

1

Unlocking Kathryn's demons would destroy her. The same dream haunted her every night for two weeks and she could not face more nights alone in the dark. In the mirror, her messy auburn hair and sinewy paths of newly formed blood vessels webbing her green eyes only added to her depression. She adjusted her gold rim glasses and exhaled. Her goal in booking the appointment with Dr. Rashid was to make sense of her dreams and understand why Lucy was locked inside her head.

She turned her brown Toyota into Rashid's dirt lot. The overgrown hedges covering the first floor windows as well as the wispy, yellowed grass blades, and peeling black lettered sign swaying in the wind, exaggerated her heightened vulnerability. Most professional buildings were located downtown in Ellerby, but this three story, faded red Victorian was isolated on a rural stretch near the town forest.

After locking her car, she swung her pocketbook strap over her shoulder and hiked across the dusty lot. Grassy clumps and sprinkled ant mounds pushed through the weathered cement walk. Lucy never spoke during the day, but her pleas for help, as if trapped within a silty, hidden underwater pocket, would bubble up at night. Kathryn paused at the olive paneled front door. She wandered over the porch slats and placed her hand on the tarnished brass knob. Again she stopped. With a single twist she

opened the door. The faint smell of incense and stronger unfamiliar food aromas lingered inside the stuffy wood veneer foyer.

In his office Dr. Rashid scrawled vigorously on a legal pad propped on his folded leg. The crimson stain glass lamp produced a single light swath over his open beige shirt and charcoal slacks. His dark eyes, black hair, and deepened beard stubble reminded her of a tribal mystic. He looked up as she stood rigidly on the foyer rug. His heavily accented voice punctuated the heavy air. " Miss Jenner, right on time."

Kathryn now wished she had solved her own problems. Rashid set down his pen and trekked across the office. She squeezed his hairy, tacky hand.

" Kathryn Jenner."

" Please sit down... Please."

He fumbled with the office door and motioned her over to a padded Queen Anne sofa. After exchanging vague pleasantries, he sat in a soiled beige chair and ran his blue plastic pen back over the yellow legal pad. He pushed a button below the chair and New Age jazz subtly reverberated from cob webbed, silver speakers in the ceiling corners. Kathryn wondered why Roz had recommended this guy to rid her of the hellish nightmares.

She tapped her fingers rhythmically on her leather pocketbook and followed the neatly woven, complex blue and brown Oriental rug to the wall. Yellowed glue had seeped through the older wallpaper seams and the plaster was cracked across the high ceiling. The front window light was dimmed by the hedges and a tall green door between the rear bookcases was closed. Rashid crossed his legs again. His accent, combined with his low voice made her uneasy. " I'm ready. Sorry for the delay."

" Roz said you could help me."

The whites of his eyes glared as he nodded and jotted something on the pad. " You feel... like someone is trying to kill you."

" Conrad Ridder."

His bristle brows rose over the dark rim glasses. " The man who has the talk show on national TV? "

" Yes."

" Forgive me, Miss Jenner I do not watch much TV, but I do know Conrad Ridder is nationally famous."

" No, you don't understand. It's a dream. The same dream every time. It started two weeks ago. I'm in Plymouth. You know, where the Pilgrims landed. I've never been there in my life."

" Sometimes we extrapolate things."

Kathryn wiped the sweat beading on her forehead. How could she ever relate the horror of someone trying to murder her? Her stomach problems erupted again as acid crept up her throat and threatened to dissolve her vocal cords.

" God, this seems so real. I almost want to go back there and straighten this out. "

" Tell me the dream."

" I'm running along a stone, sea wall at night. Only I'm not me. I'm Lucy."

" Lucy?"

" Yeah, and I'm with this guy named Smitty. We're running down the road and all the cars, they're all old, maybe twenty-five or thirty years old. Big cars with fins. We run past the place where the boat is. You know, the

replica of the Pilgrims boat. Ridder is driving down the road in his white Volkswagen. An old type Volkswagen. We tried to hide near the monument. The big granite monument where the rock is. I saw the engraved 1620 on the rock. Ridder is out of the car. He has a gun. Smitty holds me and tries to talk to Ridder. Ridder is younger and he yells out: ' I'm sorry guys, but you're in the way...You won't stop me! ' And that's it. He points the gun and fires. Then I wake up."

" I see... And it happens the same way every time?"

" Yes, all the time. Every night. Tell me how to stop it, Doctor."

" A lost soul is reaching out."

" A what?"

" A soul is reaching over the time and you are the conduit."

" At other times, she calls out for my help."

Rashid nodded again as if he had heard this complaint before. " The soul may be this woman you call Lucy. I can help with Transformation Therapy."

" I'm not familiar with that."

He smiled just long enough to flash his white teeth. " Miss Jenner, I engage in certain practices that may not be classified as conventional. I can assure you Transformation Therapy is real. It does work where the body is inhabited by restless spirits. But there are side effects, if you will."

Kathryn sat up in the chair. " So, you're telling me I actually have spirits inside me? Is that it?"

" Repeating dreams are often manifestations of spirits longing to bridge time and space." His brow deepened and his voice reflected a new intensity.

" These spirits possess a yearning to be free from the burden they carry."

" Burden? What burden? Come on. I've never heard of that nor have I heard of this therapy." She sprang from the sofa and mechanically strapped her bag over her shoulder. " I was looking for regular therapy. The kind you get from a shrink."

Rashid balanced the pen on his chin and moved his tongue around his cheek. " Miss Jenner. This dream is not going to stop until you satisfy this lost soul; this Lucy. And just your talking about it could trigger more dreams. That is the great danger. Let me help you."

" Oh, come on, Doctor. I consider myself a competent woman. I am assistant director of a marketing company here in Ellerby. I may not be married yet at age twenty-eight... I was going out with a guy. He was a jerk. Maybe that started all this."

" I don't think so," said Rashid. " I've dealt with this pattern before. The spirit is there. Perhaps, Lucy was murdered. Transformation Therapy is a form of hypnosis. We can jar loose the spirit. "

" I'm talking about legitimate psychological problems and you're bringing this Transplant Theory."

" *Transformation Therapy*. As I said it is not without risk."

Kathryn glanced at the outside door. " Something I won't have to worry about. I think I'm going to seek the services of someone a little more mainstream. No offense."

Rashid set down the legal pad, stood and faced her. " Miss Jenner, it will only get worse if someone is reaching to you over time. It will begin to consume you."

Kathryn studied the beard stubble across his tanned skin. A dramatic seriousness and mystery resided his black eyes. " I just have to trust my judgment."

" I can't force you. I just feel for what you're going through." He pinched an orange business card from the plastic holder on the table and inked a number on the back. " Please, call my private number if it gets worse. And I know it will accelerate because the spirit is aware he or she has your attention."

" I prefer to think my dreams are a result of my own tensions."

" Maybe not." He placed the textured card with raised yellow ink into Kathryn's trembling hand. She glanced at the Ellerby number. " Thank you... But I'm going seek professional help"

" Please no explanation is necessary." He escorted her around the sofa and opened the foyer door. " Remember, Miss Jenner, life issues must be resolved. Someone is reaching out for help and they won't stop until the world is made right again."

" Okay." She moved quickly into the foyer and shot out the front entrance. The clean forest air refreshed her from the strange, stifling environment inside the house. She looked over her shoulder as she trotted down the cement walk and a Venetian blind quickly descended over Rashid's door window. She fumbled for the car key. " This is nonsense. This guy is a Loony Tune."

Once safely inside the Toyota she repeatedly assured herself Rashid posited a wild, rationalized theory. She whipped the car around the dirt lot and the red house was soon lost within the dusty cloud. The idea of spirits crossing time and space was absurd. She stared into her own eyes as she

drove. Forces beyond her control lurked behind her dark expanded pupils. Rather than actually flying back east to Plymouth, she needed a competent therapist to draw out the true nature of her malady and solve her problem.

2

Kathryn grabbed the remote off the dresser when she entered her bedroom. Revitalized from a hot soak in the tub, she flung herself on the bed and pushed the TV power button. Conrad Ridder's thick gray hair and wide cheeks slowly materialized on the twenty-seven inch monitor. " Oh, man, I can't get away from this guy!"

Why was this man at the center of her nightmare? She pushed the remote, and was about to channel surf when she heard the President's southern twang, but Ridder's smooth delivery and charm rivaled the popular President's charisma. Kathryn stared at Ridder's perfect gray coif, longer than most TV personalities. His shaded black eyes exuded an empathy with millions of viewers. The well-timed clarity of his questions made people feel as though he were speaking for them. They called him, " The Voice, " because the media said rather than just asking questions, Conrad Ridder cared. Kathryn now understood how he could translate his popularity into votes if he really did run for Governor of Colorado.

Maybe his charm and ability to draw viewers was the basis of her dreams. She adjusted the pillows and thought back to a murky image of Rashid's office. His conclusion about a spirit being stuck in her head bordered on the ludicrous. Kathryn did not believe in spirits. She was convinced her breakup with Mark had triggered all these dreams, but fitting Ridder into the role of a killer baffled her. On the screen he was upstaging the

President, who loved the spotlight, but seemed to enjoy yielding to Ridder. She closed her eyes and listened to, " The Voice. " Ridder's clear baritone was surprisingly effective even without the video.

" I know, Mr. President, that your golf game is both consistent and on target."

" What about your game, Conrad?" asked the President.

" My game?" he chuckled. " My game is very consistent... Consistently bad."

Ridder had the unusual self-effacing ability to win over his friends and detractors. But why was he armed with a handgun and in a white Volkswagen, decades ago in Plymouth, Massachusetts? She thought back to her psychology courses in school and the various symbolism employed by the brain in dreams. Who was this Smitty, accompanying Lucy on her nocturnal journey along the sea wall to the Plymouth Rock monument? The lanky young man with a crop of brown hair was someone she never had seen nor met. Yet, they were running from Ridder. What could they have done to make him kill? She smiled and looked at Ridder's tailored blue suit. His gold cufflinks glistened under the bright lights. He represented success.

A substantive relationship with Mark was thwarted when he left. She was successful in her job and had not thought about pursuing another career. Yet, her unexciting life monotonously rolled along. The setting in Plymouth directly related to the Pilgrims, people who fled persecution and found a new life.

She sat up and propped the pillows, convinced she had figured out the mechanism of the repeating dream. The gall of Rashid telling her some spirit inhabited her thoughts now angered her. She thought about reporting him or

at the least going back to that weird red house by the woods and giving him a lecture on reality and professionalism.

The phone line rang and she grabbed the receiver off the end table.

" Hello."

" It's me," said Roz.

" Ah, the culprit."

" Whaddaya doin'?"

" Watching Conrad Ridder coddle the President. "

" The man of your dreams. I have better things to do between ten and eleven."

" Those dreams are not funny."

The large framed, dark haired Roz appeared with her cordless in the doorway. " So, did Rashid help you?"

" Roz, where the hell did you find that kook?" Ridder leaned back and smiled as the President kidded him. " Rashid reminds me of one of those occult people who have a handwritten sign for Tarot card readings and crystal balls out in front of a rehabbed house by the side of the road. "

" So you like him, huh?"

" Like him? I'm ready to sue the man."

" How long were you there?" asked Roz.

" Only five minutes. The guy is a kook."

" Rashid helped my friend Kitty at work, " said Roz, cordless phone at her ear as she stepped into the bedroom. A numbered purple nightshirt, with some football player's name on the back, covered her bulky form. On her wrist was a gold bracelet studded with diamonds.

" Roz, you're not wearing that bracelet out again, are you?"

" It was my Aunt Jenny's fiftieth present from Uncle Max."

" Somebody's going to rip it off your arm."

Roz still spoke through the phone. " *Paaa-leeese!* Kathryn Marie, you worry too much. Dr. Rashid worked with Kitty just two times and she was fine."

Kathryn chuckled at how her hefty roommate would call her at night from the bedroom across the hall. " Kitty... Sounds feline."

" Kitty has a fetish with army boots and-"

" Roz, I have my own problems. I don't even want to go to sleep." She turned back to the TV. The President leaned forward. " Isn't it true you're running for Governor of Colorado?"

Ridder formed a coy smile and paused long enough for people to await his answer. " Mr. President, when you're a public figure, you're always running. We're thinking about it. Certain considerations have to be made. We should have a decision by Friday. Now let's talk foreign policy."

" I say you need to change parties."

Ridder tilted back again, laughing as if the President was the funniest man in the world. " It's been a party, let me tell you. As you know, Mr. President, its people that fuel any political efforts and the cards, e-mail and faxes coming into our offices is astounding. The support is there."

" Roz, are you listening to Ridder?"

" Can't stand him."

" He's going to run for Governor out in Colorado," said Kathryn.

" I have enough trouble here in Ellerby. If I get dumped one more time, I'm moving to the landfill. " Kathryn smiled. Roz's pudgy face and mass of

short brown hair added to her ability to be funny. " Listen, you on for Friday night? Should be a wild party."

" You and your parties," said Kathryn, studying Ridder's phantom eyes. She wondered if he would someday run for President. " Roz, you know I don't fit into that loud crowd."

" The loud crowd, that's us," she said disappearing into the hall, but she continued talking on the cordless.

" Well... I belong in a simpler time."

" Cerebral Kathryn Marie. What are you going to do about the dreams?"

" Hope they stop. Although if I listen to Rashid ...when I started asking questions, the spirit would be aware of my interest and the dreams would get worse. A real confidence builder."

" Don't discount Rashid."

" Roz, he's a quack."

" Yeah, so, what's the problem?"

" Good night, Roz."

" Catch you later."

" Catch ya."

Kathryn set down the phone and checked the green digits on her table alarm. In seven hours she would be at her desk, sorting through marketing surveys. She shut off the light and only saw Ridder and the President on the glowing TV. Maybe it was time to go back to school, or find another line of work. She longed for the companionship she lost when Mark left her six months ago. Maybe his finding another woman really was at the cause of all the dreams. She yawned and sunk her head in the pillow, but when she

closed her eyes she only heard Ridder's voice. With the remote in the air, she pushed the power button and the room went dark. Fatigue crept over her as she slowly drifted off. In the vague world between consciousness and sleep Lucy's faint voice echoed sporadically like waves slowly rolling toward a level shore. "*Kathryn, help me... Kathryn... help me.*"

* * *

As Smitty drove the Nash along the ocean wall, Lucy stared at the spit, sheltering Plymouth harbor. The convoluted evening clouds hovered over the darkening water and Uncle Charlie's untimely death constantly filled her thoughts. Smitty braked at a small rotary where Route 44 began. She spoke loudly through engine hum.. " Smitty, maybe we should just let things be. Investigating Uncle Charlie's accident won't bring him back."

" Charlie was scammed. You said it yourself."

The brakes squeaked at the Court Street lights. Lucy checked the traffic and rows of buildings toward Uncle Charlie's real estate office behind Pilgrim Hall.

" Yeah, he was taken. But, saying Conrad Ridder or Sam Hunter caused his accident is pushing it. I'm afraid of them both. I say back off."

" That's not advice I'm getting from Dan Jansen," said Smitty.

" Jansen's just a police sergeant."

" If we find something Ridder or Hunter said, Jansen said he would alert the District Attorney's office and they start looking into Charlie's accident."

" You mean murder." Lucy's eyed filled. Her uncle was an outgoing guy who vitalized everyone around him. Charlie told her how Hunter took his money, but without proof, she kept that information from her despondent Aunt Stacey. "I don't believe Uncle Charlie was drunk when he hit the trees on

3A. "

Smitty pulled away from the lights and drove up the hill. " Not what the coroner says. Listen, Hunter was your uncle's best salesman and he convinced Charlie to invest the money. And now Conrad is bidding on WXBN. How does a twenty-two year old kid buy a radio station? Hunter and Conrad were seen at the station. How did they link up? " Smitty brought the Nash past the hillside cemetery near the highway bridge where Uncle Charlie was buried. The long hill continued under the highway toward a distant brown water tower within the woods. " I think he or Hunter did something to Charlie's Fury. The car was less than a year old.. "

" Exactly. And who is Hunter? What's his background? The same with Conrad. He leaves Plymouth for school in New Jersey and comes back a radio talk show host. "

" Conrad is very talented," said Lucy.

" He sounds older and wiser than he is. "

" But he has an ego a mile wide. I swear he's financially linked with Hunter, " she said, clenching her fist. She checked the back windshield for anyone who might be following them. " What would stop them from killing us if he knew we suspected them? "

" Hopefully Dan Jansen gets to the DA first, so neither one can pull anything. "

" What a stench, " said Lucy, holding her nose. The rich smell of cow manure filtered into the car and the sharp sunlight caught cornfields and a tall white silo. WXBN 's high red and white antennas towers stood like rockets on the pad overlooking the bay up to Duxbury. Yesterday Smitty asked a few questions about ownership and selling price of the station. The receptionist mentioned Conrad and Hunter talking with the station owner about purchasing the station. She wondered if he had only stirred up trouble.

Black and white cows basked in the afternoon light near the high-tension wires heading south. The creosote coated wood poles cast shadows over the high grass. " I need to look at Charlie's Fury," said Smitty. " It was a brand new fifty-seven, so no one can argue mechanical failure. If his blood alcohol level wasn't so high, they might have done a more thorough investigation. "

Lucy nodded as the road narrowed and wound through the wooded back lands. " Uncle Charlie liked a glass of wine, but he never drank to excess. He told me he was going to have two glasses and that was it. I don't get it. "

" He was at The Wayside for less than an hour. And every waitress in there said he sat alone looking out the window and had a couple of glasses of wine. Did he start drinking once he got in the Fury? But he got a phone call at the table. Who was it and what did they want?"

Lucy put on her sunglasses as the sun cut through the trees ahead. They passed a series of cranberry bogs, matted red in the sunlight. " Gwen

Rowland said he talked to her at the register. He wasn't drunk. Half an hour later he was dead and two days later the coroner said he was drunk. What happened from the time he left the restaurant until he hit the tree? "

Smitty shifted the car again. " That is the question that may never be answered, Lucy. We have to work around that with circumstantial evidence. " He looked out the side window. " The junkyard is on the Carver town line. "

" Uncle Charlie called Aunt Stacey from the Wayside and said he had business to attend to. He said he'd be home by eighty-thirty. He wanted to watch Gunsmoke..."

Smitty shook his head. " Somebody met him and got him drunk. The car is the only physically evidence we have right now. "

" If it's still at the junkyard.. "

* * *

Smitty signaled at a rusted metal sign for S. L. Horwitz Auto Salvage, an automobile junkyard carved into a wooded section in Carver. In the twilight, the Nash rolled over the uneven dirt road toward a tarpaper office shack under tall pines. Smitty slowed the car and shut off the engine about fifty feet from the shack. Lucy stepped from the car and her heart raced as she scanned the mounds of compacted cars. More rusted frames surrounded rows of stripped cars up the forested hill. A couple of

German Shepherds appeared inside the shack windows and hit their paws against the glass. " Smitty, I don't like it here."

" Suppose Hunter really sabotaged Charlie's car, Lucy? We need to find that Plymouth Fury. The police report said the car was towed here."

" Maybe we should let the cops handle it," said Lucy.

" I told you. What if they know all the cops and paid them off?"

Lucy followed Smitty past the half shingled shack, over to the first aisle of junk cars. He studied the cars, looking for Uncle Charlie's red and white Fury. Lucy remembered Uncle Charlie showboating his new car when he picked it up at the dealership up in Brockton. He and Aunt Stacey drove around for hours and gave trips through Plymouth. Lucy sat in the front seat as her gray haired uncle gripped the large plastic wheel, beeped the horn and waved throughout the town. Then her mind shot back to Uncle Charlie's funeral. She pictured the flag draped casket at the cemetery last week and how Aunt Stacey's tears never stopped.

Smitty, elevated on a car bumper, peered over the wrecks down back. He pawed over the mangled cars while Lucy followed; her arms folded as she constantly watched the office shack. Several times she pleaded with him to leave, but he was adamant about finding her uncle's car. Half an hour later he abandoned his search and brought her back to the main office. A couple of motorcycles were now parked near the trees and a Buick station wagon was backed against the building.

Smitty motioned her inside the tarpaper shack's open door. Lucy stepped into a smoke laden office with grease-smeared walls. A little man in a loose fitting, sleeveless undershirt adjusted his black rimmed glasses and stroked a hint of a mustache. He stood behind a desk scattered with

papers soiled by car parts and placed a cigarette in a glass cup as he exhaled. " Who the hell are you?"

" Somebody looking for a car."

" That's what they all say." His right arm had a vivid blue tattoo of a mermaid and a tall ship. He pinched his cigarette, made a goon face and talked like a baby. " Let me guess, you've lost your dream car?"

" Fifty-seven Fury. White with red trim."

" What the wreck? You talkin' about the tree accident on 3A?"

" Charlie Leone," said Smitty.

" Yeah, that car is up back, but you ain't gettin' near it. Car is scheduled to be towed."

" Did anyone run tests on it? "

" Tests? What tests? What the hell you talkin' about? I don't think you understand, kid. It's all over. The thing is going bye-bye. "

" If it's here then why can't we see it? " asked Smitty. His Adam's apple moved up and down as he spoke.. " Well?"

" Because you can't. Now beat it. "

A small revolver was partially hidden within the used parts scattered on the desk. Lucy raised her brows and slowly nudged Smitty to the door. He spun around once they were in the yard. " I don' t have to listen to him."

" I think we'd better go. The man had a gun on his desk."

" Maybe they paid this guy off, too. That car is still up here. It may be our last chance to prove anything. Come on. "

Smitty took her hand and they darted behind another row of rusted cars. Lucy had a queasy feeling in her stomach. She glanced back at the

office's sagging roof and was afraid the tattooed man would grab his gun and come after them. They ran past the tonnage scattered near the dirt slope. A few minutes later, next to a crunched green Buick and a wood bed truck along the woods, Smitty spotted the Fury's fins. The cracked windshield and crunched front end sent tingles across her abdomen. "Bingo, Lucy."

" Smitty, what would we be looking for? " She had not counted on the wave of grief descending upon her when she saw her uncle's car.

" Tire punctures, " he said on his knees. " Broken gas or brake lines. "

" Wouldn't the police have found this? " she asked, hiding at the edge of the Buick. " What if that guy sees us out here? "

Smitty said nothing as he stuck his head under the car frame near the collapsed front white wall tire. Lucy turned away from Uncle Charlie's blood, dried brown on the white seat under the cracked windshield glass. She closed her eyes and refused to face the car. " Hurry, Smitty. "

His voice was muffled under the car. " Do you see anyone? "

" No. "

She looked back toward the shack again. Smitty rocked from side to side on his back as he emerged from under the car. He placed his palms under the edge of the crushed hood. The hinges creaked as he forced the deformed metal upward. " Lines are intact. "

Lucy still saw no one on the slope.. " What's in there?"

Smitty fidgeted with something under the hood. " The brake fluid levels. "

The man with the gun and two men in denim jackets and jeans appeared in the main area. " Smitty! They're looking around! "

" I've almost got it off. " Something clicked under the hood. " Gone. Gone. The damned brake fluid is gone, Lucy! "

" You mean he had no brakes? "

Smitty pushed down the twisted hood and grabbed her hand. " Someone drained his brake fluid! "

Lucy ran with him along the cars. " Then Uncle Charley was murdered! "

" We need to forward this to Jansen. I can't believe this! "

They squeezed around the cars and rushed into an adjacent aisle, but the little guy in the sleeveless undershirt spotted them. He gripped the revolver with both hands, aimed and fired twice. The bullets pinged off the surrounding cars. Smitty pushed her to the ground. Other gunfire erupted as they crawled through the tall grass between the cars. Once on the other side, they sprinted to the Nash. Smitty flung open the door and started the car. Lucy leaped inside as he backed around in a huge circle, tearing up the dirt. More shots were fired as the car fishtailed onto Route 44.

Back toward the junkyard the three men ran toward the Buick, parked by the office. The Nash bounced over the ruts. " They're going to kill us! "

" They won't. We're going to call Jansen. "

She balanced her chin on the seat as the Buick backed away from the shack. Smitty's contorted face reflected the escalating tension as he raced back toward town. " We have a good idea Hunter took the money but we don't have the proof he drained the brake fluid in Uncle Charlie's car. "

" That's up to Jansen, " said Smitty.

" He can't make a case if they tow away the car! "

Smitty checked the mirror himself. " I know. Let them get a court order. Oh, God, no! "

" What's the matter? " she asked, turning again.

A couple of hundred yards behind the Nash, the Buick raced onto Route 44. " They'll kill us, Smitty! They'll kill us! "

At the next turn a white Volkswagen veered onto the highway from the wooded road up to WXBN. " Conrad! "

" I'm so scared."

" Let's get downtown, along the water and call Jansen."

* * *

" Ahhhhhhhh!" Kathryn sat up and screamed into the darkness. She reached for the light above the digital clock, but knocked over the lamp. The bulb flashed and popped as Roz raced into the bedroom.

" Kathryn Marie I can't see you!"

" They have guns!"

" Who?" Roz flipped on the side lamp. The bedroom's bright walls came back into focus. Roz held her shaking hands. " You're sweating!"

" My God! My God.... What a horrible dream. I, I, I'm back thirty or forty years in Plymouth, in a junkyard and Conrad Ridder and this guy Hunter may have killed Uncle Charlie!"

" You should have let Rashid help you."

" And I'm with this guy Smitty again. I don't know any Smitty. Do you hear me, Roz?"

" I'm right here, Kathryn."

" We found the car. See Ridder or Hunter tampered with the brake fluid and Uncle Charlie died."

" Who the hell is Uncle Charlie?"

" Lucy's Uncle Charlie."

Roz nodded. She rumbled back to the kitchen connecting the two apartments. " Let me get you something to drink. You want milk or a real drink?"

" Milk... We left Plymouth took Route 44 west.

" Route 44?" asked Roz from the kitchen..

" It was so clear. Don't you see, Roz? It was part of the other dream. It had to be. What happened before Ridder chased us at the monument? The junkyard guys were shooting at us!"

Roz appeared with two glasses in her hands. " Thank God you woke up or I'd be calling the medical examiner."

Kathryn smiled and wiped the sweat from her brow as Roz put the cold glass in her hand. She sniffed the glass. " What is this?"

" Oh, be quiet, it's milk."

" Roz, I don't know what to do. I can't take this anymore. I'd like to pretend I didn't dream it, but I did." She sipped the cold milk. " Maybe it won't happen again. I pray it won't happen again. It's like I'm in another life."

" See. It's Lucy. She's trying to tell you."

" I don't put any credence in what Rashid said."

" Then how do you explain it?" asked Roz.

Kathryn slowly shook her head. " I don't."

3

Ridder reluctantly listened to the two the two NBA players pontificate, but his director motioned with spinning fingers to wrap up the segment. The lights blazed into his eyes as he leaned toward his guests.

" Ron Thomas and Elroy Johnson are neck and neck in total points as the season winds down and incredibly are best friends. Gentlemen, thank you.

Tomorrow night my guest will be former actor turned Senator, John Webner. Or is it Senator turned actor. Well, sometimes you have to wonder." Ridder smiled into the lens and chuckled. " So, I guess there is hope for us all."

" I wonder if NBA players can run for governor," quipped Johnson.

" Put your hat in the ring!" Ridder turned to the camera again.

" I'm Conrad Ridder and *I'll be seeing you.*"

The center camera's red light blinked off, the surrounding light barrage dimmed, and Ridder leaned back in his chair. Johnson pointed from across the table. " Mr. Ridder, you didn't let me talk about the fans on that last road trip."

" Be damned glad you were on the show. You give me lip and they'll be no repeat performance."

" You're like a different guy off camera, man."

" Yeah," said Ridder standing. He paused and looked into Johnson's dark moist eyes. " Well, shit happens, doesn't it?"

Dimitri wandered behind camera two. He pretended to clap. " Good show, Sput. *The Voice* still has it after two weeks off."

" I need a damned drink," said Ridder moving away from the desk and the two gawking NBA players. " And where's Sandra? I want her up in my room."

" Sandra went over to Brubakers. You didn't mention you wanted to see her after the show. I don't read minds, Conrad."

" I want that bitch followed. She starts fooling around: she's all done. Professionally and otherwise."

" Then call Brubakers."

" I'm not calling Brubakers." Ridder bit his lower lip and shook his head as they walked into a side corridor. " That secretary in the news section. You know the red head, Tyler."

" Everybody knows her," said Dimitri.

" I'll call her and have Champagne sent up."

" Whatever. By the way Norman called. As your agent he insists on following through with the live remote he booked. And I agree. "

" Yeah, because he gets the cash for it, " said Ridder, turning. " Screw Norman. I'll be glad when we get out of this racket. Forty years is long enough. When do we meet with Senator Olsen and his people?"

" Politics is another racket. Three tomorrow. We'll iron out the announcement. The Alden poll puts you twenty points ahead of the Governor now."

" Piece of cake."

The two men marched around the corner and down the long corridor to his dressing room. " You'll announce after the last commercial break. Keep everyone waiting. Everyone knows you want to be Governor of Colorado."

" Why stop at Governor?" asked Ridder.

" First things first, Sput. We have a ten-thirty night cap with the Styron Group. That banking money is going to be critical against Governor McLaughlin."

" It sure will, the bastard got that cash for the past six years. I'm going to ruin him. He had his chance and didn't take me for Lieutenant Governor three years ago."

" Things are in place," said Dimitri. " I guarantee the dirt on McLaughlin will come out. If there isn't any dirt, we'll make dirt. Just like we always have."

Ridder stopped and held Dimitri's arm.. " I'm still worried about the past. The press will dig."

" The press have dug for years. Forget what happened. It's ancient history. It's buried so deep. No one has ever questioned it. Just put it out of your mind."

Ridder shook his head. " I can't. The closer we get to announcing, the more I worry about McLaughlin's people going back east and finding the truth."

" Listen to me," said Dimitri, pulling him aside. He spoke in a lower voice. " No one will ever find out what we did to Charlie or the niece and her boyfriend. There is just nothing to find. There is no car. There are no bodies. The money transfers took place on a cash basis. All the witnesses are dead

and the records burned. Anybody that would have anything to say is relying on hearsay and rumor. No one has ever said anything because they don't know. And WXBN is one of the more successful radio stations. McLaughlin nor any of his people can uncover anything. We just stick with the issues and let our people tear McLaughlin apart."

* * *

Ridder looked into Tyler Kirby's blue eyes. Four months had passed since her crimson hair covered his pillowcase. He glanced at Dimitri and his staff working Styron and the others across the hotel meeting room. Two hours of grooming the dog-faced Styron pushed the limits of Ridder's patience. " I'm right upstairs, Tyler."

" Really? What makes you think you're going to get the chance?"

" I will leave that to your discretion," he said, tilting toward her. Dimitri produced a sour face at the next table. Ridder whispered in her ear. " Just think what it would be like making love in the Governor's Mansion."

He detected an uninhibited grin. " I miss you, Conrad. You haven't called."

" I'm running for Governor. I've been busy, sweetheart. " He put his hand on her wrist. " What do you say?"

" You know the first rule of politics: strike a hard bargain."

Ridder helped her up. Dimitri immediately leaped from the far table without excusing himself to Styron. Ridder smiled. " Here comes trouble."

" Where the hell do you think you're going?"

" Upstairs."

" No way. You leave now and the stories start. Miss Kirby, I can make arrangements if you wish to return with Mr. Ridder, but I must insist he meet you up there later. "

" Okay."

" Good... Conrad just say good night to her and come back with Styron and his people. We're talking a several million-dollar transfer according to Styron. Let's not rattle the guy or give him reason to back off. "

" Is it legal?"

" Since when have you worried about legalities?"

" Never," said Ridder. " I don't worry so much about legalities as I do getting caught. Anything is possible as long as you don't get caught."

Tyler's sparkling brown eyes excited him. He smiled and moved with Dimitri back to the main table, overlooking the city lights. A woman with short dark hair smiled at him. He could feel the power his position generated. In his career he pushed for ratings and gaining market share. In that constant battle he had always come out on top, and along the way he swept up those who challenged his abilities, his ambition and his power. He moseyed next to the woman and extended his hand. " Conrad Ridder, I don't think we've met."

4

On her way to her downtown office, Kathryn recounted the nocturnal trip to the auto junkyard. Her eyes itched as if she had stayed up all night and Lucy's weakened voice calling for help repeated in her daytime thoughts. At the office, as she sat in front of her computer screen, but the image of the tattooed little man with the black rim glasses and the mustache flashed into her head like a close up on a large cinema screen. The crack of the shots and the spinning tires were as real as anything she had experienced in her life. By her third cup of coffee she vowed to trace Conrad Ridder's past and access a map of Plymouth on the Internet.

She wandered to the window screen overlooking the parking lot cars.
" Lucy... Are you real, Lucy?"

" Did you say something, Kathryn?" asked Nora from the other room.
Kathryn's head snapped back. She was embarrassed about her mumbling Lucy's name. " Just thinking."

" You have the one o'clock in Granby about that new account."

" I do. Yes... I won't be returning to the office," she said, checking her watch.

" You want to grab a sandwich, Kathryn?"

" Not today, Nora. I'm a little under the weather." She lifted her bag strap over her shoulder. " Maybe the end of the week."

" Sure."

Kathryn opened the office door and started down the old wood staircase. Her legs weakened and a clash of echoes preceded Lucy's strained voice. She stopped midway down the stairs and held her temples. "

Kathryn, help me... Help me, Kathryn."

" No, this can't be happening. Who are you? Who are you? Why are you inside me?"

She thundered down the remaining stairs and pushed the heavy outside door glass with her shoulder. In the warmer air she ran toward her car. The sun blinked behind the leafy branches as she quickly unlocked the car door. She sat rigid behind the wheel, awaiting another chorus within her head and debated traveling to her one o'clock appointment. Her unsettled stomach buzzed like a loose chain saw as she recklessly backed the Toyota around the parking lot.

" Get in control, Kathryn. It's not real. it's not..."

She shifted into **DRIVE** and thrust her foot against the accelerator pedal, but quickly slammed the brakes as she skidded into the intersection. A man in a large truck sounded his horn and swerved. Her hands shook as she signaled for the service road paralleling the highway. Like a drunk, combating inebriation, she fought the tension and chugged slowly along the rural stretch. Several times she wandered over the yellow centerline. As the tires hummed on the rough asphalt she sensed voices. She no longer had control as the car veered into an open field and she went out.

" Kathryn, help me... Help me, Kathryn."

* * *

Smitty pulled Lucy across Water Street and under the portico. Someone had contacted Conrad. He had fired a gun from his Volkswagen on Route 44. Smitty climbed over the granite monument's metal railing. She followed him over the edge and splashed into the salty water spreading over the boulder. Maybe Conrad had not seen them crawl below.

Lucy clung onto Smitty when she heard somebody on Water Street. She thought back to grade school and her earliest memories of skinny Conrad Ridder. He had shifted from the quiet child to the calm intellectual in high school and had gone onto Princeton. Now his hollowed dark eyes, once benign, assumed the crazed intransigence of a young man seized with great ambitions and the need to kill. Smitty held Lucy's trembling frame and she now wished they had never gone to the Carver junkyard. Everyone had assumed Uncle Charlie smashed his Fury into the huge oak in Manomet because he was drunk. Uncle Charlie was killed because Hunter and maybe Conrad stole money to fund a radio station purchase. And now Conrad somehow knew Smitty had examined drained brake fluid.

Conrad's deep voice was muffled between the portico's street level air currents and the sloshing surf at her feet. " You're dead! Both of you, you're dead!"

" Do something, Smitty," whispered Lucy. " Dead God, do something. He's going to kill us!"

She peered at Conrad's perfectly styled dark hair in the murky light above the railing. With the gun firmly in his hand, he shuffled between the

pillars. Lucy pictured the gawky kid, playing with old radio sets in grade school or camping all day in the library. When he started his radio broadcasts in high school, no one thought he would own his own station.

As Conrad circled the monument, less than fifteen feet above them, and Lucy gripped Smitty's arm again. Conrad panned the gun toward the ocean and he grinned when he saw them. He pointed the gun. " I'm sorry guys, but you're in the way...You won't stop me! "

Orange bursts blotted the darkness. Lucy fell onto the rock and slid into the water within a deafening numbness, only partially hearing Smitty's agonizing wail. Her body tumbled into nothingness and all her thoughts slowly scattered like the evening clouds moving inland over Plymouth Harbor.

* * *

The afternoon sun burnt Kathryn's eyes as she sat up. Across the spreading field, huge cumulus cloud puffs dwarfed the forest foliage and her heart smacked against her chest as she checked the radio's digital clock. The car was still running and she had lost thirteen minutes. Her mind remained in Plymouth, a place she had never seen. The horrific image of a younger Conrad Ridder, pointing a gun over the Plymouth Rock portico's metal railing, lingered. She shut off the car and stepped into the field. The grass blades whipped against her legs as she ran forward for several dozen yards, tripped and landed in the taller grass. She flipped on her back and the

mammoth clouds hovered in the sky. Her erratic breathing continued and she held her skull. " Stop this! Leave me alone!"

Tears cascaded down her smooth cheeks and she flung off her glasses. The clouds blurred. Some part of her wanted to believe Rashid. Hearing Lucy vividly calling for help bordered on schizophrenic. Yet, no other voices had entered her consciousness and the dreams were both consistent and repetitive. Smitty and Lucy seemed more than figments of her mental processes. Maybe he and Lucy really died below the monument's granite pillars.

She sat up and looked at the smeared image of her car off the road diagonally in the field. The image sharpened once she placed her wire rim glasses over her eyes. Getting on the Internet and calling up a web site for Plymouth would be a first step. By checking the area roads and surrounding towns, she might find some basis for the dreams. Only then would she know if Rashid's astonishing assessment was valid.