

THE
ALIEN
STRANGER

BOB TICER

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Shayla Magers and Tru Magers, the daughters of my nephew, to who I pledge all royalties to help further their education.

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QUEST FOR LIFE OF SELF CONTROL

Kayla walked down the hallway glancing at doors. She entered a room of empty seats except for a girl of African descent and a light tan fellow sitting beside each other.

"Hi. I'm Kayla," she said continuing towards them.

"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 fellow on her left remained silent.

"What's your major," Kayla asked after she sat down beside Wanda Sue, "psychology or sociology?"

"I'm studying them and political economics. What's your major?"

"I just finished two years at LCC. I'm not sure what I want to major in."

"Maybe this class will help you figure it out."

"I just want to be in self-control of my life, but it's difficult when the world is against you."

Wanda Sue shook her head no with a grin. "I'm not against you, and I'm sure you're not against me just

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because of the color of my skin. I feel more acceptable now than I would have in the past."

"Yeah," Kayla replied while nodding yes, "but chaos still reigns."

"Yeah," Wanda Sue said nodding her head yes, "but I just hope to become an accountant to be able to pay off my student loan. You made a good decision; two years at a community college is more affordable."

"I have little choice. My dad was killed when I was fourteen. My mother has cancer. We've been working our way out of debt with lots of medical expenses."

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

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

He raised his eyebrows along with 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 turned 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 do 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 was soon filled with students with an elderly man with gray hair standing up front.

"I'm Professor Overly," he said. "This class is a mixture of sociology and psychology. They are linked 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 to point at Wanda Sue when she raised her hand.

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"Humorous is defensive," she said. "Straightforward is bravery."

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 well."

"Good answers: Humor is directly related to emotion, and it can help relieve stress, but it can also be a means of avoiding responsibility. It can also become a means of attack, as a weapon to release frustration on somebody, or of an issue of concern. This class aims at ways for society to communicate for us to be more in harmony with our common goals. We compete by being in control of our own 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 dismissed, Kayla became aware of Bard following her out of the room.

"Kayla," he said when they were beside each other outside the building, "I just turned twenty-one 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. 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 to come, even though I heard she's a socialist."

Kayla shrugged. "She did 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 from the inn."

He smiled. "You ride a bike, go to school and work past midnight. You seem ambitious, and I don't blame you for not appreciating 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."

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"I truly 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."

"Okay, I'll see you later."

"Hey, aren't you missing an earring?" he asked with a curious looking gaze.

Kayla touched her earlobe. "It must have fallen 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 getting in shape for spring training. A 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?"

"You never know," he said with a wink and a smile. "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 don't have any use for them right now, and I'll want to get some with real diamonds when the occasion arises."

"Okay," she replied reaching out with an open hand as he gently placed the earrings in it.

"Thanks," he said.

"Thank you," she replied 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 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

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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 and 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 her on Franklin Boulevard. She hadn't thought much of it, but she again noticed it, or another one, hovering beside the bridge. She wondered why it hovered where there are no flowers to feed on.

She immediately entered a wooded area of fir trees after crossing the bridge. The bike path circled around to where it followed the river west. She approached a tall slim guy. He had a ragged beard and long dangling hair. He stepped in front of her thrusting his arms forward, making sure he blocked her way. She managed to stop before hitting him.

"Hey babe, can you spare a couple dollars?"

"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 tried to raise her bike, but he grabbed her arm. He held it tight, preventing 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.

She tried to scream, but he covered her mouth with one hand and pulled on the back of her neck with his other hand.

"Nice earrings rich girl; I don't think you need them as much I do right now."

"Take them," she briefly became able to cry out by turning her head, "you can have them."

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

She felt helpless against his pushing her as she fell

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

"Please," she finally was able to cry out, "don't hurt me."

He had gone limp just after he tore her blouse. She managed to slide away from under him and get up on her feet.

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

"I only sedated him," he replied sounding calm as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. "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. I could be arrested and detained for not having proper identification."

"You're an alien too?"

"Your statement 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 help. This body I have grown here needs proper nutrition. The leaves, blackberries and tall 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 for me this diamond and gold necklace?"

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You can keep one-half of the money you are paid for it."

He held in his hand a shiny gold like necklace of diamond like stones. She eyed it, doubting it was actual-ly of gold and silver, but she was willing to play along. "It's nice looking. How much do you want for it?"

"I do not know its monetary value, but I am in need of money to enjoy my visit here. The people here tend to respect you more if you have money to spend."

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

He handed her the necklace.

"Where are you staying?" What the heck. Although she doubted it was a real diamond and gold necklace, he did save her from a tragic fate.

"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. The diamond earrings you wear 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 pleasant place to be. It was once owned by the Baker family, who were once owners of the Register Guard newspaper, and they interconnected with the University of Oregon."

"You sure know the history. 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 out of this wooded area. Is this time tomorrow okay?"

"Anytime is okay. I will watch 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 peddle jewelry in the woods, but she was eager to be on her way, feeling uncomfortable where she was at.

She was about to get on her bike when she heard, "I expect to see you soon, Miss Kayla Chalet."

With one foot on the bike peddle and the other on the ground, she waited a few seconds puzzled before

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turning to ask how he knew her name, but somehow he was nowhere to be seen.

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

She briefly left the wooded area peddling beside the river towards Alton Baker Park, and she again noticed a hummingbird hovering nearby.

The path 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 her clothes for work.

Fortunately, she did not live far from the inn. After continuing past it about a block, crossing over the river on another bike bridge with several pedestrian on it, continuing southwest around a large grassy field and taking the first right turn leading to the street where she lived apart from the main traffic, she was finally home. It was an old house that her mother had been renting after her father had been killed.

Yep, she noticed the hummingbird hovering nearby as she entered the house. Was it a drone spy? Maybe the necklace was of diamond and gold after all.

She gloated inside the house while noticing how she looked in a mirror wearing the necklace and earrings. She combed her hair neatly in place.

When she rode her bike back to the Valley River Inn, she locked it to a bike rack and climbed the steps to her right leading up to a patio where people sat to enjoy the river scenery. She walked on into the inn to meet up with the host in charge of the restaurant, her mother, Darcy.

"You're late," her mother said while gazing at Kayla. "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 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 believe he's on drugs and is very dangerous. I also need to do something for a guy who saved

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my life. I'll 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 aren't able to 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 nearby. She wondered if and why it was spying on her.

When she entered the Valley River Mall hallway, the necklace and earrings seemed to attract the attention of shoppers.

After she walked up to the counter of 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 earrings. "Are those real diamonds on your ears?"

She shrugged.

He held the necklace up high with his fingertips. "It's sure 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 only a clerk, but I could 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 faced her shaking his head, jestingly. "They could be worth twenty years. Where did you get them?"

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

"Most likely if they're real diamonds and gold. Why would he trust a stranger with something as valuable as this?"

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

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

"He saved my life."

"How did he do that?" he asked while grimacing and eyeing the necklace.

"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. "He might know what they're really worth, but is desperate for a fix or something. Maybe he waited for someone to fool. He could be wanted by the police and didn't want to be 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 a phone as she turned to walk away. There were troubling implications. She did not want to speculate on them, but they haunted her nonetheless.

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 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 replied with a wink.

"Nope, they'll be right here when you get off work. After all, I'm sometimes the night watchman. I'll make sure of it."

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When entering the restaurant full of customers, she noticed a slim man standing beside her mother.

"Miss Kayla Chalet, I'm Detective Bentley," he said while approaching Kayla. "Your mother told me someone tried to rape you. If you can provide some details, I will look into it."

"I was riding my bike across the bike bridge near the university and was stopped by the guy who tried to rape me. He had long hair and a beard."

"I was told someone gave you some jewelry that might be stolen."

"You know that already?"

"Your mother has been 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 that doesn't want to be caught and deported. Do you think he was dealing drugs and took the jewelry for payment?"

"That is an interesting question. Do you pay attention to the news?"

"Yeah," Kayla replied, "it's nearly the news itself. I know there has been a spike in drug trafficking. That rapist seemed to be on drugs. The guy with the jewelry must have supplied him and took the stolen jewelry for payment, not knowing its real value. If he's in control, then he's worse than the rapist."

"He is a person of interest. If you can describe him in significant detail, I will check him out too."

"He's about my size with blondish hair and blue eyes. He was well groomed, 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 he looks somewhat like you?" the detective asked with a curious stare. "Could you two be related?"

"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, not feeling comfortable with the question. "A

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football player in my class gave them to me. He said he bought them from a peddler at 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 somewhere else. I'd like to follow up on some possible connections with him, the necklace and those earrings. Do we have your cooperation?"

"You sure do." she blurted before hesitating with a stare of concern. "I hope you don't think the football player gave that guy my name?"

"It's a possibility. How else would the alien stranger have gotten it?"

She shrugged. "Why would an All-American football player be involved with selling drugs?"

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

"This isn't good." She grimaced with the thought of exposing a star football player. She had even become fond of him, but it now became troubling.

"I'll try to keep your name out of the investigation," he said while turning to walk away.

"Wait."

He faced her.

"You know, there was another guy in the class sitting close by. He heard me say my name. A hummingbird also seemed to be following me after class. Maybe it was a drone spying on me because of me having the earrings."

Detective Bentley stared, as if in disbelief, or suspecting her as well. "I don't think there are any hummingbird drones on the market." He paused. "But the alien could be a spy with advanced technology. I am not sure, but it appears this is leading to something a lot more serious that needs a different plan of action." He rubbed his forehead. "We need to have a little more discussion."

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. Betty agreed to take your place. You can work one of her shifts on your day off."

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"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?" Darcy asked after a short pause.

"He gave me the earrings."

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

"I hope not."

The interest and knowledge Detective Bentley had in the alien stranger puzzled Kayla. Could she be 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 using advanced technology and ordinary citizens for some kind of devious purpose? Those questions she found troubling. Implications were that she would struggle much more to be in self-control of her life.

2

UP AND OVER TO FLOAT AWAY

While waiting for her mother to arrive from the inn, Kayla prepared a couple turkey sandwiches along with noodle soup and salad.

"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. Thinking about tomorrow is something else."

"What's this about tomorrow?"

"I'm going to Alton Baker Park to meet up with this alien stranger."

Her mother stood still, as bewildered with a creased brow from what she heard from her daughter. "You do want to work tomorrow evening, or should I call Betty again?"

"You don't need to call Betty. Detective Bentley just wants to know more about this alien stranger. There's no need to worry; he said somebody will be close by with a camera."

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After a restless night's sleep and healthy breakfast, she rode her bike to Alton Baker Park. As she sat alone on a bench beside a table only to watch ducks swim on a pond and walk on the grass, she wondered about the future of herself being involved in criminal activity.

After about an hour of nothing but worry, 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 appraised. I should have money for you sometime tomorrow. I'll stop by after class. Can you meet me here where I feel safer than in the wood-ed area?"

"If you are alone and there is no one nearby watching you, then I will meet you tomorrow where you are now sitting. Otherwise, I could be apprehended and deported somewhere unpleasant for being an alien."

"Yeah, about that guy, he looks after me and wants to make sure I'm safe. I'll convince him I will. After all, you saved my life. I know I can trust you."

She waited but heard no reply. For him to trust her, she now knew she needed to inform Detective Bentley to have his men be invisible to a hummingbird drone.

As Kayla started to get back on her bike, she heard someone say, "Hey, I am 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. He being here at this time seemed too much of a coincidence. She suspected he told the alien stranger her name. She did not suspect Wanda Sue. The only other likely possibilities would be Bard and a hummingbird drone, but she had only mentioned her name while inside a building.

"You can tell me what you're doing here," she replied while staring straight at him.

"I am testing out this electric bicycle I designed and built. It is a hybrid."

The design of the bicycle impressed her. It was not technically impressive as the hummingbird drone, but it

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did indicate the use of advanced technology.

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

"It must cost a lot. Do you sell them?"

"Yes, I work at an electric bike store on High Street. It is by the tracks. We not only sell electric bicycles; we rent and fix them. We also convert regular bicycles to electric bicycles. Would you like to have your bicycle converted to an electric one?"

"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 he had just lied to her.

"This one cost only about five grand. Let me know if you want your bicycle converted. I am looking forward to seeing you back in class tomorrow."

He turned the throttle and sped away down the bike path. She knew high street by the tracks was not too far away. There were several ways to get to it, but she needed to get ready for work.

The next morning Kayla had her favorite breakfast, oats with a few added ingredients for more nutrition: vanilla extract to clear her sinuses caused by her allergies from spring and summer pollen, nutmeg having a long list of healthy nutrients, cinnamon to help control her blood sugar, a couple slices of dark chocolate, and ginger to help digest it. As for a sweetener, she chose to add maple syrup instead of a sliced-up banana. She added milk. Although its lactic acid was known to contribute to allergies from an enormous amount of summer pollen in the air, she had learned how to counter them, as with the ginger, drinking more water, and to spit instead of blowing her nose.

On her way to class, Kayla decided to detour about a half a mile south to Fifth Street instead of following a bike path beside the Willamette River since a bike path on Fifth Street goes straight east to High Street by the railroad tracts. When she arrived, no bicycle store appeared to be anywhere close by. She suspected John

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Von Lay had indeed lied to her.

Kayla arrived early for class. As she sat alone and waited, the first other student to arrive was Bard.

"You need someone to look after you," he said as he 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. Kayla was now wondering if Wanda Sue was in cahoots with John.

"A detective at the restaurant last night asked me a lot of questions," Bard said. "A waitress who said she took your place seemed concerned. I reckon your parents know what those guys did to you."

"My mother also works there," Kayla replied. "My father died years ago and left us with too much debt. I needed to help pay my way. A couple years at Lane Community College had been affordable. A few classes like this one will keep me going in the right direction."

"You seem very willing to go it alone no matter the risk," Bard said with a lower voice while leaning towards her, as more students had entered the room to seat themselves here and there.

She stared at the wall and rubbed her chin. "When my dad didn't work, he drank and fooled around before coming home to abuse my mother. She worked to pay the bills. I learned how to take care of myself."

He faced the floor. "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 for sure what I'm doing."

"Do you fear commitment?" she asked.

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.

"You must be as wise as Socrates," he grinned with

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his reply. "He said he knew nothing. He is considered the wisest of all."

"I know I know very much less than he did. Why do you fear commitment?"

"I don't. I accept responsibility for my actions because I care, not just for myself, and 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 asked seemed to gain more of it.

"I just need to know more about you if we're going to be friends."

"I sure don't blame you for that. Ask me anything."

"Why do you fear commitment?"

"You're persistent," he replied with a pause. "Come to think about it, my dad fooled around, and he ended up paying child support to someone he didn't marry. I guess he didn't want me to make the same mistakes."

She nodded. "You'll be deserving of the millions you make playing a very tough game. I do respect you for your dedication to your goal in life, and I'm sure your sweetheart will be fortunate if she passes the test."

Some of the other students clapped.

"I see you're still wearing the earrings."

"I had them checked out, and I was told they could be real diamonds. Your sweetheart could be thrilled to have them. Do you want them back?"

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

"Wow," Bard replied, "you are a brave girl, and you are honest. No, keep them, but be careful not to get robbed while on your bike."

A few groans were heard.

"You're right. I thank you very much for your good advice. From now on, I will only wear them for special occasions."

Professor Overly addressed the class to say, "Today we are going to discuss the role of knowledge in societal relations. How to weigh straightforwardness against secrecy is our question of the day."

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

"Secrecy ends up as mistrust. It divides us. There

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are these economic scams to sell inferior products, and politicians lie just to become elected. Voters need to be vigilant and demand openness."

Bard quickly flung his hand high above his head. The professor pointed at him.

"We all live in a competitive world. If my opponent knows the play, then I'm a sitting duck."

When 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. A horse can be led by a carrot. I agree with Wanda Sue. The secret that awaits the horse could lead to mistrust if it is a dishonorable deception just for controlling it."

"Yeah," Bard replied, "but we need a good way to control the horse to ride it. We feed it and it trusts us. That's how it works."

"Those are interesting possibilities," the professor replied. "People of society do compete among one another. We have competed for economic wealth, and we have united against obstacles too overbearing for the individual self to overcome. Deception can be an advantage if we have inferior products to sell. If we have superior products to sell, then reputation and honesty are usually the way to success. Dishonest information could very well damage that reputation if customers and voters are vigilant, but . . ."

After class, Kayla hurried to the door, but not as fast as needed for her to get away from Bard.

"What's your hurry?" she heard him ask.

"I need to do something before going to work," she replied facing him.

"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?"

"Sorry, I need to go," she said looking away. "See you next Tuesday, okay?"

She turned away from his concerning stare to hurry to her bicycle. She hurried walking her bicycle to the traffic light at Franklin Boulevard where she again met

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up with Bard.

"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 felt she needed to separate herself from Bard to follow Detective Bentley's plan.

When the light turned green, she crossed the road on her bicycle 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 a grassy field. And yes, several times she had noticed a hummingbird along the way. She wondered if Bard's presence would be suspicious to the alien stranger. Was Bard being concerned of her safe-ty, or was he concerned that he might lose his source of illegal drugs, be found out, become banned from the football team, lose his chance for a lucrative football career, and even go to jail?

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 to cross over straight into Alton Baker Park.

"I'm almost there," she said to the hummingbird. To see it hover nearby indicated to her Detective Bentley's plan was working, but Bard following her could still be suspicious to the alien stranger. She only hoped she had outdistanced him.

She locked her bicycle to a bike rack and walked over to a table. She sat on the bench and watched the visual on her phone for several minutes before seeing the alien stranger walking towards the bike bridge.

"I see you are coming," she said to deceive the alien stranger, suspecting the hummingbird drone would pick

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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 one way and another to check out the area. He continued west, but quickly stopped. Another man, casually dressed, approached from the west. The alien stranger turned north, but another man stood waiting in that direction as well.

"Stop," she heard the man from the north yell, "we are the police. We need to ask you a few questions."

The alien stranger ran fast up the winding stairs for walkers to walk up to the bridge. He continued to cross over. About halfway across it, another man, who had been waiting along the rails of the bridge, turned and stepped in front of the alien stranger. They collided, and the alien stranger went up about ten feet over the railing to splash down into the river and come up ap-pearing unconscious to then sink and float down the river with no attempt to swim.

Kayla recognized the fellow who appeared to have heaved the alien stranger over the bridge into the river. 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 intoxicated and abusing her moth-er. He surely had a lot of strength to heave someone high up 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 gave him so much strength to toss someone that high.

Bard was soon in the company of a couple policemen, and she suspected he was now in serious trouble with the law. She also suddenly became aware of her phone having no more visual of current events. She was, apparently, no longer needed.

While other policemen hurried to search the river to possibly save a life, Kayla felt helpless, sorry and didn't feel any more need to stick around. She hadn't wanted to believe Bard was mixed up in drug peddling, but she could not help think he had some reason to get even

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with the alien stranger. She again was disappointed by life events.

She continued west on the north side of the river and managed to stay out of the way of searchers attempting to find 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, and it 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 being trapped under water 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. With barely enough strength, she managed to free him from underneath the log, lifting him above the surface and pulling him to shore. As expected, he lay motionless, not breathing, as she lay beside him nearly too tired to move herself.

She felt helpless and sad, wanting to move on, but getting only a busy signal on her phone while attempting to notify the police. She reasoned they would soon find him. She did not feel comfortable sticking around only to answer questions she would know nearly nothing about.

It seemed an unusually long shift at work. Although there were plenty of customers to keep her busy, she could not get the earlier outcome out of her mind. She worried about Bard getting into trouble with the law, and she felt guilty for her being partly responsible for it, even though it was mostly his own doing. And she had some sympathy for the alien stranger. It was not pleasant to see him dead even though he had been using her.

Bard, from Thursday to the next class on Tuesday, was the main news of the day, being suspended from

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the football team after being arrested and released on bail for possible homicide.

When Kayla opened the door of the classroom, being early again, she saw Bard sitting alone, eyeing her, shaking his head no.

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

They exchanged stares.

"I didn't; he jumped."

"Is that high a jump possible?"

"It shouldn't be, not even without me holding him. He nearly took me with him."

"How could he have done that?"

"All I know is that I'm in big trouble. I'm indefinitely suspended from the team. I have a lawyer. He 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 be charged with homicide, and you could be charged as an accessory."

She gritted her teeth and squeezed her eyes shut. "They should have found his body by now," she replied knowing that she had left it where the law could find it with their search effort. "Maybe he is not dead." She realized some people near death come back to life.

"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 in anger. "Nobody just throws 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."

As the class filled with students, Kayla took a seat far away from Bard, and beside John Von Lay, who had already been sitting. Although she wanted to believe Bard, she also dreaded being hopelessly involved in something she had little if no control over. Besides, the staring at her from other students indicated she was the guilty one to blame.

"Things are not always what they seem to be," John Von Lay said with a tone of voice indicating he was not against her, but with a message indicating him as be-

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ing somehow involved as well. "Be careful not to pass judgment until he has been proven guilty."

Kayla wondered if she made a mistake sitting next to John Von Lay. Did she really want to be involved investigating connections with the alien stranger? Well, she did want to be in more control of her own life, and finding out connections to the alien stranger appeared to be the only way forward.

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

"I am sorry. I should have informed you it is in the back of the building on the east side of the street. You need to follow the pathway by the tracks to get 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 other students. She figured the word was spreading fast on campus, especially 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. She favored the former alternative, but she was not ready to decide.

After class, Kayla sat saddened by the angry stares from students leaving the room. Even Professor Overly appeared saddened when he faced her.

"I know how you feel," John Von Lay said. "You will need to hang in there. Things could work themselves out and be okay."

She wondered how anything could get Bard out of the trouble he was in. She felt no hope for either him or her.

John Von Lay waved his right hand forward from his eye as he stood up and walked away.

When Kayla started to walk 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."

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"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 to walk away.

Kayla felt it was her against the world, but most of her life had been a struggle. Maybe it prepared her for the present situation. She needed to stay the course in order to find out how to cope with her life situations. She knew no other way, life otherwise having no significant purpose. She decided to accept her destination as her own personal path in life. Hopefully, she would be able to learn from it. Perhaps everything would come out okay, as John Von Lay wanted her to believe, but there was plenty of doubt to consider along with suffering from losing would-be-friends she wanted to have.

STRANGE BANKING

Kayla was dressed for work holding the earrings in her hand wondering if she should keep and wear them anymore.

"You should keep and wear them," she thought.

"No," she thought shaking her head, "I do not want to wear them anymore,"

"I need you to wear them for me," she thought.

She was somewhat puzzled by her own thoughts.

"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 to herself.

"I am the alien stranger. I am in my secret location hearing you think, and I am channeling my thoughts to your brain. 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. Transformers in the earrings amplify thoughts that are energy waves inducing actions of your physical body. I am not dead because I turned myself off when I was confronted with the threat of danger to my life. I have increased the monetary value of your bank-

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ing account, as well, as to reward you for releasing me from being trapped under a log. After you released me, my drone alerted me to turn myself back on."

This is too much, she thought, taking off her earrings as fast as she could to throw them to wherever. To find out how much money she had in her banking account, she reached for her cell phone on the dresser. What she discovered dumbfounded her.

Kayla felt desperate. She needed to ask her mother for another favor. She laid the phone back on the desk and rushed all the way out of the house to get on her bike to peddle as fast as she could to the restaurant.

She soon felt even more uncomfortable in front of her mother's stare.

"I have to do something. It's important. I hope you don't 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."

"Did you sell the jewelry?" Darcy asked while jerking her head back.

"No. The police have the necklace. It'll be mine if no one claims it, and if I don't get 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 staring angrily at it.

"What's going on?" her mother asked again.

"It's too weird to believe; too obvious not to."

"Please dear, let me in on it."

"It's a setup. I need to talk to someone right away. It's urgent. Lives depend on it, especially mine; maybe yours too."

"What's going on, dear?" Darcy asked spreading her arms and hands apart.

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 become 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

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only she were a duck, it would be a good time to fly away, but, as ducks have little ducklings to take care of, Kayla had issues she needed to be responsible for.

She touched her earlobe, finally realizing she wasn't wearing the earrings. She suddenly realized she wasn't thinking clearly, remembering what the alien stranger had said about the earrings. Feeling alone with no one in sight, she decided to leave. When she had gotten on her bike and started up the trail, she suddenly noticed the alien stranger walking towards her. The hummingbird drone must have spotted her, she reckoned.

"Why did you put money in my bank account?" she shouted loud enough for anyone in the park to hear.

She waited, but he did not answer her question.

"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 being an accessory to murder. What do you want with me?"

"Who was murdered?"

"Everyone thinks it was you. How come you're still alive? Where are you from? 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 saved you from being raped, and I will help you again. Do you have a plan I can assist 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 guess you made sure of it. Can you protect me?"

"I can alert you of danger only 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 in

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your class. Bard did not tell me your name. I learned it by hearing you talk to Bard by means of the earrings that he gave you. They amplified the sound from inside the building whereby my hummingbird drone was able to relay the sound from you and Bard to my receptor."

His answer she wanted to believe. An alien stranger spying by means of earrings as transmitters was more acceptable. It indicated Bard's innocence, but she was still suspicious of John Von Lay. Was he also a member of the secret society?

Concerning Bard, she had an idea. "Would you mind taking another dive into the river?"

"I will not do it if it can lead me to my capture."

"It's part of my plan. I'll make sure it's not a trap."

"Do you expect me to trust you after you helped set a trap for me?"

"Yes I did, but you seem to know a lot about me, as even my name, and you can sure disappear in a hurry, and turn yourself off and back on. You'll know 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 peddled her bicycle out of the park to the football stadium. After locating the office of Coach Molten, she barged into it walking up to his desk and curious stare.

"I can prove Bard Sucrets didn't toss that guy into the river. He jumped."

"It was on camera, and on the news for us to see," he replied while shaking his head no.

"He jumped. Nobody throws that much weight in the air that high."

"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. It could have been an accident. I'll go with

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that."

She leaned forward to stare straight at his face. "He jumped, and he'll do it again."

"Why do you think he's still alive?" he asked with a crinkled nose.

"There's no evidence he isn't, and I know he isn't."

"He'll be found by someone eventually, most likely deceased."

"I guess you don't want your All American cleared. What kind of coach are you, one that just looks out for himself and not his players?"

He grimaced, looking away. "How do you think you can prove his innocence?"

"Let's go to Alton Baker Park. Bring your phone and you'll be able to record what you see for evidence."

"That's it?"

"Trust me. You'll find out when we get there."

"Okay, I have some time to spare. Let's go."

He stood up and escorted her out to his car, but the park was only a short distance away from the football stadium.

"Meet me there," she told him while walking over to her bicycle.

They soon met up at Alton Baker Park. She led him to the same table she had sat at before.

"Now what?" he asked.

"Call Detective Bentley; he needs to see this."

"Detective Bentley, this is Coach Molten," the coach said shortly after pushing buttons on his phone. "Kayla Chalet claims she has something for us to see here at Alton Baker Park. If she is right, you only need visual to my phone." He pointed his phone at Kayla. "Do you have it?"

Coach Molten nodded to Kayla.

Kayla pointed to the cell phone and then at the bike bridge. Coach Molten pointed his cell phone at it.

"We're ready," Kayla thought. "It is time for you to do your thing. You should know it's not a trap if you're reading my mind."

What appeared to be a man with long hair took off his wig and leaped about twenty feet above the railing only to dive down into the river. The coach ran to the

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river, pointing the phone west for sight downstream.

"Did you see that?" the coach shouted.

Kayla held out her hand to receive his phone as he came forward.

"This is Kayla," she said holding the phone. "That was the alien stranger. He said he belongs to a secret society having advanced knowledge. He jumped, just as you saw him do it again. Bard is innocent."

"What's going on?" she heard.

"Do you think the coach would be part of a hoax?"

"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 also filing a restraining order against you and the team. The guy who jumped claims he belongs to a secret society. He's using me, Bard and anybody I befriend."

"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 with a crinkled jaw as he eyed the sky, 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. And I sure hope that guy is still alive."

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 a temporary. After all, Kayla was confronted with a desperate situation, even though it appeared she had plenty of money in her bank account to spare.

When she arrived at home, she was about to take off the earrings and put them away, but she decided to contact the alien stranger. "Kayla to Alien Stranger," she thought, "I hope you are okay?"

She waited and waited, but received no reply.

"Kayla to Alien Stranger," she shouted, "I need to ask you a question."

"What is your question?" she heard.

"I guess you don't hear all my thoughts."

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"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."

"You are correct. Your thoughts are only understood on a high level of consciousness except when they 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. You can use it online without having a physical appearance for identification."

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

"You can either go along with it or report the money in your bank account to the police. The choice is yours to make."

"Thanks. I'll think about it."

The next day she had another night off from work. She wanted to find out for sure if she had two-hundred thousand dollars in her bank account. To confirm she actually had the money in her bank account, she was on her bike heading to the electric bicycle store to find out if it did actually exist according to John Von Lay's claim. Besides, why not purchase an electric bicycle if she really did have all that money in the bank, it being too much of a temptation to resist at the present moment?

When she arrived at the bicycle store, she discovered John was indeed working there. He showed her a few different styles of electric bicycles.

"I sure like the one you were riding."

"I can let you have it for five grand."

She nodded and showed him a debit card. She then followed him to the cash register where she handed the card to a clerk. Within a minute the clerk shook her head no.

Kayla gritted, biting her teeth as hard as she could.

"Sorry, I guess I need to transfer from my savings to my checking."

Kayla just hoped it was her checking account that had been altered. Although the alien stranger had al-

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tered her checking account, he had also promised to change it. It could now be her savings account.

"We can check your credit," John suggested.

"My bank is only about five blocks away. I'll be back in about a half hour."

Having 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 account," the bank teller soon replied after Kayla had swiped her debit card for it to be verified. "You have less than two-hundred dollars in your checking. Do you think someone has hacked into your account?"

"Sorry," Kayla apologized with a blank stare. She was confused as to why she did not have all the money her account had indicated online she had in it.

"I must have it in a different account. I could have it in a joint account I have with my mother at another bank. I seem not to be remembering much, lately."

Walking away from the bank teller's curious stare, she rode her bike home. She went straight to her cell phone and checked out her banking account. Her eyes opened wide, seeing twenty million dollars.

She groaned, feeling confused, wondering why she was being used. Was she about to spend the rest of her life in jail? Her droopy body managed to make it over to her bed where she could only hope for the best and not for the worst.

"What's going on?" her mother asked when entering the room through the door Kayla had left open.

Kayla held her cell phone up to show her mother the bank display on the screen.

"Wow, you must've hit the lottery?" her mother said 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 on covering for you. 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 claims he belongs to a

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secret society. He's hacked into my bank account, and he most likely wants to use 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, as it's highly advanced in technology. I doubt the police will be able to do anything about it."

"You still need to let them know. That guy can only control you if you let him. They might not catch him, but he'll have to move on to victimize someone else if he isn't able to control you. You'll have the police on your side."

"You're right. I'm sure glad I have a mother as wise as you."

At least 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 mon-ey 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. If it was, what would be its ramifications?

Detective Bentley had seen the leap off the bridge, but she felt an urgent need to follow that up with more information that could free her from being controlled.

"I need to talk to you face to face," Kayla thought as she rode her bike past Valley River Inn.

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

The bike ride seemed forever. Kayla had too much of an urge to be there sooner, but she also didn't want to tire herself out. Peddling slow was easier than walking. It also had somewhat of a calming effect.

When Kayla arrived at the park, she noticed Bard slumped over at a table with his left arm at his backside. She faced his stare when she got off her bike.

"Don't worry. I would never hurt you. I'm no longer on the football team, but my lawyer told me there is evidence that that guy who jumped into the river could

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still be alive."

"Sorry. I've gotten in deep trouble with something. I didn't want you involved with it, but you insisted."

"Yeah, I reckon I should have known it pays to help someone I really care about, which I still do."

"How come you're not on the team? I proved your innocence."

His eyes opened wide. "You proved my innocence?"

"Yes. I found the guy that had jumped. I got him to confess, and he even showed detective Bentley how he did it."

"Well, I'm very thankful for that, but I hurt my back while practicing with some of the guys. I can hardly walk or even move without feeling the pain, even after taking pain medicine, but not enough to become addicted. I really didn't throw that guy off the bridge. He must've had some springs in his shoes or something to make him go that 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 believe we're joking around with some kind of leaping gadget playing a hoax to evade getting caught for drug trafficking. What's going on? Is the dude a drug dealer and terrorist, or something even worse?"

As she shrugged, she saw the alien stranger a good distance away approaching them.

"We're about to find out," she said while pointing at the alien stranger.

When the alien stranger had come close enough to be recognized, Bard stood with his mouth wide open, having a look of astonishment even more than Coach Molten had when seeing the leap off the bridge.

"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 bewildering look on his face. "Who saved you?"

"I saved myself with some help from Kayla Chalet."

"How's that possible? How'd you hear what we said so far away? How can you jump so high?"

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"I belong to a secret society. We are scientists having more advanced knowledge than do your scientists."

"Oh yeah, what do you know about sore backs?"

"The pain in your back can be cured by drinking a sufficient amount of soda pop."

"Get out of here. That's too crazy. Soda pop doesn't cure sore backs."

"Its acid will decompose 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. You should also shoot billiards. The exercise is mild but just enough to help your back heal 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 as high as I did to dive into the river and survive, and they are probably also concerned with me possessing expensive jewelry. They could fear me as a threat to the nation, but I have no intent to take it over or to do any harm to it."

"Don't you?" Kayla asked. "Why are you using me? Why does my banking account show online it has 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 kept eyeing Kayla and the alien stranger back-and-forth.

"The twenty million dollars added to your account is for you to purchase anything you want to spend it for. The online access to your account has a secret identity for expenditure to be recorded on another account."

Bard resumed his back-and-forth eyeing of the alien stranger and Kayla.

"I tried to spend it. It was rejected."

"I apologize to you for not having reactivated it."

"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?"

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"Your new account is only detectable online during the time you use it to transfer its monetary value to another account. The choice of using it to transfer its monetary value 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."

"The authorities will not be able to detect the transactions you make with it because of its secret identity."

"How will I be able to sleep at night by not knowing if I'm spending stolen money?"

"If you use the money for a generous purpose, you will sleep peacefully at night and feel better about your purpose in life."

"I guess it is stolen since you're not denying it. It could be dangerous. Is it worth dying for?"

"It could be worth living for."

"What do you consider generous?"

"I consider generous helping the homeless, helping cure drug addiction, and creating a social environment of real wealth instead of just monetary wealth. I would consider generous the countering of the grave effects of climate change for creating 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 could be right about the spinach. Too much of it with milk can result in a kidney stone. I once had a friend in school with a bone disease. A healthy diet was all that kept her alive. It's all that's keeping my mother alive right now."

"You might be putting yourself in danger."

"Yeah, I might be putting you and others in danger as well, but what can I do? I need to sleep at night. I can't do much without knowing where I stand."

"My lawyer could help you figure that out."

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She eyed Bard. "How about you; will you be okay?"

"I'll try some pop. You'll know when back in class."

"Would your lawyer really want to talk to me?"

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

"He somehow hacked into the online access to my account. I wasn't able to spend the money. Part of the listening device is the earrings you gave me. He also has a spy drone disguised as a hummingbird. He could belong to a secret society with advanced knowledge."

Bard faced the ground. "I guess I deserve this back pain. He probably would've hacked into my account. I don't think I'll 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 intended to do the right thing. Don't feel guilty for something someone else did. That'll just let them be in control of your life."

He nodded, thankfully, and said, "You know, I don't know how that guy knows, but I do shoot pool. How about you; would you like to play a game or two with me sometime? I might need your help exercising."

"I'm sorry. I wish I could, but I don't have enough time and money to do something like that. I'm much too busy at the restaurant."

"It looks like you now have the money."

"Yeah, but it's not for shooting pool. Besides, you're busy playing football during the day; I work at night."

"Do you really consider soda pop a health food?"

"It might be a healthy remedy for your situation if it helps reverse too much of something else."

"I thought spinach is a healthy food."

"It can be, but too much of anything isn't good. If you don't get enough vitamin A, then you can become bald, blind and even die from it. If you get too much vitamin A, then you can become bald, blind and even die from it. Even though milk sugar is energetic, it can be harmful if mixed with a wrong combination of stuff. I add ginger to help digest it."

Bard nodded. "I guess balance is the key. A bal-

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anced running and passing attack is a winning strategy."

Kayla nodded. "A balanced diet is a winner."

"My diet is balanced. Besides the spinach and milk, I eat bacon and eggs in the morning along with some fruit and vegetables. I have salad and vegetable soup with my fries and fried chicken."

"Some of your food could be cooked too hot for you to digest sufficiently."

"Why is it too hot?"

"It transforms food with a greater bond of collecting in your body, especially the joints and the heart muscle. The greater bond sort of digests slower."

"I digest food better if it's cooked."

"Yeah, but baking is better. Heating does result in a chemical transformation. Cook oats with a lot of water to a boil. It transforms the water into more solid oats. Honey and sugar are both sugar, chemically the same, but they are not the same."

"Which one is better for you?"

"They're both preservatives that provide energy. No bad germs have been found in honey. Your brain loves it, but your body can only digest so much of it. What it does not digest can transform into liver fat for health problems in the future? The good news is your hot diet is reversible. Your immune system will get rid of it in time. It's just eating too much of it that isn't healthy for you. You'll play football longer with food cooked at a lower temperature. I also need more sugar for more energy because of cinnamon and other nutrients to control my blood-sugar. More water seems to provide it, combining with sugar at body temperature."

"You know, I once had some ice-cream and pop and I became too tired to play football. Two weeks later I had some ice-cream and pop and played all day without getting tired. I even felt stronger afterwards."

"What did you do different?"

"Well, because it was a hotter day the second time, I drank a lot more water."

"Hummingbirds require a lot of sugar to move as fast as they do. Sugar has a lot of carbon. Air has oxygen and nitrogen. Water has hydrogen and oxygen. It all

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depends on how they mix. It's extremely complicat-ed. I doubt the experts have figured it all out yet. The air oxygen seems to work quicker; the water oxygen is longer lasting."

"Do you have any remedies for allergies?"

"Spit instead of blowing your nose."

"Are you serious?"

"Your snot protects your brain. More is produce if it is blown out your nose. Spitting it out allows the pollen to pass on down to the lungs for less need of snot."

The next morning Kayla sat listening to Bard's lawyer sitting at his desk. He was a small fellow about her size, well dressed in suit and tie. He appeared to be well organized and knowledgeable about his profession while he studied Kayla's statements on the paper she had filled out.

"If the money is donated," he said, "it could be legal, but you still need to report it as a taxable income. If it is stolen, it can be an accessory to criminal activity if used as such."

"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. You could be convicted even if the donor is anonymous. If you only transfer it from one account to another, then you are still a participant."

"What should I do?"

"You should go to the authorities and report it. With your cooperation, they will have no reason to charge you with anything illegal, and they would have a different direction to follow for their investigation."

"Thanks. Can I pay you with my bank account?"

"It is not okay. There is no charge. I'm following up on another investigation. It involves you with Bard."

She left feeling encouraged by the advices given to her by Bard's lawyer and her mother. She believed she now had a way of being in control of her life, as to confront the destiny of which she otherwise had little if no control whatsoever.

The next day Kayla sat in Detective Bentley's office seeing a man in suit and tie enter the room.

"This is a federal agent," Detective Bentley said.

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The federal agent stood directly in front of Kayla.

"Miss Kayla Chalet, you passed the polygraph. Bard Sucrets passed one. Someone has been peddling expensive jewelry. The diamonds in the earrings are real. The gold in the necklace is also real."

To her surprise, he handed the earrings to her.

"Those diamonds appear to be commercially made, but we were unable to find transmitters in them. I saw those jumps off the bridge, and I have no reason not to believe you except for there being no evidence any-one hacked into your bank account and 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 advised me I can be prosecuted as an accessory to illegal activity."

"So far we know of no actual law violations, but we do need to know more about this secret society."

"Is that itself a crime?"

"It is not, but being an illegal alien and a spy justifies our investigation, it already being criminal activity. If the secret society has advanced technology, it could be a threat to the welfare of the nation. We'd like your help to uncover whatever is 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 if it is undercover. I need to inform the alien stranger what I'm up to."

"Why's that?" he asked with an attentive stare.

"He can read my mind. He'll know I contacted you if he doesn't already know by now. If I don't inform him why I'm here, he is not likely to trust me with anything that could expose him."

"That is a good point," he replied while shaking his head as if in disbelief, "but we still need you to keep us informed. If he asks you to do something against the law, we will know you are innocent if you inform us of what they plan on doing."

"I don't want to break the law," she answered with a stare. That's why I'm here, telling you it is what it is, so that neither him nor anyone else, including you, has

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reason to use me."

"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 will also take that into consideration. Just don't use our trust in you against us."

"I reckon there are no guarantees," she said with a pause, "but it'll be more difficult to live in a destroyed nation. I'll do my best to keep you informed."

"Thank you, Miss Kayla Chalet. Detective Bentley is here in charge. You report directly to him. Okay?"

"Okay."

As the agent left the room, Detective Bentley stood up from his chair and handed Kayla a photo.

"Do you recognize the fellow in this photo?"

"Yes, he's the one."

She did recognize the long hair and raggedy beard. It was the guy who attempted to rape her. There was hope. Maybe the law knew more about the secret society than they were letting on.

"We arrested him for illegal possession of drugs. We can now add attempted rape and 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?" Kayla asked as she firmly stared at Detective Bentley. 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 is the only lead we have. He had been arrested before, but he was once a talented basketball player before being injured. He then became addicted taking opioids. I believe he can be useful if we bargain for his cooperation."

Kayla was shaking her head considering what to do.

"The alien stranger did tell me I should help con-front climate change and provide for the poor, but I'll need lots of help and protection." She paused to consider a possible solution. "Does this guy have a bank account?"

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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 transfer. The alien stranger might not have activated it because of my coming here," she said while eyeing the earrings that had been given back to her.

"That is a good idea, but it will have to be between you and the person with the account."

"When can I ask him?"

Detective Bentley got up out of his chair and walked out of the room. When he returned, they waited awhile before fellow officers guided the guy into the room that Kayla had recognized in the photo.

"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 barely scoot her chair a few inches away from him.

"As you see," Detective Bentley said as he stared at the prisoner, "We can add attempted rape and murder, but your victim is willing to make a deal for helping us with a more hideous crime."

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, as to have acquired special privileges from both the law and the alien stranger.

"Do you believe in global warming?"

"Yeah, it's hotter from using too much fossil fuel."

"I need help. Do you mind if I transfer some money into your bank account?"

"Who do I have to kill?" he asked with narrow eyed expression. "What's the catch?"

"I'll put enough into it for you to rent or buy a place to stay, and to buy whatever you need to stay clean if you're willing to cooperate with the police to bring drug dealers to justice."

"If only I could and did rat on any of those guys, I'd

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be dead before I had time to spend the money."

"Do you not want to take back control of your life?" Detective Bentley asked.

"Okay, put some money in the bank and I'll give it a go," James replied while staring at the floor.

There was a pause of silence.

"With the money I'll see what I can find out," James continued while reaching out his hand for the money.

"I'll need a routing number," Kayla said.

"I need to get it from my bank. They need to know it's really me."

Detective Bentley pointed to the phone on the desk. Its number along with Detective Bentley's confirmation allowed James to receive his routing number.

Kayla wondered if the alien stranger reactivated her account as he claimed he would. She knew of only one way to find out. She reached for the routing number.

Within an hour it was confirmed that twenty grand had been deposited into James Baker's account.

The police now had solid evidence of her having an unknown source of capital. At least it seemed James Baker was not a member of the secret society. He had proper identification. If he was willing to put his life in danger by accepting stolen money, he would be more likely a liability. The more likely member of the secret society would be John Von Lay.

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

COMMON CAUSE SOCIETY

Kayla entered the Erb Memorial Union known as the EMU. It was named after Donald Milton Erb, the youngest University of Oregon president of the past. He had taught economics.

She opened the door and walked into a large room of tables and empty seats except for Bard, Wanda Sue and John Von Lay sitting in cushion seats at a table.

"Have you made your decision?" Bard asked Kayla when she sat down next to him.

"I decided to notify the police."

She waited to see how John 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 seemed to do the trick. A couple games of pool could make it even better. Are you sure you don't have time to play?"

"I'm sure. Is this all you could find to come?"

Bard shrugged. "Your reputation as a trouble maker didn't help. These two are all I could recruit. My team thinks they're on your off-limits list."

"Well, maybe this is enough for a good start." She

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faced them "Are any of you members of a society with advanced knowledge that can combat climate change?"

Bard shrugged. Wanda Sue and John nodded yes. Kayla was not sure they understood the context of her question.

"I did invite someone else to join us. 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."

"Are you crazy?" Bard asked gazing at Kayla. "The guy tries to rape you and you give him twenty grand."

Wanda Sue appeared stunned as well, but John only appeared to be curious.

"I could have pressed charges," Kayla said, "but he had taken opioids as medication for an injury only to become addicted. He admits to making a bad mistake, and he promises to make amends by helping us combat climate change."

Bard, seemingly in doubt, shook his head. "You give someone you hardly know twenty grand, like this addict; he's long gone by now."

"Is that the guy?" Wanda Sue asked as she pointed her finger at someone walking towards them.

Kayla did not at first recognize the tall slim fellow. His clothes appeared tidy and new. His hair was short and combed. He had no beard. She stood up and faced him as he came close enough for her to recognize him.

"Thanks for the handout," he said. "I appreciate it."

Kayla faced Bard and Wanda Sue. "This is James Baker." She pointed her hand first at Bard and last at John, saying "This is Bard, this is Wanda Sue and this is John Von Lay. Please have a seat and join us. We are about to have a very important discussion on climate change."

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 and lighter, and placed the candle in the holder. After placing it on the table, he lit the candle with the lighter. He then reached down again to lift up a holding frame that went over and around the

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candle. He then brought up a paper cup and a water container. He poured water from the container into the paper cup and placed it above the candle with the bottom of the cup touching the flame. He then dropped a tea bag into the water.

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

"Don't sell us your dope, you dope." Bard replied.

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

"I might if they deserve it."

Kayla decided it was time to become a peacemaker.

"Okay, you two, let's make peace, not war. I have a lot of money to spend for a good cause. If not for climate change, does anyone have an idea for a better cause?"

Bard eyed 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 did 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.

"What's your specialty?" Kayla asked after taking a little time to think about it.

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

"That sounds good. You can help us form a common cause society."

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

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

"I heard there already is a common cause society," Bard informed her.

"Yes, but it's political."

"What's wrong with that?"

"They lie. The best liars get elected, as do the rich get richer, and buy our votes. There's no leadership in

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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 their need to be politically correct, and then they are accused of being liars when they decide 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 needs to be, but they advertise. They're also bought to persuade us to live in the now instead of preparing for the future."

"Still, isn't that your specialty? Shouldn't we include a society that already has experience against it?"

Wanda Sue seemed to nod grudgingly.

"Then let's get going and let's do it right."

"I need lots of help," Wanda Sue replied while facing Kayla. "What's your specialty?"

"I'm the financier. If you come up with a good plan, 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 spread her hands out far away from her chest as seemingly dumbfounded by what she heard.

"I might have gotten some big tips," Kayla continued, "or maybe I've been tricked to join a setup. I was able to give James money, but it's from an anonymous source."

"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 as illegal will need 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. "It could put our lives in danger, but

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if you're willing, then we need to start spending for the common cause. Does anyone have any suggestions?"

"The homeless need more food and shelter," Wanda Sue pointed out.

"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 gets complicated. We need to know what's going on if we're here to play with fire. You claim this guy knows about global warming. I want to hear it." He pointed right at James. "Why are 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, you're a duck, but they only fly south for the winter; beavers stay and build reservoirs to manage the water supply."

Kayla had grown up a duck fan, favoring them over the beavers, a mascot of Oregon State University. She also felt more favorable to Bard than towards James, who had tried to rape her, but there were more serious issues at stake. Bard's ridicule of James was leading 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 apologize. Do you mind telling us your story, like what you really do know and how you came to know it?"

"I learn by doing."

"Why's that?"

"I grew up not going to the same school more than two years. My dad was a war veteran. Both he and my mom both worked. When they got off work, they had a few drinks. They were fighting all the time whenever at home. They didn't pay the rent. We moved around a lot. I needed to prove myself at every new school. I became a loner. I asked a lot of questions and was really good at solving problems, but teachers regarded me as a troublemaker. They accepted what they were taught without question. I question what I don't understand to

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be sure it's consistent with what I do know. I'm good at solving problems. In camping outdoors, I learned a lot about the weather, and I figured out how climate change works."

"I find that 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 this, solutions to climate change also need to promote the economy. I have some real good ideas regarding this that'll help promote James' ideas."

"Why are winters freezing my butt off?" Bard asked while staring again at James.

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

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

James raised 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 near a lot of ocean water rises to create a vacuum effect to receive the dry, colder air from the directions of the poles. The northern states are caught in between, as are similar latitudes in the southern hemisphere. We get the freezing cold from the Arctic, which is becoming farther away from the sun during winter, although the planet as a whole gradually becomes warmer on the average instead of becoming cooler because of astronomical cycles. As large as the atmosphere is, it contains a tremendous amount of heat. Although it takes a century for only an increase in average temperature a few degrees to occur, it results in more destructive force for us to cope with."

"That seems to make sense," Kayla commented.

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"What's the economic solution?" Bard asked.

"Water management," Wanda Sue said. "Water is the key to both the environment and the economy. We need both carbon and water to survive, but it's water that promotes it. Plants need both water and carbon, but it's the water promoting more growth, and more plants then absorb more of the carbon out of the at-mosphere to supply food as real wealth for a growing population of people."

"Yeah," Bard replied, "but the increase in population just brings more pollution. What's your answer to that predicament? Shouldn't the stronger of us survive?"

"It depends on who you are," Wanda Sue was quick 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 what a democracy for and by the people needs to be, as peacefully instead of by physical revolution that leads to a destructive war all of us suffer from."

"We also need more scientific knowledge to improve the situation," James said, "but the scientists need to be 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 Wanda Sue and John Von Lay already a part of it? Hopefully the continuation of the discussion would help her know the real truth. Besides, they might come up with something to actually help combat climate change.

"What exactly is 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 can build homes and gardens, create greenhouses with drip irrigation, and transport water to desert regions. It'll work as long as the rich don't intervene by getting politicians to pass restrictions against it. That part I do disagree with Wanda Sue. We need a Common Cause Society keeping politicians in check, as to allow the tax on air pollution. I'm with them."

"Well," Kayla replied, "you seem to have promising knowledge that can help. Wanda Sue is more educated

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in the economics and politics." She faced Bard. "What do you bring to the table?"

"Somebody here needs to keep an eye on this dude to make sure he does what he's supposed to do instead of spending the money on drugs and his buddies. I'll be the overseer. If he doesn't let me know how he spends the money in a way I approve it, then you'll be advised by me not to give him anymore of it. Okay?"

"I will and can spend the money for a good cause," James replied, "if only I get the chance to do it."

Bard shook his head no. "You're not educated. You know something, but you'll need to know a lot more of it to do what you want to accomplish."

"I figure things out," James replied, "You the students and teachers only know what you've been told."

"I figure things out too," Bard replied with an angry stare, "but I do it with lots more help from the coaches. They sure make it easier to climb the wall."

"Yeah, they do, but the academia establishment is biased. They accept the textbook knowledge, but their blogs don't address questions outside it. I'll provide the knowledge they refuse to consider."

"You know what you think you know, but 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?"

"Where would our science be with no one to challenge theory?"

Kayla was feeling uncomfortable hearing an argument she had no control over. Bard had made worthy 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 there could be compromise for allowing both arguments to prevail.

"Let's properly introduce ourselves to find out what

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we bring to the table," Kayla said after removing a hand from her forehead.

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

"Yes, I really do; thanks."

Bard pointed his finger at Wanda Sue.

"I bring expertise in economics," she said. "I realize there is a difference between real wealth and economic wealth. Neither real nor economic wealth is money. It is products money can buy. Real wealth can be contrary to economic wealth in that clean air is of very little if any economic value even though we can't live without it, and polluted air is harmful to our health. It even has negative economic value to industry 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 products to sell. Money is a facilitator, as credit, for the creation of product. More money in circulation only inflates the price of product to devalue the dollar. More product increases the dollar value as real money. Distribution is also the key to a healthy economy. More money printed as credit with proper distribution for a greater creation of products balances out for creation of greater wealth, whether 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. To do this, we need more opportunity, even if by taxation."

"That sounds well said, Wanda," Kayla said. "What do you bring to the table, John?"

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

Kayla shrugged.

"I agree with both Wanda and James," John continued to say. "There has also been a lot of effort to control climate change, but it needs a whole lot more. The real solution is how we use carbon, water, and so forth.

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If we simply use hydrogen to combine with oxy-gen or air for water as the byproduct, then the hot hy-drogen combines with the heavy oxygen in the ozone layer to allow the sun's more harmful ultraviolet rays to reach us, but we can use hydrogen and oxygen un-derground to create energy along with solar energy. The byproduct of water can then be useful for growing plants without the risk of depleting the ozone layer. Carbon is useful. It has many uses. Combining it with hydrogen makes it very explosive as weaponry for the protection of wealth. It is also a vital nutrient of animal life. It can even become diamonds. Allowing too much of it in the atmosphere is only what we need to avoid."

"It appears we have our needed expert," Kayla said eyeing Bard.

"Why do we then need him?" Bard asked pointing at James.

"I know of homeless workers needing jobs." James responded. "If they get them, a proper distribution of wealth could be the result."

"Is his plan going to work?" Bard asked pointing at John.

"It's a good gesture, but it's not viable," John said.

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

"Money: If you donate more than a billion dollars to the University for financing science labs, then it would be able to purchase the equipment needed to produce hydrogen fuel with laser light, but that is only a start. There will then be a need for equipment to tunnel under ground for creation of underground aqueducts and reservoirs. However, even that by itself won't make a noticeable dent in reversing global warming."

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

"He does critique," Kayla replied. "He does seem to know it take a lot of effort to combat climate change. We're just here to do whatever we can do as our part."

"Good. I'm almost late for practice," Bard said while standing up and eyeing the clock on the wall. "I'm still hoping to play pool with you. The cost will be on me."

"Do you shoot pool?" John asked Kayla.

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Bard appeared concerned as he walked away.

"No. I don't have time for it," Kayla replied.

"I won a snooker tournament in England four years ago. I am skilled at playing it. I can teach you how to play it."

"You must take it seriously traveling all the way to England for a tournament."

"I am from England. I had been an exchange student at Harvard before getting expelled from it."

"You're an alien," Kayla said, "and a stranger."

"I am also married. My wife intends to join me here after she graduates from Harvard. For now, I am renting a room in a large house that has a nice pool table in its recreation room. The house owner is Professor Overly. If you come over, I will teach you how to play along with discussing how to combat climate change."

"It'll have to be the weekends. I work in the evening on week days, and I go to school during day time hours. You'll probably be working at the bicycle store a lot."

"My hours are flexible. I am sure we will be able to work something out, and I am sure Professor Overly and his family will enjoy your presence. He might even have some ideas on climate change that could be beneficial to our efforts to combat it."

Although shooting pool would be somewhat out of her way, and she had turned down Bard, there was this loyal commitment she had devoted her life to. She did feel a responsibility of finding out if John Von Lay and others he knew were members of the secret society, even though he seemed a bit too eager to teach her pool in front of Bard's seeming dismay of it.

THE PHYSICS AND GEOMETRY OF SHOOTING POOL

Kayla arrived at the house on the corner lot at the coveted Ashley States neighborhood. She walked her bike along a custom stonework and decorative wood pergola up to the double doors of the house where she rang the doorbell.

A middle age woman opened the door.

"Hi. I'm Kayla Chalet. John Von Lay invited me here to play; I mean to shoot pool with him."

The middle age woman raised her eyebrows while she stepped aside. When Kayla entered the house, she became aware of being stared at, but when she continued on into the decorative living room atop Brazillion Cherry floors, it impressed her more than the stare could discourage.

"Is John here?"

"He should be off work and arriving soon. How do you know him?"

"We're in class together. Isn't Professor Overly your husband?"

She nodded yes.

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"Where's the pool table?"

"It's in the recreation room down in the basement. Do you and John play a lot of pool together?"

"No. I'm just here to learn. Isn't it okay to use your pool table? You seem concerned about it."

"It's my daughter's table. She gave him the right to use it."

"Is she here?"

"She will be after she graduates from Harvard?"

"Oh," Kayla replied with her eyes wide open, "He told me he was married, but he didn't tell me who to. Please don't get the wrong idea."

"Do you mind telling me what's going on?"

"I'm just forming a common cause society and need to ensure our members are vetted."

"How does vetting relate to pool shooting?"

"John knows the physics and geometry. He claims it illustrates how to plan. We need to plan a lot to figure out how to combat climate change."

"I see. John is really into it. He put up solar panels on top of the garage for our electric car that gets us around town, and he bought one of those lithium ion batteries with the plastic for it not to catch fire and explode. It's good for three-hundred miles."

"He seems to know a lot. I suppose marrying your daughter gives him dual citizenship."

"It gives my daughter dual citizenship as well."

"Do you know anything about his parents?"

"He told us they were killed in a car accident while he was at Harvard."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Do you know much else about them and him?"

"All I know is he had to have parents to be born."

"Yeah, he would need them to be human."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Some people are just too intelligent to be human," Kayla replied with a wink while rubbing her neck.

The front door opened. John entered the house.

"Sorry I'm late. I made a late sale."

His stepmother nodded towards Kayla.

"I am sorry. I forgot to tell you about inviting her. I hope you do not think we are having an affair."

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She nodded. "I'm not stupid. I know you're smarter than to invite her here if that was the case."

"Kayla needs to learn how to shoot pool for her to be able to play with our star football player. He is very fond of her."

When John waved his hand forward, Kayla followed him all the way down the stairs to the basement where the pool table in the middle of the room was surrounded by such facilities as a refrigerator, cushioned chairs and a bar.

"Would you care for a turkey sandwich with a glass of juice?" he asked. "There is plenty of apple cider."

"Thanks, but I ate plenty before coming over."

He placed an object ball on the table along with the white cue ball. He then positioned himself to stroke the cue ball with his pool stick.

"Think simple. Just stroke the stick straight to center of the cue ball and it will go straight to where you aim it. However, to stroke straight, you also need to line up with balance. Step slightly forward with the left foot with your eye position above the stick. Hold it with the fingers of your back hand for a freer swing. Place your front hand on the table raising the index finger to form a loop for the cue stick to slide through straight ahead over the thumb and beside the middle finger."

Kayla watched him show how to form his hand into an eye bridge for the cue stick to slide through.

He stroked the cue ball with the cue stick. The cue ball hit the object ball. The object ball moved forward and fell into the pocket that was in line with the two balls. The cue ball moved only part of the distance to the pocket

"The straight shot is simple. Somewhat more complex is the angle shot. To make the object ball move at an angle apart from the direction of the cue ball, you need to calculate the positions of the two balls where they meet. There is a difference in position of the cue ball between a straight and angle shot. The angle includes both the direction of the cue ball and the direction of the object ball. The difference in directions for your aim is thus twice that of aiming to where the object ball lines up with the pocket."

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"I see. The two balls need to meet where they line up straight with the pocket."

"Also make sure you focus on where you stroke the cue ball," he said as he lined up to stroke the cue ball. "It is hand-eye coordination. If you focus on where the two balls meet instead of where you need to aim to hit the object ball, then you tend to stroke at an angle that is only half of what it should be."

Kayla watched him stroke the cue ball. When it hit the object ball, the object ball moved toward a pocket at an angle from the path of the cue ball. She noticed he had focused his eyes to see the cue ball.

"The game gets complex. It not only involves stroking with accuracy; it involves controlling where the cue ball goes as well. You also need a strategy to win. You plan ahead. The best plan depends on what you know, as also it does on how to combat climate change. The more you know the more options you have available to make shots that enable you to win at pool and much of everything else."

Kayla nodded.

"Even though the game gets complex, you still need to think simple. Find the simplest solution. Do not take a machine apart only to find out it was not plugged in."

"I do know how to think simple," she jested.

"You might need to take a machine apart. It could be a complex task, but knowing each simple step along the way is how it can become successful. Simple steps for understanding how to shoot pool can be the physics and geometry. Science is needed for climate change as well."

"Show me the way."

"How hard do I need to hit the cue ball for it to follow the object ball all the way down to the other end of the table?"

Kayla shrugged.

"The two balls contain the same amount of mass. By Newton's laws of motion, the cue ball merely transfers its momentum to the object ball except for spin from the friction of the table. By hitting the cue ball hard, it tends to slide and stop. To make it continue forward, it needs forward spin, as by more friction of the table with longer

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distance between it and the object ball, or by stroking the cue ball above its center and following through on the stroke. It is not how hard you hit the ball; it is how well you follow through on your stroke that gets you the spin you need. A lighter smoother stroke also allows you to stroke the cue ball more off center for more spin. An open bridge instead of an eye bridge allows for a higher, more level stroke above the center of the cue ball."

He closed the eye of his bridge hand and stroked the cue stick above and between the thumb and index finger for the stick to hit the cue ball high after a quick but less forceful stroke. The cue ball hit the object ball that had been about six inches in front of it. The cue ball followed the object ball about four feet of the nine-foot-long table. He then replaced the balls on the same spots they were at before moved, and he then stroked harder with no follow through. This time the cue ball only continued forward a couple inches after it hit the object ball.

"Having the cue ball draw back after hitting the object ball is similar, but it is also different. It is more difficult to control because you have the friction of the table to overcome. The friction enables a forward roll, but it also counters reverse spin. For a longer distance between the cue ball and the object ball you need a lot more reverse spin to draw. If you stroke forty-five degrees downward on the ball, you get less lift on it for a harder stroke with more reverse spin."

He demonstrated the differences in how to drawback the cue ball. Kayla saw how the cue ball moved farther after angle shots, and she surmised it was because there was less change in momentum from the cue ball to the object ball, as she had also noticed the object ball had not moved as fast after impact from an angle shot.

"Knowing geometry is also helpful knowledge. If the cue ball has no spin when it hits the object ball, then the directions of the two balls after their collision are ninety degrees apart from each other. It indicates the direction where the cue ball is going for the next shot. For the straight shot on the object ball, the cue ball tends to stop. For a nearly ninety degree cut, the cue ball continues with nearly the same speeds before and after touching the object ball. After a forty-five-degree angle

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cut, the cue ball and object ball move with the same speed."

Kayla waited for a demonstration.

"There is more to know."

"Isn't there always?"

"A reverse spin on the cue ball increases its angle of deflection, whereas forward spin on the cue ball decreases its angle of deflection."

Kayla nodded.

"You now need to learn English."

"What does English have to do with shooting pool?"

"English as pool language means either clockwise or counterclockwise spin of the cue ball. Follow through on the stroke still applies for maximum spin. However, when you hit the cue ball either to the left or the right of center, more complex effects occur. Hitting the cue ball left of center pushes it to the right of the direction of stroke along with a spin that tends to curve the cue ball back to the left. The clockwise spin of the cue ball also pushes the object ball to the right. The amount of curve depends on the speed of the ball. More spin with slower roll forward allows it to curve more."

He set up two object balls, one in front of a corner pocket, and the other close to the rail at the other end of the table. He placed the cue ball on the opposite side of the table near a ball beside the corner pocket.

"I stroke the cue ball with high left English with the smooth follow through for maximum spin. I aim to hit the object ball dead on for a straight shot instead of it angling into the pocket, but the clockwise spin of the cue ball will push the object ball into the pocket. Take notice where the cue ball ends up."

He stroked with high-left English. It pushed the cue ball slightly to the right, but the cue ball curved slightly back to hit the object ball with spin, pushing the object ball into the pocket right of it. The cue ball continued forward to spin off the rail and move down to the other end of the table beside the other object ball.

"See how easy that was. That is just one sample of what the use of spin can do for you."

"You sure make it look easy. I don't think it's going to be that easy for me."

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"You are right about that. You need to practice a lot to get better. We see with our minds, as our eyes just are a means to pass on light to our brains."

"Is that all I need to know?"

"Not quite; you need to know more about physics and geometry for having more options for success. See those dots by the rails?"

Kayla noticed three dots were equally spaced on the rails between any two pockets.

"They help you calculate the geometry for banking off the rails to a pocket. If a ball has neither clockwise nor counterclockwise spin, the angles it banks off the rail are the same for it approaching the rail and reflecting from the rail. To bank into the pocket on the opposite side of the table, the angles form a perfect V. For a corner bank, as for bouncing off two or three rails, the path is a parallelogram. It has perfect Vs, but they differ for the path to be the parallelogram instead of a rectangle. The opposite sides are parallel, but the parallels are not perpendicular to the opposite parallels. Because the parallelogram path is more complex, the dots are there to help you picture it. They indicate how you need to alter the direction of a ball to pocket it."

"That's sure a lot of knowledge to take in."

"There is still a lot more to take in, like the masse."

"I've heard of it."

"It is just more use of the English. Because the ball curves more by moving slower in ratio to its spin, you need to stroke downward for the cue stick to push the cue ball ahead for a slower roll."

"How much downward do you stroke the cue ball?"

"It depends on need. If another ball blocks the path of the cue ball from hitting the object ball, then consider the other ball is a guide ball."

"How does it guide you?"

"If you aim to miss it completely, then you will have more of an angle to curve the cue ball. If you aim to slightly hit it on its right, then the cue ball needs to be pushed to its right for not hitting it. Hitting the cue ball harder pushes it more right. A downward stroke will then render more curvature to the left. Where you stroke the cue ball also determines its path. The cue ball

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will curve sooner by stroking more downward and higher above center. A higher stroke usually is needed whenever the guide ball is closer to the cue ball. If the guide ball is instead closer to the object ball than to the cue ball, then hitting the cue ball below center will cause it to swerve with delayed curvature."

"I don't understand all that."

"The ball curves in ratio to its spin per speed. If it spins partly backward from a lower stroke, it will slow down to curve more after it advances forward, whereas a high stroke will not slow the cue ball down. It curves more immediately after being hit."

"Okay, I got it."

After placing fifteen balls spread out on the table, he demonstrated various masse shots, curving the cue ball around guide balls to not only pocket object balls, but to get better position for the next shot on an ob-ject ball as well.

"That must be about all there is to know."

"There is always more to know. I only have one last tip," he said as he placed the cue ball against another ball. "Do you want me to pocket this ball in that corner pocket down there or to pocket that ball in front of the side pocket?"

Kayla shrugged while noticing the cue ball and the object ball touching it were lined up slightly to the left of the corner pocket, and it blocked a straight path of the cue ball to the other ball positioned in front of the side pocket.

He stroked, pocketing the touching ball in the corner pocket whereby the cue ball continued towards the other ball to pocket it in the side pocket.

"How did you do that?"

"Stroking the cue ball at an angle caused it to push the object ball towards the corner pocket. The amount of follow through enabled the cue ball to continue and pocket the other ball in the side pocket. It is complex. You learn it with practice.

"I sure wish I could have the time to practice."

He shrugged. "You can probably spare an hour or two a couple days of the week."

"Is that it?"

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"No. It is time for you to learn how to shoot pool."

"I thought I was learning."

"You learn by doing. Find a pool stick on the rack and start shooting."

She walked over to a rack of pool sticks on the wall to select one of the sticks. As John demonstrated with his stick, she balanced her cue stick on one hand.

"You need to grip the cue stick a couple inches back from where it balances," John informed her. Make the bridge with the other hand. With your left foot forward, have your eyes above the stick seeing straight ahead."

He scattered the balls on the table. It was for her to start out with easy shots to get the feel of the game. After learning the tap shot for speed control of the cue ball, she applied some follow through for more forward roll of the cue ball. A similar simplicity was applied to cue low for stop and draw shots. She was on her way of learning how to shoot pool, but she still had a whole lot more to learn. It would take more hours than she had to spare. In principle, it was knowledge of how she could be more in control of her life, if only for shooting pool.

The alien stranger had suggested to Bard he should shoot pool to exercise his back. John just showed her a lot about it. She wondered if the secret society had lots of time to spare whereby the game of pool would keep their minds occupied.

FINANCING ECONOMIC CLIMATE CHANGE

Kayla was sitting between Bard and John Von Lay when Wanda Sue walked to a seat close up front to the professor. She had sneered with a glance Kayla's way, and Kayla felt she was being ignored for something she had no clue as to what she had done to offend Wanda Sue in any way.

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

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

"Yes Tom, there is freedom to make noise, but not if it interferes with 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 us with freedom to choose what we can spend it on, but after we spend it, we've spent our freedom. The wealthy have more freedom than the poor. They monopolize and dictate choice."

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Bard raised his hand.

The professor pointed at him.

"Freedom comes from opportunity, but you earn it. I have opportunity by playing my best. If I don't play well, I sit on the bench."

"Yes," the professor said, "we compete for freedom. When we spend our money, we need to earn more of it to maintain that part of our freedom. Our choices have consequences. We can choose who to marry, the success of which requires commitment. We must also decide on what commitment we are willing to take. If we shoot for the moon and fail, then we are more inclined to experience a more disheartening fate. If we acquire more knowledge for a more reasonable goal, then we are more apt to succeed in life. Although there are students in college wanting to become very wealthy, as to become a professional athlete, only a few of them succeed. Even some of the select few become injured and do not make it. It is wiser to finish your education for a backup plan."

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 seemingly stare into space. He then nodded. "That is a good question. If a secret society has good intentions, then it can provide for a fortunate outcome. If it has bad intentions, if to start a revolution only for the sake of a goal not in the general interest of the community, then the outcome would not likely 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 paid equal for their equal work. They now have a lot more of that equality, if not all of it. It can take lots of effort to obtain equality of individual freedom. It is a life challenge for most of us in one way or the other, as the establishment generally prefers not to relinquish its dominance."

"How can I be free if someone has enough money

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and power to control me?" Kayla asked.

"You earn it," Bard interrupted to say.

"Yes," Wanda Sue interrupted to say, "money can be freedom you earn, but then you need to earn more of it after you spend it. You also need the opportunity to earn it. The rich become oligopolies and monopolies to prevent all of us from having fair opportunities. In the 1950s, big gas companies had gas wars in lowering its 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 have to make the right decisions. If you make bad ones, spend unwisely, then you'll end up with a lot less freedom. Make good decisions, invest wisely, and grow stronger. It'll give you more freedom."

"Government has to stop monopolization," Wanda Sue argued. "It will only do it by us voting for it. The politicians will become aware of us voting wisely. If we don't take issue with it, then the poor are suppressed."

"This is one of many complex issues to consider," the professor replied. "The establishment does need to lead us in the right direction. If we become suppressed by an establishment, then it needs to be challenged by the will of the majority."

"What if the majority is misled?" Wanda Sue asked.

"The majority can be misled," the professor replied. "You ask a good question. There is tradition and custom that often needs to be overcome. Those of us who take the path in life to overcome it often become our heroes of the past, but posthumously . . ."

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

"Thanks. I'm looking forward to it."

"Did you enjoy your pool lessons with John?" Professor Overly suddenly asked Kayla.

"Yes. He sure can play. I learned a lot."

Kayla noticed Bard gazing at her.

"I hope you two both have a good life together," he blurted out as he turned and walked away from her.

Kayla was set back by Bard's misunderstanding of

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the situation. It troubled her, but she had another concern she could more immediately deal with as the moment. 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 Eastern Oregon property, but 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 said it is alkaline soil with not enough water to grow much."

"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. "He fears for his life. He has a place to hide so secret that he won't even let me know where it is. He shows up wearing a disguise."

"Do you have anyway of contacting him?"

"No," Wanda Sue replied as she turned around and walked away.

Kayla was next on her way to find out what Coach Molten had for her. She hoped she could get him to tell Bard that she was not having an affair with John.

"We have a seat for you in the booth," the coach said when she arrived at his office. He handed her the free pass for the Saturday game opener.

"Do you mind doing me a favor?" Kayla asked.

"I very well might. What is it?"

"Please let Bard know nothing is going on between some other guy and me. Bard had asked me to shoot pool with him, but I don't know much about it. The guy offered to teach me. He's married and nothing else is going on between us."

"I thought Bard and the team were off limits to you. What's going on?"

"Sorry. We have become good friends, but there is now this misunderstanding between us. I don't want it to affect his performance."

"Bard has a good head on his shoulders. He makes good decisions. I'll let him know you came to me with

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your concern."

Kayla had a little more hope, but the week passed without one word from Bard. With the class being over, she knew not how to contact him. Maybe there could be a chance she would meet up with him at the game.

The Idaho Vandals were playing because of financial need. They were over matched in talent by the Oregon Ducks who rolled up the score on the smaller school. Kayla watched the game from inside of the booth because of the special invitation granted to her by Coach Molten. She was able to hear a 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, he ran forty yards for another, and he also caught a pass and ran into the end zone for an eighty-yard touchdown.

After the game, she followed the huge crowd down the stairs of the Autzen Stadium hurrying to their cars only for the long wait behind stalled traffic because of only one exit road. She had taken the city bus to the game, and she managed to get through the crowd and back in line to board the bus. Being in the back of a long line, she suspected it would be for standing room only.

Kayla 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 while James eyed Kayla with his mean stare. They appeared angry about something. She decided to follow them in hopes of finding out why they were angry.

They became part of a crowd following a trail to the bike bridge and then most likely to the dormitories and apartments near the university.

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

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

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to face her. He quickly turned back around and waved his arm forward.

She managed to keep up as they led her all the way across Franklin Boulevard to a dormitory. After she followed them on into the dormitory, James stared at her while tapping Wanda Sue 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 with a grudging look on her face.

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 still on her face.

"I'm just trying to finance the 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 Wanda Sue also knowing it was still alarming. It could compromise her objective.

"James says the money comes from banks in such places as Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Mexico and South America. The account owners are anonymous. They could be drug dealers financing 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 I don't have a choice of the matter."

"Why's that?" James asked.

"The guy who rescued me from you hacked into the online access to my bank account to make it indicate it contained a lot more money. I was afraid of him trying to frame me. I didn't know if the money was real, so I went to the police to find out if the money was actually real and to find out what I could do not to be framed. They thought you were part of it, and they believed you might be able to lead me to the guy. I didn't know if you were part of it or not, but going along with my offer did get you out of jail. After all, you tried to rape me."

James grimaced as he rubbed his forehead with his head tilted down resting on his thumbs. "You still used

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us, leading us on about climate change; you liar."

"I'm serious about it, and I'll continue to finance it if I can."

"Why finance it with fake money if that was what you believed it was?"

"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 Sue pointed out, "even if it's only fiat. The banks don't disclose their sources, but they abide by the rules."

"How come it was traceable to my account and not yours?" James asked.

"That's how the hacker determined it. He claims to belong to a secret society advanced in knowledge and technology. He's taken control of my life."

"Now you're taking control of our lives," Wanda Sue accused. "You have Bard wrapped tight around your finger. He's really been watching James to make sure he's not back on drugs and spends your money as you intend him to spend it, but whatever strings are attached aren't clear to us."

"Isn't it still a good opportunity for you to do well?" Kayla asked James while eyeing him.

"It's possible," he replied, "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 is all you do?" Wanda asked. "Don't you keep most of the money for yourself?"

"Nope, I'm still just a waitress riding my bicycle 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, and I'm sorry about getting you involved, but if they get to you, then they'll most

likely get me too. 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 and also help out with the cause."

"How are you keeping them from getting me?"

"I don't know. All I can do is let you use the money. Keep disguising yourself, get a post office box for your address, and watch your surroundings. Otherwise, the Secret Society of these computer nerds will just take the money back for making you poor again. They have you the same as they have me, but you can quit if you better be as you were, but I don't have that option."

"I doubt I now have that option either with only the little amount of money you gave me."

"What if I give you twenty million?"

"What do you want me to do for it? Who do I have to kill?"

"All you need to do is get going on climate change."

"I've done that, having found homes for guys to convert to solar energy, but twenty grand doesn't buy much these days. Some of those guys I know are addicts, but some are 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 money I could hire them to build greenhouses of wind turbans, to install panels for solar energy, and to make stoves to make and burn clean coal as renewable fuel. Those guys could also 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 wanted me to do, I set up a blogging account for our Common Cause Society. Membership is growing. Some members want to help us; others have needs. I think we can even make a profit. That would be great for the economy with the creation of jobs. We need lots of money to make it happen, but I sure don't want to use stolen money."

Kayla eyed James. "You didn't steal it, did you?"

"I'll share the wealth," he replied, "and I have those jobs in mind. We just need to buy land and old houses

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to fix up to run on solar energy and gardens for self-living. Buying land in Eastern Oregon was proposed to us by John Von Lay. There's already been much effort to combat climate change in populated areas. He says our best chance of advancing the cause is in places like Eastern Oregon where there is a lot more potential for development by overcoming drought."

"Solar energy, being free energy, could bring down food prices and reduce jobs," Wanda Sue pointed out, "but it would 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 us having to rely solely on those few with extreme wealth. Besides, a lot more production of product for the consumption of the poor that would otherwise have no means of obtaining it has no need of bringing down food prices. Farmers now struggle with low prices for their produce, but population is increasing. More need for it is on its way."

"How does your water management idea connect with what Wanda Sue says?" Kayla asked James.

"Oregon has more water here in the valley for trees than are needed for it. The water somehow needs to be transported to desert areas where it can be even more useful. I have 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 pipe lines for oil to transport the water instead, but Wanda sue says that gets too political for approval."

"Well, when I get some time to help, I might come up with a few helpful ideas. I'll also ask John what he knows. Does either of you know much about him?"

They both shrugged.

"You 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 if we can afford it."

"I'll see what I can find something affordable. The

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twenty-mill should help."

When he showed Wanda Sue his right-hand palm up, she handed a cell phone to him. He then handed it to Kayla.

"It has my number logged in; 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. She might not be safe even if I leave her out of it."

"We're all not safe." James said.

"Where are you living now?" Kayla asked.

"That's my secret. Even Bard doesn't know."

"I bet Wanda Sue knows."

"She I trust. That's why I'm here, but I don't even want her to know where I live. It'll be too dangerous for both of us."

Kayla reconsidered the thought they both might be in cahoots with a secret society. "I bet the Secret Society knows. It probably uses drug dealers and terrorists to do its dirty work."

"And they still could be using you to use us," James replied.

"Okay," Kayla replied to play along, "Bard overseeing has been a good thing for me, but not so much a good thing for the cause. 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 money to use?" Wanda Sue asked.

"I have not heard from the alien stranger since I got James out of jail."

"We must be safe, then," James said. "Those drug lords don't miss 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 the twenty-mill and I'll give you half of it."

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When Kayla nodded yes, he seemed surprised, as in disbelief, but she was actually willing to do it since all that money was nothing more than a burden to her.

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

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

Kayla, not having ridden her bike, rode the city bus home.

"I might be moving somewhere soon," she informed her mother.

"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 banking account online, she transferred the twenty million of it to James' account.

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

"I don't know if I really do or not; that's why I need to leave. You also need to find another place to live. It is going to become very dangerous to stay here if drug lords find out the hacking into their banking accounts is going into my account."

"Don't worry about me. My doctor says I don't have but a couple years left. 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 do not know a James Baker. You have the wrong number."

"He's a tall, slim guy that might be using an alias, and he's been expecting me to call him. Please let him

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know it's me."

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

Kayla squeezed her eyes and teeth tight.

"Do you know who Wanda Sue is?" Kayla asked.

"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. Is there anything else?"

"No, thanks, but it's very important I get in contact with this guy."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, it is. I thank you very much."

After hanging up, she noticed her mother's watchful eye.

"I just did do a stupid," Kayla said dumbfounded as she felt disappointed of the outcome. She had regret for exposing James' secret identity to a dorm member, but she had a lot more regret for trusting him. She was not able to understand why he had set her up with a wrong number. She wanted to protect herself and her mother, but she did not have access to the money without James' help. She now felt she was controlled by him too.

INFLATION DEFLATION ECONOMICS

A few days had passed with no word from James. She still had not heard from the alien stranger. It was to work and back home wondering how she could be in control of her life.

While waiting on customers, she noticed Detective Bentley entering the restaurant. Wondering if he came for something she would be unable to satisfy him with, she placed two plates of food on the table for a couple customers and then went to find out why the detective had come to the restaurant.

"Do you have a couple minutes?" he asked.

"A couple seconds: What do you need?"

"Foreign banks have been claiming hackers hacked into their accounts and stole large sums of money?"

She gasped. "Am I being accused?"

"Not specifically: The banks are unwilling to disclose their accounts or who the accusers are. They show us no proof, but they seem to believe the thieves belong to the secret society. You're involved with it; I'm not being informed either way. What's going on?"

"I just made a deal with James. He gave me a cell

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phone with a special number to contact him, but I only get a wrong number. I'm sorry, but I don't know where he is, and I don't know what to do about it."

"He's been invisible to us. Have you been in contact with the alien stranger?"

"No. He also disappeared on me."

"I sure hope you have not decided to join up with the hacker and lead us on. You could be getting yourself in a lot of trouble," he said before walking away.

She already knew 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 did not have any idea of how to get out of her situation. Revealing it to the law did not seem, at the moment, to have helped.

A few days later she arrived at the front desk of the Valley River Inn facing the desk clerk, Bill.

"Do you know a James Baker?" Bill asked.

"Yes," she eagerly replied.

"A guy is offering a huge reward, like one-hundred grand, just for knowing where the guy can be found."

She closed her eyes and teeth tight, her eagerness being replaced with fear and caution.

"Why would anyone offer one-hundred grand just to find someone?" she asked.

"He's from Chicago. He says James Baker inherited a large estate and someone needs the property for a big business deal. He's staying here with a couple other guys. You'll probably be serving them dinner. I'll let them know you know who James Baker is."

"Please, don't tell them anything," she said leaning over the desk to become close to Bill. "They're not who they claim they are. If you get involved, you could be killed along with me and James."

He jerked his head back with raised eyebrows. "Are you serious? What should I do?"

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

"They won't know it from me, but they are spreading

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the news and asking lots of questions."

"Did you bring your recorder?" she asked, knowing he often recorded music on weekend nights.

"Yeah, it's here at the desk. What do you intend to do with it?"

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

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

"It could save your life. Is there any proof it's actually your recorder?"

"It's not mine," he replied looking away. "It's yours. I just gave it to you."

"Thanks. I'll be careful with it, and please keep this between us."

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

He reached down and came up with the 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 entered the room, turned on the recorder and placed it under the couch.

She heard the door open. She soon trembled with the sight of three mean dudes facing her.

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

They eyed each other, shaking their heads.

"I probably have the wrong room."

She hurried out to escape their mean stares. Fearing the tape recorder could be found, she felt a need to warn Bill he needed to get it before they did.

Late that evening, Kayla delivered Chicken Wings to the same three fellows. They nodded their heads while eyeing her.

"Are you Kayla Chalet?" one asked.

"No, she took the night off. I'm Pat, the cleaning lady having to take her place. Can I help you with anything?"

While they shook their heads no, she casually left the room to go straight to their sweet and retrieve the tape recorder. When she looked under the couch, she did not see it. She slapped her hand on the top of her head fearing they knew she had lied to them.

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"Where's Bill," she asked the desk clerk.

"He's on break, most likely watching that new movie at the mall he wanted so much to see."

She could only hope he had gotten the recorder.

When she returned to the restaurant, she heard her name called out from where she noticed Bard sitting with three other fellows at a table.

"Can I take your order?" she asked after hurrying to their table. Although she suspected those three men already knew her name, she did not want Bard and his buddies involved with the situation.

"I heard you are big trouble," a tall slim fellow at the table said with a smile.

She crossed her lips with her index finger.

"He's our quarterback," Bard said, "He wants to buy his linemen dinner for the victory. I had told him what you did for me. He chose this place. I hope you don't mind serving us tough dudes."

"No. I'm glad to see you again."

The other two guys were bigger than Bard.

"I heard someone say you beat a very good team today," she said with a thumbs-up gesture.

"Yeah, they are ranked in the top ten with us," Bard replied. "It's nice to see you again. Are you staying out of trouble? Are you and John Von Lay getting serious?"

"He's married, and we're not having an affair. What I was doing was finding out what he knows. The pool was just what he wanted to show me what he can do."

Bard had a crinkled nose while eyeing her. "Are you still going ahead with the plan?"

"I'm trying to, and it's becoming dangerous. It'd be wise if you guys didn't stick around here very long."

Her advice seemed to alarm Bard.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'll be fine. Thanks for your concern."

"I noticed those guys over there have been watching you. They have mean stares. Are they a problem?"

"It's just the usual thing a waitress has to deal with. Are you going to order?"

Bard pretended to drink. They all nodded.

"I think we need beer to go with our chicken wings. There's no need to worry about it. It's just one beer to

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celebrate our big victory. You seem concerned. Are you okay with it?"

"Sorry, no exceptions, I have to ask you all for ID to make sure you all are twenty-one."

They shrugged as they opened their wallets to show 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 if she was Kayla Chalet were now sitting on the patio. She shivered walking past them on her way to her bicycle.

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

"I'm not Kayla Chalet?" she replied reluctant to face them. "I'm Pat."

"We have reliable sources. You also have sources. Our sources need to know your sources. You're in big trouble, Kayla. You need us to get you out of it."

"Leave me alone."

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

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

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

Bard abruptly landed beside the concrete wall dividing the upper ground from the lower bike path. He was quick to punch the guy in the face with a left jab, and he followed with a right cross to the jaw. The guy lay on the ground, apparently out cold from Bard's punch.

The other guy pulled out a gun from his pocket, but he was landed on by one of the big linemen that had been at the table with Bard. The other lineman landed, kicked the gun away, and grabbed the guy's feet to lift them while the other lineman held the guy's arms.

"I bet we can throw him farther than Bard can," one of them said as they were raising the guy waist-high off the ground."

"No, don't do it," Kayla pleaded while squeezing her eyes tight. They might not throw the guy all the way into the river, but the jungle of blackberry vines down

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by the river was not a pleasant place to land. She had felt those sharp, sticky thorns on blackberry vines. Being entangled in them would be a torture for sure.

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

Bard pointed at the quarterback. He had the tape recorder.

"The guy at the desk asked us to give it to you," Bard said. "He said you had left it behind and were too busy in the restaurant to retrieve it."

"Thanks very much," Kayla said with a sigh of relief.

The police above the wall pointed their guns downward. Fortunately, it being late at night, there would unlikely be a lot of publicity. Kayla was confident that detective Bentley would make sure of it.

She hurried home and wasted no time turning on the tape recorder.

"Find any leads?" she heard.

"Did any of those guys at the Hilton come up with anything?" another voice asked.

"I'll check," was the reply.

After another few seconds of silence, she heard, "A couple of his buddies say he made a deal with the police to be an informative because of the waitress he tried to rape was willing to drop all charges. She works here on this shift. She claims someone hacked into her bank account to use her. Someone has been keeping tabs on her to have detected a twenty million trans-action from her account to James Baker's."

"Well, maybe someone else is the hacker, but those two we'll still need to find whoever it is. We can wait them later."

Kayla felt helplessly naked to the world around her. Those men, it seemed, had obviously been informed by someone with leaked information. The twenty million had triggered a response. She did not know what James was doing with it, but they were coming after her to get to him. She considered a slim chance of getting to James first for a possible way of getting out of her quandary.

Early next morning Kayla was well on her way to visit Wanda Sue. As she approached the dorm, another girl

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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 alone in the dorm guest room impatiently for nearly two hours before Wanda Sue finally showed up. She had entered from the front door with a curious expression on her face.

"Wanda," Kayla said standing up in a hurry, "I need to talk to James if he's still around."

"Why wouldn't he be?"

"He could be living in heaven with all that money, but I still need to warn him about a possible danger."

"Why didn't you call him like he told you to do?"

"I tried to, but I only got a wrong number. Some girl living here answered. If he's back doing drugs, he's in big trouble with guys after him. We'll have a better chance of staying alive if he turns himself in to the police. If he cooperates, we'll have their protection."

Wanda Sue seemed puzzled as she shook her head no along with a pause.

"Mary Jane must've used the phone when we were at the library. Sorry. I should have been careful with it."

"There are a lot of guys asking where they can find him. He's in big trouble for sure."

"We sometimes meet here and go somewhere more secluded. It's always a surprise visit. Coming and going is how he stays invisible."

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

"What's wrong?" Wanda Sue asked seemingly with a tone of concern in her voice.

"I'm just putting everyone in danger by giving away money."

"It creates a lot of opportunity for us in need of it," Wanda Sue advised. "After all, our freedom of choice is also needed to promote the economy."

Kayla shook her head no. "Won't adding money to the economy cause inflation and more recession, especially if James donates a billion dollars to the university? Wouldn't that cause a bubble and a collapse?"

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"Not really; inflation can be a good thing. To counter it, people need to invest in the economy. They can buy stocks, and that can promote the manufacturing of product. Even putting it in the bank for interest allows banks to loan more in allowing opportunity to produce a lot more wealth."

"How come we just had a devastating recession?"

"We the people create debt when we have to borrow to invest. With a busted housing bubble there is deflation of prices along with less investment resulting in fewer jobs. Although cheaper products can benefit some of us, others are in debt with interest rates too high for lower prices of their homes. They cannot sell them to pay back their debt. People with money hoard it, resulting in lesser spending, causing more deflation and recession. It just results in lots more bankruptcies, unemployment and so forth until either the Fed or the people turn it around."

"What can be done about it?"

"The government needs to invest in the infrastructure and to combat the effects of climate change."

"How will that help?"

"It provides more jobs for people to be able to pay off their debts."

"What if they still can't pay them off?"

"The banks could be more useful. If they temporarily suspend loans for rent instead, they could even benefit with no foreclosures losing value because of no upkeep on the property, but they just let it deteriorate instead by letting it be used by homeless campers."

"How can we avoid all this in the first place?"

"Fairer distribution and more opportunity of obtaining wealth need be established. Money itself is used to earn money, like earning interest. Those with more of it take control of it with the creation of monopolies and oligopolies. The Fed could increase money circulation. To do it, they'll need to invest in something like infrastructure that provides jobs for the creation of wealth."

"Wouldn't that cause inflation here for an imbalance of trade and a burden of debt for our grandchildren?"

"No. That's naïve politics. The dollar could cheapen with more of it in circulation without additional products

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to purchase, but the foreign money has the same buying power. It's only the current currency of US dollars used by foreigners that has less buying power. Their currency and our currency eventually adjust. If inflation occurs, it benefits those in debt; those holding the debt can adjust to the change in due time better than those of us losing out because of deflation, but those with the money have their say; we don't."

"Wouldn't the gold standard be better?"

"No. Gold was hoarded. It caused deflation so that those who had it became richer by there becoming less of it in circulation to deflate prices. There was also a battle for gold by pirates. Nations went to war over it."

"How can fiat money be better?"

"It makes it easier for the Fed to control inflation and deflation. 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 them."

"Interest and taxation are helpful to control inflation along with providing jobs and opportunity. It allows for wealth not as feasible by means of free enterprise, and it provides opportunity for free enterprise to succeed."

"How does it provide more opportunity?"

"Take food stamps. By providing them to those that need them, it becomes credit that further creates opportunity for farmers to produce and sell more food."

"What makes the credit legit?"

"It becomes legit if it can be used to pay taxes, and by creation of product. It becomes collateral as property and other securities required of all banks using Federal Credit. Gold itself is also worthless without product to buy. Wealth is the products created by money, not the money itself."

"They say too much tax and too much government is not good for free enterprise, and that what is needed for a better economy is a balanced budget."

"That's naïve politics. Too much of anything is not a good thing. They complain about having to pay taxes, but they also complain about needing their roads re-

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paired. Highways are just an example of government investment that has increased the flow of goods for more creation of wealth. Government financed education has enabled us to compete more wisely with other nations, as to produce technically advanced products, which scientists have gotten no monetary compensation for their efforts formulate theories that have benefited the ingenuity of producing more product."

"How can we prevent the inflation bubble to deflation that results in a recession?"

"It's difficult, but a better understanding of supply and demand economics is helpful."

"Tell me more."

"What is the real value of money?"

Kayla shrugged.

"What is more valuable," Wanda Sue asked holding a dollar bill, "a dollar or the bread the dollar can buy?"

"The dollar provides us a choice of purchase," Kayla answered.

"You could be right. Money has value as a convenient way of exchanging goods and services. It empowers us with freedom to choose, as for living our own lives instead of having others living it for us, but would a ton of gold be worth more than a canteen of water if you were alone stranded in the middle of a desert?"

"I guess a canteen of water is worth more than gold in that situation."

"Real monetary value of money is what it can buy. If a dollar can buy a loaf of bread, then the dollar is worth that loaf of bread. If producers can produce two loafs of bread for a dollar, then the dollar is worth two loafs of bread. If there is an equal amount of more demand for two loafs of bread, then supply and demand balance. There is then no need for inflation or deflation to occur. On the other hand, if there is too much available product for consumption, as has been a glut of oil on the world market, then the price deflates, which has been a main reason why it sometimes takes longer to recover from a recession. Using cheaper fuel for delivery also results in cheaper prices."

"Isn't cheaper a good thing?"

"It's good for some of us, but not good for those of

us not earning enough to pay off high interest loans."

"What is your solution?"

"Government needs to invest in real wealth instead of only economic wealth."

"Is there a difference between the two?"

"Real wealth is clean air we need to breathe. It's vital to our health. We can't live without air, but it hasn't any economic value because its abundance is free for us to use. Its economic value is even negative if producers are required to prevent or clean up their pollution of it, which would provide jobs and a distribution of wealth for a better economy in the long run."

"With solar energy replacing carbon fuels, why does that not result in lower prices to contribute to a recession?"

"It would if it weren't managed correctly. Solar energy jobs need to replace carbon fuel jobs. Ownership of carbon fuels needs to transfer to ownership of solar energy, as a better stock option for all of us. Government could also finance the creation of clean carbon fuel."

"Wouldn't the role of government be more taxation? That won't go over well with most of us."

"The Fed needs to create more credit in increasing the National Debt to balance an increase in taxation."

"Doesn't that just leave our grandchildren in debt?"

"No. That's just political hyperbole. A real debt left for our grandchildren to pay is to allow infrastructure to collapse. Real economic wealth is product instead of money. Money is just credit to affiliate creation and purchasing of product. Producing product creates economic wealth. The National Debt is only a means of credit that facilitates the creation of that wealth."

"You are very informative. I suppose James might not be coming today, but I learned a lot. I only hope I will be able to live long enough to use it."

FOR NEED
OF
INVISIBILITY

Kayla was cooking oats when she heard her cell phone ring. She answered to hear Wanda Sue say, "He's here, but only for about an hour."

"Thanks. I'll be there as soon as I can."

When Kayla finished eating her oats, she hurried out the front door with her bike where she was confronted by a hummingbird hovering in front of her. She watched it zip over to a car parked by a couple houses down the street. When she noticed a man sitting inside the car, she reached for her phone and called Detective Bentley.

"Hello," she heard.

"This is Kayla Chalet. A stalker is parked in front of my house, and I need to hurry to meet someone."

"I'll send someone to check it out," she heard.

After about five minutes she saw a police car pull up beside the stalker. When one of the policemen got out of the police car to address the stalker, Kayla rode her bike passed them. She was not confident that she would not be followed by anyone else the rest of the way to

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the dorm, but she had something in her backpack just in case she needed not to be recognized.

Skinner's Butte Park was generally occupied with a lot of people at that particularly warm time of the year. Not only were kids enjoying the swings, slides and so forth, other participants were taking notice of numerous geese and ducks. Ducks either swam in the river or stayed close by it on the shore; whereas geese were often crossing the bike path. Kayla had to be careful not to hit them with her bike.

She again noticed the hummingbird, as it hovered in front of her as she approached the bridge leading to Coburg Road. By watching where the bird-drone darted off to, she spotted a man by the bridge railing holding binoculars in front of his eyes. It became evident spies were everywhere to find out where and who she was going to meet up with.

For her not to lead them to James, she continued on her way not directly to the dorm. She went to the EMU instead. She went inside a restroom and took out a wig from her backpack. With it and sunglasses, she had a dress with which to cover her pants and shirt.

She walked to the dorm where she used her phone to call a few wrong numbers to fool anyone other than the alien stranger tapping into her phone. She rang the doorbell beside the number of Wanda Sue's room. She waited.

"It's me," Kayla said when Wanda Sue opened the door. "James was right. The spies are everywhere. We need to be invisible."

"He probably didn't recognize you."

"He's outside?"

"Yep, he figures he'll eventually be recognized even disguised if he stays too long at a girl's dorm."

As Wanda Sue stepped aside, Kayla walked past her to wait for James. Someone soon arrived.

Kayla didn't recognize James with black hair instead of brown, along with his mustache, goatee and sunglasses, but she knew it was him turning around and waving his right arm forward. Kayla followed him to what appeared to be a brand-new car.

"It's electric," James said. "The battery is good for at

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least three-hundred miles. It is ionized lithium, but the electrolyte between electrodes is plastic. It's safe."

"It's fantastic."

"Where's your bank?" James asked.

"It's Bank America, the same as yours, only blocks from here on East Eleventh Street."

"Get in."

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

"I told a couple of my old buddies about it when they asked how I got out of jail with all that money I had to spend. They were suspicious of where it came from and of me turning on them. What's up?"

"You now have guys asking about you."

He slapped his forehead.

The car quietly moved forward to the main branch of Bank America. After parking it in a parking space, James handed Kayla a cashier's check. She gazed at it. The ten million was a lot of money she could have to spend, and it was also drawn from the same bank of her account to allow for immediate processing.

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 a teller. She noticed he held an electronic tablet in his hand. She suspected her account had been hacked into by them waiting for her to access it, revealing her identity.

The line was short. A teller was ready to serve her.

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

"He must be waiting for someone," replied the teller man. "He's been here all morning."

"Isn't that unusual?"

"It is, but I noticed him and others outside watching the bank from across the street. He is likely expecting someone he knows to finally show up today."

"See this," Kayla said while showing him the cashier check tight up against her chest to hide it from the guy in the chair. "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," he said.

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"The police are on their way. Do you want to deposit the check in your savings account?"

Kayla was hesitant, not willing to let hackers know she was in the bank. She had another idea.

"I thank you very much for calling the police," she said softly, "but I've changed my mind."

After walking outside the bank, she waved her hand at James for him to leave her be. There was a chance of being recognized even disguised, and he had given her the check for there no longer being any need of his presence downtown in a populated area.

She crossed Eleventh Street to the south and then walked west to Chase Bank.

"I'm Kayla Chalet," she said to the lady teller inside Chase Bank, "I'm on my mother's accounts. She added me to them a couple years ago."

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

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

"This will be on hold until verified," the teller said.

"It shouldn't take long. It was issued from a nearby bank."

She handed Kayla her receipt.

While leaving the bank, Kayla was aware she still did not have all that money to spend. Even though she had just deposited ten million dollars in her mother's account, she could still become the target of the law besides those from whom the money was stolen if she spent it.

She lifted her phone from her pouch and turned it on to find out how much money was in her own banking account. She then covered her eyes with her hand. Her checking account showed over twenty billion, but it was like a twenty billion dollar headache. Oh well, she thought, it would probably take at least twenty trillion dollars to make a dent in reversing climate change.

It seemed indeed to be a headache. If she used the stolen money, those from which it was stolen would only be after her that much more. Many nations could be involved. It might even trigger a war. There would be

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no place to hide, from neither terrorists nor the law. She felt she was way over her head in trouble.

She considered the possibility of just canceling her bank account with Bank America, but she was not sure of its outcome. Her involvement with criminals and the law would most likely continue.

She chose not to cancel her account. The only way out of the mess she was to stay the course and hope for the best, but she needed help. Somehow the mon-ey needed to be used to her advantage, not to the advantage of those after her.

There was also the threat of those after her using her mother to succeed. Kayla realized she needed help from Detective Bentley for her mother's protection as well as for her own. She walked back to the university, took off her disguise, got back on her bike to ride it to the police station.

"They know who I am," she said to Detective Bentley. "They are probably inside my home right now for either me or my mother to show up. They are stalking me. Isn't that against the law?"

He nodded. "I think I will have federal help on this one. Do you have a key to the house we can use?"

"Thanks," she replied while handing him the 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 very good news, and the recording is useful information, but it could be subject to a lawsuit for being illegally obtained."

"You can't be serious."

It's now on record. You could be charged. I'm sure the DA dropped the charges on those three guys. The guy outside your house claims he was just waiting to meet someone that they were planning on enjoying a day in the park together."

"I'm working for the FBI, aren't I?"

"You are for now, but you might not be for much longer. You need to show you are working for them, not the secret society."

"Aren't you concerned about national security?"

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

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

"You're early," the desk clerk said when she arrived at the inn.

"I need to talk to my mother."

"She's in the restaurant. Are you still in trouble with those guys?"

"It's them and a lot more, but don't worry. They are dangerous, but my mother and I are quitting. They'll have no reason to involve you."

As he only stared with a sad look of concern, she turned to continue on into the restaurant.

"We need to give our notices," were the words she greeted her mother with in the restaurant.

"Is it that bad?"

"It's even worse. I now have over twenty billion in my account, and they're everywhere on their way to get us. Three of them checked into one of the rooms yesterday. They were the ones arrested, but they have been released by now."

"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 need the money to do it."

"What am I supposed to do with it?"

"It's not just to help. You'll need it to protect yourself. They'll use you to get to me."

"How will I use it?"

"Get a suite in Acapulco in an assumed name. We could develop that area, and we need someone down there to determine what will be needed. You can get to know the people to find out how they can help us help them."

"I'm sorry, but I don't speak the language. I'd feel more comfortable closer to home."

Kayla figured they would be more invisible apart from each other, but then they could help each other if they stayed close together, but somewhere they would not be recognized as who they really are was needed as

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well.

"Would you be more comfortable helping us create a paradise in Eastern Oregon?"

"That sounds interesting, and very challenging."

"I'll make sure you get set up. Right now, you need to watch wherever you go after work. They might want to capture you to get to me."

"Thanks. I'll stay in the public eye from here to the short walk to the house. What are you up to?"

"Well, if there are no strange men waiting outside, I think I'll ride my bike home. It should be safe. 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. "With your and your mother's permission, we will begin installing an alarm system with cameras."

"You have mine, and you know where my mother works."

He nodded.

Those guys you arrested were well dressed," Kayla replied as she noticed the police car driving away.

"They are likely professional hires only for the money. We should learn a lot from them 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 report to my office as soon as you can and tell me what you know. The whole police force with FBI help is ready to take on that Secret Society."

Kayla did not yet really know of anything she would be willing to report; she was only encouraging Detective Bentley to stay on her side.

10

AN
UNCERGROUND PLACE
TO HIDE

James drove to Autzen Stadium and parked close to the trail leading south towards the bike bridge.

"Where are we going?" Kayla asked him, being aware of where the path could lead them.

"I'm going to show you a secret place where we can meet and hide out. It's close to where we first met."

"Sorry, I'm not comfortable with that place, even if not alone with you there. Hiding out in the woods with you just does not feel pleasant. Although you've been very honest and trustworthy of late, there could very well be a moment when you lose it."

As she remained 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 and a cell phone."

"Know how to use a gun?" James asked.

"Yeah, my dad insisted; 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.

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

"Take the pistol," James said, "fire a shot at the log over there. . . Go on, we can't do anything here with you not feeling safe."

She grabbed the gun, opened the car door, got out of the car, examined the gun, took the safety off, 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 of anger.

"Do you feel safe now?" James asked after she had reseated herself back into the front seat of the car.

"No. I need someone else to go with us."

Even though she had a gun for protection, she had no desire to use it. Besides, she suspected 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. The phone has a fake owner."

"Hi," John answered when she called him.

"Hello John; this is Kayla. James and I are at a bike trail that begins at the football stadium. He wants to show me a safe place close to the bike ride where we can meet. Can you join us where we are now?"

"I will be there in ten minutes," she heard.

"Ten minutes," she said to James.

Within about ten minutes John arrived on his electric bicycle. He had brought with him cables for him to secure the bike to a tree for it to be out of plain site.

James led the way while glancing now and then at a small electronic tablet he held in his hand. After a long walk to where he had attempted to rape Kayla, he led them to about ten feet north of the bike path where he reached down to the ground beside a large stump 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 red button on his tablet. Light appeared from deep down of a tunnel like shaft.

James pointed a finger at John and waved towards the shaft. John kneeled to crawl inside the doorway to a

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nylon ladder. James waved his hand forward.

"Take this," Kayla said handing the gun to James. "I feel we're not alone anymore."

She climbed down the ladder about twenty feet to a level area where John stood, and where 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 the wall to open a door to a room that had been developed as a living space. It had bright 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. "I feel we're not alone anymore. With John's presence, I trust you."

"The temperature down here is constant," James said while he walked over to the other side of the room and removed a stone from in front of the wall. "Somebody somehow created an extraordinary electric system. The only thing I've been able to find is these tiny diamonds."

Kayla followed John over for a closer view.

"They're industrial made diamonds," John said. "As batteries, they will stay charged for five hundred years or more, but you will need lots of them just to light a room. There could be tons of them here worth more than a billion dollars, but there needs to be enough of a shield between the battery and whoever stays here."

"Do you belong to a Secret Society with advanced knowledge?" Kayla asked John.

"He's just more schooled," James intervened to say, "We can use his expertise for sure."

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

"Use this," he said, holding his tablet for her to see. "I found it here. There are hidden viewers 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 to where he uncovered another level. He opened another door. "This place is a maze. It seems to go everywhere. If someone

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discovers the opening, hopefully you can find your way to another opening. I tried a couple times, but I 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."

Even though 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 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, I got up stumbling. My foot inadvertently pushed the lever up there. I played with it to discover this place."

She was not convinced. "Well, this place is a good escape, but it would 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 summer."

Even though her question did not trick him, she still suspected both he and John could belong to the Secret Society as gang members recruited by it. She felt she needed to know one way or the other. She would then have a decision to make, as to either report them to Detective Bentley or keep silent for a better cause.

"What do you guys know about Big Bang theory?" she asked staring, as into blank space, wondering why she questioned something she knew little about.

"It's a crazy theory," James replied.

"You seem to know a lot of science," she said facing John. She wondered if he would answer questions that would decide if he was indeed a gang member of the secret society.

"I understand the Big Bang theory somewhat," John answered.

"How about you?" she asked James.

"I challenged what I didn't understand in school for it to be consistent with what I already knew. The academia regarded me a troublemaker, so I flunked most

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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 challenge to this day."

"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 to challenge their textbook authority."

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

"Climate change is reality. I understand and accept it. What I don't accept is Big Bang cosmology."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's biased. They dismiss any other theory that can challenge it."

"Is there a theory capable of challenging Big Bang theory?" Kayla asked John.

"One possible alternative," he replied, "is tired light, but it is considered too inconsistent with observation."

"It's dismissed because of bias," James shouted as he slammed his arm forward with his gun thrusting out onto the floor, firing a bullet ricocheting about, sizzling by Kayla's ear. He appeared angry as he picked up the gun and pointed it at the wall.

"Couldn't Big Bang theory be biased against Tired Light?" Kayla pleaded John to answer.

"All theories are biased by those who believe it. The Big Bang theory is now the established one, but not all physicists and astronomers accept it as consistent with other theory."

"Why would it not be consistent with other theory?"

"When it was discovered that light from more distant stars is less energetic, two different explanations were given: Either the source of light is moving away from the observer or the light itself loses energy while it moves. If light sources are receding, as by the universe expanding, then we see them where they were in the past because of light taking time to reach us. However, the evidence is to the contrary; distances of stars calculated according to the brightness of stars indicate the universe expanded at a much slower rate in the

past. It is now assumed that the expansion rate has increased. As for an explanation, dark energy is assumed to exist."

"Is this dark energy consistent with other theory?"

"It is somewhat consistent with quantum theory. By it there is virtual energy of virtual particles in the so-called vacuum of space. Particles not directly observable, being virtual particles, are needed for the experimental results to comply with predictions of theory."

"How can virtual energy exist in vacuum space?"

"Two already established principles support it. One is entropy, as the second law of thermodynamics; the other is equivalence of gravitational and inertial mass."

"How do they support it?"

"Entropy is stored energy in a state of equilibrium. If two bricks are of the same temperature, then the heat of one brick cannot transfer to the other brick. In general, the condition of equilibrium allows invisibility, as does the equivalence principle. If an even distribution of mass existed throughout space in a state of equilibrium, then all gravity in one direction cancels the same amount of gravity in the opposite direction. By the gravitational and inertial equivalence of mass, it becomes invisible."

"You seem to be claiming that Big Bang theory is just not discountable. Could not Tired Light theory still be a possibility?"

"The visibility of the distant stars appears to rule it out. It needs to explain how light can lose energy by it moving through space and still not distort the image of its source."

"Do you have an explanation for that?" Kayla faced James in asking him.

"How do images pass through cables to be seen very clearly by means of television?" he asked her.

"I don't know. How do we see them clearly?"

"It's according to electromagnetic theory. There is an electric field and a magnetic field. A magnetic field consists of magnets. Divide a magnet into individual parts and each part has a positive and negative pole. They interrelate with the electric field. Changes of the magnetic field cause electrical current to flow through a

wire. In turn, the electricity through a wire creates a magnetic field. They combine for the flow of energy as light. The images of light either increase or decrease with the amount of electricity supplied to cable. They can also multiply with more electricity, and can merely fade in intensity as they move through the medium of cable or space."

Kayla showed James the palms of her hands.

"That explanation is consistent with theory. The Big Bang isn't consistent. It assumes this singularity that is beyond physics."

Kayla showed John the palms of her hands.

"There is a lot of inconsistency with the Big Bang, but it is still a possibility. It is not ruled out. A singularity is assumed, and it is not observable as directly verifiable."

"What exactly are its inconsistencies?" Kayla asked. "Do they require the laws of physics to be modified?"

He nodded 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 and relative time. Now both Newtonian theory and General Relativity of gravity appear to be in need of modification because of dark matter as well as dark energy."

"Dark matter and dark energy compete for opposite effect," James pointed out. "Dark energy increases the rate of expansion whereas dark matter halts it. There's also this singularity as the origin of the universe that is beyond physics. I can explain the visibility, but, as he just pointed out, he can't explain the singularity."

"This seems to be getting complicated," Kayla said to John. How do we know if the universe is expanding or not expanding from a singularity?"

"Are you ready for this?" John asked eyeing her.

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

"A singularity is where one part of an equation decreasing to zero and another part of the equation increasing to infinity. A Big Bang singularity indication is there is infinite mass-energy density contained within an infinitesimal volume of space."

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"That's crazy," James said.

"If the universe is finite in size, but it is not static, would it not either contract or expand?" Kayla asked, not knowing why she did.

"The universe need not be finite." James said. "With Tired Light it fades away with distance."

"Wouldn't there still be an infinite amount of light?"

"Yeah, but it's infinite light in infinite space. Some theorists also claim a gradual decrease of light energy explains gravity as long range, vacuum effect relatively weak in comparison to other forces of nature."

"How can it do that?"

"Gravity is a vacuum effect in the wake of emitted radiation that is then gradually absorbed by the space medium recycling it back as matter in maintaining the atomic structure of mass-energy."

"That sounds like a reasonable theory."

"Tired Light does provide a possible explanation of gravity," John said, "but it is controversial inasmuch as it has not explained why the rotation of spiral galaxies is inconsistent with the present law of gravity."

"If the finite universe is expanding, about where are we located in it?" Kayla asked John, and again being somewhat puzzled as to why she had asked it.

"It appears as though we are nearly at its center."

"Is that a coincidence?"

"Not really; the Big Bang was formulated according to a Cosmological Principle that assumes the universe is homogeneous and isotropic."

"Can you please explain this Cosmological Principle as homogeneous and isotropic?"

"It simply means everyone perceives themselves as located near the center of the universe even if they are actually near its edge."

"How is that possible?"

"It is consistent with space-time curvature of general relativity assuming 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 it would, but everything else could become larger for no notice of any difference."

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"Is that consistent with general relativity?"

"It is a modification of it. This physicist named Dirac speculated there is a constant relationship between the structure of atoms and the changing size of the universe. He theorized the gravitational constant is not actually constant. If it is also assumed the electromagnetic unit of charge is not constant, then the universe could always appear to be the same size. It would then be consistent with Einstein's static universe."

"How would you then compare a past universe with its present condition?"

"You asked a good question. I do not know how to compare them. For the universe to appear the same as back then, as smaller and slower back then, light and everything else could have been slower, as by greater gravity. The smaller past is slower only if size is relative in contrast to present theory of gravity in a way that faster light allows us to see the smaller past as smaller and slower."

Kayla believed a secret society member would know it as true. She, herself, needed to be sure.

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

"It is consistent with special relativity, whereby the length of mass in the direction of motion decreases if its speed increases. Its mass-energy increases as well with the increased speed. At light speed, it would be infinite mass-energy within an infinitesimal length. The same result applies to gravity. If the mass and gravity increase, then mass shrinks to zero volume to become infinite mass-energy density."

"That does not seem consistent. Wouldn't a creation of infinite mass-energy be in violation of conservation of energy?"

"There is no violation of conservation of energy if it is not observed as such."

"Is this consistent with relative motion according to relativity theory?"

"Energy is conserved because there is an exchange of mass with whatever causes the increase in speed."

"Wouldn't it then need to absorb an infinite amount

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of mass in order to reach light speed?"

"Yes, it would, but it does not absorb infinite mass since light speed of mass is not attainable as such."

"How is light speed not attainable as such?"

"There is an addition of velocities theorem whereby it requires mass itself to move at light speed for it to be able to accelerate other mass to light speed."

"Can't more mass accelerate less mass to speeds faster than light?"

"Momentum is the product of mass and its speed. It increases with either more mass or more speed. There is also an increase of mass with its increased speed. It increases because mass accelerating other mass to a faster speed transfers its own mass to the other mass as mass momentum instead of speed momentum."

"Couldn't there be a gravitational potentials theorem in analogy to the addition of velocities theorem?"

Again, Kayla was perplexed of her own question.

"That is a reasonable possibility."

"Wouldn't a singularity then take an infinite amount of mass to shrink it to an infinitesimal volume, as for it to be of infinite mass-energy instead of merely infinite mass-energy density?"

He nodded yes.

"Wouldn't infinite energy having an infinitely slower speed within infinitesimal space be a contradiction?"

"Have you taken a lot of courses in physics?"

"No. I'm just wondering why Tired Light isn't a viable alternative to Big Bang theory."

"You obviously know a lot more than you have been letting on."

Kayla turned away. John knew a lot of physics, but he was no match for the alien stranger.

After they climbed back up the ladder to the closed door, James peeked at his tablet. He then opened the doorway and led them all the way out.

"Would you like to see some of the operation I have going," Kayla was asked by James when they were up breathing fresh air.

"Would I need to meet you here?"

"Yep, but it's only where we meet. It's not where I stay."

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"How do we meet?"

"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, it tells me you want to meet. This is where we meet. Use this electronic tablet to make sure no one follows you here. I found two of them. I'll keep the other one."

HACKING INTO THE FEDERAL TREASURY

It was Kayla's last day at Valley River Inn. She had given her notice and agreed to work one last shift, and she decided to wear her earrings.

When she served a fellow his Hawaiian macadamia crab cakes, he raised his hands showing 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 being used. I have no control over it."

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

"He's an alien stranger claiming 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 bank 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?"

She eyed him while nodding yes; he smirked while reaching into his pocket. He brought out a cell phone and pushed the buttons.

"Ten trillion dollars," he suddenly blurted out while squeezing his eyes shut.

"You must be the richest guy on Earth," Kayla replied, also surprised by what she heard. She did not have full control of the situation, but it was a moment when she appreciated the help.

"It was deposited by the US Treasury."

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

"How are you doing this?" he asked gazing 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 wrinkled nose.

"I just 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 one hand while pointing his other hand first at his chest, then at his ear, at Kayla's chest and finally at his ear.

Kayla nodded.

"I'm wired. You could be, but be warned, they have Bard Sucrets. He'll be crippled for life if you don't fully cooperate with what they want."

"Who are they?"

"They are hired investigators, like I am, but they'll do whatever it takes to get results. Crippling Bard is a step to their advantage. They still will be in control. Caring for him they believe is your weakness they can use. They don't have such a weakness. They have his life to bargain with, and they care not whether he lives or dies."

Staring angrily at him she put her fists on her chest and jerked them apart. He responded with his hand on his chest and shaking his head no.

She felt helpless, fearing for Bard's safety. It was a weakness she could not overcome, feeling guilty as her fault that they could destroy Bard's career and his life.

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

"I'm already as good as dead, knowing too much, so I'm just a middle man delivering a message, telling you what you need to know."

"I'm the same, but I care. Please don't hurt Bard. I'll do whatever you guys want."

"You need to convince them you really can and will help. If you don't, they'll have no use for Bard. They'll waist him, using him as an example."

"How can I convince them?"

"They'll find you tomorrow," he finally replied after appearing to listen to someone else. "Peddle your bike as far as you can east of here. Don't resist. They'll take you to Bard. That's between you and them. As for me, I need the police for protection. I know too much and I will soon be dead otherwise. I sure hope the police are outside right now instead of them."

He got up out of his chair and walked away.

Her cell phone rang. She recognized the number. It was Detective Bentley.

"Tell the guy to wait," he said. "Police will be there within five minutes."

"He's already out the door."

"Don't let them take you. They already could have killed Bard. It is most likely 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."

"You'll just let them take 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. He had not lied to her, and that was his fate for letting them control his life.

The next morning, she was on her bicycle peddling past the restaurant, Alton Baker Park and entering the wooded area. She shivered as someone on a bicycle was approaching from the opposite direction. He con-tinued

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towards her, but it was only a false alarm from her fear of what lie ahead of her. He had turned right where the winding path led to the bike bridge close to the university.

She continued east through the wooded area until she came to an open field where the bike path veered into a street. A car passed her and suddenly came to a stretching halt right in front of her.

She hit the car and tumbled to the ground. Feeling the pain of her bruised body, she managed to stand up to show the men getting out of the car her cell phone.

One of the men grabbed the phone away from her and reared his arm back ready 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'll be able to contact him. He hides and doesn't let anyone know where he is."

He grabbed her arm and pulled her forcefully to the back door of the car that was open. He shoved her into the back seat where she was soon locked in between two men.

She noticed one of the guys had a monitor.

"She's not wired," he said, "and the phone is turned off."

She was not wired except for her diamond earrings pinned out of sight within her hair. She decided to pick their brains.

"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 next to where they plan on taking you," she thought. "They plan on killing both you and him after they have obtained all the information that they want from you."

They entered the town of Springfield and eventually turned right onto a street from where they turned left onto a street leading east. When they passed the small

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town of Vida, they came to a camping area beside the McKenzie River. Two RV's and several campers filled the camping area. As they pulled up and stopped in front of an RV, men waiting outside stared at them.

The man on her right got out and led her to one of the RVs. "Get in there," he said with an angry voice.

She opened the door and entered a room wherein three men sat in padded chairs. She was directed to sit down in an available chair between two of the men.

"Tell us what you know," a muscular man standing in front of her said. "Bard's life depends on it."

"I know where there is a secret location of a Secret Society that is using me. That's all I know."

"Where is it?"

"It's underground near Alton Baker Park."

"How do we find it?"

"Its exact location is too difficult to describe. It's in a wooded area. It's by a tree of a large area of trees."

"Well, then, you'll 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 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."

"Use this," he said with phone in hand.

"It won't work. My phone has a secret number that I don't even know. It's set on redial."

"Go get her phone," the large muscular man said.

The man on her left stood up. He left and soon returned with her phone, only to hand it to the muscular man.

"Your All American is good as dead if this phone has a tracer," the muscular man said.

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

"What's his number?"

"I don't know. As I already said, I push the redial to a secret number. If I get a ring back, I push the redial again. It tells him to meet me at the meeting place. If I

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get another ring, he'll be there."

The muscular man pushed the redial and waited, and waited, and waited. There was no return ring.

"Take her outside for a little persuasion," he finally said.

"He's probably too busy to answer the phone," she pleaded, knowing it was her own phone instead of the phone James had given her. She had used her phone to call home, but her mother would be at the hospital for another treatment of her cancer. Kayla only wanted to use her phone to stall as her hope the alien stranger could and would come to her rescue again.

"My good buddy here sometimes persuades way too much for anyone to survive it," the muscular man said. "I don't even care to watch."

"The battery could be low on James' phone. He'll be at the meeting place. He always makes it. I can show you the way."

He stared at her while rubbing his chin.

"Do you think James would trust me or anyone else with knowing his secret phone number?"

The muscular man pointed at the guys beside her and waved towards the door.

"If he's not there, we'll have to waste her."

The two 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, peaked down and shook his head no.

"There's a level area about twenty feet down where there is an opening to a room," Kayla informed him. "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.

A couple bike riders passed by on the bike trail. The guy turned, as not to be recognized.

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"Get on down there," he said.

After she started climbing down, she was followed by him. She was soon in a strange place with no way to protect herself against two criminal thugs.

"What is this place?" one of the guys asked.

"It's a meeting place. Like I said, I need the phone to contact James in order to set up a meeting."

"She's a good liar. It's a good place to waste her."

"You just wait here," the other guy said. "I'll take her back and see what our fearless leader wants to do with her."

"You can stay if you want. There's no way I'm going to."

"One of us has to stay. Okay, you take her back. I'll stay and watch out for James or anyone else."

"Follow me," the other guy said.

She thought she needed to stall. She stumbled and fell to the ground. He grabbed her arm and jerked her up. She stumbled and fell again.

"What's the matter, bitch?"

"I don't know. I'm tired, weak and woozy."

She and her escort finally made their way back to the sedan, but it was also where Detective Bentley was waiting along with several police officers who suddenly approached behind them. They had him surrounded as they pointed their guns at him.

"Get your hands behind your back," Detective Bentley shouted.

He surrendered, was handcuffed and taken to a police car.

"I was informed you were here with two guys," 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. They have lots of guns. You'll need a lot of men and a way to sneak in without getting Bard killed."

"I have both the state and the Feds to call for more help. Where's the other guy?"

"He was behind us," she replied. "He's probably on his way to alert the others. They'll kill Bard if you don't

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hurry fast enough to save him."

"Do you have a description?"

"The one who I came here with could be his twin brother."

"Well, that'll have to do for now. After I take you to a safer place, I'm on my way to help rescue Bard."

"I'll be okay here. 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 have someone to protect 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, walked to his car, and he along with his fellow policemen appeared to be on their way to rescue Bard from a powerful gang of criminals.

When Kayla walked back to the hole in the ground, she found James sitting there. She was surprised to see him, and she wondered how he knew she was captured. She suspected the alien stranger was behind it.

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

He showed Kayla his spy device and his gun. "I was on my way to check out those diamonds. I saw you with those guys down there. I called Detective Bentley and tracked you with my device when you climbed out. There's only one guy down there. I'll take care of him; just don't get in the way."

Kayla had a better idea in mind. 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.

With the entrance way into the room having been left open, Kayla hurried inside 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.

With the guy facing her, James snuck up on him,

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used his arm to grab the guy's neck, and slammed him to the ground while sticking a gun barrel into the guy's mouth.

"Should I do him in now or do you have something else in mind?" James asked.

She walked over and picked up the gun the guy 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 is going on?" the guy asked shaking his head. "You must know a lot more than you let on."

"I'm psychic, and you're in big trouble after I inform Dwight you told us what he's up to."

"What do you want from me?"

"Not much: Just everything you know we also want to know. Start talking."

12

WATER WORLD

Are you sure this thing is safe?" Bard asked while looking down at the valley from inside the small cabin of the blimp.

"John designed it," Kayla replied. "It just follows the wind east to the mountains. To get over the Cascades, there just needs to be a little more push from the solar powered rotors."

"How's he piloting it from inside another blimp?"

"The computer controls the rotors. It is set to take us to Summer Lake."

"Isn't this thing a little too expensive for just a trip to the high desert?"

"It would be, but John uses laser light to transform hydrogen to helium, and the cabin is compressed wood that is cheaper than plastic and steel, and it is nearly as strong and durable as they are."

"What happens if something punches a hole up in the blimp? It's a long way down."

"The helium is contained in multiple balloons. We'd need to drop a little weight by filling some spare balloons from a tank of compressed hydrogen."

Kayla leaned towards a window for a birds-eye view of the Willamette Valley. She took notice of the variety

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of such trees as Douglas fir, Maple, Birch, Oak, Alder, Aspen and Larch, only to name a few. She knew there is enough water in the valley to grow them larger and more abundant than anywhere else on the planet.

As the blimp continued upward into the Cascades, within two hours the view at and near La Pine, Oregon became mostly of lodgepole and ponderosa pine.

"Not much grows here," Kayla said. "Summers are short. Plants and trees budding out early are vulnerable to summer frost. Only a few trees like willows and aspen make it. It is because they are able to retreat from their budding process."

"There are sure a lot of pine trees."

"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 advised them all the dead wood lying around can be transformed into charcoal if no oxygen is present. It takes seven-hundred degrees Fahrenheit. It can be used to heat homes and greenhouses with charcoal while making more of it with the same heat. Clearing the forest of it also helps prevent forest fires."

"Won't they then be polluting the air?"

"The carbon dioxide from the charcoal goes into the greenhouses that grow food with the aid of fluorescent bulbs of nearly natural and ultraviolet light. The plants consume carbon for more hydrocarbon fuel and release the oxygen into the atmosphere."

"Well, that should help make a tiny dent in reversing global warming."

"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 a gradual rise in average temperature. It's part of James' beaver engineering."

"He does dream up a lot of stuff."

"Aren't you 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."

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The blimp circled its way towards the southeastern part of the state of what was mostly desert area. Juniper trees could be seen. There was also the Lost Forest of mostly pine trees near Christmas Valley along with sand dunes of volcanic ash.

"The sand dunes resulted from a volcano that became Crater Lake," Kayla explained. "The wind blew the ash to Christmas Valley. It formed into sand dunes and preserved a water source for the Lost Forest."

"Most of the area," Bard was quick to respond, "is too alkaline to grow most things."

"All those deer down there seem to be doing okay," Kayla said noticing a herd of deer grazing in a pasture.

"Yeah, alfalfa and clover do well over here. It feeds horses and livestock, but there needs to be more water."

"James plans on doing something about that, but it's John who really knows how to do it."

Summer Lake finally came into view.

"The whole area was once one giant lake," Kayla said. "That was from melting glaciers after the last ice age. It became two lakes. What you now see is Summer Lake. It goes for about fifteen miles, and there is a hot spring beside it, but the lake sometimes dries up. More water is needed for more development."

"At least they have a source of water," Bard replied, "but unfortunately it's also alkaline."

"You're right, it's alkaline. More of interest is lots five miles north of the lake. The soil is also alkaline. You dig a few feet down and you hit hard clay. After you go through it, you get to more soft dirt at a depth that they have not been able to find the bottom of. It's ideal for underground reservoirs and aqueducts."

"What's with the blimps?" Bard asked while pointing his finger at them.

"They are tunneling beneath the hard clay to build structures. Besides getting us around the area for us to sight see, they are used to lift dirt."

"I'm sure glad I'm not down in one of those holes."

"They're using computerized robots that have lights and cameras to reveal what they're doing, and they're solar powered."

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Bard shrugged. "I guess they get to rest at night."

"They do now, but John plans on using laser light to produce hydrogen and oxygen fuel from air and hydrocarbons that become water as a byproduct. Solar energy can also be extended at night with flow batteries. They use air to breathe in providing a cheap and clean source for an electric grid. He also intends to compress carbon into diamonds for more permanent batteries for a grid underground as backup in case something happens to the upper grid."

"I reckon when robots make robots and everything else, we'll go underground and live with the worms."

Kayla smiled. "We could become football players."

"Yep, we'll need something to overcome boredom."

"I'm sure there's going to be a lot more challenges to overcome that we haven't yet anticipated."

"How come John managed to get in charge of this as a science project?" Bard asked.

Kayla shrugged. "I suppose James' billion dollar donation to the university had something to do with it."

"I can't believe you trusted that guy with more than 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. No longer do I receive stolen money from the alien stranger."

"Did you get enough?"

"We're okay."

"Did something happen to him?"

"I'm not sure if anything happened to him. Wanda Sue also is making 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 what she knows about economics. Her ideas seem very promising."

"She's a socialist for sure."

Kayla shrugged. "She has explained it according to a French physiocratic philosophy that defined wealth as food and land. To ensure land owners produced food, the land was taxed."

Bard shook his head no. "Like I said, she's a socialist

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wanting us to pay higher taxes."

"She told me about how the Federal Banking system needs to control inflation and deflation with the help of tax to prevent recessions."

"What do they do with the tax revenue?"

"Among countless other necessities for more opportunity to create wealth, they build roads and maintain the infrastructure."

"Yeah, big government can just print money and do what they want with it."

"With no gold standard anymore, Fed debt needs to be secured. Ownership of property provides security. A mortgage enables banks to receive more credit from the Fed for loaning to us. Interest rates are high during a housing bubble. When inflation reverses, then money is hoarded. A deflation of prices occurs for those of us in debt not to be able to pay our high interest loans. We're just victims of the system."

"Is she saying we need to change the system?"

The way I see it, it goes beyond the banking system. It is all about the distribution of wealth. You don't need a bank loan to buy a house if you get paid a lot of money for playing football. The bank is out of it. Land owners renting houses instead of selling them also bypass the banks. With computerized robots for creation of wealth, whoever owns them and energy sources is in control of the economy. Like the physiocratic philosophy of food and land as real economic wealth, there needs to be a tax for the distribution of real economic wealth, and it has to be big government for us instead of for them."

"You mean I'm going to be taxed for owning a car?"

Kayla, tight-lipped, shook her head no. She pointed out the window.

"Did you notice all those solar panels back there?"

"I sure did."

"They've been added of late."

"Yeah, what's going on?"

"Wanda Sue put us on social media and revealed her plan. She has followers and investors to join the cause. Free solar energy threatened to decrease the revenue of the electric and water plants, forcing them to raise their prices, driving more users to solar energy. To

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counter, she suggested solar power 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 now has a way to be part of the profit."

"That sounds a little iffy. Don't we still need labor to get to that point and to do other things?"

"James has found us needed labor. The homeless and unemployed now have jobs producing wealth, 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 that have become more valuable and attractive. Eventually we'll have the needed labor for even more creative stuff."

Bard waved his hand forward as a gesture of disgust. "This place is worthless desert. 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 ideal for an underground lab built not to collapse. John can use laser light to extract oxygen and hydrogen from various materials. He has a closed system for hydrogen-oxygen fuel creating water as their byproduct. Greenhouses can also 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 really think all 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 another step in the right direction. Its economic success could spark a trend. Storing water is needed to counter melting of glaciers and snow packs. Although wetter climates are becoming wetter, dryer climates are becoming drier. The water reservoirs and aqueducts of any size are vital. When this is realized worldwide, including the Sahara Desert, then I believe global warming will finally be reversed."

Bard shook his head no. "It'll promote a population

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increase, along with desperate competition and war for the survival of the fittest. We'll need to pack our guns to protect ourselves. That's reality; all this is speculative fantasy."

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

"What choice do we have?"

"I prefer law and order, and social cooperation."

"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, wanting 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 banking account. It was just enough to get us started in the right direction."

The rotors slowed to a stop as the blimp lowered to the ground.

"Did you enjoy the view over here?" asked John as he stood before the blimp in which he led the way.

"We were sure able to see a lot more up there than if we came here in a car," Kayla replied. "How do we get to my mother's restaurant?"

"Follow me. James and Wanda Sue took a shortcut. They are already there with my wife and your mother."

They followed him from out of the cabin right to a self-driving vehicle that drove them straight to her mother's new restaurant and Inn that James had used some of the money to purchase. Inside the restaurant was a pool table along with pool players, which would later become available after the restaurant closed.

Kayla, Bard, James, Wanda Sue, John and his wife all sat at an outside picnic table.

"I'm just here for a week," John's wife Carla said. "I should graduate before Christmas. I'm looking forward to shooting pool with you."

"I've been practicing, and I'll be waiting."

"That underground place at Alton Baker shows what can be accomplished," John said.

"How can that be?" Bard asked.

"Commercial diamonds for batteries are simply car-

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bon formed from high pressure. Solar energy can help create the pressure. Special fluorescent bulbs can grow food, which contains carbon and hydrogen. Down deep underground the hydrogen safely combines with oxygen to produce water without affecting the ozone layer."

"Isn't this all too technical and too expensive."

"Ancient Romans built a big empire with aqueducts and underground reservoirs. It could similarly be done in the Sahara Desert. A fertile area of Egypt is vulnerable to being flooded from a rise in ocean levels. Water needs to be stored to counter the melting of glaciers. Increase in temperature increases the humidity of air to cause more flooding, drought and destructiveness of wildfires during hotter and dryer periods of summer. Beaver engineering, like James suggested, is essential. An underground dwelling could shelter us from nuclear radiation, or help shelter us from such a faraway Super Volcano as has been expected to occur at Yellowstone. Underground dwellings could thus become an essential defense as well as a means for a healthier environment along with economic prosperity, as was pointed out by Wanda Sue."

"Oil companies pump seven times more water than oil and gas out of the ground," Wanda Sue said. "Even though it is mostly saline, it can be purified with use of solar energy. If we contract with the oil companies for the water, they'll become our partners instead of being our foes."

"We can also mix butane with gasoline," John said. "The butane has about the same power as gas and has a higher octane level. More water in their mixture is allowed than with ethanol, and its oxygen and hydrogen could be another water byproduct."

After a nutritious dinner, they went to settle in their rooms for their short visit at the Summer Lake Inn and restaurant. While in her room, Kayla heard a knock at the door. She opened it to see Bard standing with his hand pointing towards the restaurant.

"I want to see what John taught you that you didn't give me a chance to," he said.

She followed him back to the restaurant where they

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picked their cue sticks from the rack on the wall.

"Let's play some nine-ball," Bard said while racking the balls. "It'll show me if you're as good as John says you are."

He racked the balls for Kayla to break.

She placed the cue ball beside the right-side rail and back in the kitchen, named as such for one of the first pool tables being partly in the kitchen and partly in the living room. She stroked the cue ball hard and low for it to hit the one-ball. The balls scattered, with the nine-ball falling into a corner pocket.

Bard racked the balls again, and Kayla once again pocketed the nine-ball in the same corner pocket.

Bard again racked. This time Kayla only pocketed the five-ball. She then stroked the cue ball using low-left English with enough follow through for enough spin to draw the cue ball back. It spun off the one-ball and then off the rail for it to again pocket the nine-ball.

Bard racked the balls again. This time the three-ball was pocketed on the break. With sufficient control of the cue ball, Kayla was able to run the table, pocketing each ball in order.

"Sorry," Bard said, "it looks like I don't have time to show you what I can do."

"Sorry," Kayla replied with a smile.

Bard leaned her way. "You know, Kayla, I'm ready to make a commitment; how about you?"

"Well, I'm now finally getting to be in control of my life. You're about to have a career in football."

"We'll make the NCAA playoffs if we win the Pac 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 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?"

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"I'm just human. As Wanda Sue says, money does provide us freedom of choice. You give it up when you spend it, but it is earning it back that makes it all that much more worthwhile. That's what this is all about: Earning your freedom is like taking control of your life. That's what life is really all about."

"Do 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 share my trust."

"Trust away."

"He used DNA to grow the outside of his body into human form. I think he grew a new identity."

"Is he not from Earth?"

"I have 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 are part of a colony of aliens traveling in outer space and seeking other 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 ours. They even used gold for money. There wasn't enough for fair distribution. It was hoarded. The price of commodities decreased due to lack of demand. Those hoarding gold became rich. Those without it became pirates and thieves. War after war was 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?"

"Some of them developed more advanced science. They were able to compress carbon into diamonds for more plentiful distribution of money according to cost of production, that relatively decreased with advanced technology. They increased their life expectancy, and they became immortals, but their planet overpopulated and self-destructed. Some of them ventured out into space. Diamond batteries along with computers enabled

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more efficient use of energy."

"Like I said, overpopulation can be a serious problem, but those of them who escaped must not have anything to worry about except their own extinction if they don't reproduce."

"They are only immortals if they are not killed by a physical force. 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'm not sure, but my mother hired a manager for the restaurant. She doesn't know where he stays when he is not at the restaurant, and he talks a lot like the alien stranger did to me."

"How's your mother doing? I heard she didn't have much longer to live."

"She's making a miraculous recovery."

"She must've found a miraculous cure."

"She has been getting these thoughts on nutrition."

"What's a good diet?"

"It's complicated."

"How's that."

"The lactic acid in milk provides more energy to our muscles than glucose does, but too much energy can be destructive. Some of us are able to use that energy to play football. Some of our bodies break down with too much energy. Other nutrients can help. Cinnamon helps control our blood sugar, but it can also slow us down for more need of sugar. Too much or the wrong combination of ingredients can also be harmful. There is also the placebo. If we are confident in our abilities, then our bodies are more apt to accomplish whatever we want it to perform."

"I reckon you're not as wise as Socrates. You know too much."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bobby Dee Ticer was born in Childress, Texas in 1943. He moved to Oregon when he was three. He moved around a lot and attended many different schools. After graduating in 1962, he served in the USAF from 1963 to 1967. He retired as a cannery worker at the end of 1999 and decided to self-educate himself by means of writing and research. He expresses his ideas, he wrote several books, including *Explaining Gravity and Hubble Cosmology*.