla felt it was now her against the world, but most of her life had been a struggle. Maybe it prepared her for the present situation. She had to stay the course in order to find out. She knew no other way, life being otherwise without purpose.

Strange Banking

Back home dressed for work, Kayla held the earrings in her hand wondering if she should keep and wear them anymore.

“You should keep and wear them,” she thought.

She was somewhat puzzled by her own thoughts.

“Do not be puzzled,” she thought, “I will help you understand your thoughts.”

“What, where are you, who are you, are you in my mind, have I gone insane?” she muttered out loud.

“I am the alien stranger. I am in my secret location hearing your mind think and channeling my thoughts to it. You have not gone insane.”

“How are you doing this and why aren’t you dead?”

“The diamonds of the earrings are needed to locate signals. Also on the earrings are transformers for receiving and transmitting signals. They also amplify thoughts that are energy waves inducing action of the physical body. I am not dead because I am able to turn myself off when confronted with life threatening danger, and I have increased the monetary value of your banking account.”

This is too much, she thought, taking off her earrings as fast as she could and throwing them to wherever. She reached for her iPhone lying on the dresser to check out how much money she had in her bank account.

She laid the phone back on the desk while quickly turning to rush out the doors of her small bedroom and house and ride her bike, peddling as hard as she could all the way to the restaurant where she would soon feel even more uncomfortable in front of her mother’s stare.

“I need to do something. It’s important. Do you mind having Betty cover for me again?”

“No. Is something wrong?”

“I’m suddenly two hundred thousand dollars richer.”

“Did you sell the jewelry?”

“No. The police have the necklace. It’ll be mine if no one claims it and I’m not arrested for accessory to murder. I threw the earrings away, but only in my room somewhere.”

“What’s going on?”

“I’m being set up.”

Kayla walked over to the door and stared angrily at it.

“What’s going on?” her mother asked more urgently.

“It’s too weird to believe; too obvious not to.”

“Please dear, let me in on it.”

“I hope Betty doesn’t mind working another shift for me. I need to talk to someone right away. It’s urgent. Lives depend on it, especially mine; maybe yours too.”

“What’s going on, dear?”

Kayla didn’t answer, hurrying to her bike instead. She peddled as hard as she could all the way to Alton Baker Park and sat on a bench for about three hours only to be aware of one passerby after another and of ducks on the pond. Beside the pond on the green grass lawn was one duck leading a parade of tiny ducklings. If only she were a duck, it would be a good time to fly away, but only if she hadn’t little ducklings to take care of.

She touched her earlobe, finally realizing she wasn’t wearing the earrings. She suddenly realized she wasn’t thinking clearly, now remembering what the alien stranger had said about the earrings. Feeling alone with no one in sight, she decided to leave, getting on her bike and starting up the trail, but suddenly she noticed the alien stranger walking towards her.

“Did you put money in my bank account?”

He nodded yes.

“Where did you get it?”

“Where and from whom I received it must remain a secret.”

“Thanks. Now I’m probably a thief along with an accessory to murder. What do you want with me? No way am I getting involved with what you’re up to. So, don’t try to control me.”

“Who was murdered?”

“Everybody thinks you were. Where did you come from and why are you here?”

“I belong to a secret society. We have knowledge in advanced technology and seek adventure to use it.”

“Does your adventure include getting me out of the trouble you got me into?”

“I did save you from being raped, and I will help you even more. Do you have a plan I can help you with?”

“Not yet; I need information. Where did you get the money? How did you know my name? Tell me something about the guy who tried to rape me.”

“The money origin is my secret. The man attempting to rape you is an addict and a dealer. He distributes for very dangerous people. They can be more of a threat to you than the police.”

“I reckon you made sure of it. Can you protect me?”

“I can alert you of their presence if you wear the earrings Bard gave to you.”

“You know Bard gave me the earrings? Did he tell you my name?”

“He did not; I heard you talking to him by means of the earrings he gave you.”

That answer she wanted to believe. The alien stranger spying by means of earrings as transmitters and indicating Bard’s innocence was one she’d rather accept.

She had an idea. “Would you mind taking another dive into the river?”

“I would if it would not lead to my capture.”

“It’s part of my plan. I’ll make sure it’s not a trap.”

“Why do you believe I will trust you after you helped set a trap for me?”

“I did, but you seem to know a lot, like my name, and you can sure disappear in a hurry. You’ll know by the plan if it’s a trap. You probably just did not pay enough attention to be aware of the previous one.”

“You removed the earrings from your ears.”

She paused to ponder the situation. “I’ll be wearing them, okay?”

“If you wear the earrings and ensure me your plan will not be a setup for my capture, I will participate in its application.”

After revealing her plan to the alien stranger, she was soon out of the park where she followed a trail north to the football stadium where she managed to locate some offices. Coach

Molten appeared curious watching her walk up to his desk after she barged into the room without bothering to knock and ask permission to enter.

“I can prove Bard didn’t toss that guy into the river. He jumped.”

Coach Molten shook his head no. “They have it on camera.”

“He jumped. Nobody can throw that much weight that high in the air.”

“Bard lifts weights, but that was high, but no one jumps that high. Maybe the guy jumped to get out of the way and Bard assisted him to go higher. You know, it could have been an accident. I’ll buy that.”

“He just jumped and he’ll do it again.”

“Do you think he’s still alive?”

“There’s no evidence he isn’t.”

“He’ll be found by someone eventually.”

“I guess you don’t want your All American cleared. What kind of coach are you, one just looking out for your job and not your players?”

He grimaced, looking away. “How are you going to prove his innocence?”

“Take me to Alton Baker Park.” She noticed his cell phone on his desk. “If you bring your Blackberry, you can record what you see for evidence.”

“That’s it?”

“You’ll find out when we get there.”

“Let’s go.” He stood up, pointed at the door and picked up his cell phone.

He escorted her to his car. They were soon in the parking lot at Alton Baker Park. She led him to the picnic table she had sat at before.

“Now what?” he asked.

“Call Detective Bentley; he needs to see this.”

Coach Molten pushed the buttons on his Blackberry.

“Detective Bentley, this is Coach Molten. Kayla Chalet claims she has something for us to see. Do you have a visual on my phone?”

Coach Molten nodded to Kayla.

Kayla pointed to the bike bridge at Alton Baker Park.

Coach Molten pointed his blackberry at it. What appeared to be a man with long hair took off his wig and leaped about twenty

feet above the railing and fell down into the river. The coach ran to the river, pointing the Blackberry west for sight downstream.

“Did you get that?” the coach shouted with the phone close to his mouth.

Kayla waved her hand, signaling the coach to come forward. She held out her hand to receive the phone. “This is Kayla,” she said with phone in hand. “That was the alien stranger. He told me he belongs to a secret society having advanced technology. He jumped. Bard is innocent.”

“What’s going on?” she heard.

“Do you think coach Molten would be part of a hoax?” she asked.

“He better not be,” she heard.

She handed the phone back to the coach. “I’m now a target, off limits to Bard, don’t you think?”

He nodded yes with a puzzling look on his face.

“I’m filing a restraining order against you and the whole team,” she said when he parked back at the stadium. “That guy belongs to a secret society that is suspect. He’s using me.”

“Thank you very much Miss Kayla Chalet and good luck. If I can help in any way, let me know.”

She was soon on her bike heading for home. She had the night off from work because her mother persuaded the manager of the inn to hire someone from an attempt service. When she arrived at home, she was about to take off the earrings and put them away, but decided to first check in with the alien stranger. “Kayla to Alien Stranger,” she thought.

She waited, but there was no response.

“Kayla to Alien Stranger,” she shouted, “I want very much to ask you a question.”

“What is your question?” she heard.

“I guess you don’t hear all my thoughts.”

“You are correct. I only receive those I concentrate to hear.”

“Well, I don’t feel quite as naked to the world.”

“Yes, you are only understood on a higher level of consciousness except from when your thoughts are amplified to be heard on a normal level.”

“You can explain that to me some other day. Right now I want to know how I can keep my banking account from getting me into trouble with the law.”

“I can create a secret banking account with a secret name if you prefer, which you can use online without physical appearance for identification.”

“That would be better, but it still leaves you in charge of my life, doesn't it?”

“You can either go along with it or report it to the police. The choice is yours to make.”

“I'll think about it.”

She was soon on her bike. She decided to check out some electric cars before going to work. At the car dealer, one for eighty grand suited her needs. She nodded to the car salesman and showed him her debit card.

She followed him inside where he handed the card to a clerk. Within a minute the clerk shook her head no.

“Sorry, I need to transfer from my savings to my checking.” Kayla thought that her checking account was the one that had been altered, but her mind was in a state of confusion. She wasn't sure of it.

She had left her iPhone at home. She rode her bike to her bank where she faced a female bank teller.

“I'd like to transfer about eighty grand from my savings to my checking.”

“You only have eighty three dollars and forty cents in your savings and two hundred in checking,” the bank teller soon replied. “Has someone hacked into your account?”

“Sorry,” she apologized with a blank stare, confused as to why she didn't have the money her account online indicated she had. “I must have miscalculated.”

Walking away from the bank teller's curious stare, she rode her bike all the way home and went straight to her iPhone to check out her banking account online. Her checking account indicated she had over twenty million dollars in it.

She groaned, being confused, and not wanting to spend the rest of the day wondering why she was being used. Was she about to spend most of her life in jail?

“What's going on?” her mother asked when she came into the room through the door Kayla had left open.

Kayla pointed at the screen of her iPhone.

“Wow, did you hit the lottery?”

“I've been set up. That's all I know.”

“I hope you don’t want me to keep covering for you at work. Please let me in on what’s going on.”

“Yes, you’re right. We need to talk. The guy who gave me the necklace to sell says he belongs to a secret society. He’s hacked into my bank account and is probably using it to frame me unless I do something illegal for him.”

“Oh dear, I hope you’ve notified the police.”

“He says he belongs to a secret society. It appears he does, and it’s highly advanced in technology. I doubt that the police will be able to do anything about it.”

“You still need to let them know. That guy can only control your life if you let him. They might not catch him, but if he can’t control you, he’ll move on to someone else, and you’ll have the police on your side.”

“You’re right. I’m sure glad I have a mother as wise as you.”

Kayla had the night off. Her checking account indicated she had over twenty million dollars to spend, but she was not able to spend it. If someone else, such as the alien stranger, was able to hack into her account and use it to spend large sums of money, what kind of trouble would she be in? What if the money itself was not even real? She feared she could be spending many years of her life in jail for something she had no control over.

Secret Society

Kayla had a restless night's sleep wondering what kind of trouble the alien stranger was getting her into. She could report it to the police, but she did not know if the money was actually in her account and what were the ramifications of it. Detective Bentley had seen the leap off the bridge, but she now needed to follow that up with more information in a way that would free her from being controlled.

"I need to talk to you face to face," Kayla thought while riding her bike.

"I am on my way to Alton Baker Park," she thought, knowing she actually channeled other thought, feeling somewhat controlled by it.

The bike ride seemed forever. Kayla had too much of an urge to get there sooner, but she also didn't want to tire herself out peddling too hard. Her normal peddling was easier than if she walked. It also had somewhat of a calming effect.

When Kayla entered the park she noticed Bard slumped over a table with his left arm at his backside. She stopped next to the table and got off her bike and faced his stare.

"Don't worry. I'm not on the football team anymore and can't hurt you."

"Sorry. I'm in deep trouble and didn't want to get you involved. How come you're not on the team? I thought I proved your innocence."

He appeared surprised. "That was you? Well, I'm mighty thankful for that, but I hurt my back practicing with some of the guys. I can hardly walk without pain, even after taking pain killer . . . but not enough to become addicted, and I really didn't throw that guy off the bridge."

"I know that now. I'm sorry I didn't believe you."

“Are you sure? The rumor going around is that they found a bomb on him and I’m now a hero. The Fed is investigating. They asked me about you. They seem to think we’re joking around with some kind of leaping gadget playing a hoax to evade getting caught for drug trafficking. What’s going on? Was the dude a terrorist and a drug dealer?”

She shrugged and noticed the alien stranger a good distance away walking towards them. She pointed at him. “We’re about to find out.”

Bard stood with a look of astonishment as the alien stranger approached them.

“I am not a terrorist,” the alien stranger said when he was finally close enough for conversation. “I did not have a bomb and I do not traffic drugs.”

“You’re alive,” Bard said with a look of bewilderment about him. “Who saved you?”

“I saved myself.”

“How’s that possible? How did you hear what we said and how can you jump so high?”

“I belong to a secret society. We are scientists with advanced knowledge.”

“Oh yeah, what do you know about sore backs.”

“You need to drink a quart of soda pop.”

“Get out of here. Soda pop doesn’t cure backs.”

“It will help dissolve your kidney stone. The oxide from the spinach you eat and the calcium from the milk you drink is not a healthy combination. Furthermore, because the pain is on your left side, which is painful to lie on, and because you are right handed, you should shoot billiards to help correct it sooner.”

Bard grimaced as he eyed the alien stranger. “That doesn’t sound scientific to me. Why are the Feds after you and us too?”

“They are probably alarmed by my ability to leap high and fall into the river and survive, and with me possessing expensive jewelry. They could fear me as a threat to the nation, but I have no intent to take it over or do any harm to it.”

“Don’t you?” Kayla asked. “Why are you using me? Why does my online banking account now show more than twenty million?”

Bard eyed the stranger out of the corner of his eye.

“The twenty million is for you to use with your new secret identity online banking account. When you spend it, it will then be recorded as an expenditure on some other account.”

Bard took turns eyeing Kayla and the alien stranger.

“I tried to spend it. I was rejected.”

“I apologize. I have not yet reactivated your account.”

“Why’s that?”

“I am allowing you to decide if you want to accept the responsibility of spending the money.”

“So, I’m not in any danger until I spend the money. Is there anyway someone else can trace it to me?”

“Your account will only become detectable during the time you are using it to transfer monetary value to another account. The choice is yours to make.”

“It’d be nice to have the money, but not if it sends me to prison. I’m sure the law is now keeping an eye on it.”

“If you use the money for a generous purpose, you will sleep more peacefully and feel better about your life purpose.”

“It could be dangerous. Is it worth dying for?”

“It could be worth living for.”

“What do you consider generous?”

“I would consider generous helping the homeless, helping cure drug addiction, and creating a social environment with real wealth instead of just monetary wealth. I would consider generous the countering of the grave effects of climate change and the creation of a more livable environment.”

“That’s a tall order.”

“The choice is yours to make. I am here to provide the means of success for your willingness to help, but you will need to apply your own capability as well.”

“I’ll think about it.”

She eyed Bard as the alien stranger departed on his way back to the forest area. “You need some pop.”

“Do you believe that guy?”

“I need to think about it.”

“You might be putting yourself in danger.”

“Yeah, I might be putting you and others in danger as well, but I need to sleep at night; can’t do much without knowing where I stand. How about you? Are you going to be okay?”

“I’ll try some pop and more Tylenol and let you know in a couple days.”

“Does your lawyer still want to talk to me?”

“I’ll let him know he does. That guy seems like a con. He’s probably got a listening device to spy on people and use their words to his advantage. Did he really give you all that money?”

“He somehow hacked into my account. I haven’t been able to spend the money. Part of the listening device is the earrings you gave me.”

He faced the ground. “I guess I deserve this pain in my back. He probably would have hacked into my account. I don’t think I will ever give anyone else diamond earrings. The guilt is worse than the pain.”

“I don’t blame you. You didn’t know his intent and you meant to do the right thing. Don’t let someone else control your life by feeling guilty for something they did.”

The next morning Kayla was sitting in a chair listening to Bard’s lawyer sitting at his desk. He was a small fellow about her size, well dressed in suit and tie, and appeared to be well organized and knowledgeable about his profession.

“If the money is donated, it could be legal, but you still need to report it. It is taxable and could be stolen, which could indicate you as an accessory to criminal activity.”

“What if the money is not actually in my account; I only use it as a donation from another account?”

“If it links to a terrorist organization, you could also be prosecuted and convicted even if the donor is anonymous. If you transfer it from one account to another, then you are a participant.”

“What should I do?”

“I’d go to the authorities and report it. With your cooperation, they’d have no reason to charge you with anything.”

“Thanks. Would paying you with the money be okay?”

“That would not be okay. There is no charge. I’m following up on another investigation. That is between you and him.”

The next morning Kayla was sitting in Detective Bentley’s office when he and a man in suit and tie entered the room.

“This is a federal agent,” Detective Bentley said.

The federal agent stood directly in front of Kayla.

“Miss Kayla Chalet, you passed the polygraph. Bard Sucrets also passed one. Someone has been peddling some

expensive jewelry. These diamonds are real, as is the gold on the necklace.”

To her surprise, he handed her earrings to her. “Those diamonds don’t appear to be commercially made. We’ve found no transmitters. I’ve seen that jump off the bridge. I have no reason not to believe your story, except for no evidence anyone hacked into your bank account or tampered with your iPhone. There could very well be a secret society. You have done the right thing coming here to report it.”

“Bard’s lawyer said I could be prosecuted as an accessory.”

“So far we know of no law violations, but we need to know more about this secret society.”

“Is that itself a crime?”

“No, it is not, but if it does have advanced technology, it could be a threat to the welfare of the nation . . . We’d like your help to discover its intent. Are you willing?”

“You want me to become a spy?”

“We can sure use your help.”

“I’ll help, but not undercover; I need to inform the alien stranger what I’m up to.”

“Why’s that?”

“He can read my mind. He won’t trust me otherwise? He’ll know I contacted you if he doesn’t already know by now.”

“That’s a good point,” he replied while shaking his head as if in doubt, “but we still need you to keep us informed. If you do, we’ll know you’re innocent if he asks you to do something against the law.”

“I’m not willing to break the law. That’s why I’m here, being open so that neither him nor anyone else has reason to use me, including you.”

“We need your help, Miss Kayla Chalet. The welfare of the nation could be at stake.”

She paused. “You won’t prosecute me if I do what I’m asked, even if it breaks the law?”

“As long as you keep us informed, you will not be prosecuted for it.”

“What if I’m unable to inform you?”

“We’ll take that into consideration.”

“I guess there are no guarantees,” she said and then paused before continuing, “but destroying the nation is destroying my livelihood as well. I’ll try to keep you informed.”

“Thank you Miss Kayla Chalet. I’m leaving Detective Bentley in charge. You report directly to him. Okay?”

“Okay.”

As he left the room, Detective Bentley handed Kayla a photo while asking, “Do you recognize the fellow in this photo?”

“Yes, he’s the one.” She did recognize the long hair and raggedy beard; it was that of the one who tried to rape her. There was hope. Maybe the law knew more about the secret society than they were letting on.

“We have arrested him for illegal possession of drugs. We can now add rape and attempted murder, but he might be useful in leading us to this secret society.”

“Don’t tell me you want me to use him to get what you want?” She did not feel comfortable being used against someone who was a threat to her life even if it could free her from being used even more.

“He’s about the only lead we have. He’s been arrested and done time before, but he was once a talented basketball player who was injured and became addicted. I believe he can be useful if we bargain for his cooperation.”

“The alien stranger did tell me I should provide for the homeless and confront global warming, but I’ll need a lot of help and a lot of protection.” She paused to consider a possible solution. “Does this guy have a bank account?”

Detective Bentley reached for a folder and opened it. He soon nodded yes.

“I think I should try to put some money into it to find out if it will really transfer. The alien stranger might have had it deactivated for me coming here.” She eyed the earrings that had been given back to her.

“That is a very good idea, but it’ll have to be between you and the person with the account.”

“When can I ask him?”

Detective Bentley got up out of his chair, left the room and soon returned to his seat. They waited awhile before the raggedy bearded guy was guided into the room by a couple fellow officers.

“Take a seat,” Detective Bentley said.

The prisoner took a seat beside Kayla to her unease of him being so close to her again.

“We can now add attempted rape and murder,” Detective Bentley said as he stared at the prisoner, “but your victim might be willing to make a deal.”

The prisoner eyed Kayla. “I’m sorry for what I did. I wasn’t myself.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m a homeless victim of circumstance.”

“What’s your name?”

“They didn’t tell you I’m James Baker?”

“Do you believe in global warming?” She thought of asking that question instead of one that would most likely be more sensitive to him, such as with regard to complications of the homeless.

“Yeah, I have some ideas on how to correct it.”

“I could use your help. Do you mind if I transfer some money into your bank account.”

“What’s the catch?”

“I’ll put enough into it for you to rent or buy a place to stay and buy what you need to stay clean if you’re willing to cooperate with the police in bringing drug dealers to justice.”

“If I could identify any of those guys, I’d be dead before I had time to spend the money.”

“Don’t you want to take back control of your life?”

Detective Bentley asked.

James stared at the floor. “Okay, put some money in the bank and I’ll give it a go.”

“I’ll need a routing number,” Kayla said.

“I’ll have to get it from the bank.”

Detective Bentley pointed to the phone on the desk. It took awhile, but James finally received help from his bank’s service department. He had answered a few security questions and had been able to convince the receptionist he was James Baker.

After being informed of the routing number, Kayla turned on her iPhone. “Kayla to alien stranger,” she said as she accessed her banking account. She received no answer, but suddenly her computer indicated twenty million dollars was available in her account. Had the alien stranger been listening to her conversation with the law? Did he deactivate and reactivate her account at will? She knew of only one way to find out. She reached for the paper with the routing number.

After she transferred twenty grand into James Baker's account, she waited along with Detective Bentley as James Baker again phoned the bank. Within five minutes it was confirmed that twenty grand had been deposited into the bank account of James Baker from various accounts of banks in such other countries as Pakistan.

The police now had solid evidence of her having an unknown source of capital, but at least anyone else other than the law would not trace it back to her account. Then, again, there was the alien stranger and the secret society. Were he and it still in control of her life? She needed the help of a rapist to find out.

Common Cause Society

Kayla walked up the steps to the EMU, the Erb Memorial Union named after Donald Milton Erb, the youngest University of Oregon presidents of the past. He had previously taught economics. She opened the door and walked into a large room of tables and mostly empty seats. She recognized Bard sitting at a table with Wanda Sue.

“Have you made a decision?” Bard asked.

“I’m still thinking about it. How’s your back?”

“The pop and the Tylenol seemed to do the trick. A couple more games of pool and it should be as good as new. Do you play?”

Kayla shook her head no and pointed at Wanda Sue while asking Bard, “Do we have another member for the secret society?”

“I figured we needed an unconnected witness for a little insurance.”

Kayla seated herself across from Bard and Wanda Sue. “We need a few more.”

“Sorry, everyone thinks they’re on your off-limits-list.”

“Well, we do have another member. He should be showing up shortly.”

“Who’s that?” Bard asked.

“I transferred twenty grand into the checking account of the guy who tried to rape me. He has some interesting ideas on how to combat climate change.”

Bard stared at Kayla. “Are you crazy? A guy tries to rape you and you give him twenty grand.”

Wanda Sue appeared stunned as well.

“I could have pressed charges, but he promised to help.”

Bard shook his head, as in doubt. “He’s long gone by now.”

Wanda Sue pointed. "Is that the guy?"

Kayla did not at first recognize the tall slim fellow walking towards them. He was neatly dressed with short combed hair and no beard. She stood up and faced him.

"Thanks for the handout. I appreciate it."

Kayla addressed Bard and Wanda Sue. "This is James Baker." She pointed at them. "This is Bard and Wanda Sue. Please, have a seat and join us."

He laid his backpack on the floor and sat down next to Kayla right across from Bard's mean stare. He reached down at his backpack and placed a candle in holder on the table and lit it with a lighter. He then reached down again and brought up a paper cup and a container. He poured water from the container into the paper cup and placed it above the candle with the bottom of the cup touching the flame. He then dropped a tea bag into the water.

"Would you like some tea?" he asked. "Don't worry. It takes a thousand degrees to burn paper. Water boils at a hundred and eighty, but don't put it on a hot grease fire; it'll only fuel it."

"Don't try to sell us your dope, you dope." Bard said.

"I wouldn't think about it. I heard you like to throw guys off the bridge."

"I might if they deserve it."

Kayla decided it was time for her to be a peacemaker. "Let's make peace, not war. I have a lot of money to spend for a good cause. Anyone have any ideas of what's a good cause?"

Bard stared at her. "How did that guy in the park know I had a kidney stone? How did he know all that other stuff about me?"

"Maybe he's part of a secret society with advanced science and technology like he said. You saw what he can do on the bridge. He sure has the Fed's attention."

"We do too," Bard was quick to point out.

"What can I do?" Wanda Sue asked.

Kayla paused to think about it and then asked, "What's your specialty?"

"I'm learning computerization and social media along with economics and climate change."

"Great, you can help us form a common cause society."

"How are we going to do that?" Bard asked.

“Tweet it,” Wanda Sue replied, “and find out who wants to help combat global warming, what they need and who can supply it.”

“There already is a common cause society,” Bard informed her.

“Yes, but it’s political.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“The best liars get elected. They only want to buy votes. There’s no leadership in convincing the people what really needs to be done.”

She seemed to have won over James’ attention. He nodded while watching her talk.

“Don’t you believe in Democracy?” Bard asked.

“It’d be great if people voted intelligently instead of allowing everything to be taken out of context and only accepting what they want to believe. Those running for office become secretive in the need to be politically correct, and then they are still accused of being liars when it’s time for them to do the right thing.”

“Isn’t that the responsibility of the news media?”

Wanda Sue shook her head no. “It should be, but they advertise. They’re also bought.”

“Still, isn’t that your specialty?”

Wanda Sue seemed to nod grudgingly.

“Then let’s get going and lets do it right.”

“I’ll need a lot of help,” Wanda Sue replied while facing Kayla. “What’s your specialty?”

“I’m the financier. Come up with a good plan and I’ll get it financed no matter the cost.”

“Wow. You must get big tips. It could cost millions.”

“Yes, I’ve gotten some large tips of late. It could be billions or even trillions.”

Wanda Sue faced Bard. He nodded yes.

Kayla continued, “I might have gotten some big tips, or maybe I’m being duped into a setup.”

“Why’s that?” Wanda Sue asked.

“It’s complicated. I could be considered a soft target. We’ll need to be vigilant. Anything that appears illegal needs to be reported to the police.”

“If you want to go ahead and find out,” Bard said, “we’re here to help. I’m already involved and I need to somehow get past it before I turn pro.”

Kayla paused to think. “It could put our lives in danger, but if you’re willing, we need to start spending for the common cause. Does anyone have any suggestions?”

“The homeless need food and shelter,” Wanda Sue suggested.

“Yes, one of them tried to rape me. It’s not without risk, but we all make mistakes and can overcome them if a feasible way becomes available.”

Bard grimaced. “This is getting complicated. We better know what we’re doing if we’re going to play with fire. You claim this guy knows something about global warming. Let’s hear it.” He pointed at James. “Why are the winters freezing my butt off here if the planet is warming up?”

“Water: It’s the key.”

“How’s that possible?”

“You need to think like a beaver.”

“Sorry, we’re ducks, not beavers,” Bard mocked.

“Yeah, but ducks just fly south for the winter; beavers stay and build reservoirs to manage the water supply.”

Kayla had grown up as a duck fan and favored them over the beavers, the mascot of Oregon State University. She also had stronger feelings towards Bard than towards James, who had tried to rape her, but there were more serious issues at stake and Bard’s use of humor to ridicule was at risk of sending the conversation in the wrong direction.

“Please Bard, we need to be serious. Let’s hear him out.”

Bard faced James. “Sorry, I sincerely apologize. Do you mind telling us your story . . . like what you know and how you came to know it?”

“I never attended the same school more than two years. My dad was a war veteran. He and my mom both worked. When they got off work, they had a few drinks. When they weren’t working or drinking, they were home fighting. They didn’t pay the rent. We moved around a lot. I had to prove myself in every new school. I asked a lot of questions and became good at solving problems, but the teachers and other students regarded me as a troublemaker. They just accepted what they were taught without questioning it. I questioned what I didn’t understand in

order to be sure it was consistent with what I already knew. I'm very good at solving problems."

"That's very interesting," Wanda Sue said, "I also agree the establishment fears change. Professors don't want to lose their jobs to self education. Polluters don't want to lose their jobs to environmentalists. A carbon tax won't work. It'll take a long time to pass. Politicians don't want to lose votes. Solutions to climate change need to promote the economy. Do you have the answer?"

"Why are the winters still freezing our butts off?" Bard interrupted to get an answer to his previous question.

James reached out his forearms with palms up. "Okay, let's take it from the beginning. We breathe in air; we breathe out carbon monoxide, which is a deadly gas, but which soon converts to carbon dioxide. It is not nearly as deadly and has many uses, but in the atmosphere it increases the absorption of radiant heat. The carbon cycle is raised to a new level."

"Why's my butt freezing in the winter?" Bard asked again.

James raised the palms of his hands high above his head. "Hotter air absorbs more water. More water absorbs more heat, even more than the carbon dioxide. Water from lakes and oceans vaporize into a gas that is lighter than air. The warm humid air at the equator rises to create a vacuum effect to receive the dry, cold air from the poles. The northern states are caught in between. The cold, dry air condenses the warm, moist air above it and turns it into snow and ice."

"That makes sense," Kayla commented.

"What's the solution?" Wanda Sue asked.

"Water management," James replied, "Water is the key to both the environment and the economy. We need both carbon and water for growth, but it is water that promotes it. Plant life needs it and carbon. More water promotes more growth and more plants then absorb more carbon out of the atmosphere and supply food and real wealth for the growing population of people."

"Yeah," Bard was about to point out, "but an increase in population brings about more competition and pollution. What's your answer to that predicament? Shouldn't the stronger of us survive?"

"It depends on who you are," Wanda Sue interrupted to say. "If the wealthy establishment of the few enforces their way on the general populous with their laws of the land, then those

of us struggling against poverty and survival could join forces in creating our own laws, which is how it should be in a democracy for and by the people, but peacefully instead of by physical revolution that leads to a destructive war we all suffer from.”

“We might need science to improve the situation,” James said, “but one that is more open minded to all possible remedies.”

Kayla wondered about that possibility. Was the Secret Society of the Alien Stranger addressing it and using her to implement it? Was James Baker already a part of it? “What’s your solution?” she had to ask him.

“I’m impressed with Wanda Sue’s way of thinking. We at the bottom need to get together and build. We could build homes and gardens. We could create greenhouses with drip irrigation to transport along with water to desert regions. The rest should take care of itself as long as the rich don’t decide to intervene and get politicians to pass restrictions against it.”

“Well,” Kayla replied, “you have a good deal of knowledge that can help. Wanda Sue is more educated in it.” She faced Bard. “What do you bring to the table?”

“Somebody needs to keep an eye on this dude to make sure he does what he’s supposed to instead of spending the money on drugs and his buddies. I’ll be the overseer.”

“I’ll spend the money for a good cause,” James replied.

Bard grunted. “You’re not educated enough. You have a little knowledge, but a whole lot more is needed to do what you want to accomplish.”

“I figure things out,” James replied, “You students and teachers only know what you’ve been told.”

Bard faced James with an angry stare. “I figure things out too, but a whole lot more with the help of the coaches. They have sure made it easier to climb the wall.”

“Yeah, they do, but the established academia remains biased. They only accept the textbook. They refuse to address questions outside it. I can provide knowledge they don’t want to consider.”

“You only know what you know; you might not know what you don’t know. If you think you know everything, then you’re not that wise. You still need to learn, which is difficult if you think you already know everything.”

“I do learn, and I’ll learn even more.”

“What if a pill saves your life even though you cannot explain it? What if you question authority and don't get out of the way of a fire and the rest of your crew dies because you questioned order?”

Kayla felt out of control of an argument she had no control over. Bard had made good points: The academia is needed for an easier way to climb the wall. James had also made good points: We need to be open minded to all possible solutions. Maybe somehow the two debaters could compromise to allow both arguments to prevail.

Financing Economic Climate Change

The Idaho Vandals, playing because of financial need, were over-matched in talent of the Oregon Ducks who rolled up the score on the smaller school. Kayla watched and listened from the booth because of the special invitation granted her by Coach Molten. She could hear the radio announcer praise Bard because of his abilities to block, catch the football and run over and past defensive prayers. She saw him power his way through the defense to make key first downs. He powered his way four yards for one touchdown, ran forty yards for another, and also caught a pass and ran into the end-zone for a sixty yard touchdown.

After the game, she walked down the stairs of Autzen Stadium along with a huge crowd hurrying to their cars or whatever for the long wait behind stalled traffic because of only one exit road. She had ridden the city bus that was free on game day, and she managed to get through the crowd and back in line to board the bus for standing room only.

She noticed Wanda Sue and James Baker walking south towards the wooded area. Kayla waved for them to notice her, but Wanda just stared ahead with an angry face while James eyed Kayla with his mean stare.

Kayla decided to follow them in hopes of finding out why they were ignoring her. They meshed in with students following the trail to the bike bridge most likely leading them to the dormitories and apartments near the university.

“Where are you headed?” Kayla asked before James and Wanda could get too far away for her to follow.

They did not answer.

“Can we talk about it?” Kayla asked loud enough for all in the nearby crowd to hear.

“Yeah, we need to,” James answered while turning to face her. He turned back around and waved his arm forward.

She managed to keep up as they led her all the way across Franklin Boulevard and down a street to a dormitory. She followed them on into the dormitory. James eyed Kayla and tapped Wanda on the shoulder. He pointed to a guest area of cushioned seats. She didn't seem to want to go, but she did so grudgingly. Kayla followed them to a small table where she sat down across from where James and Wanda sat.

“Did I do something wrong?” Kayla asked in response to Wanda's silence and look of disgust on her face.

“You're using us.”

“I'm just financing a project we all agreed on. What's wrong with that?”

“You're financing it with stolen money.”

“Who did I steal it from?” Kayla had had her own suspicions about where the money came from, but the news coming from Wanda was still alarming. At least it would be real money, even if it was stolen, instead of made-up digital money.

“James says the money comes from banks in such places as Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Mexico and South America. Owners of the accounts are anonymous. They're obviously drug dealers for the finance of terrorism, and they're probably on their way here to get us.”

Kayla grimaced as she faced the table. “I'm sorry. I didn't know. I'm being used and don't have much choice of the matter.”

“How is that?” James asked.

“The guy who sedated you hacked into my computer and changed my online banking account to indicate it was loaded with money. I thought he was trying to frame me. I didn't know if the money was real. I had to go to the police to find out if the money was actually real and to find out what I can do not to be framed. They thought you was part of it and could lead me to the guy who set me up.”

James grimaced as he rubbed his forehead with his head tilted down and facing left. “You still used us, leading us on about climate change; you liar.”

“I'm serious about it. I'll continue to finance it if I can.”

“How could you finance it with fake money, if that was what you believed?”

“I didn't know if it is real money or not. Maybe it was being counterfeited electronically. I had to use it to find out if it is real and thought to use it for a good cause if it was.”

“It's legal tender from the countries where it comes from,” Wanda pointed out, “even if it's only fiat. The banks don't disclose their sources, but they abide by the rules.”

“How come it's not traceable to your account?” James asked.

“That's how the hacker arranged it. He claims to belong to a secret society that is advanced in knowledge and technology. He's taken control of my life.”

“Now you're taking control of our lives,” Wanda accused. “You sure have Bard wrapped around your finger. He's really been watching James to make sure he doesn't get back on drugs and spends the money as you intend for it to be spent, whatever that actually is.”

“Isn't that a good thing?” she asked while eyeing James.

“Yeah,” he agreed, “I do feel much better with more purpose in life, but the money you sent me isn't going to last very long, even with Bard forbidding me to spend it.”

“Well, you guys come up with the causes and I'll have the money transferred over to James' account. That's all I can do, and I will do it for a good cause.”

“That's all you do?” Wanda asked, “Don't you keep most of the money for yourself?”

“Nope, I'm still a waitress riding my bike to work. I'm only allowed to transfer it.”

“Doesn't that make you invisible to the drug dealers?” James asked. “I'm the one risking my life even if it does now have more purpose.”

“I doubt I'm invisible. I'm sorry about getting you involved, but if they get to you, then they'll most likely get to me. I still need your trust. We're in this together. I have cause to protect you, and I gladly will if you agree to protect me too.”

“How are you going to keep them from getting me?”

“Use the money, disguise your appearance, get a post office box for your address, and spy on your surroundings. Otherwise, the Secret Society of these computer nerds will take the money back and you'll be on your own. They have you the same as they have me.”

“I’ve already done that, having found homes for guys I know, but twenty grand doesn’t go far these days. At least Wanda Sue helped me find a room to rent. Some of those guys I know are addicts, but some are like carpenters out of work because of the last recession. No one wants to hire them because they’re too old and need health benefits. With more money I could hire them to build greenhouses, wind turbans, install panels for solar energy, and make stoves to make and burn coal as fuel. Any of those guys could also easily finger me. Meanwhile, you disappeared on us.”

“I regret getting you into this and for not believing you, but I’m now behind you all the way.”

She faced Wanda. “What have you been up to?”

“Like you asked, I set up a blogging account with Facebook for a Common Cause Society. Membership is growing. Some of them want to help; others have needs. I think we can even make a profit. That would even be great for the economy with the creation of more jobs.”

Kayla eyed James.

“I have those jobs in mind. We just need to buy land and old houses to fix up to run on solar energy and gardens for self-living.”

“That could bring down food prices and reduce jobs,” Wanda pointed out, “but it’ll be better in the long run if it is gradual enough for the economy to adjust to it. It’ll just mean the majority of us take back control of our lives instead of having to rely solely on those few with the extreme wealth.”

“How does your water management idea connect?” Kayla asked James.

“Oregon here in the valley has more water and trees than they need. The water somehow needs to be transported to desert areas where it can be of more use. I’ve got ideas on building greenhouses with drip irrigation for efficiency, underground tanks to hold water, windmills to pump it, ways to extract it from the air, and ways to transport tanks of water to the wells. It’ll cost plenty. It might be more feasible to use the oil pipe lines to transport the water instead, but Wanda says that gets too political.”

“Well, when I get some time to help, I might come up with a few helpful ideas.”

“You’ll need to become invisible like me.”

“You're right about that; staying with my mom just puts her in danger. Do you have a place in mind?”

“How soon do you want it?”

“Right now would be great.”

“I'll see what I can do.” He showed Wanda the palm of his right hand. She handed a cell phone to him. He handed it to Kayla. “It has my number; just push the redial. You can work for me. If you give me a raise, I'll pay you a lot more than you can make as a waitress. Just give me a call after you put some money into my account and I'll give you half of it back.”

“That's not going to make my mother happy, but, as I said, we're in this together and she might not be safe even if I leave her out of it.”

“Where are you living now?” she asked James.

“That's my secret. Even Bard doesn't know.”

“I bet Wanda Knows.”

“She I trust. That's why I'm here.”

“I bet the secret society knows. It could be using the drug dealers and terrorists to do its dirty work.”

“And they'll still be using you.”

“Okay, Bard overseeing has been a good thing. We need to do a lot more and we need to know what we're doing. We're learning. That's good. I'll be invisible but more involved. If we still have the money to use, we need to use it to set ourselves up for the task.”

“What do you mean if we still have the money to use?”

Wanda asked.

“I haven't heard from the alien stranger since I got James out of jail.”

“We must be safe, then,” James said, “Those drug lords aren't missing what is nothing but a little petty cash to them.”

“I'll go home and see if I can add a little more to your account.”

“Add twenty-mill and I'll give you half.”

Kayla nodded yes.

“Your right about one thing,” he said, “I could be putting Wanda in danger if you put too much in it and those drug lords get wise to it.”

“I'm not worried about it,” Wanda interrupted to say. “You can come here as often as you want.”

Kayla rode the city bus home and informed her mother, "I might be moving out, soon."

"Why, dear; are you and Bard getting that serious?"

"He's busy with football and classes. I'm just about to do something stupid."

Her mother shrugged.

Kayla walked into her bedroom and came back out holding her iPhone. When she entered her online banking account, she transferred over twenty million of it to James' account.

"I hope you know what you're doing," her mother said.

"I don't know if I do or not; that's why I need to leave. You should find another place as well. It's going to become very dangerous to stay here if drug lords believe I'm hacking into their banking accounts."

"Don't worry about me. I want to help if I can. Please include me in on the plan, but also let me know what's going on."

"Maybe I'll know in a few days."

She pushed the redial button on the cell phone James had given her, but it was not James who answered.

"Hello," she heard a female voice say.

"I'm calling for James Baker."

"Sorry, I know no James Baker. You have the wrong number."

"He's a tall slim guy. He might be using an alias."

"Sorry, there are no guys here. This is a female's dorm."

"Do you know Wanda Sue?"

"Yeah, she lives here."

"Will you tell her I need to talk to James Baker? She knows him, and she knows where I work."

"Okay, I'll let her know."

"Thanks. It's very important I get a hold of him."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, thanks." She hung up and addressed her mother's watchful eye. "I did just do a stupid."

Kayla felt dumbfounded. She might have exposed James' secret identity to a dorm member, but she didn't understand why James had set her up with a wrong number. She wanted to protect herself and her mother, but she had no access to the money without James' help. She was now controlled by him too.

For Need of Invisibility

A few days passed with no word from James. She still had not heard from the alien stranger. It was to work and back home while wondering how to get back control of her life. At the moment, she was waiting on customers at the Valley River Inn when Detective Bentley entered the restaurant and stood close to the door.

After she placed two plates of food on the table for a couple dining at the restaurant, she stopped by to talk to the detective.

“Do you have a couple minutes?” Detective Bentley asked.

“A couple,” she replied, “What do you need?”

“Foreign banks are claiming hackers from the US have hacked into accounts and stolen large sums of money?”

“Am I being accused?”

“Not specifically: The banks are unwilling to disclose who the accusers are. They show no proof. They seem to be from a secret society. You are involved with one, and we're not being informed either way. What's going on?”

“I made a deal with James. He gave me a cell phone to contact him, but it was a wrong number. I don't know where he is and I don't know what to do about it.”

“Have you been in contact with the alien stranger?”

“No. He's disappeared on me too.”

“I sure hope you have not decided to go your own way.”

He turned and left through the door from which he came.

She had already heard the money was stolen, but hearing it from the detective was alarming. She had lost contact with both the alien stranger and James Baker, but she was not yet out of the woods. She was in danger of being convicted as an assessor,

if not killed for being involved, even though her involvement was totally unattended.

A few days later she arrived at the Valley River Inn and heard the desk clerk ask, "Do you know a James Baker?"

"Yes," she eagerly replied.

"Really. . . One of our guests is offering a big reward, like one hundred grand."

Her eagerness was replaced with fear and caution. "Why would anyone offer a hundred grand just to find someone?"

"He's from Chicago. He says James inherited a large estate and someone needs the property for a big business deal. He's staying in a three bedroom suite with two other guys. They look like they could be mean dudes. You'll probably be serving them for dinner. I'll let the guy know you know who James Baker is."

She approached close to the desk and leaned towards the desk clerk. "Don't tell him anything. He's not who he says he is. He's more likely a drug dealer. If you get involved, you'll risk the chance of being killed along with me and James.

"Are you serious? What should we do?"

"Don't do anything. I'll notify Detective Bentley. I should be okay as long as they don't know what I know."

"They won't know from me, but they are spreading the news and asking a ton of questions."

"Do you have your tape recorder?" she asked, knowing he often recorded the music of bands playing on weekend nights.

"Yeah, I keep it here in a good place. What do you intend on doing with it?"

"There needs to be new covers on old pillows."

"Hey, what you're thinking is illegal."

"I could be saving your life. Is there any proof it's your recorder?"

He looked away grudgingly. "It's no longer mine. I gave it to you."

"Thanks. I'll be careful. You be careful, too, and keep this between us."

"Of course, there's no need to worry about that."

He reached down and came up with a recorder. He handed it to her along with a couple door keys.

After she visited the laundry room for a couple pillow covers, she went to the sweet with the number on the key and

knocked on the door. When no one answered, she went in, turned the recorder on, and placed it under the bed.

Later that evening Kayla delivered Chicken Wings to three fellows that had bought drinks at the bar before being seated in the restaurant. They were eyeing her and nodding their heads.

“Are you Kayla Chalet?” One asked.

“No. She took the night off. I’m Pat. Can I help you with anything?”

They were shaking their heads. She casually left the room and went straight to their sweet and retrieved the tape recorder.

When she returned to the restaurant, she noticed Bard and three other fellows sitting at a table. She walked straight to the table and asked, “Can I take your order?”

“I heard you are big trouble,” a tall slim fellow said.

“He’s the quarterback,” Bard said, “He has to buy his linemen dinner for the victory.” The other two guys were bigger than Bard.

“I heard you beat a very good team.”

“Yeah, they were ranked in the top ten with us. It’s nice to see you again. Are you staying out of trouble?”

“I’m trying to, and it’d be wise if you guys didn’t stick around too late.” Her advice seemed to alarm Bard.

“I noticed those guys over there giving you mean stares. Are they a problem?”

“It’s just the usual thing I have to deal with. Are you going to order?”

“I think we all want chicken wings to go with our beer.”

The other guys nodded.

At the end of the shift, she noticed two of the men sitting on the patio. She felt a shiver up her spine as she walked past them on her way to her bicycle.

“Kayla Chalet,” she heard as she was about to unlock her bicycle, “we need to talk.”

She turned and faced the two men. “Why do you think I’m Kayla Chalet?”

“We have sources. You have sources. Our sources need to know your sources. You’re in big trouble, Kayla. You need us to get you out of it.”

“Leave me alone.”

“You need to listen,” he said while grabbing her arm to prevent her from unlocking her bike.

“You're on camera,” she heard someone say. It was the Duck quarterback.

“You better mind your own business,” the guy holding Kayla said, “You don't know who you are messing with.”

Bard landed beside the concrete wall dividing the upper ground from the lower bike path. He quickly struck the guy in the face with a left jab and followed with a right cross to the jaw. The guy appeared out cold as he lay on the ground after falling from Bard's punch.

The other guy reached for and pulled out a gun, but he was landed on by one of the big linemen that had been at the table with Bard. The other big lineman landed. He grabbed the feet and lifted them while the other lineman held onto the guy's arms.

“I bet we can throw him farther than Bard can,” one of them said as they raised the guy higher off the ground.”

“No, don't,” Kayla said while squeezing her eyes tight. They might not throw the guy all the way into the river, but there was a jungle of blackberry vines between the river and the wall separating the bike trail. She had felt those sharp, sticky thorns on the vines. Being entangled in them would be a torture for sure.

“She right,” Bard said. “The police are on their way. We need to keep a low profile.

The police soon arrived above the wall on higher ground with their guns drawn and pointing. Fortunately it was late at night and would not result in a lot of publicity.

At home, she wasted no time to turn on the recorder.

“Find any leads?” she heard.

“Any of those guys at the Hilton come up with anything?” Another voice asked.

“I'll check,” was the reply.

After another minute or two she heard, “A couple of his buddies say he made a deal with the police to side with this waitress he tried to rape. She works right here on this shift. She claims someone hacked into her computer and used it.”

“Well, maybe somebody else is the hacker, but we still need those two to find whoever it is. They're just pawns. We'll use them and waist them later.”

The next morning Kayla decided to visit Wanda Sue. As she approached the dorm, another girl was about to enter.

"I'm trying to find Wanda Sue," Kayla asked, "Will you tell her I'm waiting in the lounge?"

"I'll see if she's in her room."

"Thanks."

Kayla sat for nearly two hours. Wanda Sue came in through the front door.

"Wanda, I need to talk to James."

"Why didn't you call him like he said?"

"I tried to but got a wrong number. Some girl who lives here answered."

Wanda seemed to be puzzled as she paused. "Mary Jane must have used the phone when we were at the library. Sorry. I should have been more careful with it."

"There are a lot of guys in town trying to find him. He's in big trouble."

"We usually meet here and go somewhere more secluded. He'll be showing up soon."

Wanda Sue took a seat close to Kayla.

"It's hard to believe that is even real money," Kayla said, "let alone stolen."

"What's this?" Wanda asked while holding a dollar bill in her hand.

"It sure looks like a dollar bill."

"It's also part of the National Debt."

"I don't understand: How can a dollar bill be part of the National Debt?"

"When they print it, it becomes a debt owed by the treasury that it loans to National Banks."

"Don't they have something to back it up with?"

"Yeah, bonds and other securities, such as property as collateral for more borrowing, but it is still only fiat money with no gold or silver to back it up. They can print as much of it as they want."

"Won't that leave our grandchildren in debt?"

"No. Letting the infrastructure collapse will leave our grandchildren in debt. Wealth is product, not money. Build it and we will have it."

"I don't see how they can get away with just printing more money."

"President Lincoln did it to finance the Civil War. Andrew Jackson, when he was president, had cut off funding to the

national banking system in favor of state banking. The Federal Reserve was required to use gold for all its transactions, but they didn't have enough of it and it was heavy and inconvenient to transport.”

“So, they just printed money?”

“They made it legal tender by it being used to pay taxes, and by them selling bonds. Tariffs, as import taxes, were the main source of government revenue in the nineteenth century. There was a promise to buy back the fiat money with gold on a later date.”

“That makes sense. It's debt that can be repaid.”

“Yeah, but President Nixon took us off the gold standard. There's only bonds and other securities of what the fed sells to whoever, including China.”

“How can our money be worth anything, then?”

“You can pay your taxes with it.”

“Why collect taxes if you can just print money?”

“They need to balance taxing with printing in order not to over-inflate. The real value of money is what you can purchase with it, which is not just gold or silver, but too much money in circulation without enough product leads to inflation.”

“Don't we need the gold standard, then?”

“No. Some inflation is good; it reduces debt and allows for a productive distribution of capital. On the other hand, a lack of enough gold for a growing population leads to deflation and the hoarding of gold for the rich to become richer. That occurred during the Great Depression. Some of the rich benefited while the economy as a whole suffered.”

“That's all very interesting, but what does it have to do with us?”

“There's monetary wealth and there's true wealth. True wealth is subjective. If we breathe clean air, that is wealth to some of us, but the abundance of air makes it an economic liability. By supply and demand economics, air has little if no economic value and is a negative if polluters are required to clean it, crying too much government. People tend to want that freedom of choice that money renders to them the power to spend freely, even if the environment suffers because of it.”

Kayla heard taps coming from the doorway. “That's James,” Wanda said. She went to the door and opened it.

Kayla didn't recognize James. He had black hair instead of brown, along with a mustache and goatee, and sunglasses. He turned around and waved his right arm forward. Kayla followed him to a Chevy Volt. The hybrid electric car appeared brand new.

"Where's your bank?" James asked.

"It's Bank America, the same as yours, just up the street on East Eleventh."

"Get in."

"Did you tell anyone about our deal with the law?" Kayla asked after they were both seated.

"I told a couple buddies about it when they asked how I got out of jail with a bunch of cash. They were suspicious of me turning on them. What's up?"

"You now have guys asking about you."

He slapped his forehead as the car moved forward.

After James parked in a parking space at Bank America, he handed Kayla a cashier check. She gazed at it. Ten million was a lot of money, but it was also drawn from Bank America in allowing immediate process.

After she walked inside the bank and stood in line, she noticed a man sitting in a cushion chair staring at her as she waited her turn to visit the teller.

When addressing the teller, she nodded her head towards the guy seated in the chair. "Who is that guy over there?"

The teller lady shrugged. "He must be waiting for someone. He's been here all morning."

"See this," Kayla said while showing her the cashier check tight up against her chest for the guy in the chair not to see, "He's stalking me. Call the police."

The teller left and came back a few minutes later. "He will be confronted by the security guard. Do you want to deposit the check?"

Kayla was hesitant. She had another idea. "I've changed my mind. Thanks."

She left through the front door, flashed two fingers at James and then pointed them west. She walked past the car and across Eleventh Street and west a couple blocks to Chase Bank. Inside it, she said to the teller. "I'm Kayla Chalet. I believe I'm still on my mother's accounts."

"I need to see some ID," the teller said after checking the computer."

Kayla placed her ID along with the check in the tray at the window. The teller acknowledged the ID and then stared at the check.

“This will be on hold until verified,” she finally said.

“It shouldn't take too long. It only came from a bank a couple blocks from here.”

She handed Kayla her receipt. When Kayla walked out the door she spotted the Chevy Volt parked on the other side of the street. She scrutinized the area for onlookers. Convinced none were present; she crossed the street and seated herself back inside the Chevy Volt.

“Where are we off to now?” James asked.

“I don't know. I should be about broke with no job and no place to go.”

She lifted her phone from her pouch, turned it on and accessed her banking account. She then covered her eyes with her left hand.

“What's wrong now?” James asked.

“My checking account now shows over twenty billion.”

“We'll probably need a lot more than that to make a dent in this global warming thing. Twenty trillion might make a dent.”

“Yeah, but they're going after us just that much more. There will be no place to hide. We're way over our heads. Maybe I should just toss this thing away.”

“I wouldn't do that. Once you're in, you're in. It still could be our only way out.”

“We need more help.”

“You're right, and we'll get it with the money. It's just a matter of knowing how to use it to our advantage, not there's.”

“I need to see Detective Bentley. If they get my mother, they can use her to get us.”

“We need to be invisible. Be here this time tomorrow and I'll show you a safe place to hide.”

She nodded before getting out and peddling her bike to the police station to meet up with Detective Bentley. “They know who I am,” she said to him. “They're probably inside my home right now for either me or my mother to show up. They're stalking me. Isn't that against the law?”

He nodded. “I think I'll have some federal help on this one. Do you have a key to the house we can use?”

“Thanks,” she replied while handing him a key to the house. “I think I’ll soon have some more leads for you to check out. I’m about to be let into the Secret Society.”

“That’s good news, and the recording is useful information, but it could be subject to a lawsuit for being illegally obtained.”

Kayla shrugged as she walked away.

“You’re early,” the desk clerk said when Kayla arrived at the inn.

“I need to talk to my mother.”

“She’s in the restaurant.”

“We need to give our notices,” was what Kayla greeted her mother with in the restaurant.

“Is it that bad?”

“It’s worse. I now have over twenty billion in my account and they’re already on their way to get us.”

“Oh dear, what are we going to do?”

“I just added ten million to your account.”

“You shouldn’t have done that.”

“You said you wanted to help. You’ll need the money to do it.”

“How will I use it?”

“Get a secret suite in Acapulco in an assumed name. We need to develop the area and we need someone down there to determine what is needed. You can hire the right people for us.”

“I don’t speak the language. I’d feel more comfortable closer to home.”

“Would you like to help us create a paradise in Eastern Oregon?”

“That sounds interesting, and also very challenging.”

“You need to watch where you go after work. They might want to capture you to get to us.”

“Thanks, I’ll stay in the public eye. What are you up to?”

“Well, if there are no strange men waiting outside, I think I’ll ride my bike home. I asked the police to check it out.”

She rode her bike home and arrived just in time to see two men in handcuffs being seated in the back of a police vehicle.

“You should be alright now,” Detective Bentley shouted from the front door of the house, “We should get some information out of those two and we’re in the process of installing an alert system with cameras.”

“I noticed they are well dressed and don't appear to be foreign,” Kayla replied as she approached the door.

“They are likely professional hires, in it for the money. We should learn a lot even if they don't talk. How about you; don't you have something to report?”

“I hope you don't drink a lot of coffee. I might have to go and buy the store out.”

“Please drop by my office as soon as you can. I have a whole police force ready to pounce on that Secret Society.”

An Underground Place to Hide

James, with Kayla back in the Chevy Volt, drove to Autzen Stadium and parked close to the trail leading south towards the bike bridge.

“Where are we going?” Kayla asked.

“I want to show you a secret place where we can meet and you can hide out if you need to.”

As she stayed seated, feeling too uncomfortable to walk in the woods with someone who tried to rape her, he pointed at the glove department. She opened it and noticed an electronic tablet, flashlight and small handgun. When she pointed at the tablet, he showed her his hand. When she handed him the tablet, he took it and reached again. She pointed at the flashlight and shrugged. He nodded. She handed him the flashlight.

“Take the pistol,” he said, “and fire a shot at that log over there.”

She took the gun, opened the car door, got out, examined the gun, took off the safety, fired at the log, and felt the recoil of the blast.

“Feel safer now?” he asked.

“Let’s go.”

“I’m waiting for someone.”

“Is it why I have the gun?”

He shook his head no. She stood until another car drove up and parked beside the Chevy Volt. A young man got out. He was neatly dressed and seemed harmless. James got out of the car holding the flashlight and tablet, and he led the guy to Kayla.

“Kayla, this is Ralph Cole. He’s an old high school buddy. He’s also majoring in physics. Bard says we need more expertise. This guy has all we’ll need. Let’s go.”

James led the way while glancing now and then at the small tablet he held in his hand. After a long walk to the bridge, he bypassed it and continued west. Kayla felt uneasy when he stopped at the place where he had tried to rape her. On the north side of the path he reached down to the ground beside a big rock and uncovered a lever. He then seemed to lift a portion of the ground straight up. It was more like a table doorway with four legs.

James handed Ralph the flashlight. Ralph kneeled to crawl inside the doorway to a nylon ladder. When James waved his hand forward, Kayla placed the barrel of the gun between her teeth for them to hold it, and she then followed Ralph down the ladder about twenty feet to a level area.

James followed them down after he closed the door above him, which rendered it pitch dark except for the flashlight. He pulled a lever and pushed to open a door to a room that had been developed as a living space. It had light from fluorescent bulbs nearly the same as sunlight. There was a garden area. More near them was space to sit and sleep.

“The temperature is constant,” James said, “Someone somehow managed to create an extraordinary electric system. There are these batteries. I discovered recently that are filled with tiny diamonds.”

“They’ll last five hundred years or more,” Ralf said, “but you need a lot of them just to light up a room. There must be a ton or more here worth more than a billion dollars.”

“I guess we have another member of the Common Cause Society, or are you two members of the Secret Society?”

“He’s more schooled,” James replied, “We’ll need him.”

“This place sure seems like a trap,” Kayla said. “Is there another way out?”

He showed her the tablet. “Use this. I found it here. There are hidden cameras all over the place. You only have to push an area on the screen in the direction you want to see, including where you are now.”

He led her to the other side of the room and uncovered another level. He opened another door. “This place is a maze. It goes everywhere. You keep an eye out on who is coming and going. If they discover the opening, you make your way to another opening and hopefully you’ll find another way out. I

tried a couple times, but just got lost. But a place to go is close by if you can stand the smell. It's probably used as fertilizer."

"You must belong to a secret society." There was now the possibility of another member of it she might need to report to Detective Bentley.

"If this place is part of a secret society, I wouldn't mind belonging to it," James replied.

"Don't you already belong to it?"

"Nope: When I woke that day when I was sedated, my foot inadvertently pushed on the lever up there. I played with it and soon discovered this place, and much more."

"You seem to know a lot of science." She felt more comfortable talking science at the moment rather than a more personal subject, as romance. She also still suspected him as being a member of the Secret Society, and he would be even more suspect if he answered her questions in a convincing manner. She would then have a decision to make, as to whether to report him to Detective Bentley or to remain silent for a better cause.

"I challenged what I didn't understand in school for it to be consistent with what I did know. The academia regarded me as a troublemaker. I flunked most of my classes."

"Maybe you should have listened first and figured it out later."

"I eventually figured out most of it, even with the bad grades, but some of it I still challenged."

"Did it get you anywhere?"

"No, but I don't see no harm in trying. The problem is the academia is extremely biased. Professors don't allow any blogs that challenge theory."

"You seem to have a lot of knowledge about climate change. Are they also biased about it?"

"Climate change is consistent with theory. I understand and accept it. What I don't accept is Big Bang theory."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Ask my old buddy. He's against it, too."

Kayla faced his old buddy.

"It's not consistent with the laws of physics. They assume the universe has expanded from a singularity whereby the laws of physics don't apply."

"It still could be true, couldn't it? What's the alternative?"

“The alternative is to stick with the right theory.”

“What theory is that?”

“There's relativity theory; it's consistent, and there is this tired light theory that also can be shown to be consistent with the rest of physics.”

“Isn't Big Bang consistent with the rest of physics?”

He eyed her. “Are you ready for this?”

“Yeah, give it to me straight and simple if you can.”

“Okay, here goes: Einstein assumed the universe is finite and static, as not to expand or contract but to maintain the same size. He even asserted a Cosmological Constant into his field equations as a repulsive force for it to keep gravity from shrinking the universe, but that wasn't necessary.”

“What does it have to do with the Big Bang?”

“The Cosmological Constant is only an *ad hoc* remedy of the Big Bang to explain why the universe could be increasing its expansion rate. This physicist named Friedmann examined the field equations and claimed they didn't maintain a static universe even with the Cosmological Constant, but not everything was figured into the equation.”

“What do you mean by the equation?”

“There was this discovery of a red shift in the spectrum of starlight of the more distant stars. To explain it, there were two alternatives. Either the universe was expanding for less light energy from more distant sources because they recede from us at a faster rate or because starlight loses energy as it moves through space. They chose the former, assuming the universe began from a singularity at a point in space where the energy density of the universe was then infinite.”

“If the universe isn't static, wouldn't it either contract or expand?”

“It still could be finite and static, but it is more reasonable that it is infinite with only an observable part of it as finite. Einstein just let Friedmann mislead him.”

“Can you explain how he was misled?”

“Sure, to formulate a theory, they further assumed this Cosmological Principle whereby the observable universe is isotropic and homogeneous, meaning it looks the same from anywhere in the universe. If we are actually at its edge, we still perceive it as though we are at its center. It complies with space-

time curvature of general relativity. Gravity curves the path of light for our perceptions of the universe to be relative.”

“Why is that a problem?”

“The problem with this assumption is its inconsistency with theory. If the universe is expanding, then gravity is decreasing for it to cause less space-time curvature. However, if clocks were relatively slower in the past, as due to more gravity, as according to relativity, then clocks are to be relatively faster in the future for less space-time curvature, which also allows the universe to be static.”

“I don’t get it. How can it now be static?”

“It’s relative. Gravity slows clocks, but if the universe gets bigger and clocks become faster along with faster light speed, but to still be determined the same speed by the faster clock, then distance measured according to light speed stays the same. It equates the same as a static universe.”

“Couldn’t gravity increase along with size for clocks to stay the same,” Kayla asked to her own surprise, “as by more mass from outside the event horizon being consumed by gravity?”

He seemed surprised as well. “That’s possible, but there are other unanswered problems.”

“I’m listening.”

“There’s this background radiation that appears to have no common origin. They assume it existed before the universe cooled enough to form matter, but light travels at the same speed. It is contrary to mass more at the edge of the universe receding faster.”

“Couldn’t the center of the universe have slowed more because of it being denser?”

“Have you taken physics?”

She shook her head no.

“Well, that’s possible, too, but it’s just another ad hoc remedy.”

“Well, is there a better alternative to Big Bang theory?”

“The real alternative is a tired light theory whereby light decreases in energy as light waves encounter a slight resistance of the medium through which they propagate instead of emitting less energy because of them receding from us. But the Big Bang Establishment rejects tired light because it requests explanation of why the distant stars are as visible as they appear instead of being distorted by light colliding with dust particles in space.”

“Isn't that a reasonable request?”

“It's biased,” James interrupted to say. “They accept only what they can't explain, like launching a projectile in space to help decide which thirteen versions of big bang theory is more correct, but they don't accept what the opposition does not explain, but which has been explained consistent with theory.”

“Okay, how has it been explained consistent with theory?”

“Einstein proposed an invisible wave for the particle-wave duality,” James continued. “He explained a photoelectric effect with light viewed as particles because of the amount of electrons emitted from a metal is more dependent on light frequency instead of its intensity. However, frequency is also a wave property, and the particle effect doesn't explain another experiment, as to how the energy of a single photon moving through two slits can produce an interference pattern on a screen. To explain this dual particle-wave nature of light, a hidden variable theory was proposed. However, the establishment doesn't accept hidden variables, but they have no problem accepting such ad hoc assumptions as dark matter and dark energy, and also of a virtual field of energy underlying the physical world.”

“Aren't they viable possibilities without a theory to replace the Big Bang?”

“They are in part, but Einstein himself proposed an invisible wave of light as part of this hidden variable explanation.”

“How can a wave be invisible?”

“It's invisible if it causes no detectable change. It's only partly visible as a pilot wave guiding particles of light, being light is characteristic of both wave and particle aspects.”

“Why is that significant?”

“The wave aspect of light can explain a lot more, like the long range effect of gravity of it losing only a tiny portion of its energy while leaving a vacuum effect in the wake of its emission from its source, which is mass.”

“How can it do that as such?”

“It's like inelastic collision. You throw a pillow at me and it doesn't bounce all the way back. The energy is changed to some other form. Similarly, electrons in metals divert to some other form of energy if the frequency of light is too quick for matter to respond.”

“How do the electrons get ejected, then?”

“The action is either elastic or inelastic. If it is elastic, then the light is totally reflected back. If it is inelastic, then the light is absorbed. If the frequency is of less energy, then it is merely converted to heat as molecular motion. With higher frequency of greater energy, electrons are emitted.”

“What’s its significance?”

“It’s consistent with theory that is itself consistent.”

“How is it consistent?”

“Simplified of Einstein’s momentum-energy-stress tensor is the Schwarzschild Metric whereby the Schwarzschild radius of capital R is a limiting condition for an escape speed not to exceed the speed of light c. The condition was interpreted by some physicists as a black hole, except Hawking and others pointed out it is contrary to the laws of thermodynamics. Simply put, for light to overcome gravity, it constitutes work energy, which it loses by means of the black hole emitting Hawking radiation. Black holes thus evaporate.”

“Couldn’t they still replace the energy by absorbing it from beyond the event horizon?”

“There’s still that possibility, but there’s a lot more. Planck, who introduced the quantum to explain particular results of experiment, also tried to modify it to comply with continual variance of relative motion. He came up with the concept of zero point energy, which agrees with the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle whereby it is not possible to determine both exact position or time and exact momentum or energy in one shot. Zero energy at absolute zero temperature violates the principle.”

“How does that relate to gravity?”

“A vacuum effect can occur from the emission of radiation. If detection of the radiation is slight, as to agree with the energy of light being lost by its movement through its medium, then there is a long range process in agreement with gravity being far less per mass in comparison to other forces of nature. Consider a constant decrease of light energy of capital H whereby, at distance capital R, HR equal c. Replace the speed parameter v in the Planck Constant with H and small r, and radius of the atom with capital R, and the value of the Planck Constant remains the same. General relativity and quantum electrodynamics thereby equate.”

“What is small r?”

“It is about 137 times shorter than either the nuclear or atomic radius of the hydrogen atom, depending on whether you consider all the mass of the atom or only its nuclear mass.”

“Why is it 137 times shorter?”

“The angular momentums of the atom and its nucleus are both about 137 times less than c for the action of light to be about 137 times shorter. We physicists refer to it as the fine structure constant.”

“You haven't explained the visibility aspect of the distant stars.”

“How do countless televisions receive light images from a single source so clearly?”

“I don't know?”

“It is because light is electromagnetic energy, as alternating electric and magnetic fields. Magnets are divisible. Divide one and you have two of them. If you amplify the two magnets and continue to divide them, then you have the means of using energy to move clear images here and there. Since light is electromagnetic energy, it is simply electromagnetic effects as electric current producing magnets. They can multiply if given more energy or become less energetic as they spread out from their source.”

“Well, that seems reasonable.”

“Yeah, but it's not going to be accepted by the established academia during my lifetime.”

“You seem to have advanced knowledge. Are you sure you're not part of a secret society?”

“I just pick up ideas that have been floating around for a long time and haven't been accepted because established theory is more difficult to overcome.”

She faced James. “Well, this place is a good escape, but it'd be difficult to stay here very long. Doesn't it flood in the winter time?”

“I don't know. I only discovered it this last summer.”

He didn't fall for her question, but she still suspected he and his buddy could belong to the Secret Society.

“You'll need someone like Bard or your mom to look out for you,” James continued to say, “as to furnish what you need. If you come and go too often, you'll be spotted. They'll probably be watching your mom, too.”

“She has talked about going to Eastern Oregon. I think she can help us develop the area for solar energy.”

“She could be a great help to us.”

“Do you have anything specific in mind?”

“Yeah,” he replied, “water. The area is arid. It needs a lot of water to grow food.”

“How are we going to get it water?”

“That’s a big problem. The mountains cut off the high flow of the hotter air that is more humid for it to pass over and be cooled for rain to occur. The temperature stays fairly constant, and is cooler, but there is not much water to be squeezed out of the air.”

When they climbed back up the ladder, James peeked at his small tablet. He then opened the doorway and climbed out.

“Would you like to see some of the operation I have going,” Kayla was asked by James when she climbed out, followed by Ralf.

She nodded yes.

“Like I said, ring me on the phone I gave you when you're ready. I'll ring back. If you rang a second time, then that tells me you want to meet. This is where we meet. Use the device and make sure no one follows you.”

Hacking Into the Federal Treasury

The next evening Kayla was on her last day as a waitress at the Valley River Inn. She had given her notice and agreed to work one last shift, and she decided to wear her earrings.

She was serving a fellow his Hawaiian macadamia crab cakes when he raised his hands and showed her his palms. "I'm just a messenger. I mean you no harm, but you are somehow involved in a scheme that is illegal. I'm sure we can work something out."

She stared at him. "I'm just being used. I have no control over it."

"Let me know who is controlling you and I'll do something about it."

"He's an alien stranger who claims to belong to a secret society. That all I know. Beyond that, he's invisible."

"How is he controlling you?"

"He hacked into my banking account and is using it."

"Tell me how he uses it."

"I don't know." She suddenly had another idea. "He could be hacking into your account. Have you checked it lately?"

He smirked as he reached into his pocket to hold a cell phone in his hand. He pushed some buttons and waited. He pushed a couple more buttons and stared at the screen. He suddenly appeared surprised. "Ten trillion dollars," he exclaimed.

"You must be the richest guy on Earth," Kayla replied, also surprised by what she heard.

"It was deposited by the US Treasury."

"You must have a lot of clout with the government."

"How are you doing this?"

She shrugged. "I'm not doing anything. It must be the secret society. I guess they have you now. Maybe they are done with me. That sure would be nice."

"What can I do?"

"I went to the police and told them everything I know. It seemed to help. At least it got me off the hook. They gave me immunity."

He rested his elbow on the table and his forehead in the palm of his hand. He pointed at his chest with his other hand and then at his ear. He then pointed at Kayla's chest and again at his ear.

Kayla nodded.

"I have to warn you," he said, "They have Bard Sucrets. You could be wired, I am wired, but he'll be crippled for life unless you fully cooperate with what they want."

"Who are they?"

"They are hired investigators, just like I am, but they'll do whatever it takes to get results. Crippling Bard is a step to their advantage. They are still in control. Caring for him they figure is your emotional weakness. They have no such weakness. They have his life to bargain with and no concern of whatever happens to him."

She stared angrily at him. She put her fists on her chest and jerked them apart. He put his hand on his chest and shook his head no. She then felt helpless, fearing for Bard's safety. It was a weakness she could not overcome, feeling guilty if she let them destroy Bard's career and his life.

"You know you are going to be arrested and charged, don't you?" she asked.

"I'm just caught up in the middle delivering a message. I go down either way."

"I'm the same. Please don't hurt Bard. I'll do whatever they want."

"You need to convince them you can help. If you can't, then Bard is of no use to them. They'll waist him, using him as an example."

"If I tell you what I know now, then the law will know. Do they want that?"

He paused, as to listen to someone else talking. "They'll find you tomorrow," he finally said, "Peddle your bike as far as you can east of here. Don't resist. Just let them take you. I'll let

the police have me. I need their protection. I know too much and will soon be dead otherwise.”

He got up out of his chair and walked away.

Her cell phone rang. She answered. It was Detective Bentley.

“You do not need to be captured,” he said. “They could have already killed Bard. It could be why they don’t want you to challenge their requests.”

“If there is a chance he’s still alive, I have to try to save him. He’s been there for me.”

“They are just taking advantage of you. There’s nothing you can do to save him. They will likely kill you too.”

“I can’t save him, you can’t, but maybe the Secret Society can, and there’s only one way to find out.”

The next morning she was on her bicycle peddling past the restaurant. She passed Alton Baker Park and entered the wooded area. Someone on a bicycle was approaching from the opposite direction. He continued on past her as she continued east. He passed the bike bridge leading to the university. She continued through the wooded area until she came to an open field with a road on her left to which the path veered into a street. A car passed and stopped in front of her. The doors opened and two men got out of it, one from the front passenger seat and the other from the left back seat.

She stopped and showed them a cell phone. The man who had gotten out of the car up front grabbed her phone. She then let them take her to be seated in the backseat between two men. The guy up front had a monitor.

“She’s not wired,” he said. “The phone was and had been off.”

She was not wired except for her diamond earrings. She decided to pick their minds.

“I sure miss Bard. Is he still alive?”

They did not answer. “He is still alive,” she thought.

“Did you hurt him?” she asked.

“He is not hurt,” she thought.

“Where is he?” she asked.

“Shut up,” the driver yelled.

“He will be in a separate room in another large motor home where they are taking you,” she thought. “They plan on

killing both you and him once they have obtained all the information that you can provide them with.”

They entered the town of Springfield and eventually turned right onto a street from where they turned left onto another street leading east. When they passed the small town of Vida, they came to a camping area beside the McKenzie River. There were two RVs and several campers in it, with men outside staring at them as they pulled up and stopped in front of an RV.

The man on her right got out and led her to the door of the RV. “Go in,” he said.

She opened the door and entered a room where three men sat in cushion chairs. She sat in one between two of the men. The other man leaned towards her.

“Spell it out,” he said. “Bard’s life depends on what you know.”

“I know where there is this Secret Society that is using me. That’s all I know.”

“Where is it?”

“It’s underground in a secret location near Alton Baker Park.”

“How do we find it?”

“It’s in a wooded area. The exact location is too difficult to describe.”

“Well, then, you will just have to lead the way. My two buddies here will escort you.”

“I’ll need my phone.”

“Now, why would you need your phone?”

“The hideout is only a meeting place. I need the phone to call James Baker. He’s a member of the society and can take you to them.”

“It probably has a tracer,” one of the men warned.

“One of the men who brought me here already has it,”

Kayla said. “It’s a regular phone and is turned off.”

“Go get it,” the leader said.

The man who had previously spoken got up, left and soon returned with the phone. He handed it to the leader.

“Bard is dead if this phone has a tracer,” the leader said.

“I know that, but I need the phone to call James.”

“What’s his number?”

“I don’t know. I just push the redial. If I get a ring back, I push the redial again and it tells him to meet me at the meeting place. If I get a second ring, he’ll be there.”

The leader pushed the redial and waited, and waited, and waited. There was no return ring. “Take her,” he finally said.

“He’s probably too busy to answer the phone,” she pleaded.

“You better hope he does.”

The two other guys got up and escorted her to another dark black sedan similar to the dark blue one she arrived in. She sat up front on the passenger side while one guy drove and the other guy sat right behind her as she directed them to the football stadium where they parked next to the wooded area. She then led them on foot to the underground hideout. She showed them the latch. One of them opened the door. He peaked down and shook his head no.

“There’s a level area about twenty feet down where there is an opening to a room. It has lights.”

“Check it out,” the other guy said.

The man that peaked down climbed down. After a few minutes, light began to shine from near the bottom of the hole.

“Get on down there,” the other guy said.

She started down and the other guy followed her down. They were soon inside the room.

“What is this place?” one of the guys asked.

“It’s just a meeting place. Like I said, I need the phone to contact James in order to set up a meeting.”

“You wait here,” one of them said, “I’ll take her back and see what our fearless leader wants to do.”

“You can stay if you want. There’s no way I’m going to.”

“One of us should stay. Okay, then, you go ahead and take her back.”

“Follow me,” the other guy said.

She and her escort made their way back to the sedan where Detective Bentley was waiting along with several police officers who suddenly appeared behind them.

“I got this strange information from James Baker,” Detective Bentley said. “What’s going on?”

“They have Bard in an RV just past Vida. I don’t think they have done anything to him yet, but there are two RVs and a lot of campers. You are going to need a lot of men.”

“I guess I’ll have to call both the state and the Feds. James Baker said there were two guys holding you. Where’s the other one?”

She hesitated before saying, “One was following us. He’s probably long gone by now.”

“Do you have a description?”

“The one that was with me could be his twin brother.”

“Well, after I take you to a safer place, I’m on my way to help rescue Bard.”

“I’ll be okay. Go ahead as fast as you can and save Bard.”

“I don’t have anyone to spare that can stay to protect you.”

“That’s okay. I have something I need to do and I’ll have someone protecting me while I’m doing it.”

“Do you mind telling me who it is?”

“Go save Bard. Hurry, they said they’d wait him if I wasn’t back in time.”

He nodded, got into his car and was soon on his way along with the rest of the police force.

Kayla walked back to the hole in the ground and found James sitting beside where it opened up.

“There still one down there,” Kayla warned.

He showed Kayla his spy device and then his gun. Kayla had a better idea. She was still wearing her earrings. She pointed at her chest and then down at the ground. She then waved for him to follow her. He opened the trap door to follow her down, leaving the entrance way open.

The entrance way into the room was open. Kayla went in showing her presence.

“What are you doing back here?” he asked.

“There has been a change of plans,” she replied as she walked past him to the other side of the room.

As the guy faced her, James came through the doorway, snuck up on the guy, grabbed his neck with an arm, slammed him to the ground and stuck a gun barrel into his mouth.

“Should I do him now or do you have something else in mind?” James asked.

She walked over and picked up the guy’s gun he had dropped. “Let him up.”

James let the guy get up on his feet.

“Where are you from?” Kayla asked.

“None of your damn business,” he replied.

“Who hired you?” she asked.

“None of your damn business,” he replied.

“A Dwight Stevens who lives in Chicago hired him,” she said.

“What the hell,” the guy said, “What’s going on? You must know a lot more than you let on.”

“I’m psychic, and you are in big trouble after I let Dwight know you told us about him.”

“What do you want from me?”

“Not much: Just everything you know I want to know. Start talking.”

Water World

Kayla pointed at the ground. Bard stooped down, removed some rock and uncovered the latch. He then raised the ground door. Kayla scooted herself through the opening to the nylon ladder, and Bard followed her down to the room where James, Ralf and Wanda Sue sat on the ground floor.

“I have more ideas on how to use the money,” James said.

“Sorry,” Kayla replied. “I have received no more money since the twenty million we divided among us. We need to make good with what we have.”

“What’s with the Alien Stranger,” Bard asked.

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen him since that day in the park. I haven’t communicated with him since your rescue.”

“Well, what are we now going to do?” James asked. “I have more houses to buy and convert to solar.”

“I hope we go forward,” Kayla replied. “My mother has purchased a restaurant and acreage over at Summer Lake. We need to develop it.”

“It will be an extremely difficult place to develop for that purpose,” Ralf advised.

“Why’s that?” James asked.

“The climate is too dry. There is not enough water to support a larger population of people.”

“There’s water underground,” James said.

“There is only enough of it available to supply the countless wells that already exist there,” Ralph replied.

“We can squeeze it out of the atmosphere from all that water rising from the equator?” James argued.

“The high mountain range west and south of the area prevents it from passing over,” Ralph answered. “Even though the high desert is relatively colder, the atmosphere is not humid enough to extract enough water from it.”

“Well, there’s water in the nearby mountains, isn’t there? We get a lot more than we need here in the valley.”

“You will need government permission to divert any of it east in place of its western flow.”

“You know,” Wanda Sue said, “FDR authorized the funding of the Grand Coulee Dam. It produced electricity and provided water to turn desert into a thriving farming community.”

“I thought you didn’t care to get political,” Bard reminded her.

“It can be useful. We might even need to get the Common Cause Society to help us out.”

“We could just transport the water over there,” James suggested. There’s plenty of solar energy. The wind blows like crazy at Summer Lake. We can transport greenhouses to the area. Once we have food and shelter to populate it, we can develop a paradise for a prosperous community.”

“That’s a long way to transport that much water,” Kayla pointed out.

“There is a viable possibility of transporting water from the Little Deschutes River,” James answered. “If you buy land in the area near the town of La Pine, the area is extremely difficult to grow vegetation because of summer frost. Only plants that can reverse the budding process can survive the summer frost, and the warmth of summer is not long enough for a prosperous planting season. The water could be more useful at Summer Lake. With all that Ponderosa and Jack Pine at La Pine, we’ll have all the wood we need to build small greenhouses there with drip irrigation systems to transport along with a year supply of water to Summer Lake.

“You will need a tremendous amount of greenhouses to make a difference,” Bard argued.

“Well, what else can we do?” Wanda Sue asked.

“You can store energy by converting water to hydrogen and oxygen, James answered. “If you use the stored energy for production of product at Summer Lake, the byproduct of the used energy could be water.”

“I get it,” Wanda Sue replied. “We use solar energy to convert water to stored energy. We use more solar energy to transport the stored energy to Summer Lake. We create an oasis in the desert to support a large population to develop the land

for food and restoration that also absorbs pollutants out of the air and cools the planet. What else would we need?"

"You'll need a lot," Ralf said. "The air at Summer Lake is not humid enough for us to efficiently extract water from it. Taking water from the Deschutes area could be costly and destructive to it."

"We could use methane gas for energy and get water as its byproduct," Kayla said to a mostly doubtful audience.

"She has something there," Ralph said. "NASA has been developing a closed system for traveling to Mars. If you combine the H₄C of the methane with the CO₂ breathed out, you get water, which can further be converted to oxygen for the recycling of air. Research at Duke University has shown that ultraviolet light can be used to more efficiently break up CO₂ and produce H₄C."

"I have an even better idea," Kayla said.

"What's that?" Bard asked.

"We use alcohol for fuel. Its byproduct is water and other nutrients for converting the alkaline soil over there for more productivity."

They faced Ralph.

"She's right again," Ralph said. "A company called Algenol has pioneered the way. Blue algae is used along with sunlight, CO₂ and saltwater to produce ethanol and even gasoline. Get it started and truck it over to Summer Lake where it can be distilled more efficiently with the lower humidity."

"Well," James said, "all we need to do, then, is to build an alcohol fuel producing plant at the coast and one for distilling and using it at Summer Lake."

James, Wanda Sue and Ralph seemed more encouraged as they departed from the meeting. Bard seemed to have another issue in mind.

"You know, Kayla, I'm ready to make a commitment; how about you?"

"Well, I'm just starting to get control of my life. You're about to have a career in football."

"I'll have the whole offseason to make up for it."

"Are you asking?"

"That I am."

"Well, I'm saying yes."

He hugged her and they kissed.

“You are just getting control of your life and willing to commit yourself. I sure want to be deserving of it.”

“What good is freedom if you don’t choose to better your life with it?”

“Are you a descendent of Socrates?”

“I’m just human. Wanda Sue would agree money provides you with freedom of choice. You give it up when you spend it, but earning it back makes it that much more worthwhile.”

“Maybe you still have the alien stranger in you. What do you think happened to him?”

“I’m not sure, but I do have some thoughts.”

“Are they secret thoughts?”

“They are except to whom I need to share my trust.”

“Trust away.”

“He used DNA to grow the outside of his body into human form. I think he’s been growing a new identity.”

“He’s not from Earth?”

“I get these thoughts he’s immortal and goes into hibernation from being too bored with nothing to do. He is the only member of a secret society here on Earth. The rest of the aliens are a colony in outer space seeking adventure.”

“You mean they are not going to inhabit our planet and take charge of it like you have taken charge of me?”

“They only seek adventure. Their planet history was similar to Earth’s. They used gold for money. There was not enough of it for sufficient distribution. It was hoarded. The price of commodities decreased according to supply and demand economics. Those hoarding gold became wealthier. Those without it became pirates and thieves. Wars were fought. Slavery became the norm along with the destruction of the environment. A few of them developed science. They compressed carbon into diamonds for more plentiful distribution of money according to cost of production, which relatively decreased with the advance of new technology. They also increased their life expectancy and eventually became immortals, but their planet overpopulated and self destructed. Some of them were fortunate to have ventured into outer space where diamond batteries enable them with enough energy to maintain computers for more efficient use of energy.”

“They must not have anything to worry about.”

“They are only immortals if not killed by physical forces. Their spaceships are advanced enough to recognize and avoid threats, but there is also a lack of motivation to continue living. They learned to turn their bodies off until such adventures as is here on Earth are discovered.”

“So, why would he leave this exciting planet and go back to a boring life?”

“I do not believe he left.”

“Where did he go?”

“I don’t know for sure, but my mother hired a manager for the restaurant. The guy sure talks like the alien stranger did.”