

THE
ALIEN
STRANGER

BOBBY DEE TICER

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QUEST FOR LIFE OF SELF CONTROL

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 beside a light tan fellow on the far side of her. Kayla continued towards them.

“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.”

The light tan fellow waved his hand. Kayla returned the wave.

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

“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.”

Wanda Sue shook her head no while grinning. “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 while nodding her head yes, “but it’s getting warmer. When chaos reigns, it’s everyone for their own self.”

“Oh yeah,” Wanda Sue said bowing her head. “I sure hope to become an accountant so I can pay off my student loan. You made a good decision, two years at a community.”

“I had little choice. My dad was killed when I was fourteen. My mother and I are still working our way out of debt.”

A muscular fellow about six feet, four inches tall entered the room and took a seat behind Wanda Sue. He leaned towards

Kayla. "Hi, I'm Bard Sucrets. What are nice girls like you two doing in a class like this?"

"I'm here to learn," Kayla replied facing him with a fixed gaze to become aware of his dark brown hair and blue eyes. "What's an all-American tight-end doing here? Why didn't you turn pro?"

He raised his eyebrows with a curious expression. "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."

"Well, you seem very nice," he replied with a wink. "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?"

He nodded with a smile. "Hey, show me the way to a nice fish filet and I'll be a poet someday."

The fellow on Wanda Sue's right only grinned as the room soon filled with students, and an elderly gray-haired man soon stood 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?" He faced the class here and there.

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 stress when things aren't going so good."

The professor pointed at Kayla when she raised her hand.

"If someone is shy, as sensitive to rejection or not sure of commitment, wouldn't joking around be both tactical and deceptive?"

"Good answers: Humor is directly related to emotion, and it 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 of 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 when they were alone together outside the building, “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 Sue 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 Sue if she wants me to; even though I heard she is a socialist.”

Kay shrugged. “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 bike. I live across the river not too far away from the inn.”

He smiled. “You ride a bike, 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’m 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.”

He gazed curiously. “Hey, aren’t you missing an earring?”

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

“Here, take these,” he said reaching into his pocket.

“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.”

Kayla fixed her eyes on the earrings, noticing their sparkle while still wondering if they were real or not. “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.”

He leaned forward. “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 as 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 at a rack visible to Franklin Boulevard. After putting on her new earrings, she unlocked her bike from the rack and walked it down to the traffic light. She pushed the button. When the light turned green, she rode her bike across the six lane street, past a duck pond to enter 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.

She had noticed a hummingbird hovering above Franklin Boulevard. She hadn’t thought much of it, but she noticed it or another one hovering beside the bridge. Why would it be where there are no flowers to feed on?

Across the bridge she immediately entered a wooded area of fir trees. 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 stop before hitting him, catching her fall with her left leg and left arm.

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

She turned away towards her bike. “Sorry, I left my purse at home.”

She trembled feeling his hand on her shoulder.

“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 hurried to raise her bike, but he grabbed her arm and prevented her from leaving.

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

"Help," she tried to scream as he covered her mouth with his hand.

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

"Take them," she was able to cry out, "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 had gone limp just after he tore her blouse. She managed to push herself away from under him to 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, and holding a barrel-like device.

"I only sedated him," he calmly spoke. "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 not too far away from here. 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, and I believe this belongs to you.”

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

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, not feeling comfortable where she was at.

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.

The guy who attempted to rape her opened his eyes. She peddled hard to get as far away from him as she could.

She was soon out of the wooded area moving beside the river towards Alton Baker Park, and she again noticed a hummingbird hovering nearby.

The path up ahead past Alton Baker Park was mostly between the river and an expressway. About ten minutes later she 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 inn. She continued past it up the trail about a block, crossed over the river on a bike bridge past pedestrians, continued southwest 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. Yep, as she entered the house, she noticed a hummingbird hovering nearby.

Inside the house 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 leading up to a patio where people sat to enjoy the river scenery. She went on into the inn to meet up with the host and manager, her mother, Darcy, 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. “Have you met someone special that you haven’t told me about?”

“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 vary 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.”

Kayla walked out the front door of the Valley River Inn, crossed the street to the large parking lot where she again noticed

a hummingbird hovering nearby. Was it spying on her? She entered the Valley River Mall where 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 to hand 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 up with 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 along with a photo of the necklace.

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."

He grimaced while eyeing the necklace. "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, but they haunted her just the same.

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.”

He raised his eyebrows. “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; that must be why the detective is here talking to Darcy, but I have just the place for them.”

“Not your pocket I hope.” She winked.

“Nope, they’ll be right here when you get off. I’ll make sure of it. After all, I’m also the night watchman.”

When back in the restaurant, Kayla stood alone beside a table as a tall, slim man approached her from where her mother stood.

“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. “Your mother is very informative, as was the clerk at the jewelry store.”

“Yeah, I thought the guy 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,” Kayla replied, “it’s nearly the news itself. There has sure 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. If the alien stranger is in control, then he’s worst than the rapist.”

“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 and looks somewhat like you? Could you somehow be related to him?”

“He somehow knew my name, 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.” She paused for a few seconds, feeling uncomfortable with the question. “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?”

“This isn’t good,” she said grimacing, feeling inferior to a star football player.

“I’ll try to keep your name out of the investigation.”

“Wait. You know, there was another guy sitting close by who heard me say my name. A hummingbird also seemed to be following me. Maybe it was a drone spying on me because of me having the earrings.”

Detective Bentley stared, as if in disbelief. “I don’t think there are any hummingbird drones on the market.” He paused. “But an alien could be a spy with advanced technology. You never know.”

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. Could she just part of a bigger investigation already going on? Could Bard or the other fellow that sat beside Wanda Sue be part of it, or could the alien stranger be a spy with advanced technology attempting to use ordinary citizens for a devious purpose?

UP AND OVER TO FLOAT AWAY

While waiting for her mother to get off work, Kayla prepared a salad along with a couple turkey sandwiches and noodle soup.

“You didn’t have to do this,” her mother said as she entered the kitchen from the front door. “I had a superb lunch at work.”

“I needed something to do. I don’t go back to class until Thursday, and thinking about tomorrow is something else.”

“What’s this about tomorrow?”

“I’m going to Alton Baker to meet up with this alien stranger.”

Her mother stood with a creased brow, as if bewildered. “You do work tomorrow evening. Should I call Betty?”

“No. Detective Bentley wants to know more about the stranger. Somebody will be close by with a camera. It’ll be okay.”

The next morning she did ride her bike to Alton Baker Park. She sat alone on a bench beside a table only to watch ducks swim on a pond and circle around her when walking on the grass.

After about an hour, she noticed a hummingbird hovering nearby. She turned her head, pretending not to notice it.

Her phone rang.

“Hello,” she answered.

“Did you sell the necklace?”

“No. It’s being evaluated. I should have some money for you tomorrow. I’ll stop by after class. Can you meet me here? I want to avoid the wooded area.”

“If you are along and there is no one nearby watching out for you, then I will meet you where you now are. Otherwise, I could be apprehended and deported for being an alien.”

“Yeah, about that guy, he looks after me and wants to make sure I’m safe. I’ll tell him not to follow me; I’ll be okay. After all, you saved my life. I know I can trust you.” For him to trust her, she now knew she needed to inform Detective Bentley to have his men be more invisible.

As Kayla started to get back onto her bike, she heard, “Hey, I’m John von Lay, not looking for a fray, but what can I say?”

She recognized the fellow that pulled up beside her on his bike. He was the guy sitting next to Wanda Sue yesterday in class. She now suspected he must be the one who told the alien stranger her name. It seemed too much of a coincidence that he would be here at this time.

“You can tell me what you’re doing here,” she said.

“I’m testing out this new electric bike I designed and built. It’s a hybrid.”

The sight of the bike impressed her. It was not technically impressive as the hummingbird drone, but it did indicate the use of advanced technology.

“The motor is in the hub of the rear wheel. Peddling it charges the battery. It’s convenient for going up hill, fighting a strong wind, or getting somewhere in a hurry. It has both a sensor to turn on for peddling and a throttle for taking off.”

“It must cost a lot. Do you sell them?”

“Yeah, I work at the electric bike store on High Street. It’s right by the tracks. We rent, sell and fix. Want your bike converted?”

“Maybe when I can afford it,” she replied after a little hesitation. At least she now had a place to check out to find out if she is being lied to.

“This one is only about five grand. Let me know; see you back in class.”

He turned the throttle and sped away down the bike path. She knew where high street was. There being several ways to get to it and the railroad tracts, but they were not that convenient, as they all involved uphill climbs and mostly sidewalk instead of bike paths. Besides, she needed to get ready for work.

The next morning Kayla cooked her favorite breakfast, oats as a wholegrain cereal, with milk added for protein and vitamin D along with a healthy balance of minerals and other nutrients. She also added a few more ingredients for nutritional purpose: a squirt of vanilla extract to clear her sinuses caused by her allergies from spring and summer pollen, and a teaspoon of nutmeg having a long list of healthy nutrients, a teaspoon of cinnamon to help control her blood sugar, and a couple slices of dark chocolate. As for a sweetener, she chose this morning to add maple syrup instead of a sliced up banana.

On her way to class Kayla decided to head up south to Fifth Street to take the bike path east to where it ended at High Street by the railroad tracts. When she arrived there, there was no bike store in sight. She concluded John von Lay had lied to her.

Kayla arrived early for class. She sat alone, waiting for others to show up for class.

“You need someone to look after you,” Bard said when he entered the room and seated himself in a chair next to her.

“I guess someone informed you,” she said as a few more students entered the room, including Wanda Sue and John von Lay sitting next to each other.

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

As Kayla paused, eyeing and wondering if Wanda Sue was in cahoots with John von Lay, a few other students entered the room and seated themselves here and there.

“My mother works there,” Kayla replied to Bard’s question. “My father died years ago and left us with too much debt. 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,” Bard said with a lower voice while leaning forward her way.

For a moment she stared at the wall and rubbed her chin with her index finger and thumb. “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.

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, how can you learn anything?” Kayla asked while locking her arms tight in front of her chest.

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.”

“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’ll 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.”

Professor Overly addressed the class, “Today we are going to discuss the role of knowledge in societal relations. How do you weigh secrecy against straightforwardness?”

Wanda Sue raised her hand. The professor pointed at her.

“Secrecy begets mistrust. It divides us. There are economic scams to sell inferior products, and politicians lie to become elected. Voters need to be vigilant and demand openness.”

Bard raised his hand while shaking his head. The professor pointed at him.

“We live in a world of competition. If my opponent knows the play, then I’m a sitting duck.”

Kayla raised her hand. The professor pointed at her.

“We do compete, but we also join forces. To join, we need to trust each other. The horse can be led by a carrot. I agree with Wanda Sue. What secret awaits the horse could lead to mistrust if it is dishonorable deception just for controlling it.”

“Yeah,” Bard replied, “but we might need a way to control the horse. We feed it and it trusts us. That’s how it works.”

“Those are interesting possibilities,” the professor replied. “Society does compete among one another. We have hunted for fair game, but we have also united against obstacles too overbearing for the individual self to overcome. If we have inferior products to sell, deception can be an advantage. If we have superior products to sell, then reputation and honesty is usually the key to success. Dishonest information could very well damage that reputation . . .”

After class, Kayla 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, it’s complicated, and I don’t have time to 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,” she said looking away. “See you next Tuesday.”

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.”

Why would an All-American be a spy, she thought? They must have taken advantage of him being hooked on drugs. Was she next in line? In any case, she needed at this time to separate herself from Bard to follow the plan.

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. After the path curved towards the river and then away from it, she noticed Bard taking a short cut by leaving the bike path in favor of the grassy field. And yes, several times she had noticed a hummingbird along the way.

As the path directed her back close to the river, 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.

“I’m almost there,” she said while pointing at the hummingbird. Seeing it hovering nearby indicated to her Detective Bentley’s plan was so far working, but Bard following her might become suspicious to the alien stranger. Hopefully, she had outdistanced him.

She locked the bike to a bike rack and walked over to a picnic table. She sat on the bench and watched the visual on her phone for about ten minutes before seeing the alien stranger walking along the trail towards the bike bridge. “I see you coming,” she said to her phone, suspecting the hummingbird drone could pick up on a message intended for Detective Bentley.

A man with a fishing rod laid it down, stood up and 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 with no attempt to swim.

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 had been when coming home drunk and abusing her mother. 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.

Bard was soon in the company of a couple policemen, and she suspected he could now be in trouble with the law.

She suddenly had no more visual on her phone. Apparently she was no longer needed.

While other policemen hurried to search the river to 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, but she couldn't help think he had some reason to get even with the alien stranger. 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.

Seeing the hummingbird nearby, she suspected for sure it was a drone. Maybe the alien stranger had help to find and rescue him. That could be either good or bad: good if it kept Bard out of trouble; bad if it enabled the alien stranger even more power to control her life.

The hummingbird hovered directly in front of her, it and darted now and then to her left. Was it attempting to tell her something? She followed it to the river where she spotted the alien stranger under water trapped beneath a log. It seemed hopeless that he would still be alive, but she felt the need to do whatever she could for the possibility of saving a life.

She managed to go down into the cold water and lift him to the service. He lay motionless, not breathing. She felt helpless and sad, wanting to move on, getting only a busy signal on her phone. She reasoned they would surely find him now.

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 trou-

ble with the law, and she felt guilty for being part responsible for it, even though it was mostly his own doing. And she had sympathy for the alien stranger. Seeing him dead wasn't pleasant.

Bard, from Thursday to the next class on Tuesday, was the main news of the day. He had been arrested for possible homicide. Although he was released on bail, the coach announced he was indefinitely suspended from the team.

The next Tuesday Kayla opened the door of the classroom and saw Bard sitting alone, eyeing her, shaking his head, and rubbing the top of his head.

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

They exchanged stares.

"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 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."

She froze. "They didn't find the body?" she asked knowing she had left it in a place visible enough for the law to find with their search effort. "Maybe he isn't 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," Bard raised his voice to say. "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, and beside John von Lay, who had just sat down. She wanted to believe Bard, but she also dreaded being hopelessly involved in something she had little control over, and the stares at her from other students indicated she was the guilty one to blame.

"Things are not always what they seem," John von Lay said with a tone of voice indicating he was not against her, but with a message that could indicate his involvement as well. "Be careful. I wouldn't pass judgment until he's been proven guilty."

“I just don’t know what I’m mixed up in.” And she didn’t know if John von Lay was a part of it, standing up for Bard. “By the way, I didn’t find a bike store at Fifth and High Street.”

“I’m sorry; it’s on the east side behind the building. Just follow the tracks around to it.”

She nodded, wondering if and why he would still lie.

When the class started filling up with students, Bard stood up with a mean frown on his face and jabbed his fist up in the air.

As he left the room in a hurry, 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.

“I know how you feel,” John von Lay said, “hang in there. Things might work themselves out and be okay.”

She wondered how they could get Bard out of his mess.

He waved his right hand forward from his eye as he stood up and walked away.

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. 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 how to cope with life situations. She knew no other way, life being otherwise without purpose. She decided to accept her destination as her own personal path in life. Hopefully she could learn from it, and perhaps everything would come out okay, but there was plenty of doubt to consider as well.

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 thought.

“Do not be puzzled,” she thought, “I will help you understand what you are thinking.”

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

“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.”

She pressed her forehead with her palms. “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 help 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. I think you for releasing me from the log and allowing me to turn myself back on to not be found by the police.”

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

She laid the phone back on the desk while quickly turning to rush out the doors of her small bedroom and the house, and she rode 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, as Kayla needed to ask her mother for another favor.

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

“No. Is something wrong?” her mother asked with a curious expression on her face.

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

Darcy jerked her head back. “Did you sell the jewelry?”

“No. The police have the necklace. It’ll be mine if no one claims it, and if 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 to stare 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.”

“It’s a setup. 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.”

Darcy spread her arms and hands apart. “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 to sit 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. One of his hummingbird drones must have spotted her.

“Did you put money in my bank account?” she shouted.

He nodded yes.

“Where did you get it?”

“Where and from whom I received it must remain a secret,” he calmly replied.

“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; let me be.”

“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, or is someone else in my class in your secret society?”

“There is no one else in the secret society that is also in your class. Bard did not tell me your name. I learned it when I heard you talking to Bard by means of the earrings he gave to you. My hummingbird drone relayed the sound to my receptor.”

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. But she was still skeptical about John von Lay.

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

“I cannot do it if it would 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, turn yourself off and turn yourself back on. You'll know by the plan if it's a trap. You probably just didn't pay enough attention to my discussion with a detective to be aware of what he wanted me to do.”

“You removed the earrings from your ears.”

She paused to ponder the situation, realizing she did have some privacy. “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. That was too high to lift, but no one jumps that high.” He rubbed his chin. “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.”

She leaned a little forward to stare straight at his face. “He just jumped, and he’ll do it again.”

“Do you think he’s still alive?” he asked with a crinkled nose.

“There’s no evidence he isn’t alive, and I know otherwise.”

“He’ll be found by someone eventually, most likely deceased,” the coach replied while shaking his head no.

“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?”

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

“That’s it?”

“Trust me. 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, but the park was only a short distance away from the football stadium.

“Follow me,” she told him while walking over to her bike.

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 phone. "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. Coach Molten pointed his cell-phone at it. What appeared to be a man with long hair took off his wig and leaped about twenty feet above the railing only to fall down into the river. The coach ran to the river, pointing the phone 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 knowledge. 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. "That guy belongs to a secret society that is suspect. He's using me."

"Wasn't it a little dangerous jumping into the river?"

"I'm sure he wore a life preserver this time and didn't turn himself off like he did the last time."

The coach tilted his head along facing left with a crinkled jaw, but he managed to say, "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 where she would have plenty of time to assess the troubling thoughts of her mind. 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 she decided to first check in with the alien stranger. "Kayla to Alien Stranger," she thought, "I hope you are okay?"

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, and I did get through to you with only my voice this time.”

“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 time. 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 having a 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.”

The next day she had another night off from work, having money in the bank. She was on her bike heading to the bike store. She had decided to check out some electric bicycles to confirm John von Lay’s claim that it is really there, and to find out if the money added to her banking account was also real.

When she arrived at the bike store, she discovered John von Lay did indeed work there. He showed her a few different styles.

“I sure like the one you were riding.”

“I can let you have it for five grand.”

She nodded and showed him her debit card.

She followed him to the cash register 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. “My bank is only about five blocks away. I’ll be back in about a half hour.”

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

“I’d like to transfer five grand from my savings to my checking.”

“You only have eighty three dollars and forty cents in your savings,” the bank teller soon replied after Kayla had swiped her debit card for it to be verified. “You do have only about two-hundred in your checking. Do you think someone has hacked into your savings account?”

“Sorry,” Kayla 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. Maybe I put the money in the joint account I have with my mother at another bank. I don’t seem to be remembering much, lately.”

Walking away from the bank teller's curious stare, she soon rode her bike all the way home where she went straight to her cell-phone to check out her banking account. 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? Her droopy body managed to make it over to her bed to lie down in disgust.

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

Kayla held her cell-phone up for her mother to see the bank display on the screen.

“Wow, did you hit the lottery?” her mother asked after walking up close to see the screen.

“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. I just want to help if I can.”

“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 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. She had little control of her life, much less than before if none at all.

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, and to make sure Bard would not still be accused of causing the alien stranger's death.

"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. My lawyer also said there's evidence that guy who jumped is still alive."

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

His eyes opened wide. "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. He must've had springs in his shoes or something to make him go high."

"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 with some help from Kayla.”

“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 lot of soda pop.”

“Get out of here. Soda pop doesn’t cure sore 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 if too much of it is consumed. 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 to fall into the river and survive, and with me also 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 dollars in it that I’m unable to use? I reckon I’m in trouble with the law instead of you being in trouble with it.”

Bard took turns eyeing Kayla and the alien stranger.

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

Bard again took turns eyeing Kayla and the alien stranger.

“I tried to spend it. It 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. He’s right about the spinach. Too much of it with milk can result in a kidney stone. I had a friend in school with a bone disease. A healthy diet was all that kept her alive.”

“You might be putting yourself in danger.”

“Yeah, I might be putting you and others in danger as well, but what else can I do? 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 when we meet again in class."

"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 also has these hummingbird drones. He indeed could belong to a secret society with advanced knowledge."

Bard 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."

He nodded, thankfully.

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 he appeared to be well organized and knowledgeable about his profession as he studied Kayla's statements.

"If the money is donated," he said, "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, and they would have a different direction to follow for their investigation."

"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 the earrings to her and continued, "Those diamonds appear to be commercially made, but we were unable to find transmitters in them. 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 cell-phone. 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 being an illegal alien and a spy justifies our investigation into criminal intent. If the secret society 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 to serve your country?"

"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 asked with an attentive expression.

"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 disbelief, "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," she answered with a stare. "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 also take that into consideration. Just don’t use our trust in you against us.”

“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 taking opioids. 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. When he eyed her, it countered the presence of the law. She could only scoot her chair a few inches away from him.

“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?”

“Baker,” she briefly murmured, wondering if he was heir to Alton Baker, acquiring special privileges.

“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?” He sat narrow-eyed.

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

“If only I could and did rat on 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 see what I can find out.”

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

“I’ll have to get it from the bank. They’ll need to know it’s really me.”

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. It also helped that he was able to get the bank manager to call the police, and to ask for Detective Bentley for him to confirm James Baker was the caller.

After being informed of the routing number, Kayla turned on her cell-phone. "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 now needed the help of a rapist to find out.

At least she believed she had determined James Baker was not a member of the secret society. He had proper identification, and if he was willing to put his life in danger by accepting stolen money, then he would likely become a liability of the secret society. If there was another member of the secret society who she needed to determine, it would mostly likely be John von Lay.

She needed a plan. It would likely involve including Bard and Wanda Sue for bringing John von Lay into the mix.

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 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 next to Wanda Sue and then John von Lay.

“Have you made a decision?” Bard asked Kayla when she sat down at the table next to Bard.

“I decided to notify the police,” she replied while waiting to see how John von Lay responded. He showed no response.

“That was a wise decision,” Bard said. “What, then, is this thing about a common cause society?”

“It’s related. How’s your back?”

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

Kayla shook her head no and asked, “I take it this is all the members we have for the common cause society? Could one of you have access, say, to a society that has members of advanced knowledge that could be helpful?”

Bard shrugged. “Your reputation as a trouble maker didn’t help. These two are all I could get.”

Kayla shrugged. “We could sure use 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 make amends by helping out in a good cause.”

Bard shook his head, as in doubt. "You give an addict you hardly know twenty grand. 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," James said. "I appreciate it."

Kayla addressed Bard and Wanda Sue. "This is James Baker." She directed her hand from first pointing at Bard to lastly pointing at John von Lay, saying. "These three are Bard, Wanda Sue and John von Lay. Please, have a seat and join us."

James 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, lifted up a candle along with a candle holder. He put the candle in the holder, placed it on the table, and lit the candle with a lighter. He again reached down and brought up a holding frame that went over and around the candle. He then brought up a paper cup and a container of water. 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 also find out 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. They live in the now instead of preparing for the future.”

“Still, isn’t that your specialty? Shouldn’t we include a society with experience against political one-sidedness?”

Wanda Sue seemed to nod grudgingly.

“Then let’s get going and let’s 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 crinkled her nose as she faced Bard. He nodded yes.

“She did give me twenty grand,” James said.

Wanda Sue shrugged, spreading her hands out away from her chest as seemingly dumbfounded but okay with it.

Kayla continued, "I might have gotten some big tips, or maybe I'm being duped into a setup. I was able to give James money, but the source is anonymous."

"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 that can be overcome 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 straight 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. He might know something we'll need to know."

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. In camping outdoors, I learned a lot about the weather, and I figured out how climate change works.”

“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. To overcome all this, solutions to climate change also need to promote the economy. Do you have any good ideas?”

“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 it 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. We get more of the freezing cold from the Arctic even though the planet as a whole gradually becomes warmer on the average.”

“That seems to make sense,” Kayla commented.

“What’s the economic 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 both water and carbon. More water promotes more growth, and more plants then absorb more carbon out of the atmosphere in supplying food and real wealth for the growing population of people.”

“Yeah,” Bard said, “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? Were John von Lay and Wanda Sue already a part of it? Hopefully the continuation of the discussion would help her find out.

“What’s your solution?” she asked James.

“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. If he doesn’t tell me how he spends the money in a way I approve it, then you don’t give him anymore, Okay?”

“I’ll spend the money for a good cause,” James replied, “if only I get the chance to do it.”

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 while the rest of your crew dies because you questioned orders?"

Kayla felt uncomfortable hearing 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.

She took her hand off her forehead and said, "Let's properly introduce ourselves and find out what we bring to the table."

"I told you my role," Bard said. "Do you accept it?"

"Yes, I really do; thanks."

Bard pointed his thumb at Wanda Sue.

"I bring expertise in economics," she said. "Real wealth is not money. Real wealth is product. Clean air has little if any economic value even though we cannot live five minutes without it, and that polluted air is harmful to our health. It even has negative economic value if industry is taxed to clean it up, but clean air has real value for a healthy life style."

"So, what do we do?" Bard asked.

"To promote this healthy lifestyle economically, we need product to sell. Money is a facilitator, as credit, for the creation of product. More money in circulation only inflates the price of product and devalues the dollar. More product increases the value of the dollar. Distribution is also the key to a healthy economy. More money printed as credit with proper distribution for more

creation of product balances out for the creation of more wealth, real or economic.”

“How, then, does economics combat climate change in a way it promotes a better economy?”

“We need to use solar energy as more free energy for creating product we can buy and sell in good faith.”

“That sounds good, Wanda,” Kayla said. “What do you bring to the table, John?”

“I was majoring in physics and chemistry at Harvard. I let my roommate use my laptop. He downloaded a bunch of porn. Since it was my computer, I got caught and was suspended indefinitely. I came west to find a good school for my degree.”

Kayla shrugged.

“I agree with both Wanda and James, There has also been a lot of effort to control climate change, but now it needs a whole lot more. The real solution is how we use carbon, water, and so forth. If we simply use hydrogen to combine with oxygen or air for water as the byproduct, then the hot hydrogen combines with the heavy oxygen in the ozone layer in allowing more harmful ultraviolet rays to reach us from the sun, but if we used hydrogen and oxygen underground to create energy along with solar energy, then the byproduct of water could be useful for the growth of plant life without the risk of depleting the ozone layer. The use of carbon is similar. It has many uses. Combined with hydrogen, for instance, it can be very explosive for weaponry. It is also a vital nutrient of animal life and such things as the creation of diamonds. Just allowing too much of it in the atmosphere is what we need to avoid.”

Kayla eyed Bard. “It looks like we have that expert we’re going to need.”

He shrugged, and then pointed at James. “Why do we then need him?”

“I know the homeless, good workers who need jobs. It’s the proper distribution of wealth for more of it.”

“Is his plan going to work?” Bard asked John von Lay while facing him.

“It’s a good gesture, but it’s not viable.”

“What does it need to be viable?” Kayla was quick to ask.

“Money talks . . . donate a billion dollars to the University for financing its science labs. It then purchases the necessary equipment to produce hydrogen fuel with laser light. That’s only a good start. It’ll then need equipment to tunnel under ground in

Eastern Oregon for creating underground aqueducts and reservoirs, but that by itself won't even make a noticeable dent in reversing global warming."

"I like this guy," Bard said facing Kayla while pointing his thumb at John von Lay.

FINANCING ECONOMIC CLIMATE CHANGE

Kayla, sitting between Bard and John von Lay, noticed Wanda Sue ignoring her, sneering while walking to a seat up front close to the professor.

Today we are going to discuss the ramifications of freedom and conformity,” Professor Overly announced.

Kayla heard the sound of loud rock music from the back of the room. Professor Overly calmly pointed towards it. The music stopped.

“Yes Tom, there is freedom to make noise, but it prohibits our freedom to teach and learn. That is one ramification of freedom. What are others?”

Wanda Sue raised her hand.

The professor pointed at her.

“Money provides the freedom to choose. Once you choose, you’ve spent your freedom. The wealthy have a lot more freedom over the poor. They can monopolize and dictate choice.”

Bard raised his hand.

The professor pointed at him.

“Freedom comes from opportunity. You earn it. If I play well, I have more opportunity to perform. If I don’t play well, I sit on the bench.”

“Yes,” the professor said, “we compete for freedom. When we spend money, we need to earn more of it to maintain our level of freedom. Our choices are also consequential. We can choose who to marry, the success of which requires commitment. If we shoot for the moon and don’t make it, then the failure is more disheartening. If we have more knowledge and a proper attitude, we are more apt to succeed in life. Although lots of students are in college hoping to become very wealthy as a professional athlete, only a select few of them succeed at it. Even some of the select few become injured and don’t make it. It is wiser to get that education as a backup instead of becoming a total failure.”

Kayla raised her hand.

The professor pointed at her.

“Have you ever belonged to a secret society?”

The professor turned his head, facing the wall, as to stare into space. He then nodded. “That is a good question. If the secret society has good intentions, then it can provide for a good outcome. If it has bad intentions, if to start a revolution only for the sake of an individual goal not in the best interest of the community, then the outcome would not be as favorable.”

“People of a secret society can take control over our freedom,” Kayla blurted out.

“Yes, they can, and there is also the establishment, good for some of us, bad for others. Women and colored people once did not have the freedom to vote, or to live by equal standards, as to get equal pay for equal work; now they have a lot more of that equality, if not all of it. It often takes a lot of effort to obtain equality of individual freedom. It is a life challenge for most of us in one way or the other.”

“How can I have freedom if I’m controlled by someone with all the money and power to control me?” Kayla asked.

“You earn it,” Bard answered.

“Yes,” Wanda Sue answered, “money as freedom you earn, but you also spend. You need to earn more of it. You also need the opportunity to earn it. The rich can for oligopolies and monopolies to prevent all of us from having fair opportunities. In the 1950s, for instance, the big gas companies had gas wars in lowering the price to drive out smaller independents. They were then able to raise gas prices to a new level.”

“All you really can do,” Bard said, “is live with what you got and make the right decision. If you make bad ones, spend money unwisely, then you’re likely to have less freedom. Make good decisions, invest wisely, grow stronger; that’ll give you more freedom.”

“Government policy also needs to prevent monopolization,” Wanda Sue pointed out. “It will only do that if we and they are aware of it and we vote wisely. If we don’t take issue with it, then the poor become even more suppressed.”

“I have practice in a half hour,” Bard said to Kayla after the class was dismissed, “I hope to see you at the game. Coach Molten has a special offer I believe you will enjoy.”

Kayla nodded. When he turned and hurried off, she hurried to catch up with Wanda Sue to find out why she sneered each time she passed by.

“What’s wrong?” Kayla asked when they were outside the building.

“You and Bard are wrong.”

“Why’s that?”

“James bought some property in Eastern Oregon. Bard doesn’t approve of it. You won’t give him more money to develop it. I thought that was part of the plan.”

“Bard says it’s desert property with bad soil.”

“James and John have a righteous plan to develop it.”

“We can’t find James to find out anything about it.”

Wanda Sue bowed her head. “James fears for his life. He has a secret hiding place. He won’t even let me know where it is. He comes to me in a disguise.”

“Do you have anyway of contacting him?”

“No.” Wanda Sue turned around and walked away.

Kayla went to find out what Coach Molten had for her. When she arrived at his office, he handed a free pass to her for the Saturday game opener.

“We have a special seat for you in the booth,” he said.

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 to 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. Being in back of a long line, she suspected it would be 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 Sue 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. Kayla hurried to catch up with them. She nearly had to run

“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 then eyed Kayla while tapping Wanda on the shoulder. He pointed to a guest area of cushioned seats.

Wanda Sue 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 Sue sat.

“Did I do something wrong?” Kayla asked.

“You're using us,” Wanda Sue replied with a look of disgust on her face.

“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. I didn't know if you were or not, but going along with it got you out of jail.”

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 needed to use it in order to find out if it is real, and I intended to use it for a good cause if it is.”

“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 for him to spend the money as you intend for it to be spent, which is not very clear with whatever strings are attached.”

“It can still be a good opportunity, couldn't it?” Kayla asked while eyeing James.

“Possibly,” he answered, “I would 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?”

“I don't know. Just use the money, keep disguising 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, but you can quit if you want to and go back as you were, but I don't have that option.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Get a lot of help for climate change.”

“I've already done that, having found homes for guys I know, but twenty grand doesn't go far these days. 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 clean 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 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, but I need money to make it happen.”

Kayla eyed James.

“I'll share the wealth,” he said, “and 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. The idea to buy land in Eastern Oregon was John's idea.”

“James' idea of solar energy, as free energy, 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. I'll also ask John von Lay what he knows. Does either of you know much about him?”

They both shrugged.

“You'll also need to become invisible like me,” James said.

“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, but I don't even want her to know where I live.”

Kayla reconsidered that they both might be in cahoots with a secret society. “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,” James said, “and they could use you to use us.”

“Okay,” Kayla said to play along, “Bard overseeing has been a good thing and not so much 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, actually willing to do it since it being in her bank account was nothing more than a burden to her.

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

“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 a stupid.”

Her mother shrugged.

Kayla walked into her bedroom and came back out holding her cell-phone. 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 find out 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,” Kayla replied while pushing the redial button on the cell-phone James had given her

“Hello,” she heard a female voice say that obviously would not be James.

"I'm calling for James Baker. Is he there? I need to talk to him. It's urgent."

"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?" Kayla asked while squeezing her eyes shut.

"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 just did 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 now felt she was 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?”

She gasped. “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 with the law. She was in danger of being convicted as an assessor, if not killed for being involved, even though her involvement was totally unattended. She had no idea of how to get out of her situation. Revealing it to the law did not seem to be of any help.

A few days later she arrived at the front desk of the Valley River Inn where she 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."

She closed her eyes and teeth tight, her eagerness being 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 them know you know who James Baker is."

She approached close to the desk leaning towards the desk clerk. "Don't tell them anything. They're not who they says they are. They're more likely drug dealers. If you get involved, you'll risk the chance of being killed along with me and James."

He raised his eyebrows. "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 just 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 couch well out of view.

She heard the door open. Three men were soon facing her.

"I'm the cleaning lady," she said. "I was told you need clean pillow covers."

They eyed each other, shaking their heads.

"I probably have the wrong room," she suggested.

She hurried out to escape their mean stares.

Later that evening, Kayla delivered Chicken Wings to the same three fellows after they 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 replied while looking away. "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 to retrieve the tape recorder. When she could not find it, she slammed her fist on the top of her head.

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.

She crossed her lips with her index finger.

"He's our quarterback," Bard said, "He has to buy his line-men dinner for the victory."

The other two guys were bigger than Bard.

"I heard you beat a very good team," Kayla replied while showing them a thumbs-up.

"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 here very long."

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?"

Bard pretended to drink. They all nodded.

"I think we all want a beer to go with our chicken wings. There's no need to worry about it. It's just one beer to celebrate the victory."

“Sorry, no exceptions, I have to ask you all for ID to make sure you’re all twenty-one:”

The other guys nodded, reaching for their wallets, and then showing her their IDs. Fortunately, they were all seniors legally of age, even if they might be breaking team rules.

At the end of the shift, she noticed two of the three men that had asked about Kayla Chalet were now 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 trembled as she turned to face 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.”

She turned her head seeking a way to escape. She then hurried to unlock her bike.

“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, grabbed the feet to lift 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 of higher ground than 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.”

He pointed at the quarterback, who then showed Kayla the tape recorder.

“The guy at the desk asked us to give this to you,” Bard said.

“Thank you very much,” Kayla said with a sigh of relief.

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. Detective Bentley would likely make sure of it.

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. They have been keeping tabs on her and recently detected a transaction of twenty million from her account to James Bakers’.”

“Well, maybe somebody else is the hacker, but we still need those two to find whoever it is. They’re most likely just pawns doing the dirty work. We’ll need to use them for now and wait 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. When Wanda Sue finally came in through the front door, Kayla stood up in a hurry to say, “Wanda, I need to talk to James.”

“Why didn’t you call him like he told you to do?”

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

Wanda Sue seemed to be puzzled as she shook her head no along with a pause. “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 should be showing up soon.”

Kayla sat back down, faced the floor and shook her head.

“What’s wrong?” Wanda Sue sat close to Kayla asking.

“I’m just putting everyone in danger by giving away money.”

“It could create a lot of opportunity,” Wanda Sue advised, “and opportunity equates as freedom.”

Kayla shook her head. “Won’t adding money to the economy just cause inflation and more trouble, especially if we donate a billion dollars to the university? Wouldn’t that cause a bubble and a collapse?”

“Not necessarily; inflation can be a good thing. To counter it, people need to invest in the economy. They buy stocks, and that promotes the manufacturing of product. Even putting it in the bank for interest allows more loans and opportunity to produce more products.”

“How come we just had a devastating recession?”

“When people invest, they go into debt. When the housing bubble busted, then they can’t pay back their loans. Deflation occurred. People with money begin hoarding it, spending less, thus causing more deflation and more recession, as more bankruptcies and more unemployment.”

“What can be done about it?”

“The government needs to step in and invest.”

“Invest in what . . .”

“Invest in infrastructure, provide jobs: that way people can pay off their debts.”

“What if they still cannot pay off their debt?”

“The banks could help. If they temporary suspend loans for rent instead, that way they won’t have foreclosures losing value for no upkeep.”

“How can we avoid all this in the first place?”

“Fair distribution and opportunity needs to be maintained. Money begets money. Those who have more of it take control and create monopolies and oligopolies. The Fed could print more money to counter them.”

“Wouldn’t that cause inflation for an imbalance of trade and a burden of debt for our grandchildren?”

“No. That’s naïve politics. The dollar cheapens, but foreign money has the same buying power. It’s only the current debt and

US currency possessed by foreigners that has less buying power. Inflation benefits those in debt; those holding the debt can adjust to the change in due time.”

“Wouldn’t the gold standard be better?”

“No. People hoarding it caused deflation so that those who had it became richer. There was also a battle for gold by pirates. Nations went to war over it.”

“How can fiat money be better?”

“Money is owed credit. The flow of credit begets economic wealth. It speeds up the distribution of trade. One dollar transferred one-hundred times a day equals one-hundred dollars of credit. Credit cards make it even faster.”

“Yeah, but you have to pay interest on credit cards.”

“If you gave every Oregon citizen a certain amount of temporary credit for a particular amount of time to buy food produced in Oregon, then it creates opportunity for Oregon farmers to produce and sell more food. Paying taxes or interest is needed for control.”

“What makes the credit legit?”

“It becomes legit if it can be used to pay taxes.”

“They say too much tax and too much government is not good, and that a balanced budget is needed for a healthier economy.”

“Too much of anything is not good. That’s naïve politics. Printing too much money is not good. Taxes for beneficial programs of the government help control inflation. Building and maintaining highways has been a government investment that increases the flow of goods. Government financed education has enabled us to compete more wisely, as to produce technically advanced products, which scientists have gotten no monetary compensation for their efforts in their formulation of theories that have benefited the invention and production of product.”

Kayla heard taps in the direction of the doorway.

“That’s James,” Wanda Sue said while getting up and going to the door and opening 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 down East Eleventh Street.”

“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, Kayla 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. The police are on their way. 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 towards where Chase Bank was a couple blocks away.

“I'm Kayla Chalet,” she said to the female teller inside the Chase Bank, “I believe I'm still on my mother's accounts. She added me to it a couple years ago.”

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

Kayla placed her ID along with the cashier check in the tray at the window. The teller nodded, acknowledging the ID, but she then stared in awe at the check.

“This will be on hold until verified,” the teller 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 soon 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 and turned it on to access 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. It's more like a twenty billion dollar headache.”

“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 if we use it, they're going after us just that much more. Maybe nations will come after us. It could start a war. 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. Show up again at the dormitory tomorrow and I'll show you a safe place to hide.”

She nodded.

After he let her out back at the dormitory, she rode 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.

It's now on record. You can be charged. I'm sure the DA is going to drop the charges on those three guys."

She closed her eyes. "I'm working for the FBI, aren't I?"

"You might not be for much longer."

"Aren't you concerned about national security?"

"Yes I am, and obeying the law is essential to it."

Kayla grimaced with a tight jaw, ready to stomp her feet and explode as she walked away. She might be doing a wrong, but it was to make a bigger wrong right.

"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. They checked into one of the rooms yesterday."

"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 get to know the people and find out how they can help."

"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."

"I'll make sure you get set up. Right now 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 said when Kayla was close enough for him to talk softly. “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 noticed the police car driving away.

“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 beside him 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 hide out. It’s close to where we first met.”

“Sorry, I don’t feel comfortable even being alone with you, much less hiding out in the woods. You’ve been very honest and trustworthy, but there’s always that moment when you might lose it.”

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 immediately noticed a handgun.”

“Know how to use a gun?” James asked.

“Yeah, my dad insisted I learn how. He showed me how easy it is to kill rabbits, birds or anything you want. He was also killed by a gun.”

James raised his eyebrows.

“He drank a lot and fooled around. When the husband found out, they feuded. Both had guns. My dad lost.”

“Take the pistol,” James 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. It only reminded her of her dad’s tragic fate, triggered by alcoholic addiction and a gun solution to anger.

“Feel safe now?” James asked when she seated herself back into the front seat of the car.

“No. I need someone else to go with us.”

Although she had a gun for protection, she had no desire to use it. Besides, an awkward situation could still arise.

“I’m not going to show Bard this place,” James said, “and you better not.”

“How about John von Lay?” she asked.

“Call him.”

“Hi,” John von Lay answered when she lifted her cell-phone out of her pouch and called him.

“Hi. James and I are at a bike trail beginning at the football stadium. He wants to show us a hiding place close to the bike bridge where we can meet. Can you join us where we are now?”

“I’ll be there in ten,” she heard.

“Ten minutes,” she said to James.

In about ten minutes, John von Lay arrived on his electric bike. He had brought with him cables for him to secure the bike to a tree out of plain site.

James led the way while glancing now and then at a 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 pushed a button on his tablet. It somehow turned on a light deep straight down a tunnel like shaft.

James pointed at John von Lay and waved his finger towards the shaft. John von Lay then kneeled to crawl inside the doorway to a nylon ladder. When James waved his hand forward, Kayla handed the gun to him before going down the ladder about twenty feet to a level area where John von Lay stood waiting. The light appeared to come from a hole in the wall.

James followed them down after he closed the door above him. 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 along with space to sit and sleep.

He reached to hand her the gun.

“Keep it,” she said, feeling safer with someone else present.

“The temperature is constant,” James said while walking over close to a wall and removing a stone as part of the floor. “Someone somehow managed to create an extraordinary electric system. The only thing I can find is these tiny-like diamonds.”

Kayla, with John von Lay beside her side, went over for a closer view.

“They’re industrial made diamonds,” John von Lay said. “As batteries, they’ll stay charged for five hundred years or more,

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. Hopefully there is enough of a shield between the battery and whoever stays here.”

“Are you a member of a Secret Society with advanced knowledge?” Kayla asked John von Lay.

“He’s just more schooled,” James replied, “We can use his expertise for sure.”

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

James 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.”

Although James seemed to have a troubled life, with a personality at odds with those of John von Lay and the alien stranger, he had this access to a whole new world below the surface. There was thus the possibility of another member of the secret society 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.”

She shook her head no, not convinced. “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. Like I said, I only discovered it this last summer.”

He didn’t fall for her question, but she still suspected he and John von Lay both could be members of the Secret Society. She wanted to know one way or the other for sure. She would then

have a decision to make, as to whether to report them to Detective Bentley, or to remain silent for a better cause.

“What do you guys know about Big Bang theory?” she asked staring, as into blank space wondering why she asked a question of something she knew little about.

“It’s a crazy theory,” James replied.

“You seem to know a lot of science,” she said facing John von Lay, wondering if she could ask him questions that would decide if he was even more suspect if he answered them in a convincing manner.

“I understand it somewhat,” John von Lay answered.

“How about you?” she asked James.

“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 John von Lay. That’s his expertise.”

Kayla faced John von Lay.

“It’s presently the accepted theory, but not all physicists and astronomers accept it. Many of them consider it as inconsistent with the laws of physics.”

“They sent a probe out into space,” James interrupted to say, “to test thirteen different versions of the Big Bang without considering any other theory. That’s bias.”

“Is he right?” Kayla asked John von Lay.

“Yes, technically, but to test another theory, it needs to be mathematically formulated for its predictions to be testable.”

“Are you saying none of these other physicists have a testable theory?” James asked.

“I don’t know of any.”

“What are the challenges of Big Bang and other theories,” Kayla asked.

“With Big Bang they assume the universe has expanded from a singularity whereby the laws of physics don't apply,” James replied.

Kayla faced John von Lay.

“There is a lot of inconsistency with the Big Bang. The singularity is assumed, and it is sort of outside the laws of physics in that it is not directly observable.”

“What are its inconsistencies?” Kayla asked.

“For one, it was originally accepted over a tired light theory, as believed to be in favor of this Tolman Bright Test. If stars and galaxies are receding from us, then we see them of the past because of it taking time for their light to reach us. They were then closer to us than where they are now, and they should appear larger and brighter than their present distance according to the red-shift formula.”

“Do they?” Kayla asked.

More determination of the data has indicated otherwise, but they now explain it by assuming the rate of expansion was slower in the past. For the universe to increase its rate of expansion, they further assumed there is this invisible source of dark energy for its cause.”

“Do these explanations require the laws of physics to be modified?” Kayla asked.

He shrugged while nodding yes.

“Are the laws of physics modifiable?”

“They have been modified through history. Newtonian Mechanics was modified by relativity theory by replacing the concepts of absolute space and absolute time with relative space-time. Now both Newtonian and General Relativity of gravity appear to be in need of modification, but not only because of dark energy. For about a century the rotation of galaxies seems to be at odds with gravity theory. They then assumed there is dark matter. Other physicists have proposed a modification of gravity theory. All in all, the increased rate of expansion complicates the formulation of theory even more.”

“Could not another theory besides Big Bang be a solution?” Kayla continued to ask.

“There's this tired light theory that some physicists claim it can be shown to be consistent with the rest of physics, but there's also problems with it.”

“This seems very confusing.”

James von Lay 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.”

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

“Einstein thought the Cosmological Constant could counter gravity to maintain the universe as static, but this physicist named Friedman examined the field equations and concluded it didn’t work, but it is now reconsidered as a possible explanation to explain why the universe could be increasing its expansion rate.”

“How do we know the universe is expanding?”

“There was this discovery of a red-shift in the spectrum of starlight of the more distant stars. Red-shift can be the result of the light source and the observer moving away from each other.”

“Isn’t there another possible explanation for the red-shift?”

“Yeah, there were originally 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.”

“What do you mean by a singularity?”

“The singularity means one part of the equation decreases to zero while another part of the equation increases to infinity. There is thus an infinite mass-energy density within an infinitesimal volume of space.”

“That’s crazy,” James said.

“If the universe isn’t static, wouldn’t it either contract or expand?” Kayla asked.

“The universe doesn’t need to be finite.” James answered.

“It could be finite,” John von Lay replied, “but it need not be finite according to Tired Light. If the universe is filled with an infinite amount of stars, then it was assumed by some physicists that there would be no darkness at night. Tired Light counters this assumption in assuming light energy is absorbed by plasma in intergalactic space.”

“Wouldn’t there still be an infinite amount of light?” Kayla asked.

“Yeah, but it exists in an infinite amount of space whereby its distance of propagation is limited. Some Tired Light theorists also claim it provides an explanation of gravity as a long-range-vacuum effect relatively weak in comparison to other forces of nature. Gravity could be a vacuum effect in the wake of emitted radiation. It is then gradually absorbed by the space-medium that gradually recycles it back as matter in maintaining the atomic structure of mass-energy.”

“That sounds like a reasonable theory.”

John von Lay nodded. “Tired Light does explain gravity in consistent manner of previous theory, but it also needs to explain why the rotations of galaxies don’t comply as such, and why the distant stars are as visible as they are if light is losing energy by interacting with the plasma in intergalactic space.”

“Couldn’t the decrease in light energy determine a different measure of distance?”

“That needs to be verified.”

“If the universe is finite and expanding, about where are we located in it?” Kayla asked not knowing why she did.

“We’re nearly at its center.”

“Is that a coincidence?”

“Not really; the Big Bang was formulated according to this Cosmological Principle whereby the universe is assumed to be homogeneous and isotropic.”

“Please explain this Cosmological Principle,” Kayla asked, still hesitant to ask about something she knew very little about.

“It means everyone perceives themselves as located in the center of the universe no matter if they are actually near its edge.”

“How is that possible?”

“It’s according to Einstein’s general relativity explained as space-time curvature. The path of light is curved due to gravity.”

“If the universe is expanding, wouldn’t there be less gravity and less curvature?”

“Yeah, I suppose, but we and everything else could become larger to not notice the difference.”

“Is that consistent with general relativity?”

“It’s a modification of it.”

“I still do not understand this singularity. How can there be an infinite mass-energy density in an infinitesimal space?”

“It’s consistent with relativity theory. By Special Relativity, the length of mass in the direction of motion decreases with increase in speed, and its mass-energy increases. At light speed, it is infinite mass-energy at an infinitesimal length. The same goes for gravity. As gravity increases, mass shrinks to zero volume to become infinite mass-energy.”

“That does not seem consistent. Wouldn’t the creation of infinite mass-energy violate conservation of energy?”

“It’s only infinite mass-energy density, not infinite mass-energy.”

“Do you then mean the mass increasing in speed also only increases in mass-energy density and not mass-energy itself? How is energy conserved?”

“Well, energy is conserved because there is an exchange of mass with whatever is causing an increase in speed.”

“Wouldn’t it then need to absorb an infinite amount of mass in order to reach light speed?”

“Yeah, but it doesn’t since light speed is not attainable.”

“How is light speed not attainable?”

“Well, there is this addition of velocities theorem whereby it takes mass itself to move at light speed for it to accelerate other mass to light speed.”

“Couldn’t there then be a gravitational potentials theorem in analogy to the addition of velocities theorem.”

“That’s a reasonable possibility.”

“Wouldn’t the singularity then mean it takes an infinite amount of mass to shrink it to an infinitesimal volume of space?”

“Have you taken courses in physics?”

“No. I’m just wondering, like, why isn’t this tired-light theory a viable alternative?”

“There’s this visibility problem, like how we see distant stars clearly when they should be distorted because of light losing energy by interacting with something in intergalactic space.”

“How do I see pictures so clearly on my TV after the light has moved miles through cable? How does light relate to electricity?” She stared again into blank space.

“Light is electromagnetic energy. Move a magnet close to a wire and it induces an electric current. Coil the wire and it becomes a magnet. Light is the continuation of the process.”

“What are magnets? How do they work?”

“Magnets have opposite poles of positive and negative charge.”

“Can they be separated to be either a positive or negative charge at opposite poles?”

“No, divide them and each part still has poles of positive and negative charge.”

“I suppose, then,” Kayla expressed her thoughts, “I see the TV screen clearly because the electric current going through wires divides similar to bar magnets and multiplies with an increase in electric current.”

John von Lay shrugged.

“Couldn’t light moving through space be similar?”

John von Lay shrugged. “Are you sure you haven’t taken physics?”

She shook her head no, and she now doubted he was a member of the secret society. Although he knew a lot about physics, he was no match for the alien stranger.

“You’ll need someone like Bard or your mom to look out for you,” James interrupted 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,” John von Lay interrupted to say. “The Cascade 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.”

“Is there a solution?”

“This place is an example of what can be accomplished,” John von Lay said.

“How can that be?” Kayla asked.

“Take these diamonds for batteries. They are simply carbon formed from high pressure. Solar wind and light could provide the means to create the pressure. Special fluorescent bulbs could grow food, which is mainly carbon and hydrogen. Down deep under ground, the hydrogen can safely be combined with air to produce water without affecting the ozone layer.”

“Isn’t this all too technical and too expensive?”

“The ancient Romans built an empire along with aqueducts and underground reservoirs of water. The Sahara Desert could similarly be tunneled into. The fertile area of Egypt is now being flooded away by rising ocean levels. Water needs to be stored to counterbalance the melting of glaciers. The increase in temperature increases the humidity of air to cause more flooding disaster along with the destruction of wildfires during hotter and dryer periods. Beaver engineering, like James suggested, is essential. Underground dwelling can also be a useful shelter for nuclear radiation, or for a Super Volcano that has been expected to occur at Yellowstone. It is thus essential to defense as well as for healthier environment and economic prosperity.”

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 John von Lay.

She nodded yes but asked, “Would I need to meet you here?”

“Yep, but I don’t stay here. This is only where we meet.”

“How do we do that?”

“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's all I know. Beyond that, he's invisible."

"How is he controlling you?"

"He hacked into my banking account to use it against me."

"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 shrugged.

She eyed him, nodding yes.

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?" he asked with a fixed gaze at her.

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?” he asked with a serious frown.

“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 pointed it at his ear. He then pointed it at Kayla’s chest, and then again at his ear.

Kayla nodded.

“I have to warn you,” he said, “They have Bard Secrets. 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 they care not whether he lives or dies.”

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 as good as dead, knowing too much, so I’m just telling you as-it-is.”

“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.”

Later that evening she heard the news that a man had been shot and killed in the parking lot of the Valley River Inn.

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. She shivered as he continued towards her, but it was only another false alarm: He turned right up the path to the bike bridge leading to the university as she continued east. 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 suddenly stopped right in front of her to a stretching halt that gave her not enough time to stop. She hit the car and tumbled to the ground with a damaged bike.

She lay bruised and in pain as car doors opened and two men got out of the car, one from the front passenger seat and the other from the left back seat.

She got up on her feet and showed them a cell-phone. The man who had gotten out of the car up front grabbed the phone away from her and reared his arm back to throw it.

“Wait,” she quickly said, “I have to have that to get the guy you want.”

“Why’s that?” he asked with a mean stare.

“It’s the only way I can contact him. He hides and doesn’t let anyone know where he is.”

He nodded towards the back seat of the car where she became seated between two men, and where she noticed the guy up front had a monitor.

“She’s not wired,” he said. “The phone is turned off.”

She was not wired except for her diamond earrings pinned out of sight to her hair. 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 down in an available chair between two of the men.

"Spell it out," the man who had gotten out of the chair 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 he 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 that is turned off."

"Go get it," the leader said.

The man sitting on her left 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. 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, knowing it was her own phone and not the one James had given for her to use to call him. She had used the phone to call home, but her mother would now be at work. Kayla was just stalling in hope the alien stranger would come to her rescue again.

“You better hope he does,” the leader said referring to James’ need of answering the phone.

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.

After she started down, the other guy followed her. 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. They surrounded him with pointed guns. "Hands behind you back," one of them shouted. He was handcuffed and taken to a police car.

"I got this strange information from James Baker," Detective Bentley said. "What's going on?"

She bowed her head, facing the ground. "They have Bard in a blue and red 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 waist 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 it.

"There's still one down there," Kayla warned.

He showed Kayla his spy device and his gun. "I was on my way to check out those diamonds. I saw you and that guy coming out. I called Detective Bentley and tracked you with my device. If there is only one guy down there, I'll take care of him."

Kayla had a better idea. She was still wearing her earrings that she could use to avoid a gunfight. She pointed at her chest and then down at the ground.

He opened the doorway. She started down the nylon rope. Far enough down, she waved for him to come on down.

The entrance way into the room was open. Kayla hurried in to show her presence before James would arrive in due time.

“What are you doing back here?” the guy 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 sat at a table enjoying a strawberry sundae as she waited for Bard to show up at the Dairy Queen a couple blocks from the university. When he did enter through the door, she didn't recognize him in his disguise, but she was expecting him to show up at this time with a fake beard, fake long hair, and fake glasses. It was for them not to be recognized together. His disguise was only temporary where her wig and fake glasses had become the normal routine.

"I have the latest assessment," he said. "It's all set up at the lab."

"Let's go." She swallowed her last spoonful of ice cream.

They walked a couple blocks to enter a building on campus to inside a room with a big viewing screen. Bard plugged a Flash Drive to the computer, turned the computer on, and directed the mouse to assess the Flash Drive. Kayla and Bard then sat beside each other to watch the big screen.

What first appeared was a birds-eye view of the Willamette Valley showing a variety of trees: Douglas fir, Maple, Birch, Oak, Alder, Aspen, Ash and Larch, to name a few. Water, of course, was plentiful in the valley. What was of interest that came next was the view higher up into the Cascade Mountains of mostly lodgepole and ponderosa pine at and near La Pine on Highway 97.

"Not much grows there," Bard said, "the summers are short. Plants and trees budding out early are vulnerable to summer frost. Only a few trees like willows and aspen make it because they are able to retreat from their budding process. Lots of people and residences are hidden between all those trees. A lot of food is required to feed them."

"What's James doing about it?"

"He and Wanda Sue are encouraging them to build or buy greenhouses. John von Lay has advised them that all the dead wood lying around can be transformed into charcoal. It only takes about seven-hundred degrees Fahrenheit and a few hours

to transform it. They can heat their homes and greenhouses with the charcoal while making more of it. The carbon dioxide from the charcoal goes into the greenhouses that grow food with the aid of blue light. The plants consume the carbon for more hydrocarbon fuel and release the oxygen into the atmosphere.

“They are also trying to convince the forest service to build reservoirs to slow down the water flow back to the oceans. It’s to counter the melting of glaciers and less snow packs in the mountains because of the rise in average temperature. It’s James’ beaver engineering.”

“You’re okay with that now?”

“Yeah, he turned out to be okay. Helping to save our lives; I have to give him due credit for that.”

The view made its way east to towards the southeastern part of the state. It was mostly desert area of Juniper. There was the Lost Forest of mostly pine near Christmas Valley and the sand dunes of ash.

“The sand dunes are supposedly the result of the eruption of a mountain allowing the creation of Crater Lake,” Kayla explained. “The wind blew the ash over to Christmas Valley. It formed into sand dunes and preserved a water source for the Lost Forest.”

“Most of the area,” Bard said, “is too alkaline to grow most things.”

“Those deer seem to be doing okay,” Kayla said noticing a herd of deer grazing in a pasture.

“Yeah, alfalfa and clover do well over there. It can feed horses and livestock, but there needs to be more water.”

“What’s James doing about it?”

“It’s John von Lay who really knows what to do.”

The scene on the screen was now of Summer Lake.

“The whole area was once one giant lake,” Bard said. “That was from the melting of glaciers after the last ice age. It’s now two lakes. What you see is Summer Lake. It goes for about fifteen miles, and there is a hot springs beside it, but the lake sometimes dries up in the summer.”

“At least they have a source of water.”

“Yeah, but it’s alkaline. More of interest is lots five miles north of the lake. The soil is also alkaline, but you dig a few feet down and you hit hard clay. You go through it and you got more soft dirt at a depth that they have not so far found the bottom of.

It's an ideal setup for the structure of underground reservoirs and aqueducts."

Kayla noticed some large blimps above the land along with a lot of RVs.

"What's with the blimps?"

"They are tunneling beneath the hard clay to build structures. The blimps lift the dirt. They are also used to get around the area and sight see."

"I suppose they're filled with hydrogen for their lift. Isn't that dangerous to the ozone layer?"

"Nope, John's lab uses laser light to convert hydrogen to helium."

"I doubt you can have much control where you go with a blimp."

"John did a marvelous job with their engineering. They manage to maneuver in winds up to fifty miles per hour. They keep tabs of the weather. If you want to go east from the valley, just rise up and follow the clouds. Over at Summer Lake they are ideal for getting around."

Bard showed Kayla a little piece of metal. "The handle broke off. How that little hollow piece of it stores such gigabytes of information equal to dozens of books I don't know."

Kayla shrugged.

"How did John von Lay manage to get in charge of the science project?" Bard asked.

She shrugged again. "I suppose the billion dollar contribution by James to the university had a little something to do with it."

"I can't believe you trusted that guy with a billion dollars."

"I had nothing else to do with it, and he delivered."

"How much more are you going to give him?"

"That's it. I'm not receiving anymore from the alien stranger."

"Did you get enough? Did something happen to him?"

"I'm not sure what happened to the Alien Stranger. Wanda Sue is gong to make this project work with her ideas on economics. She's investing the other billions in a stock project."

"I suppose she's going to wave her magic wand."

"She told me her idea of laissez faire economics. It sounded very promising."

"Laissez faire was the precursor to free enterprise, but she's a socialist for sure."

Kayla shrugged. “The way she explained it is that the French defined food as wealth. They gave landowners free reign to produce. To ensure they produced it, they had a land tax, and it also provided government revenue to enforce the law. Producing food as wealth was part of.”

Bard shook his head no. “Like I said, she’s a socialist.”

Kayla, tight-lipped, shook her head no. “Did you notice all those solar panels back there? They’ve been added of late.”

“Yeah, what’s going on?”

“Wanda Sue got on social media and revealed her plan. She got followers and investors to come on-board. Free solar energy threatened to decrease the revenue of the electric and water plants, forcing them to raise their price, driving more users to solar energy. To counter, she suggested to them the solar power needed to be used to build greenhouses for food that can be regulated by the electric power grid. The electric power company, in turn, sells stocks. The dividends are at seven percent interest and growing in value. The general public thus has a way to be part of the profit.”

“That sounds a little iffy.”

“James found the needed labor. The homeless and unemployed now have jobs, and some of them are camped out in those RVs you now see at Summer Lake, where John is setting up his underground lab. Wanda Sue is also helping to sell stock in the project along with land lots becoming more valuable and attractive.”

Bard waved his hand forward. “That place is worthless desert. The alkaline soil with too little water won’t grow much.”

“As you been informed, a few feet below soft dirt is hard clay,” Kayla reminded him. “Below the hard stuff is more soft dirt whose depth is unknown. It’s an ideal place for an underground lab built not to collapse. There, John can use his laser light to extract oxygen and hydrogen from various materials. He can have a closed system for a hydrogen-oxygen fuel with water as its byproduct. Greenhouses can be built up above. Jack rabbits, chickens, horses, worms and so forth can fertilize the soil. These blimps are just a convenient way to get around and help do the work.”

“Do you think this is really going to reverse global warming? All the effort of selling solar panels and wind turbines has hardly made a dent.”

“It’s a step in the right direction. Its economic success could spark a trend. Storing water is needed to counter the melting of glaciers and snow packs in the mountains. Even though wetter climates are becoming wetter, dryer climates are becoming drier. Water reservoirs of any size and aqueducts are vital. When this is realized worldwide, including the Sahara Desert, then I believe global warming will be reversed.”

Bard shook his head no. “It’ll only promote a population increase, along with desperate competition and war for the survival of the fittest. We’ll need to pack guns to protect ourselves. That’s reality, not speculative fantasy.”

“Is that really the kind of life you want to live?”

“What choice do we have?”

“Law and order, and social cooperation would be nice.”

“I think Wanda Sue has turned you into a socialist.”

“I think reality has turned me into a socialist.”

“What’s with the alien stranger,” Bard said along with a shrug, as to change the direction of their conversation.

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen him since that day in the park. I haven’t communicated with him since your rescue. I was left with only a few billion in my bank account. It was enough to get us started in the right direction.”

Bard leaned her way. “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.”

“We’ll make the NCAA playoffs if we win the Pas 12 this Saturday. I’ll have the whole off-season to make up for it.”

“Are you proposing?”

“That I am.”

She smiled. “Well, I’m saying yes.”

He hugged her, and then they kissed.

“You are just getting control of your life and willing to commit yourself,” Bard said. “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 descendant 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. That’s what this is all about: Earning your freedom is taking control of your life. That’s what life really is.”

“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 one of only a few members of a secret society here on Earth. The rest of the aliens are part of a colony traveling in outer space now seeking adventure far away from here.”

“You mean they are not going to inhabit out planet and take charge of it like you have taken charge of me?” he asked with a wink and a smile.

“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. Wanda Sue said that was once how it was here with gold as the foundation of mercantilism. Slavery became the norm along with the destruction of the environment.”

“What’d those space aliens do about it?”

“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.”

“Like I said, overpopulation can be a problem, but those of them who escaped must not have anything to worry about, except extinction if they don’t reproduce.”

“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 a lot like the alien stranger did.”

