

Alister and Allison suddenly found themselves standing on a hill overlooking a small stone bridge that spanned a river.

One moment, Allison had been in a dorm room safe within the confines of the University of Kansas campus. The next moment, she was standing outside bathed in bright sunlight as a brisk October wind of the Italian countryside blasted her through the thin cloth that adorned her body. The sounds of battle harassed her ears, the sharp odor of burning wood and the smell of blood assailed her nostrils.

She grabbed onto Alister's arm to prevent herself from falling over, the inertia of her body propelling her forward from her previous lunge in the dorm room.

The scene was chaos. Steel clashed, and men screamed in agonizing pain. All around her, the broken and bleeding bodies of soldiers littered the ground, their limbs torn and slashed, their intestines oozing from their stomachs turning the frosty earth to blood-soaked mud. In the valley near the river below, an army stood over countless dead bodies. Some soldiers still fought in small clusters around the blood-stained waters of the river.

"What did you do?" Allison nearly screamed at Alister. After regaining her balance, she took up position behind him, as if using him as a shield, desperately clinging to his arm with both hands. She frantically looked around in fear.

"Oh my God, we're gonna die!"

"Calm down," said Alister with a confidence he didn't really feel. "We're not gonna die."

"They can't hurt us, can they?" he asked aloud, looking up toward the sky, seeking reassurance for himself as much as for Allison.

"No. You do not reside in this plane of existence physically," said the Lens. The Lens was no longer visible, but Alister and Allison could hear it in their minds. "You are but a shadow, a mental projection into the temporal plane."

"Wow, kinda like Scrooge then, you know, when the ghosts of Christmas took him to see the past and future, so nobody can see us. This is the shadow of what once was. It's like watching a movie," Alister said to Allison.

Alister's statement was not true, of course. The Lens had merely stated it had projected the consciousness of the humans in its charge into a holographic representation. The holographic representation served to limit the energy output. It was far easier to transport streams of consciousness and to coordinate the experiences encountered back to the physical forms left in the present, rather than to transport physical bodies. With the stream of consciousness thus configured, the transport of their physical selves would not have added to the experience in any meaningful way. The holographic images of the two students were very much visible to those around them, giving them a semi-transparent, ghostlike appearance. However, the Lens was not programmed to offer unsolicited information to correct the misrepresentations of fact from its operator. It made no response to Alister's proclamation.

Allison calmed quickly as the realization that they were in no danger sunk in. Looking at herself and at Alister now, she could see that they were semi-transparent. The experience was uncanny, and the gruesome scene before her was more than a bit disturbing, but it was a comfort to know that they were in no mortal danger.

She let go of his arm, took a step back and tried to comport herself.

"Where exactly are we?" Alister asked, still looking up as if talking to the Lens.

"You stand on a hill, near the shore of the river Tiber in Italy, just north of Rome," said the Lens. "The date is October 28, 312. This is the date and location of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, the historical battle in which Constantine the Great is purported to have seen his vision from God."

"Are you insane?" Allison asked angrily, punching Alister in the arm. "You could have warned me. You nearly gave me a heart attack!"

Allison, still seething from being brought back to this time against her will, along with Alister's remarks back in the bedroom, looked around, her face set in a stern visage. She spotted a man and a woman standing near them on the hill. The woman, dressed in fine robes vaguely similar to those that Allison herself wore, looked to be in her mid-thirties. She wore robes of woven wool, not fine silk as were Allison's, and like Allison, she also wore a necklace. It too was made of gold, although it didn't have the large ruby that Allison's had. Allison took a moment to admire the woman. She looked stately

in her robes, almost regal. Allison almost smiled at her image, but for the moment, she was still too aggravated to smile. A man in his early forties stood next to the woman. He was dressed in Roman soldier's garb. She had seen enough historical movies to know he looked like a general of the Roman Legions. He stood, unmoving, with a sword raised above his head.

"There he is," she said.

"Who? Where?" asked Alister.

"There! Right there!" she said, raising her arm and pointing her finger at the Roman general. "That must be Constantine."