

# Auraman the Beginning





# Auraman the Beginning

---



B.E. STARLIGHT

Copyright © 2017 by B.E. Starlight.

Library of Congress Control Number:	2017915379
ISBN:	Hardcover
	978-1-5434-5693-6
	Softcover
	978-1-5434-5692-9
	eBook
	978-1-5434-5691-2

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Any people depicted in stock imagery provided by Thinkstock are models, and such images are being used for illustrative purposes only.

Certain stock imagery © Thinkstock.

Print information available on the last page.

Rev. date: 03/16/2018

**To order additional copies of this book, contact:**

Xlibris

1-888-795-4274

[www.Xlibris.com](http://www.Xlibris.com)

[Orders@Xlibris.com](mailto:Orders@Xlibris.com)

768360

# CONTENTS

Chapter One .....	1
Chapter Two .....	14
Chapter Three.....	17
Chapter Four.....	21
Chapter Five.....	29
Chapter Six .....	33
Chapter Seven .....	39
Chapter Eight.....	43
Chapter Nine .....	48
Chapter Ten .....	59
Chapter Eleven.....	64
Chapter Twelve .....	67
Chapter Thirteen .....	78
Chapter Fourteen .....	84
Chapter Fifteen .....	92
Chapter Sixteen.....	100
Chapter Seventeen.....	105
Chapter Eighteen .....	127
Chapter Nineteen.....	143
Chapter Twenty.....	151
Chapter Twenty-One.....	167
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	187
Chapter Twenty-Three .....	207
Chapter Twenty-Four.....	221
Chapter Twenty-Five .....	245



# Chapter One

Friday, May 13, 1994

Glenda was waiting at Dr. Bearlight's Park Avenue office, pondering the likely outcome of the fertility treatments she had undergone in the last few months. It was somewhat dark and murky in the otherwise clean and neatly organized office; soft old-school music was playing in the background ("Mercy Mercy Me" by Milira Jones), and she couldn't help but notice the large framed photo of the triple spiral fertility symbol hanging prominently by Dr. Bearlight's door.

The doctor was known for his remarkable success rate in treating infertility, and Glenda's friend Greg has recommended his services. "He's eccentric yet brilliant," Greg said. "His notoriety speaks for itself, but there is something odd about him."

"What do you mean *odd*?" she inquired.

"Odd as in strange, otherworldly."

"Otherworldly?"

"Well, many question his phenomenal success rate with virtually numerous helpless cases. There seems to be more than just scientific methodology applied in his treatments. Some of his clients swear they have seen his hands glow when handling his patients."

"Greg, stop. You're being a comedian," she scolded him. "You're not suggesting I'd see a quack, are you? You know how long Osiris and I have been trying to get pregnant."

"Glenda," Greg quipped, "of course not. I wouldn't recommend him if I wasn't certain he could help. Even Aurora has gotten pregnant." That was all Glenda needed to hear. Aurora, Greg's wife, was trying to conceive for years and has been seeing every doctor and fertility expert in town but to no avail. It was this bit of news that persuaded Glenda to book an appointment with Dr. Bearlight and to go through a series of fertility treatments.

Have they borne fruit? Possibly. Her self-testing pregnancy kit suggested she was pregnant; thus, she was anxiously looking forward to seeing him. Was Dr. Bearlight successful? She did not observe any glowing hands or any other "unusual properties" associated with the doctor, not that it mattered anyway.

But it was Friday the thirteen<sup>th</sup>, a day Glenda considered lucky. Thus, she was hopeful and buoyant, visualizing herself holding an adorable infant in her hands in no time.

Glenda recalled her first visit to his office. Dr. Bearlight was sitting behind his desk, his look stern and somewhat sad, yet he exuded warmth and calmness. Admittedly, Dr. Bearlight was one of the handsomest men Glenda has ever laid eyes on—square jaws, piercing blue eyes, straight jet-black hair, and skin tone of a sixteen-year-old adolescent. *For crying out loud, she said to herself when she first entered his office, he looks more like a model, not a doctor.*

"Are you sure he's in his sixties? He doesn't look a day older than thirty-five," she asked Greg.

"He's an alchemist," Greg replied jokingly. "He is rumored to have found the philosopher's stone and the secret to immortality."

"Yeah, right, and I am Mary Poppins," Glenda replied sarcastically.

"Keep an open mind, Glenda. The man is remarkably gifted." Greg continued. "He's a spiritualist as much as a phenomenal and brilliant scientist. I am confident he'll be able to help you and Osiris."

"Glenda Rasmussen Jones?" The assistant called her name, interrupting her thoughts. "Please come with me."

"Hello, Glenda, how are you?" Dr. Bearlight greeted her as she walked into his office.

"I am fine, thank you, Doctor," she responded.

"Please, please sit down. Would you like some water? Juice perhaps?"

It's been nearly a month since her last visit to Dr. Bearlight's clinic. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something was off. Was it the doctor? He appeared to be extraordinarily radiant and unusually energetic. Or was it the room itself? The doctor's room appeared as if it were immersed in a thin blue mist or light. It was as though she could touch the substanceless haze, which had a unique sweet odor to it.

"Did you just cast a spell, Doctor?" Glenda asked humorously.

"Excuse me?" Dr. Bearlight muttered alarmingly. "A spell? What do you mean?"

"It was just a joke, Doctor. Relax."

"Oh, that. Well, Glenda, some of my clients do think I am a shaman. I find it quite amusing. Well, let's get straight to it, dear," he said, his tone of voice changing abruptly. "Please sit down. I am afraid the news is quite grim."

"Grim?" she asked while still standing.

"Yes. Regrettably, the treatment I have prescribed failed. You are not pregnant. The pregnancy test result you informed me about earlier was in error. You are not with child."

Glenda was gasping for air as she heard Dr. Bearlight's words; they hit her eardrums with the ferocity of a thunderstorm and reverberated like an echo in each cell of her body. She began breathing profusely and rapidly, trembling and shaking uncontrollably. Her head was pounding, and her eyes began to tear up as she comprehended the devastating news. She fumbled and attempted to talk but just couldn't form a legible, clear sentence as she mumbled incoherently, "But . . . didn't . . . you . . ." Glenda sank into the chair, which slid away underneath her; she hit her head slightly at the edge of the chair and lost her consciousness.

"Glenda, Glenda, wake up. Wake up," Dr. Bearlight whispered softly. The doctor seemed to be at a loss but sprang into action immediately. He knelt over and stretched his hands forward over Glenda's face, and as he was laying his hands inches above her, he gazed fiercely at the space between them, focusing intensely at the center. Bright white light appeared to be emanating from his hands and filling the air in between; the light grew in magnitude, and radiance in a form of an expanding

ball—a glowing, shiny luminosity—hovered and encompassed Glenda's face. The ball of light grew brighter and brighter and seemed to have enveloped her body entirely.

She finally opened her eyes and smiled at Dr. Bearlight, asking, "What happened?"

"You passed out," he said, smiling back at her.

Shaken and still disoriented, Glenda couldn't help but notice the light cloaking her body and mumbled softly, "What have you done, Doctor? Where is this light coming from?"

"Calm down, Glenda, relax. Everything will be all right. You needn't worry." The doctor helped her stand on her feet, and she then slowly paced toward the mirror hanging on the left wall. It was a heavyset mirror that reminded her of the Evil Queen's mirror in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Her body was still shimmering with a gleaming yellowish light, which appeared to be receding. The entire room, as a matter of fact, was flushed with a warm, intense light reminiscent of an aura emanating from angels' halos.

*Am I hallucinating?* she pondered. *What is all this madness?* It must have been those idiotic comments that Greg made about the doctor that somehow affected her subconsciously, and she was now seeing things, or she may have been subjected to some unknown hypnotic effect that she couldn't yet explain.

She could see the doctor in the far corner of the mirror. He appeared to be on fire but unhurt by it. She looked back at him, but he seemed completely normal. She gazed back at the mirror, and there it was again—Dr. Bearlight engulfed in flames.

"Can you explain this, Doctor?" she asked him, pointing at his image in the mirror. "What are you? Who are you?"

Dr. Bearlight looked at Glenda and smiled. "Who or what do you think I am?"

"Frankly, Doctor, I am not sure. There are so many rumors about you and your glowing hands, your youthful looks, and your highly unusual fertility treatment success rate. People wonder if you are some sort of shaman. Some refer to you as Dr. Warlock, which frankly, I think, is absolute hogwash." Glenda paused for a moment, staring at

Dr. Bearlight inquisitively and continued. “How do you explain what I have just seen, though? Your body was engulfed in flames when I looked in the mirror, yet when I glanced back at you, you appeared absolutely normal, and there remains the bright light wrapped around my body when I woke up.”

She stopped briefly to catch her breath and sighed softly. “And more importantly,” she grumbled, “I am still quite baffled by the failure of the fertility treatment I had undertaken under your guidance and supervision.” She glanced toward the mirror, looking for his reflection. “All who know you claim that failure is a virtual impossibility. So no, Doctor, I don’t know what to make of you.”

Glenda wasn’t about to beat around the bush. If there was any human quality she valued and appreciated most, it was brutal honesty and integrity. “Tell it like it is” was her motto. Thus, she chose her words carefully in a manner that reflected intelligence, common sense, and rational thinking, not insult or disrespect.

She worked at the research center for applied science and technology in the city, specializing in micro-nanoengineering. Osiris, her husband, worked at the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center on the Upper West Side, focusing on cultivating scientific methods to substantiate paranormal claims; they both considered themselves agnostics and practiced what they termed “controlled spirituality,” consisting in attending Osiris’s parapsychology lectures, meditating, stretching at the yoga center on Thirty-Four<sup>th</sup> and Lex, celebrating the Judeo-Christian holidays, and participating as contributing members at the Center for Scientific Exploration of Life in Space (CSELS).

They met at one of Osiris’s lectures in 1986 at NYU. Osiris was reviewing the current findings in Kirlian photography, which Glenda thought was absolute nonsense. *He’s deluded*, she said to herself. *This is a total farce. Isn’t this young black man aware that scientific experiments published in 1976 involving Kirlian photography of living tissue (human fingertips) showed that most of the variations in corona discharge streamer length, density, curvature, and color can be accounted for by the moisture content on the surface of and within the living tissue? Hasn’t he heard*

of Konstantin Korotkov, who developed a technique similar to Kirlian photography called “gas discharge visualization”?

She was about to teach this alleged scientist a thing or two about the scientific method. Glenda approached Osiris at the exit of the lecture hall as he was walking away toward the library. “Professor Jones,” she called. “Professor Jones.”

“Yes!” he exclaimed as he turned toward her.

“Hi, Professor Jones, how are you? My name is Glenda,” she said and stretched her right hand forward. They shook hands. It felt as if she were hit by an electric jolt as soon as their hands touched; a tingling sensation rumbled up and down her spine, rebounding throughout her entire body. Glenda gazed at Osiris’s emerald eyes, and all thoughts of discourse have simply melted away.

“I have never seen a black man with emerald eyes,” she quipped. “Excuse my staring.”

Osiris smiled at her, exposing the whitest set of teeth she has ever seen. “Well, I am a product of mixed marriage. My mother is from Sweden, and my father is from Kenya.”

“Wow,” she said. “Fascinating.”

“I must say you remind me of someone,” Osiris said.

“Who?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Barbie.”

“Yes.” Glenda laughed. “I get that a lot,” she said, tossing her long blond hair and striking a Barbie pose. “That is indeed a weird coincidence.” She continued. “My parents are from Denmark. They have moved to the States in the early ’50s.”

“How unexpected,” he uttered. “Would you like to get a cup of coffee, Glenda? I’m heading toward the library to grab a paper. Just wait here for a second. I’ll be right back.”

Glenda’s heart was racing. She felt attracted to this young black man like a moth to a flame, but it was his demeanor and sense of calm and peace that captivated her even more so than his looks; their shared Scandinavian origins was intriguing, yet she pondered about his name. *Osiris, why Osiris? Wasn’t Osiris the Egyptian god of the afterlife, underworld, and the dead? He should have been named Thor, shouldn’t he?*

Osiris walked out of the library and onto the hallway and waved at her. She proceeded toward him, contemplating whether to initiate a discussion about Kirlian photography, as she originally intended, or maybe focus on light, personal conversation. She decided the latter. “So why parapsychology, Professor Jones?”

“Call me Osiris.” He smiled, grabbing her hand as they walked down the stairs toward the cafeteria. They sat and talked for hours about their shared passion for science since early childhood; they were both of similar age (twenty-seven), grew up in a semiobservant Lutheran Christian families, and went on exploring spirituality, yoga, and meditation. Both appeared to have spent considerable time in India; Osiris conducted scientific experimentation in the outskirts of New Delhi, testing yogis who allegedly exhibit supernatural powers, and Glenda stayed in an ashram for two months and traveled throughout India.

The conversation continued uninterrupted as they further explored their mutual passion for R&B and jazz, the arts, sci-fi movies, and off-Broadway theater. Glenda’s heart was beating ever faster; it’s been some time since she engaged in such a deep, personal conversation with a man. She wasn’t much for relationships and focused her attention on her career yet left the door slightly open for the possibility of finding love. *Is this it?* she mentally asked herself. *C’mon, don’t be stupid. You just met the man. Snap out of it. You’re behaving like a smitten sixteen-year-old girl.* Sure enough, a year later, Osiris and Glenda tied the knot to the tune of “Just the Way You Are” by Barry White.

Glenda looked at Dr. Bearlight intensively, awaiting his response as her mind momentarily wandered around the past events that led her to him.

“It’s funny,” he said as he asked her to sit down, “that the term ‘warlock’ or ‘shaman’ comes to mind when you encounter phenomena out of the ordinary. There is, however, a possible explanation to what you have witnessed, though I am not quite sure I can explain the mechanism of how it works, not yet anyway.” He sighed. “If you recall, your husband spent a few years in India conducting scientific research related to yogis with alleged supernatural powers. I was one

of those yogis. I was in my early forties, consumed by an unrelenting passion to explore and expand my understanding of human spirituality, connect with my innermost essence, and discover unexplored human potentialities. My search for enlightenment has brought me closer to grasping the nature of our human uniqueness and our ability to literally transform reality with the power of our consciousness alone, thereby becoming godlike (i.e., active participants in molding and shaping creation in a fashion reminiscent of a deity)."

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "You and Osiris met before my treatment? He never mentioned it."

"That is because I asked him not to. I thought you might forgo the fertility treatment because of misconceived impressions about me. I felt that the circumstances in which your husband and I met will totally dissuade you from considering my services."

"What circumstances?" she asked alarmingly.

"I saved your husband's life."

"You did?" She looked at him with disbelief. "How?"

"Osiris was observing one of the fakirs attempting to charm a cobra with a pungi [a musical instrument]. The snake was startled suddenly and was rapidly crawling toward your husband as the cobra was 'standing' at the edge of its tail, ready to attack. Instinctively, I stretched my hands toward the cobra as if I was about to grab it. Instead, a flash of bright light zoomed right out of my hands and engulfed my entire body, just as you observed in the mirror. The light detached itself completely from me and proceeded toward the reptile, creating a barrier between it and Osiris, and right in front of our eyes and as we gazed in disbelief and astonishment, the light instantaneously solidified and turned into a Madagascan mongoose, shimmering and glowing with the intensity of a miniaturized sun. The mongoose sank his sharp teeth onto the back of the head of the cobra, which melted away immediately. The mongoose was fading away too as the intensity of its radiating light diminished in scope and magnitude. It took a few more seconds, and the reptile remains, and the mongoose vanished into thin air."

The doctor paused briefly and then continued. "It was your husband, myself, and the snake charmer who witnessed the event. The

fakir stood up, all shaking and trembling in fear, bowing to me, and requesting permission to depart. They were both as startled as I was since this instinctive demonstration of wonderment was indeed mind blowing, to say the least. Your husband was researching my aura's ability to detach itself from my body, but never in our wildest dreams did we conceive that this luminescent energy manifestation surrounding our bodies might have a life of its own, solidifying itself in the physical plane in accordance with our thoughts.”

Glenda felt a sudden urge to walk away and leave. This was far too much for her scientific mind to grasp. If the doctor was not a lunatic, then the term “lunacy” must be redefined—and fast; she was angry at Osiris and Greg for urging her to consider this crock’s services. *What came over these two?* She was getting angrier by the minute, feeling as though she was misled and deceived by her husband and her best friend. *For what purpose, damn it?*

Yet there remained the doctor’s reputation as a top-notch fertility expert. She did her due diligence. Dr. Bearlight was indeed an expert in his field. But his treatment didn’t work, not on her anyway. *Why?* “Doctor, you must excuse me. I don’t want to be rude, but this is all far too difficult for me to comprehend. It sounds so far fetched as though the all episode was taken from a sci-fi movie. What exactly are you saying?” She persisted. “Are you Master Yoda from a galaxy far, far away, manipulating the Force?” She giggled.

“No, Glenda, not the Force, and there is certainly no need to travel to a galaxy far, far away to perform these feats of wonder. I’ll prove it to you,” he said. And before she was able to utter another word, Dr. Bearlight assumed the star position, his neck tilted slightly backward and his palms positioned upward. A powerful flash of bright light sprang right out of his head and leaped across from his body, encircling Glenda, who appeared to be panicking.

“Behold,” he said in a commanding voice. The light became denser, appearing ethereal at first, and then in a matter of seconds, it solidified and morphed into a gigantic butterfly. The insect batted its wings to reveal the most dazzling plethora of colors enmeshed in dustlike luminescence; the butterfly flew over Glenda and landed onto the

doctor's desk, where it desolidified and transformed once again into a living fairy, an actual tiny winged, humanoid-type creature with shimmering golden hair and pointed elfin ears. The imp batted her translucent wings and flew right toward Glenda and landed on her left shoulder, appearing to whisper in her ear.

Glenda was semifloating in midair as the teeny being dissolved into pure bright light and morphed yet again into an athletic and youthful-looking man dressed in a white tunic, holding a bow and a golden lyre. She seemed to have recognized him as he approached closer to her, smiling, while she was still hovering several inches above ground. *It's Apollo, the Greek god of light*, she said to herself as she landed softly onto the ground and as the god stretched his hands forward to greet her.

Apollo abruptly dissolved, however, into a shapeless sparkling light that kept morphing into a cacophony of living creatures and inanimate objects that dazzled Glenda's faculties while imbuing her with a sense of calm and peace, rather than panic and shock that immobilized her when the doctor cast his aura into the room.

The episode lasted about five minutes, in which Glenda felt as if she were transported to another realm of reality, experiencing otherworldly phenomena. Dr. Bearlight looked at Glenda throughout the entire event; his serene gaze assured her she was safe and that no harm would come to her. The doctor's aura had a life of its own, though separated entirely from his body; it appeared to be connected to him consciously, transfiguring and materializing itself in conformity with the images generated in his mind. The light finally assumed its original ethereal state and surrounded the doctor as it gradually reabsorbed itself into his body.

Glenda approached Dr. Bearlight, semibreathless, shaken, and befuddled beyond reproach. Her scientific mind was crashed asunder; this was, after all, her first ever alleged supernatural experience, and she wasn't yet sure about what she has just witnessed. Attempting not to sound unnerved or rattled by the doctor's demonstration, she composed herself and looked at Dr. Bearlight somewhat bewildered, carefully considering what to say next. "I am not quite certain what it is I have just witnessed, Doctor. Whatever you just demonstrated might have

a rational explanation. You appear to be shaping and molding reality somehow, albeit shortly, utilizing your aura in a manner I have yet to understand. Most other people will call that magic, but you know what I think about magic. It is all superstition and outright balderdash. There is no such thing as magic.”

“You are quite right,” the doctor acknowledged. “There is no such thing as magic, only unexplained phenomena that are bound to be analyzed and demystified sooner or later. Call it ‘matter manipulation.’” He continued. “But instead of wands or spells to direct our conscious thoughts, we use our energy field, our aura, by magnifying it immensely and detaching it from our bodies to solidify and alter reality.”

“Still, Doctor, you must admit that what I have just witnessed can easily be misconstrued as magic, and the only way to verify the nature of the ability you just demonstrated is to subject yourself to scientific scrutiny and rigorous investigative experimentation. And besides, Doctor, what does all this has to do with the failed fertility treatment?” She stared at him, looking sad and somber.

“We’ll get to that in a second, Glenda. Indeed, your husband and I have been working together for years, attempting to understand my abilities. We have kept our joint research pretty much to ourselves to prevent a media circus and safeguard a semblance of normalcy in my life. You are now an active participant in this secretive research as well, and discreetness is of utmost importance. Now let’s try to make some sense of the so-called magic you have just witnessed. Do you recall the story of the golem?”

“Yes, of course,” she replied. “Osiris has given a few lectures about Jewish mysticism in NYU.”

“That’s right. According to Jewish mystical lore, a golem is an artificial creature created by magic, often to serve its creator. It is made from soil and brought to life by reciting a combination of letters from the Hebrew alphabet, evoking the name of God, and using the book of creation (*Sefer Yetzira*). The most well-known story of the golem is connected to Rabbi Judah Loew, also known as the Maharal of Prague. It was said that he created a golem out of clay to protect the Jewish community from blood libel and to help in doing physical labor

since golems are very strong. The creature ultimately appeared to have threatened innocent lives, so Rabbi Loew removed the divine name, rendering the golem lifeless.

"Other stories in the Jewish Talmud tell of two anonymous sages who were able to create a one-third-sized calf for Shabbat meal out of nothing. Leave it to the ancient Egyptians, however, to set the foundation to all things magical, including converting nonliving things and images to become living and making them act per the magician's wishes."

The doctor paused for a second, catching his breath, and then continued. "What you have just observed is no different from the feats performed by Egyptian sorcerers and Jewish rabbis, yet your husband and I are quite convinced that the ability to transfigure our aura and mold it into a solid matter can be subjected to stringent scientific investigation. Thus far, we have concluded that consciousness (i.e., thought) in combination with electrical impulses in our bodies can influence existing matter and reshape reality.

"My own aura appears to have been transformed into a symbiotic energy field composed of matter and nonmatter, pulsating jointly, phasing in and out of existence while totally subjugated to my thoughts. I'm able to immensely intensify the electric impulses in my body to such a degree that my aura can solidify outwardly into a formed substance for a limited time. The process, however, can be perfected by increasing the energy level and thereby intensifying the solidification process, thus injecting life into my thought form and giving it permanency."

Glenda couldn't help but utter, "Wow. This is indeed an unusual reconceptualization of the term 'magic.'" She continued. "The question is, can the process be repeated and verified by other scientists?"

"Currently, I am the only man alive who is able to manifest such phenomena. Soon there are going to be two others."

"Who?"

"You and your husband. We are going to create a living child, a child of light born from your combined auras."

Glenda was getting a severe migraine; the last two hours at the doctor's office have been mind boggling, to say the least. She pinched

herself lightly to ensure she was awake and in control of her faculties. She was.

“I have mentioned the possibility to Osiris briefly, but we haven’t discussed it thoroughly.” Dr. Bearlight continued. “My fertility treatments never fail. You are the first unsuccessful case ever. Maybe it’s an omen, a sign that we should consider a different approach. Rest assured, Glenda, we are going to bring forth life.” He smiled.

Dazed and somewhat incoherent because of this life-altering reality onslaught she has just endured, Glenda couldn’t help but smile back at the doctor, asking him in a somewhat sarcastic tone, “And how do you suggest we do that?”

“By training you, of course,” he responded. “You’ll become adept at manipulating your auras in no time. You did not expect any of it.” He continued as he was walking her toward the door. “The entire episode must look as though it was taken right out from *The Twilight Zone*, but I assure you it was not.” He nodded. “I am confident that, once you discuss it with Osiris, you will find his input in the matter inspiring.”

He then pulled the office door wide open and yelled as she was exiting, “See you in two days!” He slammed the door behind him.

## Chapter Two

Glenda was walking down Park Avenue, feeling tired and exhausted, her mind still racing and attempting to digest the events she just experienced. “Taxi, taxi.” She impatiently hailed for a cab as she watched a slew of them passing her by.

“Where to?” the cabdriver who finally stopped asked her.

“West Eightie<sup>th</sup> Street,” she replied.

*You've got to be kidding me,* she said to herself as she sat down. One of her favorite songs was playing, “Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft” by the Carpenters.

“How quaint,” she mumbled incoherently as she listened to the words: “In your mind, you have capacities, you know, to telepath messages through the vast unknown . . . You've been observing our earth, and we'd like to make a contact with you. We are your friends. Calling occupants of interplanetary craft.”

Glenda played and replayed the fantastic events that have unfolded in Dr. Bearlight's office. It was much easier to entertain the possibility that he may have been an alien from that “interplanetary craft” the Carpenters sang about, rather than a mere human being with such unbelievable powers. How else could it be explained away? Was Dr. Bearlight a charlatan? Did he somehow manage to drug her? No, it cannot be. She discounted that possibility outright; she wasn't drugged, and he, mind you, was about to administer an encore of his abilities in two days. *But what a preposterous idea,* she pondered. *Creating a child from our combined solidified auras, what utter nonsense.*

She was getting sleepy by the minute and dozed off, breathing heavily. "Miss, miss," the cabdriver called, gently waking her up. "We're here."

"Oh, sorry, sir. I am worn out, had a long day." She smiled at the driver. "Thank you. Be safe," she said as she stepped out of the car and walked inside her building lobby, patiently waiting by the elevator.

"Come on, come on," some delivery boy who stood next to her uttered angrily.

The elevator door finally opened, and they both walked in. "Everything all right, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks for asking. Just tired, that's all." She got off at the thirteen<sup>th</sup> floor and stormed into their apartment. "Ozi, are you home?" she shouted.

"Yes, honey. I'm right here in the kitchen."

"You knew about it, didn't you?" she snapped at him. "How could you trap me like that?"

"Trap you?" he asked, smiling.

"I don't find it amusing at all." She raised her voice slightly. "You could have warned me."

"Warn you about what exactly? Flying fairies and unicorns?" They both burst out laughing.

"No, seriously." Glenda continued after catching her breath. "You could have at least hinted at the possibility that something peculiar was about to happen."

"Glenny, dear, we both know how you get when we discuss paranormal research. You want documented proof, cold, hard physical evidence. Well, darling, you got your fill of it today. I couldn't very well give you any hints, but the hints were there already—glowing hands, alchemist. You've heard all the gossip and innuendos about Dr. Bearlight, which nobody takes seriously and all discount as one big joke. Look, I can't out the guy. The last thing we need is the media all over him—well, not until we complete our research anyway."

"But what about saving your life? Don't you think you should have told me at least that?" she quizzed.

"Maybe, but since the circumstances of that event were so stunning and mind blowing, I knew you would not believe a word of it. You had to see it for yourself firsthand," he said, pulling her toward him and embracing her warmly.

"I know, I know. You had quite a jolt." He looked at her intensely. "I love you," he whispered as their lips locked.

"Do you think it will work?" she asked, overcome with emotion and her eyes tearing up. "The whole idea sounds so preposterous. I am mad at myself for even considering this . . . whatever it is. We must be so desperate for a child we are willing to hang on to imaginary straws."

"You know, Glenny, as mind numbing as it seems, I think it will work. I believe it will," he said as they remained embraced. "We have witnessed incontrovertible proof that light solidification exists, and though we are not yet able to understand how it actually works, we cannot deny what we have experienced. We are being offered an opportunity to embark on a new path of creating life in an unimaginable way. Dr. Bearlight had to stun and overwhelm our senses to create a new mind-set, which would quell our doubts and allow for subconscious acceptance of such a possibility. We could have chosen adoption, but you must admit that the prospect of conceiving our own child in such an incomprehensible manner and participating in such a miraculous event is quite an appealing thought for researchers such as ourselves, who have been trying to unravel the secrets of the universe our entire lives."

"You're right," she said softly, hugging him. "You're right."

Osiris swept her off her feet and carried her to the bedroom. "My sweet Glenda," he muttered softly as he laid her gently on the bed, "we're having a baby."

## Chapter Three

Sunday, May 15, 1994

Dr. Bearlight exited the elevator and paced toward Osiris and Glenda's apartment; he knocked softly on the door and waited for a moment or two. "Hi, Doctor. How are you?" Glenda asked as she opened the door and let him in.

"I'm fine, Glenda, thank you," he answered cordially.

"Hello, Doctor!" Osiris exclaimed from the other side of the living room. "Please sit down. Anything to drink?"

"Yes, please. Long island ice tea will be fine," he said.

They sat down in the living room chatting about this week's news, particularly the latest Multiracial elections in South Africa, catapulting Nelson Mandella into the presidency of the former pariah state, and mentioning the man who shot another man on the no. 4 train at Grand Central Station. "That was scary," Glenda interrupted. "I take the no. 4 almost daily. Can you imagine?"

Dr. Bearlight's mind, however, was elsewhere; he couldn't help but notice their television set as static was flickering across the screen, and a soft hissing sound was echoing throughout the room. "Something must have happened to the cable box," he muttered. "How odd."

"Why is it odd?" Glenda inquired.

"Because the screen static and the hissing sound are exactly what we need for your training. Now observe," he replied. There was no respite with Dr. Bearlight, always direct and straight to the point. There wasn't

a moment to lose with unnecessary pleasantries. The doctor was staring intently at the TV screen and breathing slowly.

"Here it comes," Glenda said to Osiris, anticipating the doctor's aura to appear and detach itself from his body, but alas, instead, it seemed as though the doctor's body was phasing in and out of existence. One minute, he was there sitting on the sofa; and in the next, he simply disappeared.

For the next three minutes, the doctor was phasing in and out repeatedly, until he finally transformed into a ball of TV static. The ball was floating in the middle of the living room for a few seconds; it then shrank slightly and suddenly swooped right into the TV set. The TV screen was ablaze. The entire set was in flux, appearing and disappearing in an ever-increasing speed.

Glenda began to shake, fearing the screen was about to explode. Osiris held her tightly in his arms and said, "Don't worry, he knows what he's doing."

The television set finally solidified, and the ball of static pounced right out of it; it hovered the living room sofa and began to twist and turn, contorting and buckling, until it finally coalesced into a full-figured human form. Dr. Bearlight was back sitting on the sofa, sipping his Long Island ice tea as though nothing has happened. Osiris looked at the doctor, gazing at him with his piercing emerald eyes, and asked, "Do you expect us to do what you have just done?"

"Essentially yes," he replied. "But not right away. What you have just witnessed is a battery-charging process. This is how I magnify the intensity of my aura, by fusing it with power sources such as a television set and imbuing it with electricity-type energy on a quantum level.

"When I first discovered my ability in India, I'd sit at the riverbank and gaze at the sunlight reflected off the water. The sun is the ultimate power source, and fusing your thoughts with the sun's light is similar to what I have just demonstrated with the TV static. Once you reach a point of 'clarity of thought' while focusing on the sun's light or the television's electricity as manifested by the crackling, hissing noises, you become one with the energy source, thus magnifying or charging your aura's potency by a thousandfold and possibly more." He went on. "At

my current level of training, I can manipulate my aura to suspend reality as you perceive it, transforming and reshaping it as you just observed.”

“But we are not as adept as you are,” Glenda interrupted. “It will take us years of training to become proficient in such a focused meditative practice.”

“That is true,” he replied. “But you have me.” He smiled. “And I can transfer the essence of my years of practice to you, thereby saving us precious time.”

He then got up off the sofa and assumed the star position Glenda was acquainted with from his previous demonstration at his office. This time, however, a flash of light did not spring out from the top of his head. He simply transformed into a ball of white light (just as he did earlier when he morphed into a ball of static) that filled the entire room with a magnificent radiant glow that shot right out their living room terrace.

Dr. Bearlight’s luminescent aura enveloped Glenda and Osiris entirely; the light seeped through their skin and nostrils as they were breathing it. Their bodies appeared to be thinning in density while maintaining their shape and form. They were both floating in the air as Dr. Bearlight’s ball of light appeared to have condensed itself around the two of them. They felt euphoric and happy, overcome by a sense of transcendence they have never experienced before. They were attempting to hold hands as they were floating, but they seemed to lack matter as their bodies passed right through each other. The look on both their faces was one of sheer joy and divine contentment as if the secret of creation itself was somehow revealed unto them in its bare nakedness.

Rapid bangs on the apartment door have unexpectedly interrupted Dr. Bearlight’s energy transference process. He coalesced back into himself as Glenda and Osiris descended softly on the floor while their bodies consolidated and solidified. The knocks on the door grew even stronger. “Yes, yes,” Osiris hollered. “Who is it?”

“It’s Justin, Mr. Jones, your next-door neighbor. Is everything OK in there?”

"Yes, of course, Justin," he said as he opened the door. "Anything the matter?"

"Well, we thought your apartment was on fire." Justin continued. "There were intense flashes of light coming out of your balcony. We thought the whole place was going up in flames."

"Do you mean flashes like that?" Dr. Bearlight interjected and pointed at what appeared to be a gigantic crystal ball situated on the coffee table. The ball was flashing intensely, illuminating the entire room with a yellowish, reddish glow. "It's my new invention. It's battery operated. I don't believe we've met. I am Dr. Bearlight."

## Chapter Four

For the next two weeks, Glenda and Osiris embarked on an extensive “training marathon,” but rather than using dumbbells and weights or climbing up a treadmill, they went out to the Wiz and purchased the largest TV set they could find, a fifty-inch Sony rear-projection television, considered one of the biggest and most advanced TVs. “I don’t believe we are actually doing this,” Glenda said while turning it on and tuning to the “static channel” as they referred to channel 4 on their VCR.

“Oh, you don’t, eh?” Osiris smiled, gazing at her intensely and flashing an ethereal image of a red rose right out of his stretched arm. “Catch that!” he roared, but by the time the rose came within her grasp, it vanished and dissolved.

“So you wanna play?” She giggled back at him. “Catch this.” She pointed her finger at him, releasing a bolt of light that instantaneously solidified into a cartoonish basketball moving swiftly across the room, only to disappear midway.

“Are we having fun yet, Glenny?” he said, thrusting his hand forward, expelling a flash of aura that solidified into a nightingale. The bird chirped loudly, batting its wings and flying toward Glenda as it finally landed on the coffee table and disappeared.

The couple was tossing flashes of condensed and solidified aura at each other, testing and practicing their newfound power; they have been exercising in front of their TV set daily for at least an hour, focusing their eyes on the flickering screen static, listening to the hissing sound, and

ultimately reaching a convergence point where a singularity of thought and electrified static became one—a blending moment of clarity where thought and energy fused and unified to allow the remolding and reshaping of reality. Indeed, when this moment of perceptibility and distinctness was achieved, it left a subconscious imprint, and further training allowed for additional strengthening of the initial imprint, thus enabling light solidification and matter manipulation at will.

Osiris videotaped their meditative sessions and reality-bending practice. On several occasions, they too transformed into a ball of static and swooped right into the TV set, only to reconstitute themselves into their human forms moments later. The entire process was recorded in the clearest frame-by-frame format—an incontrovertible proof discounting any chance of disputing their findings or challenging the validity of their shared experience.

Yet they chose to keep their experimental training secret, until such time when a theory could be devised that would explain the fusion between the singularity of thought and energy and consequently the apparent enabling of matter manipulation via the human aura. They knew that releasing the documented proof now would cause a worldwide uproar and that their lives would never be the same again. And besides, scientific research wasn't at the top of their list right now. What mattered most was the conception of their child—yes, their child born from the fusion of their auras, an idea that they both found so grotesquely idiotic and mythological in nature but now have learned to accept as an emerging, valid possibility.

“Look, Glenny.” Osiris pointed at the TV screen as they were staring at it, fusing their thoughts with the static. “Look.”

The static seemed to have cleared away, disappearing gradually, and substituted with a vivid picture of Central Park’s Bethesda Terrace. This was no ordinary picture transmitted via cable or satellite but a lifelike actual imagery of the terrace; there it was, the arcade, flanked by two staircases leading to the plaza, as well as the Bethesda Fountain with its Angel of the Waters looking as majestic as ever. Dr. Bearlight was sitting on the fountain edge, admiring and feeding the ducks while waving at Glenda and Osiris, aware of their remote presence. It was

unmistakable. It was indeed the doctor, whose whereabouts they were wondering about out loud. Their TV screen has somehow opened a portal and a direct route to him. They both waved right back at the doctor and wished him well.

“June 6,” he said. “June 6, I think you’re ready. You’re ready.” Before anyone noticed, he morphed into a swan and flew over the Angel of the Waters and sat on his head.

Monday, June 6, arrived faster than Glenda and Osiris could have imagined; they completed their final battery-charging routine early in the morning and made final preparations before leaving for Dr. Bearlight’s office. They were restless and somewhat agitated yet hopeful that their lifelong dream of having a child would finally be realized. The doctor elaborated extensively on the ceremony (which was about to be unfolded in his office cellar), particularly on the imagery he was about to utilize to increase the energy levels required to create “solidification permanency.”

A day before the “ceremony,” he walked them through the cellar and explained the steps that would be taken in the child-creation process. The cellar was remarkable in its simplicity; it was painted all white and had two omega-shaped windows on the west and east walls. The north wall was decorated with a variety of religious symbols—a cross, the Star of David, the star and crescent, and the wheel of dharma. The doctor pointed at a vast round marble altar at the center of the room and said to Glenda, “You will stand here assuming the star position twelve feet away from the altar.”

And then he turned to Osiris and said, “You will stand right across from Glenda on the other side of the altar, twelve feet away from it, assuming the star position.”

He then pointed above at the sphere crystal sun pendant hanging from the ceiling, stating, “I’ll fuse my aura with the light above and energize the six statues circling the altar.”

“What statues?” they both asked in unison.

“My apologies,” he said, disembarking his aura, which solidified into six separate marble statues of fertility gods and goddesses. There they were—Astarte, the Phoenician fertility goddess and the deity of

the planet Venus; Heryshaf, an ancient Egyptian ram god, creator, and fertility god who was born from the primordial waters; Freyja, the Norse goddess of fertility, along with Freyr, the Norse god of fertility, virility, and prosperity; Aditi, the Hindu goddess of space, consciousness, the past, the future, and fertility; and finally Ishtar, the Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian goddess of fertility and love. The statues were positioned in an outer circle surrounding the altar, their appearance lofty and majestic.

Glenda walked toward the image of Aditi and exclaimed in astonishment as the goddess's eyes seemed to follow her. "It is so lifelike. They are all so meticulously detailed. It is as if they were made of wax, not solid marble."

"Yes, quite right," the doctor mumbled. "The statues will serve as 'thought form magnifiers and energizers.' Each and every image imbues and exudes fertility, birth, and the power of creation itself. Their combined cultural energy essence will ensure permanent solidification of the child and ultimate transformation to flesh and blood. Unlike our current ability of manipulating reality for a short period, this specific process will bring forth life as we know it. Though the baby is conceived in thought and solidifies through the fusion of your combined auras, the final materialization in this realm of existence is achieved by a powerful energy surge pointed at the altar through the deities surrounding it."

"And how will the deities direct their energy toward the altar?" Glenda inquired somewhat impatiently.

"Well, I guess you'll just have to wait and see, won't you, my dear Glenda?" He smiled as he climbed the stairs leading to his office.

The couple stood outside their apartment door, looking at each other. "We are really doing this, aren't we?" Osiris said as he was locking the door.

"It's surreal, Ozi," Glenda replied.

"I'm afraid we're gonna wake up from this fantastic dream any second now," she said while reaching for her handbag.

"Wait, Glenny, is that a tear I see? Why are you crying? Come now. Calm down," he whispered as he held her tight in his arms and pressed his lips against hers. "This is what we wanted, Glen—well, not exactly,

but this is as close as we are going to get to having our own baby, apart from adopting one. We have been looking forward to this moment, love, and this yearning is about to literally materialize. We are having a baby, Glenny, a baby." He smiled and dried up her tears.

They took a cab and remained silent for the duration of the ride to Dr. Bearlight's Park Avenue office; they were both confined in their thoughts, eyes wide open, looking dazed and disoriented as though they were under the influence of psychedelic drugs. Glenda held Osiris's hand tightly, breathing slowly and steadily, relaxing and pacifying her troubled mind.

The cab finally stopped at the office of Dr. Bearlight, who was outside waiting for them. He greeted them enthusiastically and walked them into his private residence, situated on top of his office. "Would you like some tea?" he asked.

"No, Doctor, thank you. I think we are ready," Osiris replied.

"Absolutely, quite right," the doctor responded, handing them two white silk Roman-looking tunics. "Put these on." The tunics were amazingly soft to the touch, adorned with gold trimmings around the sleeves and along the sides; the center had a golden infinity symbol drawn horizontally that appeared to be pulsating and moving. They were somewhat longer than usual and touched their knees.

"We are not going to disappear once we put these on," Glenda said semiseriously.

"What a funny thing to say." Dr. Bearlight giggled. "Of course not"

They put the tunics on and proceeded to the cellar, their hearts beating ever faster. The cellar was brightly lit, and Dr. Bearlight, wearing a similar tunic as Glenda and Osiris, hovered softly and landed on the marbled altar. The couple assumed their positions across each other as they were instructed earlier, both glancing at the omega-shaped windows, which were shining mightily over and across the ceiling.

Standing firmly, the doctor looked at the couple and said in a soft but clear voice, "My friends, I want to express my gratitude for your trust and friendship and for allowing me into your lives. Osiris, we have known each other for many years now. Your passion and diligence for science will transform this planet and put it on an evolutionary

new course. You are the founding father of a wondrous transformative era, a participant in the bold unveiling of human potentiality. Your resourcefulness was a catalyst in my own journey for enlightenment. Indeed, I am forever in your debt, my dear Osiris. Let your persistence guide you in the path of human self-discovery and godhood.”

He stopped momentarily and turned to Glenda. “My dear Glenda, I gave you a bit of a scare, didn’t I?” he said, smiling broadly. “I shook your perception of existence and landed you in a world that appears in stark contrast to nanotechnology and mathematical equations, but it is all connected, my dear. Reality is a lot more simplified than the complexity your colleagues think it must be. Your child is about to be born in the most unfathomable way—a product of your mutual love, born of thought, and solidified through the light that streams majestically in your bodies. Rejoice, dear and beloved woman. Your child is at hand.”

And as Dr. Bearlight completed his sentence, his body morphed into a tiny point of flashing sparkle that then burst and exploded like a mini-big bang with thunderous ferocity, illuminating the cellar with a blinding light as it was being rapidly absorbed by the sphere crystal sun pendant hanging from above. The pendant was shining brightly, glowing and pulsating intensively, filling the entire room with its ethereal magnificence, exuding a sense of serenity and tranquility.

“Now!” they heard Dr. Bearlight’s voice shout. “Now!”

Glenda and Osiris assumed the star position as the infinity symbols in their tunics began to beam and move with ever-increasing speed. Their auras leaped through the infinity symbols and floated toward the altar in their original human form. Both auras landed on the altar, facing each other, in their star position.

Suddenly, six beams of condensed and concentrated light shot through the crystal pendant and touched the six divine statues circling the altar; the statues came to life immediately, looking illustrious in their dazzling and delightful beauty. Each god and goddess stretched their arms forward, their palms raised and directed toward the altar. Blasts of brilliant focused light came out of their palms and hit the altar from all six directions. It appeared as though the altar were turning

into a cauldron of ethereal fire while Osiris and Glenda's auras were fusing. The altar, however, did not lose its structural form, in spite of the immense energy burst it absorbed. The couple's auras were hovering the altar (as their energy increased in ferocity), circling around themselves in stunning speed and changing colors while merging and interfacing with each other; one second, the combined auras were glowing orange and the next blue and then suddenly green. The colors were changing erratically as the merged energies continued their circling dance with ever-increasing velocity, floating steadily on top of the altar.

The fusion of auras was finally transfigured into an infinity symbol spinning around itself, protected by a flashing shield surrounding the vertical space between the hanging crystal pendant and the altar. It continued to spin around itself for exactly six more minutes until it finally assumed the likeness of a small, miniaturized sphere measuring twenty inches in diameter. The sphere was convulsing vigorously, changing into a variety of geometric patterns and other inanimate objects, until it disappeared as Glenda and Osiris watched in utter disbelief.

The two were exchanging looks of befuddlement as if something has gone awry; the sphere suddenly reappeared, all translucent and glassy, brewing with an unrecognizable matter that gradually took the form of a humanoid fetus in front of their very eyes. A nine-month process has unfolded in literally minutes as the fetus was stretching, twisting, and tumbling, ready to push through as though encased in a womb. The fetus, facing downward, burst out of the sphere and hovered the altar while absorbing the altar's gushing inferno and the light streaming from the crystal pendant in the ceiling. As the baby appeared to consume the entirety of the remaining energy, the pendant suddenly exploded into thousands of pieces, remaining suspended in midair in what appeared to be an outline of a galaxy with an enormous lustrous star at its center. And while the infant baby landed softly inside a bassinet on the altar, all the pendant's broken fragments, along with the sphere and statues, disappeared into thin air, leaving the omega-shaped windows as the only source of light in the room.

Glenda and Osiris rushed toward the altar and took a first look at their child. “It’s a boy!” Osiris exclaimed.

“Aura’el,” Glenda whispered, “my little aura man.” She burst into tears. She held the baby in her arms and hugged him passionately.

Osiris gazed at his newborn son as he was screaming out loud, “Thank you, Dr. Bearlight! Thank you!” But Dr. Bearlight was nowhere to be found.

## Chapter Five

“Dr. Bearlight, Dr. Bearlight.” Osiris kept calling the doctor’s name, hoping he’d materialize as he always did, but alas, the doctor simply vanished without a trace.

“What do you suppose happened?” Glenda asked, looking all worried.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” he replied, looking intensively at the ceiling above, where they last saw him. “What do you think it was?”

“What do you mean? What do I think what was?”

“The shards, Glenda, the thousands of crystalline pieces suspended in midair in an outline of a galaxy with a bright star in the middle.”

“I don’t know. I’d rather ask Dr. Bearlight as soon as we find him. Maybe he materialized upstairs,” she said somewhat impatiently.

“Maybe, possibly,” Osiris replied as he was climbing up the stairs and exiting the cellar while Glenda followed, holding their baby, who slept peacefully in his little bassinet.

Glenda took a long look at Aura’el and noticed that he was still glowing and shimmering. An energy-type blanket seemed to have resonated from the child’s body. It grew weaker and lighter in strength as the baby kept breathing. With each breath, the light grew dimmer until it finally disappeared, exposing Aura’el’s slightly darker natural skin color. “He is so beautiful.” Glenda sighed as she was tearing up again, finding it hard to control her emotions.

“Are we actually naming him Aura’el, Glenny?”

"Yes. Aura'el, light of God, my light, our light," she responded in an absolute, determined voice.

"A unique name for a unique child, but how do we explain him to others? It's not like we are about to share the details of this very unheard-of birth with anyone Osiris," questioned her while admiring his son.

"Well, of course not, silly. The word *aura* means 'light,' from the Hebrew word *or*. It is basically the male version of the name Aurora," she answered, ignoring his original question.

"Wow, you are absolutely right, Glenda. It didn't even cross my mind."

"Look," she cut him off in midsentence. "Look at our little aura man. He is so enchanting, almost hypnotic. He's everything we could have hoped for and probably more."

"It's the 'probably more' that frightens me somewhat," he said.

"You don't assume he has our abilities, do you?" she questioned him rather warily.

"I do, indeed, and they are probably magnified by a thousandfold," he noted with absolute certainty. "Come to think of it. I wonder if Dr. Bearlight didn't have some sort of ulterior motive that extended far beyond fertility treatment and the eventual birth of a 'normal' child. Otherwise, why would he infuse him with such an unimaginable amount of energy when much lesser was needed to complete the solidification process? Only the future might tell what our son is capable of. With all that startling power circulating in his veins, manipulating reality must be in his nature. We must contain it, however, at least until he has grown up."

"I suspected as much as well," Glenda concurred. "Be that as it may, I am looking forward to an uneventful, normal childhood, no hocus-pocus. Can you imagine what would happen if we chose to reveal to the world how he was born and the type of ability, or abilities, he might possess? He'll be taken away from us in no time and dissected like a lab rat. We must keep it a secret, and when the time comes, we will inform him of his unusual birth and likely powers. It will be up to him to decide

what to do with that information and whether to share it with the rest of the world or not.”

“What is he really?” Osiris asked Glenda, almost whispering as he paused momentarily and then continued. “Considering the way he was born, I suspect that he is not just our bundle of joy but most probably a new beginning in humanity’s evolutionary process, a way for all of us to explore and unravel the extent of mankind’s potentiality. I am not quite sure what that means yet, but I have no doubt we will find out.”

“How do we explain his arrival though? We can’t just say we wished him into existence or that we conjured him up,” Osiris bemoaned while looking for Dr. Bearlight upstairs in his private residence.

“Well, we can say that—” Glenda started saying as they both noticed Dr. Bearlight floating by the solid, heavyset oak grandfather clock standing against the southern living room wall.

“Dr. Bearlight, thank god you are all right!” Glenda exclaimed happily. “We thought we lost you.”

“Yeah, you gave us quite a scare,” Osiris added.

But Dr. Bearlight’s image continued to float and stare at the couple as though it did not recognize them; his reflection lacked substance and was devoid of its usual stamina and vigor. It resembled a lifeless 3-D hologram rather than the doctors usual vivacious self. The image flickered a bit and finally turned toward them and said in a tone of voice that sounded echolike, “Congratulations, my friends, on the birth of your son. Alas, I did not survive the energy transference. A part of my essence will forever be united with your child. Indeed, I have anticipated as much and implanted time reference memories in the minds of all your friends and acquaintances, who believe that it has already been a year since you embarked on my fertility treatment, a procedure that was proved to be a success, culminating in the natural birth of your baby just a few days ago. The imprint of those memories extends further to the entire staff at Mount Sinai Hospital, who have supposedly delivered the child.”

Glenda attempted to interrupt the doctor’s flow of words with a question, but it seemed as though the image was on auto mode and was oblivious to any efforts of direct conversation. “All is as it should be.”

The doctor continued. "Your son's birth is perceived by all as completely natural, and my absence is because of sudden and abrupt death."

The doctor's voice subsided and grew dimmer as the grandfather clock's pendulum swung erratically from side to side, his image flickering on and off as though the signal generating it was being cut at the source. "Beware, beware," the doctor said repeatedly.

"Beware of what, Doctor? Of who?" they both asked alarmingly.

"Beware of the Ma-a-all-la-a-akahr-riansss, the Ma-a-al-l-la-akahr-riansss."

Bang, bang! The grandfather clock was chiming with ever-increasing ferocity. Its sound and volume was deafening, and with each and every bang, parts of the doctor's residence began to change and alter their appearance; the color of the wall turned from off-white to pale blue, the carpet disappeared to expose a neatly polished marble floor, and the living room furniture was morphing from one design to another. Gone were the curtains, the reclining armchair, the bookshelf, the coffee table, and the pictures on the wall; the entire place was in flux. The doctor's private residence, along with his office, was transfiguring into an entirely new abode to conform with the memory imprints in the minds of those who knew him and learned of his untimely demise.

"What is going on?" Glenda yelled, attempting to overcome the clock's increasing banging.

"This is incredible!" Osiris yelled toward her. "Dr. Bearlight is not even here, and the place is phasing in and out of configuration. Look at the pendulum bob, Glenda. Are you seeing this?" The pendulum bob was shining brightly as if it was ready to blast, and the doctor's image seemed to have been sucked right into it.

"Osiris, you're fluxing!" Glenda screamed as she rushed toward him while holding Aura'el. And as soon as their hands touched, an immense flash of light exploded out of the pendulum bob and swallowed them both right through it.

## Chapter Six

In what seemed like a brief moment, the couple and their son materialized in the living room of their Upper West Side apartment, along with the grandfather clock, which situated itself adjacent to the balcony. “Check on the baby, Glenda!” Osiris hollered at his wife as he was observing their surroundings, which appeared to be somewhat off, a likely aftermath of their abrupt manifestation out of the pendulum bob. There was some golden ethereal dust fleeting out of the kitchen window and some around the clock, but other than that, the apartment seemed as normal as could be expected.

They both sank into their living room sofa, staring at the gigantic TV screen with Aura’el by their side. “Are you up to it?” Osiris asked laughingly as he was looking fixedly at it.

“Are you mad?” Glenda replied acerbically. “I think we had enough popping in and out of objects to last us a lifetime, don’t you?”

“You are absolutely right,” he said as he continued laughing while carrying Aura’el to their bedroom, laying the infant gently in his crib.

The baby’s aura was brilliant and sharp, pulsating with a steady rhythm as though it was an extension of his heartbeat. It took several more minutes, and the child’s aura waned and finally evaporated from sight. Aura’el was sound asleep while they both stood over the crib, admiring their newborn son.

Their bedroom phone suddenly rang as they continued gawking at him, commenting on every curvature of his face and tiny body. “Who

could that be this late at night?" Glenda pondered loudly and somewhat impatiently. "Hello."

"Hi, Glenda, how are you? It's Greg. I heard you just got out of the hospital. How are you feeling? How is the baby?"

Osiris could overhear Greg as he stepped closer toward his wife. "We're fine, Greg!" he yelled from across the room. "Thanks so much for calling. What an unexpected surprise."

"Aurora and I are dying to see the little one." Greg continued. "Can we stop by tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course," Glenda finally replied. "Please. We'd love to see you tomorrow."

The following day, the phone rang incessantly and without pause. It was as though the entire universe called to congratulate them on the birth of their son—family and friends, colleagues from work, and long-forgotten acquaintances. Aunt Eydis called from Denmark, and Osiris's uncle Jata took a flight from Nairobi, Kenya, as soon as he learned about his nephew's birth; even his yogi research subject Chandra Deep called to congratulate him, and Glenda's ashram instructor, Ambika Chand, sent a gigantic bouquet of flowers.

By the voluminous stream of phone calls, it seemed as if Aura'el's birth resembled a worldwide event, drawing well-wishers from all over the globe. "What has he done?" Osiris asked rhetorically. "How many people did Dr. Bearlight imprint with the memory of our son's birth?"

"As many as he thought would be necessary to concoct the ultimate cover-up substantiating and validating Aura'el's natural birth," Glenda replied, awestruck by the doctor's mind-altering feat.

"Aren't you a bit worried Aura'el is going to glow right in front of everyone?" Osiris asked, looking concerned.

"Well, if that happens, we'll counter it with our own matter-manipulation abilities," Glenda replied. "Here, let's give it a try." Her skin began to glow.

Osiris stretched his palm forward as though he was about to touch her, and Glenda's glow vanished immediately. "You see?" she said. "Nothing to worry about."

Eight o'clock was fast approaching, and their guests started to arrive. First, of course, were Greg and Aurora and their three-year-old daughter Annette, carrying a huge teddy bear. Uncle Jata was stranded in the airport and insisted on getting to the city on his own. "Stay home," he commanded Osiris in his deep baritone voice. "I know my way around the city." Glenda's parents, who lived in LA, promised that they would stop by the following week. And Osiris's mother, Loretta, walked in at about 7:30 p.m. Glenda's entire office attended the celebratory event as was Osiris's fellow researchers.

"Parapsychology, meet exact science," he said, laughing out loud as he was introducing his colleagues to those of Glenda's. The two groups engaged in light social conversation and steered away from potential controversy about parapsychology, which was viewed by the majority of the "scientific establishment" as pseudoscience and quackery rather than exact science, but today was not a day for discourse about differentiating facts from fiction; they were all engaged in small talk, drinking and, of course, admiring the newborn infant.

Aura'el was wide awake and smiling at all who carried him in their arms, poking faces at him and cooing in high-pitched voices. The child was giggling out loud and making his own funny noises to the delight of everybody.

Though the place was quite noisy, Osiris could clearly hear the knocking on the apartment door. "It must be Uncle Jata." He turned to Glenda. "Finally."

They opened the door and nearly fell off their feet. "Father Mulligan!" Glenda yelled with sheer delight. "Father Mulligan!" They embraced and hugged as Glenda's tears of joy streamed down her face, leaving wet trails in their course.

"How long has it been, Father Mulligan?" Osiris asked as he shook his hands and hugged him.

"Since the day I married you, my children," he replied with a broad smile on his face.

"But how . . . how did you know?" Glenda asked, drying up her eyes. "We would have called you, of course, but I hardly had the time to catch my breath yet."

"Well, my dear, you keep forgetting I have a direct line to God. I know everything. Just ask your husband," he said jokingly.

Father Mulligan was a Jesuit priest who served at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. He came across Osiris in 1984 while participating in a research on psychic phenomena conducted by the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center. The two were remarkable chess players and met regularly for a game of chess, along with philosophical conversations about religion and humanity's never-ending search for God.

Father Mulligan appeared to be able to levitate when praying intensely, and Osiris suggested that he might be the reincarnated soul of the Franciscan friar Joseph of Cupertino, who was said to have been prone to miraculous levitation. The tests, however, were hardly conclusive as Father Mulligan was never able to perform the feat under scientific observation. Regardless of this failure in obtaining indisputable proof for his ability to levitate, the friendship and bond between the two men grew stronger with each passing year.

Osiris introduced Glenda to Father Mulligan a month after they met, and she, of course, ridiculed the whole idea of him being able to levitate. "That's absurd," she said to Greg. "But at least he has the decency to admit that he is not capable to manifest his alleged ability in a controlled environment."

Glenda was awestruck, though, when she learned that Father Mulligan was a physicist and had a master's degree in nuclear physics. "How so, Father?" she asked him. "From nuclear physics to the priesthood? That is some journey. What happened?"

"It was a natural progression for me," he said. "Unlocking the secrets of matter at the atomic level has brought me closer to God. 'This world couldn't just be a mere coincidence, as my colleagues contend, could it?' I kept asking myself. No, absolutely not. And then it dawned on me that nuclear physics was basically a vehicle that catapulted me into priesthood."

Glenda was mesmerized by Father Mulligan's personal journey and his spectacular intellect. His kindness, humility, and goodness of heart left her craving his nurturing companionship; and when Osiris

and she tied the knot, Father Mulligan became the obvious choice to marry them.

When he was transferred to Ireland in 1988, they both felt shocked and saddened by his move, but it was understood that he'd be back sooner rather than later. That was nearly six years ago. "Are you back, Father? Permanently?" Glenda asked as her eyes lit up and while accompanying him into the living room.

"Nothing is permanent, my child," he replied softly. "Nothing. But yes, I am back at St. Ignatius."

Glenda was bursting with joy as was Osiris; Father Mulligan's abrupt and unforeseen arrival was indeed the best unexpected news they could have hoped for, which made them both wonder if Dr. Bearlight might have arranged his return. "That calls for a drink, Father." Glenda giggled. "What will you be having?"

"My usual gin and tonic, dear."

"Yes, of course, how could I forget?"

The couple introduced Father Mulligan to their guests, and not before long, it appeared as though they were all captivated by his charm and magnetic personality. The priest was a born leader and a master of mingling and socializing; he exuded a feeling of warmth, well-being, and calm on all who surrounded him. Being a certified scientist as well as a devout, religious person, he left both Glenda's hard-core scientists and Osiris's parapsychologists awestruck by his profound knowledge of particle physics, as well as the latest news in paranormal research.

"Where is the little one? Oh, I see Aurora holding him. Can I hold him and say a prayer to St. Brigid of Ireland (patron saint of infants and newborn babies)?" he asked somewhat apologetically.

"Of course, you can, Father. We'd be honored," Aurora said as she laid the infant gently in his arms.

Father Mulligan held the child close to his chest, right below his heart; closed his eyes; and began to recite a prayer: "God our Father, we pray that, through the intercession of St. Brigid, You will protect this newborn child, keep him safe from harm, and help him grow in grace and be pleasing in Your sight. Give him strength to keep alive his joy in Your creation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

And as Father Mulligan began to recite the prayer a second time, a burst of bright, shimmering light whooshed out of his chest and enveloped his entire body as he appeared to be gently lifted off the living room floor and floating in midair. His aura at the top of his head was blinding in its intensity, and his face seemed to have disappeared momentarily till the light subsided slightly and hovered above him like an angel's halo.

"Mommy, mommy!" Annette screamed, turning to her mother. "The man is flying! The man is flying!" Aurora's wineglass came crashing down as she stared at the priest in total disbelief, and Osiris's mom dropped the silver hors d'oeuvre tray she was holding and almost fell to the floor in utter bewilderment; the others simply stood there gaping and gawking, not quite sure what was happening.

Greg took a few photos of the "flying monk" while looking at Osiris and saying, "Did you put him up to it? I thought he wasn't able to levitate in a controlled environment?"

"But this is not a controlled environment, Greg," he countered. "He is not even aware he's suspended in the air. He's in a prayer trance. It's what I have been saying all along. These types of abilities manifest themselves suddenly and without warning."

While Greg and Osiris were having their verbal exchange, Glenda attempted to bring the priest down by pointing her hands behind her back toward the living room floor and shooting bolts of condensed light, thus striving to increase the floor's gravitational force by altering its molecular structure. She also struggled to dim Father Mulligan's beaming aura by touching his hand gently but to no avail. Father Mulligan continued to hover and glow for nearly a minute till he finally landed softly on the living room armchair and opened his eyes. "What did I miss?" he asked as he noted the looks of discombobulation and perplexity spreading across everybody's faces.

## Chapter Seven

The following day, Glenda received a personal visit from the chief of her nanoengineering department, Dr. Gerald Epstein, who congratulated her and dropped off a huge “bundle of joy” gift basket; he also spoke to Osiris and took the opportunity to extend an offer of cooperation between the two labs in light of the testimonials relayed to him by his staff (who attended last night’s celebration) concerning Father Mulligan’s levitation feat. “I missed it, didn’t I? A true manifestation of psychic phenomena. Whatever happened here yesterday evening seems to have opened up an opportunity for a joint venture between us, with the sole purpose of unlocking the nature of this energy exhibited by Father Mulligan and its implications on nanotechnology.”

He continued. “Yes, yes, I am aware that Father Mulligan tests poorly in traditional laboratory settings, but it might be possible to conduct a discreet camera surveillance program to observe his every move. The scientific implications of unraveling this yet unknown source of kinetic energy are mind shattering, absolutely grandiose,” he concluded enthusiastically.

“Undoubtedly,” Osiris concurred. “Nothing would please us more than to combine our resources and plunge into a vigorous experimentation with the research center for applied science and technology. We’ll work out the details later on in your corporate office, Doctor.” Dr. Epstein shook his hand and greeted him farewell.

Osiris shut the door behind him and turned to Glenda with a somewhat worried expression. “So what happens next?” she asked.

"Well, I know we're hoping for an uneventful and normal upbringing for our little boy, but in light of what happened yesterday, we better get used to the idea that unexpected occurrences will manifest themselves around him unintentionally and occasionally. Father Mulligan's glowing levitation was most certainly unintended. Aura'el sensed the priest's compassion and affection for him and subconsciously responded in kind by magnifying his levitation ability a thousandfold and throwing an aura blast around him as a bonus. I am concerned that we won't be able to formulate a rational explanation should these paranormal episodes transpire around him while in the proximity of unsuspecting audiences."

"You are aware we are totally powerless to stop him, right?" Glenda interjected.

"Yes, I know that. We simply need to keep him away from overexcitement that might trigger his reality-transforming ability. I am confident we'll be able to determine his overexcitement threshold relatively fast."

"I think I might have an idea," Glenda interrupted suddenly, cutting Osiris in midsentence. "The joint research between our two departments can serve as headway to gradually disseminate awareness of supernatural phenomena and thereby paving the way to a new public mind-set in which levitation, telekinesis, invisibility, and other psychic feats become more palatable to the public. Imagine a nightly news program that opens with a statement from the Rhinefeld Institute asserting the scientific validity of such phenomena and providing indisputable proof. Furthermore, imagine repeated news segments and not some doctored, rating-driven documentaries about such people as Father Mulligan. Wouldn't that contribute to new public alertness to humanity's uniqueness and our inherent limitless evolutionary potential?"

"I think you are certainly on to something," Osiris acknowledged.

Glenda went on. "The most important thing, as far as we are concerned, though, is that—in such an environment—Aura'el's gift will be viewed with a nod of familiarity and understanding rather than that of fear and dread. He'll be one among many, albeit with an immensely

more advanced ability. All I am saying is that a gradual shift in public approach toward the paranormal will safeguard and minimize a possible mass panic and hysteria once Aura'el displays his powers."

"Hold on, Glenda, hold on," Osiris countered. "How are we going to go about gathering enough people with unique abilities to influence such a transformation? In my entire career as a parapsychologist, Dr. Bearlight was the single and only person who was able to exhibit or manufacture supernatural and paranormal events. All the others did not stand up to scrutiny or to what we term as 'indisputable scientific proof.'"

"You're forgetting something, dear," Glenda retorted.

"And what is that, darling?"

"You're forgetting about us and our own abilities."

"You are not suggesting that we go on live TV and—"

"Of course not, but we can certainly enhance and amplify the capability of those people who do exhibit a certain level of unique psychic tendencies in a manner similar to how Aura'el influenced Father Mulligan's levitation. You will gather all the research subjects at the Rhinefeld facility, where both of us will be in direct contact with them, observing their progress in each and every step of the research while imbuing them with a dash of our own energies to further strengthen their own paranormal demonstrations."

"You really thought it through, didn't you? It should have been me coming up with such an elaborate plan, and to think that, less than a month ago, you thought I was wasting my time at Rhinefeld." The couple burst out laughing and immediately attempted to control themselves so as not to wake up their son.

"True, true. I came a long way in a very short while, but wouldn't anyone? When proof is shoved in your face in such a spectacular manner, I am not sure you are left with any other choice but to accept it and study it. Isn't it what science is all about, the concerted human effort to understand the natural world and how it works with observable physical evidence as the basis of that understanding?"

She continued. "We know that Aura'el's ability is godlike in essence, and it will eventually explode into the world stage. It is unavoidable. We

must therefore soften the shock-and-awe effect that his emergence will surely generate and ensure, to the best of our ability, that he is embraced and accepted by humanity rather than rejected and feared. We will choose the time and place to introduce him to the world as our son, relaying the story of his unusual birth. We won't be proselytizing for a new procreation process, of course, but rather emphasizing the fact that our son was born of pure love—an expression of our hopes and dreams and, in some way, our gift to humankind."

Glenda hushed suddenly as Osiris was pointing toward their son's crib. "Look, Aura'el is glowing and beaming like a shooting star."

"Maybe he overheard our entire conversation." Glenda smiled broadly.

"It feels as though we just got the OK to proceed with our plan," Osiris said jokingly.

"We did, didn't we?" Glenda responded as she gently kissed Aura'el on his forehead.

"Sweet dreams, my little aura man," she whispered softly.

"Sweet dreams, Mommy," she was sure she heard him say.

## Chapter Eight

For the next seven years, Glenda and Osiris carried out their plan in its most minute detail. The Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center became one of the most notorious centers for the advancement of paranormal investigation partly because of Dr. Epstein's involvement in devising the most rigorous testing routines to weed out the charlatans from the truly gifted. Father Mulligan's levitation ability was proved to be authentic and beyond a shadow of a doubt. Not only was he unknowingly photographed floating in midair while praying in his private quarters at the church but he was later also able to manifest the feat in front of a cadre of world-renowned scientists at the research center. His capacity to levitate and defy gravity has also received a stamp of approval by a plethora of professional stage magicians, who attested and confirmed its genuineness. Father Mulligan's levitation was the first ever scientifically certified, documented proof for the existence of a yet unknown kinetic energy, which challenged the current understanding of the accepted laws of physics.

There were other significant observations of a supernatural nature personified by the vivacious Marisol Flora Gonzales, a former Dominican nun who turned into a marine biologist, and Rabbi Jedidiah Goldstein, a known Kabbalist from Jerusalem. Ms. Gonzales's telekinetic abilities were reminiscent of the late Nina Kulagina, whose alleged psychic powers were studied in the USSR during the 1960s. (During the Cold War, silent black-and-white films were produced, in which she appeared to move objects on a table in front of her without touching

them. These films were allegedly made under controlled conditions for Soviet authorities and caused excitement for many psychic researchers around the world, some of whom believed that they represented clear evidence for the existence of psychic phenomena. Later, she was critically debunked by the James Randi Educational Foundation and the Italian Committee for the Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.)

In comparison, however, Ms. Gonzales astounded the scientific community and left it gasping for air with demonstrations of levitating chairs and heavy furniture as she was sitting ten feet away from the affected objects with her hands tied behind her back. In one spectacular specific trial, two of the scientists were sitting on the sofa as it was suspended above ground for nearly one continuous minute while being videotaped. And in another incident, Ms. Gonzales levitated as many as twenty items at a time, moving them throughout the lab.

Rabbi Goldstein has demonstrated a remarkable ability to bilocate, a feat usually ascribed to Christian saints, monks, and Muslim Sufis. He was photographed conducting a simultaneous conversation with two researchers each placed in a different room at the facility. As in Ms. Gonzales's case, the rabbi's ability was videotaped in separate occasions and by different people.

The repeated attempts to challenge the documented proof failed miserably as debunkers and skeptics from all over the globe were invited to conduct their own experiments but to no avail. The powers demonstrated by Father Mulligan, Ms. Gonzales, and Rabbi Goldstein stood the rigors of scientific scrutiny and were declared "evidence" beyond dispute and a shadow of a doubt.

Glenda and Osiris were elated with the outcome of their new joint project. None of the subjects tested (including Ms. Gonzales) had originally exhibited an ability that was continuous or one that could be generated on demand rather than spontaneous in character. It took a "touch" of their own matter-manipulation ability to further enhance that of their test subjects in a manner that allowed for keen observation in a lab and under controlled examination.

Their research created a sense of loss and, to some extent, panic in the scientific community. The laws of physics were challenged in broad

daylight and in the most direct manner that established science could ever fathom. The religious community, on the other hand, was having a field day with the discovery and validation of authentic psychic powers.

There was no doubt in the mind of numerous religious figures that the Rhinefeld research provided an outright evidence for the existence of God. Many biblical stories and accounts of holy men exhibiting supernatural powers were suddenly scientifically validated, and in spite of their theological differences, it was agreed that the revelation of these three specific people was no mere coincidence but an unmitigated divine testimonial that their shared religious experience and humble background was directly responsible for their ability to express God's divine supernatural spark on our plane of existence. "The findings do not contradict established science," proclaimed the archbishop of Canterbury. "They rather fulfill it."

"Indeed," announced the chief Rabbi of Israel, "it only serves to prove our age-old contention that there is divine law that coexists with natural law as it did from time immemorial. The difference now is that the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center has provided us with clear evidence to that end. May God Almighty bless them and their work."

"Not so fast," countered Dr. Epstein. "Religious figures routinely succumb to their old habit of magical thinking, the belief in the interconnectedness of all things through forces and powers that transcend both physical and spiritual connections. This speculative methodology was wrong then as it is wrong now. It is quite likely that we have stumbled on a new form of energy that we have yet to understand, but rest assured we shall spare no effort until we unravel this mystery. It is too early to conclude that a religious faith is necessary to induce those powers, though it is quite clear that some sort of spiritually meditative process serves as a catalyst in their manifestation."

Osiris further emphasized the theorem of the singularity of thought and its relation to the human aura in a series of a world tour lectures. "The ability of the human brain to produce electricity is an established scientific fact. We are not yet aware of a process that might harness it out of its enclosed confinement," Osiris stipulated in a conference attended by the faithful as well as prominent scientists in Copenhagen. "In living

organisms, charge gradients across membranes produce electricity in the form of flowing ions.” He continued. “Electricity is found throughout the human body. The flow of charged ions causes your heart to beat and your muscles to contract. But nowhere in the body is electrical activity better documented than the brain, which contains roughly a hundred billion electrically conductive, biological wires. If you could somehow divert every single biological wire in your skull to a standard battery, it would be fully charged in just under seventy hours. Now imagine a mechanism that allows for continuous growth in electrical brain activity and then unleashed through an electrical field surrounding the human body otherwise known as the ‘human aura.’”

“Balderdash,” cried Dr. Dankirk from the Association for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Supernatural. “There is no such thing as a human aura. You have yet to prove its existence.”

“But we did, Doctor,” Osiris responded calmly. “Please refer to the video depicting Father Mulligan’s levitation. In many instances, his body glows brightly while levitating, and his face emanates a continuous stream of visible ethereal-type golden light, that is, by definition, the human aura.”

Osiris went on. “It is clear that our recent findings have been difficult for many of you to comprehend, but unlike our religious colleagues, we are quite confident that a rational explanation is at hand. We further stipulate that the energy level within the human body can be boosted exponentially, and it is directly linked to a cognitive process termed by us as ‘the singularity of thought’ (i.e., a convergence point where a single thought and energy merge, a blending moment of clarity in which *both* fuse and unify and thus allow for a drastic elevation of energy within the human aura, which is then channeled into the remolding and reshaping of reality in a variety of ways we have witnessed and in other ways we are yet to discover).”

“Where is the additional energy coming from?” Dr. Dankirk quizzed with an obvious sarcastic tone.

“From a continuous meditative process on a variety of energy sources,” Osiris replied. “Somehow the meditative practice appears to increase already existing levels of electric energy within the human

body, which is later stored in our body's electric field (i.e., the aura) similar to the process undergone by excess calories, which are stored in our body's fat cells.

"As mentioned earlier, that kinetic energy can be absorbed into the human aura through a controlled and focused mental process and be manifested in a manner and range of ways that appear to defy the laws of physics. Indeed, we are far from understanding the methodology of this alleged 'energy boost,' but we are confident that, with additional research, we'll be able to decipher this mystery."

Osiris stopped momentarily and sipped from the cold glass of water next to him and said, "We are proud to announce the next phase of our study. The Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center is conducting guided tests of people who have been practicing meditation for a minimum of five years. The tests are open, of course, to all people regardless of their religious background or ethnicity and provided they abide by the health requirements the tests stipulate."

As Osiris was about to finish his speech, Glenda walked toward the podium accompanied by Ms. Marisol Flora Gonzales. The crowd recognized Ms. Gonzales and greeted her with a round of applause. "Thank you, thank you. Muchas gracias." She smiled and bowed as the clapping grew stronger. "We are privileged to be a part in what might become a stepping stone in humanity's evolutionary process," she said. "We have submitted ourselves to the rigors and scrutiny of science to expand our understanding of human potentiality. We are hopeful that the research center will enlighten the halls of knowledge with a new comprehension of our unlimited inherent abilities and the way with which to expand our consciousness for the benefit of mankind. A new path has been set on the way to enlightenment. Grasp it with both hands, and embrace it warmly."

And as Ms. Gonzales finished her speech, she gazed at the bouquet of flowers placed on the table that then rose and flew across the room toward Dr. Dankirk. The bouquet hovered his shoulders for nearly ten seconds and then landed gently on his lap as the auditorium erupted in a thunderous roar of cheers.

## Chapter Nine

Monday, March 1, 2006

“Tipsy is sick, Mom.”

“She is, sweetheart. What’s wrong with her?”

“I don’t know,” Annette replied with tears in her eyes. “She’s been throwing up all morning.”

“I’m gonna give Jenny [the vet] a call, honey,” Aurora said as she was calming and comforting her distraught daughter. “Don’t worry, I’m sure Tipsy will be fine in no time. Maybe it’s just an upset stomach. What did you feed her?”

“The usual, Mom, Sheba salmon pâté. She loves that stuff.”

“Well, it may have been bad. Did you check the date on the food tray?” Aurora inquired.

Annette was petting her little Siamese cat and consoling her. Tipsy was beautiful and extremely energetic for her age, characterized by a vivid set of brilliant almond-shaped blue eyes, a slender agile body, and a distinctive soft, glossy coat with dark “points” on a light background. She was given to her as a gift by Glenda on her thi<sup>rd</sup> birthday, a month after Aura’el was born.

“Can Aura’el come with us?” she shot back in response. “Tipsy loves him. She is calm when he’s around.”

“Yes, of course, he can. Let me call Glenda. We’ll go to the vet and then stop by at Ray’s Pizza on our way back. I am sure that will cheer you up.”

Annette and Aura'el were inseparable; in spite of their three-year age difference, they virtually grew up together as their parents' friendship transformed into a full-blown partnership at the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center. Aurora worked as the head administrator at the human resources department while Greg served as the supervisor of the electrical design engineering department, where new electrical gadgets were devised to detect and monitor energy fluctuations in the human aura.

Rhinefeld provided for a day-care center, as well as a kindergarten, for their employees' children. Aura'el and Annette were best friends and engaged in numerous activities while at the center, playing outdoors games (kickball, hide-and-seek, red rover, basketball, and soccer), racing each other at the swimming pool, and taking care of the animals at the Central Park Zoo, where Aurora's best friend, Jenny, worked as the chief vet.

Glenda and Osiris's concerns about supernatural manifestations in the vicinity of their child literally vanished as they realized that his powers were observable exclusively at home as though a self-aware internal mechanism kept his ability in check, confining it to their apartment. Indeed, the couple was dumbfounded by the enormity of his subconscious matter-manipulation capacity. As a baby, the child was materializing toys he had seen on TV commercials and animals he observed in picture books. Glenda was alarmed and unnerved at the sight of imaginary creatures appearing and disappearing while the child was attempting to conceptualize the images he viewed in his mind.

At one time, a miniature sphinx popped right in front of his crib; the sphinx had its usual body of a lion, but its head was that of a cat rather than that of a human. On another occasion, a genie appeared out of a lamp when she read him the story of Aladdin, and it floated gently close to the ceiling. The creatures appeared ethereal at first and then solidified, only to disintegrate and dissolve into nothingness in a matter of minutes. The manifestations, however, ceased as soon as Aura'el exhibited the first signs of self-awareness, and both Glenda and Osiris were thunderstruck by the sudden disappearance of any indication of subconscious matter-manipulation ability.

Aura'el was an extremely intelligent baby who could legibly converse when he was just thirteen months old and read at the tender age of twenty-two months, mastering a 750-word vocabulary. A year later, he was doing high school math like Tristan Pang, the child prodigy from England. At the age of five, Aura'el began to display an unrivaled photographic memory and flawlessly commented on current affairs, general knowledge, history, and geographical statistics. He marveled the scientists at the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center with recollecting minute details of scientific research on virtually every subject matter.

The child was a genius blessed with the athleticism and stamina of an Olympic gold medalist. Indeed, he was a virtuoso at the swimming pool as he was at playing the piano. He was a phenomenon on its own, and Glenda's fellow researches were certain he was a "designed" outcome of Dr. Bearlight's fertility treatment. "I have no doubt he somehow manipulated his genetic makeup," Aurora told Glenda on a few occasions. "Most children who were conceived through Dr. Bearlight's procedure exhibit a high degree of intellect and physical prowess, male or female, but nothing comes close to Aura'el's level."

"It does appear so, doesn't it?" Glenda responded laconically. "We are blown away by it as the rest of you and feel blessed and privileged to be the parents of such a beautiful and intelligent child. We are truly hopeful that he'll make a difference in other people's lives as he does in ours."

Though Aura'el was a social magnet, Annette and he always found ample time for their various joint activities; Annette wasn't dazzled by Aura'el's intellectual marvels or his mastery of sports. He simply made her laugh. And laugh she did.

They met at Sixtie<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, right by Columbus Circle, and proceeded toward Central Park Zoo. Tipsy was encased in her black travel carrier and meowed softly as soon as she noticed Aura'el, who petted her gently. The cat was purring with delight, succumbing to Aura'el's pleasant touch. "You see, Mom?" Annette turned toward Aurora. "She loves Aura'el. She already looks much better, like she was never ill."

"You are right," Aurora concurred. "Let Jenny check her out and make sure she is fine and in good health."

Jenny greeted the group as soon as they walked into her office, smiling at Aura'el and hugging Annette warmly. "How is everybody?" she asked.

"Excellent," Aurora replied. "But Tipsy appears to have fallen ill. She was throwing up all morning long. We suspect it's the food she ate, so we have brought the food tray with us."

"Yes, of course," Jenny replied. "Why don't you let Tipsy out? Let me have a look at her." Jenny picked up the cat and placed her on the examination table; she checked her eyes, nose, mouth, and teeth for any signs of inflammation and then examined her ears, listened to her heart and lungs with a stethoscope, and concluded with combing her fur, looking for signs of flea dirt, as well as probing her for possible exposure to worms.

"There is nothing wrong with her," she said to the group as they were anxiously awaiting her comments. "Tipsy is in perfect health. Why don't you let her play in the kitty playground while I run some tests on the food tray in my lab? I'll be right with you."

Aura'el and Annette were playing with Tipsy and teasing her mercilessly with a dragon flyer toy. The cat chased it around, tossing it upside down with the energy and vigor befitting a newborn kitty and not a ten-year-old cat.

"I have never seen anything like it!" Jenny exclaimed as she came out of her lab, half an hour later, with an outright astonished look strewn across her face.

"What do you mean?" both women asked her warily while the kids continued playing with the cat, all but oblivious to Jenny and their moms.

"By all accounts, Tipsy should have been dead by now," she whispered to them both, trying to keep her voice down so Annette and Aura'el wouldn't hear her. "It's as though the cat came back from the dead and was resurrected somehow. The food tray contained high traces of arsenic in such concentration sufficient to cause certain death. Yet the cat is alive and well. It is quite remarkable and absolutely unbelievable, and I am not sure what to make of it or how to explain it. Not only is Tipsy well and completely healthy but she also appears to have traveled

back in time. The cat is nearly eight years younger than the last time I checked her. I am utterly flabbergasted.”

“What?” Aurora gasped. “Eight years younger? How?”

“I think we have one psychic cat on our hands,” Glenda uttered as she stared at Aurora, signaling her to drop the issue. “We’ll take her to the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center and run some more tests. We deal with gifted people, but gifted cats? That’s a first.”

Jenny giggled in response and said to Aurora, “Let me know of any unusual behavior. By the look of it, she seems to be in perfect health.”

“Jenny, is Tipsy all right?” Annette shouted from across the room as the cat hopped and landed on her shoulders.

“Yes, sweetheart. Tipsy is more than just all right. She’s as good as new. You take good care of her.”

“Of course,” Annette replied as she placed the cat back in her travel bag; the four left Jenny’s office, marching toward Columbus Circle on their way to Ray’s Pizza on West Seventy-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street.

Aurora and Annette were pacing fast as Aura’el and Glenda were tagging along, stopping by momentarily at Barnes and Noble and window-shopping for a new cell phone. “What was wrong with Tipsy?” Aura’el asked. “There’s nothing wrong with her, Mom, is there?”

“No, no, quite the contrary. Jenny gave her a clean bill of health.”

“But how is that possible?” Aura’el insisted. “The cat seemed as though she was about to die.”

“You are quite right. Jenny was altogether puzzled herself since it appeared as though Tipsy was poisoned but miraculously survived it. She said something about the cat getting younger, but we couldn’t truly understand what she meant,” Glenda replied while somewhat distorting the information that was relayed to her and Aurora by Jenny.

“Strange,” Aura’el mumbled. “When we stopped by at Aurora’s, I petted Tipsy and wished her well. She looked so weak and fatigued. I could have sworn that I heard her thoughts. She felt she was dying and was extremely frightened. It sounded like an echo in my head, and I could really feel her pain, so I wished for her quick recovery and hoped she’ll regain her full strength and spunk just as if she were a kitten again.”

"Well, sweetheart, I guess you succeeded. Tipsy does appear to be alert and active, more so than before she's gotten sick."

Glenda's heart was racing, and she could feel herself getting anxious and restless. Her palms started to sweat, and her mouth was getting dry. *It's starting*, she said to herself. Her son's powers were beginning to resurface and manifest themselves in the open. Doubtless, it was Aura'el who cured the cat and realigned her molecular structure to resemble that of a two-year-old kitten. A simple petting touch was enough to initiate the transmutation. His ability was not confined only to solidifying thoughts into existence but also to subjugating existing matter to his will. *My god, is there anything he cannot do?*

Glenda was hoping for a few more years of normalcy for the three of them, a life away from prying eyes and overstimulated paparazzi. Though Aura'el was deemed a genius by accepted scientific standards, the media attention surrounding him was muted, always surpassed by the "gifted" such as Father Mulligan and Ms. Gonzales, but the unexpected event that was about to unfold resulted in a media blitz that nearly uncovered their secret.

"What are you having, Mom?" Aura'el asked Glenda, interrupting and cutting short her semidaydreaming thought ride.

"I'll have a Sicilian, dear," she replied, smiling. "And what are you having? Your usual pepperoni?"

"No guessing here." Aura'el nodded as he was sprinkling garlic and other spices on his slice.

They sat down at Ray's Pizza savoring a variety of pizzas and sipping soda and fruit punch when Annette suddenly realized that Tipsy's carry-on bag was empty. "Where is Tipsy?" she asked alarmingly.

"In her carry-on bag, isn't she?" Aurora responded, almost whispering.

"No, she is not," Annette replied as she was frantically looking for the cat throughout the restaurant.

"Tipsy! Tipsy!" they called but to no avail; the cat just seemed to have vanished.

Annette finally broke down and burst into tears as Aura'el and Glenda stepped out of the pizza shop looking for Tipsy in the surrounding area.

“She is right there!” they heard Annette yelling. “Right there on the other side of Broadway! Oh my god . . . oh my god, the limo is going to run her over. She’s gonna get killed. Tipsy! Tipsy!” Annette screamed her lungs out, but the cat was oblivious to the sound of her voice and sat frozen and immobilized on the middle of the street as the white stretch limousine was seconds away from crushing and running her to the ground; they were all signaling the driver, who seemed to be preoccupied and engaged in conversation with the passengers sitting behind him.

Annette ran toward the cat, hoping to catch and save the feline from her impending doom, but alas, the limo appeared to be seconds away from hitting her. Aura’el leaped forward, bypassing Annette and successfully grabbing a hold of Tipsy while looking directly at the approaching wheels. Glenda screamed in horror as it looked as if both her son and the cat were about to be crushed by the advancing monstrosity of a car.

“Stop!” Aura’el shouted, extending his left arm forward and signaling the driver to stop. Suddenly, a tremendous explosion was overheard throughout the street as a colossal round shield of light of about thirty feet in diameter appeared out of nowhere and separated Aura’el and the limousine. The car proceeded toward the shield and was swallowed by it on its entirety, disappearing into thin air.

A moment later, an ethereal glowing version of the limo and all its occupants burst out of the shield and ran through Aura’el as he was standing and holding Tipsy in his hands. It took nearly ten seconds for the elongated luminescent car to pass through the two of them as both seemed to have been stripped of their solid corporeal state; the shield continued to make crackling noises as its density waned while Aura’el, Tipsy, and the limousine gradually regained their solid state, fluxing and phasing in and out of existence, appearing and disappearing as their bodies coalesced and settled back into their normal forms.

The limousine finally came to a halt, and the driver got out, looking disoriented and pale, shaking and trembling in fear. “What just happened?” he asked Glenda, who rushed toward Aura’el, hugging him tightly and holding him close to her waist.

"You almost killed them, you dumb idiot," she snapped. "You were too busy talking to your passengers instead of watching the road ahead of you. Luckily, no one got hurt."

Annette dashed toward Aura'el and embraced him, while Aurora grabbed Tipsy and placed her in the carry-on bag and locked it securely. "Thank you, Aura'el. Thank you. Are you OK?" Annette frantically asked as she touched his hands, making sure he was real. "You disappeared." She continued holding his hand.

"I did?"

A crowd was gathering around them, touching the limousine, confirming and double-checking it was not a figment of their imagination; though the entire episode lasted no longer than ten to fifteen seconds, it was vivid and visibly crystal clear. "Did you see what I just saw?" a young, teenage skateboarder asked his girlfriend, who opened the limousine back door, glancing at the startled passengers.

"Yes," she said. "The limo disappeared into that thing and emerged right through it, looking like a mere shadow of itself."

"It passed right through the kid holding the Siamese cat," said another.

"It was awesome!" yelled a third.

"Better than *Star Trek: Voyager*. Now tell us, how did you create these special effects? It was mind blowing!" a nerdy-looking kid howled at Aura'el.

"Hey, is this *Candid Camera*?" shrieked a middle-aged lady. "I did not know they brought that show back."

The commotion grew wilder, with onlookers exchanging impressions of the wondrous event that left them all bewildered and befuddled, not exactly sure what to make of what they have just witnessed and wondering if it was real or some make-believe magic trick. "What has just happened?" Aura'el finally asked Glenda. "Did I really disappear?"

"Yes, you did, sweetheart, but I am not quite sure how or why. We have never encountered such a phenomenon before. Maybe your dad will be able to make sense of it. How ya feelin'?" she asked, touching his hands and face, ensuring he was completely solidified and in one piece.

"I think I'm well, Mom. I feel dizzy and somewhat disoriented as though I had an out-of-body experience, similar to that of Rabbi Goldstein from the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center. It was so exhilarating, Mom, almost intoxicating, I want to do it again." He smiled and started laughing.

A police car stopped right across from the pizzeria, and two officers emerged from the vehicle, one of which walked toward Glenda. "Mrs. Rasmussen Jones?"

"Yes, Officer, how did you know?"

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am. My name is Officer Hesston, and this is my partner, Officer Sung. We're part of a new division linked to the Rhinefeld facility. I am not even sure if your husband is aware of our affiliation with the research center yet, but we're a part of a task force aimed at containing any type of occurrences or events that may unintentionally spill over from your labs. We received numerous calls about an accident that bears all the hallmarks of a Rhinefeld-related incident. Could you please shed some light on what exactly happened?"

"Yes, of course, Officer," Glenda replied and smiled at him. "Where shall I begin?" She went on and recounted the event that inadvertently put her son in the spotlight, though she attempted to minimize his role to that of an unfortunate and unlucky bystander "being in the wrong place at the wrong time" and not being able to explain any of it.

"None of us can," she said as Officer Hesston took notes and listened to her attentively. "Obviously, the entire episode will be communicated to our colleagues at the center, and we should be able to stop by in a matter of hours with our equipment and inspect the area for anomalies."

"As a matter of fact, an investigative team is already on its way here," Glenda heard Osiris say right from behind her.

"Ozi!" she exclaimed as she found herself wrapped in his bear embrace.

"Dad!" Aura'el yelled from behind the limo's trunk, looking underneath it.

"You gave us quite a scare, you little rascal. Come give your dad a hug." Aura'el approached his dad and embraced him warmly. The similarity between the two was striking, particularly their smile, which was captivating and made people stare with jealousy. Though only

twelve years old, Aura'el was nearly the size and height of his dad, a feat both Glenda and Osiris attributed to Dr. Bearlight's alleged genetic design modifications.

"Hello, Mr. Jones," Officer Hesston greeted and shook his hand. "I reckon you'll take it from here."

"Well, yes. Considering the fact that there are no injuries or fatalities and no damage was incurred by anyone, we feel that your division's role in this specific incident is superfluous and unnecessary. The limousine driver, however, must be held accountable for his sloppy and dangerous driving, though we won't be pressing any charges against him. We have arranged for a team of researchers to be here in about half an hour, and we'll conduct our own investigation, including questioning and collecting testimonies from the driver and the passengers."

"Let me just contact my superior," Officer Hesston replied while completing his report. "I'll be right back." Osiris and Glenda exchanged worried looks as soon as the policeman departed, knowing full well that it was their son who was responsible for the supernatural spectacle that brought Broadway to a halt.

The crowd appeared to be dispersing, and traffic finally resumed. "Aurora, could you take the kids home?" Osiris asked. "Glenda and I will be staying here for a while with our team. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not, silly. Come on, guys, we're going home. Aren't you guys tired? I am exhausted." Annette and Aura'el joined Aurora, and the three of them went up Broadway toward West Eightie<sup>th</sup> Street, leaving Glenda and Osiris behind.

"It's all over the news," Osiris uttered softly.

"What's all over the news?"

"This, Glenny, this," he said, pointing at the limousine, which was parked at the side of the street since Officers Hesston and Sung were still questioning the driver. "Someone videotaped the entire incident from the time Tipsy was sitting frozen in the middle of Broadway all the way through the appearance of the shield and all. They are calling it the 'Tipsy hoax.' How do they even know the cat's name?"

"Well, they must have heard Annette screaming her name out loud. The girl was desperate. A hoax? Why a hoax?" Glenda inquired.

“Because the magnitude of the event was so startling that those who observed it refused to accept it for what it was.”

A nerdy-looking bespectacled kid who was interviewed by channel 7 told them it was some sort of special-effect publicity stunt and that the reporters bought it. Luckily, the occurrence was witnessed by no more than ten to twenty people, who themselves were not quite sure what happened. So the explanation sank in since the journalists themselves didn’t know what to make of it. They were convinced that it was some sort of elaborate hoax.

“Thank god for that.” Glenda breathed a sigh of relief. “They’re expecting us to issue a final verdict about what happened here. We’ve scheduled a news conference a week from today to relay our findings. We’ll think of something,” she muttered quietly.

“You know it’s going to happen, don’t you? And most likely sooner rather than later.”

“I know, dear, I know as does Aura’el. He’s not able to verbalize it yet. But subconsciously, I am certain he is aware of his reality-altering ability.”

“No doubt,” Osiris concurred. “He may not be fully cognizant of it yet, but he will surely connect the dots between wishing for something to happen and having it realized almost instantaneously. A mere-coincidence-type reasoning won’t fly, if these occurrences continue to happen.”

“Get ready for a bumpy roller-coaster ride then,” Glenda shot back.

The two of them were standing, chatting, and gazing at their crew pulling anomaly-detecting gadgetry out of the van and setting up a perimeter. “I am looking forward to a few more years of uneventful child-rearing. It’s not too much to ask for an ordinary quiet life, is it?”

“Nothing in our life is ordinary, darling,” Osiris replied and burst out laughing.

“You know what I mean, you silly goose.” Glenda giggled.

“Yes, I know what you mean, love. We’ll just have to wait and see how our lives are about to unfold.”

Little did the couple know, at the time, that Glenda’s wish was to be granted, a cosmic gift of sorts and a much-needed respite before the milestone event that was destined to transpire—an arresting landmark occasion that forever changed the course of human history.

## Chapter Ten

Nearly six years went by without a single paranormal manifestation associated with Aura'el (to the sheer delight of Glenda and Osiris). The Tipsy hoax was never fully explained, though some theories were suggested about what took place on that cold March day, one of which advocated the emergence of “confluence X” (a.k.a. the shield of incorporeality), a vortex-type phenomenon capable of emanating dematerializing particles that destabilize solid matter and strip it of its mass, leaving it temporarily in a simultaneous state of being and nonbeing. The committee, however, was not able to provide a satisfactory explanation about why the vortex opened when it did and by what means or by whom.

Ultimately, the Tipsy hoax remained unsolved as the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center proceeded full steam ahead with its efforts to establish the singularity of thought theorem and to demystify supernatural phenomena. The theorem stipulated the existence of the E particle (*E* for “eternal”), a by-product of the electrical brain activity that produces thought. “Thought is an outcome of electric energy oscillating in our brains,” Osiris wrote in a paper published in *Science* magazine, “just as sunlight is the electromagnetic outcome of the sun’s hot, scorching plasma.”

He continued. “Light consists of photons, elementary particles that exhibit the properties of both waves and particles. Similarly, a thought is a massless, vibrating energy pulse consisting entirely of E particles that are characterized by a similar duality of behavior

appearing to be capable of affecting our physical reality under certain conditions in a manner that appears to defy the laws of physics. Imagine a concentrated laser beam. Likewise, a focused thought may affect our physical plane in a manner perceived as magical, supernatural, or paranormal. A focused, intentional thought to levitate an object (without physically lifting it), for example, can be magnified significantly through the human aura (an unlimited E particle energy reservoir), which in turn interacts with the object's 'substance' and executes the focused thought to levitate it. Thus, enhanced E particles that come in contact with the object imbue themselves to its molecular structure and 'strip it of its mass' (while retaining its shape coherence) and thus causing it to levitate.

"Previously, we have stated that the singularity of thought is a convergence point where a single thought and energy merge, a blending moment of clarity in which *both* fuse and unify, thus allowing for a drastic elevation of energy within the human aura, which is then channeled into remolding and reshaping of reality in a variety of ways. We conclude, therefore, that meditation is the key element in this thought/energy merger. Deep concentration and introspection allows for the blending moment of clarity that amplifies intent and 'materializes' it in our plane of existence through the human aura. The external materialization of the intended thought and its manifestation in our plane of existence may appear in a variety of ways, such as telekinesis, bilocation, clairvoyance, psychometry, precognition, spontaneous healing, and many other phenomena considered miraculous or metaphysical."

"In the past, the blending moment of clarity was achieved primarily via the chanting of spells, the drawing of magical circles, the evocation of divine names, and the conjuration of alleged demons, spirits, and other deities. Nowadays it appears that meditation and contemplation on a variety of energy sources could elevate one's E particle quotient just the same and, in many cases, decidedly and significantly more."

Osiris concluded with the submission of an audiovisual documentation of three additional persons of interest who have exhibited supernatural powers (clairvoyance, psychometry, and precognition), which further lent credence to an ever-growing acceptance within the

scientific community that the “natural” and “supernatural” seemed to cohabit the same plane of existence despite their inherent contradiction.

As staggering as the observation was, it was accepted as a matter of fact since the video proof provided was beyond dispute even by the most vociferous debunkers, who were invited to the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center to conduct their own experiments with the test subjects. Their conclusion was always a positive confirmation of the test subject’s authenticity and the genuineness of the phenomenon being observed.

Indeed, Osiris and Glenda’s plan of creating worldwide awareness as a precursor to the inevitable emergence of their son in the world stage was highly successful. In eighteen years, Rhinefeld has transformed from a local NYC research lab into a global and internationally recognized paranormal research center. Glenda and Osiris became household names, and “singularity of thought” came to be a term that exuded hope for transforming humanity and catapulting it into a new era of enlightenment.

“The term ‘gifted’ is grossly incorrect,” Osiris stated in one of his lectures. “Psychic powers are not ‘gifts’ born of a mutation of sorts but rather an inherent and integral part of what signifies us as human beings. Each one of us possesses the ability to achieve this unique moment of thought/energy blending that allows for the expression of the so-called supernatural. Meditation is the key to unlocking our godhood, and our aura is the undisputed vehicle.”

The demystification of the paranormal has proved incredibly successful. The stage was set for the emergence of the impossible and for the continued unraveling of the human psyche. Fear of the unknown made way for an unquenchable thirst to unravel humanity’s innate godhood at its bare essence.

But not all agreed. Rhinefeld had its own fair share of critics and detractors, who viewed its research as a dangerous and ungodly provocation. “Recall the Tower of Babel,” said Pastor Dietrich Schmidt, the president of the Dawn of the International Faithful, an interreligious consortium composed mainly of the three monotheistic religions. “And so it is written, ‘And they said: ‘Come, let us build us a city, and a tower,

with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Our ancestors decided to build a tower that was to reach to heaven to make them equal to God, resulting in a calamity: ‘So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.’”

“The Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center has awakened a genie that may eventually turn against its master,” said Dr. Butrus Abdul Aziz, the great imam of Egypt. “Indeed, Rhinefeld has provided us with indisputable scientific proof to many of the biblical stories considered myth just a short while ago, but going any further might result in unleashing uncontrollable powers that may bring about the downfall of humanity. We urge you then—stop the research now.”

Alas, their warning fell on deaf ears. The research continued unfettered and full steam ahead. The Rhinefeld Institute has done for meditation what Einstein’s theory of relativity has done for physics. Meditation practice centers have popped up all over the globe like mushrooms after the rain, with the expressed aim to elevate humanity to its fullest potential. The supernatural and the miraculous were no longer articles of faith but rather scientifically proven facts that instilled hope for a future devoid of hate, violence, and wars, which have plagued humanity since its inception.

The powers displayed and exhibited at the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center, however, were erratic and lacking consistency. They were difficult to produce on demand and relied heavily on spontaneity and unpredictability, reason enough for government agencies around the world to conclude that psychic powers have no military use because of their unstable and inconsistent nature, nor can they be weaponized. Yet both Glenda and Osiris knew that the abilities they researched and brought into international scrutiny paled in comparison with thought solidification and matter manipulation exhibited by the late Dr. Bearlight and, to a certain degree, by themselves; theirs was, by far, the most majestic and illustrious expression of the singularity of thought, dwarfing all powers combined, and free of the usual restrictions of unpredictability and inconsistency. Theirs could have been called on at a moment’s notice and was worthy of weaponization.

The two continued to keep their own ability a secret to shield themselves and their son from public scrutiny and to ensure keeping any military interest at bay. Still, it was clear that it was only a matter of time before they too would be compelled to step forward and display their power in all its imposing glory.

## Chapter Eleven

The couple miscalculated, however, and did not foresee that their own son would choose to keep his ability to himself once he became aware of it. They were certain that, once Aura'el would become familiar with his own power, he would approach them for clarification and guidance, but Aura'el chose to keep quiet about his own nascent, emerging capacities.

It's been nearly three years since it became clear to him that he also possessed unusual capabilities, unlike the abilities manifested in his father's labs. It started with a simple craving for a chocolate bar and then experiencing a momentary bodily glow that detached itself from his body and solidified into an edible chocolate bar. It continued with materializing articles of clothing and small, little animals (such as a mouse and a frog in one of his biology lab classes), gazing at water until it boiled, and levitating heavy items by the mere thought of an antigravity force.

It was as though reality succumbed to his will and obeyed his every command. His thoughts manifested themselves in two major ways: light solidification (i.e., energy detachment from his aura and its materialization and coagulation into a fully formed animate or inanimate object) and a straightforward influence on existing reality by directing his thought-infused aura to matter, bending it to his will, and altering it on a molecular level. Remarkably enough, it appeared that the above process did not necessitate any type of meditation or retrospection, in stark contrast to his dad's research emphasizing the importance of meditation for the manifestation of paranormal abilities.

"How is that possible?" he asked himself. "I have never meditated, yet I am capable of displaying such uncanny feats. Where did it come from? Shall I ask my parents? No, they might become overconcerned and worried since my ability is so vastly different from what they have researched thus far. It may not even be related at all to the singularity of thought theorem." Aura'el concluded that it would be best to keep his ability to himself for now until such time that circumstances changed and might necessitate a confession not just to his parents but to Annette as well.

The bond between Aura'el and Annette grew stronger with the passing of the last six years and eventually blossomed into a full-fledged romantic relationship. Both attended NY Institute of Technology; Aura'el was a freshman majoring in computer science and electrical engineering technology and Annette a senior about to graduate with a degree in biotechnology and chemistry. The couple was the talk of the campus not just because of their deep involvement in community-related volunteerism but also for the personal care and warmth they have shown to those "outsiders" and "outcasts" who appeared to have been left behind socially.

The two were easily mistaken for models. Annette reminded everyone who knew her of Vanessa Williams, a well-known actress, singer, and fashion designer. Aura'el appeared to be a splitting image of Wentworth Miller, an actor, model, and screenwriter who rose to prominence after his role as Michael Scofield in the series *Prison Break*. Together, they made heads turn, and many of their associates would just sigh with envy when the two would pass by.

"So when is the happy day?" Margarit Tomlinson, Annette's friend, asked her jokingly.

"You're being funny," Annette responded with a smirk on her face. "He's hardly eighteen."

"Well, he could have fooled me." She giggled. "He's got the body of an adult Olympic swimming champion."

"Yes, he does, doesn't he? Don't think I haven't noticed, but frankly, Margarit, I am more impressed with his intellect and wit rather than

his bulging muscles. He is just so incredibly smart and knowledgeable. I keep forgetting he's younger than me."

"Brawn and brains, you got yourself a perfect combination there, Annette." Margarit exploded with laughter.

Aura'el too was relentlessly teased for his good looks and perfect physique, leaving behind a trail of broken hearts of all those who had their sights on him but learned he was already taken. *Imagine, Aura'el said to himself, what would have happened if they knew of my ability. Would they still crave my company as they do now? Wouldn't they freak out? No, not at all. After all, psychics are in nowadays. Father Mulligan, the flying priest, and Ms. Gonzales, the telekinetic, are international celebrities, adored, and revered by all who knew them. If anything, exposing my ability to my friends, and most of all to Annette, would most likely further strengthen the bond and friendship between us.*

Alas, the event that took place the following day generated a sudden sense of unexpected immediacy that brought all thoughts of a deferred confession to the forefront.

## Chapter Twelve

Sunday, October 7, 2012

“It’s a perfect day for that.”

“But I think it’s lame,” Annette interrupted. “The Empire State Building? ‘Sounds boring.’”

“Come on, Annette. We said we were going to do it. Shame on us. We dare call ourselves New Yorkers, and we still haven’t been to the top of the Empire State Building, and don’t let me start about the Statue of Liberty.” Aura’el placed his cell phone on the table momentarily while checking the weather on NY1. “Call Margarit and Leonardo. See if they want to join us!” he shouted into the phone.

“OK, handsome, let me find out.”

“Tell them to meet us by FAO Schwarz on Fifth and Fifty-Eighth Street. Ask Leo to bring his exchange student friend.”

“Marco, isn’t it? He hasn’t been there yet, hasn’t he?”

They all met two hours later at about 1:00 p.m. by FAO Schwarz, grabbed some hot dogs and diet sodas, and proceeded down Fifth Avenue, walking leisurely toward Thirty-Fourth Street. It was a cool and chilly day without a cloud in the sky and with clear, sharp visibility—a perfect day for sightseeing and exploring NYC’s major tourist attractions.

Though they have never been to the Empire State Building, Aura’el and Annette walked down Fifth Avenue many times before; and each time, they have noticed the never-ending changes that continued to transform this gigantic open mall between Fifty-Seven<sup>th</sup>

and Forty-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Streets. True, there were some permanent fixtures on that high-end strip such as Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Tiffany's, which have been there forever, riding through the ever-increasing rents, but many other shops they have known from previous visits have closed down and were replaced by new corporate flagship stores like Abercrombie & Fitch, NBA, and H&M.

They passed by St. Patrick's Cathedral, and Annette couldn't help but mention Father Mulligan's visit to the church on Christmas Eve 2006. The flying priest was invited by the archbishop to participate in the annual midnight Mass; he was to sing "O Holy Night" in front of numerous guests and dignitaries gathered from around the world. Indeed, Father Mulligan was so overjoyed by the honor that was bestowed upon him and sang most eloquently and passionately; in his excitement, however, the priest started levitating to the absolute awe and disbelief of his audience, who have heard of his marvelous ability but have never witnessed it firsthand. The priest's aura glowed like a shooting star as he ascended toward the cathedral ceiling and remained suspended in midair for about a minute before finally descending. Since that day, he was known as the "shooting star of Bethlehem" to all Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

"I'll never forget that midnight Mass," Annette said to Aura'el as they walked in for a short tour.

"How can one forget? That was a close encounter with an actual 'star.'" He cackled. "We should pay him a visit soon. How about next Sunday after Mass?"

"Deal," Annette responded.

They both adored the pastor as much as their parents did; for them, he was not the flying priest but a close friend and confidant who enlightened them with spiritual guidance and sound advice as well as insightful look into the world of particle physics and its relation to the singularity of thought theorem.

Aura'el contemplated confiding in Father Mulligan and disclose his ability to him before approaching his parents. He trusted the priest's judgment as well as his impartiality and expanded perspective on

matters big and small. He was to discuss the “confession” issue with him a day after New Year’s Eve as part of his New Year’s resolution.

The group proceeded toward Forty-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street and stopped by at the New York Public Library, gazing and idolizing the marble lions standing proudly before the exalted Beaux-Arts building. “Hello, Astor and Lenox!” Margarit yelled as they were admiring the statues and taking photos from every possible angle.

“I think you’re wrong, Margarit. Yes, originally, they were named Astor and Lenox, but Mayor Fiorello La Guardia named them Patience and Fortitude for the qualities he felt New Yorkers would need to survive the economic depression during the 1930s,” Marco commented in his heavy British accent. “This is Patience.” He continued as he pointed at the lion guarding the south side of the library steps. “And this is Fortitude.” He pointed at the lion sitting to the north.

“Well, how would you know that?” Margarit looked at him, stunned.

“Here, read it yourself.” Marco laughed and handed her his New York City travel brochure.

The girls were posing by the lions, putting on a variety of farcical expressions; Margarit, a trained gymnast, couldn’t help herself and climbed on the back of Fortitude and grabbed a hold of his mane. “Have you lost your mind?” Leonardo shouted at her. “Get off that lion before you’ll get us all arrested!”

“Fine, fine. Calm down, y’all.” She giggled as she jumped off the lion’s back and landed softly on the ground.

Aura’el glanced intensely at the lions and felt somewhat mischievous as well. *It would be fun to animate those felines, wouldn’t it?* he said to himself, grinning, and decided to play a trick on Annette. As the girls were chatting and cackling, being momentarily unmindful of his presence, Aura’el raised his left index finger and pointed it at Annette’s cell phone. A second later, Annette screamed in terror and grabbed Aura’el’s right shoulder, dropping her cell phone to the ground.

“Did you see that? The damn thing is alive. He yawned and appeared ready to jump right at me. How can that be? Here, take a look yourself,” she said, picking up the phone and handing it over to him.

"You must have imagined it," he said as he strongly attempted not to burst out laughing. "You're spending far too much time with those psychics at my dad's lab, and now you're seeing things."

"One of them must have done something to my camera. I know what I saw," she remarked.

"We're finally here!" Margarit exclaimed.

"Wow, what a long line," Leonardo complained. "It's gonna take us forever."

"No worries, guys. We'll be at the observation deck in no time," Aura'el assured them all.

Fifteen minutes later, they exited the elevator on the 86<sup>th</sup> floor and entered the observatory. The place was packed with tourists as well as locals; children were running around, chasing each other, while the vast majority were busy posing and snapping photos of themselves against the amazing NYC skyline.

The observation deck wraps around the building's spire, providing 360-degree views of New York and beyond, featuring panoramic sceneries of Central Park, the Hudson River, the East River, the Brooklyn Bridge, Times Square, and the Statue of Liberty. Exclamations such as "Wow, it's awesome" or "It's breathtakingly beautiful" could be heard throughout the 86<sup>th</sup> floor and from those who visited the 102<sup>nd</sup> floor, which provides even more spectacular views of the city and beyond. (Central Park comes into full view; the grid of streets reveals its brilliant design, and on a clear day, one can see beyond the skyscrapers up to eighty miles away.) Truly, it appeared as if the spectators couldn't get enough of New York City and its majestic beauty, its pulsating and pumping heart, and the enormity of its size. They were all simply smitten and mesmerized by the sights, colors, and sounds unfolding in front of their eyes.

Margarit took a deep breath and grabbed a hold of Leonardo; she appeared light-headed and semi-intoxicated, and then she did the absolutely unthinkable and hopped right against the ten-foot-high spiked security fence, stretching both her arms and grabbing a hold of the spikes. "Quick! Snap a picture already!" she yelled at Leonardo, assuming a classic gymnast pose.

They all froze solid as the spike supporting her back unexpectedly loosened and came undone from behind her while a fast-approaching gust of wind threw her off balance. The petrified girl screamed in horror as the wind pushed her with a shuddering ferocity right outside the security fence. Annette and Leonardo rushed toward the edge of the fence in a futile attempt to grab a hold of her and prevent her from falling, but the speed and force of the wind blew the petite Margarit about thirty to forty feet away from the fence.

Aura'el stretched his hand forward instinctively, briefly, glowing sharply, and unnoticeably; Margarit appeared to be suspended in the air 1,050 feet high above the ground in the middle of Thirty-Four<sup>th</sup> Street while a flicker of intense, bright light exploded beneath her, hurling strings of golden light from Thirty-Four<sup>th</sup> and Fifth all throughout Midtown Manhattan. Seconds later, the luminescent strings pulled back to their focal point of origin to form a gargantuan ball of light that appeared to be taking the shape of some winged creature right underneath the unconscious Margarit and in front of the panicked spectators at the observation deck (who couldn't even utter as much as "oh my god") and the thousands of pedestrians below running for cover.

The ball of light finally solidified and morphed into a Peryton (a mythological hybrid medieval European beast with the head, forelegs, talons, and fearsome antlers of a stag and wings, plumage, and hindquarters of a bird) while the unconscious Margarit landed safely and softly on its back, appearing as if she were glued to it by an invisible force. The Peryton spread its enormous wings and flew down Thirty-Four<sup>th</sup> Street, speeding west toward the Hudson River, roaring and bellowing; the wing flapping of the creature was so ferociously intense and his cries so high pitched that numerous windows in the adjacent vicinity shattered and broke, showering the streets with huge chunks of glass debris that turned into golden dust as it descended gently onto the sidewalk and on petrified pedestrians.

Annette and Leonardo gazed at the winged behemoth with awe and trepidation, while many other spectators at the observation deck ran toward the exits, and others took live videos of the flying monstrosity as it advanced toward Six<sup>th</sup> Avenue. "Where the hell is he going? He is

flying in the wrong direction!" Annette hollered at Aura'el in frustration after overcoming the initial shock of the Peryton's sudden appearance.

"Margarit is safe and sound," Aura'el responded calmly.

"What are you talking about?" she snapped, worried sick about the safety of her best friend.

"Look again. I can tell from—"

"It's coming right over here!" Leonardo screamed, cutting Aura'el in midsentence, as the gliding hybrid flew in circles and then changed course right toward the observation deck, making some erratic turns and twists as it soared high into the clear blue skies and then descended low, appearing to be almost dropping the paralyzed Margarit off its back.

An absolute pandemonium erupted throughout Midtown Manhattan as people ran toward the nearest subway entrances, screaming and yelling, with some fainting and dropping like flies, while others stopped and gazed in wonderment at the falling chunks of glass turning into radiant golden powdery soot, landing tenderly on their face and body. Traffic came to a complete halt as courageous drivers got out of their vehicles to videotape the mammoth monster's flight, following its every move.

"It's the end of the world!" yelled a petrified passerby as he ran toward Madison Square Garden.

"It is most likely a locked-up creature who escaped from that Rhinefeld lab. Didn't I say they were all devil worshippers out there?" A man in his midforties turned toward his friend, who appeared to nod in agreement.

"What do you mean 'devil worshippers'?" a young lady cried from behind. "The creature appeared suddenly and out of nowhere. It emerged from that ball of light, not some lab. It saved that poor girl's life from certain death."

"Why won't you just take a hike?" the other guy said, hissing back at her, as they were watching the Peryton advancing toward the Empire State Building observation deck.

The beast circled the top of the 86<sup>th</sup> floor, approaching the deck and appearing as though it was about to crash-land; but instead, it seemed

to be decreasing and shrinking in size, its body mass gradually losing its structure coherence, dematerializing, and increasingly turning ethereal until it finally disappeared, dissolving into thin air in front of the many startled and stunned tourists who remained at the observation deck. Margarit floated for a few seconds and then landed smoothly on the floor. Annette rushed toward her and immediately checked her pulse; Margarit was breathing slowly, and a weird smile was strewn across her face as though she were dreaming of her latest big win in one of her gymnastics tournaments.

“Margarit, Margarit, can you hear me?” Leonardo whispered while holding her hands. Margarit moved slowly and opened her eyes.

“What happened?” she asked. “Where am I?”

“What is the last thing you remember?” Annette questioned her rather quietly.

“I am not sure,” Margarit replied, raising herself into a sitting position.

“I was holding on to the security fence, posing, and asking Leonardo to hurry up taking those pictures of me. I remember losing my balance, and it’s all blank from there.”

“What matters is that you are all right now,” Marco interjected.

“We need to take you to the hospital,” Leonardo added. “We have to make sure you did not suffer internal injuries or anything else for that matter. We’ll fill you in on what happened as soon as you feel better.”

“But I feel better now,” Margarit insisted. “What the hell happened? Why do you guys look at me as though I just came back from the dead?”

“Here, why don’t you show her?” a tourist said in a heavy German accent and handed Annette his cell phone. “Just press that button right here.”

Margarit grabbed the cell phone from Annette’s hand, pressed the play button, and froze. Here, she was suspended in the air as a giant flying stag materialized right underneath her, gliding through Thirty-Four<sup>th</sup> Street. Her unconscious body appeared to be glued to its back, while all along exploding broken glass was turning into golden soot and falling on the heads of pedestrians running for their lives. “But that is just impossible,” she mumbled incoherently as she passed out again.

Two paramedics and a few police officers approached the group while the observation deck security guards directed the rest of the remaining onlookers toward the exit elevators. The paramedics lifted Margarit onto a stretcher, checking her life signs and assessing her overall condition; after a few minutes of examining Margarit, they finally woke her up and said to the startled Leonardo, “She appears to be in perfect shape, albeit still in a slight state of panic, but that is quite understandable considering what she has just gone through. We’ll be taking her to Bellevue Hospital for further observations.”

“Please follow us,” said one of the police officers. “We’ll be taking an account from y’all of what exactly took place here.” The rattled group left the observation deck and took the elevator down, exiting the building from a back passage since the front entrance on Thirty-Four<sup>th</sup> and Fif<sup>th</sup> was mobbed by a sea of reporters and a throng of spectators.

Bellevue Hospital was just a short ride away from the Empire State Building, but the ride appeared to be taking longer than usual, though the congested vehicles ahead of the wailing ambulance did attempt their best to clear the way. Aura’el’s phone rang. “Are you all right, dear? How’s Margarit? Is everyone OK?” Aura’el heard the tense voice of his worried mother.

“We are all just fine, Mother. We’re taking Margarit to Bellevue. I am not quite sure how long we’ll be staying there. Annette, Leonardo, and Marco are still quite startled.”

“How are *you* feeling, son?”

“I feel like we need to talk. I sense that you and Dad know exactly what about.” There was a prolonged silence on the other side of the line. “Mom, are you still there?” Aura’el howled into the phone.

“Yes . . . yes, sweetheart, I am here. We’ll talk as soon as you get back home. Do you know when?”

“As soon as we are done here.” The conversation was cut off suddenly as the ambulance approached the front entrance of the hospital. Aura’el glanced intensely at Margarit, who appeared to have totally regained her faculties. She was laughing and giggling with the doctor and his nurses, being her vivacious self again—lively and full of her usual spunk and charm.

The cops completed taking their account of the incident, focusing mainly on what was already termed by the Empire State Building assistant director of operations as “a freak accident” in a statement released to the news media clogging the street. Dr. Blumenthal, who was checking on Margarit, approached the group and said, “Your friend appears to be euphoric. There is no sign of any trauma whatsoever. She’ll be staying here for the next twenty-four hours.”

“Her parents are on the way. They should be here shortly,” Leonardo responded, relieved that Margarit seemed to be doing better than anyone could have expected.

“Wow, what a day,” Marco said, turning to Annette. But Annette appeared to have not heard him as they were watching the jaw-dropping news blasting from the giant TV screen and hitting the crowded hospital reception area with a sense of a fast-approaching Armageddon. All the networks, without an exception, interrupted their usually scheduled programming to report the events that have transpired at the notorious Empire State Building; indeed, from the streets of NYC to London, Paris, Berlin, and all throughout the globe, one story and one story only was covered ad nauseam.

“NYC attacked,” MSNBC anchor Zachary Robertson reiterated in his opening statement.

“It ain’t no monkey,” Christian Netherlander of The News Network Channel (TNNC) reported in the 7:00 p.m. special edition of its Sunday news, in direct reference to King Kong (a giant movie monster resembling a colossal ape that climbed the Empire State Building, only to fall from the skyscraper while protecting his caretaker woman).

“Invasion of the flying stag monster!” shouted the soft-spoken Brian McNamara of Fox News.

“It’s all Rhinefeld’s fault. Shut it down now,” lamented Dr. Butrus Abdul Aziz, the great imam of Egypt, at his nightly show broadcasted worldwide via satellite.

“We are broadcasting live from the Rhinefeld Parapsychology Center in Manhattan,” announced Brian Amalberti of Channel 2 News. “We are awaiting a statement from Prof. Osiris Jones, chief researcher at the famed Rhinefeld Institute.”

"Hey, it's your dad!" Leonardo shouted at Aura'el, drawing his attention to the TV screen.

Osiris approached the lectern and, in a stern voice, addressed the numerous reporters, who nearly overran him. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Please rest assured that the Rhinefeld Institute will be thoroughly investigating the extraordinary occurrence that has taken place earlier today at the Empire State Building observation deck. From the preliminary information provided to us mainly via the building security cameras, we are certain and confident that there is no need for alarm. No, we haven't been invaded by aliens," he said, smiling broadly and staring at the cameras. "No, this is not the dawn of magic either. We believe we have encountered this phenomenon before but not to such a magnificent extent. There is evidently an intelligence behind this amazing and successful rescue attempt, though it is yet to be confirmed and further investigated."

Osiris stopped momentarily to sip some water and stared at his audience intently. He continued. "Naturally, social media has been ablaze, in the last few hours, with unfounded reports of the so-called invasion or attack. From Facebook to YouTube as well as Twitter, numerous videos have been posted that give the impression that some mythical monster of old has 'raided' our city in the most unimaginable display of wonderment ever witnessed since the dawn of human history. Indeed, to all those misguided media fearmongers, we offer cold, hard facts as attested by the videos they themselves broadcasted.

"The facts, ladies and gentlemen, cannot be clearer. A young, teenage girl was saved today from certain death by a fabled creature that appeared to have solidified out of sheer light. Moreover, glass debris that showered the streets below turned into golden soot, thus avoiding any injury to any pedestrians and passersby. Truly, New York City—excuse me, the world was rattled today by a manifestation we are yet to understand, but the assignment of malevolent intent to the being, or the intelligence behind it, flies in the face of common sense and rationality.

"Someone or something saved Ms. Tomlinson's life in a manner that boggles the mind. We extend an invitation to whomever is responsible for this heroic act to come forth and enlighten us. Help us understand

the nature of this striking and imposing light solidification, reality-shaping process.”

“Reality shaping?” cried Mr. Fitzgerald, a newscaster for channel 7. “Is that what you are calling it, Professor Jones? With all due respect, it looks like outright magic. M-A-G-I-C, magic.”

Osiris stared at the reporter and, with a calm, commanding voice, said the following: “From time immemorial, science has held that there is no such thing as magic, and Rhinefeld’s position on unexplained phenomena is no different. Let me reiterate: there is no such thing as magic, period. There are, however, strange and unexplored occurrences that may seem magical for lack of any explanation. But in the last fifteen years, the Rhinefeld Institute has provided indisputable proof for such numerous abilities that were considered magical before unraveling them as absolutely consistent with our current understanding of energy displacement and transformation. We are certain this incident is no different. And rest assured Rhinefeld will get to the bottom of this Peryton rescue. Good night to you all.”

Osiris moved away from the lectern and walked toward the exit, ignoring additional questions and comments tossed at him from all directions. “Professor, should we be afraid?” another reporter yelled. “What will happen if this something or someone decides to go rouge the next time around?”

## Chapter Thirteen

“What, indeed? What would have happened if the Russians went rogue?” Marco asked rhetorically while thinking out loud. “I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.” He answered his own question as Annette, Leonardo, and Aura’el started walking toward the hospital’s west wing exit.

“I don’t see the point in playing the ‘what if’ game,” Annette shot back at him. “It will get us absolutely nowhere. Guys, do you want to share a cab? We’re all heading toward the same direction anyway. Cheer up, Leonardo. You heard what the doctor said. Margarit is just fine.”

“Thanks, Annette,” Leonardo responded, looking at her with an ashen face. “I am still feeling as though we were caught up in one of those *Twilight Zone* episodes. It’s absolutely surreal.”

“I think this was just the opening salvo. There is more to come,” Aura’el said suddenly.

“Yes, I think so too,” Annette concurred as she stared at him intensively. “There is definitely more to come.” She continued. “Whoever is responsible for the Peryton lifesaving feat won’t just sit idly by, bottling down such an amazing power. I am telling you, the world as we know it is but over.”

“You sound pretty certain, Annette. Why would you say that?” Marco looked at her, all puzzled.

“It’s just a gut feeling I have. The way I see it, the genie was let out of his bottle, and he ain’t going back.”

“Maybe we can all have our wishes fulfilled,” Marco added jokingly.

"Maybe," Aura'el responded, laughing out loud.

The group entered a taxicab at Twenty-Eighth and First. Annette sat next to the driver, and the three boys sat in the back still arguing about what it all meant. "I bet you guys that we'll be mobbed by journalists tomorrow. I wouldn't be surprised if some of those pesky reporters are already camping by our homes. After all, we're Margarit's friends. Wouldn't they suspect that one of us was behind it all?" Leonardo turned to Aura'el, looking for confirmation of his assumption.

"No, I don't think so," Aura'el replied confidently. "We simply do not fit the profile of your typical psychic. Take a look at my father's research in the last eighteen years. All those people who were found to be able to exhibit supernatural powers are in their late thirties, most have an intense religious background, and all have practiced meditation for years, which, as you all know, is a prerequisite for a successful reality-altering manifestation such as telekinesis or levitation. I bet none of you can sit still for five minutes, let alone meditate for an hour. So forget it. They won't be coming after us. If anything, they might stop by at Marisol Flora Gonzales's house. She's the only one who is capable of willingly suspending a person in the air."

"Well, there is a problem with that hunch," Annette interjected.

"Which is?" Aura'el asked.

"Ms. Gonzales is in Spain and has been teaching in Madrid since September. You don't suggest that her telekinetic powers are able to cross the Atlantic Ocean and that she is somehow omnipresent."

"No, of course not."

"Back to square one then," Marco summarized.

"Whatever it was, whoever it was, they were there with us at the observation deck. They witnessed the freak accident as we did and acted instinctively," Leonardo added.

"Or they may have been down below at the street level, looking up and responding instinctively as you suggested. There is really no easy way to find out," Annette stated as she turned and looked at them, packed like sardines in the back of the cab.

And as soon as Annette finished her sentence, both Leonardo and Marco appeared to have been sucked right into the cover page of an

ESPN sports magazine that Aura'el was holding in his hands, turning into images of football players dressed up in Chicago Blackhawks garb. The two were positioned with the rest of the team players, smiling broadly and gazing at the camera. The photo of the two was so vivid that Annette felt they were about to continue the conversation that was so abruptly and unexpectedly interrupted. She had also noticed with disbelief that the driver next to her seemed to have turned into a very lifelike humanoid robot or an android, and before she was able to say another word, she found herself disappearing and reappearing right next to Aura'el in the back seat.

Annette's jaw dropped as she observed that the taxi was no longer driving in New York's Upper West Side but rather in a cartoonish version of it. The streets to her right and left looked as though they were brush-painted and taken right out from Warner Brothers' *Looney Tunes*. The colors were so bright and distinctive that she had to close her eyes and open them again. Her head was spinning, and she felt as though she was about to pass out.

"Hey, are you OK?" Aura'el whispered softly as he bent over to hug and kiss her.

"OK? Are you for real? You scared the living daylights out of me!" she growled.

"Well, you've been hinting all day long that you knew. I did not want to continue this charade with the guys. I wanted us to talk in private. Besides, I felt that a keen and sharp demonstration of reality-altering power will save us a lot of idle talk."

"Nothing about all this is idle, Aura'el," Annette replied. "I knew about your thought-solidification ability for quite some time now. I saw you glow briefly at the lab when you created those frogs and mice. It was for a split second, but I noticed it nonetheless. I have suspected that you had certain abilities for quite a while. I haven't forgotten about Tipsy and how you saved her. It all makes sense now."

"Are you upset that I did not confide in you sooner?"

"No, not at all. I knew that you'd eventually confess to being different. It was clear, however, that you needed to come to terms with it yourself before sharing it with others. You just caught me by surprise."

I didn't realize that the extent of your ability is literally godlike. I have so many questions I want to ask you."

"Yes, I do too. Am I even human?"

There was an awkward moment of silence, which Annette broke quickly, saying, "I don't really care if you're human or not. You are you, the person I have known since I was three years old, the person I have shared so much with, and the one that I truly love. So whether you came here from Alpha Centauri or some other distant galaxy, you are still my Aura'el. Your newfound abilities don't change any of it."

"I love you too, Annette. I have never doubted your support, care, or true feelings for me. We grew up at Rhinefeld, and we are no strangers to the paranormal. None of this should be too hard to believe or come as a complete surprise. It's important you understand that not pushing forward with this earlier is, by no means, an indication of mistrust on my part or a debilitating fear that you may not accept me or even reject me. I just do not know who I really am."

"I haven't spoken to my parents yet, but I have already told my mom that the three of us are about to have a serious heart-to-heart conversation tonight. Auntie Glenda, as you refer to my mom, knows. I am confident both my parents know that I am the one who set out that Peryton. I am certain they knew all along about my abilities. I am just not quite sure why they haven't mentioned any of it."

Aura'el stopped momentarily, catching his breath as Annette held his hands and said softly, "I have to admit what you are able to do is far more advanced than anything we have ever witnessed and unlike any of the other researched subjects that have been studied thus far at the center. I am convinced there is no one on this planet quite like you. Your ability is *godlike*. It is out of this world. I wouldn't be surprised if you were an alien after all."

"Take a look at me as I really am, and judge for yourself," Aura'el said abruptly as his aura turned bright, like a golden star, and filled the car with intense, blinding light. His body was shimmering and glistening so fiercely that Annette yelled at him to "turn it off" as her eyes were beginning to hurt. Aura'el complied, and his aura diminished instantly.

"What was that?" Annette asked, still rubbing her eyes.

"Well, that was me and my aura energy field, which pulsates at all times. It is in a constant state of a visible glittering luminescence, which I am able to control and hide from human sight. Can you imagine me walking around like a fireball? I'd freak everybody out."

"I can actually imagine you looking like that when you're about to save a life, just as you did earlier today at the Empire State Building. Sooner or later, you'll come forth as you truly are. You know it is bound to happen eventually."

"Yeah, about that, I am not quite sure what to do next. It is only recently that I have realized the extent of my ability and its seemingly omnipotent nature. I am hopeful my parents will provide me with some answers before we start plotting what we're about to do next."

"We?" Annette looked at him, perplexed.

"Yes, us, of course. We're a team, aren't we? We always were. You and I will sort this out." Aura'el seemed somewhat sad and somber as he began to contemplate the enormity of the life-altering significance of possessing such a mighty and supreme capacity. "My head is about to explode, Annette," he whispered softly. "I'm literally flipping out. It just dawned on me. You are right. I have a godlike ability. It is not a boastful remark born of pride or gloating but rather a mere observation of facts. I am clueless about what I am supposed to do about it, Annette. Your insight, on the other hand, is always spot on. It is refreshing as it is helpful, now more than ever. You are my guiding light, Annette."

The strain in Aura'el's face was stark and acutely visible. His heartwarming sincerity and his childlike vulnerability brought tears to Annette's eyes. She leaned forward toward him, kissed him passionately, and then pulled herself away and looked at him lovingly as Aura'el dried out her tears. "I am here, love. I always will be. I sense we are about to embark on a wild adventure, one that is unexpected as it is exciting and thrilling. As you said, we'll explore it together one step at a time. We will figure out what it all means. I feel hopeful about what the future holds for all of us. Cheer up, my sweet, handsome aura man."

They sat there for a few more minutes embraced in each other's arms, gazing through the cab's front window at the cartoonish streets turning

back into their original solid form; Annette vanished momentarily and reappeared sitting in the front next to the cabdriver as Marco and Leonardo popped out of the *ESPN* magazine front cover, looking dazed and disoriented. "Did we just fall asleep?" Marco asked Aura'el.

"Yes, you both did," Aura'el replied. "We are just all tired."

"Driver, could you stop by at Sixty-Eighth Street?" Leonardo requested.

"Yes, of course," the cabdriver replied and stopped by at Sixty-Eighth and Broadway.

"I'll see you guys tomorrow," Leonardo said as he exited the cab. "Have a good night sleep, y'all."

"Bye, Leonardo." Annette waved at him. "See you tomorrow."

Marco got off next at Seventy-Third Street, and Aura'el and Annette kept an eerie silence during the remainder of the ride, until the driver dropped them off at Eightie<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue. "Will you be OK?" Annette questioned Aura'el, sounding somewhat worried.

"I'll be fine, Annette. This conversation with my parents is long overdue, and I am actually looking forward to it. I'll tell you all about it." He smiled at her.

The couple hugged and kissed for what seemed like an unusually prolonged embrace. Aura'el just wouldn't let go as he quickly realized what needed to be done next. He must be reborn, accept his father's invitation, and reveal to the world who he truly was.

## Chapter Fourteen

It was already 9:30 p.m., and Aura'el was standing by the building elevator feeling stressed and worn out. *Tired? Fatigued?* he thought. *That doesn't seem right. What utter nonsense. I am never drained or burned out. I just think I am, but I am clearly not. Those terms do not apply to me. I can light up galaxies and dry up oceans. It is just who I am. Why am I even waiting for the elevator when I can simply dematerialize and rematerialize at the exact place I need to be?*

With every passing hour, it became clearer that his powers that have lain dormant for the last eighteen years were surging, gushing, and swelling in each and every bone in his body, yearning and longing to erupt into the open in a mammoth display of wonderment, affecting everything in its path. Doubtless, he was a force of good, a kindhearted person of a benevolent nature whom the world has just gotten a glimpse of today.

Aura'el closed his eyes momentarily, and when he opened them, he was sitting on his living room sofa right across Glenda and Osiris, who were standing a few feet away from him. "That was some grand entry, son," Osiris quipped as he and Glenda were rattled by their son's unexpected and sudden appearance out of nowhere.

"Out with it, guys," Aura'el griped. "Out with it."

"Can we at least have dinner first?" Glenda suggested. "I cooked your favorite dish, Aura'el."

"Yeah, I guess you are right, Mom. I could smell that fried chicken and corn bread a mile away. Just so we clear, I am not mad at you

two. I am convinced you kept silent about all this for a good reason. Whatever your motives were, I am confident they were noble and had my well-being in mind, but it is time to move forward and chart a new course. I can no longer contain who I truly am or what I can do. I know you understand that.” Aura’el sighed briefly and then stared directly at Glenda and said, “It’s time to let go, Mom.”

Glenda couldn’t contain herself and burst into tears. The level of maturity and compassion her son exhibited toward them both before learning of his extraordinary birth was thought provoking since most young teenagers in similar circumstances would probably respond angrily to being kept in the dark about something as monumental and life altering, about who they truly were. “Come on, Mom. Stop. It’s OK, really.” Aura’el approached his mother and gave her a bear hug.

“I know, love, I know.” She kept on weeping. “I just refuse to let you go.”

“And where is it I am going, Mom?” Aura’el quizzed her jokingly. “Any ideas?” They all erupted in laughter.

They gathered around the kitchen table, listening to old-school classics, and drinking nonalcoholic frozen margaritas. Glenda served a feast fit for kings, a mixture of Southern cuisine with a dash of Scandinavian favorites, such as Swedish meatballs and Danish doughnuts for dessert. They were savoring and enjoying the food, laughing and singing to the tune of the Doobie Brothers’ “What a Fool Believes,” when Aura’el abruptly interrupted the festive mood and asked, “So, Mom, Dad, am I truly human?”

“Yes, son,” Osiris replied. “Of course, you are, but the story of your birth is out of this world, to say the least. You knew, for quite some time, that your mother and I were not able to conceive a child. Thus, we contacted the late Dr. Bearlight, a fertility expert who helped Aurora and Greg conceive Annette. What you did not know is that Dr. Bearlight was one of my early research subjects, a man with the unparalleled ability to solidify light into matter as well as shape and alter reality on a whim. ‘Sounds familiar?’” He smiled as he stared directly at his son. “Anyway, the fertility treatment failed miserably, and we did not get pregnant, but here you are.”

"So what are you saying, Dad? You wished me into existence?"

"Almost but not quite." Osiris abruptly and without warning signaled to Glenda, and they both extended their right arms, palms forward, toward the center of the table. Their bodies flashed as their auras ignited in a spectacular display of ethereal lustrous golden light. They were both shimmering with splendor as the light bursting from their bodies streamed through their palms, colliding in midair to form a crystalline, translucent bubble about three feet in diameter.

The bubble resembled a gigantic crystal ball, and soon enough, still images of the conception ceremony that took place eighteen years ago appeared inside it. Here was Dr. Bearlight giving a partial speech to Glenda and Osiris, followed by the astonishing and sensational fusion of their auras, culminating in Aura'el's eventual emergence in the flesh out of solidified light emanating from an immense source of ethereal luminescence projected from above, as well as from six different directions.

Aura'el was stunned by the unfolding imagery and mesmerized by the explosion of the ceiling pendant into thousands of pieces suspended in the air, shaped in a form of a galaxy with an enormous effulgent star at its center. Aura'el could have sworn he had seen that star before but could not recall where and in what context; he was standing there fascinated by the lifelike display of past events. He noticed suddenly that his parents morphed into vibrant, beaming orbs of light encircling the gleaming, glassy crystal globe in an ever-increasing velocity, which ultimately turned it into a warping time bubble displaying many of the events that have taken place since before his birth and after it, this time in a very real-time audiovisual setup. He was standing there startled by his parents' unexpected display of power and gawking at the unfolding past episodes in a 3-D virtual reality imagery, hearing the sounds and watching the images as they moved and bounced in perfect clarity.

The eventual emergence of his fetus out of the sphere left him breathless. Observing the intensity of the light used to solidify him into existence made him feel empowered and invincible. The enormity of his mind-blowing birth left the young teenager gasping for air and sent shivers down his spine as he began to fathom and realize the nature and

essence of his being—a child of sheer energy solidified into matter via the power of thought. It was as if he was staring at the emergence of an utterly new being into a world that was yet to unravel and reacquaint itself with its immense evolutionary potential.

The images continued to flow inside the crystal time bubble as Aura'el sat nearly motionless, getting an eyeful. He also witnessed the disappearance of Dr. Bearlight, the gathering of friends and family to celebrate his birth, the flight of fancy of Father Mulligan, and his early days as an infant materializing toys and other inanimate objects into existence.

Suddenly, the crystal's translucence began to subside, and the images disappeared. The globe flashed and glowed intensely as it finally dissolved into nothingness; Glenda and Osiris, still in their orb-shaped form, flew around the apartment in an incredible speed, appearing to chase each other, until they finally hovered by the table's chairs and coalesced back into their human forms, looking refreshed and energized.

The three of them sat exchanging looks and staring at one another until Aura'el finally broke the silence and said, "Well, that was unexpected. You caught me by surprise."

"You don't say," Osiris replied somewhat sarcastically.

"I'll say and keep on saying. What was that all about? Since when did the two of you possess such high-level powers?"

"Since about a month or so before your birth," Glenda responded. "Are you astounded by that? You shouldn't be." She continued. "As it turns out, the apple did not fall far from the tree, but our abilities pale in comparison with yours. We are not able to solidify light into permanency as you do, and our level of influence on existing matter and reshaping reality is weak at best. You are one of a kind, son. There is no doubt about it."

"OK, Mom, I get that, though I am not quite sure how I feel about being conceived in such an unimaginable process. For some time now, I wasn't sure of my own humanity. I was convinced I was otherworldly—you know, an alien being."

Aura'el stopped for a moment and levitated a plate of doughnuts in his direction. He looked at his mom, saying, "These are simply

irresistible.” He continued, referring to his previous comment. “Well, evidently, that is not the case. Was Dr. Bearlight of this world? After all, it is obvious and indisputable that, whoever he was, he was the most instrumental element in my conception. If it wasn’t for him, you would not have possessed such abilities, and I would not have been born.”

“You are absolutely correct, son. We wouldn’t be as fortunate as we were if it wasn’t for him. I have known Dr. Bearlight for many years and before meeting your mom. I have never had any reason to believe he wasn’t who he said he was, though I must admit that, in the month before your birth, his powers appeared to have grown exponentially, thus raising some doubts about his true nature. Yet I have determined that, whether he was truly human or some unknown hybrid of alien and human, it didn’t matter. He was here to inoculate us with his benevolence and goodwill, a man of unparalleled compassion and grace. He brought so much joy to so many barren parents and was renowned for his altruism. No couple was turned away regardless of their financial standing, and at times, he would provide his services for free. So you see, son, his origin was irrelevant. What mattered was his honorable humanity.”

“And besides,” Glenda added, “Dr. Bearlight saved your father’s life, but that is another story.”

“Yes, I know, Mom. I saw it in the globe.”

“It wasn’t until he met your mom that the idea of conceiving you in a blast of aura fusion came about. He knew that the news of the failed fertility treatment would break your mother’s heart.”

“And he wasn’t wrong,” Glenda interjected. “I was devastated and heartbroken. I actually blacked out when I learned that my hopes of having a child were crushed. And then all these bizarre things started to happen around his office. Your father, of course, who knew about his abilities, didn’t warn me at all. I thought I was losing my mind.”

“Well, that is all history now,” Osiris intervened.

“But what happened to Dr. Bearlight?” Aura’el inquired. “Surely you don’t think he died?”

“No, of course not,” Glenda responded. “That was just a ‘memory implant’ he placed in the minds of all who knew us, along with a

conceivable logical explanation of your natural birth at the hospital. Last we saw him, he was suffused in the ceiling pendant, serving as the main power source for your solidification process. When the pendant exploded after your emergence, we thought he would rematerialize, but he didn't. We can only assume that he may have manifested himself somewhere else, but we just don't know where or why he chose to disappear."

"We consider Dr. Bearlight your godfather, Aura'el, in every sense of the word," Osiris added. "And we are looking forward to his return."

There was a prolonged moment of silence as Aura'el ingested the story of his birth and the significance of Dr. Bearlight in the lives of his parents and that of his own. Strangely enough, he did not feel like an aberration or a miscreant. Quite the contrary, he felt unique and extraordinary, overjoyed by his association to Dr. Bearlight. It became clearer by the minute that he was to continue Dr. Bearlight's work, not as a fertility expert but as a benign and compassionate benefactor to all humanity.

Was it a mere coincidence that he was imbued with such godly powers by the doctor? Of course not. Was it coincidental that the manifestation of his powers required no meditation as the singularity of thought theory mandated? No. The doctor must have imprinted him with the ready-made ability as though he meditated for a thousand years. The thoughts of the gracious and kindhearted doctor filled Aura'el with a tremendous sense of bliss, and in that moment of sheer conceptual delight, his aura flashed in a dazzling display of brilliant white light as he morphed into a bright and glittering star, reminiscent of that enormous lustrous, sparkling star that appeared in the midst of that exploding pendant shards at the night of his birth.

Glenda and Osiris exchanged stunned and panicked looks, pondering the significance of what they were witnessing while scrutinizing their son's incandescent form from every possible angle. There was no doubt in their mind that the similarity was overwhelming. It was virtually identical. Their son, unknowingly or not, just assumed the shape of that star.

Their eyes began to hurt as Aura'el's blazing radiance was impossible to look at directly. They have shielded themselves with their own auras, but Aura'el's magnificence was far too overbearing. "Aura'el, son!" Osiris yelled. "Dim yourself out! Your aura is exploding through the concrete walls of this building! We don't want to attract unnecessary attention! Turn yourself off!"

Aura'el complied instantly, and his aura waned rapidly. He seemed somewhat disoriented and unsettled as though he was unanticipatedly disconnected from a source of alternate existence known only to him. He regained his normal human form and sat on the chair with his eyes still closed. "Mom, Dad," he finally said as he opened his eyes, "I sensed his presence, Dr. Bearlight's, that is. You are right. He is alive. It's like an echo in my head, reverberating all around and filling me with confidence and calm. His reemergence is only a matter of time. I am certain of it."

"Yes, about that," Glenda countered. "We are just as hopeful as you are. Now that you have made your grandiose appearance, I am confident he will reappear to lend a guiding hand."

"What is next then?" Aura'el asked somewhat rhetorically.

"We are not sure," Osiris acknowledged. "As contrary as it may seem to suggest to an eighteen-year-old adolescent, it is really up to you to decide where we go from here. Granted, you may be chronologically young, but we regard that as a matter of mere appearance. You carry the knowledge and imprinted experience of a fully mature adolescent. We will respect your choice whatever it might be."

Osiris gazed at his son momentarily and continued. "You may choose to accept my invitation made earlier today at the news conference and expose your true identity, regardless of the impact it may have on us. I am confident your mother and I can handle the media circus that will follow. Or we may indefinitely stall and inform the press of our ongoing investigation into the Peryton rescue as well as other fantastic events that are likely to occur going forward now that you can barely contain yourself."

"Dad," Aura'el whispered softly and then raised his voice, "I have no desire to live in hiding. You and Mom have succeeded in your

efforts in creating and shaping an environment that is accepting of ability-prone people. The ESP phenomenon, which was considered outright quackery, is now acknowledged as valid as the second and third laws of thermodynamics. And though fear of the unknown still lingers to a certain degree, it is beyond dispute that, in the last decade, you have instigated a mental shift in the way humanity views its limitless potentiality and its eventual ascendancy in the evolutionary ladder. I will select the time and place at which to come forth and introduce myself as who I truly am. For the time being, however, I must focus my attention on what it all means. I know I must walk in Dr. Bearlight's path, but I am not sure yet what that means exactly. I am not even sure what the extent of my powers is, much less what to do with it."

"Son," Glenda interrupted, "this may sound like an overused cliché, but I reckon its usage is appropriate here. 'With great power comes great responsibility.'"

Osiris continued Glenda's train of thought. "Though it may not be clear what we ought to make of all this, doubtless, you have been bestowed with these great powers for the greater good. What that greater good is will undeniably become clear sooner rather than later."

"You are correct, both of you," Aura'el replied. "Maybe part of it has something to do with the Malakahrians."

"What did you just say?" Both Glenda and Osiris cried out in unison.

"The Malakahrians—you know, the ones Dr. Bearlight warned you about."

## Chapter Fifteen

Monday, October 8, 2012

The NY Institute of Technology cafeteria was mobbed with students gathering around Leonardo and Margarit, who appeared to marvel at this sudden and unexpected overabundance of attention; indeed, as a competitive gymnast, Margarit had her fair share of fans, but nothing has come close to the level of interest expressed by colleagues and total strangers alike. Her picture riding unconscious on top of the Peryton monstrosity was blown out and posted on bulletin boards and walls throughout the school. The entire incident, captured in numerous video feeds, was streaming in TV screens and cell phones, accompanied by comments suggesting possible explanations for the beast's appearance, as well as hope for the eventual emergence of the hero who saved her life in such a spectacular manner.

"Look," said Bernadette, an exchange student from Paris. "I think that whoever saved her just realized they were in possession of such a startling ability. This was their first rescue attempt. Expect more such wonders in the days ahead."

"I tend to agree," Josef Muller, who recently immigrated to the United States from Austria, concurred. "But looking at Rhinefeld's cadre of researched people, none exhibits an ability that is even remotely close to light solidification or, in other words, the creation of solid matter out of sheer light. This is the first time we have witnessed such a

phenomenon. So if it didn't originate at Rhinefeld, the person or entity responsible for it is right here among us, in NYC, that is."

"Say what you want, guys, but I am quite conflicted about the whole thing," Darrel, a redhead basketball player, interjected as he was looking at one of the video feeds. "Don't get me wrong, I am nothing but thankful for whoever or whatever saved Margarit's life, but such power can work both ways. It can easily wreak mayhem and destruction with the same ease as it saves lives."

"Yes, and there is that," said Cassiopeia (Cassi) La Bonc, a gorgeous-looking four-foot-six, little person who was one of NY Institute of Technology's brightest and most promising student. "Though I agree we should hold off judgment on the entity's intentions, I am certain, however, that we have nothing to fear. Margarit's life was saved by a being that is, no doubt, benevolent in nature."

"I couldn't agree more," said Annette, who joined the impromptu student gathering, along with Aura'el. "Let's just wait." She continued. "There is probably more of the same coming our way as Bernadette suggested."

"More of the same?" Josef Muller inquired, raising an eyebrow.

"Surely, none of you is seriously considering the Peryton rescue as a onetime occurrence. This was clearly the opening salvo. An intelligence of such vast reality-altering power is bound to make its presence among us a matter of daily appearance."

"And why is that?" Josef further insisted.

"Because unquestionably, it is in the entity's nature," Cassi interjected, raising her voice. "No doubt the unquenchable desire to right wrongs and exude goodness is the being's signature trait, a part of its psyche and innate impulse. I am not entirely sure what that means, but I am confident that life as we know it is but over." Cassi completed her sentence and stared at Aura'el with her deeply penetrating baby blue eyes.

Aura'el's heart sank for a moment. "Do you think she knows?" he whispered in Annette's ear.

"No way," Annette responded. "How?"

The gathering broke off as the students proceeded to their various classes. Cassiopeia, however, walked toward Aura'el and Annette, waving at them with intensity and looking inside her book bag. "Is something the matter, Cassi?" Annette inquired.

"No, not quite," Cassi replied, smiling. "Can I borrow your handsome hunk of a boyfriend for a while? I seem to have forgotten all about withdrawing funds from the bank earlier this morning, and I must make an urgent payment at the students' administrative office later today. I'll return him back to you as soon as we're done, I promise."

"Well, yes, of course, but only if you promise." Annette exploded in laughter. "Here, he's all yours," she said and waved goodbye to the two of them as she climbed up the staircase.

"Thanks, Aura'el, for agreeing to accompany me. I assure you it won't take long. It's the Chase Manhattan branch across the street."

"No worries, Cassi," Aura'el answered. "And besides, we need to go over some details concerning the event we were planning for the kids at the Children's Aid Society."

"You're absolutely right. We'll stop by there as soon as we are done at the bank. When is your next class? At 1:00 p.m., isn't it?"

"It's actually at two, Cassi, so we have plenty of time."

Cassiopeia La Bonc was one of the kindest and most socially conscious people Aura' el has ever met. She was a close friend and a confidant and, just as himself, was blessed with a photographic memory that seemed to have eclipsed his own; her wit was unmatched as was her deductive reasoning and penchant for all things science.

Cassi grew up in a foster home and sadly was subjected to ridicule and malicious jokes growing up because of her dwarfism, but despite the mayhem she endured throughout the greater part of her young life, Cassiopeia never lost hope in humanity's capacity for good and regarded her trials and tribulations as a catalyst for voluntarism and charity work. She loved children and vowed to do her utmost best to improve the lives of the disabled among them. It was that quality of an amiable and kindhearted spirit that brought Annette and Cassi together. They considered themselves sisters and were close to each other as though they truly were. When Cassi fell ill because of unexpected side effects

from a new dwarfism treatment, Annette sat by her hospital bed and kept her company for days. Aura'el too spent some time with her, after which she was released fit as a fiddle.

"That is odd," Cassi said to Annette at the time. "He touched my forehead, and the pain just went away."

"I would have let him know earlier, but he was away with his parents," Annette responded.

"There is something about him," Cassi said in a very low voice that Annette could barely hear her. "He's got the soul of a healer. If it's broken, he will fix it." It was only a matter of time before Aura'el took notice of Annette's "sister" and realized she was a power to reckon with not just because of her intellectual prowess but mainly because of her sense of duty and unsurpassed love and care for the disabled.

"Is everything all right, Cassi?" Aura'el asked as she appeared to be somewhat somber and gloomy.

"Yes, of course, Aura'el. I just got a lot on my mind. I found out that one of the disabled kids, Tommy, at the Children's Aid Society is dying of leukemia, and I am absolutely devastated by it. His parents are heartbroken and beyond themselves. He is such a brilliant young kid. It's not fair. How unfortunate can someone be?" she said as tears filled up her eyes and streamed down her face.

"Is he currently in the hospital?" Aura'el questioned as he knelt over and hugged her, wiping the tears off her cheeks.

"Yes," she replied. "He's at Memorial Hospital at York Avenue between Sixty-Seven<sup>th</sup> and Sixty-Eighth Streets. It's actually not far away from here."

"Well then," Aura'el said in a clear and reassuring voice, "why don't the three of us get there tomorrow? We may not be able to prevent the young child's death, but we can certainly make his final days the most memorable in his life."

"Yes, absolutely," Cassi acknowledged as she composed herself. "He always wanted to go to Disney World, but his parents were never able to afford it. Maybe we should contact the Make-A-Wish Foundation and work out the necessary arrangements to ensure they all get there."

"Right on, Cassi. We'll do whatever is necessary," Aura'el vowed.

They arrived at the Chase Manhattan branch and stood in line, awaiting their turn. It was 11:45 a.m., and the bank was quite busy. There were about thirty people in the facility, of which twelve stood in line for the teller while the others were scattered around the bank's various customer service departments.

Suddenly, as Cassi was about to approach the teller, three masked gunmen stormed into the bank, brandishing AR-15 rifles and shooting toward the ceiling. "This is a stickup!" yelled the tall and bulky one, who was wearing a brown sweatshirt and a pair of Air Jordan sneakers.

"Everybody on the floor!" yelled the other bandit, forcing customers and employees to lie facedown on the ground while shooting more rounds right over the tellers' area.

The third robber appeared to have disabled the security officer by the front door and pointed the AR-15 rifle to his head. "Don't move," he said. "Or I'll blow your brains out."

Cassi and Aura'el lay on the floor, along with all the others. The heavyset thug was demanding to see the manager and threatened to execute hostages one by one unless he opened the bank's safe and filled up their bags with stacks of cash. Cassi was shaking and trembling with fear as were all the other bank patrons. Some cried and begged the tall bulky robber to spare their lives, while others pondered, in panic, the ever-increasing likelihood that they might meet their Maker sooner than they have intended.

"I got this, Cassi. Stay calm," Aura'el whispered in her ear. He then gazed at the heavyset robber and pointed his index finger toward him as he was still lying down next to Cassi, who looked back at him, not quite sure what she heard.

A deafening sound shook the building as a mighty beam of condensed and concentrated light appeared out of nowhere and assumed the shape of a seven-foot-tall man dressed in a golden, platinum armor suit with an infinity symbol emblazoned and circling across his chest. The man's suit radiated intensely and fiercely discharging rays of bright yellowish light in all directions, appearing like a star that descended from the heavens. The man had no visible head but rather a circular shimmering, glowing aura similar to a candle flame's halo, its

luminescence expanding two feet in diameter and rotating around its axis. The creature somewhat resembled a majestic faceless and wingless angel exuding calm, tranquility, and peace.

The robbers, who were completely caught by surprise, responded instinctively and shot at the glowing man from all three directions, emptying their rounds. The bullets turned into sparkling golden pellets in their flight and landed softly at the man's lustrous armor, further increasing his resplendence.

A pair of lips appeared unexpectedly in the creature's shimmering "head," and a deep voice commanded the robbers. "Surrender—now."

The lead gunman remained unfazed and undeterred while the other bank patrons raised their heads off the ground, watching the ensuing confrontation with eyes wide open and looks of utter disbelief. "Who are you?" the gunman asked. "What are you?"

"It matters not who or what I am. Surrender now, or bear the consequences of your malice."

"You don't frighten us, freak. I bet you ran away from that wretched Rhinefeld Institute. That house of horrors should be blown to bits, along with its necromancer chief, that pathetic excuse for a man, Prof. Osiris Jones."

"For a common criminal, you certainly have a way with words," the entity responded.

"We may not be able to kill you, but if you stand in our way, we will execute these people one by one," said the bulky, heavyset robber as he reached for his pocket, pulled a Smith & Wesson pistol, and pointed it directly toward Cassi. The other two marauders reached for their pockets as well and pulled their pistols, pointing them at the bank's manager and his assistant.

"Wrong move!" The being's voice thundered across the room. "Behold," said the glowing man with an increasing deafening sound. "Experience the fear you so eagerly wish to inflict on others."

The pistols disappeared out of the robbers' hands and reappeared aimed toward their foreheads as though they themselves were now being held at gunpoint. The guns' hammers were pulled straight back while the three mortified thugs stared directly at the muzzles, awaiting their

imminent death. Three shots were fired all at once, and golden ethereal pellets whirled out of the guns and penetrated the assailants' foreheads, instantaneously engulfing them in bright yellowish light similar to that of the entity's glowing luminescence. Their bodies soon vanished from sight, and all that remained was a floating, condensed, liquefied light, which radiated profusely and flashed repeatedly.

The liquefied light coagulated and thickened swiftly into three ovum-shaped separate spheres, hovering in midair and turning hot red; the floating spheres expanded and contracted, gyrating erratically up and down, moving left and right, and circling around themselves in a rapidly increasing velocity, until they finally solidified into what appeared to be ostrich-looking eggs, which descended smoothly onto the floor. The eggs cracked open simultaneously, and three winged homunculi emerged out in the open, flapping and batting their little wings and cawing loudly like crows. The scary-looking creatures appeared frightened and stood close to one another, continuing to caw.

"What are these?" asked the startled manager, his hands still shaking.

"These are homunculi—or homunculus should you refer to them individually," said the being. "A grotesque, hideous miniaturized, fully formed humanoid, an aberration of the alchemists of old, a creature of malevolence and utter distrust." The entity's lips stopped moving momentarily and then continued. "A befitting punishment for human souls run amok."

Another condensed beam of light struck the area over the homunculi and was immediately solidified into a three-foot-tall dandelion-colored birdcage, which glared for a few seconds before retaining its final shape. The homunculi continued to grunt and make high-pitched, guttural sounds as though they were attempting to talk in their former human language. Their faces were a distorted image of their former selves, twisted and perverted beyond recognition. They flapped their tiny wings repeatedly, flying around the cage and struggling to flee through its cracks but to no avail.

The cage levitated off the ground and floated toward the security guard, who was still standing by the bank's revolving door. "Mr. Edward." The entity called the guard by his name.

"Yes, sir," the guard replied.

"Take those three to the nearest police precinct, and ensure they are placed in a holding cell," he said as the bank patrons got up on their feet and circled the being, marveling at his magnificence, awestruck and dazed by his splendor. He continued. "In seven days, the homunculi will regain their normal human form, ready to stand trial and pay for their crimes."

He then looked at Cassi, who stood farther away by the opposite side of the bank's entrance, and smiled. And as he stood there observing her, a flame burst out of the creature's ethereal head and covered the stunned girl from head to toe. Cassi was engulfed in soothing flames of white light that appeared to emanate from within her and radiated extensively. She was lifted about ten inches off the ground, turning around herself and spewing sparkles of luster in all directions. She finally landed gently on the floor, appearing serene and overjoyed, filled with a sense of calm and confidence. "May I ask what just happened?" she asked the creature while catching her breath.

"You will soon find out." The man continued to smile as the intensity of his luminescence diminished and waned, and his body began to fade out of sight.

"Who shall we say saved us?" asked the manager.

"Someone who cares," the entity responded.

"Did you rescue that girl yesterday at the Empire State Building?" inquired the assistant.

"Yes."

"What shall we call you?" Cassi asked.

But the entity dissolved entirely as its brilliance filled the entire facility one last time, mending the cracked ceiling and repairing the broken windows. "Auraman." Cassi answered her own question. "Auraman."

## Chapter Sixteen

Cassi and Aura'el left the bank and paced back toward their school farther down Broadway; they stopped by at the next-door deli for some soda and snacks and were waiting by the sidewalk for the traffic light to change. Cold, crisp air was blowing in their faces, and heavy clouds suddenly covered the sky. "Are you cold?" Aural asked as he noticed she was shivering.

"Yeah, just a little bit, no biggie," she answered.

"We'll stop by at the Children's Aid Society tomorrow morning," he promised.

"Sure thing. Thank you, Aura'el," she replied.

As the two were about to cross the street, they noticed a huge crowd walking toward them and signaling them to stop; and before they had a chance to react, Cassi and Aura'el found themselves surrounded by a sizable throng of people taking their pictures. Numerous cell phones were pointed at Cassi, videotaping her every move, and many long-lensed cameras have zoomed in directly at her face. "Do you know Auraman personally?" someone yelled at her.

"Why did he hit you with that bolt of light?" asked another.

"What do you think it means?"

"How do you feel, Ms. La Bonc? Would you care to make a comment about what you have just experienced?"

Cassi was shocked and dismayed by this sudden and unexpected invasion of her privacy; unaccustomed to be the center of attention (unlike some of her classmates), she composed herself, took a deep

breath, and said, “No, I don’t know Auraman personally, and I have no idea why he hit me with that bolt of light. All I know is that he saved my life and the lives of all the other people at the bank, just as he saved Margarit Tomlinson yesterday at the Empire State Building. I am forever indebted to him.”

“Do you know who he is?” asked a well-suited young man.

“While being engulfed by an extension of his aura, did you get a sense if he was human?” she heard someone asking from far across.

“No,” Cassi replied. “I don’t know if he is human, but I am willing to bet that he is. There was nothing alien about his behavior. On the contrary, he seemed to care as though he was one of us. His morals appear to reflect our own. He is kind and nonviolent. He could have easily chosen to disintegrate the robbers into nothingness but instead . . .” Cassi stopped for a second. “But instead, he transformed them temporarily into those creatures, whose name I can’t even pronounce, as a befitting punishment for their crime and until they stand trial.” She continued as her eyes lit up. “Take notice. There’s a new sheriff in town who watches over us.”

Suddenly, a 2012 Subaru Legacy stopped by at the curb, and Annette’s voice was heard through the window, saying, “Hop in, guys, hurry!” she yelled.

“Our ride has just arrived!” Aura’el exclaimed. “Get in, Cassi.” He gently pushed her inside. They sped away as the ever-increasing number of onlookers packing the sidewalk murmured with disappointment at Cassi’s abrupt departure.

Annette was driving toward Times Square, courageously bypassing yellow NY cabs and almost going over the speed limit, agitating numerous drivers who hissed and cussed at her. Both Cassi and Aura’el looked at her as if she lost her mind. “What’s going on, Annette? You’re driving in the wrong direction,” Cassi griped.

“No, I’m not,” she said somewhat impatiently. “You guys ought to see this.”

“See what?” Cassi persisted.

“In a minute, Cassi, in a minute.”

They arrived at Times Square, and Cassi's jaw dropped in amazement as she watched herself on virtually every high-definition screen and billboard scattered around the square. It was an extravagant spectacle that Cassi could not have imagined in her wildest dreams. Here she was at the bank, levitating off the floor, engulfed in mysterious flames and looking transcendent. And here she was again talking to the creature and asking, "What shall we call you?"

"Auraman," the billboards flashed in unison. "Auraman."

The entire encounter, which was picked up by the bank's security cameras, was provided to the media, who wasted no time in splashing its content on countless TV screens not just those in Times Square but also all over the world. Tourists and many passersby were ogling and gaping at Auraman's grand entry, appearing out of nowhere and materializing out of sheer light, and his transforming the robbers into miniaturized winged humanoids and trapping them in a birdcage. "Mystery solved," beamed the gigantic ABC SuperSign.

"Peryton rescue unmasked," read the subtitle.

"Auraman to the rescue," flickered the mammoth Branded Cities Nasdaq billboard.

"Auraman, the beginning," echoed the adjacent board poised directly above the famous New Year's Eve ball.

There was a sense of bliss in the air; clapping and praise could be heard everywhere. The square was mobbed by onlookers riveted by the flashing video images and the ensuing captions; looking dazed and bemused with eyes wide open, they appeared to be hypnotized as though subconsciously sensing an upcoming change—and not just any change but also a monumental one, an earth-shattering transformation destined to turn our planet upside down. There was an expression of hope and longing in people's faces, an outright anticipation for relief from ongoing struggles and tribulations; Auraman's direct interference at the Empire State Building and the bank, in less than twenty-four hours, gave rise to a growing feeling of reassurance, of better days ahead, of a direct involvement of the supernatural in their lives, in ways found only in fairy tales and ancient myths. The impossible suddenly became

possible—a living, breathing reality—and New York City found itself captivated and enamored by its addictive, alluring beauty.

Annette sped farther down Broadway, making a right turn on Forty-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street and proceeding en route to West End Avenue. “Cassi!” Annette hollered toward her friend, who was sitting in the back. “I’m taking you home. All remaining classes were canceled for the day. We were all far too excited, students and teachers alike, to be able to focus on anything but what happened yesterday and today. It is simply overwhelming. If I am not mistaken, the president will be giving a speech later tonight.”

“I am not going home, Annette,” Cassi interrupted her. “Would you mind dropping me off at Memorial Hospital? I must see Tommy. I promised him that I would visit him today.”

“Are you sure?” Aura’el inquired. “I think you’ve been through a lot, don’t you agree? Your nerves are absolutely rattled. You are in no shape for any hospital visit.”

“Look at Dr. Aura’el Jones psychoanalyzing me.” Cassi giggled and burst into laughter. “I am perfectly fine, Doctor. Don’t you worry.”

Annette proceeded uptown toward York Avenue and Sixty-Eighth Street, driving somewhat erratically, and arrived at the hospital’s front entrance in five minutes. “That was incredibly fast, Annette. I’ll call you guys later,” Cassi said as she exited the car and waved them both goodbye.

“You make sure you do!” Annette howled back at her.

Cassi disappeared inside the crowded hospital reception area as Annette paused for a second, looking shortly in the mirror and then staring at Aura’el. “Now what?” she asked.

“Now we go home,” he replied. “I have a surprise for you.”

“Really? What kind of surprise?”

“Well, if I told you, it wouldn’t be much of a surprise, would it?” Aura’el countered.

“You’re right, I guess. Anyway, I’m dying to hear all about what happened in the bank and the conversation you had with your parents yesterday evening. Was that really you at the bank? Or did you solidify light in the form of Auraman as you did with the Peryton?”

"No, Annette, that was really me."

"But how is that possible?" Annette insisted. "You were lying there on the floor next to Cassi, holding and shielding her. We all saw that."

"I believe I am omnipresent," Aura'el responded. "I can simultaneously be here with you as well as anywhere else. Granted, it appears as if I am the physical embodiment of quantum mechanics on the macro level. The electrons in my body vibrate so fast it enables me to be present everywhere at the same time, if I consciously choose to do so."

"Wow," Annette muttered in astonishment. "But wait, I thought I saw you point your index finger directly at the location where the heavyset robber was standing, and that was followed by the appearance of the condensed beam of light that solidified into Auraman. Isn't that how you usually solidify thoughts into existence?"

"Yes, that is true. My aura would immediately respond to my thoughts and congeal into living matter in the shape and form I visualize in response to the incident at hand. But in that instance, I decided to personally intervene and vibrated myself onto that spot by the robber and appeared as I really am. Well, the suit was an add-on, of course, and is now associated with that tall man identified as Auraman. 'Strange that Cassi chose that name.' Aura'el continued. "Thus far, it was only you and my mom who referred to me by that name."

"Well, who wouldn't?" Annette smiled toward him and then said, "It's the first thing that comes to mind when people look at you. Your aura is so bright and radiant when you manifest yourself as you truly are. We are compelled to raise our hands and protect our eyes from your dazzling brilliance. Frankly, I couldn't think of a better name."

"Annette," Aura'el said, "we're here. Would you like to come up?"

"No, I am tired. Let me take a quick shower, and I'll meet you later on at about 4:30 p.m. Can you at least tell me where we're going?"

"We're going on a tour."

"What tour?" she asked him with an odd expression on her face.

"You'll see." He smiled at her as he exited the car, waved goodbye to her, and walked toward his building entrance.

## Chapter Seventeen

As a matter of habit, Aura'el found himself waiting by the elevator yet again. "This will take some getting used to," he said to himself as he disintegrated into nothingness and reappeared in his room.

"Mom, Dad, are you guys here?" he yelled as he was walking toward the living room.

*Mother, where are you?* Aura'el asked in his mind.

*Right here in the White House with your dad,* he heard her reply.

*Can you actually hear me?* he asked.

*Yes, I can. I am not sure how. We haven't communicated telepathically before.* Her voice kept echoing in his head.

*No, we haven't,* Aura'el replied. *There are many abilities I might be in possession of that have not yet surfaced. I found out earlier I am omnipresent.*

His mother asked, *Are you saying that was you at the bank? I thought you solidified Auraman into existence, just as you did with the Peryton.*

*That was me. Annette asked me the exact same question,* he said.

*Does she know?* Glenda asked, sounding anxious and alarmed.

*Of course, she does, Mom. We have no secrets,* he replied.

*I see, son.* Her voice continued reverberating. *That was some performance at the bank, dear. It left many officials here pondering what next is to come. We were requested by the president to arrive at DC and update him in person on our findings. We will stall in your behalf, if necessary, but eventually, you'll have to come out, particularly if you continue saving people's lives in this spectacular unprecedented manner.*

*Come out?* Aura'el giggled in his mind.

*Come on, you silly boy. You know what I mean. He heard her laughing uncontrollably. Eventually, you will have to make your identity known. You can't remain faceless indefinitely.*

*You're right, he said. But let me just reiterate what I said to the both of you yesterday evening. It may take some time for me to reach an understanding of what role to assume in our society. And there is also the matter of realizing the full extent of my powers before putting them to good use. You may tell the president, however, that you have been contacted by Auraman and that he would appear on a major television event, revealing his true identity.*

Glenda said, *We'll do just that, dear. We should be home by tomorrow afternoon.*

*Say hi to Dad,* he asked as he terminated the connection.

Aura'el was still preoccupied in contemplation of his newfound telepathic ability and didn't realize that his cell phone was ringing. He reached forward and finally grabbed it, noticing it was Annette; but before pressing the answer button, he responded instinctively and said in his mind, *Hello.*

*Aura'el, is that you?* he heard her voice asking.

*Yes, it's me.* She heard what she thought was Aura'el's voice. *Don't be alarmed.* He continued. *It appears we no longer need cell phones to communicate. I just need to think about you, and if you happened to be attempting to contact me, I'll hear your thoughts telepathically.*

*Alarmed?* she asked. *What other tricks are you planning on pulling out of your hat? I am learning to expect the unexpected from you.* Her voice continued to oscillate. *Anyway, I'll be in your place in about fifteen minutes. May I ask where we are going?*

He replied, *We're going to Pier 84, Hudson River Park, to watch the sunset. It is one of the best places in the city to watch it.*

*How romantic of you. Is that the surprise?* Annette asked.

*No, Annette, that is not the surprise,* he said.

*You're such a tease, Aura'el. I know it's not. Anyway, I want to hear all about your conversation with your parents yesterday evening.* Annette's voice dissipated into oblivion, but Aura'el's mind was immersed with endless thoughts about today's events and the concept of absolute power.

He dreaded the possible negative impact that omnipotence might bear over its holder. It seemed virtually certain he was transforming into something more than a man—something that most human beings would refer to as a god or a deity.

“Absolute power corrupts absolutely,” he kept hearing repeatedly.

*What a cliché, he muttered to himself. It has nothing to do with me. I may possess godly powers, but it is humanity that owns them. I am not looking for self-aggrandizement but to serve and heal, nor am I concerned about wealth or material possessions as I can manifest them into being if I so choose. I want to bring positive change in people’s lives, spread light where there is darkness, bring joy and peace where there is pain and suffering.*

*True, Cassi, Annette, and I are involved in a great deal of charity work and volunteerism, but “bring light where there is darkness” sounds like a job for a deity. I am no deity. What is happening to me? Are these really my thoughts? Maybe they are Dr. Bearlight’s thoughts. I am not sure anymore where his thoughts begin and mine ends.*

Aura’el was lost in a whirlwind of nagging reflections about his role in the world and had completely forgotten about Annette, who was waiting for him downstairs. His cell phone rang. “Where are you?” Annette hollered. “I am downstairs waiting for you.”

“I’ll be right there,” he said and materialized himself next to her the following second.

“God,” Annette said as she reached forward and kissed him. “I’ll never get used to that or to communicating with you telepathically.” She giggled and waved her phone at him.

She drove toward Pier 84 and complained about possibly missing the sunset, only to find herself and Aura’el a moment later sitting by the pier’s dock overlooking the Hudson River. “Why do we even bother to use a car if you can just pop us in and out of places?” she asked him, chuckling.

They were sitting there by the dock wrapped in each other’s arms and resting their heads on each other’s shoulders, gazing intensively at the flaming yellow-red sun and then looking at each other and nodding in agreement. It was a breathtaking sight, a cacophony of dancing rays hitting the waters and bouncing back in all directions in a symphony

of lights that intoxicated their senses, a marvelous sight of natural beauty that brought into mind a soulful longing for communion with the divine. The sound of the waves hitting and splashing against the pillars below added to the feel of a calm, pastoral atmosphere. “It’s just wonderful, isn’t it?” Annette whispered in Aura’el’s ear.

“Yes, Annette, it is peaceful as it is calm. It quiets the mind.”

“I bet a quiet mind is what you most certainly need,” Annette replied. “The last two days resemble a high-speed ride. How was dinner with your parents?”

“I assume you’re referring to the conversation I had with my parents about the origin of my abilities.”

“But of course, what else would I be referring to? And by the look on your face, I can safely say that you are *not* an alien.” She cackled.

“I am perfectly human,” he answered, “made of solidified light. But my conception is an entirely different matter.”

“Do you mean the fertility treatment administered by Dr. Bearlight? I know all about that. Aren’t you forgetting? It’s the same doctor that made my birth possible as well.”

“But I wasn’t born through a fertility treatment,” Aura’el griped. “It didn’t work in my case. It totally failed.”

“So how were you born then?” Annette quizzed.

“Aura fusion,” he said as he looked at her befuddled facial expression.

“Aura fusion? What in the name of God is that?”

“Why don’t I show you?” he said and held her head in the palms of his hands, directing her attention toward the water about one hundred feet away. “What do you see, Annette?”

“I see the reflection of the sun hitting the water.”

“Take another look. What do you see now? Focus, Annette, focus.”

“I see the reflection of the sun hovering the water. Oh my god, this is so amazing. It’s spectacular. I am drawn toward it. What are you doing to me?” she asked, her voice cracking.

“You’re completely safe, Annette. Relax. In a minute, you’ll be swept entirely into the sun’s glowing reflection, right at the center of its corona, and relive my memories and all the events that have transpired before and after my conception. You’ll be able to view firsthand how it

all began, starting with my mom's visit to Dr. Bearlight's office. Merge with the sun, Annette. Become fully immersed in its light. You are the only one seeing this."

Annette felt as if she was entirely absorbed by the sun; a pleasant tingling sensation vibrated throughout her body as she was swooped wholly right into its luminous, floating reflection, leaving behind what appeared to be "another her."

*This is crazy, she thought. I am here and there, in two places at once.*

*No, you are not losing your mind, she heard Aura'el telepathically responding to her inner conversation. I have created a temporary plane of existence so you may revisit my past in the most vivid way possible, while the "other you" is sitting here with me for the convenience of those around us who might be watching. It shouldn't take long. You'll be back in your original self in about five to ten minutes. You may walk around that made-up environment, observe all the images, and listen to all the sounds as the past unfolds itself in front of you one segment at a time. Enjoy the ride, sweetheart.*

Aura'el's voice faded away, and Annette found herself in Dr. Bearlight's clinic reception area, staring intensely at Glenda as she was sitting there and waiting, lost in her thoughts. She followed Glenda into Dr. Bearlight's office and witnessed their conversation and the ensuing events that followed. The past episodes of Aura'el's life kept changing in accordance with their chronological timeline, and Annette realized she was fully immersed in a captivating tale of absolute wonder as if she was witnessing the unfolding of a new beginning in human history, a monumental new chapter in humanity's advancement toward a yet unknown future.

She was overwhelmed by a sense of paramount responsibility and obligation. After all, she was a close friend, a confidant, and the love interest of the entity known as Auraman, who relied on her judgment and trusted her opinion. He clearly marveled at their inseparable bond and looked forward to being supported by her wisdom in charting a course to positively channel his godly powers. Indeed, she was acutely aware of the tremendous importance their relationship carried in jointly deciding their next step in this unexpected adventure, and the thought

of it made her agitated and jittery. She listened to Aura'el's discussion with his parents and agreed that time was indeed of the essence in conceptualizing a working path that would eventually culminate in his emergence and final disclosure of his identity.

A pleasant sudden jolt caused Annette to swerve and depart from her staggering, mind-blowing trip. She could feel her organs come to life again as she was transported back into her original self. "You're back," Aura'el greeted her. "How was it?"

"Magical," she replied as she pressed her lips against his and kissed him passionately.

The sun finally set, and it was getting darker by the minute; many of the people who were touring around the pier walked toward Forty-Four<sup>th</sup> Street, taking off in droves. It was a mass exodus of sorts as though they were compelled to turn away, leaving Aura'el and Annette alone and all by themselves. "Why is everybody leaving?" Annette inquired.

"Because I want them to." Aura'el giggled at her. "We'll be needing some privacy."

"Why? What do you have in mind?" She giggled back at him.

"Well, didn't I promise you a surprise?"

"Yes, that is right. What is it?"

"Let's wait until it is absolutely dark," he said and continued smiling at her.

"Cut that out, Aura'el. What's the darn surprise?" Annette griped. "Come out with it already."

"OK, OK." He laughed. "Do you remember the *Arabian Nights* stories your mother used to tell us when we were kids?"

"Yes, of course. How can I forget 'Aladdin and the Magic Lamp' or 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'?"

"Right, but there was one story you liked in particular, 'The Thief of Bagdad.' And if I recall correctly, it was the magic carpet in that tale that fascinated you the most."

"That is correct." Annette nodded in agreement.

"For years, you dreamed about flying on one of those rugs, particularly after watching that '70s movie *Arabian Adventure*." Aura'el

continued. "Well, tonight you are about to experience firsthand what true ride on a flying carpet feels like. We're taking an aerial tour of NYC, starting with the Statue of Liberty, which—shame on us—we haven't yet been to and then Ellis Island, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Empire State Building, and the rest of the NYC skyline. We'll stop by at the George Washington Bridge and Central Park."

"You've gotta be joking," Annette cut him off in midsentence, thinking he was simply being whimsical and playful.

"No, Annette, I am not," he said as he leaned forward and rubbed his fingers through her long hair. "You know, these powers of mine come without any strings attached. They are part of who I am, and I may use them not just for the purpose of saving lives and exacting justice but for trivial things as well, such as taking a ride on a gliding carpet with my girlfriend. And this is not just any carpet. It is the one you visualized when Aurora read us that story. Yes, Annette, the one with the angelic pure white wings."

"You are just so theatrical," Annette responded, smiling broadly as her eyes lit with anticipation. "I am stunned that you even remembered the fairy-tale hour with my mom every Friday night, where I was the princess, and you were the prince saving me from all these demons and grotesque monsters. That is some surprise, Aura'el," she said, pulling herself toward him and resting her face on his broad chest. "But wait." She continued. "Wouldn't that be a spectacle observed throughout the city? Won't we be seen?"

"No, not exactly, but the winged carpet and Auraman will be very much seen, and I am sure it will serve as another news item later this evening."

"Is that what you're after, media exposure?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

"No, not at all. But with every act of wonderment I launch, people become more accustomed and familiar with this emerging new reality, accommodating it and embracing it as it is rather than dreading it. As you saw earlier this afternoon, people are excited about Auraman and look forward to see more of him rather than less. I intend to fulfill that

expectation, while not shying away from putting my powers to more mundane usage as well.”

“I see you got it all sorted out,” Annette replied. “A day ago, you seemed at a total loss.”

“Well, Annette.” Aura’el paused and took a deep breath. “I am not sure I sorted anything yet since it is not clear to me what role people want or expect Auraman to assume. I know that saving lives and upholding our moral values and rules of conduct is the general direction Auraman should follow, but the details of that route are still murky and unclear.”

“I agree,” Annette concurred. “It is too early to designate a coherent, clear role for Auraman. It’s a bit reminiscent of a god descending from heaven and choosing to dwell among us humans. What capacity is that deity to assume in a democratic, freedom-loving society by virtue of its omnipotence? I do not know the answer to that.”

“Wow,” Aura’el uttered. “It’s rather inaccurate, isn’t it? A god? The analogy is somewhat off, don’t you think? True, I appear to have powers that resemble omnipotence, but we do not know that I am actually omnipotent. Am I immortal? I do not know the answer to that question either. Did you consider that I may be vulnerable to some not yet disclosed power or influence? It is probably only a matter of time before a way is found to stop me by those humans who hate and detest everything that is good and peaceful. I assure you that people that thrive on violence and wish to wreak havoc and mayhem on our society won’t sit idly by while I might be asked to alter the very fabric of our society.

“And besides, if you recall, Dr. Bearlight warned my parents about the Malakahrians, which we all don’t have a clue who or what. I firmly believe that my presence here has something to do with that, more so than the idea of an alleged deity interacting and living with humans.”

“Fascinating, Aura’el.” Annette gasped in response. “I am just so intrigued by all this. I have so many questions that I’d like to ask. I wonder, however, what Dr. Bearlight had in mind when contemplating solidifying you into existence via aura fusion. Did he attempt to set up a new process for human procreation, or was it a onetime event meant to bring you into being for a very specific task?”

"Maybe both," Aura'el answered. "Doubtless, he wanted to provide barren couples who were not successful in conceiving through traditional fertility methods with the visual imagery that may assist them in becoming pregnant. He may have thought that there were other people out there, just like him, with a similar ability that would gladly step forward and assist those couples. I am reluctant to assume that he wanted to replace natural sexual conception with aura fusion. He more likely intended to offer an alternative to those unfortunate couples whom nature stripped of the capacity to bear children."

Aura'el suddenly asked Annette, "I am not boring you, am I?"

"Are you out of your mind?" She cackled. "Of course not. Go on, please."

"I am certain, however, that Dr. Bearlight's intention in facilitating my birth was more than just mere assistance to my parents. He was acquainted with my dad life's work and thus chose him as the father of the first aura-born child, to whom he obviously assigned unique abilities for a purpose we are yet to unravel. He called on six different godly thought forms and somehow transferred their combined energies and that of his own into my very essence. Though my genetic makeup is entirely human, he imbued me with the power of creation itself. My parents and I are quite confident that Dr. Bearlight is alive and may still return, and though I am not able to sense him telepathically, his echo resonates in my very being."

Aura'el paused and remained quiet momentarily. He grabbed Annette's hand and walked toward the edge of the dock. "It's totally dark, Aura'el. Where is my magic carpet?" she asked, laughing.

"Coming right up, Your Highness," he said as he flashed for a second, pointing his finger toward the water. "Look over there." He drew her attention in the direction of the Hudson River about ten feet away.

Droplets of golden light hovered the water and spiraled around themselves in a dancing motion, moving simultaneously in four different directions and forming a fifteen-by-thirteen-foot, gigantic gleaming carpet adorned with Moroccan trellis geometric shapes. The enormous rug levitated over the water while a set of angelic wings sprang out of its

sides. The wings ruffled, flapped, and spread wide open, unfolding their breathtaking, graceful glowing beauty as the carpet advanced toward Annette and Aura'el, hovering by the waterfront.

"Hop aboard!" Aural yelled excitedly at Annette as they were both lifted in the air, landing softly on the spellbinding enchanted carpet.

"Up!" Aura'el yelled. "Up!"

It was a comfortably cool and pleasant night. Patchy clouds dotted the skies, with only a few stars seeping through, while a mild breeze caressed Aura'el's and Annette's faces as the glittering, flying object ascended high into the heavens, leaving behind it a lengthy trail of sparkling golden dust.

At about three hundred feet over the Hudson River, the carpet stopped its ascent and glided south toward the Statue of Liberty. A few minutes later, it hovered near the statue's crown, slowly circling its seven spikes, to the utter amazement and disbelief of the spectators, who were snapping photos and videotaping the soaring winged craft in all its magnificent glory. Numerous cries could be heard from all sides of the crown. "Look, it's Auraman! It's Auraman!" they shouted as Aura'el transformed himself into the lifesaving entity that appeared earlier at the bank. The loud roars of "oh wow" and "yay" coming from the monument's direction pierced through their quiet flight path till Annette felt compelled to cover her ears. Aura'el veered the carpet away from the spectators, thereby showering them with golden soot, which made the crowd even more raucous and overjoyed.

The rug continued its climb farther and farther into the skies, soaring into the upper troposphere, bypassing the patchy clouds, and heading toward an ocean of gleaming stars flickering in amazing unison as though by command. Now it was Annette's turn to exclaim "wow" and stare in fascination at the sheer vastness unfurling in front of her. "This is absolutely breathtaking, Aura'el. I have never seen so many stars. It's so incredibly bewitching. How is it they all flicker as one?"

"They are not, really," Aura'el answered. "It is just a visual effect created for your benefit. I knew you'd like it."

"Hey, wait a second," Annette said. "Where are you steering this thing? We are nowhere close to the NYC skyline."

"Hold on tight!" Aura'el cried in response. "This is one detour you will never forget, dear."

To her astonishment, Annette noticed that both she and Aura'el, as well as the carpet, were gradually turning into a weightless mass of infinitesimal particles, radiating intensely and profusely until their original forms completely dissipated into an ethereal concentration of dancing photons, coagulating and coalescing into a sparkling tail of light that flashed through the night sky, shooting across the Atlantic Ocean, and rematerializing a flicker of a second later over Paris, right above the Eiffel Tower.

Annette's entire body was shaking and trembling with excitement as it reemerged, regaining its solid mass and coalescing back into its original form. "Are you OK?" Aura'el asked her, sounding somewhat concerned. "I didn't mean to freak you out. It's simply a shortcut." He held her close to his body while calming and soothing her jittery nerves. "You'll get used to it eventually." He continued. "Decomposing into light particles, that is. We don't really need a flying carpet to travel anywhere around the world, but it is exciting nevertheless."

"Yes, it is exciting," Annette concurred, "particularly to the people down below watching this UFO of ours, waving their hands in hello, just as our fellow New Yorkers screaming their lungs out as if you were some sort of rock star."

Indeed, the winged carpet glided above the Eiffel Tower near the observation deck as throngs of people gathered around to get a closer look of the opulent flying object illuminating the Paris night sky with an almost esoteric glow of brilliance that extracted an ecstatic reaction from the multitude of onlookers gawking at the eye-popping spectacle in utter shock. *Le tapis volant* (i.e., "flying carpet" in French) continued its glide through the Parisian skyline, hovering some of Paris's most notorious tourist attractions (such as the Arc de Triomphe, Grand Palais, Notre-Dame de Paris, Montmartre, and Sacré-Coeur Basilica) to the sheer delight of the thousands of observers below, who were snapping photos incessantly.

*Le tapis* veered sharply north toward the English Channel, ascending high into the sky and disappearing as it drifted and fluttered in the

direction of London. “Are we going where I think we are going?” Annette asked in elation.

“Yes, we are, sweetheart.” Aura’el chuckled. “London is next. Hold on tight!” he yelled as they picked up speed while the wings went out full span, flapping intensely, sending wave after wave of powerful reverberations minced with golden dust particles.

Annette was sitting calmly at the center next to Aura’el, who appeared to be in his natural acute brilliance, yet unlike before, she could look at him directly and without being blinded by his overwhelming brightness. “This was entirely unexpected,” she said as she held his hands, bathing herself in his light. “I just don’t know what to say. I am struggling to verbalize what’s going through my mind. I am overtaken by a sense of happiness I have never experienced before. I feel as though I am daydreaming, as if I was transported into one of Steven Spielberg’s sci-fi movie sets. This is so unbelievable. I think I am losing my mind.”

“Calm down, Annette,” Aura’el whispered softly as he wrapped his arms around her in a reassuring hug. “This is not a dream, and I am not an imaginary childhood friend that suddenly and unexpectedly came to being. This is real. I am real. And this experience as well as those that are yet to transpire are part of who we are. I can’t see myself being amid all this without you beside me. I love you, Annette, more than you can possibly imagine.”

Their lips locked as the London skyline could be seen in all its greatness while the carpet swerved right in the direction of the Thames River, fast approaching Big Ben by the Palace of Westminster. “Hey!” Annette exclaimed as they began their decent. “It’s the clock tower. Wow.”

“Yes. It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” he concurred as they wafted smoothly over the water. “Let’s take a closer look. I think the Londoners are expecting a show, and I don’t intend to disappoint them.”

As they approached the massive clock, a sliver of light burst out of Aura’el and flew in the direction of Big Ben, hitting it right in the center. The entire structure shook while the clock emitted strings of dazzling condensed rays as if it were a planet about to go supernova. The tower appeared to be engulfed in mind-numbing, ethereal flames that lit up

the dark and soggy London skies and igniting a swarm of people down below as they ran and dashed toward the building, hoping to catch a better glimpse of the celestial glowing cloud encompassing it.

The cloud radiance grew so strong that it seemed ready to explode, yet it continued to shimmer until it finally burst like a shooting star while the clock continued to shine brightly, tossing sparkling particles up through the air and in all possible directions, hitting all nearby buildings and monuments, as well as a legion of spectators, who absorbed the shattered brilliance directly into their bodies and thereby turning into lustrous human torches. The sudden suffusion of this transcendent beaming energy appeared to have caused an abrupt antigravitational force that resulted in people being lifted in the air, hovering and floating around like bubbles shot out of a bubble gun while their bodies continued to shine like miniaturized planetoids.

The sight was one of biblical proportions, reminiscent of the rapture foretold in the book of Revelations. Yet this defying-gravity event was not of an apocalyptic nature but rather a joyous occasion where the affected crowds were struck by a staggering jolt of sheer delight and contentment that rivaled an outright religious nirvana. It was as though Father Mulligan's ability to levitate turned contagious and caught fire in the center of London, sending children and adults alike into a flight of fancy, hopping on top of rooftops, chimneys, treetops, and the nearby Palace of Westminster, as well as the adjacent Westminster Bridge.

There were screams of fright, mingled with those of pure glee and loud laughter as some women opened their umbrellas, jokingly mimicking the beloved character of Mary Poppins. Others were flapping their hands like birds, flying toward the clock and sitting on its hands, pretending to be *Peter Pan* characters, while some were breaststroking through the open air as if they were swimming in water, but the vast majority simply floated aimlessly as the wind scattered them around and high above the Thames River. Aura'el and Annette watched the ensuing pandemonium with outright delight, basking in a childish sense of mischievousness and actively sharing in the intoxicating emotional feast that exploded in front of their eyes. There was happiness all around

them, the kind of contentment that is rarely observable, a state of serenity and an outpouring of delight.

As the couple continued to marvel at the Londoners' excitement, the energy blast began to wear off, causing a gradual restoration of Earth's natural gravitational force. The many attendees to this once-in-a-lifetime event began descending softly onto the ground as their lambent auras waned and wafted away. Cries of disappointment could be heard from several directions, as well as those of farewell and goodbye. Big Ben continued to beam for a while longer, until it finally stopped radiating about ten minutes later, but the golden soot that filled the air refused to evaporate, lighting up the nearby vicinity with an eerie, mysterious glare, while the winged carpet ascended slowly into the sky to a loud chorus of "cheers," "goodbye," and "adios, amigo."

"Are you planning on pulling other rabbits out of your hat?" Annette asked, snickering.

"One final stop." Aura'el chuckled. "We're going home. I saved the best for last."

"And what could that possibly be?" Annette persisted.

"Hold on, dear," Aura'el replied as his aura gushed through the carpet, engulfing them all and instantly morphing their corporeal forms into photonic particles. They whooshed through the night sky and crossed the Atlantic Ocean, leaving an awe-inspiring comet-type trail behind them. An instant later, they materialized right by New York City's Chrysler Building, about seven hundred feet above the ground.

The sudden appearance of Auraman in such relative proximity to the ground caught New Yorkers down below in utter surprise and gave them a sense of incredulity. Like a thunder in broad daylight, the subject of today's most exciting news popped out of the blue right in front of the very same eyes that have witnessed the Peryton rescue, as well as the bank rescue just mere hours earlier. This totally unforeseen and unexpected close encounter of the four<sup>th</sup> kind with the city's new undeclared hero created an almost instantaneous mass hysteria of fans running and clamoring for a better viewing spot under the hovering carpet so they may catch a firsthand glimpse of Auraman, shining brightly and lighting up the adjacent skyscrapers.

The crowds went wild, congesting Forty-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue, dazzled by the rug's angelic wings, which span across from one side of Forty-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street to the other. Aura'el was overtaken with emotions as he noticed the many love signs that countless people made with their hands, while others were clapping in elation, chanting, and screaming his name repeatedly: "Auraman! Auraman! Auraman!"

The chanting continued unabated while a star-shaped glinting substance began to form about 250 feet above the celebrating crowd; the star-shaped matter began to circle around its axis, instantly approaching a blinding and unfathomable speed until it lost its original shape, morphing into an immense golden pyramid adorned with the eye of Horus emblazoned in each and every one of its triangles, and a glistening orb spun on top of its apex. The vast and magnificent structure floated far below the carpet and closer to the revelers, moving slowly around itself, while the orb was picking up speed and spinning manically, phasing in and out of existence.

*My fellow New Yorkers. A voice echoed in the minds of thousands of pedestrians below, gaping at both Auraman and the pyramid. The inner voice continued. I thank you for your warm and gracious welcome. Behold my gift of wonder. For the next ten minutes, you may turn yourselves into whatever your heart's desire. Transform yourselves into fire-breathing dragons, and experience the delights of flight, soaring high above the clouds. Turn yourselves into wizards of old, the emperors of ancient Greece and Rome, or perhaps the gods of Mount Olympus. Indulge in your fantasies, and experience the sheer, unadulterated sensation of true freedom. Let the joyride begin.*

The phantom sound subsided as the spiraling orb was brewing with unrecognizable white gaseous energy, which flickered on and off in a measured, steady pace. The energy appeared ready to burst out of the orb, but instead, a barrage of thousands of miniaturized golden lightning bolts erupted out of the sphere, hitting the onlookers below right in the middle of their foreheads. Instantaneously, a sea of creatures from every story ever told exploded into the wide open, filling the streets and avenues next to the Chrysler Building, as well as the skies, with an unimaginable menagerie of dragons, fairies, leprechauns, trolls, comic

heroes, wizards, witches, Olympian gods and goddesses, princesses, kings, queens, and a never-ending vast array of fanciful characters conceived in the mind of every storyteller ever lived since the dawn of human history.

It was an inconceivable and unthinkable sight, one that words can hardly and barely describe, a pantheon of legendary beings who stormed the sidewalks below and filled the heavens above, a tapestry of grand and resplendent beauty that dazzled the senses and bewildered the mind. It was as if Midtown Manhattan were transformed into a magical land, composed of every known legend written by man.

There were wizards harmlessly battling each other, with their staffs and wands raised above. Merlin was doing battle with Morgan le Fay as Gandalf and Saruman were combating Medea and the Greek sorceress Circe. The dragon known as Fin Fang Foom was seen chasing Sapphira around the newly erected NY Times Building while Draco was seen spewing “fire” at the 30 Rockefeller Plaza. And Pete’s dragon, Elliott, was sitting on top of the MetLife Building, appearing and disappearing on and off like a flickering light bulb. Thousands of fairy folk such as pixies, brownies, leprechauns, and gnomes alongside nymphs, elves, mogwais, merpeople, fauns, and many other creatures swarmed the sidewalks and buzzed across the air. The Wicked Witch of the West was seen flying on her broomstick toward the nearby United Nations Building, accompanied by a band of flying monkeys and followed by her sister, the Wicked Witch of the East; Zeus, the god of Olympus, was spotted on top of the Empire State Building shooting lightning bolts at the taxis below and turning them into hovercraft, while his wife Hera was standing next to him, lashing out at Pegasus, who was circling the observation deck, looking for Perseus and Andromeda. Legions of comic superheroes were crisscrossing the city, demonstrating their awesome powers and wrestling one another to the ground.

Aura’el and Annette were standing on the floating carpet, stunned by the immensity and enormity of this fantastical congestion of imaginary beings that erupted and indeed detonated in front of their eyes like lava from an exploding volcano. “What have you done?” Annette hollered, sounding alarmed and somewhat panicked. But

Aura'el did not respond. He appeared to have been caught in some sort of trance as if his consciousness were transported out of his body; his face, visible only to Annette, was expressionless yet exuded a mysterious tranquility and equanimity.

For a second, which seemed to last forever, Annette found herself trapped in Aura'el's telepathic thought stream, merging her consciousness with his. It was achingly quiet and surprisingly serene, a feeling that resembled that of unsealing or unraveling an untold ancient secret. It was as though Aura'el was communicating, albeit unknowingly, with the source of all creation, with the essence and birthplace of his omnipotence, which was transforming him with every passing hour into a being that defied comprehension. She yelled his name repeatedly and found herself bouncing back into full consciousness, wrapped around his arms as he stared into her soul with his piercing emerald eyes.

"Why?" he said. "You thought I was gone?"

"Yes," she replied. "You seemed to have been locked up and lost in some scary mind trip. I had to pull you out."

"Thanks for coming to my rescue," he whispered as he tilted the carpet away from the Chrysler Building and toward Manhattan's West Side.

Aura'el swayed his hand and pointed his palm directly at the drifting pyramid, which immediately vanished from sight, dissolving into sparkling golden dust and showering the throngs below. The impact was rapid, causing an instantaneous reversal and transfiguration of the legendary creatures back into their original human forms, a process that was as delightful to observe as the original transformation. The crowds, clearly dazed and stupefied by the experience of physical metamorphosis, cheered loudly, "We love you, Auraman! We love you!" They waved goodbye, jumping up and down the sidewalk.

The flying carpet continued its path, crossing Central Park and approaching West Eightie<sup>th</sup> Street, where it vanished from sight as Aura'el and Annette rematerialized themselves in his apartment living room. "That was some surprise," Annette muttered as she sank onto the comfortable sofa, looking visibly shaken. "Wasn't that a bit excessive?"

"No," he replied. "Not at all. I felt an urge to personally connect with the revelers and touch them with a momentary dose of wondrous power, the kind of power that is at the core of my being. It's as though I was saying, 'Hello, friends,' shaking everybody's hands, and smacking them with an out-of-this-world experience."

"Now what?" Annette kept on insisting.

"Now you answer your vibrating cell phone." Aura'el chuckled and pointed at Annette's brand-new Apple iPhone 3GS buzzing on the coffee table.

"It's Cassi," Annette said, picking up the phone. "I wonder what she wants. Hey, Cassi, how are you? Is everything OK?"

"I am still at the hospital. Is Aura'el there? Can you please put me on speaker?" she said, sounding as if she was attempting to catch her breath.

"Yes, of course," Annette replied.

"Is everything all right?" Aura'el cried into the phone, raising his voice. "You sound like you just got off the racetrack. Are you still at Memorial Hospital?"

"Yes!" Cassi yelled back. "Yes, I am still at the hospital. And frankly, it was more like a roller-coaster ride rather than a race. As a matter of fact, I feel like I am still tripping."

"What has happened, Cassi? What are you talking about?"

"Well, I am not quite sure, but I think it had something to do with Auraman and our encounter earlier at the bank. You see, the kids and I were watching the madness that unfolded by the Chrysler Building. And as soon as everybody suddenly transformed into their most favorite fictional characters, I too was transformed—to Panacea, the Greek goddess of cures and universal remedy, even though I wasn't anywhere close to the midtown Auraman gathering, nor was I hit by any of those little lightning bolts."

Cassi stopped momentarily as she was still attempting to catch her breath and gather her thoughts. She asked the kids to keep quiet and then continued. "I was standing there in front of Tommy and the other children while the transfiguration occurred, stunned by its unexpected abruptness and concerned about the well-being of the youngsters, who

stood there, frozen, staring at me as I was metamorphosing into that illustrious goddess, emitting some sort of bluish energy field that quickly surrounded the kids and enveloped their bodies. They were totally soaked and inundated with this brilliant blue light. For a few seconds, they were completely stripped out of matter, turning into shimmering shadows but quickly regaining their human forms a few moments later.”

“Are the children fine?” Annette interjected. “Are they OK?”

“Fine?” Cassi replied, sounding as if she did not understand the meaning of the word “fine.” “They are completely healed. They are cancer-free. It was clear that they were somehow altered by the blue light that was radiating from me as that healing goddess character. They were no longer the sick kids plagued by cancer and doomed to die whom I had come to visit and play with but rather a vibrant bunch of toddlers and preschoolers with a full head of hair and an explosive vitality they were missing just a few minutes earlier. Are you hearing what I am saying, Aura’el?”

“Tommy is completely healed!” Cassi screamed into the phone as she began crying uncontrollably.

“That is wonderful!” Aura’el shouted. “That is absolutely wonderful.” But the line went dead as Cassi hung up the phone, apparently too overcome with emotions and delirious with joy.

“It was you, wasn’t it?” Annette swiped at Aura’el as she held the TV remote, changing the channels. “You planned all this—the flying carpet; the ensuing madness in Paris, London, and here at home; and the miraculous healing of these cancer-stricken kids. What else do you have in store for us, Mr. Aura’el Jones?”

“Only time will tell, precious,” Aura’el shot back at Annette, turning her attention toward the television screen. “Hold on a second, dear. The president is about to give a speech. Can you please increase the volume?”

They were both glued to the screen as President Collins approached the lectern, surveying the sea of journalists in front of him and staring directly at the camera. “Ladies and gentlemen, my fellow Americans, good evening. In the last forty-eight hours, we have been exposed to some fantastical and incomprehensible events that appear to shatter our perception of reality, setting the stage for drastic and monumental

changes in the course of human history. The entity known as Auraman saved the lives of a young gymnast in what is now known as the Peryton rescue, turned three heartless thugs into little winged humanoid creatures, and was spotted riding a flying carpet in Paris, London, and New York City, causing some startling phenomena in its path, in which the laws of physical reality, as we know them, cease to exist.

"A few moments ago, we were advised by the NY Memorial Hospital staff that all their cancer-stricken children have experienced total recovery after coming in contact with Ms. Cassi La Bonc, who earlier today was touched by Auraman's intense brightness."

The president paused for a moment to sip some water and then continued. "What are we to make of these inconceivable feats of wonder? We are being reassured by the Rhinefeld chief researchers Glenda and Osiris Jones that the intentions of the entity, who is of human origins, are benevolent as they are benign and that, in a yet to be disclosed date, Auraman will indeed make his true identity known to us.

"Undeniably, the episodes that have taken place in the last two days suggest, quite clearly, Auraman's adherence to moral norms commonly accepted in free and democratic societies. His intentions seem noble and reek of natural compassion and utter disdain for violence. His sense of humor and playfulness were noted as well.

"Intrigued as we are by these marvels, we ask our newly arrived hero to disclose his mission for our planet, his intentions and goals in gracing our world with his noble presence. We extend our hands in peace and friendship and look forward to reciprocity. We call upon this new being to make himself known, disclose his human identity, and enlighten us with his profound knowledge and wisdom. Indeed, humanity looks forward to embarking on this new journey, this new path we were so unexpectedly been put on.

"Come forth, Auraman. The world awaits you. Thank you all."

"Wow!" Annette exclaimed. "That was short and to the point."

"Wait, it is not over," Aura'el replied. "Listen."

A TNNC journalist was seen grabbing a microphone and shouting toward the president, "Mr. President, how do you know Auraman is human?"

President Collin stopped momentarily and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Jones were contacted telepathically by him, and he confirmed that he was indeed human, though conceived in a very unusual and unique manner. We take Auraman's words at their face value since he does not appear to have any reason to lie. He could have easily maintained that he was of alien origin, but that would not have changed our assessment of him. We are certain that his yet to be known intentions are completely altruistic."

"What role do you expect this godlike creature to fulfill?" Simon Fuller from the OWL News Network questioned from behind a slew of reporters obstructing his way.

"I don't quite know the answer to that. The betterment and enlightenment of mankind, I suppose. He unquestionably did not come here to die for our sins," President Collins said jokingly as everyone burst out laughing. "It is a matter to be discussed thoroughly with the creature as soon as he responds to our invitation." The president walked away from the lectern, followed by his security team, as the reporters continued to toss questions at his direction.

"What will happen if Auraman goes rogue?"

"Will there be world peace now?"

"Is Auraman—" Annette turned the TV off, exchanging looks with Aura'el as they both appeared somewhat dazed, attempting to digest the importance and enormity of what the future might hold for them. It seemed, for a twinkling of a second, that humanity's well-being was placed on their shoulders—a burden they were destined to carry jointly, an unimaginable task they were willing to embrace but weren't sure how.

"This is more than what you opted for, isn't it?" Annette asked him, almost whispering.

"Yeah, possibly," Aura'el answered. "But I am sure it is not as daunting as it seems. I am actually looking forward to it."

"Looking forward to what exactly?" Annette persisted.

"To making a difference, dear. Making a difference—" And before Aura'el could finish his sentence, two monstrous-looking elongated-clawed partially human and partially *Australovenator* dinosaur

materialized out of nowhere right behind him and immediately grabbed a hold of his neck, attempting to rip it apart.

Aura'el burst into flames instinctively and began to phase in and out of existence as the freakish talons went right through his throat but failed to fasten their grip on any actual matter. His brilliance suffused the claws as they continued in their vain struggle to hold on to any physical matter and shred it to bits; the horrid-looking hybrid hands finally disappeared as Aura'el, still in a semicorporeal state, fell inside the adjacent glass coffee table and completely merged himself inside it while regaining his human form. His body lay motionless, totally encased inside the glass.

Annette watched in horror as she leaped forward, endeavoring to grab a hold of the claws, but remained totally numb midstep, not being able to move at all as though she were being frozen in time. But as soon as the claws disappeared, she instantly regained her mobility and rushed toward the glass coffee table, stretching her hand forward in a futile attempt to grab a hold of Aura'el as he sank right into the table, leaving her hand trapped inside it as the glass solidified and regained its corporeal state. Annette, stricken with panic and outright terror, screamed uncontrollably as she struggled to release her captured hand but to no avail. "Aura'el!" she cried in despair as he lay still inside the glass. "Aura'el!"

But Aura'el remained silent, appearing unconscious and comatose, his eyes shut and his body lifeless like that of a corpse.

## Chapter Eighteen

Alfonso de Leon stood in the middle of his palatial living room, staring at the gigantic TV screen and cussing at the president. “‘Humanity awaits you,’ he says. Really. I certainly do not await this omnipotent infestation to impose his grace on my business, do I?” he muttered to himself sarcastically. Seething with rage and outright fury, Alfonso picked up an expensive tulip-shaped vase from the Japanese Edo period, situated on an opulent marble stand, and threw it against the wall, smashing the lavish art piece to bits. “Vida, where are you? Vida?”

“I am right here, sir,” Vida replied as she approached him. “Is anything the matter, sir?” She looked concerned.

“Gather the troops,” he responded somewhat angrily. “We are going to war.”

“What war, sir?”

“The war to put an end to that dreadful illuminating candlestick before he turns us all into homunculi or whatever the infernal miniaturized winged humanoid is called. We need a plan—and fast. Schedule a meeting for Thursday right away.”

“Yes, of course, sir. I’ll get right to it,” she answered, her voice trembling.

“And another thing,” he added. “See me at the fire-gazing altar in ten minutes. We’re in dire need of specific information about that creature.”

“Sure, sir. I’ll be there as you requested,” Vida replied as she stepped out of the room.

Alfonso was one of the wealthiest persons on earth, rich beyond belief, with vast real estate holdings, financial conglomerates, oil fields, banks, communication firms and media outlets, weapon-manufacturing plants, pharmaceutical companies, and many other assets in almost every country on the planet. Indeed, his mammoth empire stretched to every corner of the earth, and *Forbes* magazine has crowned him the richest man who ever lived, with a net worth of nearly \$150 billion. Kings, presidents, prime ministers, and other potentates courted him, seeking his advice and stamp of approval for national projects, economic endeavors, and many other politically driven enterprises.

Doubtless, Alfonso was blessed with the Midas touch, turning everything into gold, but his heart was as black as coal. He was a soulless creature steeped in sadistic violence and sheer, utter malevolence. His cruelty knew no boundaries, and his supposed benevolence was nothing but a calculated scheme to increase dependency and reliance on his good graces.

The man was a trafficker in human misery that seemed to enrich his coffers exponentially; he stirred nation against nation, incited mayhem among competing companies, promulgated religious discord, and set the stage for strife and anger by financially supporting opposing ideologies so adherents may endlessly engage in violent upheaval and never-ending mutual recrimination. His mastery of double-crossing was unparalleled and unmatched. He would urge freedom fighters to keep on fighting, only to arm them as well as their rivals with top-notch weaponry, pocketing millions in the process and ensuring a perpetual continuation of bloodshed. He would assume the role of a mediator in numerous world conflicts, only to keep them ablaze and ensure further despair. The man was evil incarnate, but to the millions of his innocent admirers around the world, de Leon was nothing but a paragon of virtue, a savior of sorts, and the embodiment of compassion and decency.

No doubt, his deceiving good looks enabled him to substantiate the charade and win the hearts and minds of countless people who unknowingly fell into his trap like a moth to a flame. The man was blessed with an angelic face, soulful almond-shaped green eyes, hair as black as pitch, and a smile that turned hearts upside down; yet under

the guise of innocent baby-faced features and a warm, understanding appearance, there resided the most arrogant and self-obsessed tyrant who put to shame even Emperor Nero himself.

He grew up in Berkshire, England, during the early sixties, despondent and achingly poor. His mother died while giving birth to him, and his father abandoned him at the age of seven, but fortunately enough, he was adopted by the eccentric baroness de Leon (who was led to his orphanage by one of her psychic friends), who bequeathed to him her vast fortune, which catapulted his life in an unimaginable direction. The baroness, blessed be her memory, loved him dearly and fell under his spell, though she did ultimately sense that something was amiss with the child. She could never put her finger on it, nor did anyone else for that matter.

The baroness had an unquenchable passion for the occult and an insatiable thirst for knowledge of the paranormal. A woman of deep faith, she believed that human beings were indeed “created in the image of God,” thus endowed with godly abilities that were yet to be unraveled. She dedicated an entire floor in her colossal mansion for psychic experimentation long before the emergence of the Rhinefeld Institute. She invited mediums and conducted séances under some sort of pseudoscientific supervision and became friends with numerous psychics, including the late Jeane Dixon, who predicted the assassination of Pres. John F. Kennedy in the May 13, 1956, issue of *Parade* magazine, as well as Edgar Cayce, whom she met in 1943, two years before his death.

Alfonso was no doubt inspired by her unwavering passion for the supernatural. The baroness has taught him meditation and creative visualization at the age of ten. Alas, Alfonso became fascinated with the black arts, particularly ceremonial magic. Unbeknownst to her, he attempted to evoke the same demons conjured up by the biblical king Solomon.

A year after her passing, on his twenty-first birthday, he resurrected the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (an organization devoted to the study and practice of the occult, metaphysics, and paranormal activities during the late nineteen<sup>th</sup> and early twentieth centuries) in a

fervent attempt to gain supernatural abilities via the invocation and summoning of malignant spirits and other infernal entities. He turned the baroness's infamous floor into a semitemple where he conducted countless black magic rituals as prescribed by the late Aleister Crowley and Samuel MacGregor Mathers.

Within a year of consistent and relentless pursuit to manifest a spirit in the flesh, Alfonso came to the sad and inevitable conclusion that the entire endeavor was nothing more but a futile trial and wishful thinking—a sad, delusional farce utterly devoid of truth and completely immersed in nonsensical Judeo-Christian mythologies; thus, he abandoned his quest for power through magic and disbanded the order.

Yet in spite of that somber realization, his passion for the paranormal never waned and was rekindled during the midnineties with the emergence of the Rhinefeld Institute and the introduction of Marisol Flora Gonzales in Copenhagen at a scientific gathering, where she was introduced by Prof. Osiris Jones, Rhinefeld's chief researcher. Ms. Gonzales's astonishing demonstration of her telekinetic power caught de Leon completely by surprise. He was dumbfounded and totally staggered, doubting his own eyes. Though Marisol's name preceded her, Alfonso was certain she was a fake, as well as all the other alleged "mentalists" introduced by the Rhinefeld Institute as evidence for the existence of ESP.

Still, Ms. Gonzales's manifestation of levitating heavy objects in front of such a large audience and floating a bouquet of flowers at Dr. Dankirk's direction was so breathtakingly impressive. Alfonso realized right then and there that he had spent years of his life looking in all the wrong places. Inspired by her performance, he finally understood that the paranormal abilities he was seeking were not hidden in magical grimoires and ceremonial magic but rather in hard-core scientific research and empirical experimentation.

It was a moment of absolute clarity, a distinctness of thought and purpose, a life-sought nirvana on a scale he never experienced before in spite of his familiarity with deep meditation and visualization techniques, a moment in time in which factual and observational proof

for the paranormal begot a sense of empowerment in his own quest for dominion and control. He was reborn.

Later on that night, he met Vida Simon at a dinner party attended by scientists and parapsychologists, as well as private donors who financed many of the research work conducted by Rhinefeld and other institutions. Vida was discovered by Dr. William Higgins, a known time travel theorist who, among other things, conducted his independent experimentation in clairvoyance and psychometry. Ms. Simon was diagnosed with schizoid personality disorder at an early age yet possessed a remarkable ability to tap into the Akashic records (a collection of concise and detailed information of events encoded in the astral plane [i.e., a nonphysical plane of existence]) via fire gazing. She would concentrate and focus her attention on blazing flames until they turned gleaming, lustrous black; she would then lose consciousness and, while in a trance, provide knowledge of past, present, and future events of the object of her thoughts. Her accounts were eerily clear and spectacularly accurate, but because of her mental condition, they were devoid of emotional impressions and intent.

Just like a camera, she “photographed” whatever piece of information she observed and delivered it in its raw state, without confounding it with her own perspective. Vida would first “feel” the people whom she read by sensing their auras or meditating on their printed image. She would then gaze into a fire altar (a stand with a large metallic bowl on top containing burning fire logs), dematerialize, and become one with the black flames, only to reappear moments later with an exact narration of a person’s past. The future, however, was somewhat harder to perceive and recognize, but despite that difficulty, Ms. Simon was known to predict with downright accuracy many impending events in the lives of the people she read.

Dr. Higgins theorized that Vida’s disappearing fire-gazing routine created a sort of alternate and personal time realm allowing her direct contact with the Akashic records, in which the past, present, and future were in flux, existing all at once. He was convinced that he could replicate the experience and mechanize the process in a digitized format, thus creating an alternative route for time travel. His premise stipulated

the creation of a virtual reality software application that, in combination with the singularity-of-thought meditative process, would enable people to dematerialize and then reconstitute themselves in the astral plane, equipped with their “sensory organs” and ready to immerse and relive the past as well as the future. Dr. Higgins further insisted that the process was not like that of “astral projection” since it would allow for the actual physical body to rematerialize in a nonphysical plane while vibrating in a unique semicorporeal frequency, thus allowing for the retention of full physical and sensory impressions. The mechanism he conceptualized would neutralize the possibility of any time paradoxes or causality loops; it would provide time travelers with a choice to remain in the astral plane indefinitely, where they would age and die as if they were in the normal physical plane, or to restore themselves in our plane of existence comparably aged, recalling the time travel experience but not remembering its details, thus ensuring the integrity of the timeline point of departure.

The time-traveling doctor introduced Ms. Simon to Prof. Osiris Jones and his team of researchers, but Vida refused to join the Rhinefeld Institute in spite of Dr. Higgins’s encouragement. When pressed by the doctor about why she felt so unrelenting concerning the matter, she confided in him that she was not able to sense Professor Jones and his wife, Glenda, at all—an anomaly she had never encountered with any other human, a fact she found disturbingly unnerving. Nevertheless, the doctor did share his findings with the Rhinefeld Institute in hopes that the institute might speed up the research in teleportation and dematerialization.

Before meeting with Ms. Simon and Dr. Higgins, Alfonso secretly approached Osiris and Glenda with an offer to bankroll Rhinefeld’s future research but was rebuffed by the board of director’s chief, Dr. Gerald Epstein, who was convinced that his sole purpose was to weaponize supernatural abilities for sheer profit rather than for the advancement of human potentiality. Dr. Higgins, however, who was short on research grants, embraced him with open arms and invited him to his hotel suite for a private session with Ms. Simon.

Indeed, de Leon's first encounter with her fire-gazing stunt was an absolute validation of his newly reborn spirit and a further testament to the existence of true and unadulterated paranormal abilities. She stood there at the hotel suite, in front of a makeshift fire-gazing altar, staring intensely at the flames as they turned shiny black and then, right in front of his eyes, dissolved into an ethereal glittery smoke, which was immediately absorbed into the blazing flames. The flames danced erratically, increasing in size and volume, as Vida Simon's face pierced through them with a stare that nearly caused Alfonso's heart to stop. She finally emerged out of the fire and gradually coalesced back into her normal physical form as he watched her with utter disbelief. "How is Bernadette?" She asked him about his autistic half sister whom only he knew about.

And while still in a trance, she muttered, "Baroness de Leon told you about the source of her wealth, which she never divulged to anyone except you, details of which are safely kept in a Swiss vault in Geneva." She went on detailing in the minutest fashion a plethora of events, words, codes, encounters, names, and explicit knowledge only he was privy to. She finally awoke from her trancelike state, acknowledging that she had forgotten everything she has just told him. Dr. Higgins, who joined them later, explained to the startled, nearly panicked de Leon that forgetting the knowledge and information she absorbed while in a state of stupor was a fail-safe mechanism to ensure her sanity.

Astounded and moved beyond comprehension by the encounter he just experienced, Alfonso signed a comprehensive draft agreement with Dr. Higgins, providing him a research grant to last a lifetime, in return for rights to potential financial gains resulting from his time travel research in general and an exclusive access to Ms. Simon's ability in particular. He offered Vida a lucrative salary and a generous expense account, provided she agreed to reside in his lavish London mansion for an unspecified period. Suffice it to say, the "deal" de Leon struck with Dr. Higgins and Ms. Simon that night was a life-altering juncture and served as a catalyst to his meteoric ascendancy to unimaginable wealth and power.

It was Ms. Simon's accurate reading of his competitor's character and past histories that gave him an unparalleled edge in assessing the success or failure of would-be business deals and an uncanny ability to predict market trends and financial moves that almost always guaranteed a profitable transaction. Indeed, Vida was his golden goose, routinely pocketing and heaping for him fortune upon fortune in a staggering and overwhelming pace, yet because of the uniqueness of her power (her inability to remember the content of her readings once out of trance) and utter lack of concern for his boundless ambition, she wasn't quite sure how important her role was in his meteoric rise to fame and fortune. Her schizoid nature and outright apathy to human emotions virtually ensured that de Leon's secret of success would forever remain dormant and entombed in her lost, moribund soul.

Though numb to emotional stimuli, Vida led a very pleasant and safe life. She was serene and calm, wrapped in her own existential bubble of fantasy; she'd emerge occasionally into the world of the living, joining de Leon in some social events, while avoiding others like the plague. She ran unique and specific errands for him and focused her attention on keeping him informed and up to date on all the latest Rhinefeld news, as well as other paranormal institutes. Once or twice a week, she would stop by at Dr. Higgins's lab for further experimentation and inspection of her ability.

Her simplicity of thought and kindhearted demeanor appeared to have ignited Alfonso's romantic interest in her. Though he did not find her incredibly attractive, he was convinced that her loyalty to him transcended anything he could possibly ever desire in a mate. She was beyond reproach and could never be bribed into betraying him.

Vida proceeded toward the cellar, where she practiced her fire-gazing routine, and lit up the fire logs on top of the marble altar. She stood about ten feet away from it, staring directly at the flat LED screen hanging on the wall above it. The room was painted still white and was spotlessly clean; there was a solid black rug covering the floor and two tall, elongated candleholders behind her.

"Are you ready, Vida?" de Leon asked her as he walked into the room.

"Yes, sir, I am. May I proceed?"

"Yes, Vida, of course. Please do," he replied. "Look at the image on the panel."

Vida focused her attention at the image of Auraman, staring directly at him intensively, centering her sharp stare at his circular faceless, shimmering aura. Then she looked away and redirected her attention at his overall appearance and the brilliance emanating from him, embracing his magnificence and absorbing it into her eyes. She then gazed at the fire for about five minutes, causing the black flames to expand and contract, splitting them apart, till they detached themselves from the altar as they continued their graceful dance in the air. The flames finally turned shiny black and descended back onto the top of the altar, while Vida's body was phasing in and out of existence till she completely faded away and turned into ethereal dark smoke. The smoke hovered for about fifteen seconds as it was soaked up right through the black fire, merging with it completely.

Alfonso stood behind and followed her every move. He was calm and relaxed and looked pointedly at the altar, where she disappeared. The blaze suddenly increased in intensity, overflowing the altar and encompassing it entirely and then shooting upward toward the ceiling as though it was suddenly possessed. "Help me, Alfonso! Please help!" de Leon heard Vida's cry emanating from the blasting inferno.

The flames twisted and shifted erratically in opposite directions, turning around in circles as they gradually assumed the shape of a horrified facial expression in the likeness of Vida Simon. The image's lips moved again as they cried out in agony, "Help me, sir! Please help me!"

"What shall I do, Vida? Tell me what to do. How can I help you?"

"Please, sir, please hurry!"

"But what do you need me to do?" he cried again in exasperation. Alas, it dawned on him that, while he was able to hear her cries for help, she wasn't able to hear his reply.

Fearful that he might lose his most precious asset and seized by an utter sense of helplessness, Alfonso instinctively and as if by cue calmed and relaxed his mind, took a few deep breaths, and meditated on the

black flames while visualizing Vida Simon in his mind's eye. And then in a commanding and decisive voice that thundered throughout the cellar, he called on the demon Baal, the head of all the infernal powers and the first king of hell. "With these words, I conjure thee, O great and mighty Baal. I summon thee in the name of Agla, tetragrammaton, Elohim, Jehovah, Speraton, Tremendum, Ogia, Plegaton. I invoke thee in the name of Habadanum, Ingodum, Engalbis. Come forth, O Baal. I exorcise thee. From the depths of hell, I command thee. Release the maiden, and hear her cry. I dare you, spirit. Don't let her die. Heed my demand, and hearken my plight. Bring her forth from darkness to light. Show me thy power. Show me thy might that I may witness your wonders tonight."

Alfonso repeated the incantation three times with ferocity and fervor born out of acute sense of urgency and alarm, and to his utter shock and amazement, he suddenly found himself surrounded by thick darkness, a place of nothingness devoid of matter and bereft of substance, a twilight zone of sorts where existence could be summed up as awareness in its most simplistic form—pure consciousness stripped of physical form as we know it yet filled with a subtle sense of physical being. De Leon could not see his body yet felt his heart pumping, his chest moving in a slow but steady rhythm, and his blood circulating from head to toe while the breath from his nostrils filled the spaceless void. *Where am I?* he pondered. *Where is Vida?*

Other than a sense of his own self, Alfonso couldn't perceive any other presence around him, but the thought of Ms. Simon disrupted the void and ruptured the thick darkness. He could now clearly hear Vida's cries for help as bright white light abruptly appeared in front of him. The light was ferociously intense and blinding, but de Leon, nevertheless, stared directly at it and looked beyond it, attempting to fine-tune it and adjust it to a clear and visibly defined form.

There she was right in front of him, her body caught in a glittering pentagram encased in a moving circle. She seemed to be locked in the middle of a whirling black vortex emanating from the center of the five-pointed star, which pulled her slender figure farther and farther into the

abyss. Vida's hands were stretched forward, striving to grasp at a golden human shadow that stood slightly away from her, radiating profusely.

Alfonso scrutinized Vida's hands and felt like his eyes were about to pop out of their sockets. *What happened to her hands?* he thought as he approached closer to her. Her dainty fragile hands have turned into a pair of disgusting elongated claws partially human and partially *Australovenator* dinosaur, lunging at the golden shadow and grasping at its perceived throat, seeking to rip it apart while staring at Alfonso in absolute and total terror.

"Help me, Alfonso!" she cried, tears rolling down her cheeks. "I am not doing this. There is something here with us. Help me, please."

Instantaneously, de Leon appeared to have regained his physical form and stretched his arms forward in an effort to grab a hold of her hands. Alas, his hands went right through her claws, failing to grab her; Vida continued to scream as her body kept its unstoppable descent, inch by inch, into the swirling black void stemming from the center of the pentagram. "Vida!" de Leon yelled at her. "Look into my eyes. Calm down, Vida. Look into my eyes. Focus." He said it in a relaxed but assertive voice.

De Leon was staring at her while invoking one of the most ancient primordial deities known to mankind straight out of the pages of the nefarious *Necronomicon*: "Oh great Ziku!" he hollered in a commanding voice. "Zee kee ya kan pa. Zee an na kan pa. Zee deen geer kee ya kan pa. Zee deen geer an na kan pa. Hear me, O thou, Ziku. Come forth in the name of Giggim A Gan Pa. Zi kia kanpa. Zi anna kanpa."

As he was repeating the chant, Alfonso's eyes began to glow like gigantic red rubies, gradually turning into yellow-orange coloration, similar to the fire logs used at Vida's gazing altar. "Keep on looking," he instructed her. "Keep on looking at my eyes as if you are about to read me. Read me, Vida. Read my past. Blend into my fire." Drowning in an excruciating pain and feeling her life slowly being drained out of her with every passing moment, Vida gazed into Alfonso's eyes and immediately began to flux, dematerializing and turning into an ethereal black smoke that shifted right through de Leon's burning, flaming eyes.

For a moment, time stood still, and Alfonso found himself back in that place of nothingness, where absence was thought, and thought was absence; where existence was a concept lacking physical property; where consciousness was *life*, and life was but a *file* of past, present, and future intertwined, braided together in an inseparable bond. It was a place beyond the beyond where darkness and light were transfix and suffused in an embryonic eternal dance, battling for dominion. It was a transcendent point in reality where de Leon's awareness was reduced to its most pristine form—a living, breathing spark of creation, all-knowing, all-encompassing, and one with universe itself.

A flash of blue lightning struck the cellar floor, and the two found themselves back in the fire-gazing room, curling on the ground in a fetal position and breathing heavily. "Are you all right, Vida?" Alfonso asked her.

"Yes, sir, I am. Thank you for coming to my aid. I am forever in your debt. I would have remained trapped in that nothingness if it wasn't for you."

"How did I even get there?"

"I pulled you in, sir," she replied. "I have that ability too, but I would not have been able to do so without your tacit approval and cooperation. You went to a great length to ensure that, and your incantation and conjuration of Baal sped up the process."

"Aha, I see." Alfonso nodded, feeling somewhat disappointed since he was convinced that, for the first time in his life, he was successful in invoking a spirit to do his bidding. "And how do you explain your release from the black vortex at the center of the pentagram?" he quizzed. "You dematerialized while looking into my eyes."

"Yes, sir, I did. Your eyes lit up like the fire logs on the fire-gazing altar when you asked me to read your past. I knew exactly what you were attempting to do."

"And what was that, Vida?"

"You recognized that, once I started gazing into your eyes, I would start to flux, phasing in and out of existence, and eventually turn into a cloud of ethereal smoke, a sure way to escape whatever it was that was holding me," she said in a quiet but firm voice.

"What or who took hold of you? Any idea?" Alfonso kept on asking.

"I am not sure, sir." Vida gasped in desperation, her hands shaking. "I really don't know." She took a deep breath and continued. "From the first moment I merged with the black flames, I sensed that something was wrong. All I could see and feel was nothingness, absolute nothingness, as though Auraman was devoid of past, present, and future, a timeless creature, an entity of no beginning or end. It is absolutely insane and makes no sense. All beings, human and nonhuman alike, leave behind them a historical imprint, a trail of sorts, but not Auraman."

"That is impossible," Alfonso interjected. "What are you insinuating? That Auraman is God?"

"No, sir, not at all, but I am not quite sure what to make of it. There was a stillness of time when I attempted to gaze into Auraman's essence as if he was stripped of any substance or physical matter as we know it—a creature of focused thoughts, an embodiment of wishful thinking, a phantom born of deep desire infused with the power of divine light. Frankly, sir, it felt as though I was staring into an infinite abyss. And then it happened."

"What happened?" de Leon asked, listening attentively to each word that came out of her mouth.

"A glowing shadow appeared out of nowhere in front of me while the five-pointed star popped right behind me. They emerged simultaneously." Vida's body began to shake as she was recalling her experience.

Alfonso held her right hand gently and whispered softly, "Calm down, Vida. You are safe now. Take a deep breath. You are safe."

"Thank you, sir. Thanks for your kindness," she replied and then went on. "There was an unexplained presence there bereft of any impressions and lacking any feelings or emotions—a state of existence that defies definition, akin to the same emptiness I sensed when gazing at Auraman's image. Yet this particular essence discharged a tremendous sense of urgency and purpose, an all-encompassing readiness. It wanted something, but I couldn't tell what."

"A powerful jolt of energy broke my concentration as I suddenly found myself trapped in the pentagram while lunging forward toward

the glowing shadow's neck and attempting to tear it apart. I looked at my hands and realized that they turned into those grotesque and repugnant semihuman-semidinosaur claws. It was obvious they had a life of their own as I was not able to control them. They lashed out at the shadow repeatedly, determined to rip its neck wide open, while pulling it in the direction of the vortex behind me, till it eventually broke free and disappeared. Clearly, sir, if you did not heed my cries, I would have been lost inside the void."

Vida paused, sighing at length while composing herself, and then looked at Alfonso somewhat sheepishly. "I have felt that nothingness before, sir, that desolation, that blank sensation of emptiness. I am sure of that."

"Where?" de Leon responded as if he were suddenly bitten by a serpent. "When? Come on, Vida, think. When did you feel like that before?"

"At the Rhinefeld lecture in Copenhagen, where Marisol Flora Gonzales demonstrated her telekinetic powers. Before her performance, Dr. Higgins introduced me to Glenda and Osiris Jones, the head researchers of the Rhinefeld Institute. I felt absolutely nothing when I shook their hands, an absolute hollowness as though they were both apart and distinct from recorded human history. I just couldn't sense anything."

"Bingo!" Alfonso cried with sheer delight. "Bingo! I knew it. I knew that this creature was somehow linked to Rhinefeld." De Leon stood up while assisting Vida off the ground as she was still quivering and unsettled.

"I must hand it to those two," he said to her. "They have created the ultimate super weapon. No doubt they intend to take over the world and use that vile monstrosity of theirs to dominate this planet or, better yet, to reign over and subjugate the universe. For years, they have lulled us into a state of complacency and inaction with their lofty preaching about expanding human consciousness and ascendancy in the evolutionary ladder while all along plotting our demise."

"What are you talking about, sir?" Vida responded sharply. "Isn't Auraman a force for good? Everybody knows that. Even the president confirmed that earlier tonight."

"I think you should keep quiet and just shut up now, Vida. No one asked for your opinion," Alfonso groused and walked away from her. He then turned and looked back at her. "Don't you see, Vida? The Joneses are evil, and just like Lucifer—the bearer of light and the master of all wickedness—they have brought into this world a creature of light, an exact reflection of the prince of darkness before he was cast out from heaven. They are hell-bent on bringing our downfall and extinction."

"But to what end, sir? What do they stand to gain from our destruction?" Vida persisted.

"I am not quite sure. They do not strike me as deeply devout and religious people bent on resurrecting the devil from the depths of hell. It is likely they do not even believe in Satan's existence and probably refer to him as a myth. I used that analogy to further stress the point that they are evil and that their true intentions are nefarious, aimed at wreaking calamity and misery in our lives.

"Evil is just evil for evil's sake, Vida. It needs no reason or motives. Its desire to unleash suffering and pain is inherent. It is the sum and the whole of its deep-rooted essence. It derives an innate pleasure from inflicting devastation, and it is in constant pursuit to quench that addictive thirst for violence and mayhem."

He continued. "Would you ponder about why fire is hot? Of course not. It is hot because it is in its nature to be so. Granted, the Joneses are not inanimate objects. And it is possible that, by destroying the planet or turning it upside down, they might be advancing a yet unknown cause or a goal. But their ultimate reasoning in creating that monstrosity is irrelevant and beside the point. They need to be stopped," Alfonso said in a commanding and firm voice.

"And how will you accomplish that, sir?" Vida asked in her soft low voice.

"By enlisting your help, of course. How else?"

"Me, sir? How? I am not even able to read them."

"That is indeed correct, Vida, but you are quite able to read all those around them. Call the Thursday meeting off. This job is for you and me alone."

"What do you expect me to do, sir?"

"Call Prof. Osiris Jones first thing tomorrow morning, and advise him that you changed your mind and would like to participate in his psychic research. He has been attempting to recruit you ever since he met you in Copenhagen. It's an excellent opportunity to gather more information about Auraman. I am certain of it. I'll make all the necessary arrangements for your immediate departure and extended stay in Manhattan. You'll contact me with updates as soon as information becomes available. You must keep utmost discretion about all this. I am counting on you, Vida."

"Yes, sir, of course," Vida replied, still feeling weak and wobbly.

Alfonso concluded his instructions and was ready to depart, but suddenly, he stepped back and gently pulled Vida toward him, placing a passionate kiss on her glossy lips. Vida stood there stunned and motionless as if struck by lightning, too startled to grasp the enormity and meaning of her life's first kiss.

## Chapter Nineteen

Panicked and overcome with a sense of complete loss, Annette gazed at Aura'el as he laid trapped and immobilized inside the glass coffee table, appearing to be dead. Her hand was still caught inside the glass. She succumbed into despair and began to cry, striving to understand what just happened. *Who would have launched such an attack? she pondered. Aren't they aware of Aura'el's abilities? Aren't they concerned about the mortal consequences to themselves of such a hostile action? Indeed, Aura'el was right. Someone or something has set their sights on eliminating him and wasted no time in doing so.*

Annette's mind was troubled with nagging, frightening thoughts of death and sorrow, a tremendous sense of agonizing sudden abandonment. "It's unfair," she mumbled to herself as she continued to cry. "Why? How? It's impossible. He cannot be dead." She stared at his image through the glass and sobbed continuously.

"Stop crying, dear," she heard his voice say and looked behind her. "No, Annette, I am still here inside the glass." Aura'el opened his eyes and smiled at her. The coffee table radiated mightily for a moment and then disappeared as Aura'el rose, engulfed in his blinding aura. He rushed toward Annette and embraced her, imbuing her with his starlight brightness.

It appeared as if she completely vanished inside him, only to emerge moments later, beaming and invigorated as though nothing had happened. Annette lunged at Aura'el, kissing and hugging him and roaring out loud, "You're alive! You're alive!"

"Of course, I am," he replied, kissing and embracing her warmly.

"I thought I've lost you. You were still and unresponsive for quite some time. You appeared to be lifeless."

"I know, I know. I was fully conscious, though, attempting to latch on to the essence that attacked me. It was not of Earth as I could not sense it anywhere on this planet or anywhere in our galaxy for that matter," Aura'el commented in a calm and relaxed voice.

"What happ—" Annette stopped in midsentence and peered at the grandfather clock, which started phasing in and out of existence, emitting a bright yellowish cloud, while its bob disseminated such an intense flash of light that it seemed as though it was about to explode.

"Don't worry." Aura'el calmed his startled girlfriend. "It's just my mom and dad."

"It is?" she asked, looking bewildered.

"Yes, observe." The bob continued to shine for a while longer, disappearing and reappearing, until two flashes of lightning burst out of it, hitting the floor close to where Aura'el and Annette were standing, immediately turning into human forms. It took a few more seconds, and the ethereal images coalesced into Glenda and Osiris.

"We came as soon as we heard," Osiris said.

"Is everything all right?" Glenda added, looking worriedly at her son.

"Yes, of course," Annette responded as she wrapped her arms around her. "Everything is just fine."

"Well, not exactly," Aura'el interjected. "I was attacked by something, but I am not quite sure what." Aura'el went on and recounted the incident in the minutest way possible, ensuring that nothing was omitted, regardless of how trivial or unimportant some of the details may have seemed. "I was caught by surprise, Dad, and for a moment, I wasn't sure how to respond. I instinctively phased into my ethereal mode while endeavoring to contain the claws. Though I wasn't hurt during the encounter, I was immobilized for a split second before finally latching myself on to that essence, pulling it into the glass table, and attempting to force it to manifest itself in our plane of existence."

"Did the entity materialize?" Osiris asked as he was looking for the glass table, which reappeared in front of him as Aura'el was talking.

"Unfortunately, it did not."

"It is likely a response to all your recent activity," Glenda commented. "Somehow your interaction with humanity in the last forty-eight hours has triggered a violent response. The question is, why? And by whom?"

"Well, that shouldn't be hard to guess," Osiris asserted. "It's the Malakahrians, of course. After all, Dr. Bearlight did warn us about them."

"That might be correct," Glenda concurred. "But we don't know that for sure, nor do we have a clue about who or what the Malakahrians are. For all we know, it might be an earthly metaphysical presence that perceived Aura'el's influence as threatening to its existence. Or it could very well be a local villain who might stand to lose should Aura'el transforms and reshapes our society. Clearly, some among us are keen on keeping things the way they are—a planet still rife with violent discord, where turmoil, misery, and pain run rampant in many parts of our world. Those who enrich themselves by such desolation and gloom, mind you, won't seat idly by while Aura'el ingrains himself in our reality."

Glenda continued. "And that is not all. I am sure that whoever launched that attack is already devising ways to contain you or put you out of the way altogether." Glenda stared at Aura'el, looking perturbed and distressed.

"Regardless of who attacked Aura'el or why," Osiris noted, "we must further investigate the matter and gather as much information on likely adversaries who might have discovered a way to harm Auraman or even kill him." Osiris paused, staring at his son and talking about him as if he wasn't there.

"But I think I have the answer to that," he pronounced as his eyes lit up. "This is a remarkable coincidence. Earlier tonight I received a call from a colleague of mine, Dr. William Higgins, a time travel researcher who has been conducting experiments with a gifted woman named Vida Simon. I have been trying to recruit her for quite some time, mind you, but she always refused without elaborating why. Apparently, she'll be staying in NY for the next month and possibly until the end of the year, during which she agreed to work with us at Rhinefeld."

"I know of her," Glenda remarked. "She is known to give very accurate readings of people's past, present, and future while in trance. Her ability is quite remarkable, but I am not sure how she would be of any help to us."

"How so?" Osiris asked.

"Well, she must view the object of her reading before entering the Akashic records. And currently, we lack a starting point from which to allow the merger of her consciousness with that of a potential adversary."

"We actually do, dear," Osiris interrupted, "at least with regard to the Malakahrians."

"You are right—well, sort of," Glenda conceded. "We have a visual impression of the Malakahrians' home planet."

"But wait, what about us?" Annette bemoaned. "Wouldn't she be able to read us too and thereby discover the truth about Aura'el?"

"No, not necessarily." Aura'el finally broke his silence and chimed in to the conversation. "I can shield all of us from her prying mind. She won't be able to read us as long as our auras are vibrating in a non-earthly frequency. Anyway, I have no desire to play hide-and-seek with the media and therefore decided to formally reveal my identity at a scheduled interview with TNNC."

Aura'el paused for a moment and looked at his parents, who looked back at him and said in unison, "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure," he replied. "But I have no intention of disclosing the facts that you are my parents. I'll spare you the worldwide frenzy that is sure to follow should I divulge that my mom and dad are the famed and notorious Glenda and Osiris Jones. Nor do I intend to appear in my Aura'el human form but as Auraman."

"Wait," Annette intervened. "If you don't show yourself as who you truly are, what is the point?"

"The point is, my sweet Annette, that the public does indeed have the right to know who I truly am—a being of light that is also human born to a no-less-human couple via the unique process of aura fusion, taught to them by a mystic. Now since I am able to alter my appearance and assume the features of any person on the planet, the way I appear to my family and closest friends is irrelevant. I am known to the world

as Auraman since I did emerge into public view as I truly am. Thus, imposing a specific human face on that visible form is essentially hiding my true appearance. Plus, I won't deny it, I do want to retain some measure of privacy for myself as well as for those I love and care about," he concluded as he smiled and grinned at all of them.

"Of course, son, of course." Glenda nodded in agreement.

"There is more," Osiris remarked, looking distressed and somewhat alarmed.

"What do you mean more?" Aura'el inquired.

"In a totally unrelated issue, we were advised by the president that planet Nibiru has tilted on its axis."

"You must be joking," Annette griped. "Everybody knows that planet Nibiru is a made-up extraterrestrial story meant to amuse the gullible among us."

"No, not quite," Osiris insisted. "The planet is, after all, real. It's a binary star system located in the constellation of Reticulum, about thirty-nine light-years from Earth."

"Yes, that is correct." Glenda nodded in agreement. "We are indeed aware of all the fairy tales and false predictions associated with Nibiru. Who can forget the panic among some UFO groups who were certain Nibiru was about to collide with Earth in 2003?" Glenda intoned and burst out laughing. "But seriously, this is no laughing matter. The president seemed to be genuinely concerned since NASA scientists picked up some unusual activity at the Reticuli solar system that appeared to emanate from Nibiru. Further observations have suggested that the planet indeed veered off its axis. They are not sure what caused the shift or if it bears any importance to the safety of our planet, but they are rather apprehensive."

"I think I'll be able to help, Dad," Aura'el suggested.

"How?" Osiris asked.

"Right now, we simply need to confirm whether the shift poses any danger to Earth. I'll just hop over there and check."

"Hop over thirty-nine light-years? Are you mad?" Osiris exclaimed in astonishment. "Seriously, son, we know you possess reality-altering abilities, but this is beyond the scope of your powers."

"Not quite," Aura'el replied. "Behold." His aura exploded in all directions, obscuring him from sight and then appearing moments later.

"How in the name of . . ." Glenda uttered as Aura'el coalesced into his human form. "Seventy-eight light-years in a flash. It is absolutely incomprehensible."

"It is not distance travel, Mom. It is a hyperthought travel in the Imaginarum."

"Imagi-what?" Glenda questioned him with a puzzled look on her face.

"Imaginarum, an immaterial library of sorts composed of holographic, three-dimensional images of every thought form ever conceived, a plane of virtual existence that is an exact reflection or an exact replica of all knowledge ever perceived or gathered since the creation of the cosmos, similar to the Akashic records' plane of existence. But unlike the latter, it does not contain a record of events but rather a visual imagery of every object or thought that ever existed or will exist. Thus, once I tuned myself into the Imaginarum, I was able to observe planet Nibiru as if I was actually there."

"What have you seen, son?" Osiris probed further.

"Nothing about the Malakahrians," he replied. "Unfortunately, there is nothing there besides the image in our minds of what we perceived to be their home planet. Indeed, planet Nibiru shifted on its axis, and it is now spinning around itself in an increasing velocity. Theoretically, if it somehow detaches itself from the gravitational forces that are holding it in place, it may blast off like a rock out of a catapult. Frankly, even if that is to happen, I am quite skeptical if it is likely to head in our direction. Just as you suggested, Annette"—Aura'el paused and looked at her admiringly—"it is mostly made-up pseudoscience."

But Annette did not respond to his comment. She sat on the couch gazing aimlessly into the room as if she was daydreaming and semiconscious, dazed, and totally detached from her surroundings. Her face started to glow, and an enormous cloudlike halo covered it completely, concealing it from sight. The image was a stark resemblance to that of Auraman's facial halo and caught Aura'el and his parents by

complete and utter surprise. "What is happening?" Glenda cried out in shock, looking petrified.

"I don't know, Mom, but she is not in any danger," Aura'el replied.

A loud and deep metallic voice suddenly pierced the living room, filling it entirely. "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin. Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin." The sound grew louder and louder and seemed to have come right out of Annette's glowing halo as if it were a roaring speaker. "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin. Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin."

"It's Aramaic!" Osiris yelled, attempting to overpower the blaring metallic voice.

But the earsplitting, deafening sound went on, blasting with an unstoppable ferocity. "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin. Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin."

For a moment, Annette's body from neck down vanished entirely, and all that remained was her floating head, still obscured by a brilliant candlelike halo and hovering in midair. "It's a message!" Aura'el hollered at his parents' direction. "I recognize it too. I know what it means."

"Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin," the voice continued to rumble. "Mene, mene, mene, mene, mene, tekel, tekel, tekel, tekel." The deep, heavy sound has finally begun to wane until it faded away completely; Annette's halo diminished in strength and grew substantially faint, exposing her face, while the rest of her body rematerialized.

"What?" she asked as they were all gawking at her.

"Aren't you aware of what just happened?" Glenda asked.

"No. What just happened?"

"You seemed to go into trance." Glenda went on. "For a short while, you appeared to have turned into the female version of Auraman. Your face totally disappeared into a dazzling candlelike halo while your body evaporated from sight."

"You guys are totally putting me on, right?" Annette responded in outright disbelief.

"No." They all nodded back at her.

"Wait, there is more," Osiris pressed on. "There was a metallic-sounding voice that emanated directly from your halo-covered face. It

repeated an Aramaic sentence over and over again: ‘Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.’”

“Oh my god!” Annette exclaimed, still baffled and confounded by what she was told. “I know exactly what that sentence means. We came across it a few weeks ago during a philosophy of science class. Somehow the discussion shifted to ancient mythologies, biblical folklore, as well as nonbiblical fairy tales, and one of the students brought up the story of Belshazzar’s feast from the book of Daniel—you know, the story about the writing on the wall. Aura’el, can you take it from here?” Annette looked somewhat fatigued.

“Sure.” Aura’el proceeded. “Anyway, recall Belshazzar, the king of Babylon who held a feast in his palace, drinking from vessels that were looted during the destruction of the first Jewish temple. A hand suddenly appeared and wrote on the wall, ‘Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.’ After several attempts by his astrologers to decipher the words, the king was advised by his wife to call for the prophet Daniel, who correctly interpreted the message: Belshazzar’s days are numbered, a punishment for blaspheming the Jewish God. Thus, his kingdom would be given to the Medes and Persians. The very same night, the king was killed. And Darius, the Median king, conquered his kingdom.”

“Wait,” Glenda interrupted as Aura’el appeared to have finished. “What do the words actually mean?”

“Yeah, Mom, I am getting there. *Mene* means ‘God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.’ *Tekel* means ‘you have been weighed and found wanting. And *upharsin* means ‘the kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.’”

“I don’t get it,” Osiris pondered out loud. “What does it all have to do with us? No offense, but it is ancient mythology with hardly any relevance to our current situation.”

“Quite right,” Annette concurred. “Anyway, I don’t remember any of it. How come I am not aware of what just happened?”

“I am not sure yet, sweetheart,” Aura’el whispered as the look on his face suddenly changed dramatically, and his eyes lit up like a beam. “I know what it means.” He raised his voice. “We are doomed. Planet Nibiru is headed straight for us. Our days on Earth are numbered.”

## Chapter Twenty

Monday, October 14, 2012

Alfonso de Leon spared no expense in ensuring Vida's comfort and well-being. He rented the finest suite at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Park Avenue for a period of two months and dispatched a few of his goons to watch over his golden goose, instructing them to remain unnoticed. Additionally, he indulged her with a charge account, urging her to "shop till you drop." "Go on a shopping spree" he said. "Don't hesitate. Get yourself whatever your heart desires. The card has no credit limit. It is unique in its features, and for all I care, you may buy yourself a condo on the Upper West Side in proximity to the Rhinefeld Institute should you find it more convenient or should you not like your accommodations at the Waldorf."

"Of course, sir," she replied. "Thank you kindly for your generosity." Vida walked inside the limousine as the chauffeur closed the door behind her.

"Where to, ma'am?"

"The Rhinefeld Institute, West Seventy-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street by Central Park."

Vida's mind was troubled with nagging thoughts about the task she was supposed to accomplish. She still wasn't convinced that the Joneses were hell-bent on unleashing havoc and mayhem on the planet as Alfonso insisted; they just didn't strike her as people who would even hurt a fly, much less a human being. But alas, de Leon's arguments

echoed strongly in her mind, and she thus chased those doubts away, burying them deeply in a remote corner of her schizoid subconscious.

"De Leon knows best," she chanted to herself, repeating the sentence over and over again as though it was a sacred mantra, and then it dawned on her.

"He kissed me," she muttered to herself quietly. "What do you suppose it means? Does he have feelings for me? That is absolutely ridiculous. Why would he? He is stunningly handsome and can have any woman he desires. Why would he even entertain such a possibility? Anyway, I certainly have no feelings for him. Come on, Vida, you don't have feelings for anyone, period—for him or for anyone else for that matter. What is wrong with you?"

She continued mumbling to herself softly, "Well, I don't know. Nothing is wrong with me. I was just born this way. Being so emotionally placid never bothered me before. Why should it bother me now?" She went on further analyzing her cerebral detachment. "Because he is the wealthiest man on the planet who just placed a passionate kiss on your lips, you demented moron. Wake up."

"What was the street number?" the driver asked, interrupting her daydreaming and self-probing.

"West Seventy-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street, right by Central Park West. You can't miss it," she replied.

"Yes, that's what I thought." The chauffeur nodded in agreement, exiting the limo and opening the door for her. Vida smiled at him and waved goodbye to him. "Thank you, Ms. Simon," he said. "When shall I pick you up?"

"About 4:00 p.m.," she uttered and proceeded to the building entrance.

Vida was enamored with Manhattan, where she grew up as a teenager and where she frequently visited her aunt Calista, who moved to the United States in the early sixties. Though her family was German in origin, they split apart and moved all across the globe, with her immediate family moving to the UK in 1972. Her dad, Helmut Simon, was accused of being a Nazi sympathizer who committed war crimes but was nevertheless exonerated for lack of evidence. His sister,

Calista—who always suspected him of being a closeted anti-Semite—was certain he fooled the German courts, successfully hiding his early twenties “job” as a guard in a concentration camp. The last time Vida saw of him, he was leaning over her bed, kissing her goodbye, telling her how much he loved her. She never saw him since as he vanished without a trace.

Her mother, Greta, fell further into mental illness and eventually died of a heart attack in her early thirties, entrusting the ten-year-old Vida to her sister-in-law, who was a successful neurosurgeon working at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. The widowed Calista, who vowed never to remarry, raised her as if she were her own daughter, heaping love and attention on the young child, providing her with the best of care.

At the age of eighteen, Calista sent the quiet and introverted Vida to King’s College London, where she completed her education with high honors, majoring in genetics. Afterward, she interned for the famed Dr. Ginsburg, focusing on DNA profiling, a technique used to identify people by the characteristics of their DNA. She later joined the London UCL Genetics Institute and remained there in a research capacity for nearly twenty years.

Vida would visit her aunt regularly, mostly during the holidays. They would tour the city extensively, go on numerous shopping sprees, watch Broadway shows, and attend the New York City Opera. Indeed, Manhattan was Vida’s second home, and she felt more at home there than at her own native London, in spite of her pronounced British mannerisms. Calista furiously ventured at setting her niece up with what she (so old-fashionably) termed as “local gentleman callers,” but Vida rejected all her would-be suitors and implored her aunt to stop those incessant efforts at introducing her to the local NY intelligentsia. “I am just not interested, Auntie,” she repeatedly scolded her.

“But why?” Calista insisted. “Is there something you’d like to tell me?”

“No, Auntie, there is truly nothing to tell or hide. I am just not interested in boys or girls. I’m not quite sure why. You, of all people, should understand. After all, you are a neurosurgeon. Aren’t we the sum

of chemical reactions and neurons firing up in our brains as you always contend? Maybe I am missing some enzymes or other elements that are essential to triggering a heightened emotional response. I simply don't know, nor does it bother me one bit. I am happy just the way I am."

"I don't buy that, sweetheart," Calista persisted. "I admit, your reasoning is plausible because of the history of mental illness in our family, but I know you well, darling. I think it is something else." Indeed, to Calista's shock and dismay, Vida was diagnosed a year later with schizoid personality disorder.

"May I help you?" the concierge at the Rhinefeld front desk asked Vida, drawing her attention back to reality.

"Yes, sir. My name is Ms. Simon. I am here to see Professor Jones."

"Sure," the attendant replied. "We've been expecting you. Please follow me." The concierge walked her toward the elevator and instructed her to press the six<sup>th</sup>-floor button.

"What am I doing here?" Vida rambled to herself, feeling anxious and somewhat flustered as she walked inside the elevator. Ultimately, she was no spy, nor was she here for scientific exploration.

"Hi, Ms. Simon. How are you? I am delighted to meet you," Osiris greeted her as soon as she stepped out of the elevator.

"I am fine. Thank you for asking. I am thrilled to meet you again, Professor Jones," she lied with a broad smile on her face. "How long has it been? Twelve, fifteen years from our last encounter in Copenhagen?"

"Yes." Osiris nodded in agreement. "Just about that. How is your stay?" he further inquired. "Is the city of New York living up to its reputation?"

"Yes, of course," she responded in a perfect American accent. "I know New York like the palm of my hand."

"How so?" he asked, continuing their small talk as they paced toward his office.

"Well, I have a family here. I grew up in the West Village since I was ten years old and have been visiting regularly since I moved back to the UK."

"How wonderful," Osiris noted. "I truly appreciate your willingness to work with us. I look forward to that."

"So do I, Professor, but could you please elaborate in some more detail about your new research and my direct involvement in it?"

"Absolutely," Osiris acknowledged as they entered his office. "Would you like a cup of tea? Coffee perhaps?"

"No, thank you. A cold glass of water will be just fine." Osiris pulled a bottle of Evian from the minicooler situated at the far end of the room as Vida looked around his office, marveling at the artwork that adorned the wall behind his desk.

"I see you have some unusual artistic flavor." She grinned, pointing at Salvador Dali's famous 1931 *The Persistence of Memory*.

"Definitely," Osiris concurred. "I find Dali's work to be absolutely riveting and thought provoking. I bet he was rather odd."

"You have no idea." Vida cackled. "Occasionally, Dr. Higgins would have me profile people for the purpose of confirming various personal anecdotes told to him in the strictest confidence by friends and relatives of said people so he may validate my ability to pinpoint information not available to the general public. One such anecdote involved the late Salvador Dali. Suffice it to say, the story I have uncovered was quite unusual. But of course, I don't remember any of it, unless the information is later shared with me by Dr. Higgins or by the person I read."

"I am aware of your defense mechanism," Osiris countered. "Your ability is indeed remarkable."

"If it wasn't for the stunned faces I encounter whenever I come out of my fire-gazing trance, I wouldn't even know that my ability was that impressive."

"How did you discover your ability, if I may ask?"

"Yes, certainly," Vida replied. "I remember gazing at fire from a very early age. I used to sit by the fireplace and find myself mesmerized by the burning coals, overtaken by the dancing flames and the crackling sound of the burning embers. The hypnotic effect of the experience was rather addictive. It had a soothing effect on my mental well-being and most likely contributed greatly to maintaining my sanity, in spite of the trials and tribulations I had to endure from a very young age growing up in Germany."

Osiris seemed somewhat puzzled by Vida's frankness and outpouring, not knowing that she was instructed by de Leon to appear gracious and amicably vulnerable so as to gain his confidence and trust. "And then it happened." Vida went on recalling her first encounter with the paranormal. "I sat by the fireplace and gazed at the embers as I would normally do. Suddenly, the flames appeared to have detached themselves from the burning logs as they flew across the room right at me. In seconds, I was engulfed entirely by the flames as their intensity grew in strength and splendor. I stood in the middle of the room, bathing in a dazzling inferno, as my body seemed to have lost its natural human coherence. It was as though I became one and the same with the flames and reshaped in their essence. The whole experience lasted for about five minutes, after which I regained my human form."

Vida stopped for a moment and sipped from the glass of water beside her and then continued. "Suffice it to say, I was stunned and shocked beyond comprehension. Somehow years of gazing at flames created a point of confluence where I was fire, and fire was me, an intersection of thought and matter, a blending of the material and the immaterial that resulted in a reality-altering, symbiotic physical manifestation."

"Sounds like the singularity of thought," Osiris interrupted.

"You're quite right," Vida answered. "It does fall within the singularity's definition."

"When did you start tapping into the Akashic records though?" Osiris proceeded questioning her.

"Already at my first encounter with the singularity," she remarked, borrowing his own terminology. "It was a side effect of sorts resulting from the fire merging. While in a state of communion with the flames, I saw images of past, present, and future events. It was a messy jumble of meaningless impressions that threatened to blow my mind. It was Dr. Higgins who realized that, while I was suffused with fire, a doorway to the Akashic records seemed to have opened, allowing me access to a downpour of information. I would recall numerous details, which he would then write down and later verify."

Vida closed her eyes momentarily as though she was visualizing her verbal conversation with Osiris and then continued her explanation.

"Through controlled experimentation, the doctor was successful in devising a way that allowed me to focus and control the influx of infinite data that gushed through my mind like a monstrous tsunami to a degree where I could concentrate on a single image or event. Further trials have confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt my ability to pinpoint, with uncanny accuracy, unique and personal anecdotes. The specificity of the information was so devastatingly startling and so incredibly detailed Higgins concluded that I must have been time traveling in that plane of existence, experiencing the events as though I were there, rather than just observing them from afar as if they were flashing on a screen."

"Indeed," Osiris acknowledged. "I am fully briefed on your ability as I have reviewed Dr. Higgins's research before your arrival. The focal point of our upcoming trials, however, is to unravel the dematerialization process associated with your fire-gazing routine, though we would also attempt to explore the extent of your reading ability."

"My reading ability?" Vida asked.

"Yes," Osiris confirmed. "Have you ever tried drawing impressions from looking at images of other planets? What would happen if you read the planet Mars, for example? Would you be able to draw any information that might enable us to confirm the existence of life on those worlds?"

"I am not sure," Vida replied. "I have never tried that. If I am not mistaken, though, the Akashic records' plane is unique to Earth, and the available information that is stored there is therefore specific to our planet and does not extend beyond it."

"Well, that remains to be seen, doesn't it?" Osiris asserted as he smiled at her.

"I suppose so. I am confident we will soon find out." She grinned back at him.

"Please let me show you around," Osiris offered as he stood up and walked toward the door. "It's a rather large complex. I am confident you'll enjoy your stay."

"Thank you, sir. I have no doubt that I will."

The two walked out of the office and stepped toward the auditorium; Vida recalled the grand entrance of the facility, which reminded her of a mini-palace-basilica with its traditional low-slope roofs, double colonnades, and a breathtaking semicircular apse adorned with classical art composed of a myriad of saints and angels. As in all basilicas, the Rhinefeld Open Hall extended from end to end, with a raised platform at one end and arched columns separating the nave from the side aisles. The entire facility was dotted with numerous exquisite stained glass windows of all sizes and shapes, which have contributed to the sense of awe-inspiring tranquility befitting a church, rather than a place of science and research.

After stopping by at the auditorium, they continued to explore the complex for nearly forty-five minutes, inspecting the various labs, stopping by at the grand library, continuing to the day care/recreational center, and finally heading toward the cafeteria. "Wait," Osiris said. "We haven't visited the fire-gazing lab. It is right over there in that direction." They proceeded toward the north wing of the building and went down the escalator.

"Here we are," Osiris acknowledged, pointing at the heavy-looking door ahead of them; he then reached inside his pocket and pulled a set of keys, unlocked the door, and pulled it wide open.

"After you, Ms. Simon," he said in a heavy British accent and laughed.

"Thank you so kindly, Professor Jones," she replied using a Southern American pronunciation.

Osiris turned the lights on, and Vida froze, looking awestruck. "What is this place?" she asked, sounding all rattled. "You call that a lab? It reminds me of a Greek temple." Vida continued gawking at the front wall, which appeared somewhat three-dimensional. A gigantic fireplace was carved deep inside it, and she felt as if she were about to be swallowed by the cobblestones.

This was no ordinary fireplace; it seemed to be the lower part of a twenty-foot-high statue of the god Hephaestus, with his arms stretched forward in a wide embrace, slightly bending over an anvil, holding a massive golden hammer in one hand and a trident—forged for his

brother Poseidon, god of the sea—in the other. Hephaestus's face looked so lifelike that Vida felt as if she were about to dematerialize and shift right through his piercing red eyes.

The other walls were covered with a variety of electronic instrumentation, flat screen TVs, and a plethora of unrecognizable research gadgetry. Their simplicity and mundane appearance stood in stark contrast with the grandeur of the front wall, which seemed to have been duplicated right from one of Cecil B. DeMille's biblical movie sets. "Wow," Vida finally uttered as she continued to marvel at the unusual fireplace. "Wow."

"We felt that proper optics might generate a psychic response that you may not be aware of yet," Osiris remarked. "This was originally part of a catacomb that we have converted into a small meditation room and recently altered to accommodate your needs. As you can see, there is a bell-shaped metal altar situated inside it. You may use wooden logs or oil to ignite the fire, whichever you find more convenient."

"I think you might be right," Vida observed. "This structure is so eye popping I feel I can burst into flames just by looking at Hephaestus's penetrating eyes. It is absolutely amazing."

"I am glad you like it," Osiris acknowledged. "I am sure you're famished though. Would you join me for lunch?" They turned back toward the door.

"Yes, of course, Mr. Jones. Thank you kindly."

They left the lab and stepped in the direction of the cafeteria. Vida felt unusually tired; her body was numb and her movements somewhat heavy. She couldn't determine if the reason for her weakness was her continuous fear that her true reason for joining the Rhinefeld research team might be exposed, or was it because of the overall sense of emptiness the facility generated despite its grand splendor?

No, she concluded. It wasn't fear that made her feel so fatigued. It was definitely this place, a colossal spot of real estate devoid of a time line and bereft of existence. It wasn't just Osiris but also the entire complex and everyone in it. The sense of "being" was absolutely zapped out of its content here.

*How was that possible?* she wondered.

"I could accept the notion of some people lacking a historical signature for whatever unexplained anomaly but not on such an unimaginable scale. Something must be going on here," she quietly whispered to herself.

"Did you say something, Vida?" she heard Osiris asking her.

"No, sir," she replied, overtaken by a slight sense of panic (as though he might have read her thoughts) as well as a feeling of sudden, unexplained power surge that rammed throughout her body.

*What is happening? she wondered. Why do I feel as if I am about to dematerialize and burst aflame?*

"Ms. Simon, are you OK?"

"Yes, of course," she answered, snapping out of her semimeditative state. "Just got a lot on my mind." She smiled.

"I'd like to introduce you to someone," Osiris stated as Annette and Cassi appeared, coming out of the library and walking toward them. "This is Annette, my son's girlfriend, and her best friend, Cassi La Bonc."

"Pleased to meet you," Vida said, stretching her arm forward and shaking Annette's hand.

A thunderous sound of explosion pierced through the hallway suddenly as Vida burst into flames while still holding Annette's hand; the flames converged on both women, encircling them in a dazzling, magnificent, ethereal red cocoon. Another deafening sound ran through the circular inferno as Annette appeared to have generated a sky blue energy shield emanating from her body's aura—a counterblast of power that overtook the flames, changing the color of the bubble encirclement into blue. Osiris and Cassi flew across the room and landed on the floor, though Osiris reduced the velocity of their fall, thus avoiding injury.

For the next few minutes, the staff and crew of the Rhinefeld Institute witnessed one of the most spectacular displays of energy disbursement as the ball of light caging Vida and Annette changed colors from red to blue and vice versa. It was a sight of sheer magic as the two seemed unable to let go of each other's hands, while the red/blue light show they were trapped in continued its battle for color supremacy, like fire and ice.

The stunned Osiris, who has avoided demonstrating his own light solidification abilities, was nevertheless on the verge of interfering by using a Lightroscope (a cone-shaped device capable of slowing down molecular movement) in an attempt to break the locked hand grip, but the telekinetic Marisol Flora Gonzales was seen running in his direction from the other end of the hallway. "What is happening here?" she asked as she aided Osiris in getting back on his feet while moving Cassi, using her power, farther away from the crackling exhibition of turquoise blue and scarlet red.

"I am not quite sure! It's Ms. Simon, our new research subject. It looks like an unintended reaction triggered somehow by Annette. Are you able to break them loose, Flora?" Osiris yelled, attempting to overpower the roaring of the sharp, snapping sounds coming from the clashing energy bubbles.

"Let me give it a try," she uttered as she ascended in the air, floating and fast approaching the gushing cauldron of plasma. Marisol levitated close to the semivortex of blue and red energy and looked steadily and intently at its center. The ball of changing lights was quickly and swiftly lifting, along with Vida and Annette inside it, who seemed to be entirely immobilized throughout the entire episode. It continued to hover across the hallway, whooshing from one side to another while changing colors erratically from red to orange, from blue to green, from lavender to pink and many other colors until it finally turned to clear and blinding white. The energy around the two women seemed to be drifting away and dissolving rapidly, moving in a concentrated and focused beam of light toward Ms. Gonzales, who absorbed the condensed stream of energy through her aura, which in turn radiated profusely from her body like a shooting star.

Annette and Vida landed gently on the ground as Marisol continued to radiate and beam for several more minutes until her aura waned in intensity and returned to its natural state of invisibility. Flora floated for a while and then landed beside the two staggered women and held their hands as they briefly glowed. "You can now shake hands," she said reassuringly.

"I am pleased to meet you, Vida." Annette giggled nervously as she shook Vida's trembling hand.

"What just happened?" they both asked simultaneously as Osiris approached them.

"Some sort of energy disbursement," he replied. "It may have something to do with your Auraman encounter last week." He winked at Annette and signaled her to play along.

"What Auraman encounter?" Vida sniped as if she were stung by a bee.

"I am sure you've heard about it." Annette went on. "Auraman appeared on a flying carpet in Midtown Manhattan, hitting the revelers watching him with a bolt of lightning. It was all over the news and social media. Many of the spectators have been experiencing odd energy blasts, including myself, ever since the encounter. It might be some residue still circulating in my body that inadvertently triggered your natural fire-gazing disposition."

"Alas, I feel terrible," Vida muttered. "I am so sorry."

"But it's not your fault," Cassi finally chimed in. "Cheer up, Ms. Simon. Weirder things are known to have happened at the Rhinefeld Institute." She chuckled.

"Would you, lovely young ladies, care to join me for dinner later this evening? I am staying at the Waldorf Astoria. I heard that their Peacock Alley restaurant serves the best seafood dishes in the country. I assure you, you won't regret it."

"Yes, why not?" Annette replied without hesitation after receiving a nod of agreement from Osiris.

"Awesome. It is settled then. I'll see you at 7:00 p.m. by the lobby. Simply ask for me at the reception desk," she said as she and Osiris stepped away from the hallway.

"You won't mind if I departed earlier today, would you, Mr. Jones?" Vida asked as they kept walking. "I am somewhat rattled by this unexpected experience."

"No, not at all, Ms. Simon. No worries. Our first trial is scheduled for next week. Go home and unwind. Reserve your energies for those two young, teenage girls. I am sure you'll have a blast."

"Are you sure it wasn't too soon—asking them to dinner, that is?" she asked, looking troubled.

"Absolutely not. On the contrary, you'll get a rather engrossing point of view of Rhinefeld as seen by two bright minds who practically grew up here," Osiris responded reassuringly.

"Thank you, sir," Vida countered. "Thanks for your encouragement as well as your kindness."

"Of course, Ms. Simon, anytime. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye, Mr. Jones," she said as she exited the front entrance and waited across the street for her driver.

Osiris turned back and reached for his cell phone, dialing Glenda's number. "Where are you?" he barked into the receiver.

"Right here, behind you," she replied, waving at him from afar. "Are you hurt, dear?" She spoke into her phone as she approached him.

"I am well, sweetheart," he said and hung up as he finally saw her. "I'm fine, but Cassi was a bit unnerved. Annette, of course, remained calm and unfazed. Where were you?"

"I was listening to some research tapes at the library and wasn't paying attention to the commotion around me. Rabbi Goldstein briefed me about what happened with Ms. Simon. Where are the girls now?" Glenda asked.

"They went back home. Vida invited them for dinner at the Waldorf later tonight."

"What?" Glenda griped. "Are you sure this is a good idea? Wouldn't Vida be able to read them once outside of the facility?"

"No," Osiris replied assertively. "She just experienced a jolt that would last her a lifetime, most likely as a result of the vibrating shield that Aura'el placed around Rhinefeld, as well as around us. This masking armor is part of our very being, regardless of our physical location."

"What do you think happened exactly?" Glenda probed further.

"When Vida shook Annette's hand, she triggered a defensive response unique to Annette because of her constant proximity to Aura'el. Apart from the fact that this incident caught us by surprise, you have just missed one of the rarest, most dazzling displays of psychic phenomena we've ever encountered."

"Yes, so I've heard," Glenda answered, sounding envious. "Anyway, I am not convinced that this shield our son placed around us is truly necessary. After all, Aura'el is set to appear on TNNC for an exclusive with James Walters."

"Darn it," Osiris groused. "I have totally forgotten about that. When was that interview scheduled for?"

"Next Friday. God, it's just around the corner," Glenda uttered with much alarm.

"Are we ready for it?" he asked as they both exchanged worried looks.

"We knew this day was bound to come," Glenda finally said with a sigh of exasperation. "We've prepared an entire planet for his eventual appearance, and besides, he wants to keep our identity private, so stop worrying about the paparazzi descending all over Rhinefeld."

"I am not worried one bit about them. I am concerned about Nibiru. We sort of left it up in the air and haven't mentioned it since that night. Though there is no physical proof yet, Aura'el seems quite convinced that this planet is heading our way. Can you believe our son is rather confident in his ability to alter the planet's trajectory and prevent its eventual collision with Earth?"

"Yes, I know," Glenda reflected. "I think our beloved child is overestimating the magnitude of his omnipotent power."

"How so?"

"Whatever abilities he might possess, whether light solidification or the power to alter reality via molecular restructuring, they all require energy, and his energy is finite, wouldn't you agree?"

"What do you mean?" Osiris quizzed.

"It means that the amount of energy required to change the trajectory of a fast-approaching planet is enormous, far greater than the energy injected into him at the time of his birth, which also means that attempting such a feat might cost our son's life," Glenda concluded as her voice cracked.

"Honestly, dear, I thought Aura'el was immortal."

"He very well might be," she said as her eyes began to tear up, "provided his energy source is not abruptly cut off or overexerted."

Osiris and Glenda exchanged fretful and distraught looks, feeling as though the ground beneath them suddenly shook and were about to swallow them. The realization that their adolescent son might die as a result of an unexpected rescue mission was totally devastating and shattering. The possibility of Earth's destruction and the eventual annihilation of all life was not factored into their nearly two-decade-old plan to advance human kind toward its eventual ascendancy in the evolutionary ladder.

"This cannot be," Glenda finally uttered. "It just doesn't make any sense." She continued. "Our son enters the world stage by exhibiting his godlike powers, and two weeks later, we are advised that planet Nibiru might be on a collision course with Earth. Are you kidding me? This is not a coincidence."

"I agree, but what does it matter now?" Osiris grumbled. "Coincidence or not, if this planet is indeed on a collision course with Earth, Aura'el will eventually be caught in the crosshairs."

"We can only hope that his initial interpretation of what happened last week was wrong. The so-called writing on the wall might have had a whole different meaning that we are yet to untangle." Glenda lamented, sounding unconvinced.

"I am almost certain Vida would be able to confirm or deny our suspicion, Her power is truly unique. It is not as if we somehow enhanced it as we did with our other research subjects. She may not be aware of it yet, but her ability extends far beyond what she gives herself credit for."

*Stop worrying so much.* Aura'el's voice reverberated in their heads as he appeared right behind them. "I can handle that planet, guys. I just haven't figured it out yet."

"You gotta stop doing that, son," Osiris griped, "barging in on our private conversations."

"Sorry, Dad. I don't really mean to, but we are telepathically connected. Thus, when you and Mom are distraught, I am alerted immediately. Anyway, it is too early to be obsessing over Nibiru. My earlier conviction was based on an instinctive emotional response to Annette's incident last week. Someone or something channeled a message through her. Why? Whatever for? Was that a warning of an impending

doom or simply a death sentence uttered by a malevolent, sadistic force? We just don't know. I am hopeful my initial interpretation of the event was wrong, but if I am right, I'll be better prepared facing it."

Aura'el went on. "Focus on Vida. Find out if she is able to provide a more accurate assessment of the planet's existing state and confirm my initial suspicion. I am dropping off Annette and Cassi at the Waldorf later on, and I would very much like to meet her myself," he concluded.

"Don't shake her hand," they both said jokingly.

"No worries." Aura'el sneered. "She is all tuned up by now."

"Is she really?" Osiris wondered out loud as Aura'el faded out of sight.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Vida returned to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and stormed by the reception desk without as much as saying hello to the clerk as she normally did. Agitated and visibly nervous, she pressed the elevator button repeatedly and waited impatiently while calming herself down, breathing slowly and steadily. She finally made it to her lavish, sumptuous penthouse suite, pulled the door wide open, and slammed it forcefully behind her.

“What is happening to me?” she asked herself. “Why am I feeling as though I am about to lose my mind? Just calm down, Vida. Calm down. As usual, you’re overthinking things to a point of exhaustion. Everything will be fine.”

She turned on the television set and tuned in to TNNC, listening to blaring commercials announcing the historical upcoming exclusive interview with Auraman set for next Friday. “That is indeed one for the history books,” she murmured to herself as she viewed the sensational Auraman encounters that have been observed and recorded thus far.

*Has God decided to come down and dwell among us?* she pondered. *This is extraordinary. It simply boggles the mind. But wait, didn’t sir insinuated that Auraman was a tool forged by unadulterated evil?*

“Shoot!” she snapped. “My head is about to pop open. I totally forgot to call him.” Vida pulled an all-black cell phone out of her bag. It was ornamented with 14K gold lettering on the outside case and was given to her by Alfonso with specific instructions to use it only for the purpose of contacting him.

Still visibly shaken, Vida meditated for a while and then dialed his number. "How are you, sir?" she greeted him as he answered the phone.

"Report," he commanded, bypassing all pleasantries and the usual small talk.

"I believe we are wasting our time, sir," she griped.

"Let me be the judge of that!" he snapped at her impatiently.

"Yes, of course, sir, but quite frankly, I think the place is protected from any type of prying. It is totally devoid of any timeline-related imprint. It is totally one big black hole of nothingness."

Vida went ahead and relayed to him all that transpired throughout her first day at Rhinefeld, focusing mainly on the clash of energy disbursement that erupted as a result of shaking Annette's hand. "It sounds like you nearly got yourself fried." She heard him cackle. "As impossible as it may seem, considering your own fire-merging ability."

"I am still overtaken by the brunt of that encounter, sir. Frankly, it is quite probable I may have been affected by it in ways I have yet to discover. I am concerned that my fire-gazing ability may have been diminished by the ferocity of the encounter."

"Not a chance, Vida," he blasted. "Your ability is transcendent and far exceeds the minor influence of a blocking shield. You and fire share an immortal essence. You are one and the same."

"Be that as it may, sir, how do you suggest we proceed?" she asked, sounding somewhat skeptical.

"It is perceivable you may come across people that are not directly associated with the institute, people that might still hold clues and other important information yet not bound to be affected by that psychic concealment blanket that surely canvases the entire facility and nearby surroundings."

"True," Vida concurred. "As a matter of fact, I invited Annette and her friend Cassi to dinner. They should be here shortly. I sense, however, that the shield is indeed impenetrable and hermetic regardless of venue."

"Indeed," de Leon's voice rumbled. "That may turn out to be the case. Nevertheless, keep your eyes open. And more importantly, keep your psychic vibes tuned at all times. It is likely that something or

someone was overlooked and that the shield is penetrable after all. Find its Achilles' heel, Vida."

"Yes, sir, of course. I shall try my best," she acknowledged in agreement. "There is one more thing, sir. It is kind of personal. I think we need to talk about it."

"And we will," de Leon said abruptly. "But not now."

"But I insist, sir. I couldn't stop thinking about that ki—" Vida's other cell phone rang, playing one of her favorite old-school jams ("24/7" by Dino). "It's them, sir. I must take the call."

"Yes, of course," Alfonso answered. "I'll call you in a few hours." He hung up.

Vida rushed into the bedroom and reached for her cell phone. "I'll be right there, Annette," she said. "Give me a few minutes."

"Sure," Annette's voice echoed in the background. "Take your time."

"My god, it's nearly seven," Vida mumbled to herself while putting on her high-heeled stilettos and freshening her makeup. She then reached for her Enjoli Charles of the Ritz perfume and sprayed it across her neckline. The scent reminded her of times long gone when she would aimlessly walk around Bloomingdale's, window-shopping and idolizing the handsome young fragrance models who kept enticing her with free gifts and vain compliments.

Vida took another look in the mirror and said, "Not bad for a damsel pushing fifty." She complemented her look with a dazzling ruby-red lip gloss.

"Now let see if that little person, whatever her name is—yes, Cassi—can shed some light on that Rhinefeld place. Let's hope I won't get zapped again," she thought out loud and tiptoed out of her suite.

Joe Manford, the hotel desk clerk, greeted Vida as soon as he saw her, applauding her appearance. "What a lovely dress, Ms. Simon. Is that Chanel?" he asked. "And those shoes, my god, Manolo Blahniks? Right?"

"You're a tease, Joe." She smiled at him and placed a \$100 bill in his coat pocket. "Where are the young ladies that asked for me?" she inquired.

"They are outside, Ms. Simon, by the double-parked car."

"Indeed," she responded. "Thank you, love." Vida exited the hotel's lobby and approached Annette and Cassi, who were standing by the car.

"Hi, Vida!" Annette hollered and waved toward her.

"Hi," she replied, approaching the two girls and shaking their hands somewhat hesitantly as they all burst out laughing.

"I'd like to introduce you to someone," Annett said and pointed at Aura'el, who was sitting inside their 2012 Subaru Legacy.

But while holding on to the car door and grabbing its handle, Vida seemed to have lost her balance as if she was about to fall. For a split second, it looked as though she was completely frozen, but she immediately regained her composure and shook Aura'el's hand. "Pleased to meet you, Ms. Simon. Are you OK?" Aura'el asked while lightly holding her hand. "I thought you tripped. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes, darling, I am absolutely fine," she lied. "I am not used to wearing high heels. Plus, I had something to drink before coming down. I guess I am a bit tipsy. Goodness gracious, young man." She went on. "You are so handsome, a splitting image of your father." Vida laughed out loud.

"Thank you, Ms. Simon. I look forward to spending some time with you at the institute." Aura'el smiled in response to her infectious laughter.

"Yes, of course. Bye, love," she said while turning back and joining the girls, who waited for her by the lobby.

"I am jealous," she teased Annette.

"We all are." Cassi chuckled.

"Would you, young ladies, excuse me for five minutes? My shoes are killing me. I don't usually wear high heels, but the salesgirl at the Manolo Blahnik shop complimented me and said that I looked drop dead gorgeous, and foolishly enough, I fell for that sales shtick."

"But they really look good on you, Ms. Simon," Cassi insisted. "They are stunning."

"Maybe so, but I can barely stand on my feet. Why don't you ladies wait for me at the restaurant? I'll join you in a bit."

"Sure, Ms. Simon," Annette said. "We'll see you shortly."

Vida looked at her jeweled wristwatch momentarily and paced toward the elevator, visibly shaken. There was nothing wrong with her stilettos, of course, since she was no stranger to high heels. She was

rather overexcited as well as a tad agitated and in an immediate need to calm her raw nerves. She didn't supposedly "lost her balance." Oh, no, that was a blatant lie. She was most surely struck with an abrupt vision, a sense of *déjà vu*, and an outright recognition that she just hit the jackpot.

The moment she touched that Subaru car, ready to shake that handsome young man's hand, an overwhelming energy blast surged through her body and made her lose her equilibrium briefly. It was as if she were hit by lightning. The car was supercharged with an unusual psychic energy gushing right at her. She definitely sensed a historical residue that suggested some affiliation to a super being—a being of solidified light she had met before in one of her visions but under totally different circumstances. There was a sense of familiarity associated with it, as well as that of trepidation—enough of a vibe to allow her to enter the flames and provide her benefactor with the clues he needed and, quite possibly, even unequivocal answers.

"How was that possible?" Vida asked herself begrudgingly, playing devil's advocate. It wasn't as if she did not touch other inanimate objects at Rhinefeld. On the contrary, while touring around the institute, she touched books, lab tools, photos, statues, even packaged food; but alas, there was nothing there, nada, zippo, not even a smidgen or a whiff of some sort of historical insignia. Yet as soon as she touched that car door handle, all hell has broken loose, and she found herself momentarily frozen and nearly dematerialized.

"Was that a lucky coincidence?" she kept questioning herself audibly, persisting in her tortuous analyzing. "It is only my first day at the facility. Less than an hour ago, I had a conversation with sir, advising him that the likelihood of getting anywhere was slim to none, yet I was just blasted away with a powerful vision of the Lumena Superioris. A vision of what? What am I babbling about? Lumena Superioris, who or what the hell is that? Was that a code name for Auraman?"

Still visibly jolted and tempted, as she was to call de Leon and gaze at the makeshift fire altar she prominently placed on the oval cocktail table in her hotel suite living room, she realized it would have to be postponed for later in the evening. With the image of the Subaru car still fresh

in her mind, Vida reached for a pen and jotted down some reminders of unique markers she noticed, such as a deep scratch on the door she touched, an odd-looking amulet that was hanging from the rearview mirror, and an unusually elevated trunk compartment; she then folded the note and placed it in one of the drawers of her bedroom's dresser and then hurriedly rushed into the bathroom, looking for her Valium pills.

"Christ, where did I put those dastardly pills? Darn it," she whined. "Here they are." She sighed in relief, grabbing two pills out of a custom pillbox where she kept some of her other relaxants.

Once again, she looked at herself in the mirror; but this time, she stared beyond the image gazing at her from it, taking two deep breaths and calming herself mentally, just in case the medication would not be enough to soothe her edgy nerves. Vida finally walked out of her hotel suite and marched toward the elevator, her mind still preoccupied and caught in a mental firestorm.

The elevator stopped right in front of her, but Vida's awareness drifted away in anticipation for her fire-gazing routine later tonight. She didn't care much about the expected outcome of that particular foray into the Akashic records since she was bound to forget it anyway. She rather mused about de Leon's response to the information she was about to divulge. On the one hand, she looked for validation of her ongoing usefulness to him; and on the other, she questioned her willingness to be dissuaded by his reasoning, particularly in the matter of Auraman. Indeed, she began to somewhat doubt his absolute conviction in the matter but wasn't sure why. She surmised, however, that it might have had something to do with that Subaru car.

"Are you going up or down, miss?" an elderly man asked Vida, transporting her back into reality.

"I am going down. Thank you for asking," she replied. "What a lovely evening, ain't it?"

"Yes, it most certainly is, miss."

"Simon, the name is Simon," she said as the elevator door opened.

Vida walked through the Peacock Alley entrance and took notice of its art deco design and gilded ceilings, admiring the refined, elegant overall atmosphere and basking in her relative affluence. She spotted

Annette and Cassi sitting by a round table and waved at them while addressing one of the waiters. "I'll be right there." She signaled the girls.

She then approached the table, looking all freshened up and vivacious. "How are you darlings doing?" she inquired and pulled the chair by Cassi. "I hope I did not keep you waiting for too long."

"Oh no, Ms. Simon," they both answered simultaneously. "This is an amazing-looking place. Thanks a bunch for inviting us."

"Yes, of course, you are very welcome," Vida replied, "But please call me Vida." Annette and Cassi suddenly giggled while sipping from their diet sodas.

"Did I say something funny?" Vida chuckled. "Let me guess. You were checking out some of the waiters, attempting to determine if they were gay or straight."

Annette's jaw dropped in response as she muttered, "How did you guess?"

"Well, I am a psychic, am I not?" She cracked. "Come on, love." Vida continued. "I was a teenager once, though quite a while ago, I might add. But I still recognize the look of infatuation and excitement when looking at handsome young men." They all erupted in laughter.

"You are absolutely right, Vida," Annette clarified. "We were just being silly. As a matter of fact, we were actually talking about Auraman before you arrived."

"Indeed? What about Auraman?" Vida asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Are you serious?" Annette gushed. "The world can hardly contain itself in anticipation for his upcoming interview on TNNC. A month ago, we were mired in our usual, monotonous, humdrum lives, with the occasional Rhinefeld flare advising us of continuous progress in our underdeveloped human potentiality. But now with the abrupt emergence of Auraman practically out of nowhere, it seems as though mankind has been thrown into a frenzy of hope for a better future ahead."

"Like, what do you think will happen, sweet child?" Vida replied as she signaled the waiter, who collected their orders. "He'll protect us from alien invasions? Common criminals? And your local drug lords, like he did at that Chase Manhattan bank? We have Superman and Spider-Man for that." Vida intoned it somewhat sarcastically.

"Superman and Spider-Man are just comic book heroes, continuously parlayed by the special effects movie industry for the sole purpose of crowd-pleasing entertainment, nothing else," Cassi interjected. "I reckon Auraman has a different agenda." She continued. "One that, by all means, does include the preservation of law, order, and peace—and yes, even defense from alien invasion should they ever decide to pay our planet a visit, intending to destroy us. But quite honestly, Vida, I am rather convinced that he is here for more than just that. He is here to expand our human consciousness and herald a new age of enlightenment."

"My lovely Cassi," Vida responded in a low voice that sounded a tad sad, "I think you have been watching far too many *Star Trek* episodes. Where are you getting all that? I hate to burst your bubble, but you let your wishful thinking carry you on a flight of fancy. That is understandable, though, considering the instantaneous recovery of these unfortunate cancer-stricken children at the hospital where you volunteer."

Vida stopped momentarily and poured herself some red wine, sipping it slowly and savoring it at length. "Have you considered the possibility that Auraman might be evil?" she quizzed, placing the crystal glass on the table.

"Evil?" they both cried out in utter disbelief. "Why would you even consider such an unlikely idea?"

"Mostly because it is, as you say, 'unlikely,' thus being excluded as a viable option by the vast majority of people. But as you know, darlings, I am not the vast majority," she quipped and smiled at them. "I admit." Vida went on. "I don't have a definite answer to that question. Earlier I was asked to read him but wasn't able to obtain a psychic signature lock from his various appearances as if he did not exist. I found that suspicious. That, of course, does not mean that Auraman is evil. All it means is that all options should be taken into account in spite of what we witnessed thus far."

"Wait, Vida," Cassi expounded. "Isn't what we have witnessed thus far proof positive to Auraman's good intentions? We think it is. Consequently, we have initiated a worldwide, global petition urging

Auraman to disable all weapons of mass destruction, leaving world leaders with no other choice but to peacefully coexist.”

“Wow, I am stunned,” Vida answered, appearing to be somewhat caught off guard. “It sounds as though you kids believe him to be some sort of god, a deity. Well, I am not quite sure how to respond to that. I think it is far too early to tell, and besides, I understand that Auraman is of human origins, which most likely means that he too is exposed to human weaknesses, such as pride, greed, lust, envy, wrath. Shall I go on? Human traits that might take over his current perceived character as a benevolent and compassionate being.”

The girls exchanged looks as if they were unintentionally scolded by their parents for being overbearingly naive, yet they were both mesmerized by Vida’s apparent common sense and insistence on evaluating last month’s events from every possible angle and not just through the most obvious perspective.

With every passing moment, Annette and Cassi found themselves pondering if Vida was their long-lost elder sister. “It is obvious,” Annette finally said while tasting her red velvet cupcake, “that your assessment is absolutely contradictory to what most media pundits claim Auraman to be. Your alarmist point of view is nowhere to be found. It is nearly nonexistent. One would expect teenage girls, such as ourselves, to be somewhat naive and gullible, but what about the mainstream punditry? They seem to go head over heels for him. They maintain that he is a likely force of good with a mission to catapult us into a brighter future.”

“Maybe so,” Vida acquiesced. “Or maybe not. Indeed, though I am not able to recall the exact details of the information I provide while in trance, I am nevertheless able to retain an overall impression of the experience without recalling its specifics. I can vouch, with no doubt whatsoever, that many of the people I read who appear to be docile and kindhearted turn out to be, in many circumstances, evil incarnates, replete with a closetful of skeletons.”

She sighed heavily while sipping more wine. “Please understand I am rather inclined to agree that Auraman is quite likely what most people hold him to be. All I am suggesting is that caution is called for before a final verdict is rendered on his character and mission. I get

it. In the face of such wonders, we are naturally prone to assume the best about him, and I am hopeful we are indeed correct in doing so. But as far as I am concerned, I'll continue to maintain a more cautious approach."

"You're something else, Vida," Annette professed. "I can't wait to share this conversation with Aura'el and some of our other friends. Even though I am confident Auraman is benign and forbearing, you do bring up a valid point. Out of curiosity, however, what would you ask of him to prove his good intentions? What would convince you?"

"The instantaneous healing of the cancer-stricken children," Vida replied as she glanced at Cassi, "is certainly a step in the right direction. Disabling weapons of mass destruction is another. It is not just the occasional magic trick Auraman might pull out his bag of tricks but rather a continuous pattern of behavior, extended over a sustainable period, that will show to all that he is indeed kindhearted and magnanimous as most people hold him to be."

"There is one more thing, Vida," Cassi remarked. "What would you have done had you been endowed with similar powers as Auraman?"

"Wow!" Vida exclaimed. "What would anyone do if they were suddenly bestowed with the power of creation? I don't really know. What would you do—or anyone else for that matter? My guess is that the response will vary depending on the person's character. If you happen to be an altruistic person, you will most likely wave your hand and bring forth global peace, end world hunger, and eradicate all human suffering. Can you even conceive living in such a world?"

Vida stopped and signaled the waiter for her bill. She then took a last long sip from her glass of wine and said, "My answer is yes. I can visualize myself living in such a world. However, if you happen to be a self-obsessed, sadistic creep who thrives on the pain and suffering of others, my prediction is that such a person, endowed with such abilities, will turn our planet into a living, breathing hell, pretty much the world we live in today but much worse."

She continued. "You see, it all begins and ends with the character and personality of the one empowered with those kinds of abilities. The question we should all be asking therefore is, what will Auraman do?"

Annette and Cassi absorbed Vida's intellectual musings with much attention and thoughtfulness. The more she elaborated on such ideas as how to tell good from bad, the more the girls felt compelled to engage her even further in discussion about science and the paranormal. "Hey," Vida said. "Leave some for our next dinner, and besides, it is getting rather late. I have a busy day tomorrow. I promise we will do that again soon."

"Well, how about Sunday?" Annette asked. "We're going to meet a good friend of ours, Father Mulligan, and Auraël will be there too. I am sure they will find your company captivating and compelling as much as we did." She smiled and looked at Cassi.

"Father Mulligan? The flying pastor? Yes, of course, I'll be there," Vida said as she handed over her credit card to the waiter. "Though I must warn you, I find religious folk somewhat tedious and difficult to converse with. But I promise to behave." She snickered.

They got up and thanked the waiter as Vida left him a generous tip while the girls walked toward the lobby. "Why don't you girls stay awhile and explore this beautiful hotel?" she suggested. "I am exhausted and ready to retire for the night."

"Thank you, Vida. We'll do just that," the girls replied.

"I'll see you girls on Sunday then," she said as Annette and Cassi bid and kissed her goodbye.

Astounded by such physical warmth, Vida, alas, remained unfazed, rushing to her hotel suite with one thought in mind—call de Leon and gaze into that fire. But unlike other instances, where she delved into a trance and showed total lack of interest in the actual content of her reading, this time, she was determined to record her session, albeit without her boss's knowledge. She couldn't quite understand the sudden interest in learning the possible identity of the so-called Lumena Superioris, but this time around, it was different. Was it because of the worldwide interest in the matter? Nah, she couldn't care less about any such nonsense as the world interest. Or was it because of the conversation she just had with those two lovely girls who were beguiled by her philosophical wrangling?

Be that as it may, she concluded that the exact reason she wanted to be privy to the content of this specific reading mattered not, though she

leaned toward accepting the latter assumption as a more likely reason that might explain her impromptu interest. Truth be told, she enjoyed the conversation immensely and the fact they referred to her as their “big sister.”

Brushing aside all those unusual thoughts, Vida prepared her makeshift altar and contacted Alfonso via her laptop Skype, leaving her private cell phone on record mode and placing it on top of the TV stand. “I guess it must be urgent.” De Leon’s image appeared on the screen. “I did not think I would hear from you tonight since it was getting so incredibly late. What’s up?”

“Yes, sir, I know, but this cannot wait. I think I am on to something.”

“You are? Seriously?” he replied with obvious excitement. “A few hours ago, you sounded downright pessimistic.”

“Well, sir, a few hours make quite a lot of difference,” Vida replied and went on as she recounted the events that took place since she has last spoken to him, highlighting of course her car encounter and the impressions it triggered.

“Eureka!” de Leon shouted and jumped off his seat. “Talk about luck. This is indeed beyond belief. What a coincidence. Get ready. Ignite the fire on your altar.”

“Yes. Of course, sir,” Vida said as she lit up a match and threw it inside. “Please, sir, if anything goes wrong, I’ll be pulling you in.”

“Sure, dear,” he assured her. “I am right here. Proceed.”

Vida went to her dresser and pulled out the note that she had placed there earlier. She read it and then tossed it into the fire. She stood about five feet away from the altar and started her slow-breathing routine and then dematerialized within minutes.

This time, however, she wasn’t absorbed into the black flames. The flames appeared to have bounced off the altar, suffusing her rapidly diminishing human form and giving off an increasing, crackling sound as her ethereal shape burst into a pillar of fire. The blaze convulsed momentarily and then floated toward the altar, where Vida’s semicelestial features, composed of glowing black flames, finally appeared, staring directly at the camera.

Her image flickered on top of the altar as it began to speak in a low, monotone voice, telling de Leon of a barren couple who was aided by a renowned fertility expert and mystic in their unrelenting attempts to conceive a child. “Dr. Bearlight!” Vida’s flickering form suddenly screamed. “Truly human yet truly *divinus*, touched by the light of creation, endowed with the power of life.”

“Who are the parents?” Alfonso’s voice rumbled. “Can you see their faces? What are their names?”

But Vida went on, ignoring his questions and recalling the mother’s visit to Dr. Bearlight’s clinic, elaborating on some parts of their ensuing conversation concerning magic and the doctor’s final revelation of his light solidification ability. She further commented on the process of creating a child born of solidified light via aura fusion and the imagery that was used to conjure up a vast amount of *lux creaturae* (light of creation) to solidify the infant into a state of permanency. She concluded by unraveling the doctor’s plot of memory implantation to explain his abrupt disappearance from the world stage.

She then stopped as her floating face remained still while Alfonso kept asking her additional questions but to no avail. Vida’s image simply flickered in silence. And then on the spur of the moment, it began to grow and expand erratically, looking tormented as if caught in an unbearable, agonizing nightmare.

“Oh no, not again!” de Leon shouted in panic, thinking she was once again trapped in her vision and about to draw him in.

But her image regained its calm demeanor as she began to utter out loud in a bone-chilling, frightening, demonic voice a series of sentences that seemed, at first, to be incoherent and incongruous. “Six beams of condensed light. Six different directions. Six pagan gods. Six divine statues. Six more minutes. Sixth of June. Aura’el, son of Glenda and Osiris Jones.” Vida repeated sputtering the sentences a second and third time, her roaring sound sending shivers down Alfonso’s spine and her glistening eyes penetrating and piercing his foul soul, forged by the blackest coal.

Stumped and baffled by the continuous vocalization of the word “six,” which appeared to have ignited a firestorm of confusing thoughts in his mind, de Leon stared at Vida’s image, pondering the meaning

of her words. *Could it be?* It dawned on him. *Am I thinking what I am actually thinking? Was I right to assume what I originally ascertained about the Joneses? But it cannot be. It is impossible.*

Alas, there was no way of escaping the unmistakable conclusion: Auraman—also known as Aura'el, son of Glenda and Osiris Jones—was none other than Satan's own begotten son. His parents were duped by Lucifer, the bearer of light or Dr. Bearlight as he made himself known to them, misleading them into thinking they were participants in a new evolutionary process of childbearing. *What a clever and unimaginable plot, ingenious in its craftiness and executed to perfection*, he thought as he listened to Vida's rambunctious intonation of the number six.

"Auraman is none other than Lucifer's son, a creature of pure light, created in the image and likeness of his father." De Leon continued mumbling to himself. "Whether his parents knew of the plot did not matter," he figured. "Surely, they love him as their own, unaware he was not their flesh and blood. Osiris was carefully picked for the task, seduced by the power of light solidification and the singularity of thought theorem. The devil lulled him and his wife into the aura-fusion bubbling cauldron, where he bestowed his essence on the newborn child. Moreover, he steamrollered the two researchers into initiating a worldwide campaign of paranormal acceptance, paving the way for his son's effortless and triumphant conquest of humanity, heralding it into the age of darkness, rather than that of enlightenment and progress."

De Leon scolded himself out loud, "Snap out of it, you idiot. Are you mad? You're doing it again, falling for idiotic conclusions propelled by your infantile fantasies, wishful thinking, and Judeo-Christian mythologies. Have you learned nothing, you moron?" He went on admonishing himself. "In all the years you spent calling the corners, drawing magic circles, and invoking this so-called Lucifer and his minions, have you ever seen anything remotely close to a metaphysical manifestation of a malevolent spirit or any other infernal ghouls? How typical of you, the so-called Aleister Crowley of the new age, to fall prey yet again to such nonsense. Wake up." Vida continued her recitation like a scratched record, though her voice began to soften.

*The number six is full of symbolism and not just that associated with the beast.* He continued his internal analysis. *It is a ‘mother number,’ which signifies responsibility and service, nurturing and protection—a number that induces harmony, peace, justice, and truth. Sounds familiar? Reminds you of someone you heard about incessantly in the news? Of course, you did. His name his Auraman, a being characterized by the number six, whose greatest joy is derived from taking care of others.*

*Don’t be fooled by those incantations you cast when you were trapped in the “nothingness.” De Leon proceeded further with debunking his own “son of Satan” theory. After all, it was Vida who pulled you in, as she clearly confirmed, when you both came out of it. You know the truth, so do not delude yourself back into your ancient, old misconceptions of evil suddenly manifesting itself in the flesh.*

*Rhinefeld research is the only truth there is, and it makes perfect sense. The day you attended that Copenhagen conference was the day when you finally realized that the so-called magic comes from within, manifested into being by the energy field surrounding the human body, the aura. None of the people you met that day bothered to cast a spell or draw a circle to make objects float in the air, dematerialize, or be in two places at once.*

“You are the only devil you know. There is no other, admit it,” de Leon murmured and babbled incoherently while watching Vida’s face fading away.

“You are evil incarnate, de Leon,” he said to himself, “obsessed with power and greed and sadistically cruel. You worry this Auraman will disrupt and shut down your weapon-manufacturing plants. You’re fearful he’ll bring an end to disease and sickness, thus rendering your plethora of addictive pharmaceuticals obsolete. You would rather plot his death than make the effort to conceive new ideas to propel humanity forward into prosperity and brighter future, replacing your current empires of mayhem and destruction. You literally feast on blood, you demented, sick freak. You are indeed Satan’s truly begotten son, hiding behind charitable organizations, bogus philanthropy, and an angelic-looking face, while all along pocketing untold fortunes from the misery of others—devious and cunning to the core.

"But your time is up. You're about to be evicted and uprooted by this child of *human light*. Now how do I get rid of this accursed young man?" he asked, concluding his supposed self-reflection as Vida's fading face continued to float on top of the altar.

*Alas, he pondered as a new infernal thought crossed his mind, this teenager seems to be unstoppable, but the vast majority of the populace will be compelled to abandon their hero if swayed and convinced that their precious Auraman is no other than Lucifer's own begotten offspring, conceived in light and brought forth into our world by none other than the father of all lies. If no way is to be found to get rid of this illuminating do-gooder. This type of public shaming will certainly compel him to crawl back into the cave he came from.* Alfonso's mind was racing with plots and schemes to bring about the demise of Auraman and ensure his ongoing global reign, but the sick plan he just conceived in his nefarious brain didn't seem to bring him much solace or calm.

He kept looking at Vida's motionless face as it suddenly began to move clockwise increasingly with every passing moment. Her face disappeared completely, coalescing into a perfectly shaped black cube, which continued to float over the altar. "What is going on?" de Leon asked. "Why isn't she rematerializing? She would have pulled me in had she been in any kind of problem."

"Vida," he called through his desktop. "Vida, can you hear me?"

The cube was floating motionless in the middle of the room and then abruptly changed into a sharp-looking all-black dagger adorned with an infinity symbol handle. The dagger, shimmering and glistening in a mysterious luminescent blackness, flew across the room, hitting Vida's laptop and exiting through Alfonso's computer screen. It stabbed his chest, piercing right through his heart. The stunned and shocked Alfonso fell off his chair and started convulsing, gasping, and choking while lying on the floor as he ferociously tried to pull the dagger out of his chest.

Mortified and convinced he was moments away from certain death, de Leon attempted reaching for the buzzer underneath his desk to call for help but realized, as he was struggling with the knife, that he felt no pain, nor was there any blood dripping from the dagger's point of

impact. To his astonishment, there was no wound either. "What the hell?" he said as he got up, all shaken and trembling, staring at the dagger still stuck in his heart as it suddenly began to glow profusely.

Still overcome by a state of panic, Alfonso instinctively tightened his grip over the infinity handle, straining to remove it; but all at once, he was jolted by a powerful energy surge that went through his body and made him glow as parts of his body began to disappear as others remained intact. Alas, it wasn't a normal aura glow that most were keenly familiar with but a sparky black radiance somewhat similar to the ethereal flames Vida usually disappeared into when gazing. Yet these were no flames but his own aura glowing black as his body was turning semi-incorporeal.

"What is happening to me?" de Leon screamed in horror as the blade melted into his flesh and disappeared from sight, while his black aura completely detached itself from him and floated around the room. The rattled Alfonso, still shivering in fear, took a long deep breath and called on his aura, commanding it to reattach itself to him. And to his great stupefaction, the ethereal sparkling black form complied and reabsorbed itself back into de Leon's body as it coalesced, regaining its natural form.

For a while, Alfonso's black aura continued to shimmer as if ready to do his bidding. Struck by this unimaginable turn of events and a sudden sense of invincibility, he felt a rapid and unexplained compulsion to call on his most favorite spirit, Asmodeus. "Come forth, Asmodeus. I command thee," Alfonso said in a dominating, assertive voice and pointed his index finger toward the center of the room. "Come forth now!"

An incandescent vortex began to form a few inches above the ground and, within seconds, turned into the fearsome three-headed demon Asmodeus. His first head resembled that of a bull, the second of a man, and the third of a ram. The heads were attached onto a grotesque old man's body, adorned with a tail of a serpent; the monstrosity was sitting on a miniaturized dragon and holding a lance. Though the demon was glowing a murky yellow, he was nevertheless surrounded

by a thick glinting black halo. “What would you have me do, Master?” the spirit asked in de Leon’s own voice.

Awestruck and dazed by this supernatural manifestation of a thought form that he has evoked numerous times without success, Alfonso realized he had just undergone a metamorphosis, a complete and instant transfiguration into someone adept at the singularity of thought as he was certain that the image before him was nothing but his own thought solidified into being. “I command thee,” he said, “to confer upon me the power of telekinesis.”

“As you command,” the demon replied and pointed at his desk. “Do unto it as thou desire.” De Leon raised his hand and pointed at the desk, levitating it from one corner to another, suspending it in midair, crushing it, reassembling it, and finally floating the desk back to its original location.

Asmodeus, however, dissolved into nothingness within minutes, further confirming de Leon’s suspicion that he was somehow endowed with thought solidification prowess, though his aura—a prime factor in the process—radiated black, rather than the usual golden light. *How odd*, he pondered. *Granted, this is no coincidence.* Vida hasn’t drawn him into the “nothingness” this time, but she must have drawn something out that fused itself with him, granting his wish for dominion and endowing him with an ability like that of his foe, albeit different and quite likely less pronounced in strength and grandeur.

“Could it be the works of that entity that attempted to devour her in the last encounter?” he noted out loud. “Could it be that whatever that was chose to enter the human realm by attaching itself to me?”

Alfonso concluded that he couldn’t care less about who or what was responsible for his surprising transfiguration. Intoxicated by his newly installed reality-shaping ability, he basked himself in it, levitating objects all around him, conjuring into being spirits from his abominable black magic grimoires, and tossing miniaturized lightning bolts at his cat, Morgana, chasing the frightened little feline out of the room.

“I thank thee, O Master!” he cried out loud. “I bow down to thee, oh powers of the cosmos. At last, the spark of creation found its home—me!”

"Sir? Sir?" he heard Vida's voice say through his computer sound system.

"Yes, Vida, I am here. You seem to have disappeared for a while."

"Are you OK?" she asked. "I thought I saw you being thrown against the wall. What was that?"

"Oh, nothing," he lied. "I just tripped over Morgana. That darn cat is driving me crazy."

"I see," Vida replied. "Have you discovered Auraman's identity? Was I successful?"

"Yes, Vida, you were. And just as we suspected, Auraman is indeed a product of the Rhinefeld Institute, an elaborate contraption devised by the Joneses to wreak chaos and devastation on our world and render it into submission."

"A contraption, you say? What do you mean?" she inquired, sounding baffled.

"Indeed, Vida, a tool in human form, a creature of malice concocted in their lab eighteen years ago. And though he appears human, I am confident he is not."

"Who is he? What's his name?" she asked with a great sense of urgency in her voice.

"It matters not," Alfonso responded succinctly. "The less you know, the better. I intend to stop him one way or another. The countdown for his eventual downfall has begun."

"What shall I do then, sir?" Vida asked, sounding perplexed. "Shall I fly back to London?"

"No, absolutely not," Alfonso countered. "Watch the Joneses closely as they might pull other rabbits out of their hat. Auraman may not be the only device in their possession. Remember, Vida, they spent the last eighteen years lulling humanity into a state of meditative coma, while all along conniving and plotting in the dark."

"Yes, sir, of course," she said. The transmission was suddenly cut off, and their computer screens went blank.

*The cell phone,* she thought and rushed toward the TV stand, picking it up and freezing in panic.

"God Almighty," she uttered, her hand shaking uncontrollably.

"I can't believe this!" she screamed in disgust as she noticed the phone's power was off. "The battery must have died. Darn it." Vida connected the gadget to a power source. "Let's hope it recorded something." She located the file and pressed the play button.

To her amazement and relief, the phone appeared to have recorded her trance, albeit with occasional interruptions as some of her words were minced, while others were garbled and unclear; but in spite of the awful quality of the recording and the many blank spots in between one sentence and another, one sentence was crystal clear and left no doubt about the identity of Auraman: "Aura'el, son of Glenda and Osiris Jones." That part of the recording was indeed coherent and unambiguous.

Shocked to her bare bones by the startling revelation, Vida began dematerializing out of sheer fright and utter panic in light of her upcoming visit to the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola and the eventual face-to-face encounter with Auraman (who was none other than the handsome young man who shook her hand earlier today).

It took her a few moments to recuperate from the unexpected news; she then regained her composure, solidified back into her normal self, and poured herself a glass of Château Montrose wine. "There is no need for alarm." She calmed herself down. "Sir must be wrong about his absolute conviction concerning Auraman, unless there was something about that dashing youngster I may have missed or overlooked when I first locked hands with him."

She whispered softly, "Be that as it may, it would be best to follow my own advice, keeping a watchful eye on the lad. And if he was indeed a tool of carnage, I would no doubt aid de Leon in plotting his demise. But if Auraman is indeed a force for good as most people believe him to be, I'll make sure sir abandons his obsessive crusade to annihilate him."

Alas, deep down in her desolated heart, Vida knew that would never happen and that de Leon was hell-bent on destroying Auraman no matter what. And for the first time she could ever remember, Vida began to cry.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

Sunday, October 21, 2012

Vida was a light sleeper who often marveled at how little she slept yet managed to keep a very tight schedule while exuding oodles of boundless energy. *It must be the fire. The fire-gazing ritual must be akin to feeding on nectar and ambrosia*, she pondered. Indeed, Vida was full of vigor and bounce; her vivacity was captivating and often noticeable by others who habitually quizzed her about the secret to her youthful, good looks.

She woke up at 6:30 a.m. and went about her Sunday routine, including ordering a light Sunday breakfast from room service, taking a prolonged bubble bath, and concluding by relaxing in front of the television and flipping between the various news channels. “Why? Why does it have to be this way?” She sighed in desperation, responding to the bleak news coming out of TNNC.

“Don’t we deserve some respite from this daily account of sadness, discord, and misery? How long can we continue to endure all those worldwide conflicts without eventually blowing ourselves up to smithereens? What kind of oddities are human beings?” She hissed out loud. “We are maniacally obsessed with self-destruction and consumed with an errant propensity for violence. Though Rhinefeld contributed immensely to an ever-growing sense of calm and hope, igniting optimism for better days to come, somehow man’s inclination for madness and ruination seems to always take the upper hand. No

wonder the kids are looking for Auraman to put an end to this rampant violence,” Vida blurted.

*Can you imagine? she mused. If Auraman is indeed what he appears to be, then chances are the youngsters are about to have their wish granted. Imagine the looks on all those faces of despots, dictators, and all other global troublemakers confronted with a new weaponless reality, leaving them with no other choice but to settle their differences amicably and violence-free. Ah, what a world that would be!* She gasped as she drank her coffee and took another bite from her toasted salmon bagel.

“I could only hope de Leon is wrong!” Vida exclaimed as though wishing on a star. “After all, he is a prominent figure in the world of philanthropy, donating considerable fortunes to a variety of social programs aimed at benefiting the poor and the dispossessed and protecting the environment. No doubt he will come around should he realize, however unlikely, that his previous convictions concerning Auraman were truly erroneous. What are the chances of that happening?” She recalled her tears of sadness from the night before.

Nevertheless, Vida remained hopeful; and despite her somewhat innate knowledge that de Leon can hardly be swayed once he made up his mind, she chose to remain inspirited and contemplate the unimaginable. Reminding herself, though, that she hasn’t made up her own mind about Auraman, Vida recognized she was about to have a close encounter of the four<sup>th</sup> kind, and her heart began to race.

The room’s phone rang, and she lunged at it as if stricken by a sudden energy jolt, yet she hesitated a bit before picking it up and speaking into the receiver. “Hello,” she murmured incoherently.

“Ms. Simon?” She cringed as she heard the front desk attendant’s somewhat irritating voice. “There is a dashing young man named Aura’el Jones waiting for you by the lobby.”

“I’ll be right there!” she hollered in response and grabbed her Michael Kors jacket lying on top of the couch. “I’ll be there in a jiffy.” She hung up the phone as she stormed out of her room, feeling as if her heart were about to be pulled right out of her rib cage.

Aura’el was patiently waiting by the front desk and greeted her as soon as she emerged out of the elevator. “Hi, Ms. Simon. How are you?”

"I am fine. Thank you for asking. My god, you're a lovely sight to behold." She went on complimenting him on his looks. "And it is just Vida, darling. Could we please dispense with the formalities?"

There was no mistake about it; Vida felt as if she were about to be dissolved into the ground like the Wicked Witch of the West. On the one hand, she was delighted to meet the world's number one news maker; and on the other hand, she was numb and jittery, fearing that her secret might be exposed with untold dire consequences to her personal safety.

Being adept in meditative techniques and breathing exercises, she mentally calmed herself down, smiled at him, and firmly shook his hand. "Have you ever considered a modeling/acting career?" she blurted as they stepped outside of the hotel. "I am confident you'll be successful at it."

"I think you're mistaken, Vida, far from it. I am not cut for the world of fashion—or acting for that matter," he replied. "And this might come as a surprise to you. I am rather shy." He smiled at her.

"Shy?" Vida exclaimed. "You must be joking. I would never think that in a million years." She seated herself inside his double-parked car.

"Well, yes," he affirmed. "But it's not a type of timidity that prevents me from speaking up my mind in front of an audience."

"I see." Vida sighed disappointingly. "But I could still easily picture you in next month's *GQ* cover page. How far is the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola?" she added.

"Just a few blocks away. We should be there in about ten to fifteen minutes," Aura'el replied.

An eerie silence ensued as Aura'el focused his attention on the road and traffic lights ahead, while Vida kept fumbling with her cell phone and checking her messages. "Oh, how I love New York," she suddenly spouted. "Maybe I should move back to the village. London is getting quite tiresome."

"I think you can drop the act now, Vida. I am quite aware of your knowledge of who I truly am."

Stunned by the abruptness of Aura'el's statement, Vida froze in sheer panic in response. *How in the name of heaven did he find out? It simply*

*made no sense, unless he was a telepath and read my mind.* “What do you mean?” she finally said, smiling as if she wasn’t petrified by what might follow next.

*Yes, Vida, I am telepathic,* she heard his voice say, echoing from within her. *But this is not how I found out about your awareness of my identity.* His voiceless words continued to reverberate in her mind. *I don’t have to spell it out for you, do I? But yes, I am Auraman.* He looked at her with a kind and understanding expression strewn across his face.

*It’s all right, Vida. There is no need for alarm. You are perfectly safe,* he messaged her telepathically and gently held her hand. *I am not upset. After all, it is not what you know but what you do with what you know.* He smiled, again attempting to calm her raw nerves.

“How did you find out then?” she inquired as she abruptly terminated their telepathic connection in favor of normal verbal communication.

“I got a glimpse of your reaction when you first touched this car. You were startled as if hit by a lightning bolt and immediately lost your balance. I was also affected by whatever vibe you released into the open, and the resultant historical impression you perceived and unintentionally unleashed hit me with a similar ferocity as it did you. I knew it was only a matter of time before you would eventually figure it out.” Aura’el went on. “I am not quite sure how you arrived at the conclusion that the being of light you observed or sensed was me, but as soon as you greeted me earlier at the hotel, I was certain that you knew.”

“If you don’t mind me asking”—Vida stared at her image in the front mirror as she calmly questioned him—“what else do you know? Is it safe to assume that you have meticulously probed my mind since you saw me?”

“No, absolutely not,” Aura’el replied assertively. “As I stated previously, your knowledge of my identity was not obtained via mind reading but through the impression you let loose when grabbing the car’s handle. I am telepathically privy to information that is freely being communicated to me. I may choose to start a mind-reading conversation with you but will stop should I not have your consent to proceed. I will never invade your private thoughts—or anybody else’s

for that matter. In times of stress or outright peril, I will sense your plight and respond to it."

Aura'el veered toward Park Avenue and Seventy-Ninth Street as they were fast approaching the church, though it appeared as if they were about to hit a bit of a traffic jam. "I appreciate that immensely," Vida answered, unloading a sigh of relief as she realized that her cover wasn't blown after all, that is, provided he was telling her the truth and not attempting to expose her at a later stage. But what would he expose her for anyway?

It occurred to her that, though he may not be cognizant of her true intentions, she did not wish on him any ill will. Quite the contrary, his sweet demeanor, softness and eloquence of speech, and his mannerisms and body language all suggested to her that he was of benign and noble nature; and with every passing moment, it became extremely difficult to give any credence whatsoever to her boss's stipulation that the young lad sitting next to her was somehow a device set to unleash onslaught and anarchy. Clearly, the task of spying on him and the Rhinefeld Institution has become cumbersome and somewhat unbearable. Nevertheless, Alfonso's words warning her of possible deception by a sheep in wolf's clothing did continue to occupy some parts of her subconscious mind and lend further justification to hold judgment as events unfold.

"I actually concur with your approach, Vida," Aura'el interrupted her mental overview and assessment of her uneasy predicament. "I mean, I sympathize with the concerns you expressed in your conversation with Annette and Cassi regarding my known nature and alleged purpose. Ultimately, expressing doubt and apprehension, particularly in circumstances where little information is available or none at all, is to be expected. You were correct to point out and stress the potential of wrongdoing on my part because of my human origins, which is replete with flaws as you stated. Though I am made out of solidified light, my genome—the essence of my being—is truly and unmistakably human on all its advantages as well as deficiencies."

Vida looked at Aura'el and felt somewhat awkward by his candor and directness. Stung by his graciousness and civility, she found herself succumbing to an ever-growing conviction that it was indeed wrong to

maintain the charade of her mission, feeling a categorical compulsion to come clean and share with him, as well as with his parents, the true reasons for accepting their research participation invitation. As mind blowing as it may have seemed to her at first, Vida realized that she was being swept by Aura'el's "irresistible sweetness" to an unfamiliar quarter of her own emotional psyche, which she very rarely visited; and this diminishing grip on her innate tendency for apathy and detachment seemed to have simultaneously frightened her deeply as it also mercilessly clobbered her senses with odd, delightful sentiments.

"I promised to keep quiet about all this," she finally said. "This is indeed remarkable. I assume that apart from your parents, Annette, and now me, no one knows your true identity."

"You are correct, Vida. I am truly thankful for your discretion. I could have easily influenced you with an altered-memory implant without your knowledge, but I chose to trust you instead. We share a unique bond because of a previous unfortunate encounter I have yet to unravel. But despite that previous adverse engagement, I trust you completely, though I do not understand why."

"Where could we have met?" she inquired, looking all puzzled.

"I have no idea, nor does it really matter," he noted. "I know you're a kind and warmhearted woman, but oddly enough, you are not aware of your own empathic abilities or your capacity for good as if those attributes lay dormant, buried somewhere in your soul and ready to erupt at a moment's notice like a fiery volcano."

"I am dumbfounded." Vida gasped in amazement. "I do not know what I have done to gain your trust, but I reckon it is not based on mere rationalization or logic. Surely, you arrived at that conclusion based on perception that transcends ordinary intellectual capacity. Indeed, my heart is aflutter as I was somewhat fearful that my expressed doubts concerning your character and mission might be held against me. I am truly grateful for your capacity to evaluate events from such an uncommon angle because most impartial observers expressed an opinion so starkly contradictory to my own. I can assure you, my young man," she added while slightly coughing, "that I meant every word I said to Annette and Cassi. And though I am, alas, captivated and beholden by

your charms, just like everybody else, I do not give in to euphoria and media frenzy. I am bound by rational thought and keen observation.”

“I know, Vida. I know,” Aura’el interjected as he signaled the driver behind him to bypass him.

“I am glad we had this opportunity to talk and get to know each other somewhat. Your friendship is truly appreciated as is your foresight,” he said, prodding her gently and handing her a bottle of FIJI Water. “You must be thirsty.”

Relieved at having such a direct and honest conversation with the object of her personal research, Vida felt compelled, right there and then, to reevaluate her perception of Auraman based on the lengthy discussion they just shared but more so because of his psychometric vibes that seemed to overwhelm her psychic abilities. And though she did contemplate earlier, during their exchange, to come clean and divulge her true mission, she concluded it was too early and vowed to proceed with caution and subject de Leon’s convictions to strict and rigorous scrutiny.

“We’re here,” Aura’el said, disrupting her train of thought and stopping across the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola’s front entrance. “Annette and Cassi are waiting for you right there.” He pointed at the girls as they waved and called her name. “I’ll be parking the car and join you ladies in about ten minutes” He let Vida out and then drove farther down the block.

Vida paced toward the church somewhat slowly as she pulled her gold-ornamented cell phone out of her bag and dialed de Leon’s number. “Yes, Vida?” she heard him say, forgoing the usual small talk. “Any news?”

“No, sir, not at all,” she lied. But I am about to participate in a Sunday Mass at the Church of St Ignatius Loyola. I am joined by Annette, Cassi, and Aura’el. I think I might have mentioned him earlier—you know, Annette’s lovely boyfriend.”

“Yes, you did,” he said. “Keep your eyes and ears open as instructed.”

“Of course, sir,” she responded, sensing an unusual level of softness in his voice that was starkly unfamiliar. “May I speak freely, sir?” Her voice was slightly trembling.

"Yes, of course, Vida. What is it? It is not about that kiss we shared, is it?" He chuckled.

"No, sir, it's not," she replied, staggered by his out-of-the-blue directness. "It's about Auraman. There is a great deal of chance that you might be mistaken in your assessment. Wouldn't it be more prudent to wait for a while and observe how events unfold before rushing to judgment? After all, if you are mistaken and Auraman is brought down as a result of your action, you'll end up being vilified and hated by all, not to mention the dire consequences to your global business interests and the penalty you might have to endure."

Vida paused for a moment and braced herself for a snotty remark or possibly a nasty retort on his part, but instead, Alfonso responded in a way that left her delirious with shock and utter disbelief. "I think you're right," he said, reversing his previous cornerstone position of immediate action to bring about Auraman's demise. "You were right to advise caution as you did in your conversation with the girls." He continued. "Your wait-and-see approach is as prudent as it is wise. I may have jumped into an erroneous conclusion partly because of my business instincts and some unresolved childhood issues, no doubt. I reckon that the widespread perception that Auraman is a force for good has some validity to it, if not more. Simply proceed as you advised, and report any type of activity that might suggest a nefarious intent on the part of the Joneses."

Vida pulled her cell phone away from her ear and looked at it as though it was possessed. Her heart rejoicing with contentment, she placed the phone back against her ear and said, "I must admit, sir, you are full of surprises. I wasn't expecting that. You were so adamant. I was certain you'd double down on your previous position. I am absolutely thrilled that you were able to reevaluate your stand and adopt a more measured approach. Thank you profoundly for your trust and confidence in me."

"I have always heeded your counsel, Vida," Alfonso replied. "I know I come across as asinine and boorish at times, but it is not who I truly am. Though I might often be perceived as an absolutist, I do not mind constructive criticism or the occasional positive prodding, particularly

if initiated by those who truly care about my well-being and not just my fortunes. You are not just an employee, my beautiful darling Vida. You are a friend and a confidant. Surely, you are aware of my feelings for you, aren't you? The kiss we shared was a testament of that. Indeed, dear, there is a great deal for us to explore as soon as you get back home."

The call was abruptly cut off, and de Leon's disappearing voice echoed in Vida's mind, stirring up fireworks of flat-out bewilderment and utter incredulity. It was an outright earthquake as if her boss went through some sort of unexplained spiritual baptism, a conversion and reawakening of his soul. Alas, it was so shockingly stupendous that Vida felt as if a higher power must have intervened on her behalf while she burst into tears the other night, fearing that he would succumb to his deeply held beliefs and needlessly extinguish humanity's new hope.

Feeling as if she were about to erupt out of her mind, in light of his confession that he had romantic feelings for her, Vida fumbled in her bag, looking for one of her sedatives as she felt like she was about to vanish out of sight because of her exceedingly unnerving excitement. The emotional high was so excessive for her schizoid-type persona that it became apparent that calming herself down (because of her inability to accommodate her newly emerged emotions) was too overbearing for her instantaneous meditations to handle. She needed a chemical fix—and fast. She finally found her Xanax pills, which she drank immediately, and then hurried toward the church entrance, where Cassi and Annette stood by, awaiting her arrival.

Little did Vida know, however, that de Leon's supposed remarkable transformation was nothing but a wicked facade, perpetrated by a degenerate, contemptible man. Endowed with his new reality-altering powers and keenly aware of the identity of his foe, de Leon took no chances that might jeopardize his plan for complete and total eradication of Auraman. He knew that Vida's intellectual honesty would eventually triumph over his manufactured lies, yet he needed to ensure her ongoing cooperation and continued loyalty in a way that would render her harmless and unable to point him out as the culprit should he succeeded in his plot to bring about Auraman's downfall. Thus, through agreeing with her rational, logical approach and declaring his supposed affection

for her, Alfonso opted to secure her trust, numb her suspicions, and lull her into complacency.

A devious strategist to the core and crafty as the devil himself, he recognized that should he triumph over his nemesis, the “beloved by all” halo-radiating Auraman, he would surely be compelled to deflect any suspicion that might end up with his own ruination and financial collapse. And who else but the lovable and loyal Vida Simon could better vouch for his “remarkable transformation” and “spiritual conversion”? The man was a meticulous planner who always got his way, while ensuring others took the blame.

Though aware of Vida’s expressed animated interest in commencing romantically where they left off, he ridiculed the idea and brushed it aside as if he temporarily lost his marbles. *What was I thinking?* he mused. *Me and that semiautomaton, schizoid freak? No way. She is just a cash cow, nothing else.*

Filled with a new sense of renewed optimism that all was advancing according to plan, he went up to his mansion second floor, where he previously used to conduct his black magic rituals, and prepared himself for the “grand attack” he planned to launch at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, bringing down the structure on all its occupants and hopefully destroying Auraman while still in his Aura’el human form.

Totally oblivious to the death and devastation he was about to let loose on multitudes of women and children in this magnificent house of worship, he was nevertheless concerned about the safety of his golden goose and the means with which to remove her from there just in time. He was certain, however, he’d be able to dematerialize her and transport her to safety as soon as the church’s walls collapsed. Steeped in his maniacal pursuit of unadulterated power and overexcited by surges of incomprehensible energies cascading through his body and momentarily turning him semi-incorporeal, he entered his ceremonial magic room and sat inside a prepared protection circle, from which he was hell-bent on unleashing his black aura in the form of three malevolent demons: Asmodeus, Baal, and Agares, capable of turning the church to dust, leaving no stone unturned.

While de Leon sat in his consecrated and fiendish circle, Vida calmly crossed Park Avenue and waved toward the girls as she finally arrived at the church's front entrance. The three hugged and kissed as they entered the St. Ignatius's interior space, a foyer of sorts sheathed in gray cipolin marble and paved in pink Tennessee marble—a narthex subdued both in color and light.

It's been some time since Vida attended Sunday Mass, and the grandeur of this Lord's house seemed to have rekindled long-forgotten memories of her early childhood visits to the Cathedral of St. Paul in London. "What a splendidly amazing place," she said as they crossed the threshold into the church's main interior.

Indeed, this baroque basilica was awash in changing light of bright and muted colors; its curve-walled sanctuary apse exuded a breathtaking visual drama at the point of entry. The illustriousness of this optical glory continued in the vibrant interaction of the side aisles, the richly decorated and illuminated domes, and the seventy-foot-high gilt-coffered barrel vault suffused with light from the multicolored windows. Adding to this house of worship's incredible liveliness, of course, were the rich and diverse colors and textures of the European and African marbles of the revetted walls.

The unfolding images of St. Ignatius seemed to have recalled Vida's affinity for transcendence, reigniting her longing for communion with the divine, with that part of humanity that was truly docile and tranquil. Though she wasn't much of a churchgoer, Vida was still mesmerized by the incontrovertible impact places of worship had on her, particularly those mighty basilicas traditionally steeped in an overwhelming and awe-inspiring pantheon of saintly icons, stained glass, and fine art. "Thank you," she whispered to Annette. "Thank you for inviting me."

"You are very welcome, Vida," Annette replied. "We'd like to introduce you to Father Mulligan. He is right over there." She pointed toward the corner, not far from the great sanctuary arch.

Father Mulligan noticed Annette and looked in her direction as he finally approached the group and shook Vida's hand. "You must be Vida," he said. "Welcome to our church."

"Thank you, Father," she answered somewhat hesitantly. "I am delighted to be here."

"Naturally," he muttered. "These two young ladies can't stop talking about you. You have made such a good impression on them. What is your secret?"

"Oh, Reverend Father, they are just exaggerating. It was a simple girl talk, that's all." Vida chuckled as they all giggled and smiled.

Father Mulligan proceeded. "Anyways, I'd be pleased to chat with all of you after Mass," he concluded and walked away in a hurry.

The parishioners gathered around, quickly filling up the pews, as Father Mulligan observed from afar, buoyant by the presence of such an unusually large crowd, populated with numerous youngsters and tots.

In the eyes of the esteemed "shooting star of Bethlehem," nothing could have surpassed the joy of giving Mass in the presence of such a precious audience. Thrilled by the congregation turnout, Father Mulligan entered the sanctuary, accompanied by his altar servers, and approached his chair. He then made the sign of the cross and said, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

"Amen," the crowd responded.

The priest proceeded with the Penitential Act, also known as confession, which takes place at the start of the Mass. "Have mercy on us, Lord," he pronounced in his deep voice.

"For we have sinned against You," the congregation responded.

"Show us, O Lord, Your mercy," he implored.

"And grant us Your salvation," the audience replied.

At the end of the Penitential Act, the church's children choir began to sing "Kyrie Eleison" (Lord, have mercy), a song by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore His mercy. The angelic, harmonious sound of the choir was a total embodiment of peace and serenity. Their voices reverberated throughout this striking house of God, amplified by an almost magical echo. Father Mulligan's baritone voice thundered mightily in between verses, supplementing and completing this profound and moving manifestation of divine, godly praise. Many of the congregates were spotted with tears of joy rolling down their cheeks,

while others were bedazzled by the sudden glow of Father Mulligan's aura, adding to the overall sense of blessedness and inviolability.

Vida's eyes were glued at the children's choir as well as at Father Mulligan's glistening halo, savoring every syllable while reminiscing on bygone childhood memories of Christmas and Easter. As she continued to gaze at the priest, she felt as if she was about to merge with the images of the glorified Christ seated in judgment, surrounded by the Blessed Mother and St. Michael (the archangel pictured yielding a fiery sword). But alas, the ground beneath her began to shake.

*Am I trapped in one of those biblical sceneries drawn on the church's walls?* she pondered. Was she at the Crucifixion site witnessing the Lord's suffering as he cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" after which he "yielded up his spirit," thus causing the earth to shake and the rocks to split?

*Alas, I am right here. I did not dematerialize,* Vida thought as she finally snapped out of her semireligious nirvana and took a detailed look around her. The church's ground shook with an uncanny ferocity as its mighty bronze doors were pulled out of their base and tossed onto the street, suspended in midair as if they were weightless feathers. The entire structure shook as if it was hit by a powerful earthquake.

As the ground continued to swell, the air above and across the nave began to darken, while the mortified and panicked parishioners realized they were frozen and completely immobilized, not being able to move a muscle. "The vortex," Vida assumed. "It must be the vortex." She immediately recognized the foul presence that nearly killed her last time she encountered it. Vida waited impatiently for the vortex to appear, but instead of the all-consuming void she expected to come into being, a continuous black gaseous mist wrapped in a diminished yellow glare around its edges was gaining strength and substance as it fast approached Father Mulligan and the children choir behind him.

The priest, aghast by the unusual phenomenon, responded instinctively and began to glow profusely. His luminescent aura expanded away from his body to form a protective golden shield around the choir. Alas, his bolstered aura was no match for the thickness of

darkness that clashed with his halo. The gaseous mist began to seep through, diminishing Father Mulligan's solid light, surrounding both him and the youngsters behind him. The kids appeared to have fallen on the ground and lost consciousness as Father Mulligan struggled to reignite and invigorate his dimming luminescence.

"No!" Vida cried. "It cannot be!" She burst into an immense pillar of fire that whooshed its way through the nave, immediately attaching itself onto the priest's drained aura. There was a brief sound of a muffed explosion as Vida's pillar of fire collided and fused with Father Mulligan's divine-looking aura, increasing the pillar's size tenfold and soaring upward, approaching the cathedral's ornamented ceiling while dissolving the glittering black darkness into oblivion.

Frightening as it may have seemed, the immobilized parishioners' facial expression was that of blissful wonderment as the children rose from the ground and stood behind Father Mulligan, engulfed in immense flames but not consumed by it. It was a sight to behold, an image of utter sanctity taken straight from the book of Exodus, a direct manifestation of biblical scripture for a current-day audience—the pillar of fire reborn. It appeared celestial in nature as opposed to an all-consuming inferno emanating from an erupting volcano. The image was so commanding and radiant that it conveyed the impression that it had unknown healing qualities to it that somehow oozed of reassurance and consolation as if ensuring the faithful that God's grace and protection was at hand.

Alas, the black gaseous mist seemed to have regenerated and reconstituted itself as it began to encircle the pillar of fire from the bottom up, getting thicker by the minute, seeping through it and turning it black bit by bit. The pillar of fire began to weaken considerably as Vida realized it was only a matter of time before she would unwillingly recast herself back into her human form.

"Where are you Auraman?" she asked, thinking of him. "Where are you?"

"I am right here, Vida, behind Father Mulligan," he acknowledged.

"But I see you right there, all the way back by the church entrance."

"Yes, Vida, that is correct. I am there as I am here."

"How many of you are there?" he heard her shout.

"One, my dear Vida, just one," he replied and pointed his index finger toward the flames, which immediately transformed back into Vida's human form.

"Wow!" she exclaimed and raised her hands, blocking Auraman's bolstered brightness and savoring, albeit shortly, the magnificence of this seven-foot-tall man dressed in a golden armor suit, radiating intensely and discharging rays of bright light in all directions. But nothing struck Vida more than his rotating, faceless head shimmering like a candle's halo as its luminescence expanded two feet in diameter. Auraman pointed at her direction, and she, the parishioners, Father Mulligan, and the choir were all transformed into tiny specks of sparkling light that hovered in the air momentarily and then drifted in unison toward the image of the crucified Christ in the sanctuary apse's semidome, located above the pavonazzo marble and the gilt bronze main altar.

The formless, semisolidified, luminescent black light continued its transubstantiation, gathering volume and consistency, as it began to take the shape of three demonic-looking entities in accordance with de Leon's visual imagery, unleashed via his black aura and solidified into being nearly 3,500 miles away from its point of conjuration. There he was, Asmodeus, as well as Agares, a repulsive creature in the form of an old man riding upon a crocodile and carrying a hawk on his fist, a horrid beast of hell capable of causing earthquakes. Right next to him was Baal, a no less abhorrent and vile prince of hell, appearing as a frightening three-headed beast, consisting of the heads of a man, a cat, and a toad, all of which were placed onto a set of spider legs. The sheer ugliness of Baal was supplemented with a whip hovering his jeweled crown resting on his human head. The other two demonic entities carried solid black whips as well, and all three seemed to disseminate an internal murky yellow glow while surrounded by a thick black halo.

As the three monstrosities began to encircle Auraman, the transformed yet consciously aware human specks of light continued to cluster and amass as they ascended toward the image of the crucified Christ until they were fully absorbed and immersed in it, as well as in the image of the expansive scroll of a colorful flowering vine

painted against a gold leaf background. Both images began to glimmer capacious, shining brightly and emitting condensed human aura that filled the high gilt-coffered barrel vault with an awe-inspiring vapor, transforming its look into a heavenly phantasm conceived, no doubt, by a Renaissance artist.

Cognizant that the congregation was safe from harm, embedded inside the image of the crucified Christ and the flowering vine, Auraman turned his attention toward Alfonso's three thought forms, conjured up directly from his *Key of Solomon* grimoire. "Who are you?" he asked in a commanding, almost godlike voice. Why are you here? In this sacred house of worship?"

"You do not frighten us, Lumena Superioris. Prepare to die. Let us extinguish your light," Asmodeus rumbled.

"Who or what is Lumena Superioris?" Auraman responded instinctively, realizing instantaneously that he knew the answer to his own question (as in Latin it means *light supreme*).

"You are Lumena Superioris," all of Baal's three heads replied in concert, "an aberration of divine law and a sworn enemy of the demonic order." He struck his black whip, locking its fall around Auraman's left wrist. For a moment, Auraman's luminosity diminished somewhat but was immediately restored, shining ever brighter, though his left hand appeared to have remained immobile.

"Die as you deserve to!" Agares shrieked as he too lashed at him with his whip, hitting him on his right hand and paralyzing it on contact.

"And now!" Asmodeus hollered in his mortifying demonic voice. "Return to whence you came from!" He wrapped his whip around Auraman's faceless head. An ethereal black poison began to ooze rapidly through the whip's point of impact, coagulating swiftly and ferociously striving to penetrate his armor and darken his brilliance but to no avail. Alas, Auraman's reality-altering ability and thought solidification seemed to have been curtailed by the poison's effect.

A stalemate ensued where de Leon's manufactured, deformed ghouls kept him at bay yet failed to penetrate his shield beyond their whips' grasp. Perplexed by the simultaneous presence of Auraman as well as his

human form standing by the church's entrance, de Leon commanded his creatures to let go of the whips' grip and storm Auraman's human form instead. But the two merged instantaneously as soon as the demons withdrew their whips.

"Now!" Auraman's voice echoed throughout the church. "Bear the consequence of your insolence!"

"You can do us no harm, Lumena!" Agares bellowed as he hit the ground beneath him with his whip, causing it to shake and crack open.

"Maybe I cannot, but they surely can," he said, vanishing before their eyes and then reappearing as a miniaturized star hovering by the sanctuary, shooting concentrated beams of light through every stained glass adorning the basilica.

The stained glass windows shattered and erupted into the church interior, tossing countless of colorful shards into the air, which floated and drifted in a wondrous chaos right toward the three beasts gazing in awe at the flashing star above them. The broken glass gathered next to the hovering star in a matter of seconds and then began to flux in and out of existence, gyrating erratically, turning into liquefied white light, and finally coagulating into two exalted archangels (the archangel Michael and his brother Gabriel), who floated several feet above ground, their wings fully spread and their swords of bright light drawn forward and pointed at two of the demons. Auraman assumed his armored shape and drifted alongside the archangels, pointing his own blinding sword at the third demon.

The image of the crucified Christ in the sanctuary apse's semidome was noticeably radiant and pulsating in a slow but constant rhythm as the conscious congregation, transformed into specks of light, watched in apprehension as a classic clash between good and evil was about to unfold before them. There they were, incarnated from broken stained glass and solidified into being in all their majestic glory: St. Michael, prince of the heavenly host and the leader of all the angels dressed up in arms with a golden helmet and a shield, along with his brother Gabriel, or "God is my strength," dressed up in similar garb, both wrapped in divine halo and ready to do battle. The combined brightness of the archangels as well as that of Auraman seemed to have garnered looks

of dread and terror from the demonic troika below as they increased the strength of their black auras in a futile attempt to shield themselves from the ever-increasing brilliance.

"You will defile this house of God no more," Auraman commanded in a thunderous voice. "Depart now from this sacred ground." He held his sword against his face as Agares caused the entire structure to rock violently.

The archangels too held their swords against their faces and then pointed them again directly at the demons. Three extremely focused beams of light burst out from the tips of the swords and hit the three horrid abominations at the center of their bodies, piercing their thick, glistening black halo like a surgeon's scalpel gliding through flesh. The light spread from within their deformed carcasses as they struggled to block the spread of the light by coagulating and solidifying additional ethereal black substance to heal their wounds but to no avail. The intensity and ferocity of the three beams of light was far too overwhelming and impossible to withstand. The demonic entities' black aura was no match for the fierceness of the swords' blaze as they gradually lost their physical coherence and began to metamorphize into three distinct liquefied golden light cocoons, of which three white doves began to emerge.

The doves chirped their way out of the cocoons and flew across the basilica, flapping their wings rapidly, carrying tiny olive branches in their beaks, and sprinkling the now familiar golden soot in their path. The birds flew for some time more and then disappeared right into St. Ignatius's seventy-foot-high gilt-coffered barrel, merging in its eye-popping imagery.

"No!" de Leon screamed in agony from inside his protection circle. "No!" He endeavored to muster his depleted energy and form additional demonic creatures that might withstand Auraman and his conjured beings of light. But Alfonso's emerging, nascent powers were feeble and lacking the necessary strength to withstand the two archangels, solidified into being to counter his demonic thought forms. Indeed, in his utter exhaustion, de Leon realized that he was outsmarted by those beings whom Auraman's thought into existence to counteract his own

demonic vermin, which seemed to have been quite successful at holding him down at first.

Nevertheless and in spite of his increasing fatigue, Alfonso gathered his remaining vigor and called on a harmless wood spirit (a dryad) with a rather pleasant and calm look—a being, he presumed, the archangels would not harm. The dryad—a splitting image of an oak tree with long limbs, leafy hair, and a mossy body—appeared as soon as the white doves vanished. It rotated around itself counterclockwise while floating in the air, dispersing a very dim black aura, and moving toward Auraman somewhat cautiously.

“Who are you?” Auraman asked her in an assertive, compelling voice while the two angels still hovered beside him.

“You do not belong here,” the spirit answered softly as though in a trance.

“Why do you wish to harm us?” Auraman thundered, realizing, however, that the poor nymph was nothing but a mouthpiece for the malevolent entity that nearly brought the church down.

“You must die so I may thrive,” answered the dryad. “Until next time.” The spirit dissolved into nothingness.

Concluding that the disturbing, ominous ordeal was finally over, Auraman pointed his index finger at the archangels, who vanished instantaneously, as the church’s entire structure and its stained glass windows and mighty bronze doors were all restored to their former appearance and reinstalled in their places as if nothing happened. He then pointed at the image of the crucified Christ and the expansive scroll of the flowering vine, releasing the conscious embedded specks of light back into the pews and reconstituting them to their human forms while Father Mulligan and the choir materialized a few feet away from him.

“Be safe, Father,” Auraman said in a calm, reassuring tone as the priest raised his hands against his eyes to protect them from Auraman’s brightness.

“Thank you for saving our lives,” Father Mulligan replied, still feeling wobbly and incoherent. The parishioners burst into a thunderous applause.

"Are you a messenger of God?" he suddenly asked Auraman.

"No, Father, I am not. I am a friend you know," he said while bathing the stunned priest in a glow of golden light and restoring his aura.

"I do?" Father Mulligan asked shockingly.

"Yes, Father, you do. I am a friend you know, a baby whom you baptized, a human born to parents whose sole wish is to bring peace and harmony to us all. Have a blessed day," he greeted the faithful and wishing them farewell as he finally faded away.

"Friends," Father Mulligan's voice roared as soon as Auraman departed and the clapping fizzled out. "Friends, let us sing in praise of the Creator who blessed us with this noble being of utter wonderment." He signaled the choir, who erupted in singing "For the Beauty of the Earth," a song that captures the essence of how wondrous creation is. The faithful, still dazed by their miraculous lifesaving feat, joined in with much fervor and heartiness, singing in an amazingly perfect pitch and in tandem with the choir.

Vida looked around her as if absorbing the equanimity of the sounds and sights that filled the air. She then glanced at Aura'el, who winked back at her, thanking her telepathically for her courage and fearlessness. She hesitated momentarily but then did the unthinkable and embraced him warmly, kissing him lightly on his cheek. "Thank you," she said, somewhat overtaken with emotion. "Thank you."

"You are welcome, Vida," Aura'el replied, kissing her back.

"What's with the two of them?" Cassi nudged Annette.

"I am not quite sure." Annette chuckled, knowing full well of Vida's awareness of Aura'el's identity. "It must be one of her pills or whatever else she's taking."

## Chapter Twenty-Three

The demonic assault that took place at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola whizzed throughout social media like a fire in a field of thorns. A video of the entire confrontation was miraculously discovered in one of the parishioners' cell phones, raising immediate questions about how that was possible. After all, the entire congregation was turned into specks of white light. "Who then held the phone and recorded the showdown?" asked Lisa Cruise of WWN Network.

"One mystery we may find an answer for on Friday," said Peter Wassermann of TNNC, alluding to the most anticipated interview with Auraman scheduled for the weekend.

"Indeed," said his cohost, Ruth Parker. "Tune in on Friday for this once-in-a-lifetime event."

A sea of reporters mobbed the church's front entrance while numerous police officers, along with Rhinefeld researchers, scoured the nearby vicinity for clues that might reveal much needed information about the origins of the three demonic entities that launched this unfathomable raid. Yet there wasn't even a smidgen of broken glass or misplaced item in the entire church surroundings, indoors as well as outdoors. Despite the devastating quake that shook the basilica and caused its ground to split open, as well as the tremors that rocked the adjacent Park Avenue vicinity, all was as it should be, impeccably flawless and virtually damage-free as if nothing had happened.

"This is your area of expertise," said Officer McFadden to the Rhinefeld chief investigative officer. "Once again, there is truly nothing

for us to examine here since no harm was done, and all is as it should be. Please contact our department should you need any assistance."

"You are absolutely correct," said Brad Lawrence, the Rhinefeld chief investigator. "We're not dealing with common criminals or your neighborly hooligans. This is a unique phenomenon our institute has seldom encountered. We shall do our best to gather as much of the available evidence and keep you guys informed."

"Yes, of course," said Officer McFadden, turning his attention at the chaotic scene by the church's front entrance.

Alas, Father Mulligan was besieged by a deluge of journalists and news reporters crowding and cramming the church's staircase. "Do you know who Auraman is, Father?" cried Robert Smith from the OWL Network.

"No, I don't," he replied succinctly.

"But he said he was your friend!" hollered another reporter from the VOP channel.

"I have a lot of friends," the priest responded somewhat jokingly.

"But you baptized him!" yelled another.

Father Mulligan couldn't help but burst into a roaring laughter. He stared at the journalist and said, "Young man, do you have any idea how many babies I have baptized throughout my lifetime? Thousands. Thousands!"

"What are the religious ramifications for the existence of such a being?" asked a reporter for the *World of Miracles*, a monthly publication. The crowd suddenly went silent as they awaited Father Mulligan's reply to a question that seemed rather challenging.

"I do not know," the priest professed. "The being known as Auraman does not proclaim himself a deity or a messenger of God. He insists on emphasizing his human origins in nearly every encounter he had with us thus far. As a person of faith, I view his emergence into our lives as a testament of God's benevolence, who in His grace blessed us with the presence of such a remarkable person endowed with reality-altering abilities and whose ultimate purpose is yet to be unraveled."

Father Mulligan looked at the many reporters encircling him and closed his eyes for a moment. A broad smile was strewn across his face.

He then opened his eyes and stared at the heavens above, saying, “Time will tell if what we have witnessed here today—indeed, if what we have witnessed in the last few weeks—is the beginning of a new chapter in our human history, a new dawn that may not necessarily be of any religious significance (though surely some might view it as such) but nevertheless will herald humanity into a far better future, a peaceful future free from violence and fear and replete with hope and promise. I am confident that Auraman’s scheduled interview this Friday will enlighten us all and provide answers to many of your questions.”

The priest continued. “Mind you, it wasn’t just Auraman that came to our rescue today. Special thanks are also due to Ms. Vida Simon,” he said, pointing at her as the crowd cheered and applauded. “No doubt her immediate response of turning herself into a pillar of fire saved many innocent lives. Thank you, Vida.” He turned toward her. “Thank you for your courage and for saving our lives. We are forever in your debt. May God bless you all.” He made the sign of the cross.

He then turned away from the reporters and hurriedly walked toward his living quarters, accompanied by Vida, Annette, Cassi, and Aura’el. “They are absolutely relentless,” Annette blurted, trying to catch her breath.

“Well, what do you expect?” Cassi replied. “It wasn’t just Auraman. It was Vida’s pillar of fire too. That was a double whammy on behalf of the supernatural today. They are simply confounded and overwhelmed by what’s been happening lately. Aren’t you?”

“Indeed,” Father Mulligan concurred as he opened the door to his office. “Indeed.”

He closed the door behind him and invited them all in, and then he approached Vida and said, “What you did over there, Vida, was absolutely heroic. I meant every word I said to those journalists.”

“But I am not a hero, Father,” Vida mumbled in a soft, whispery voice. “I did what I had to do. I reacted instinctively, considering that your life and that of the children was in jeopardy.”

“Nevertheless,” the priest insisted, “you have exhibited remarkable bravery, confronting the black gaseous mist. It was an encounter that could have easily ended in your demise. You are as much as God’s gift

to the world as Auraman.” He stared at Aura’el as if he wanted to ask him something.

“Thank you, Father,” Vida answered, “though I am not quite sure about the term ‘God’s gift.’ There is a perfectly logical explanation to what I am able to do.”

“Which is?” the priest quizzed.

“Here we go,” Annette snickered as she looked at Aura’el and Cassi.

“Which is the singularity of thought, Father,” Vida replied. “It’s a perfect, rational explanation that clearly analyzes my ability—as well as yours, mind you—without resorting to faith-based systems that do not rely on empirical scientific evidence.” Aura’el, Cassi, and Annette were clearly having a blast at the burgeoning exchange as if watching a drama that was about to reach a startling crescendo.

“You are absolutely right, child,” Father Mulligan acknowledged. “The science of the singularity of thought details the confluence and apparent symbiosis that exists between thought and energy, but it does not explain the essence of the process itself. Let’s take you, for example. We know that years of fire gazing resulted ultimately in a convergence point in which you and fire became one and the same, allowing for your body’s molecular dematerialization and its reconstitution into that which resembles the molecular makeup of fire. In short, your human form is transformed into a conscious mix of carbon dioxide, water vapor, oxygen, and nitrogen—a remarkable feat, no doubt.

“However”—he sighed—“though we know how the process works, we do not yet understand, nearly twenty years later, how this convergence permits the suspension of physical laws. We just know that it does.

“We, the faithful, ascribe the suspension of the laws of physics to divine law and see no contradiction between them that allow (in our opinion) for your transformation into fire and the accepted laws of physics as we know them. Where scientists see contradiction and negation of common sense, we see coexistence and harmony, where one set of laws completes the other.

“Think about it, Vida,” he said, smiling at her. “This is a part of the divine law, which we may not be able to rationalize, yet we accept it on faith as we do with all other sacred teachings. We are, however,

enlightened—thanks to Rhinefeld—by the process or techniques that allow the so-called paranormal to manifest itself in the way we have observed in the last two decades and particularly now with the emergence of Auraman. My good friends Osiris and Glenda Jones may spend their entire lives striving to unlock the apparent mystery of this odd cohabitation between the laws of physics and the supernatural that nowadays showcases itself so dramatically in broad daylight. But we, the faithful, view that so-called mystery as an *axiom*, a statement that is self-evidently true and accepted *without proof*.

He went on. “Now, my dear Vida, clearly, the vast majority of scientists disagree with our contention and insist that a valid, verifiable explanation is out there and will eventually be unraveled. Maybe? Or maybe not. We are not bothered by such triviality and consciously choose faith over reason in our attempt to understand all aspects of divine law.”

Vida looked at Father Mulligan intensively as Aura’el and the girls were having fun, excitedly awaiting her response. She then smiled broadly and said, “I can’t believe we’re having this conversation.” Vida giggled. “We were nearly incinerated half an hour ago. But anyway, you are absolutely right, Father. It is a matter of choice, yet your choice is totally unacceptable as a valid, workable method to differentiate between fact and fiction. I must admit, however, that faith—though not a scientific method by any stretch of the imagination—might, at times, point us in the direction of the truth.

“Before the emergence of Rhinefeld, many people chose to believe in the existence of phenomena such as telekinesis, clairvoyance, teleportation, levitation, invisibility, etc., in spite of overwhelming evidence suggesting it was all nonsensical quackery, promulgated by money-hungry charlatans. But it was the discovery of Marisol Flora Gonzales, Rabbi Jedidiah Goldstein, and yourself, of course, that created a monumental shift in public awareness with regard to such abilities. Thus, no one currently doubts the existence of these wonders because of overwhelming scientific evidence that, oddly enough, help turned faith-based tall tales into validated, proven facts.

"So yes, Father," Vida clarified. "You look at the world and its many wonders and ascribe its complexity to a creator. We, on the other hand, look at the world and evoke a similar axiom—that energy was ever present and that it is fluid and constantly changing, unraveling in its path simple truths that, a millennium ago, were ascribed to gods and goddesses and a plethora of other mythological creatures."

"She's a tough cookie, isn't she?" Father Mulligan cackled as he addressed the group.

"Well, Father, you can't say we haven't warned you about her," Cassi affirmed.

"Indeed, child, indeed. I shall make a note never to underestimate your warnings," he said as they all burst into a loud laughter.

"Tell me, Vida," Father Mulligan asked as they all continued laughing. "What went through your mind during Mass?"

"A sense of cultural beauty, Father," she replied. "I enjoyed the prayer for its soothing and calming effect. I am fascinated by the prayer's entrancement."

"Fair enough," Father Mulligan replied. "You are always welcome in our church, regardless of your spiritual affiliation or lack of it. Your courage and sense of sacrifice far transcends any religious creed or dogma. I am humbled by your presence, dear child." He teared up as his aura began to gleam capacious.

"Thank you, Father. Thank you for your heartwarming words and wisdom," Vida responded, her voice slightly breaking down. "I am not much of a social person. As a matter of fact, I am quite a recluse. But the last few days have been a mind-blowing roller-coaster ride for me. I am truly fortunate to have met you all." She began to flux, losing her form coherence.

"Vida, you're turning into fire!" Annette and Cassi yelled.

"Yes, yes, no worries, guys. It's a natural reaction to Father Mulligan's glow. Since we merged, our minds are now linked and mentally connected and respond similarly to emotional stimuli."

"Father," Cassi suddenly interjected, "may I ask you a question?"

"Yes, of course, child. What is it?"

"Auraman said he was a friend you knew. Did you really mean what you said to those reporters? Are you truly clueless about Auraman's identity?"

There was a moment of awkward silence as Annette, Vida, and Aura'el exchanged bewildered looks. It was rather likely that the priest knew Aura'el's secret identity yet chose not to confront him with that revelation out of respect for his choice to keep it a secret; Cassi's question, however, appeared to have placed Father Mulligan in the lumbering position of unintentionally lying to safeguard that secret.

"Father, you really need not answer that," Aura'el blurted as he walked toward the door and away from the group. "I can answer that for you." He then disappeared, reappearing instantaneously as Auraman.

Father Mulligan as well as Cassi and Vida raised their hands, placing them against their eyes to protect themselves from his blinding light. "Aura'el, sweetheart!" Annette hollered. "Dim your brilliance. They can't look at you this way."

"And you can?" Vida bellowed.

"Yes, my vision has already been augmented to withstand his appearance as he truly is," Annette replied.

Within seconds, Aura'el adjusted his aura emission frequency to a comfortable visible level, allowing them all to stare at him directly, while his face began to emerge, turning from a head-shaped featureless halo into his recognizable facial characteristics. "Pleased to make your acquaintance," he said to Father Mulligan and Cassi. "This is me as I really am, also known as Auraman."

"I know, son. I have finally figured it out," the priest acceded.

"How?" Aura'el asked, still filling the entire room with his tranquil effulgence.

"Though I have baptized many babies, there was one infant that I've blessed before his baptism. The strangest thing happened while performing the blessing and holding that one-day-old newborn in my hands. I was lifted in the air and remained there for longer than ever before as my aura glistened in a manner that baffled and rattled the minds of those who witnessed the event. You were that infant, my dear son. It was after that mind-blowing celebration that Rhinefeld teamed

up with Dr. Gerald Epstein from the Center for Applied Science and Technology, heralding humanity into the age of the paranormal.

“When I was asked by the journalists about possibly knowing you, it didn’t occur to me until I was reminded by your words—‘I am a friend you know, a baby whom you baptized, a human born to parents whose sole wish is to bring peace and harmony to us all’—that you might be who I thought you were, but I wasn’t yet sure. I therefore phrased my response in such a generic fashion that it could have easily been applied to numerous babies and couples as was made clear by my instinctive reply to the reporter’s question.”

“I must admit,” Cassi interrupted, “that I had my own suspicions as well. The day you handled those robbers at the Chase Manhattan bank was the day we were scheduled to stop by at Memorial Hospital and visit Tommy. You supercharged me with your healing power, knowing full well of the miraculous recovery that was sure to follow as a result of my interaction with the kids. Yet I have to concede that your omnipresent ability threw me off guard completely, and I therefore assigned my mental reflections about your true identity to circumstantial evidence. I guess my gut feeling was true after all.” Cassi giggled.

“And what about you two?” Father Mulligan asked Annette and Vida, smiling broadly.

“Yes, Father,” Annette responded. “Aura’el confided in me right after the Peryton rescue at the Empire State Building. Vida just found out about it accidentally a few days ago.”

“Are you guys going to stare at me and talk as if I am not here?” Aura’el interrupted suddenly, pretending to be serious. The entire group burst out laughing; Father Mulligan’s roaring laughter was particularly catchy, and the girls seemed to tear up somewhat while attempting to catch their breath.

“Just for the record, Father,” Aura’el said and paused as the girls continued to cackle, “I was about to confide in you and tell you all about it as part of my New Year’s resolution. But then Margarit had that freak accident at the Empire State Building, and well, you know the rest.”

“Can you please fill us in?” Cassi asked Aura’el. “How did you become this way?”

“What way?” he teased her.

“This way, silly,” Cassi quipped, pointing at his shimmering luminosity. “Auraman, how did you turn into him?”

“I wasn’t ‘turned into’ anything. I was forged this way,” Aura’el reported.

“What do you mean ‘forged’?” Cassi insisted.

“I think we can answer that,” they all heard Osiris’s voice say as the group noticed, in the center of the room, two hovering balls of bright white light expanding swiftly and rapidly coalescing into human forms.

“What is going on here?” Father Mulligan uttered, looking shocked and discombobulated. “Have I died and gone to heaven? Osiris, what is the meaning of this?”

“All is well, my dear Father Mulligan,” Glenda replied in a calm and soft voice, hugging him and patting him on his back. “All is well.”

For the next half hour, Osiris and Glenda shared with the group all the events that have led to Aura’el’s birth and his virtual transformation into Auraman; Glenda recalled her visit to Dr. Bearlight’s office and the consequential mental realignment she has undergone, literally within hours, as a result of the doctor’s mind-numbing reality-bending performance. Osiris was elaborating on the process of aura fusion and light solidification, invoking Father Mulligan’s knowledge of quantum physics, and striving to analyze the phenomenon in a purely scientific manner. Both Glenda and Osiris reiterated that Dr. Bearlight surely had a secret agenda that culminated in the birth of a “supercharged” child endowed with unfathomable reality-altering powers.

“We suspect,” Osiris remarked, “that Dr. Bearlight deliberately used higher than necessary energy levels for the light/thought solidification process. He most definitely aimed at attaining more than a mere human, and he did.”

“The question is why?” Glenda interjected.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Father Mulligan replied, as if the answer was clear as glass. “After all, he did warn you, didn’t he?”

“Do you mean the Malakahrians?”

“Yes,” the priest responded. “Dr. Bearlight most likely foresaw the emergence of the Malakahrians right about the same time he helped

you conceive Aura'el. He thus equipped the newborn child with powers to match their own."

"But who or what are the Malakahrians?" Vida inquired. "And what do they want with Auraman?"

"I am not quite sure it's the Malakahrians," Aura'el countered. "The being that produced the demonic thought forms reiterated that 'I must die so it may thrive.' It seemed more like a human battle cry in a quest for absolute power rather than a plot devised by aliens or nefarious entities from hell.

"This is not the first attack that was staged against me." He continued. "There was that initial attack nearly forty-eight hours after the so-called Peryton rescue."

"Yes," Annette concurred. "That was the scariest thing imaginable. Two monstrous-looking elongated-clawed partially human and partially dinosaur materialized out of nowhere right behind Aura'el and grabbed a hold of his neck, attempting to rip it apart."

The look on Vida's face changed dramatically as if she's seen the devil himself; her skin color turned pale white as though she was bitten by a vampire who sucked out her blood up to the last drop, and her hands began to tremble. Panic stricken, horrified, and on the verge of passing out, Vida asked Father Mulligan for a cold bottle of water.

"Are you all right, Vida?" Aura'el asked. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Yes, dear, I am absolutely fine," she lied. "I am, alas, exhausted. My energies are tapped out. I just need some water and freshen up a bit, that's all." She excused herself out of the room.

Vida paced toward the adjacent kitchen and grabbed a bottle of water and ice cubes out of the refrigerator. Still shaken by the revelation that it was her who attacked Auraman (albeit not willingly) shortly after his first appearance, she sat by the kitchen table, striving desperately to collect herself and evaluate her awkward situation before joining the others. "But I did not attack him," she whispered to herself. "It was that presence who took control over me, attempting to draw us both into the vortex. We were *both* attacked, but by who or what?

"Obviously, the essence that encountered us in the Akashic records has found its way into our plane of existence. It is apparently outfitted with similar powers as Auraman. It is safe to assume, therefore, that it needs a human vessel to cohabit.

"But wait, there were no such 'vessels' in the church. The demonic entities had an existence of their own. How was that possible? How did the vortex transmigrated into our dimension? Was de Leon somehow involved? No, no way. He couldn't have. After all, I did not pull him into that nothingness a second time, nor was I trapped when I last performed my fire-gazing ritual."

Vida's designated cell phone rang, and she immediately snapped out of her semimeditative state. "Yes, sir, I am fine," she replied to Alfonso's question if she was well and safe. "I am unharmed and unhurt. We are all perfectly fine. Auraman obliterated those monstrosities and turned them into white doves. I am sure you have seen the video that has been circulating around the world in the last few hours. He saved us all. I must admit we are wasting our time here. There is absolutely not an iota of ill will or any other type of enmity in Auraman or the Joneses. I am sure you'll agree with me that, in light of what transpired at the church, we should be concentrating our efforts elsewhere."

"I think you are absolutely right," de Leon responded in a calm, cool demeanor.

"There is more, sir," Vida stated.

"Indeed?" de Leon murmured.

"Yes. Recall our first encounter with the vortex, where I was trapped in a pentagram while lunging forward toward a glowing, shadowy figure and attempting to tear it apart. Well, it turns out that the shadowy figure was none other than Auraman, who experienced that grisly attack by those hideous ghastly fangs while I was trapped in the vortex, struggling to pull him in."

"And how would you know that?" de Leon snapped. "Are you aware of Auraman's identity?"

"Yes, sir, I do. He just revealed himself to us, that is, Father Mulligan, Annette, Cassi, and myself, of course. He is Aura'el Jones, the son of Glenda and Osiris Jones, Rhinefeld head researchers. I had to walk out

of the room as soon as he made plain that he was previously attacked and how." Vida paused momentarily and then proceeded. "I became far too distraught when I learned that I was the one who first attacked him, albeit not willingly."

"It seems that you were right all along, Vida," de Leon noted. "You are intuitive as you are perceptive. Clearly, I was wrong to make those unfounded assumptions about Auraman as well as his parents. I would urge you, however, to withhold any information concerning the 'claws attack' as it might unravel the recent new bond that you have so successfully forged with the entire group.

"Additionally, should you choose to yield that information, they might be led to believe that you are still under the influence of that malevolent essence. Wait awhile. Maintain your research schedule with Professor Jones, until we gather more information about our shared experience in the nothingness. Once we have completed our examination to better understand the phenomenon we have encountered, you'll share that information with Aura'el as well as his parents."

"My thoughts exactly, sir," Vida barked excitedly into the phone. Absolutely awestruck by the continued mind-boggling reversal of Alfonso's initial suspicions, Vida felt as though he read her mind and quoted verbatim her would-be response.

"You continue to surprise me, sir," she finally spouted. "I recall your previous convictions and absolute certitude that Auraman was a tool forged by evil to subjugate us all. What a remarkable transformation."

"Well, dear, I am not oblivious to common sense." She heard him cackle. "And I have you to thank for my modified view of the work done at the Rhinefeld Institute. You are very seldom wrong, Vida. I should have known better. Your assessments are usually proved to be correct. Go now," he commanded. "Your new friends might start to wonder if you passed out or vanished into oblivion."

"Yes, sir, of course," she replied. "Thank you for your words of encouragement. I couldn't hope for a better boss. I am indeed fortunate to have met you."

"We'll speak again soon," he answered and hung up.

Though stunned by her unexpected interference at the church, he was confident that his continued deception has garnered him a patron and an advocate. Alfonso clasped his hands in satisfaction, marveling at how much Vida idolized him and thus bolstering his conviction that the likelihood she might ever suspect he was the mastermind behind the demonic attack in the church was virtually nonexistent, nor would she ever believe that he was still hell-bent on extinguishing Auraman's light and bring about his downfall.

Vida grabbed a few more bottles of water from the refrigerator and, feeling all enthusiastic and reinvigorated, rushed back into Father Mulligan's office. "What did I miss?" she asked as she stormed into the room. "Water anybody?"

"Yes, thank you, Vida," Annette replied.

"We continued to postulate over the possible identity of the would-be attackers. We can't stress it enough. Someone or something wants Auraman out of the way."

"Any luck?" Vida asked.

"Luck?" Cassi asked, looking somewhat bewildered.

"I mean, did you come up with any new ideas of who or what it might be?"

"No, not exactly," Glenda replied.

"We think we might have a clue but can't be certain about it either," Osiris noted.

"As we mentioned earlier, Dr. Bearlight did warn us about the Malakahrians. All we have, however, is an image of a bright star that appeared when the hanging crystal pendant exploded at the conclusion of the aura fusion. Alas, we are not even sure if the star is even connected to the Malakahrians, though we are quite convinced that it is."

"Do you have an image of the star?" Vida quizzed.

"Better yet, Vida," Osiris said, "we have the entire recording of Aura'el's conception. It is pretty much G rated." They all blasted in laughter.

"Maybe I can help then," Vida suggested, still giggling. "I'll try to read the darn thing first thing tomorrow morning. I guess that is why

you asked me if I ever tried drawing impressions from looking at images of other planets.” She winked at Osiris.

“Well, Vida, it is no secret that you are the most insightful person on the planet.” He winked back at her.

“Aura’el suggested earlier that the attacker might be of human origins,” Annette interjected, directing her comment at Vida. “Any ideas?”

“Clearly, every common criminal would wish for Auraman to simply disappear so they may continue to indulge in criminal behavior unimpeded. The demonic entities that we have encountered earlier today might be the work of a power-hungry, demented freak who has similar abilities to that of Auraman and whose intentions of putting Auraman out of the way were made quite clear. On the other hand, it is possible Dr. Bearlight wasn’t the only avatar toying with the powers of creation. He must have realized that aura fusion may have awakened something at the same time Aura’el was born, hence his warning about the Malakahrians.”

“I must admit, Vida, I really meant what I said about you being perceptive.” Osiris cracked as they all grinned.

“It’s getting late,” Glenda noted as she noticed Father Mulligan dozing off momentarily. “We are all tired and could use some rest.” She continued. “Cassi, Annette, you will go with Osiris. He’ll flash you back home in an instant, saving you an irritating Sunday afternoon traffic jam. Vida, you will come with me. I’ll drop you off at the Waldorf. And you, darling”—she stared at Aura’el—“you’re gonna drive the car back home.”

“You keep forgetting I don’t have to do that, Mom,” Aura’el chided her. “The car is already parked back home. I’ll see you guys later.” He then disappeared.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Tuesday, October 23, 2012

The next few days were rather uneventful, though the commotion in anticipation for Friday's interview reached mass hysteria. TNNC was besieged with requests by numerous celebrities to attend this once-in-a-lifetime event, doling out donations and lucrative advertising contracts in exchange. Others marveled at the circumstances that have led to the orchestration of the interview in the first place. "How did it come about?" asked the notorious Facebook page Changing Times. "Did Auraman actually contact the network to schedule an interview?"

"Yes, something like that," responded James Walters, TNNC's chief anchor who was set to be conducting this most widely anticipated tête-à-tête. A message was suddenly transmitted throughout the network computer screens stating the day and time of this upcoming phenomenal appearance. At said time (i.e., Friday, October 26<sup>1</sup>), Auraman would manifest himself in front of Mr. Walters, and the interview would begin.

In preparation for this otherworldly official introduction, every TV station on the planet broadcasted ad nauseam all related Auraman appearances, debating the extent of his powers and their resulting implications for their lives in ways that most people couldn't even begin to fathom.

The Monthly Wonderment, a well-known YouTube channel, introduced a rather remarkable theory assigning the conception and

ultimate birth of Auraman to none other than the Hollywood studios. “For years,” its spokesman (Ronaldo Rivera) contended on a live-streaming event, “Hollywood has bombarded us with an ongoing influx of superhero movies attended by millions of fans. It is apparent that the continued success of those movies reflects—on a deep public yearning, indeed—an unquenchable desire for the supernatural to manifest itself in our lives. Alas, we have grown weary of endless battles, continued strife, and blatant injustices, which our leaders seem unable or unwilling to resolve. Thus, we immerse ourselves en masse in a two-hour alternative reality, an escapist illusion, about mighty heroes who correct our wrongs and restore order to our planet with a fantastical display of abilities usually assigned to a deity. The scriptwriters frequently add a plethora of alien invaders to the mix of our internal problems to intensify the drama and suspense, as well as the visual majesty, of those moneymaking special effects.

“The bottom line, however, is clear. This public obsession with superheroes and the continued craving and longing for supernatural solutions have put in motion a powerful thought form that somehow found its way into *manifestation* in our distressed and frequently agitated existence, placing all our heroes’ powers in the hands of a single being, Auraman. Yes, it is as if our global wishful thinking magically blasted into our reality, embodying our dreams into a living, breathing entity of *our own making*.

“Indeed,” Mr. Rivera professed, “Auraman is not entirely omnipotent, as evidenced by the recent encounter at the church, but no doubt his abilities far outweigh all that we have been accustomed to seeing in our fantasized superhero culture. We are thus salivating at the thought of where Auraman will lead us.”

The Monthly Wonderment live-streaming event was mocked by most viewers, who branded it “nonsensical” and “far too difficult to consider seriously, even as a remote possibility.” “We know that, during humanity’s infancy, our planet was visited by alien beings,” tweeted in response the Phantasmagorical Bulletin in a series of tweets, suggesting a theory of their own. “It is far more logical to assume, therefore, that extraterrestrial knowledge may have been recovered by some people

among us who mastered it fully, culminating in the creation and design of a deity born from genetically infused light.”

Telling Facts from Fiction, on the other hand, advised the “obvious”: “Auraman is an evolutionary-accelerated human being, a mirror image of our future selves twenty-five to thirty thousand years from now. Our technological mastery of light and energy will put the singularity of thought theory to shame. We will all become gods, free of limitations and fully in tune with the spark of creation, where omnipotence will be considered commonplace.”

The most outrageous of all speculations was that of another Facebook page called Las Conspiraciones Flagrantes, theorizing that Auraman did not exist and that all the stupendous events witnessed by thousands were nothing but a public awareness stunt, a gimmick, for a yet unknown purpose. “We assume Big Brother is at it again,” said their most recent headline. “Using holograms and advanced holodeck technology borrowed directly from the beloved *Star Trek* sci-fi series, Big Brother has devised a new way to extort us into submission and subservience by utilizing illustrious special effects. Behold, under the guise of benevolence, the perpetrators of the ‘Auraman sham’ will soon dominate our lives, turning us into obedient puppy dogs wagging their tails at their masters.”

Las Conspiraciones Flagrantes’s post was scoffed at and ridiculed as a sheer conspiratorial hogwash, but some entrepreneurs were quite amused by the notion and quickly introduced a new range of T-shirts into the market known as the “Auraman holo-hoax,” which failed miserably. “Look at this T-shirt,” Vida said as she handed over her newly purchased tablet to Aura’el. “Are you seeing all this?” She nudged him, pointing at the latest headlines as they were standing in front of the twenty-foot-high statue of Hephaestus.

“Sheer and utter madness.” He cackled. “Why don’t you pinch me? Make sure I am real,” he urged Vida jokingly.

“Some folk won’t accept any proof no matter what.” Osiris lamented. “If it conflicts with their well-established viewpoint, they’ll just toss any evidence out the window as if it was somehow fabricated or doctored. It is truly remarkable.”

"Yes, but the truth exists regardless." Vida laughed as she went ahead and pinched Aura'el's arm. "Oops. What do you know, my young man? You're real!" she cried out loud.

"Are you ready, Vida?" Osiris asked.

"Yes, of course, Osiris. I can't get over how magnificent the image of Hephaestus is. It is breathtaking."

"If it's too much of a distraction, Vida, I can change that for your convenience," Aura'el said and pointed his index finger at the wall, turning it into an ordinary brick stone structure with a traditional fireplace carved in it.

"So you are the architect of this ostentatious wonder!" Vida exclaimed.

"Guilty as charged," he concurred as he approached her.

"Bring it back, young man," she commanded. "I could use some Olympian inspiration."

"Yes, of course, Vida," Aura'el replied as he waved his hand, and the illustrious Hephaestus statue reappeared, protruding from the wall.

She went on. "Now please ignite the fire, and produce the image of the alleged star between Hephaestus's hands."

"As you command, ma'am!" Aura'el hollered and smiled at her.

Vida stood about ten feet away from the fireplace and focused her mind on the three-dimensional illustration for a short period. She then diverted her attention and concentrated her stare on the fire. Within seconds, the flames turned black as Vida fluxed in and out of existence till she swooped right into the blazing inferno while Aura'el and Osiris stood in the back, monitoring her progress. Both kept glancing at the burning coals, expecting her to emerge within minutes, but alas, the flames remained still and placid. "How long does it usually take for her to emerge back from the fire, Father?" Aura'el inquired.

"It depends," Osiris answered. "From the reports Dr. Higgins provided to us, her average stay in the Akashic records is between five and ten minutes."

"She's been there for nearly ten!" Aura'el hollered. "Do you think she's OK?" He sounded overconcerned. "I can't establish a telepathic link with her while she's there."

“Look!” Osiris roared. “Look at the wall, son!”

The entire Hephaestus form moved and swayed from one side to the other as if attempting to detach itself from the wall. Its hands, holding the massive golden hammer and trident, slammed the anvil repeatedly with frightening ferocity while its head moved left and right, and his eyes glistened bright red, tossing numerous sparks out into the air.

“It’s her, Dad! It’s Vida!” Aura’el shouted. “She’s about to communicate with us!”

“Yes, I see that!” Osiris’s voice blared across the room “Its lips are moving!”

“Mali Absolutis!” Hephaestus’s deafening voice reverberated as he hit the anvil with his hammer and slammed the floor with the trident.

“Destroy their planet!” cried a distant voice.

“Annihilate them all!” yelled another.

“Return Lumena Superioris. Extinguish his light,” demanded a third voice.

“They have all been infected, touched by light.”

“Kill Dr. Bearlight. Destroy the Imaginarum.”

“He’ll kill us all.”

“Mali, save us. We are doomed.”

“Throw planet Nibiru at them. Thank the empress. It’s on a collision course.”

“December 21.”

“Even Lumena cannot help them now. Let the black aura suffocate him.”

“Mali Absolutis, empress of light and darkness, queen of all creation, essence of thought, save us from this corporeal defilement.”

Engulfed in black flames, the cast figure of Hephaestus continued to sway as its voice thundered mercilessly, uttering words and broken sentences in a variety of sounds and vocalizations, until it finally quieted down. It remained fixed and restful as the flames gathered together, detaching themselves from the statue, floating in midair, coalescing into a vertical ellipse, and finally coagulating into Vida’s human form. It took Vida a few more seconds before she regained her molecular integrity completely and fell on the ground.

"Vida! Vida!" Osiris cried, lightening up her body with his aura. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes, Osiris, of course," Vida said as she opened her eyes, smiling at their worried faces. "My energy is overdrawn. Thanks greatly for your invigorating blast of light, Osiris."

"Anytime, dear, anytime."

"What did I miss?" Vida finally asked.

"You tell us," Aura'el replied. "What do you recall?"

"Voices, my young man, lots of voices."

"Where you in any specific location? Did you observe any planet at all? A star?" they both uttered in unison.

"No, there was no star, no specified location," she noted. "Just infinite stillness, a spaceless concoction of timeless equilibrium—the birthplace of matter, energy, and thought."

"You're speaking in riddles again, Vida. What are you talking about?" Osiris stammered.

"I have no idea what I am talking about, darling," she blurted. "I am simply attempting to convey a sensation, striving to describe the indescribable. It's like nothing I have ever experienced."

"What were my exact words?" she asked Aura'el.

"Here, look for yourself," he countered as he played the recorded session on the flat TV screen.

"This doesn't look good," Vida noted while Osiris and Aura'el nodded in agreement.

"Obviously, Vida, you were quite successful in transmitting the voices you heard," Aura'el finally said. "Whoever they are, they appear to perceive us as a threat, not just me but also all humanity. My emergence, facilitated by Dr. Bearlight, has triggered an adverse response by these nonbeings or nonentities. The Malakahrians, no doubt."

"They have hurled planet Nibiru at us," Osiris noted. "It is to collide with Earth and obliterate us out of existence on December 21, just as prophesied by the Mayans in accordance with the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar. We have yet to verify that the planet has truly begun its journey toward Earth. Last we heard, planet Nibiru has tilted on its axis."

“We are doomed.” Vida sighed heavily.

“Not so fast,” Aura’el quipped.

“What do you mean *not so fast*? There is nothing anyone can do, not even you, my dearest child.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure, Vida,” he countered. “I might be able to pull a few more tricks out of my hat.”

“This is not a joke, son,” Osiris groused. “I am certainly hopeful we’ll be able to prevail against the calamity heading our way for all our sake.”

“Not a word about any of this to anyone,” he ordered as they were exiting the lab.

“Yes, absolutely.” Aura’el and Vida nodded in agreement.

“And besides,” Vida stated, “Aura’el and I have an interview to prepare for. We’ll coolly evaluate all our options to tackle this approaching menace after you introduce yourself to the world.” She stared at him with a distressed look on her face.

“But there is nothing to prepare for, Vida, really,” he insisted as they went down the stairs. “I do not wish to rehearse my replies. Mr. Walters may ask whatever questions he has in mind. Why? Do you think I’ll be facing some gotcha questions?” He chuckled.

“No, not necessarily, if he knows what’s good for him.” She grinned. “Anyway, I have no doubt you’ll be able to handle him eloquently.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Osiris added as they finally approached the cafeteria.

Indeed, the idea of such an immense public exposure of a personal nature was somewhat unnerving, even for a cool, levelheaded person as himself, but Aura’el brushed aside all doubts and worries that this upcoming intimate encounter with the entire planet would turn out to be anything but a revealing introduction to new possibilities and opportunities that would dazzle everyone’s senses. This global joining was a necessary step in clearing doubtful minds, calming raw nerves, starting a discussion about an eventual plan of action, and striving to better understand what was expected of him through direct communication with the world community.

It was evident that, though most people were excited about the likelihood of direct supernatural intervention aimed at bettering their lives, it was surely not clear how that anticipation would be actualized. Would Auraman end all disease as he did with the cancer-stricken tots at the hospital? Would he put an end to weapons of mass destruction as the most recent “save our planet” petition implored him to do? Would he impose Western values on cultures that did not share their moral standards (i.e., regimes that practiced human rights abuses routinely)? Would he usurp free will and dictate a global behavioral code and end all human suffering? Or would he become just another ordinary crime-fighting superhero battling a plethora of local and extraterrestrial super villains? Undoubtedly, planet Earth was ready for more—much, much more.

Aura’el’s mind raced with endless media references concerning those questions and many others. It was evident that humanity did *not* expect him to be your usual crime-fighting superhero. The consensus was that, since he possessed such mind-blowing reality-altering abilities, he was thus destined to change the course of human history and march mankind toward a new and illustrious future.

Verily, the world’s burdens seemed to weigh heavily on his shoulders, but Aura’el considered the upcoming interview as light entertainment. *There isn’t going to be such an intense intellectual discussion on this first official appearance*, he mused. He assumed it would simply be a casual talk about who, what, how, and why (i.e., the story about a barren couple and their struggle to bear a child, the wondrous process of aura fusion and its startling ramifications to the possibility of asexual procreation, his childhood memories, and finally the singularity of thought and its transformative impact on human development). And though James Walters might try to steamroller the discussion into a more inquisitive direction, he, Auraman, would pull him down to earth, so to speak.

Confident that his TV debut would turn out to be a mutual positive experience for both himself and his audience, Aura’el focused his attention on confirming Vida’s impression that planet Nibiru was indeed on a collision course with Earth. Thus far, NASA provided no confirmation to that end; on the contrary, it was quite dismissive

of any notion of an imminent planetary collision and referred to the “2012 phenomenon” as complete and utter nonsense steeped in acute mass psychosis.

Lurking in shadowy corners and plotting to disrupt the festivities was Alfonso de Leon, who vowed to pull the red carpet right from under Auraman’s feet. “This will be Auraman’s first and last broadcast,” he pledged as he sat in the middle of his protection circle, conjuring a variety of demonic entities, drawing massive amounts of energy from his newly acquired black aura, which seemed to intensify exponentially, like a dark plague growing in leaps and bounds.

Not fully aware yet of the vastness of his ability, de Leon considered his options and erroneously concluded that he was no match for Auraman; he thus proceeded with his initial plot of doubt and confusion to turn the interview on its head, thereby silencing and exiling his nemesis into irrelevancy and public indifference. “The gullibility of his audience will be his undoing.” He cackled as he fine-tuned his crafty plot. “He wouldn’t know what hit him.” He continued snickering as he fluxed in and out of existence, hovering inside his circle.

On Friday late afternoon at about five thirty, it seemed as if the entire NYC area was brought to a halt; the streets appeared to have been abandoned, traffic came to a complete stop, and businesses closed their doors earlier than unusual. The grand AMC multiplex theater on Forty-Seco<sup>nd</sup> Street and Eigh<sup>th</sup> Avenue, as well as its companion across the street, the E-Walk, posted placards advising patrons of scheduling changes for the remainder of the evening; Broadway shows were all canceled; and Times Square seemed deserted, aside from a few pockets of tourists banded several feet away from the ABC Studios’ gigantic LED screens. Similar scenes were observed all around the world; London, Paris, Rome, and Sidney turned into virtual ghost towns as all held their breath in anticipation for Auraman’s special appearance.

The entire global community seemed to have been glued to their television sets in an ecstatic anticipation for this once-in-a-lifetime event as were Glenda, Osiris, Vida, Cassi, and Annette—and yes, even Aura’el—who gathered at the Joneses’ Upper West Side apartment and anxiously awaited the start of the interview. “Aren’t you supposed to be

going somewhere?" the girls teased Aura'el as they stared at the living room's sixty-five-inch flat screen TV.

"It's not like I have to drive there," he teased them back. "Why? Are you concerned I might end up stuck in traffic?" He laughed.

"Not really," Cassi insisted. "Wouldn't you rather inspect your surroundings before you're about to be voluntarily dissected?"

"Come on, ladies, calm down." He smiled. "Everything is gonna turn out just fine," he said as they all reached for the hors d'oeuvres and other delicacies Glenda prepared in celebration of tonight's special occasion.

As the entire planet looked forward to the start of the broadcast, James Walters stared at the direction of the massive seamless LED wall behind him, a Primeview 2.5 mm full-video LED display panel that created a flawless incredibly wide image and served as a backdrop. He then took an abrupt look at the jam-packed studio and surveyed the cameras pointed at the center stage, accentuated by a beautifully crafted spacious armchair and a somewhat elongated desk. An acclaimed journalist and an avid interviewer who was well accustomed at questioning the most recognizable and well-known political figures and media celebrities, James couldn't help but feel the obvious—that the upcoming conversation was nothing like any interview he has ever conducted throughout his extraordinary career. Somehow it seemed as if he were about to question his Maker, a thought that brought about a slight sense of unease. *What if Auraman gets irritated by my line of questioning?* he pondered. *Is he gonna blast me into oblivion or turn me into one of these little winged creatures from the Chase Manhattan bank?*

"Of course not," he heard himself muttering. "I am just naturally nervous as the entire world is about to tune in and probe every single syllable I am about to utter."

His show *What Matters Most* was a weekly newsmagazine program that focused mostly on interviewing opposing political rivals in an attempt to find common ground and mutual understanding. Each guest would present their own point of view concerning a controversial political matter. The audience, which was carefully selected by both guests before the show, would then ask the protagonists questions

relating to their expressed views; the guests would then respond and proceed to the next question, a total of five questions per guest. At the end of the discussion, the audience would then vote for the person whose arguments they found more compelling and convincing and whose purpose or mission they would ultimately support.

The show was one of the most popular productions in cable news history. Rather than pit two adversaries against each other like gladiators in a Roman arena, the topic of discussion was referred to spectators for evaluation and commentary on the merit of the opinions presented by the opponents. *What Matters Most* influenced the creation of a movement called Left-Right United (LR United), aimed solely at bringing contesting groups together for similar discussions designed to encourage members of parliaments from across the world to promote change in discourse that would ultimately result in a change of heart and improved new legislation. The group was hugely successful in promoting tolerance and pluralism in lands that have tiptoed on the verge of civil anarchy and consequently elevated James Walters to stardom and worldwide prominence.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” his voice thundered across the studio, “welcome to this once-in-a-lifetime special edition of *What Matters Most*. Our next guest needs no introduction. We have all witnessed his wonders unfold across our city, indeed across the globe. We have all been bedazzled by his astounding abilities and confounded by his benevolence. He has left us gasping for air and hopeful for a better tomorrow.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, people of the earth, without further ado, please welcome the one, the only Auraman.” He then pointed at the beige armchair next to his desk and pulled it slightly away from him. The crowd responded in a wild thunderous applause as an immense bright golden light appeared floating over the armchair, radiating mightily, and filling the studio with a blinding luminosity. Instinctively, James, as well as the audience, raised their hands and placed them in front of their eyes as the light was far too intense to look at. Within seconds, however, the radiance subsided, and Auraman appeared in his fine-tuned visible form, dressed in his now recognizable

golden, platinum armor suit with the infinity symbol emblazoned and circling across his chest. Completing this awe-inspiring image was a circular glowing halo expanding two feet in diameter and rotating around its axis in place of what should have been a human head.

The crowd went wild, cheering, clapping, and whistling in approval, as James shook Auraman's hand, thereby igniting his own aura, which extended a foot away from his body, blanketing him momentarily in a cloak of saintly holiness. The applause continued for some time, until James signaled Auraman to sit. "Wow," he said as he pointed at him. "Your appearance is quite remarkable. This is your usual visible human form, I gather?"

"Thank you, James. Thank you all," Auraman replied as he waved at the cheering crowd. "You are correct, James." He proceeded as the lips that appeared across his circular faceless halo continued to move. "Mind you, though, I had to adjust my light intensity and lower its vibration to render myself visible to human eyesight."

"Why would you still choose to appear faceless? May I ask?" James inquired somewhat hesitantly.

"Of course, you may," Auraman replied and then morphed into an exact copy of James himself. "Would you feel more comfortable talking to a mirror image of yourself or possibly that of your colleague standing there?" He pointed at the show's producer, Tatiana Kopernikova, as he shape-shifted into a splitting image of herself.

"Here we go again," Annette said to Cassi as they were all watching. "He just can't help being overtheatrical."

"You are right. That's our Aura'el, all right," Cassi noted as they both exploded in laughter.

Auraman continued to transmogrify himself into a variety of celebrities as James's jaw dropped in outright puzzlement. "We know you can do all these unbelievable things," he said. "But we find ourselves amazed yet again every time you perform all these mind-blowing marvels. But honestly, Auraman, don't you think we have the right to know who you truly are? After all, you do claim to be of human origin, and all of us humans do have a visible face."

"You do know who I truly am, James," Auraman countered. "My form, which you find so difficult to gaze at directly, is who I truly am. I had to fine-tune my vibrating frequency for your convenience."

"Yes, we know that," James replied. "What I mean to say is who are you when you are not Auraman? Though it is clear you may assume any of our appearances, we would like you to introduce us to that specific identity for which you are known to your human parents, friends, classmates, teachers, and possibly even your girlfriend. Do you have a girlfriend?" The women in the audience held their breath.

"Yes, I do have a girlfriend," he answered in a resolute tone of voice. "As to your other question, you are correct, the public does have a right to know my everyday identity and not just the lifesaving persona I have become. One might mention, however, that it is quite customary for our cultural superheroes to have a secret identity. And quite frankly, I am not quite sure why that is necessary. Couldn't Clark Kent just come out and say to the people of the earth, 'I am Superman,' and get rid of those ridiculous glasses that supposedly mask his true self?"

The crowd responded in outright laughter, forcing Auraman to pause momentarily. "I am all for directness and accountability." He continued. "But more than we, so-called superheroes, want to share our everyday identity with the rest of the world, we strive to protect those who are close to us and whom we love and care about from the irrevocable invasion of privacy, which most surely would turn their lives upside down and expose them to possible danger. I wasn't given permission by the people I know, and who know of my abilities, to place them in the crosshairs of constant media frenzy and other likely risks. Thus, I've chosen to appear here, on your show, only as the person I have become to be known, Auraman."

There was a round of applause that immediately subsided by Mr. Walters's next question. "How can we validate your claim then that you are of human origin?"

"Well, I guess you can't—for the time being, that is. Rest assured, however, there is a mountain of evidence held by my human parents depicting various stages in my life, starting at my conception all the way

through my adolescent years. At the appropriate time, this substantive documentation will be made available to the public."

"Your conception?" James asked, appearing somewhat startled.

"Yes, James. The moment of my conception was fully videotaped. But it's not what you think. It is not what all of you think," Auraman added as many in the audience chuckled. "I am specifically referring to the asexual process of genetic aura fusion that was utilized in my conception and that resulted in my eventual birth, a groundbreaking method that brought into existence a newborn baby in less than an hour."

"Do tell," James instructed as the audience as well as himself appeared totally discombobulated.

"Unable to conceive, my parents were aided by a fertility expert and a mystic. This person was a well-trained practitioner in light solidification (i.e., the process of turning light into matter or substantiating a focused thought into existence via the utilization of light and the human aura). When the traditional fertility treatment failed, the honorable doctor introduced my parents to this new concept and provided them with indisputable proof of his abilities, which was duly recorded and documented.

"Overwhelmed and convinced beyond reasonable doubt of the doctor's supernatural powers, my parents agreed to take part in the first ever attempt to conceive a child through aura fusion, the merging of two genetically infused human auras into one through an immense energy transfiguration, culminating in the creation of a fetus made of solidified light and born in the image of his parents. Call it 'thought turned matter.' That is me, pure light in human form vibrating as flesh." Auraman paused momentarily as cries of "wow" echoed throughout the studio while the enormity of the revelation began to sink in, as well as the depth and honesty with which Auraman responded to all of James's questions.

"This is absolutely astounding," Mr. Walters finally said. "Indeed, we have all heard about the singularity of thought and its ability to manipulate existing matter via the human aura. Just this week, we were absolutely staggered by its inspiring manifestation through Ms. Vida Simon, who turned herself into a pillar of fire at the Church of

St. Ignatius Loyola. But this . . . this is something else. You're talking about creating human beings out of sheer light. That is impossible."

"So what do you call me?" Auraman chuckled.

"You know, Auraman," James stuttered. "The Las Conspiraciones Flagrantes suggested that you might be some sort of holodeck projection, a mass hallucination, that feels and looks real but is nothing but a collection of photon, transmitted via holo-emitters."

"Oh ye of little faith." Auraman laughed as he transported the entire studio and all its occupants into the desolated Times Square, across the ABC headquarters, and then transported them back. "Would you call that the work of holo-emitters, James?" he asked the stunned celebrity.

"No, sir," he responded, his voice quivering.

"Would you call that some sort of mass hallucination?" he asked, pointing at the audience and turning them into a plethora of exotic birds. What are your cameras telling you, Mr. *What Matters Most*? You may choose to claim that your eyes fool you, but can your cameras and all your other electronic gadgetry be fooled by so-called emitters too? I am as real as you are, my friend." There was a wide thunderous applause.

James smiled in response and then interrupted the wild cheering, suggesting to Auraman that someone would like to talk to him, someone who knew him personally. "Who could that be?" James inquired.

"I haven't the foggiest," Auraman replied. "Maybe Ms. Tomlinson, the gymnast from the Empire State Building."

"Put her through," James whispered into his earpiece.

The LED video panel behind him changed from its galaxy space background to a sky blue coloration with a darkened image at its center; the facial figure pulsated for some time until it finally cleared, smiling broadly at the stunned Auraman. "Would you care to tell us who that is?" James asked as the studio turned so quiet that you could hear a pin drop.

"Yes, I guess," Auraman stuttered. "This is my girlfriend, Annette." There was a sudden gasp of disbelief coming out of the audience as James Walters and the entire production team appeared speechless and stupefied beyond comprehension, considering this unexpected and totally surprising change of direction.

"Something is wrong," Glenda said out loud as they were all sitting and watching the interview. "How can you be there, Annette, when you are clearly here with us? Osiris, come, we must flash ourselves to the studio immediately. I have a bad feeling about this." She attempted to flux herself out of the room, only to discover that they were both impounded and unable to dematerialize.

"Why won't you tell them who you really are?" the image on the LED video screen behind James asked Auraman somewhat rhetorically. "Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Annette, and I am indeed Auraman's beloved girlfriend—Auraman, who is also known as Aura'el Jones, son of Glenda and Osiris Jones, head researchers at the Rhinefeld Institute. Do not let this young man and his parents fool you as they fooled me. Under the guise of light, there comes darkness." Her face was turning red with anger.

"Auraman is none other than the devil's spawn, begotten by Satan himself, who appeared to his desperate barren parents as Dr. Bearlight. Let me repeat the name—Dr. Bearlight. Indeed, the famed Dr. Bearlight was none other than the bearer of light, a.k.a. Lucifer, the morning star, the fallen angel cast out from heaven, who seduced the grieving couple into conceiving his child, an offspring born of his father's heavenly light and solidified into human form—sheer, unadulterated evil masquerading as good and shrouded in a saintly halo."

"Annette!" Aura'el yelled as the entire planet watched the ensuing drama in awe and utter consternation. "What is wrong with you, dear? Where are you getting all this?"

"Don't let this so-called Auraman sweet-talk you into subservience and ultimate subjugation." She proceeded as if reading from a teleprompter and ignoring him entirely. "Alas, only now I understand the images I have seen. The mark of the beast is upon him, this creature standing before you. Behold the marks of his ungodly birth: born on June 6, 1994, solidified by six beams of condensed light emanating from six different directions through six pagan gods.

"For the last eighteen years, his parents paved the way for his ultimate appearance, infecting our global consciousness with eventual acceptance of their son's arrival, creating an environment in which their

offspring will be received with open arms, warm public embrace, and much adulation—a recipe to turn humanity into a docile herd of sheep ready to be slaughtered.

“As I speak, planet Nibiru has been thrown out of its orbit and is in direct collision course with Earth, destined to decimate our planet on December 21 and turning it into Satan’s *new hell*. Yes, the father of all lies has bedazzled us with feats of wonder,” Annette preached with certitude, “as it carefully plotted our eventual downfall and the expansion of his dominion, condemning us to eternal damnation and everlasting bondage.”

Aghast by the interview’s sudden change of direction, Cassi, Annette, Glenda, and Osiris exchanged looks of utter shock and disbelief. Vida froze solid, her heart beating so fast as if it were about to pop right out of her chest. “I’m afraid I wasn’t fully honest with you. This is obviously not Annette you’re seeing out there. I know exactly who that person is. There isn’t a moment to lose. I must fix this,” she said and immediately dematerialized and reconstituted herself in the studio, standing beside Aura’el.

Glenda and Osiris watched in bewilderment as Vida departed while they seemed to remain apartment bound by some invisible force. “I am so sorry, my dear,” Vida blurted, ignoring James Walters as well as the entire rattled production team. “I should have been completely honest with you, child. Please merge with me. Touch my soul with your essence. Read my mind. I beg of you.”

“Yes, of course, Vida, as you wish,” Aura’el replied and, in a split of a second, absorbed all her thoughts relating to the first attack on his life, her original mission, and Alfonso’s initial plan to kill him as well as his devious so-called transformation.

“It was him who attacked us in the church,” her voice echoed. “Doubtless, he’s been imparted with thought substantiation abilities similar to your own. It must have happened, no doubt, when I last informed him from the fire who you really were. He tricked me into believing he was a changed man, using our recent intimate engagement to lull me into acceptance of his newfound faith in you, while all along he continued to plot your demise. He must be stopped, child. Stop

him now. He appears to have fully embraced that malevolent essence we encountered in the Akashic records, the same foul presence that attempted to pull you and me into the void.”

“What is going on here?” James Walters asked, interrupting Vida and Auraman’s telepathic bonding.

“Nothing that you should be concerned about or any of you watching,” Auraman replied, staring directly at the camera while morphing his faceless halo into his normal human features. “Ladies and Gentlemen, citizens of the world, do not be alarmed. The image you see behind me is *not* that of my beloved girlfriend, who is sitting at home with my parents and my friend Cassi, watching this broadcast.

“Indeed, I am Aura’el Jones, son of Glenda and Osiris Jones. Behold.” He pointed his index finger at the LED panel behind him, opening a miniaturized portal, from which Annette, Glenda, Osiris, and Cassi were observed sitting on the living room couch and waving hello at the studio audience.

“I am right here!” Annette exclaimed at the crowd as a flash of bright white light blasted out of the portal, and all four of them materialized onstage, standing right next to Aura’el.

“What you have just heard was an absolute lie,” Annette griped as she stepped forward. “The supposed image of me was a manufactured illusion, a charade, perpetrated by none other than the earth’s greatest philanthropist, the esteemed Alfonso de Leon.” She tuned to Aura’el’s thoughts.

“A sheep in wolf’s clothing, hell-bent on world domination, conquest, and oppression, the earth’s true villain,” Aura’el’s voice was heard rumbling as he stood behind Annette. “Observe.”

He pointed at the front of the stage as the flat LED panel behind him vanished, along with its false Annette image, which continued to scream and shout, “But I am the true Annette! She’s an impostor! Beware! Beware!”

“The true master of all lies.” A flicker of golden light appeared in the air and was immediately transmogrified into a 3-D reflection of Alfonso de Leon, the celebrity known to all as the richest man alive. The image was lifelike and seemed as though it was talking to itself, while

a gigantic translucent orb appeared on top of de Leon's holographic head, streaming video feeds of his actual thoughts. "Listen to and watch this man's own words, his ascent to power, and the malice and cruelty inflicted on friend and foe alike. Understand the wickedness that is Alfonso de Leon."

The orb flashed brightly and then transmitted sharp, vivid images of Alfonso's climb to power as it truly happened from his twisted and perverted perspective and not from the standpoint it was thus far assumed by all. The disclosure of his warmongering and penchant for violence caused the studio audience to sway uncomfortably in their seats as they all falsely surmised he was a man of peace, considered for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

His many philanthropic endeavors were exposed by *his own voice*, magnified by the orb, to be a sham and an outright prelude to enslavement, addiction, and dependency. Video transmissions of his weapon business dealings were particularly enlightening, providing further proof of his meanness, bloodlust, and affinity for all things evil.

The orb was pulsating as it projected Vida's fire-gazing ritual at the hotel and Alfonso's eventual transfiguration into a being endowed with reality-altering powers like that of Auraman, yet the most palpable of all scenes was the one in which he self-analyzed the "son of Satan" theory after learning of Auraman's identity and for which he was clearly heard saying, referring to himself, "You are the only devil you know. There is no other, admit it. You are indeed Satan's truly begotten son, hiding behind charitable organizations, bogus philanthropy, and an angelic-looking face, while all along pocketing untold fortunes from the misery of others.

"This teenager seems to be unstoppable, but the vast majority of the populace will be compelled to abandon their hero if swayed and convinced that their precious Auraman is no other than Lucifer's own begotten offspring, conceived in light and brought forth into our world by none other than the father of all lies." Alas, Alfonso de Leon's true self was stripped naked and exposed for all to see in its despicable raw essence and utter horrid ugliness, a cunning creature steeped in an endless web of lies and made-up plots.

Cries of “cuff him up” and “jail him now” reached a fever pitch as many in the crowd reacted almost violently, learning of the numerous recent hardships they had to endure as a direct result of his contemptible meddling. As the chants increased in intensity and while James signaled the crowd to quiet down, the orb suddenly turned pitch-black, and the lifelike hologram of Alfonso de Leon began to darken as it garnered mass and substance, until it finally coalesced into his normal physical form, infused in glowing black aura and facing the raucous, enraged spectators.

“Cuff him now, you say, you insignificant peasants,” he lashed. “Die as you deserve to.” He unleashed a nasty herd of sharp-toothed gargoyles at the audience, which was turned immediately into golden soot as Auraman waved his hand.

“You again!” he screamed and turned back, facing Auraman. “You ruined me!”

“You ruined yourself!” Auraman roared in response.

“Do you really think you can stop me?” Alfonso groused as all but Auraman and Vida found themselves immobilized, standing still, or glued to their chairs.

“Yes, Alfonso, I can stop you, both you and that darkness inside you.”

“Really.” He sneered. “But you’re nothing but a foolish young brat who is so full of himself.”

“I am much improved since our last encounter.” He smirked.

“Your portrayal of me was brutally accurate, Lumena. Do you really think you can defeat me? Me? The master of all creation?”

“You have gone absolutely mad,” Auraman replied as Alfonso lifted his arms, palms facing forward, hitting Auraman with a huge blast of condensed dark substance, which surrounded him, imprisoning his brilliance in a glowing black shield. “Nice try.” Auraman smiled as he radiated profusely, melting away the black substance and turning it into golden mist.

“Your audacity and self-assurance is your undoing, Auraman.” Alfonso cackled maniacally. “Now die so I may thrive!” he shouted and turned himself into a miniaturized black hole, locking himself directly

and exclusively on Auraman's expanding light, ignoring all others, who watched the ensuing battle with horror and dread.

Aura'el felt as if he was about to be torn apart; he lost his balance and fell to his knees as the vortex swooped him in bit by bit with a staggering explosive power of a thousand planets.

"OMG!" Vida exclaimed in panic, her voice echoing in Aura'el's mind as he was struggling to keep his molecular coherence, fluxing himself ferociously in a desperate attempt to escape the intense gravitational pull.

*This is a very similar vortex to the one that nearly decimated you and I both while I was trapped in the Akashic records with Alfonso!* she yelled telepathically at the straining Auraman while approaching de Leon from behind. *He has successfully manifested it here, on this plane, yet it is exponentially more potent than the one I encountered.*

"I am so sorry, child," she said, her voice breaking down. "This is all my fault. I have never intended to hurt you. Maybe I can reason with him." She stepped closer toward the vortex and stood a few feet behind it.

"Please, sir, I beg of you. Stop this. It's wrong!" she cried.

"Wrong?" Alfonso's creepy voice reverberated throughout the studio as his face protruded out of the spiraling black hole. "Wrong? What do you know about right and wrong, you meddling, reprehensible bitch?" he yelled. "If it wasn't for your idiotic interfering, these gullible peasants would have believed he was the beast and exiled him into irrelevancy, somewhere in the farthest corners of the earth. But no, you had to barge in, you revolting, despicable creature. His death is on your hands. It is your fault" His ethereal blackened face contorted uncontrollably.

"I implore you, Alfonso, please reconsider. You heeded my cry and jumped to my rescue when I was trapped in the void. You battled for my sake. You saved my life. I know there is good in you. I could sense that earlier when we shared that intimate moment. Please, sir, stop this. I beseech you."

Alfonso's deformed face turned expressionless, and then he burst in an all-out malevolent laughter. "You demented emotionless freak. Who in their right mind would ever consider loving you, you detestable

female? You're an aberration of nature, an automaton devoid of feelings and stricken with apathy, a schizoid stripped of warmth and cursed with a heart of stone. You are the most disgusting and vilest beast to ever walk the face of this earth. Even now when you stand here, begging for this abominable creature's life, even now you remain lifeless, soulless, and aloof, unable to comprehend the gravity of the moment or feel pain, love, or empathy, only the cold, pathetic reasoning of your mechanized mind."

Alfonso's image continued to expand and contract out of the vortex as Auraman's light continued to diminish in an alarming pace. "What do you care if this human abhorrence dies or not?" De Leon continued to pounce. "He means nothing to you. None of these people do. Tell them who you really are, you horrid, appalling woman."

"My mental condition is beside the point, sir," Vida finally interjected, looking stoic and unbelievably serene as if she wasn't just publicly humiliated in front of the entire world. She raised her head and stared at Annette and Cassi and then smiled softly at the crowd, and though all were still immobilized and unable to move, there wasn't a single dry eye in the studio. Alfonso's relentless, humiliating attack continued unabated, yet Vida persisted to reason with him, hoping that, by doing so, she might buy Aura'el some necessary time to escape the void but to no avail.

"I owe you my life, sir," she said. "I can give you what you most desire. Let the child live."

"What can you possibly give me that I don't already own or possess?" he asked as his face suddenly disappeared.

"Everlasting eternity, sir, power absolute," she replied and then glanced briefly at Aura'el. "Now, Aura'el, now!"

A flash of light appeared a few feet away from where Vida stood and immediately solidified into her fire-gazing altar, the same altar through which Alfonso entered the Akashic records to save her. Within seconds, Vida dematerialized and merged herself with the black flames dancing on top of the altar. Unlike previous instances, however, the color of the flames changed from its usual black to bright gold as they rapidly fused together to form a circular ring five feet in diameter, hovering the altar.

The circle of golden fire moved around itself with a frightening velocity as the eye of providence suddenly manifested itself in its midst, enclosed by a triangle and surrounded by tranquil rays of light. It was a mystical symbol Alfonso was far too familiar with and used in numerous conjurations and ritual magic, an emblem that had an almost hypnotic immediate impact on him. The eye leaped out of its triangular enclosure and floated a few feet away from the circular ring of fire as it focused its stare at Alfonso's misshapen face, protruding through the miniaturized black hole. "Allllllfooooonnnnsooooooo! Allllllfooooonnnnsooooooo!" Vida cried in a calm, soothing voice, filling the air with an almost trancelike vibration that appeared to stall the black hole somewhat.

"Come to us, Alfonso," she whispered. "Depart from this mundane earthly existence. Forsake this plane of inferiority and mortality. Join us." Her voice echoed. "Join us. Unite with us, the alpha and the omega, the first and the last. Merge with us, Alfonso. Release yourself from this earthly bondage. Commune with the oneness of creation. Enter the godhood of omnipotence. Complete your journey, your transfiguration. Thou art *Dei Omnipotentis*. [You are God Almighty.] Come now. Bond with us. Now."

Vida kept repeating the semisuggestive chants as the eye of providence kept its watch directly at Alfonso's facial image, until it finally disappeared, dissolving itself into the vortex as a shuddering jolt went through its axis. Within seconds, the black hole lost its structural coherence and turned into a thick, condensed black aura, releasing its grip on Auraman; the ethereal matter was swooped right through the eye of providence and shifted farther into the triangle behind it as it finally disappeared without a trace into the circle of fire. The eye's intensified glow subsided somewhat as it moved back toward its triangle enclosure, until it stopped right in its center.

The circular ring of fire began to rotate counterclockwise, picking up speed, as the eye of providence in its midst moved in the opposite direction. The conjured apparition continued its maddening motion, until it finally turned into a formless, glistening halo, devouring the fire-gazing altar below it. "Go in peace, my beloved Vida," Aura'el said as he rose from the ground, still fluxing erratically, until he finally

coalesced back into his human form. The glistening halo hovering in the center of the stage continued to flicker and flit for a while longer, until it finally disappeared into thin air.

Cassi and Annette wept silently as Glenda and Osiris embraced them both in a futile attempt to console and calm them but to no avail. The crowd, which was gradually recuperating from the state of stasis they were under, gazed at Mr. Walters, as well as at Auraman and his out-of-the-blue guests, with utter befuddlement and confusion, not quite sure what to expect next.

One thing was crystal clear, however: the newly discovered Vida Simon lived up to her reputation as a heroine by saving Auraman's life. None was certain, though, if she has just died or simply vanished into the Akashic records, imprisoning herself and Alfonso de Leon in the process, but it was rather evident that she wasn't coming back or that vile brute who was trapped there along with her.

"Yes, my friends," Auraman finally said in an authoritative voice. "You are indeed correct. Ms. Vida Simon is no longer with us. Thankfully, she is not dead but imprisoned, along with Alonso de Leon, in the astral plane or as Mr. Higgins—her research professor—would refer to as 'her personal time realm.' We shall not tire until we find a way to break the handcuffs that hold her hostage to this reprehensible menace to humanity. Clearly"—his voice was breaking—"I owe Vida my life. Had it not been for her courage, valor, and incredible willingness to sacrifice her freedom for my sake, I would have surely perished.

"At this point and because of these unusual and unexpected circumstances," he said and glanced briefly at the audience and then at Mr. Walters, "we must depart and promise to continue where we left off. Dear James"—he turned toward the TNNC anchor—"I thank you for the opportunity you provided me in sharing our story with the entire global community. We look forward to enlighten you all and answer all your remaining questions." He vanished from sight, followed by his parents, Annette, and Cassi.

"But what about planet Nibiru?" yelled a middle-aged woman, looking all panicky and distraught. "Are we all going to die?"

## Chapter Twenty-Five

“No, we are not going to die,” answered the *NY State Daily* as did virtually all other mainstream news outlets; there was a near unanimous agreement that the “Nibiru outburst,” as uttered by the false Annette, was nothing but a made-up fairy tale based on the now debunked and completely discredited 2012 phenomenon. NASA provided the media fact-checkers and investigative reporters with incontrovertible, indisputable proof that planet Earth was in absolutely no danger of an imminent collision with Nibiru or any other star for that matter. Conspiracy theorists remained unconvinced and suggested a cover-up aimed at preventing mass chaos and the total disintegration of our society into anarchy and widespread unrest.

The main topic of discussion, however, remained the unusual turn of events at yesterday’s most watched TV program ever; there was a consensus that the interview turned reality show was unlike any in recorded history. The abrupt and sudden appearance of the renowned Alfonso de Leon and the “good versus evil,” *Clash of the Titans*-type battle that ensued added a sense of further reassurance in Auraman (a.k.a. Aura’el Jones) and his presumed mission to transform our planet, undeterred by the likes of Alfonso or any other would-be villains.

Auraman’s near demise came as an utter shock to many in the press, who perceived him to be omnipotent in the strictest sense of the word but settled for the “nearly omnipotent” characterization of his observed abilities, considering his near disappearance into de Leon’s summoned black hole. The outrageous accusation leveled against him of being

Satan's firstborn was laughed at and caricatured by none other than the pope and many other prominent religious figures. To the faithful, Auraman was somewhat of a mystery. After all, he did not claim to be a deity or any other god or would-be Messiah.

On the contrary, he stressed his humanity as much as he could and ascribed his nearly omnipotent nature to an immense energy overexposure while conceived on the aura fusion altar. "Though my formation was obviously unique," Auraman went on to say, "it can be replicated, culminating in the emergence of a normal human child via the utilization of a measured energy stream, unlike the power blast that was used in my creation. We have not yet been able to decipher Dr. Bearlight's reason for forging a super being, rather than an ordinary baby, but we are certain that his motives were absolutely altruistic as exemplified by the life he led." Believers across the globe, thus, adopted a wait-and-see approach, giving Auraman the benefit of the doubt and promising to keep an open line of communication with him should moral or ethical questions arose because of his human interaction.

Topping the conversation, of course, was the untimely departure of Ms. Vida Simon; editors and commentators alike grappled with the apparent contradiction between her medically diagnosed condition of schizoid personality disorder, which rendered her a virtual automaton plagued with acute apathy and severe emotional coldness, and her remarkable compassion and sense of sacrifice as exemplified by her heroic actions. Though she worked for the greatest villain in human history, unknowingly serving as a springboard for his untold richness, she remained unfazed by the ongoing hoopla that surrounded him. "One might ponder how come Ms. Simon was not aware of the fact that her gift played a crucial part in de Leon's ascendancy to the top of the Forbes list of billionaires," asked the *Berliner Zeitung*, a daily German newspaper.

"Not at all," replied the Danish *Politiken*. "De Leon was well off at the time of her hiring, and she quite likely perceived her job to be that of an adviser who provided him with information detailing, with pinpoint accuracy, the character flaws and strengths of his rivals, information that he could have easily procured from professional psychiatrists and

psychoanalysts. Indeed, she supplied him with anecdotal accounts not available to others. But ultimately, he had to analyze the data and strategize a path to further increase his already vast fortunes. The man was a genius, albeit a wicked one."

"Right they are," concurred the *Times of Israel*. "It's not as if Vida provided de Leon with repeated combinations of lottery winning numbers stolen from the Akashic records, did she? The creep was a business prodigy, period. And she simply enjoyed the relative affluence, stress-free environment, and freedom that came with this once-in-a-lifetime gig."

The faithful, however, considered her heroics as a further testament to the existence of a human soul. "How else can it be explained?" asked the *Christian Daily Monitor*. "In spite of her unique medical impairment, diagnosed detachment, and emotional frigidity, she nevertheless leaped forward to rescue the innocents. If her heroic actions, therefore, are not valid proof for the existence of a 'divinely inspired spark' distinct and apart from the scientifically defined term 'human consciousness,' then the term 'proof' must be redefined."

Annette and Cassi wouldn't have any of the media's commentary about Vida or anything else for that matter. The two were beyond consolation; to them, Vida was not a matter of intellectual debate about genetic predispositions or the transcendence of the human spirit. In the short period they have spent with her, they have both developed a remarkable bond and an outright emotional attachment to her. Though she was surely a pure rationalist and as distant as everyone described her, Vida, nevertheless, inspired the girls with her sense of honesty and her uncanny ability in attentive listening. For Annette, the bond was far more intense and forceful since they formed a psychic connection when they first shook hands, jolting each other with opposing blasts of energy. It was at that moment when Annette caught a glimpse, albeit a short one, of Vida's unfathomable sense of care and compassion.

Father Mulligan too was grieving at her sudden departure and refused to talk to the press; he remained secluded in his residence for nearly two days, fasting and praying for her well-being and safe return. At the end of that week, he organized a vigil commemorating

her bravery and fortitude; though he met her only once, he was deeply touched by her sense of duty, her intellectual wit, and most of all her natural inclination to protect and shield the innocent from harm.

During her commemoration ceremony at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, attended by the congregation and many dignitaries, Father Mulligan couldn't help but cry as he reminisced on the conversation the previous week. "Here she was," he said as his eyes began to tear up, "a current-day doubting Thomas who, despite her agnostic convictions, did not shy from attending Sunday Mass and rejoiced in celebrating faith she long claimed to have lost out of recognition and respect for her friends."

He wept. "My dear Vida, you may have lost your faith, but you kept your humanity fully intact, never forgetting the value of human life even at the cost of your own. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you." He blessed her. "May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

Ample attention, of course, was focused on the startling revelation of Auraman's identity, as well as that of his parents. An army of reporters, bloggers, paparazzi, and social media news mongers descended like locusts on the Rhinefeld Institute as well as West Eightie<sup>th</sup> Street. None was surprised by the disclosure that Osiris and Glenda Jones were Auraman's parents. "It makes perfect sense," declared Wunderwelt ("wonderful world" in English) in his YouTube channel. "Can you think of a better suited couple to conceive a semidemigod? After all, it was Mr. Jones who put Rhinefeld on the map and turned it into a mainstream institute. It was him, as well as his wife, Glenda, who introduced us to the singularity of thought and who acquainted us with Marisol Flora Gonzales and Rabbi Jedidiah Goldstein."

The idea that the barren researchers somehow colluded with the prince of darkness to herald a "new hell" was derided at length as a futile attempt by a deranged man to con the masses into believing his lies based on his misguided conviction that a clear majority of the populace was intellectually inept and gullible enough to fall for his demented pile of falsehoods. "Accusing Mr. and Mrs. Jones of plotting the end of the world is tantamount to blaming the pope for disavowing

Jesus or condemning Christianity. Sheer lunacy, no doubt,” concluded Wunderwelt.

The Rhinefeld Institute was indeed bombarded with numerous requests for exclusives by the entire media elites as interest in aura fusion and its apparent success in creating life, albeit asexually, grew to a fever pitch. The couple declined all requests and posted their aura fusion research on the Rhinefeld website; though they charted a new course in human reproduction, the process remained impractical since the amount of energy necessary to achieve solidification was far too great for even the most accomplished practitioners of the “singularity.” Their research depicted their own limited light solidification ability and its failure to bring about physical permanency.

“Well, what about Auraman?” asked the *Atlantic Star*, a local daily. “Surely, Auraman will lend a helping hand to all those couples who wish to employ this extraordinary method of conception.”

“Of course, he will,” replied the French *Le Figaro*. “But alas, the process of genetic fusion itself is achieved primarily by *trained conscious minds*. Auraman’s function is limited solely to providing the energy boost necessary for solidifying the genetically imbued, fused auras into a human form.”

Some compared Aura’el with the first test-tube baby, who was born on July 25, 1978, as the two concepts appeared somewhat similar—well, at least in theory anyway—since both were controversial and required the merging of genetic material outside of the womb and through external interference. Aura fusion, however, was perceived to be a pioneering attempt in manipulating “genetic energy,” a process that appeared to have succeeded where more traditional fertility treatments have failed. The energy symbiosis was unique to humans as it necessitated the mutual blending of one conscious mind with another via their human auras.

For days, Auraman’s name was brought up repeatedly not only in the context of facilitating aura fusion but also in nearly every other imaginable facet of life. There was a laundry list of requests thrown at him from every possible direction, an endless and exhausting catalog of tasks presented by every imaginable group on the planet. Some were

so outlandish that they were laughable. "I am not Santa Claus, nor am I a wish-granting genie," he was quoted as saying to the *NY Observer*. "I have no plans to replace either one of them. I respectfully ask all of you to tone it down a notch and take a deep breath. All requests will be considered, though we must proceed with caution and consider all possible ramifications resulting from initiating all this life-transforming changes."

It was as if humanity won the biggest Powerball lottery jackpot in recorded history, and everyone wanted their fair share; the perception was that Auraman was the most startling gift humanity could have ever hoped for, and it was indeed incumbent on him to bring about worldwide prosperity and serenity. Even Aura'el's closest friends jumped into the fray and bombarded him with trivial day-to-day entreaties, which he gently declined. "Like I said to the *Observer*," he told Margarit, "my mission is all-encompassing and consists mainly in protecting our world from self-annihilation and charting a new course for a better, prosperous future, a task that will be achieved jointly with the earth's leaders. If you think I am here to whip up Ferraris and other frivolous toys for every man woman and child, then you've got another thing coming."

"You are absolutely right," Margarit concurred. "I am just so thankful that you saved my life. Saving a life is the greatest gift you can possibly give to anyone. I think many of us have forgotten that because of sheer excitement of winning the national lottery." She snickered. "By the way, are you coming back to school?"

"I don't know yet," he replied. "Maybe, though quite frankly I don't think I need to, but I do enjoy the camaraderie."

The Auraman hoopla continued unabated for nearly a week and then, like a thunder striking out of a blue sky, was pushed aside altogether as NASA—along with many other astronomers, astrophysicists, and stargazers—confirmed the utmost worst: "Planet Nibiru was indeed on a collision course with Earth. Scheduled impact: December 21 at 5:00 p.m." Armageddon was, alas, fast approaching, and a total civil meltdown was expected to ensue as soon as the news sank in.

"What are our options?" President Collins asked Aura'el and his parents at a hastily called meeting.

"We are still attempting to ascertain the validity of the information available to us," Osiris replied. "Clearly, there was no indication of an impending planetary collision up until yesterday, yet here we are."

"Something is totally off," Glenda noted. "It simply doesn't make any sense. Planet Nibiru popped out of nowhere right at our doorstep as if by magic."

"Magic?" the president asked.

"Well, sir, for a lack of a better word," Osiris clarified. "Unquestionably, the planet did not travel from its original location, some thirty-nine light-years away. Its abrupt appearance in its current location suggests teleportation of some sort in a manner not yet known to us. Clearly, there is an intelligence behind this apparent and monumental feat."

He went on. "The amount of energy necessary to dematerialize an entire celestial body of that magnitude and reconstitute it in another point in space dozens of light-years away is simply mind numbing. Doubtless, the Malakahrians are out to destroy us." He sighed.

"Who are the Malakahrians?" the president asked as did his defense secretary Gen. Melvin Clifford.

"We do not know," Aura'el interjected. "Dr. Bearlight warned us about them before his unexpected departure. I was attacked twice by a presence we assume is directly connected to them. The first attack was launched from the Akashic records, where Ms. Simon originally encountered it and was overpowered by its menacing influence, attempting to kill me remotely. It appears that the same entity might have found its way to Alfonso de Leon and used him too in another murderous attempt on my life at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola and finally at the TNNC interview. We assume therefore that those attacks were launched by none other than the Malakahrians, who seem to dread us humans as if we were a malignant disease that must be entirely wiped out and fully eradicated."

"What could possibly cause these beings to fear us?" General Clifford pondered out loud.

"My manifestation at the Empire State Building and its accompanying unique energy signature might have reverberated into the farthest corners of the universe," Aura'el suggested, "and may have been picked up by a variety of intelligent beings who quite possibly perceive me, or us, as a threat. In her attempt to gather more information about the identity of the Malakahrians, Vida stated that she found herself in an 'infinite stillness, a spaceless concoction of timeless equilibrium, the birthplace of matter, energy, and thought,' and couldn't quite explain what she meant by that. She also noted that the voices she heard begged their empress, Mali Absolutis, to 'save them from this corporeal defilement,' clearly in direct reference to humanity. Consequently, whether we are correct in our assumption that we are threatened by the Malakahrians, whom Dr. Bearlight warned us about, or by some other entity, it is evident we have been targeted for total annihilation."

"Is this the end then?" the president asked with a perturbed look on his face. "Are you suggesting those idiotic 2012 end-of-the-world predictions are true?"

"Are you telling us that nothing can be done?" the general inquired in his strong baritone voice.

"No, absolutely not. I am not saying that at all," Aura'el replied decisively.

"With all due respect, sir," Glenda interjected, "we do not succumb our research to mythological blackmail. Nibiru is here not because of some ancient calendar calculations or some other tall tales but because some very advanced intelligence transported it right at our doorstep."

"What can be done to prevent the approaching calamity then?" the defense minister insisted.

"I can solidify a planet-deflecting device, the Aurablasteron, with a combined energy output far greater than that of Earth's entire nuclear arsenal. Its pulse discharge will divert Nibiru from its current collision course trajectory by generating an immense gravitational push while reconstituting its molecular makeup, shrinking it down to a miniaturized size until it is no bigger than a stone."

"You are joking," the president mumbled, his facial expression changing to that of utter disbelief.

"It sounds so far fetched I cannot even draw it in my mind," said the general.

"Gentlemen," Aura'el reiterated, "any thought that can be formulated and clearly drawn on a piece of paper can be manifested into being and brought to life. My parents advise caution, however, and insist that every endeavor I take conforms to my potential energy capacity, or I will be irreparably harmed. Frankly, I am not quite sure what that threshold is. But be that as it may, Earth's survival outweighs any harm that might befall me, even at the cost of my existence." He stared directly at his parents.

"When did you come out with that plan?" Osiris inquired.

"Ever since we became aware of the possibility that Nibiru might indeed bring about our extinction. I was considering several options, one of which was the solidification of a fleet of spaceships big enough to transfer the entire Earth's population to Alpha Centauri, some 4.37 light-years away. But I believe, however, that the preferable option should be saving our Earth. What do you think, Mr. President?" Aura'el questioned.

"I think we would all turn up dead if it wasn't for you. I am aware this question was asked before, but are you sure you are not a messenger of God?" he then asked unexpectedly, startling Aura'el.

"I do not know how to answer that, sir. I have no idea. I recognize you are a man of faith, but quite frankly, I don't think that my being here has anything to do with God and neither is the approaching doomsday planet."

"Be that as it may," the president countered, "we are fortunate and blessed by your presence. Will you be needing any assistance from us?"

"No, sir, that will not be necessary," Aura'el commented. "It is imperative, however, to keep calm while the Aurablasteron is being erected in the upper exosphere. According to most calculations, Nibiru will enter our solar system on the morning of December 20. On that same day, at about three in the afternoon, the deflector will be activated, and the approaching planet will change its course as it will gradually diminish in size until it is totally disintegrated."

"Can you please elaborate about how this so-called Aurablasteron works?" the defense minister inquired.

"Yes, sure," Aura'el answered. "This contraption is basically a white hole inducer or generator, conceived by the singularity of thought, of course. It's ignited and amplified by my aura, creating a colossal artificial gravitational push while interfacing with the planet on a molecular level and shrinking it to oblivion. As noted earlier, it is likely that I might be injured or harmed while dispensing such an incredible amount of energy."

"Wow!" the president finally exclaimed as the general appeared disoriented. "What else do you have in store for us, young man?"

"It's a question we will answer jointly as soon as this menace is behind us. In the interim, please relay my message of peace and holiday greetings to the entire world community as I will be spending the next few days lighting up the skies."

Indeed, the following day, President Collins called up a news conference and appealed for calm and order as he further elaborated on the steps that have been taken by Auraman to protect the planet. Images of the advancing calamity resulted in a measured degree of worldwide civil unrest, which tapered off quickly as soon as a spectacular light show appeared across the skies all over the globe. Clearly, Earth's defender was engaged in a concerted effort, assembling his Aurablasteron, as the heavens were filled with metallic objects hovering in unison and finally converging and aligning themselves into an octahedron configuration.

A detailed observation of the structure unveiled a breathtaking sight of mythical proportions; the apparatus was disseminating continuous slivers of multicolored light breaking off its surface. It was hypnotic in its appearance and had an acute mystical effect on all who gazed upon it as it was clearly visible to the naked eye. The object's eight symbols engraved on its eight faces (the universal flower of life, Metatron's cube, the infinity symbol, the tree of life, the Buddhist endless knot, the symbol of the ankh, the shriyantra, and the triskelion) exuded soothing tranquility and composure; its beauty was so captivating that many felt compelled to ogle at it for hours.

“Come on, son.” Osiris nudged Aura’el while he, Glenda, and Annette were sitting on their apartment building’s roof and staring at the octahedron. “What have you injected this machine with? It seems to have an almost instantaneous spellbinding impact on all who stare at it. It’s nearly addictive.”

“It’s the symbols that are inscribed on its eight faces, Dad. They encapsulate hope and infinite power. Gazing at the various markings as the device rotates around its axis induces a transcendent global consciousness of hope and boundless promise in succeeding to defeat the malevolent intelligence heading our way.”

“We certainly see proof of that all around us. It’s truly extraordinary,” Glenda chimed in.

“Aurora and I did our annual department store window-viewing tour, and it is absolutely astounding to watch the crowds—whether at Macy’s, Bloomingdale’s, Saks Fif<sup>th</sup> Avenue, or Barneys—immerse themselves in the Christmas holiday festivities and conduct themselves as if we do not face oblivion. You didn’t turn us all into droidlike automatons to prevent mass hysteria, did you?” Annette inquired jokingly.

“No, not at all,” Aura’el acknowledged. “I think that, in the last two months, there has been a monumental public shift in understanding the true meaning of the word ‘possibility.’ It is as if the word ‘impossible’ has been struck from record, and nowadays everything is within the realm of possibility, even the suspension and stoppage of a would-be colliding star.”

“That is indeed truly amazing,” Glenda affirmed. “Humanity trusts in your ability to avert this approaching disaster, this looming catastrophe.”

“I am hopeful it remains that way,” Aura’el noted. “Failure is not an option.”

“I understand that the activation of the Aurablasteron is to be televised and transmitted via satellites, correct?” Annette asked.

“Yes,” Aura’el replied. “That is correct. It is scheduled for tomorrow at midday as soon as Nibiru enters our solar system. My guess is that

viewership for that event will most likely surpass that of my interview with Mr. Walters.”

“We are alarmed by the possibility that you might be irreparably harmed,” Glenda said as her eyes began to tear up.

“I know, Mom. It is nothing like anything I have ever attempted before, and the device does require an immense aura infusion to become fully activated and operational. But I think I’ll be able to withstand the transference. I may become weakened by it but not significantly impeded or harmed. Anyways, I’ll be telepathically linked to you throughout the ordeal.”

“We’ll watch you from here,” she pronounced.

“And I’ll be watching all of you from there,” he said and pointed at the direction of the octahedron.

At exactly nine the following morning, they all reconvened at the apartment building’s rooftop for a farewell party of sorts, to which many others were invited to wish Aura’el good luck and express words of encouragement and support. There was Cassi, of course, as well as Margarit Tomlinson and her boyfriend, Leonardo; Marco, his friend; Bernadette, the exchange student from Paris; Josef Muller; Darrel; and many other students.

Glenda and Osiris were stunned by the fact that none of them exhibited any doubt in the derailment of the approaching Nibiru, saving Earth in the process. All were absolutely convinced that Aura’el would be successful in stopping the colliding star in its course. “Smack the damn thing out of its path,” said Marco.

“Yeah,” Margarit concurred. “Turn it into golden dust.”

“Better yet, blow it to a million pieces, like Four<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks!” Leonardo yelled.

“I thank you for your trust in me,” Aura’el gushed. “I am grateful for your words of encouragement as well as your friendship. Though you are keenly aware of who I truly am, you do not shy away from my company and treat me as one of your own without fear or aversion. I commend you for your support of my family and for so eloquently handling the media standing by your doorsteps. I must go now. I love you all. We’ll meet again soon.” He vanished into thin air.

Glenda wept as did Cassi and Annette. The guys did not fare any better and shed some tears too as the enormity of the task ahead has finally sunk in. There was an imminent battle ahead that must be won, or they would all perish. The faith of the world rested in Auraman's hands as multitudes gathered across the world in town squares and city halls, watching breathlessly as the drama unfolded in front of their eyes in stark, vivid colors, transmitted through satellites positioned not far away from the Aurablasteron.

At about midday, planet Nibiru was spotted entering our solar system and picking up velocity in its course toward its final destination. Oddly enough, though, it passed by very close to Pluto and Neptune, yet no real disturbances were observed or registered on those planets. It was as if Nibiru was an intercontinental ballistic missile programmed to hit a specific target—Earth. Pondering on how it was possible that Pluto and Neptune were not affected by Nibiru's gravitational pull despite its proximity was pointless. The advancing planet had a mind of its own, no doubt, as if powered and guided by a living, breathing consciousness.

When it finally whooshed by Saturn, Auraman was observed about a hundred yards from the Aurablasteron as he hit its engraved symbols with his starlike beaming effulgence. As if on cue, the markings pulsated and shone brightly for nearly a minute as they gradually began to melt into the octahedron faces, which in turn tilted and assumed a horizontal position. The octahedron began to rotate around itself in a full circular motion, picking up speed until it eventually disappeared. A loud, thunderous explosion was heard across the sky as a white hole suddenly appeared, expanding rapidly in planet's Nibiru direction, to the utter awe and astonishment of the billions of observers below. White holes (i.e., reverse black holes) are considered completely theoretical mathematical concepts that have never been observed, yet here it was, in all its magnificent glory, humanity's last hope of escaping the approaching Armageddon.

The engraved markings, which originally dissolved into the octahedron when it was activated, reappeared scattered around the white hole surface, flashing brightly, pounding and throbbing like beating hearts. Its image was reminiscent of that of a star being born,

yet the startling phenomenon was completely devoid of any matter and exerted the gravitational push of a thousand planets; it was so shocking to the senses that many fell on their knees in prayer and quiet meditation as if the gates of heaven suddenly opened. The rapidly advancing planet was all but forgotten as the spectators reveled in this semidivine spectacle, which emitted a sense of boundless strength and protection, along with its blinding, gleaming light.

Alas, within minutes of its formation, it became clear that the white hole had absolutely no impact on the fast-accelerating Nibiru; on the contrary, its velocity increased even further as its image grew larger in magnitude and size. His strength depleted and power waned, Auraman flashed himself back onto his apartment building rooftop as his parents and friends greeted him with looks of fear and utter panic. Death was imminent. The fowl stench of extinction was in the air, and they could all sense it, as well as the multitudes watching the menacing Nibiru crossing Jupiter. Unquestionably, Earth was about to be decimated in less than a few hours.

"I'll be suspending time!" Aura'el yelled. "There isn't a moment to lose. I am not sure how long I'll be able to keep Earth in suspended animation. I must think of something quick before Nibiru hits us. Mom, Dad, you're coming with me. Annette, you stay with the others."

"Where are we going, son?" Osiris asked.

"Times Square," he replied. "Times Square." He then pointed his finger at his friends, tossing a time bomblet in their direction, which froze them solid on impact.

Scenes of utter chaos were observed all around the globe as Earth began its gradual disintegration, its surface floating around, clouds of debris rising high, and the atmosphere wandering off. Gigantic earthquakes shook Tokyo, New Delhi, Rome, and LA, followed by huge tsunami waves, all of which froze in midmotion as Auraman cast his time-suspending bomblets at the towering waters, the shaking grounds, the falling mountains, the erupting volcanoes, the collapsing high-rises, and the monstrous showers of broken glass and fallen waste. All was caught in a time freeze blanket that extended to the farthest corners of the earth.

“What shall I do?” he cried in desperation to his parents while tossing his mini-time-bombs all around the NYC skyline, halting the disintegrating towers from falling and crashing down to the ground and turning the continuous stream of broken glass into golden soot.

“I don’t know, son!” Glenda howled in anguish.

“We just don’t know,” Osiris reiterated.

“I refuse to accept that this is the end. There must be a way, something we are overlooking. Think, Mom, think!” he howled, his voice breaking.

The look on Aura’el’s face was that of absolute horror. It became clearer by the moment that Earth was gasping its last breath and that Nibiru was about to destroy it and, with it, all humanity. Distraught and completely demoralized, he cried out to his parents and friends and expressed his love and care for all of them. “I would have turned all humanity into specks of light as I did at the church, but keeping you all in that state for a prolonged period is tantamount to a death sentence. It is simply irreversible. I am so sorry, but I must go now,” he said as he prepared to put humanity into a state of unconscious bliss, taking away its innate fear of death. He thus waved his hand, ready to cast a highly charged sound wave that would have rendered all humanity insensible.

*Tipsy.* He suddenly heard Annette’s soft voice echoing in his mind. *Tipsy,* Annette whispered again from her semisleepy state of timelessness. *The shield of incorporeality, save us.*

“Wow!” Aura’el exclaimed in excitement as it dawned on him that the answer was right there in front of him all along. And strangely enough, he did overlook it.

“But of course!” he shouted excitedly. “What’s good for the darn cat is good for us all. I love you, Annette.”

*I know. I love you too,* she telepathically replied.

“But it will surely kill you!” Glenda wailed as she chimed into the couple’s telepathic chatter. “It will most certainly kill you. Your energy is finite, son, and has already been significantly depleted. This is nothing like handling a limousine, a cat, and a few people.”

“We are talking about the entire planet and all its inhabitants,” his father interjected. “The energy output for such a task is massive.

It is beyond your current capacity. You'll be destroyed." His voice was cracking in pain.

"I have no other choice," he replied emphatically. "I must do this, no matter the consequence to my own survival. This is quite likely why Dr. Bearlight has endowed me with these powers—to save humanity."

"I know, son, but I can't let you go!" Glenda cried.

"Go in peace," Osiris said and broke down in tears. "Do what you must, son."

"Stand aside," he commanded. Aura'el, a.k.a. Auraman, stood in the center of Times Square, surrounded by fallen skyscrapers and a sea of glass, suspended in time and standing motionless as if waiting to revert to their original position. Remarkable as it may seem, this stillness of motion appeared to have exuded, quite unexpectedly, a sense of hope rather than that of certain death and ruination.

He took another look at his parents beside him and then exploded upward like a star that has gone supernova. A mushroom cloud of sheer, unadulterated aura erupted through the NYC afternoon skies, quickly ascending into the atmosphere, continuing upward toward the mesosphere, and finally exiting the exosphere. It then dispersed in all directions, until it blanketed the entire Earth in a bright golden halo, further expanding in the direction of the moon and beyond, all the way to Saturn.

As the planet and its occupants began to lose their mass, Earth itself started to grow at an unimaginable rate as if some hidden force blew ethereal substance into it akin to air blown inside a balloon. It grew so vast that the soon-to-collide Nibiru appeared as though it suddenly shrank significantly. Across the globe, all things—animate and inanimate alike—turned incorporeal, ghostly versions of their former selves and light as feathers; but while the inanimate remained earthbound, all animate beings appeared to be ascending into the heavens, shining brightly like torches, and consciously awakened by the blast of the shield.

Telepathic cries of joy echoed strongly and were heard across the farthest corners of the universe—cries of lives saved and a planet rescued. The fear of impending doom evaporated entirely as Nibiru emerged

miniaturized and nonthreatening as if it was about to be swallowed by a gigantic star many times its size. Indeed, as it continued its collision course, Nibiru has gone incorporeal as soon as it came in contact with Earth's protective halo; it then continued its soft decent, passing through numerous floating human torches, who smiled and poked fun at the star, which moments earlier threatened their very existence. The asomatous, disembodied planet dashed toward the Earth's core, shifting gently through its mantle, outer core, and eventually its inner core, completing its journey and exiting through the Pacific Ocean back into the atmosphere till it abruptly fizzled and disappeared.

Still suspended in a state of discarnate flux, humanity cheered its newfound hero, thanking him for his valor, compassion, and sense of duty. Cries of "Thank you Auraman, protector of Earth" and "Long live Auraman! Thanks for rescuing our lives" reverberated throughout the disembodied earth as it gradually shrank back to its normal size while its shield of incorporeality began to wane, causing matter to coalesce and fall back into its previous state of time freeze.

Within minutes, the shield of incorporeality vanished completely, and Auraman appeared, lying lifeless, on the ground in the midst of Times Square, surrounded by motionless, crumbling buildings and immobilized but conscious New Yorkers, who were shocked to realize that their hero just paid the ultimate price for their rescue. He died.

"Aura'el! Aura'el!" Glenda wept as she rushed toward her son's deceased body.

"My son. My son." Osiris's voice cracked as he leaned over Aura'el.

Grief stricken and heartbroken, Glenda laid her hands over her son's body, bathing him with her light in a desperate attempt to infuse him with revitalizing energy and revive him; Osiris joined her, and together, they have successfully produced a significant power pulse and directed it toward their son's solar plexus but to no avail.

Aura'el remained dead and unresponsive, and the grieving couple held their child's hands, ready to disembark since the temporary time stillness was about to expire, resulting in a maddening chaos of collapsing high-rises destroying everything in their path. They would,

of course, transport as many bystanders to safety and away from harm as soon as they returned.

Thus, as they began to flux, they noticed a sharp glow emanating from Aura'el's forehead, which grew rapidly, covering his entire body within seconds. "What is happening?" Glenda asked. "Are you doing this? We must get out of here fast. This whole place is about to collapse."

"No, I am not doing this," Osiris replied. "But something is clearly happening. Are you thinking what I am thinking?"

"What are you talking about?" she yelled. "His body is still lifeless, and our telepathic connection is completely severed."

"Observe, Glenda. Look!" he hollered and pointed at Aura'el's head as a ball of white light sprang out of his third eye and began to hover his body, expanding in size and density, while six other shining globes erupted out of Aura'el's solar plexus and ascended into the air, floating in harmony across and around Times Square, about twenty feet above ground.

"I can't believe it!" Osiris shouted. "It's Dr. Bearlight! It's Dr. Bearlight!" He went on screaming as the ball of white light solidified into the notorious doctor.

"Dr. Bearlight!" Glenda's voice erupted as she rushed toward him and embraced him warmly.

"What a surprise!" Osiris exclaimed as he too charged in his direction, shaking both his hands.

"So good to finally see you, Doctor. Is it really you?" Glenda asked, her eyes still tearing up. "Whatever happened to you, Doctor?"

"Where have you been all these years?" Osiris inquired.

"Nearby," he said. "Nearby." He pointed at Aura'el's body lying on the ground. "Hurry, there isn't a moment to lose. She is here—Mali Absolutis, the Malakahrian empress. She is coming. She'll be in here shortly. We are all in grave danger. We must awake Aura'el. He's our only hope."

"Awake him?" Glenda gasped. "But he's dead. My beautiful boy is dead," she mumbled, her voice cracking again.

"No, he is not," the doctor replied confidently and assertively. "Aura'el is not dead. He is simply deactivated."

“Deactivated?” they both cried out with a look of absolute puzzlement strewn across their faces.

“Yes, my friends, your son is light transformed, equipped with a self-sustained, finite energy quotient. Overexertion of his power results in a virtual shutdown that appears as death. As you have already noticed, Aura’el is not indestructible and can be hurt or even killed. We cohabit his consciousness.”

“We?” Glenda stammered.

“Yes, I and the other six thought forms that were called on to solidify him at the time of his birth, imbuing him with energy supreme and the light of creation. They are right there,” he said and pointed at the six globes circling the square and awaiting his signal as they morphed and assumed their godly forms, looking as majestic and exalted as Glenda and Osiris could recall.

“We will reignite Aura’el’s aura,” the doctor said, “and infuse him with a far greater capacity to withstand Mali Absolutis’s wrath, though I am doubtful she can be stopped.”

“Who is this empress, and what does she want with us?” Osiris questioned the doctor, who appeared to phase out slightly. “Why is she hell-bent on destroying us?”

Dr. Bearlight sighed and looked up into the heavens as if expecting a thunderbolt to strike him. “The Malakahrians are semi-incorporeal humanoids who initially unraveled the secret of light solidification thousands of years ago. They are beings who, to this day, still drift between a state of physical existence and incorporeality. Light solidification is a state of existence that allows for cohabitation of the material and immaterial, a knowledge they guard with their very lives. Yet despite the prolonged time that has passed since the concept was identified and observed, the Malakahrians never quite accomplished a state of permanent cohesion that will enable them to exist like—”

“Aura’el,” Glenda blurted.

“Correct,” the doctor replied. “I must have come across the idea of light solidification while traveling in the Imaginarum during one of my very deep meditations. With the help of the singularity of thought, the

process was perfected, and Aura'el was born, a perfect balance between matter and incorporeality."

"I don't quite understand, Doctor," Osiris interrupted. "Aren't the Malakahrians the progenitors of the singularity? How is it possible that they haven't yet reached a state of existential equilibrium?"

"I am not quite sure," he answered. "But what is beyond dispute is that, at the time of Aura'el's conception, when he emerged from the aura fusion altar, shock waves reverberated throughout the universe but were too weak to fall under their radar or that of other psychic entities. It was I who caught a future glimpse of Earth being attacked by the Malakahrians' empress and her army of shadows, thereby deciding, at that moment, to turn Aura'el into a mirror image of his would-be nemesis and imbue him with godlike abilities. No, Aura'el is *not* a Malakahrian, but he does possess their powers. So do you, to a drastically lesser degree."

The doctor completely phased out and disappeared for nearly a minute, only to reappear floating several inches above the ground in a semisolid form. He went on. "The Malakahrians view humans as inferior beasts who hold an innate potential for wreaking havoc throughout the universe and thus unworthy of the singularity's blessings. They are keenly aware of Earth's history and consider our capacity for change as the main reason for our extermination. They view unpredictability of character, as well as the inconsistency of choice between good and evil, as irredeemable flaws, thus worthy of one solution—complete and utter annihilation."

The doctor went on. "Humanity is not alone in the universe. But whereas all other species can be clearly characterized as good or evil, mankind is neither. Its behavioral traits are erratic as they are capricious. Humanity's lack of absolute values espouses what the Malakahrians refer to as the 'acute unknown,' a state of uncertainty they will not tolerate and view as mortal threat, particularly now that Lumena Superioris (i.e., Aura'el, a prime and flawless embodiment of the material and immaterial permanent cohabitation) has catapulted humanity into the path of omnipotence. Indeed, they view Lumena as a perfect specimen, the ultimate example of the harmonious state of being they so desperately

aspire to attain, which ironically was achieved by us, a ‘lesser’ species. In spite of his perfection, however, Lumena is considered a ‘tainted’ (by his humanity) lethal threat, and the Malakahrian empress, therefore, will not rest until he is extinguished and, with him, the entire human race.”

“So it was her all along,” Glenda noted as she stared at the six conjured deities above.

“Right you are, dear Glenda. Her attempt to eliminate Aura’el began less than twenty-four hours after the Peryton rescue. His energy signature was clearly felt throughout the Malakahrians’ home planet. Mali encountered Ms. Vida Simon in the Akashic records and, through her, attempted to tear Aura’el apart and pull him into the void. She then imbued Mr. de Leon with a reality-altering black aura and the power to invoke a black hole. Yet that attempt was unsuccessful as well. And finally, she conjured a clone of the planet Nibiru but failed to anticipate the immensity of Auraman’s shield of incorporeality. Rest assured this divine goddess will not rest until Lumena is vanquished, and Earth is obliterated.”

The doctor then began to flicker and flash profusely, losing his form coherence entirely and turning ethereal. “It is time,” he said, waving his hands across the suspended scenery, restoring Times Square to normal, and then ascended in the air, where he remained hovering a few feet above the six godly thought forms.

Within seconds, Dr. Bearlight transformed into a huge flame-shaped halo, which gently irradiated and brightened the square surroundings. Oddly enough, the image did not exude an overabundance of energy as much as it produced a sense of calm and peace. It was, however, undeniably composed of some sort of mysterious undefined substance, a type of which both Glenda and Osiris were unfamiliar with, though it was unavoidably reminiscent of the divine.

“Behold,” they heard the doctor say, “the first light of creation.” One by one, the six godly thought forms swooped into the flame-shaped halo, which extended in size and intensity as it began to descend toward Aura’el’s floating body, until it enveloped him completely. The summoned godly images formed a hexagon around his figure and then raised their hands, palms forward, and thrust their golden white “energy of essence” into his third eye and solar plexus. The process continued

for nearly six minutes, until the energy-blasting deities turned back into shimmering spheres, disappearing into Aura'el's expanding, glowing aura. The flame-shaped halo continued to glisten for a while longer, until it finally began to dissolve into Aura'el's body.

*Farewell, my friends.* The doctor's voice echoed in their minds. *I shall always be near you. All is as it should be.* The natural order of things across the planet was restored as if the near collision with Nibiru never happened.

"But what shall become of us, Doctor?" Glenda yelled "The empress's wrath is upon us. How are we to defeat her?"

"The void of thought infinitum," they heard him say. "The void of thought infinitum." The flame-shaped halo completely disappeared.

Within seconds, Aura'el's body landed softly on the ground, right by his parents' side, as the two anxiously leaned over him. "Aura'el," Glenda whispered. "Aura'el, can you hear me?"

"Yes, Mother, I can," he said as he opened his eyes, smiling at the two of them.

"You're back! You're back!" she hollered and hugged him as he rose from the ground.

"How are you feeling, son?" Osiris asked as he too embraced him, pulling him close to his heart.

"Good as new, Dad, good as new."

"Are you aware of what just happened, son?" Glenda inquired.

"Yes, of course, Mom. I owe it all to Dr. Bearlight. I told you he was nearby."

"Nearer than any of us could ever anticipate," Osiris said, smiling at the two of them.

A small group of onlookers gathered around them and began to clap and cheer. "Thank you, Auraman. Thanks for saving our lives and rescuing our planet." The cheering and wild applause continued as some approached him hesitantly and shook his hands, and others saluted him as if he were a military veteran hero.

"We must go now," he said. "I thank you all for your warm and kind words. I shall be seeing you again soon." He vanished from sight, followed by his parents.

The three rematerialized at the rooftop of their West End apartment building and were immediately surrounded by their friends and loved ones, who sprang back to life as soon as Dr. Bearlight restored Earth to its former self. “Aura’el!” Annette shrieked as she jumped at him, planting a passionate kiss on his lips. The others shook his hands and patted him on his back, wishing him well and congratulating him on his bravery.

“Look who’s here,” Annette said as she pointed at Tipsy and then exploded into hysterical laughter.

“We’ve come full circle, Tipsy,” Aura’el said and picked the purring little feline, which he “condemned” to a prolonged and extended lifespan.

“So what happens next?” Cassi asked.

“We celebrate,” he replied succinctly. “We celebrate and cherish our time together, giving thanks to our newly revitalized home and preparing for the battle ahead.”

“It seems like we’re about to cut our festivities short!” Margarit exclaimed as she pointed toward the heavens. A cloud of pitch darkness was seen forming rapidly, gaining in strength and size, reminiscent of one of Alfonso de Leon’s conjured images. The puffed mass of steam and smoke was brewing like a bubbling cauldron, shooting out lightning bolts and spewing a fiery mist from all directions. Its contractions and gyrations continued for a short while longer until it was finally transfigured into a bright, sparkling star.

“Wow!” Glenda yelled. “It’s the Malakahrians’ home planet. How is it here?”

“It’s not the actual planet, Mom. It is one of its many reflections,” Aura’el answered.

“It is so beautiful,” Margarit noted as her eyes lit in astonishment.

“Hey, look at the ray coming out of its center!” Leonardo shouted out.

“It’s coming right at us!” Annette howled.

“Take cover,” Osiris commanded.

“There is no need to, Dad,” Aura’el interjected. “It’s Mali Absolutis, the Malakahrian empress.”

The condensed, luminescent ray hit the roof and instantaneously disappeared as a breathtaking enchantress appeared in front of the bedazzled group, standing behind Aura'el. The enchantress's beauty was stupefying in its splendor, an image so breathtakingly unique that they all felt compelled to bow in her presence. Her long white hair moved and glittered as if it were alive, her hypnotic eyes were the color of the rainbow, and her pouting lips resembled that of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Her body was a sight to behold, translucent and ethereal in nature, devoid of solid matter, and lacking any defined, recognizable organs yet solid enough and distinctly different from that of a ghostly apparition, similar to an unstable combination of a vacuous pile of molecules and solidified light. The siren-looking empress was wearing a celestial flowing tunic with a moving infinity symbol in its center, which pulsated steadily as if it were her living, beating heart.

Mali floated gently a few inches above the ground and smiled at Aura'el, ignoring all the others. "Come, Lumena," she said. "It's time to go."

"Where are we going, *Mother?*" he asked as his parents and friends listened with utter shock and amazement.

"We're going home, son," she whispered and pointed at the effulgent star above.

"Home?" Aura'el mumbled.

"Yes, Lumena, home," she said and pointed her index finger at his direction.

Aura'el was suddenly transformed into Auraman, shining ever brightly that even Annette had to raise her hands and shield her eyes from his brightness. He hovered for a few seconds and then abruptly assumed the shape of the Malakahrian home planet as did Mali Absolutis, who whooshed herself toward the star above, followed by Aura'el, until they both disappeared inside it.

"Aura'el!" Glenda howled. "Aura'el!"

But Aura'el was gone, leaving behind a trail of flickering golden dust.



