

# Unseen Realities

A Novel

Gordon Stallard

# **Unseen Realities**

A novel by Gordon A. Stallard

Editing by Vanessa Shields

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## Chapter 1

Ellen Freeland drove toward a metal gated parking entrance. In awe, she glanced up at the Fort Knox-like structure on the other side of the lot. A cement block building morphed into a ten-story glass and brick tower. It housed the private offices, labs, and conference rooms for some of the University of Windsor's prized research programs. Top-secret projects in engineering, computer technology, and science were hidden from the public eye within this building. She attended school here, but had never been inside this building. Class lectures were not held here. Ellen pulled alongside the security booth and rolled down her window.

"Another hot June day," the guard said as he wiped his brow with a hankie. "I'll need some photo ID, Miss."

Ellen handed him her driver's license and a letter regarding the interview she was there to attend. He glanced at the document then handed it back to her keeping her ID.

"An important interview, you're beautiful and smart." He smiled then stepped back into the booth. Standing in front of his computer, the security guard hunched over as he read her ID. Ellen watched him use his index-fingers to peck at the computer keyboard. She watched him enter her

name and address information from her ID into the security system.

“Here yah go, young lady.” He offered her ID and a laminated visitor’s badge back to her.

“Thank you,” she said, reaching for them. The badge almost slipped out of her hand from the humidity and the anxiety she could barely hide.

“Use the barcode on the badge to open the main door,” he said. “Park your car at the front of the lot in one of the visitor spots.” He stepped back into the booth to press a button. The gate wheeled open.

After parking, Ellen sat quietly and inhaled a deep, calming breath. She stared up at the building. The tinted-glass windows reflected a distorted view of the university’s landscape: the trees, the Engineering building, the Health Center, and the parking lot.

*It’s truly happening.* She felt her eyes well up. *I’ve got to keep it together.*

On the day the university’s HR department called to confirm a second interview, Ellen was ecstatic. She had run through the living room like a ten-year old girl, excited to tell her mother and brother the good news. Her family knew how much this position meant to her. This job was an important step in her career. At the age of twenty-six, she had earned her Master’s Degree in Physics and desired a position on a well-known physics team. She had worked hard on other research projects trying to build an impressive reputation, and now she had the opportunity to work with Dr. Richard Zane, a top Canadian physicist – it was her goal, her dream to work for him.

This interview was extremely important to her. She had to nail it. Feeling perspiration under her arms, she twisted an air vent toward herself. She was wearing a summery suit: a tan-colored knee-length skirt with a white blouse. It

was too hot to wear the suit jacket. Ellen looked down at her clothes. The outfit was perfect.

Ellen clutched her stomach. It was doing summersaults. She took a sip from her water bottle.

She'd woken early this morning and spent the extra time reading, sorting and organizing her notes. Being overly prepared for the interview just wasn't possible in her mind. Ellen knew this meeting would be mentally demanding as Dr. Zane investigated her academic knowledge and her laboratory research. She'd be challenged as only he could challenge her.

She looked over at her briefcase sitting on the seat next to her. The notes she brought contained questions, remarks, and ideas about Zane's work that would be helpful during the interview. She assumed she would need them to discuss Dr. Zane's theories, teaching, and past projects. His background information she had thoroughly researched and practically memorized over the last few days. If there was a lull in the conversation, Ellen planned on referring to these notes.

"Dad, be with me today," Ellen said, then lifted her chin proudly.

As she walked to the building, she kept her eyes fixed on the prominent entry doors. She slid her badge through the barcode reader next to the doorway. A green light flashed. Cool air rushed out as she pulled the door open.

There were no windows in the spacious lobby, but a huge skylight brightly illuminated the area. Craning her neck, Ellen looked passed security to the reception counter. She'd always wondered what it would look like inside.

The male uniformed guard standing beside the security check didn't have a gun. For some reason, she thought security in such a guarded building would call for it. The

scanning equipment in the entryway was like the security check at an airport. She walked over to the guard.

“Place your things on the conveyer then step through the archway,” he said. “You can pick your stuff up on the other side.”

Ellen walked through without any problem and took her things, once they moved past the x-ray machine. The clicking of her footsteps echoed through the sterile lobby as she walked to the reception counter. The place filled her with a sense of uneasiness.

A serious-faced, middle-aged receptionist was busy talking into a headset as she stared at a flat-screen monitor mounted on the counter. The woman talked and typed quickly.

On the wall behind the receptionist was a surveillance camera pointing directly at the area in front of the counter. Ellen turned her head to look around. She noticed cameras mounted everywhere, in all the corners and hanging from the ceiling.

“I feel like a million eyes are watching me,” she whispered to herself.

As Ellen waited, she looked up at the massive two-story square photograph dominating the lobby wall to the right – a businessman and woman stood gazing out a third-floor window. Their faces lacked expression even though they were looking at a mile of steel crossing over the Detroit River – the Ambassador Bridge. The bridge connected two countries: Canada and the United States.

*Bet they're not thinking about an interview,* Ellen thought as she continued to admire the massive photo.

“Excuse me,” the receptionist said. She spoke again, a little stronger, “Miss, can I help you?”

Ellen turned, pulled from her thoughts. The receptionist looked at her with a friendly smile and asked, “Can I have your visitor’s badge? How can I help you?”



“Hi, I’m Ellen Freeland. I have an appointment to see Dr. Richard Zane.” Ellen spoke quickly as she handed the receptionist her laminated badge a bit embarrassed for being so taken aback by her surroundings.

The receptionist swiped the barcode side of the badge through a slot on the top of the keyboard. The computer beeped. She returned the badge.

“Let me see.” The receptionist ran her manicured index finger down a list clipped to a pad beside the computer. “Your appointment is at one o’clock.”

“I know. I’m a little early.” Ellen had planned on being early so she could relax and be more at ease during the meeting with Dr. Zane.

“I’ll let HR know you’re here. You can wait over there.” She pointed to chairs lined up against a wall.

“Thank you.” Ellen walked to the chairs and sat down. She looked at her watch – twenty minutes early. She was glad they had let her in.

Ellen felt goose bumps rising on her skin and rubbed her arm. As she waited, she thought about Dr. Zane again. He was fearless, not afraid of being bullied by society. She admired him for publishing his remarkable theories even though he got angry reactions from conservative groups.

She wondered if she’d be working on his latest theory about electromagnetic fields. His theory proved that the electromagnetic field that surrounds people, animals, plants and even manmade things, provided an unseen communication between them and the vibrating universe. This was the project that got her most excited.

Ellen knew that no matter what project she worked on, she’d get to debate any of his controversial theories. Her confidence swelled when in a heated debate. She had awards to prove her cut-throat ability when it came to debates.

‘Seek and you shall find,’ was Ellen’s favorite quote. She thought of this saying whenever she started a new research project, or when she was challenging an archaic belief. If she kept on studying, experimenting and debating, she knew she’d find an answer.

“Ellen?” a thin woman with long black hair asked.

“Yes,” Ellen replied looking up at the woman.

“I’m Cherie from the Human Resources department. I’ll take you to Dr. Zane’s office, now.” She held out her hand. Ellen stood and shook it.

They walked to the elevators and Cherie slid her barcoded badge through the device next to the elevator. A green diode light flashed on the unit. A moment later, the elevator pinged, and the doors parted. Ellen followed Cherie into the elevator and stood at the back and watched Cherie press buttons on the elevator control panel. The doors slid shut.

Ellen clutched her stomach feeling nauseated. The movement of the elevator heightened her nervousness. She was glad the swift ride was only to the second floor.

Cherie looked at her watch. “Dr. Zane called. He’s caught in traffic so he might be late.” The doors opened and Cherie led them out. “He wants you in his office ready for the interview the minute he arrives.”

They stepped into a narrow hallway. A sign on the wall read Physics Research Department. There was one door to the left and two doors to the right with a stairwell exit door at each end of the hallway. A domed security camera was mounted in the ceiling above each door. They walk down the hall and stopped at the first door on the right. On the door was a black lettered nameplate, Dr. Zane’s Office. Cherie unlocked and opened the door, then looked inside.

“You can go in and have a seat,” Cherie said. “I can’t stay. I’ve got a meeting to manage. Is there anything I can get you before I leave? Would you like some water?”

“Nothing thanks.”

“Alright, I’m sure he’ll be here soon.” Cherie walked quickly back toward the elevator.

She felt even more uneasy being left alone in this brilliant man’s office. Ellen frowned as she glanced down at her watch. It was twelve fifty-five. She went into the office and felt her anxiety ease immediately. The shelves along the walls were stuffed with books, scientific magazines, research notes, and manuscripts. Papers were piled everywhere: on the desk, the chairs, and the floor.

So many prestigious degrees and awards were on display. Ellen could barely see the paneled walls behind them – he was more accomplished than she realized. This made her pull her shoulders back in a renewed determination. *I will achieve this type of recognition one day.*

Numerous cassette tapes and VHS tapes were stacked on the shelves to her right. Seeing the antiqued audiotape and projection machine on the lower shelf made her laugh out loud a bit. Even though it was old, the equipment looked well used.

Ellen decided to sit in the visitor’s chair adjacent to the desk, but had to move well-thumbed books and papers to the floor first. She sat down glad to have a time to relax before the interview. Opening her purse, she took out her cellphone and turned it off. She didn’t want personal phone calls interrupting the meeting. She put it away, then pulled out her reading glasses and put them on. After taking her notes out of her briefcase, she began to review them, but her eyes shifted to a scrapbook overflowing with newspaper clippings sitting on the corner of his desk. She leaned closer to the desk tilting her head to get a better look.

She felt the urge she got when she started a new experiment. The urge to leave nothing untouched, no questions unanswered. She couldn't stop herself from reaching over and moving the scrapbook to see if there was a title on the cover. There wasn't.

Ellen turned her head and looked to the open door. No one was there. Then she quickly stood up, leaned over the desk, opened the scrapbook and began flipping through the pages. As she scanned the news articles and glanced at the photos, she felt like a detective looking for clues.

What she read, she already knew, but she didn't stop inhaling the information in the scrapbook. Dr. Zane's latest theory had created quite the uproar especially in the United States where all the major newspapers sensationalized the controversy. *Dr. Zane communicates with the devil; Religious groups demand a retraction; Opposition groups gather outside the university protesting Dr. Zane's theory; Zane's secret invention could prove his theory.* The public outcry around Zane's work made Ellen angry that someone she admired was treated so badly.

Again, Ellen glanced at the office door. Still alone, she pushed the scrapbook back into place and sat down feeling almost satisfied.

Looking over at the wall to her left, she saw a typical classroom clock, white face with black numbers and trim, but it was definitely larger than most office clocks. The second-hand clicked ever so loudly.

She compared the time on the large wall clock to her watch. They matched. It was one-ten and Dr. Zane was now officially late.

Ellen heard a noise coming from the opposite side of the office that the clock was on. She turned and realized there was a door to her right and it was a bit ajar.

“Hello, is someone there?” Ellen stood up. She slid her reading glasses into their sleeve, placed them and the file folder on the chair seat, and walked to the door. “Hello.”

She pushed the door open and peered into the next room.

## Chapter 2

Ellen stepped into a brightly lit rectangular boardroom. It had floor to ceiling tinted windows, a ten person conference table: four chairs on either side and a chair at each end. A 60-inch flat screen television was mounted on the wall. There was an empty snack table with a water cooler along the end wall.

Just inside the doorway was a large cabinet with large glass doors on the front lit by spotlights. Miniature ceramic figurines lined glass shelves. She couldn't resist taking a look. Standing in front of the cabinet, she saw within it a collection of movie and television show memorabilia, science figurines, and solar system models. The collectibles on the lower shelves illustrated the history of Hollywood sci-fi movies and TV shows: *Lost in Space*, *Flash Gordon*, *Twilight Zone*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *The X-Files*.

Ellen fought her instinct to take a picture of the figurines for her mom who loved amazing collections like this, but knew she would need Dr. Zane's permission before doing it. Not to mention it would prove she was snooping around before he arrived.

Fascination and curiosity forced her to linger. Her eyes moved along the next two shelves as she browsed miniature replicas of famous scientists: Faraday, Einstein, and Hawking.

Alone, centered on the top shelf was a black leather book. The leather was cracked, artistically edged in floral decoration and embossed in the center with large gold-block Gothic-style letters: 'The Holy Bible. She was surprised to see a rare copy of the Bible on display in Dr. Zane's conference room since it was so often used by religious groups to support their opposing arguments against Zane's theories.

Ellen peered back into Zane's office through the open door.

*What am I doing?* She hesitated, stuck between impatience and curiosity, and a gut feeling she might get caught. Dr. Zane still wasn't there. Returning her attention to the conference room, she walked over to the solid wood conference table, pulled out one of the leather chairs located at the end, and sat down. She moved the comfortable chair closer to the table, and leaned back. She sat tall and looked around at the empty chairs.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said. "Thank you for attending this meeting. Today, I'm introducing an incredible new invention that our team has been working on for the past year." She was inspired by sitting at the impressive table.

On the center of the table, she noticed a long-thin rectangular wooden box. Ellen reached over and pulled the box closer. Black-lettered words were etched into a brass plate on top.

"Project Vision," she said reading the nameplate out loud.

The custom made box had a highly polished reddish-brown finish. She picked it up and tilted the box side-to-

side, taking a good look at the unique container. No lock or latch was visible, only a small hinge along the back.

Ellen re-read the label quietly to herself: *Project Vision*. The words rolled off her tongue like she was meant to read them. She paused. *I need to stop*.

She put the box down and pushed it an arm's reach away, then began looking around the room, glancing at all the furniture surfaces. Her eyes moved from the table up to the ceiling to each corner of the room. Surprisingly, there were no cameras anywhere. The rest of the building was highly watched, but not this room.

Ellen glanced at the open office door and listened for a sound then looked at the box. She was drawn to it like a magnet to metal. Reaching for the mysterious box, she moved it closer, but didn't lift it.

"I really want to look inside," she said to the empty room. She glanced at her watch, stood up and pushed the mystery container to the center of the table. She walked quickly to the office door and stared into Zane's office.

A scientist alone in another scientist's workspace was worse than a kid alone in a candy store. She turned to look at the box as she bit her lower lip.

Motivated completely by instinct and years' worth of research skills, she hurried over to the conference table and picked the box up. She held it in front of her face and ran her thumbs along the grooved lip of the lid.

Her mind spun with curious torment. Her eyes moved from the box to the door, back to the box. She bit her lower lip harder as she held the box tighter. With her thumbs, she pushed the lid up, slowly, to peek inside. Ellen flinched when the lid snapped open, but it didn't stop her.

Inside, on top of tan-colored material, sat a pair of eyeglasses. The eyeglasses had thick, black, plastic frames



containing clear but slightly tinted glass lenses. They looked like typical brand name eyewear.

“Eyeglasses,” she said, surprised and a bit let down. She removed the eyeglasses and sat the open box on the table. Ellen held the eyeglasses with both hands and began thoroughly looking them over for some type of branding. She knew there had to be more to the eyeglasses. And there was. On the right side frame was a small numbered dial.

With the tip of her finger that was shaking with nervous excitement, Ellen touched the dial. It was set at zero. She could see numbers printed on each side of the zero.

A noise came from inside the office. She turned her head toward the office door holding her breath as she listened. She heard the noise again. *Oh shit!* A surge of panic tore through her. Quickly, she folded the arms closed and put the eyeglasses back into the box, shut and pushed it back to the center of the table. She swiftly walked to the doorway, stopping to take a second to calm down before peering into the office.

No one was there. She was confused. She heard the noise again and tracked the sound.

“It’s that loud ticking clock,” she said both relieved and annoyed.

Ellen looked back at the conference table. Her eyes fixed on the box as she wondered about the dial. It was too difficult to stay away. She wanted to try the eyeglasses on. She *needed* to try the eyeglasses on.

She hurried across the room to the table and grabbed the box, opened it, and lifted the eyeglasses out. *Just do it,* the mad-scientist voice in her shrieked. She listened and put them on.

“Holy shit!” she exclaimed, stepping backwards, stunned. “Unbelievable.” Her eyes widened with

astonishment. She felt like a blind person opening her eyes to the incredible beauty around her for the first time.

The clarity was shocking. Colors were intense and dazzling. Shapes and textures were more distinct. Ellen looked around the conference room mesmerized by the details she was now able to see. Everything she looked at stood out more clearly, but not in a distorted way. In a way that almost lifted it more into her experience of seeing.

“What type of eyeglasses are these?” Ellen shook her head in amazement. Her vision was enhanced a hundred times over.

She looked down. The table looked different. The beauty of the hardwood grains clearly stood out. The glossy lacquer finish was layered thick on top of the wood. Ellen touched the table sliding the palm of her hand across the wood finish feeling the surface with her fingertips. The feeling of the surface hadn’t changed. As she moved her hand along the edge of the table, it still felt smooth and flat, but both the table and her hand looked *more*. She didn’t know how else to explain it.

Ellen looked at her hand resting upon the table. Her hand was clearly a separate object on top of the table, but the texture, the lines, and the pores were more detailed, more beautiful. She moved her hand closer stopping as she noticed the time on her watch.

“I’ve got to put them away.” She gazed around the room.

A line had been crossed that she couldn’t get back over. Although she was thrilled to have found the eyeglasses, she knew she shouldn’t have put them on. In her heart, she knew it was these eyeglasses she would be working with and that she’d have the opportunity to wear them again.

“Project Vision,” she mumbled, her speech clearly affected by the excitement and energy of the eyeglasses.

The second word engraved in the nameplate gave her an idea.

“Vision-glasses,” she breathed, naming them aptly, obviously, and in doing so, she became instantly attached. Ellen slowly panned around the room one more time then took the vision-glasses off.

*They’re truly amazing.* Her eyes quickly readjusted to their normal viewing.

She got up, still holding the vision-glasses in her hand, walked to the open office door and looked in.

“He’s still not here.” She looked over at the miniature figurines, put the vision-glasses back on and hurried over to the cabinet. She had no problem walking while wearing the vision-glasses. There was no change to the size, depth, or distance between objects so her sense of balance was not affected.

“Oh, those figurines are fantastic.” She stared through the glass doors and browsed the miniature replicas marveling at the perfection of each piece. Ellen turned toward the windows and swiftly walked across the room.

“Oh my God, it’s beautiful out there.” She held her breath for a moment as she stared out the window. Her head moved from left-to-right as her eyes scanned the landscape. She was mesmerized by the enriched splendor - addicted to the beauty only the vision-glasses would let her see. Her chest tightened. The vision-glasses weren’t hers to wear, not yet.

“Now put them away,” she said to herself firmly.

Ellen removed the vision-glasses. Her eyes readjusted to a flatter, less intense reality. She was sad the enhanced beauty was gone.

There was no noise except the sound of the ticking clock. She hurried to the table, placed the vision-glasses in the box, and set the box back in the center of the table.

Doing her best to stay calm and not let on what she had just done, she went into the office.

After sitting down in the visitor's chair, she looked at her watch. Her thoughts remained on the eyeglasses. *God, those vision-glasses are remarkable.* It was her dream to work on a project like this. Her eyes glanced over at the scrapbook. She wondered if any of the articles mentioned 'Project Vision'. She put her reading glasses on and searched through the scrapbook, but found no reference to it.

As Ellen placed the scrapbook back on Zane's desk, she heard footsteps in the hall so she quickly opened the folder with her notes in it. She turned to look as the door pushed open and in walked Cherie.

"Ellen?" Cherie asked as she stepped into the room. "Gosh, I'm so sorry you're still waiting here."

Ellen straightened and smiled.

"You look a little flush," Cherie said. "Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine my eyes are a little sore from reading," Ellen said closing the file folder. "I'm trying to get in as much studying as I can before the interview."

"There's a water cooler in Dr. Zane's conference room," Cherie said. "I can get you some water if you'd like."

"No thanks," Ellen replied.

"Dr. Zane called again," Cherie said. "There's been a terrible accident on the freeway and he's caught up in the traffic. He'll get here as soon as they reopen the freeway. He's hoping you'll wait."

"I'll wait," Ellen said without hesitation.

"Good," Cherie said. "I've got to get back to my meeting. If you need me, use Dr. Zane's phone and dial extension 230."

"Thank you," Ellen said reopening her file folder.

Cherie left, leaving the door partly open.

Ellen listened to Cherie's footsteps fade out. When she heard the elevator ping, she glanced at the wall clock then looked at the conference room door. You've got more time. Her body completely ignored the voice in her head telling her to stay put.

She sprang up from the chair and walked to the conference room door, her eyes homing in on the box. Ellen saw the water cooler out of the corner of her eye and felt her throat dry up.

Dr. Zane wouldn't mind if she was in the conference room getting a cup of water. Cherie had suggested it. She hurried in to get a cup of water. After filling a paper cup, she stepped toward the conference table and took a sip of water. The cold water was refreshing, triggering her alertness. Still, her eyes were drawn to the box on the table, its contents like rich chocolate, a craving she couldn't ignore. Slowly, she walked to the end of the table. Her eyes never left the object of her growing obsession.

Ellen put the cup on the table.

"I just want to take a look at that dial," she told herself. She reached for the box then sank down into the chair at the head of the table.

After removing the vision-glasses, Ellen held them with both hands and stared at the lenses. Her eyes shifted to the dial, and then to the numbers on each side of the zero setting. It looked like it rotated either way. Scientific curiosity pushed her on. With the tip of her index finger, she turned the mini dial clockwise from zero to one. It clicked into place. She took off her reading glasses and put them beside the paper cup.

Holding the vision-glasses in both hands, she slowly moved them toward her face. Ellen hesitated.

*Don't do it!* A voice in her head shouted. Was it the voice of her father? It was enough to make her hesitate

and think that what she was doing was wrong, but not enough to stop her.

Ellen placed the vision-glasses on her face.

Shock snapped through Ellen like a jolt from an electrical cord – there were people sitting around the table. Although the conference room looked the same: the cabinets, tables, and the flat-screen television were there, she was no longer alone. She counted seven people sitting at the table staring at the television. And, there was something on the television.

She waved her right hand in front of her eyes. She couldn't see it.

“My hand!” she whispered her voice caught up in fear and awe. Ellen ripped the vision-glasses off her face and held them up to view the lenses from a distance. She tipped them side-to-side. They were clear. Nothing was there. She was unable to see any reflected images in the lenses.

Ellen looked around the unoccupied conference table. Cautiously, she put the vision-glasses back on. The people returned. They mustn't have heard her. They were talking, taking notes and watching the television.

She was compelled to look straight ahead to watch.

On the right side of the table were four men she had never seen before. Ellen recognized two people on the left side of the table as students. She had worked with them on research assignments. Next to them sat Dr. Zane's colleague Dr. Stephen Patterson.

Ellen moved her left hand toward Dr. Patterson. She waved it around as she leaned forward trying to touch him. Her hand never entered her view and she couldn't feel his body when she put her hand where his shoulder clearly was.

“Dr. Patterson, can you hear me? It's Ellen Freeland.”

He turned toward her and said something, but she couldn't hear it. She took the vision-glasses off and looked for a way to turn the sound on. There was only the setting dial so she put the eyeglasses back on. Dr. Patterson turned away and began talking to a man on the other side of the conference table.

Ellen tried again to get his attention, "Dr. Patterson."

Seemingly not hearing her, he continued talking to the man.

"Dr. Patterson can you hear me?" She was practically yelling.

He didn't look toward her.

Feeling uneasy, but still curious, Ellen continued to watch the scene. She squinted, trying to focus on the image on the television, but was unable to decipher it. Her aim was to try and understand what was going on, but without being able to hear anyone or make out what was on the TV screen, she was lost. Even the notes in front of the people were unclear.

All of a sudden, in unison, the people at the table turned away from the television and looked directly at Ellen.

She froze her confusion sky-rocketing as she wondered what she had done to get their attention.

They kept looking at her. Was it because she was wearing the vision-glasses? She shifted uneasily in her chair.

In a desperate attempt to grasp the situation, she said again, "Dr. Patterson. It's Ellen Freeland."

Dr. Patterson reached for the remote control and turned off the television. He took charge of the conversation. Whenever he looked in her direction, Ellen focused her attention on his lips.

She moved the vision-glasses higher on the bridge of her nose, closer to her eyes, but that didn't help.

Ellen took them off. Swiftly, she looked again for a volume control or a small speaker. There was definitely no other buttons, only the setting dial. Ellen quickly put them back on. She didn't want to miss anything, but when she put them on, the meeting continued from the same spot.

"It paused when I removed them," she said surprised.

Dr. Patterson was pouring water into his glass. The glass was a quarter full. She removed the vision-glasses again and slowly counted to five. She put them back on and looked directly at the glass of water.

"The water level in the glass is the same. Incredible!"

Dr. Patterson looked in Ellen's direction, nodding as he spoke.

*He can hear me!*

He picked up the TV remote control and offered it to her. Ellen moved her hand to take it just as another hand moved into view and took hold of the remote.

"What?" Ellen pulled her hand back and held it against her stomach.

Quickly, both the hand and the remote moved out of view. The video on the TV changed and the hand put the remote back on the table.

Ellen pushed back in her chair and looked down taking a moment to assess the situation. She jumped out of the chair finally realizing what was happening. The person leading the meeting was sitting in the exact chair she was sitting in. She got chills, feeling like she passed through a ghost. She could only see the back of the person sitting in the chair. It was definitely a woman. Ellen leaned in to get a closer look but the woman stood. Ellen shifted back and when the woman turned Ellen was face to face with her. She was face-to-face with herself.

"Oh my God!" Ellen shrieked as she covered her mouth with her hands. "What the hell is going on?" Ellen shook in disbelief. "It's impossible!"



Ellen was both the audience and the presenter. In the vision, the other ‘her’ was dressed differently. She wore a black pant-suit which suggested it was fall or winter. Her sandy-blond hair was pulled back. Her face was cheerful. Her gestures moved confidently in a controlled, pleasant manner. The men at the table gazed in attentiveness at her. It looked like this ‘other’ she was enjoying leading the meeting.

It was too much for Ellen to comprehend. She frantically pulled the vision-glasses from her face. The vision instantly disappeared. Ellen placed a hand against her chest and felt her heart pounding. She put the vision-glasses back in the box and pushed it to the center of the table. She hurried out of the room, and went directly into Zane’s office. Sat down, picked up her folder that lay on the desk, and pretended to look at it.

Over and over again, she played the boardroom scene in her head like a video stuck in an endless loop.

“Was it the future?” Ellen questioned loudly. The emptiness held her question in mystery.

She knew her curiosity was powerful. She knew it was too much on a good day – but today it led her to a discovery she couldn’t believe – and that was because she didn’t understand it.

It wasn’t a vision of her past because this was the first time she’d ever been at this location. It certainly wasn’t the present – nothing matched. She was alone here. It had to be her future. It was the only logical hypothesis.

The implications of this parallel reality were mid-blowing. Her mind raced to the final conclusion like a horse crossing the finishing line. Zane had created this technology – a technology that was able to show the future.

If what she saw was ‘real’ then it meant Ellen would definitely be working with Dr. Zane. She shook with

excitement thinking it must mean that she would get the job. She forced her body to stop shaking and sat still.

Or was she misunderstanding what she saw?

Ellen looked over at the clock on the wall. Her hand stiffened as she looked down at the eyeglass sleeve she was squeezing in her hand. It was empty.

“Oh God, my reading glasses are on the table!” Leaving them in the conference room would implicate her. She placed the folder on the chair then walked quickly back into the conference room.

She went to the end of the table, grabbed her reading glasses and put them into the sleeve. Her eyes flashed to the Project Vision box.

“Don’t do it,” she said sternly. Ellen hesitated long enough to consider again that if the vision-glasses foretold the future, no matter what happened now, she would still get the job. Ellen knew what she was doing was wrong, but when did morality fit into science?

“One more setting,” she said like a drug addict at the steps of a crack house.

Ellen sat down, put her eyeglass sleeve on the table then grabbed the wooden box. She removed the vision-glasses and turned the dial to the next setting – which was five, not two, three or four. She pushed back in the chair and tightly gripped the armrests, bracing herself.

What she saw was confusing and chaotic: people, faces, cars, houses, buildings, and scenery - everything rapidly popping in and out of view. Scenes moved fast forward then backwards. Images flashed too rapidly for her to comprehend. Ellen tried to focus her eyes on any of the moving images, but couldn’t. Her mind strained to hold onto something, anything, but she was getting frustrated. This seemed to make the images speed up. She realized she was letting her emotions get involved. She knew she had to calm her mind.

Ellen wanted to slow the flashing images. As she concentrated, faces and scenes flashed in and out a little slower, but still darted too fast for her to decipher. When a scene slowed, she watched, trying to keep her mind still like a meadow without a breeze.

*That's Tillie.* Her black-and-white Border collie was running around the backyard. The image flickered out and her focus moved again.

*I know some of these people,* she thought.

She started to recognize some of the faces as they slowed enough for her to clearly see them.

“Oh my God! That’s Mrs. Beamer, my grade-six teacher. I’m at my desk holding my hand up.” Ellen could almost smell the chalk dust as Mrs. Beamer wiped the blackboard. Before she figured out what the image meant, it was gone.

The images began moving faster again. She straightened her back and inhaled deeply then exhaled slowly trying again to slow the flashing images.

“Mom,” Ellen whispered in confusion. She watched her mom reading a magazine with Dr. Zane’s picture on the cover. She blinked and it was gone. “Damn it!”

Were these random images of her life or was there some meaning or pattern to them? She stopped her thinking.

“Dad,” she cried out. A vision of her father entering their house appeared.

Ellen focused and watched the scene unfold. She watched her four-year old self running through the living room to greet her dad. He dropped his suitcase to pick her up. She hugged and kissed him. He kissed her on the cheek.

His sudden death from a heart attack four years before had left a void in the family and in her heart. This vision

brought him to life again. She gently touched her cheek where he had kissed her.

*Dad, I miss you.* Ellen was overwhelmed by his image. The scene disappeared.

She slapped her hands on top of the table and slowly shook her head.

“What’s going on?” Ellen said loudly. “Why is this all about me?”

All the images of people and places were connected to her. She was watching a scrambled history of her entire life shown from her point of view. These memories were from her past and they were just as fleeting in the vision-glasses as they were to her in reality. She felt her shoulders slump exhaustedly, especially after seeing her dad.

Ellen’s ability to concentrate was gone, but the random images were still flashing wildly. She pulled the vision-glasses from her face and flung them onto the table.

She was trembling. Her body was covered in goose bumps. Ellen tried to clear her mind by blinking, but she couldn’t stop the confusion. She closed her eyes tightly trying to seal the images out. She shivered in fear, panicking that it might not stop.

“Stop flashing,” Ellen shouted.

*Please stop,* Ellen thought as she rubbed her eyes trying desperately to halt the pulsating light.

An overwhelming feeling of dizziness struck her. Acidic liquids from her stomach rose into her throat like lava. Perspiration beads covered her forehead. Her throat was tightening. It was hard for her to swallow. She needed water and moved her hand across the table in search of the Dixie cup she’d filled earlier.

She heard a noise, stopped, and grabbed hold of the table edge with both hands. Was someone in the room?

She heard a voice. It was a man’s voice. And, he sounded concerned.



## **About the Author**

Gordon Stallard is the author of Unseen Realities. He graduated from Business and Information Technology at St. Clair College, Windsor, Ontario Canada. Gordon pursued his interest in writing by taking a creative writing course in 2010 where he met instructor, Vanessa Shields. She has continued to mentor him. After working in the IT field for twenty-two years as a Systems Manager, Gordon retired and has since pursued full-time writing.

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