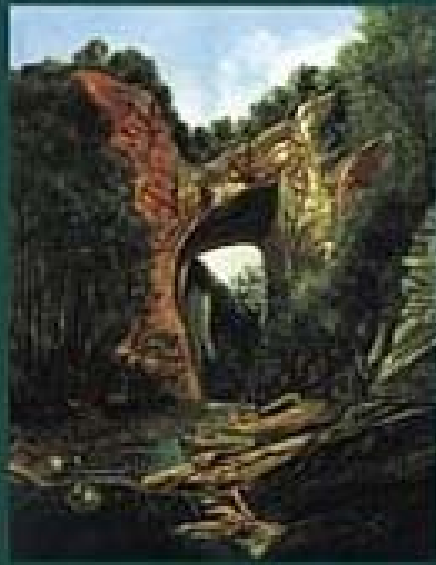




LOU TORTOLA

A BRIDGE OF TIME

A NOVEL

"The pages fly by as quickly as time travels in this novel that will do for Virginia's Natural Bridge what Robert James Waller's *The Bridges of Madison County* did for covered bridges in Madison County, Iowa and abroad."

Ellen Singer,
Author of *Quicksand* (HarperCollins, 2001)

"Escape and unwind with this brilliant first novel by Lou Tortola."

Nicola Hetherington,
Writer and Astrologer, www.readmystars.com

"A terrific story! Lou Tortola's wonderful imagination keeps each scene moving, always leaving the reader wanting to turn the page."

Eileen Kraatz,
Author of *A Spy in the Nursing Home*

"Lou Tortola's remarkable imagination and brilliant storytelling ability have blended wonderfully to create this powerful time-travel fantasy and gripping tale of love and family. Tortola is one of our promising new novelists!"

Tony Frassrand
Producer, Former CNN Anchor

"Lose yourself in this amazing fictional story of mystery and intrigue that is based on the author's creative imagination of one of the world's Seven Wonders."

Cheryl Vigh,
Senior Writer, www.mp3.tv

ISBN 88-900945-0-8



9 788890 094507

A BRIDGE OF TIME

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used factitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organization, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright 2002 by Lou Tortola

All rights reserved

Published by arrangement with the author by:
Sigmastudio Publishing
Via Pio La Torre #23
Isernia, IS 86170 MOLISE
ITALIA

Printed in Italy
October 2002

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information contact the author: lou@i.net

Permission for the use of the partial lyrics of *My Generation* and *Baba O' Riley* by The Who has been granted by the artists.
With thanks from the author to Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey.

www.abridgeoftime.com

ISBN: 88-900945-0-8

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



T E R Z O M I L L E N N I O
Sigmastudio Publishing
www.sigmastudio.it

LOU TORTOLA

A BRIDGE OF TIME

A NOVEL

In memory of my dear friend Cosmo Fasano

“When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”

Patanjali (c. 1st to 3rd century BC)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Linda, Tiffany, Tina and Felicia Tortola
Peter Naccarato
Gabriella Petrino
Mary Anne Janisse
Eileen Kraatz
Lise Jolie
Elisa Brian
Ellen Singer
Nicola Hetherington
Cheryl Vigh
Tony Frassrand

*...Your encouragement greatly influenced my desire to
complete this novel.*

With thanks, Lou.

1

Sarah was drawn to the Natural Bridge as intensely as her horses were drawn to the cold Cedar Creek that ran beneath it. Her fascination had nothing to do with its history. She couldn't care less that Thomas Jefferson had been its first American owner and that George Washington had scrawled his initials in one of its limestone walls. Nor did she feel dumbfounded by the sheer magnificence of the place, as the rock bridge spanned two hundred feet above the blanket on which she was sitting. Rather, Sarah sought, and had always found, peace here. With a three-month old baby, a difficult husband and a painful secret, Sarah needed solace now more than ever.

Here, deep in the canyon, as she set out the picnic lunch she had promised for her four friends, she listened to the sounds of water and birds. Tucked between the steep cliffs, lush with heavy vegetation, she felt blissfully apart from her everyday existence and, in ways she didn't understand, she also felt somehow linked to worlds not her own.

"Clarence, can you please stay close to Daniel?" Carrying both the bassinet and the food across the twenty feet to where her brother was attempting to doze in the soft grass directly under the span of the bridge, Sarah added, "I think Daniel may be inclined to rest better here with you."

Clarence, who had been feeling more unsociable than sleepy when he'd distanced himself from the others, smiled for the first time that afternoon and proudly em-

braced the bassinet.

"Yes, the two of us will have a nice nap together. You relax and enjoy yourself with the others."

"Thank you, and Clarence... thank you for coming today. I know it's difficult for you, given your feelings for Matthew, but your presence means a great deal to me."

"You mean the ogre..." Clarence fell silent. He couldn't discuss his disdain for Sarah's husband without getting angry. Shaking his head to free his mind of such thoughts, Clarence tipped his hat toward his sister and started to put it back over his face as a shield from the sun. Then, changing his mind, he set it next to his body instead, deciding to keep at least one eye open to watch Daniel.

A caressing warm breeze and the gentle noise of the flowing water in the stream beckoned Daniel to sleep. Holding the wicker bassinet snugly against him, Clarence's face twitched from time to time as the voices of the others nearby rang out, disrespectful of his need for tranquility.

The day was warm, with the wind blowing gently over the sleeping baby. Clarence labored to stay awake to monitor Daniel's soft gasps.

Above them, the underside of the bridge released droplets of moisture ever so slowly. These droplets represented the rainwater that migrates through the mass of stone and earth, making up the thickness of the Natural Bridge. Clarence could not know that the water dripping from the bridge contained only minute traces of minerals. It had been filtered clear and cleansed of all human contact. The droplets seemed mystical, appearing ever so sporadically out of nowhere on the underside of the bridge, only to drop to the ground and stream 215 feet below.

Droplets, perhaps blown in the wind, seemed to approach closer to baby Daniel. Clarence noticed the

droplets without concern, watching them in an almost hypnotized fashion. He focused on the origins of the droplets on the underside of the bridge and followed an individual bead of water down to his elevated knee. As the droplet approached, he positioned his knee in its path allowing the moisture to soak into the cloth of his outerwear. For Clarence, this concentration became a game. Soon droplets seemed to approach the edge of the bassinet.

It wasn't long before the droplets were falling on Daniel; first his forehead, then cheeks, and chin. He woke up, opening one eye widely, the other seeming to resist opening, not wanting release from its dream state. His open eye focused on a single bead of water from its origin on the underside of the bridge and followed it as it reached the eye itself. Opening his mouth wide, Daniel cried loudly as the next droplet fell dead center into his throat. Suddenly his crying stopped. The bottom of the bassinet had splashed out an amount of water, its volume equal to what a baby the size of Daniel would displace if fully immersed in a tub filled to its rim. Clarence jumped up in horror; his left side was soaked with the wetness from the bassinet's sudden outburst. He let out a terrifying scream.

The nearby group exploded from their sedentary positions unable to comprehend what was happening. Clarence was shaking like a leaf, his complexion white, and he appeared to be chilled solid. Sarah stared dumbfounded at the drenched empty bassinet, but only for a split second and then screamed horrifically at the top of her lungs.

"Where is my baby?!"

The others reacted frantically. Sarah fell to the ground. She pulled at her own hair, dislodging some of it from her scalp. Her husband, Matthew, scrambled in the ankle-

deep water adjacent to the grassy banks, looking for any sign of his son.

He turned in the direction of Clarence, immediately launching toward him, tackling him to the ground. While the other couple attempted with very little success to console Sarah, Matthew continued to attack Clarence, slapping him repeatedly with each question unanswered.

“What have you done with my son?”

Clarence’s bloody eyes stared at the underside of the bridge. He remained speechless. His vision and hearing were blurred. Clarence did not feel the blows that his brother-in-law was inflicting on him. Nor could he find the words he needed for his sister. His mind could not comprehend what he had witnessed.

2

Except for his spastic, extended right arm, William Monterey was an invisible lump beneath the down comforter Kate had covered him with the night before. The phone was ringing and his hand slapped jerkily at everything in reach, knocking medicine bottles and toiletries onto the floor. He just wanted to sleep. He desperately wanted to make the noise and voices inside his head go away.

"William? William, can you hear me? William, are you there? Do you know what day this is? William, answer me!"

"Mom?"

"Thank, God! I was getting worried. I..."

"Mom, it's, it's..." William opened one eye and squinted at the flashing red light. "It's five... five... five-fifty-five!"

"Yes, darling, I wanted to catch you early this morning. If I didn't, I probably wouldn't be able to talk to you on your birthday."

As the answering machine switched on, William finally gave in to reality. He climbed out of bed, shifted the cordless phone to his left ear and turned it off.

"Mom, you know you can reach me anytime you want to!" William was already opening his day planner to study his agenda for July 21, 2002. The page was crammed with details. William read the lines with his finger, shaking his head at the sheer magnitude of this day's obligations.

"I know I can reach you anytime, but at this hour I

have your attention all to myself.”

“Mom, I wish I could assure you my attention was not on Torco business right now, but today will be a demanding one for me.”

“Well, I am glad I found you early enough to tell you how much I love you, and to wish you a happy birthday.”

“Thanks Mom, I love you too! But I still would like to think of my birthday as being tomorrow, after all that is what my driver’s license tells me.”

“As you like, I don’t want my baby to be thirty years old any earlier than you need to be.”

“Thanks, Mom. I would rather be thirty years old tomorrow; that will give me one more day to be twenty-something.”

“Oh honestly, you’re not that old! And anyway, it was exactly thirty years ago today you were awarded to your father and me. Legally you were our son on that day. We knew the birth date the State assigned you was that of tomorrow; but for your mom this date will always be your birthday!”

William walked back toward his bed and bent over to pick up the Claritin and nail clipper that had fallen off the nightstand. As he did so, the alarm rang, the digital display reading 6:00 AM.

“Mom that’s my cue to get on with this optional birthday of mine. I’m sure glad I can pretend it’s tomorrow. Today is going to be all work and no play!”

“William, you work much too hard! I am very proud of you though Son, I love you... Happy Birthday.”

“Thanks for calling, Mom, I love you too. Hope to see you tomorrow, on my birthday! Bye for now, Mom.”

“Bye William.”

William smiled, feeling genuinely loved by his mother. He reached over to place the cordless back in its cradle and to kiss Kate, who was still sleeping on her side of the

bed. Suddenly startled that he had allowed himself these seconds of reverie, he jolted from where he was sitting and headed in the direction of the bathroom.

3

Torco Construction Inc. of Maryland was awarded the contract to build the new sports complex and convention center for the town of Harrisonburg in Virginia. William Monterey, a civil engineer, was the project manager. In the construction trailer, the wall clock was three minutes shy of 7 AM. Three men collected their coffee mugs, rolls, architectural drawings and various gadgets of the trade as they gathered to be directed by their manager.

“Listen guys, today we are going to see the entire footing of phase one poured.” William had earned the respect of his crew and was highly regarded as one of Torco’s best project managers.

“Have both your crews showed up, Ray? We can’t afford to be shorthanded!” Ray, the site foreman, had arrived an hour ago.

“All twelve of my men punched in at six-thirty. They are checking all of the forming and preparing the equipment as we speak. I’ve got three carpenters and four finishers confirmed by phone ready to punch-in at seven-thirty.”

Ray was one of the best site foremen William had ever worked with. He was always one step ahead of him. “The consultant on this project is a first class prick. He hates the fact that we are out-of-towners. If we don’t pour the entire phase one ribbon footing today, he will have a field day at our expense. Let’s make it happen and show him why we got this project over his local cronies.”

As the first ready-mix concrete truck arrived on time, a

small army of skilled tradesmen worked furiously.

“Ray, get those guys to prep the next section, the trucks are starting to back up!” One ready-mix truck was dumping its load, while two other trucks stood ready. The construction site was buzzing. A Jeep Cherokee kicking up dust came to a halt at William’s side. Jak Kline slammed his door and walked around to the front of his Jeep.

William decided to appear as confident as possible, trying to initiate a friendly good morning. “Hey, Jak, good...” but he wasn’t given the chance to finish.

Caught up in his own world, Jak butted in, “Good morning Mr. Monterey, do you have my first set of slump test results?”

“Good morning to you, Jak. All is going just fine, the slumps are over here for you to certify.”

“Bill, I am sure I don’t need to remind you how important it is to pour the entire phase one footing today.”

“Jak, we are here to make it happen. Barring any unforeseen disasters, we will complete the task at hand.” Turning on his heel, he added, “Now if you will excuse me I have got to place this mud before it turns to stone.”

By 4 PM, the precise teamwork of the crew was evident as completion of the pour seemed within reach.

“Ray, how many yards of concrete do you need to complete the pour?” William shouted with cell phone in hand.

“Beside what is here, we need at least four more full trucks.”

“Dispatch,” William shouted into his cell phone. “I have two trucks on site. As soon as these are empty, I will send them back for two loads. Do you have at least two more on the way to us?”

Ray, standing at the pour location, feeling panicked and overwhelmed with tension, suddenly screamed down the two-way radio for William’s attention.

“Bill, do you copy? We have a major problem on our hands!”

William, whose attention had been elsewhere, jumped at the sound of urgency in Ray’s voice. Ordering the ready-mix dispatch to hold on the line, he replied sharply: “What is it, Ray?”

“Bill, you’d better get over to the pour. We have a failure of a form panel and a possible injury.”

“Shit!”

William flipped the phone shut, and rushed on foot to the pour location.

The damage was worse than he had anticipated. A vertical form panel had let go and mounds of concrete had poured out. One worker appeared to have been knocked over by the collapsed form panel and was lying on his side. Fluid concrete had covered his legs and was rushing to his waist. The fallen worker’s arms were waving for help as the other men struggled to get to him.

An adjacent panel opened to the pressure and a mud-slide of concrete engulfed the trapped man. William reacted instinctively, racing to a skid-steer loader idling nearby. He lowered the machine’s large front bucket, scraping it along his path for a few feet. Scooping up a volume of dry gravel, he signaled Ray on the radio to move the crew. William dumped the load in front of the failure point, choking off the flow of liquid concrete. As the flow stopped, on cue the men scrambled to rescue the trapped worker. A fire hose was used to thin out the spillage. William left the loader positioned over the forms. Scrambling out of the machine, he jumped in the excavation and helped pull the worker by his arms. The worker was coughing but was able to stand.

“I want to know how in the hell that panel let go?” Ray was shouting at the top of his lungs, staring down the men.

"Ray, never mind that for now, we will get to the bottom of it later. Let's get this mess cleaned up. I want you to drive Roland to the hospital and have him checked out."

Ray stalled, looking at William to indicate that there wasn't a need.

"I'm okay, Bill. I just need to catch my breath, I want to see this finished."

"Listen, Roland, that was a very scary moment for both of us. I am not going to risk yours or anybody's life for the sake of a lousy footing. Ray, get him checked out. Now!"

William spoke with the men to ensure that they were all okay. The consensus among them was to finish the job. Realizing that it might be too late, William shouted a succession of directions designed to clean up the mess and restore the forming. The ready-mix trucks sat idling as the crew worked furiously to restore the formwork.

"Listen Jak..." An hour later William was on his cell phone informing Jak Kline about the mishap. "Given this situation, let me pour the last twenty feet tomorrow, we can place re-bar in the tie-in juncture, and it will be as good as having poured it in one shot."

Ray, calling in on the two-way, disrupted the conversation.

"Bill, Roland is fine. The doctors checked him out and they found no injuries. He is anxious to get back."

"Ray, have a cab take Roland home and let him know I appreciate his hard work today. Tell him he is to take two days off next week with pay. On your way back, go by the ready-mix plant. I may need you there."

Turning back to his phone call with Jak, William said, "Jak, did you hear all that?"

"Yes I did. Bill, I'm glad to hear no one was injured. That would not be good for Torco this early into the project. I wish I could say it would be no problem for me to

certify the footing if you don't pour the remainder in the next twenty minutes. It's your call, Bill. If you can't finish today, just figure on tearing up what you have placed and start from scratch. I have already made myself clear. The Specs call for a monolithic pour with no breaks. It may put you behind a week or so, but I am sure you big city guns know how to make up lost time."

Call waiting on the cell phone signaled another incoming call.

"Jak, I will call you shortly to let you know that we need you to certify a completed pour! I just have to take this other call."

"William Monterey, how can I help you?"

A secretary to one of Torco's partners was on the line letting William know that the head office had been informed of the mishap and that Tony Torco, one of the partners, wanted to speak to him regarding the details.

"Listen, Ida, you tell Tony that all is okay here. I have a footing to complete, he will have my detailed report via e-mail by 10 PM this evening."

William joined the men and helped them restore the forms. Before long the concrete pour had resumed, and it took little time to exhaust the ready-mix on site. As the last truck prepared to pour its load, they were two loads short to complete the pour.

William let Jak know things were looking good for completion, and then flipped his phone shut, only to open it again to initiate a call to the concrete dispatch. As he dialed the cell phone, he shouted on the two-way radio.

"Ray, are you at Superior Concrete yet?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Monterey, but I have no more drivers here at the plant. The two drivers on site at the time of the accident left for the day convinced the site was shut down. We didn't hear from you otherwise, and judging from what they told me..."

“Ray, what is your twenty?”

“I’m at the gate of Superior Concrete...”

“Dispatch, my site foreman is at your yard, load one of your trucks ASAP. He’ll drive it to our site. I am on my way to pick up the next load. Have it ready for me in fifteen minutes!”

As expected, some bickering with the dispatcher followed. The dispatcher didn’t want to allow anyone but a Superior licensed driver to handle its trucks. William placed the dispatcher on hold and turned it into a conference call with the owner of Superior at his other plant.

“Harold, you tell your dispatcher how critical supplying concrete to our site is to keeping her job...”

“Listen, Betty, load a truck ASAP for Ray and let him deliver the product. Bill, I am five minutes from the concrete plant. I will personally bring you the last load.”

4

It was 9:30 PM, fifteen and a half hours after being awakened by his mother's pre-birthday greeting, when William walked through the door of his apartment. His wife and a tender kiss greeted him.

"Honey, your mom stopped by at seven-thirty, and just left about half an hour ago," said Kate, her arms still wrapped around William's cement-dusted neck. "I've been calling your cell almost every fifteen minutes trying to reach you since then."

"My cell phone is dead. Even *it* couldn't make it through the day." William gently disentangled himself and took off his work boots before stepping onto the rented carpeting.

"If I tried to tell you all about my day today I would have to relive it. That would be more than I can take just now."

William headed toward the bathroom, removing his shirt along the way. He turned on the shower and stripped down to his boxers before returning to the living room.

"Why was Mom here? I spoke with her this morning... before work no less. She didn't mention being in the area tonight, I figured she might stop by tomorrow."

"Her friend George Tyler, the auto dealer she has been keeping company with, is taking her to Atlantic City for the weekend. They're spending the weekend together."

"I truly love my mom, but she scares me living in a faster lane than we do!"

“Don’t be. I doubt she got off the curb much when she was our age, with young children and a husband who was only home long enough to shower and...” Kate seductively appraised William’s muscled frame. “You know...”

“Daddy, Daddy, happy birthday!” Tara, 7, and Nicole, 5, darted into the room from one of the bedrooms, dragging paper cutouts and other crafts.

“Look what Grandma helped us make you for your birthday!”

“Hi pumpkins,” William said, wrapping himself in a towel and admiring the paste-covered creations. “Your mom and I were just about to...” He glances mischievously at Kate, who reacts in silent-film-star alarm, “talk about how my birthday is really tomorrow, and that I am going to take Mom and both of you out to visit this beautiful state in which we now live.”

Kate stared at William with relieved embarrassment and wonderment. She could not remember the last time he took a Saturday off.

5

After harnessing the girls in their car seats, Kate snapped her seat belt shut. William duplicated this ritual, and as he reached for his own seat belt he leaned over to kiss Kate. She kept him drawn toward her and kissed him for the longest time.

“Are we there yet?”

“I’m hungry.”

“I have to go to the bathroom.” Tara and Nicole burst into giggles at their rehearsed routine and their parents’ embrace.

Kate turned around in her seat and smiling said, “Hey, guys, you know how much Mummy loves Daddy? Well, today is his birthday, and he’s spending it with us!”

“Yeah!!!”

William pulled the car out of the parking space of the apartment complex that would be their neighborhood for the next year and a half. William’s out-of-town jobs would be harder to accept as the girls grew older and more reluctant to switch schools, but for now these extended “vacations” provided more important experiences.

Both Kate and William shared a passion for the outdoors and today they had decided to visit the Lauray Caverns.

“I wonder why it’s L-a-u-r-a-y Caverns and L-u-r-a-y city,” Kate mused as she flipped through a Virginia guide.

“I think it’s because they hadn’t invented spell-check when these places were first discovered. It’s like Mackinac Island and Mackinaw City in Michigan, both pro-

nounced the same way even though they're spelled differently."

"You're probably right, since it says here the caverns were discovered by settlers holding candles, not Palm Pilots. But, hey, here's something the girls should enjoy. In 1954, the year Grandma was born, a man named Leland W. Sprinkle built the Great Stalacpipe Organ, the world's largest musical instrument inside the caverns, using stalactite from the cave walls."

"Cool, like in church? Can we play it?" Tara asked.

"I don't know. Let me check." Kate flipped through the pages. William glanced her way casually, and then abruptly interrupted her search with a pointed finger.

"There. Let's go there instead."

"But Hon, the Natural Bridge is a good distance from here, probably an hour at least. Don't you want to visit the Lauray Caverns today?"

"No, we can do that another day. Let's visit the Natural Bridge first. I really want to see why this landmark is one of the Seven Wonders of the World!"

"Well, it's your birthday, so you get to choose. Let me check the map so I can figure out how to get there from here."

Kate did not mind accommodating her husband's sudden interest in prioritizing their visits of Virginia points of interest. As long as they spent a whole day together she would be content.

"Well, we're already on US 33. If we go south instead of north at I-81, we'll be on track."

Kate refolded the map and returned her attention to the sight-seeing guide.

"Girls, it looks like you'll have to see the cave organ another day. Daddy has a different treat in store. It's a bridge that no one built. It's just there. It's as tall as Niagara Falls. Remember when we went there?"

“Cool, will there be wax museums and stuff?” Nicole asked excitedly.

William and Kate exchanged silent groans.

The car ride to the Natural Bridge was relaxing. William parked his mind in neutral, allowing it to pursue any train of thought influenced by the passing scenery. As they followed the road signs to their destination, they arrived at a setting that appeared to be a small town square, with big city intersections. This center was the gateway to the Natural Bridge and filled with all the tourist traps, wax museums included, that brought squeals of excitement from the girls.

The weather could not have been any more pleasant. A bright sun hung in a perfect clear sky with a soft breeze keeping the family cool. Unaware of the method of entrance to visit the Natural Bridge, William and Kate were caught off guard when they realized that access to the bridge could only be gained by first paying an admission fee in the main building.

“Could you imagine arriving at Niagara Falls or Mount Rushmore only to find the main site is shielded by a building, and to see it you must pay an admission first?”

Kate smiled in agreement but moved forward in line to purchase the admission tickets. They joined a crowd on the short walk to a waiting shuttle bus and boarded. After a five-minute ride down a winding declining road, they disembarked at the entrance of a walkway leading to the bridge. They came upon a large pavilion that housed a snack bar, a covered patio and public washrooms. The area was crowded with visitors whose dialects and outward appearances gave away their origins.

As they approached the Natural Bridge, calmness fell over William. The area was a secluded gorge with steep high cliffs overlooking each side of a curving stream. The family moved in the direction of the bridge. The left side

of the stream was still in its natural state, while the right side had been developed to handle the vast number of pedestrians who had also discovered this hidden site. William's construction eye studied the stonework making up the barriers and pathways leading forward.

Whilst looking down, his concentration was interrupted by the awed gasps of adjacent tourists.

"Wow!..."

William looked up ever so slowly and as he did so, the site, a curved natural stone arch, came into sight. The Natural Bridge seemed larger than a twenty-story building, about half as wide as it was high, spanning the two banks of the canyon. The arch was mostly green covered with vegetation, the underside dark and shaded. Across the top there appeared to be a functioning paved roadway. A steel roadway railing and signposts were dotted across the top.

William was frozen in his tracks, his serious face glancing at Kate. She was twenty feet or so in front of him, holding one daughter in each hand and skipping toward the bridge. Beyond Kate a continuous chain of visitors crowded the pathway. Looking down, William viewed the sea of bodies as a single collage of moving colors.

The figures directly under the bridge reminded William of his childhood tiny soldier collection below his bedroom door archway. In his mind's eye the pathway seemed to suddenly disappear. This brief mirage startled William, but he didn't question its meaning.

He moved toward the bridge ever so slowly, almost stoically.

As he moved closer in this pensive trance, people around him momentarily stared, but his secluded focus was no match for the enormous sight before them. William was hearing the voices of his daughters and the comments of his wife. Kate, though, was unaware that

William was only hearing and not comprehending anything around him.

William walked past his family, completely ignoring them. Kate was like most of the visitors around her, very involved with all of the sights and sounds of this place. Yet, William was no longer mentally aware of his actions.

To Kate, observing from a distance, her husband appeared to be in his usual studious appreciation of an engineered creation. She was distracted by Tara who tugged on her tee shirt. As she attended to Tara's inquisitiveness, she realized that something was odd with William. He was approaching the center of the bridge still trance-like, ignoring people around him. Kate returned her attention toward William and became curious about his frozen stare at the underside of the bridge.

She saw him focusing on the droplets of water forming on the underside of the bridge and falling to the surface of the pathway below. As Kate came to within a few feet of William, she called to him. He did not respond. As she moved to touch him, Nicole, at her side, resisted moving forward. Kate dropped down and spoke to Tara in serious tones. William was now focusing on the origin of the droplets bombarding his shoulders, hair, forehead, cheeks and chin. His eyes closed momentarily, and as a droplet hit the bridge of his nose, his left eye opened to see a droplet just leaving the underside of the bridge.

His eye followed the individual droplet down, catching it head-on. William let out a scream that could be heard for only a split second. As the water droplet hit the surface of his open eye, a second droplet directly behind it found his open mouth and entered the center of his throat.

Kate had been occupied with a persistent daughter. As she explained to Tara the importance of holding onto her smaller sister while she checked on Daddy, she heard a horrific scream coming from William. A downpour of wa-

ter met the turning of her head knocking her backward on her behind.

As Kate fell back, she heard Tara and Nicole scream, and she heard herself scream. Kate looked in amazement as water slammed to the ground. The quantity of water now splashing on her clothing and that of her daughters as well as the hard surface around her, equaled in volume to what a grown man the size of William would displace if fully immersed in a tub filled to its rim. A puddle of quickly dispersing water now lay where William stood only moments ago.

Kate looked up to the ceiling of the bridge. Shaking like a leaf, and her complexion white, she appeared to be chilled. Her vision and hearing now blurred, Kate fainted.

6

William lay unconscious in a fetal position. Most of his body was on the grassy banks of a stream with his feet in the water. Directly above him was a natural span of land from one elevated bank to another. In the distance, horses in water and on land could be heard approaching.

Men's voices mixed into the distant sounds. A group of seven men on horseback were discussing in loud tones facts relating to the disappearance of a newborn baby just hours ago. For the moment their backs were turned to William; they had not seen him crouched on the ground. Only a few moments ago, the men had rode over the very spot William's body was now covering. The cold water at William's feet and the voices of the men nearby were starting to awaken him. His eyes opened facing the ground. Now he could clearly comprehend the nearby conversations.

"Are you sure?" demanded Matthew. "How is it possible that Daniel just vanished?"

"I must believe that while that idiot brother-in-law of yours was sleeping, an outlaw must have snatched the baby out of the bassinet!" Charles Brookfield, Matthew's uncle, was the eldest of the bewildered group of men. Normally level-headed and forceful enough to quell his nephew's general distemper, the disappearance of the infant had him, nevertheless, seriously alarmed.

"Well, how do you explain the water then?"

"Look, Matthew, there must be somebody in this area who knows this place better than we do. It is very possi-

ble that Daniel is nearby. Do not give up hope just yet,” the uncle replied.

“Kate,” William heard himself whisper. As he started to raise himself, William noticed the surroundings around him had changed. The vegetation was more lush and plentiful. The paved pathway was no longer there. There were no tourists and his family had vanished.

William turned toward the men who now had tied their horses to nearby branches. They were sitting on large rocks in a circle, and one man was pointing into the ground with a bayonet. William instinctively took half a step in their direction, and then froze. He caught a glimpse of the horsemen’s rifles and long pistols, the barrels of which were clad in wood. Rubbing his forehead, he extended and pressed his two bottom fingers into his eyes almost as if to wipe the scene around him back to what it was like just a few minutes ago. He removed his hand from his forehead, hoping for a miracle. The vision before him remained unchanged.

The thought: “I desperately need to know!” raced through William’s mind. “Just what in the hell is going on?” he yelled out loud.

On cue, the men turned in William’s direction, disbelief visible on their faces. They were less than one hundred feet from where William stood. William was wearing a bright nylon tracksuit, clothing unfamiliar to the horsemen. One of them raised his weapon.

“Sir! I command you to remain as you are,” one of the men ordered.

“Matthew, lower your weapon; that pistol is no threat at this range.”

The elder horseman’s whispered comments were inaudible to William. William was becoming concerned; he had no idea what was going on or if he was in danger.

“Who are you and what do you want?” William shout-

ed in the direction of the horsemen. Matthew Bulow, the man who had first spoken, lowered his handgun to the ground then reached for the rifle lying at his feet. William thought at first that he was lowering his weapon to show a sign of peace, but then he noticed that the horseman was actually raising a long rifle, which appeared to have the necessary range.

“Oh shit!”

William turned to run in the direction away from the horsemen. Reacting, the horseman Matthew fired his rifle. A second horseman had already found his rifle and joined his cousin in firing on the fleeing stranger.

“Hold your fire!” yelled out the elder. He jolted toward the riflemen as they prepared to reload and grabbed both rifle barrels, one in each hand. “You idiots! I would bet my horse that the strange person you scared off has the answer to the whereabouts of baby Daniel.”

“Uncle, there is no way out of this ravine for him now.” Matthew was already releasing his horse and climbing on. The others were joining him.

William felt the two rifle rounds strike rocks and nearby water, in dangerously close proximity to him. Not knowing what lay ahead, but certain the horsemen would harm him if they caught him, he ran for his life along the banks of the stream. He looked back and saw the group now on horseback and in full pursuit. As he ran along the edge of the stream he relied on his expensive athletic shoes and his physical fitness to maneuver him over the jagged rocks and slippery grasses.

Another shot rang past him. William saw the opening of a cave just ahead. As he scrambled up a small hill to the entrance, he quickly realized the cave was only thirty feet deep or so. There was nowhere to hide. The opening of the cave was very wide with the center of it blocked by heavy vegetation, but the left side remained slightly

opened. By now all of the horsemen were at the foot of the hill leading up to the entrance of the cave. They simultaneously dismounted their horses and scrambled up the hill, their weapons leading the way.

William saw the horsemen approaching; they were so close now he could see the look of confidence on their faces. In perfect timing to their entry, William quietly eased through the vegetation on the far end of the opening and darted to one of the last horses left at the foot of the hill. William mounted the horse with ease and directed him in the same direction he ran.

The horse galloping on the hard ground and rocks alarmed the men in the cave. Turning toward the opening, they could see William's bright tracksuit flash by on one of their horses. William was relieved to be on a vehicle equal in speed to that of his pursuers. His horse slowed almost to a stop before jumping a stream in their path. As he passed the stream, he glanced to his side and saw an odd sight. The stream was gushing into a large hole and continuing underground. The horse charged forward.

William looked back and saw the distant chasers pursuing him. William had no idea where this path would lead him. Up ahead the ravine curved. William maintained his horse's speed. The horse obeyed. Allowing his own head to drop momentarily, William lost clear vision of the path ahead. As he regained focus, his heart raced to his throat.

Just ahead, a small deep pond received a picture perfect waterfall, abruptly ending his escape route. The horse was still at full speed so William frantically pulled at the reins with all of his strength. The horse labored to stop but as it saw the edge of the deep pond, it managed to stop completely. William's body, still traveling a good speed, flew forward over the head of the horse directly in-

to the deep pond. The cold water shocked him and the catapulting dive sent him to the very bottom. Pushing off the bottom with all the strength he could find, he propelled his body upward.

William's mouth opened the instant it broke the surface of the water but luckily, his loud gasps for air were muffled by the sound of the waterfall. He treaded the cold water, listening for sounds of the approaching horsemen, but all he could hear was the waterfall directly behind him. Certain that the rifles of the horsemen would appear any moment, William swam in the direction of the only refuge he could see.

The underside of the elevated rocks that led him into the pond cantilevered over the water. William was now under the rocks and had only a few inches of air. He twisted his head to give his mouth access to a pocket of air hidden to the bewildered hunters directly on the rocks above him. William's disappearance without a trace into the clear pond baffled the group pursuing him. One horseman screamed out:

"I want my son back!"

William recognized this voice as the same one that yelled out earlier at him, the one belonging to the man who fired his rifle first. Holding on to the rock for dear life and attempting to avoid disturbing the small rippling on the water's surface, William was not prepared for the next shock. The man who yelled out, venting frustration over his predicament, picked up a large boulder, raised it over his head, and slammed it into the center of the pond.

The first resulting wave came at William with no warning. The water displaced by the large boulder filled the gap under the rocks. Water entered William's open mouth, choking him; his convolutions were uncontrollable. William felt large amounts of liquid entering his lungs. He pushed himself toward his previously safe gap,

banging his head on the underside of the rock.

A gash appeared on his forehead, spilling his blood from the wound. He had hoped to find enough air to clear his lungs but the air was not there. It was no use. The air space was now compromised by the disturbed surface of the water. Dark blood, which appeared black to William from his underwater position, was flowing toward the edge of the rocks. He knew he no longer had a choice. He had to expose himself if his blood had not already done so.

“Matthew, you need to control yourself.”

The elder of the group was holding onto Matthew’s elbow and arm. As the elder finished his sentence, Matthew’s cousin, Jesse, noticed red blood emerging from the bottom of the rock below them.

“Father, look, there must be...”

Jesse’s observations were interrupted by William’s body being pulled forward and out from under the rock by a hand that had found the front of the rock ledge. Matthew already held his pointed rifle at William’s bobbing head.

“Get him out of there safely, we need him alive.”

To this command, two of the group’s hired hands jumped in the water. William had no strength to fight them off; more than anything else he needed air. The men placed William over a rifle elevated horizontally above the surface of the water. They dragged him over to a ledge in the pond where the depth of the water was only knee high.

As they pulled up on the rifle, the pressure of it in William’s chest and stomach forced him to expel much of the water in his lungs, breathing through his coughing. The two men continued to drag William out through the stream until they were close enough to the bank to allow them to place him at the feet of the others waiting. Matthew and Jesse arrived first and took over the efforts

of their drenched comrades. They each grabbed one of William's arms and plucked him out of the water, dropping him onto the adjacent ground. William's face was bloody from the gash that was still bleeding on his forehead.

"What do you want from me?" William struggled to speak in between his gasps for air. They responded with a blow to his head from Matthew's fist.

"I want my son!"

"Matthew, I swear I will shoot you myself if you do not control your temper," threatened the elder of the group.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," William, visibly shaking and scared for his life, gasped out over the conversation of his captor. The elder turned his attention away from his nephew and addressed William, glaring at him, his voice very firm.

"Sir, please listen carefully. It is obvious to us you have something to hide. It is also obvious to us you are not from these parts. We are certain you have knowledge of my nephew's baby, who disappeared only hours ago at the very spot we first saw you under the natural land bridge ahead."

The elder of the group paused to see if there was any reaction to what he had said so far. His instincts told him that this man certainly had something to do with the disappearance of baby Daniel. He also realized that the injured man before him was not dangerous, but probably scared out of his mind. Without response from William, the elder resumed his appeal more diplomatically.

"My name is Charles Brookfield, this is my son Jesse, and the over-anxious, violent man to my right is the missing baby's father, Matthew Bulow. These other men are my employees. Sir, may we know your name?"

"William! William Monterey! I think I know where I am, but I have no idea who you are or what very realistic

nightmare of mine you have come from. I have no idea what you are talking about regarding a missing baby."

"Liar!"

Matthew launched at William, ready to strike him again but he was restrained, this time by Jesse.

"Mr. Monterey, I am trying to help you, we know you can assist us in finding our Daniel. Please do not allow yourself to be left in the hands of the law. I can assure you they will treat you far worse than my nephew is capable of, even in his current state."

William realized that no matter what he said, they remained convinced that he had caused the disappearance of their infant.

"I need time to think this through, please take me to the place where your child went missing."

Before Matthew had a chance to blurt out his reply to William, Charles held his hand up and motioned to his men to grab William and accompany him in the direction of the Natural Bridge.

"Uncle, he is stalling..."

"Matthew, we have time to let Mr. Monterey come to his senses and assist us in finding your son. Now, Mr. Monterey, please consider the importance of giving us the answers we need. Your life may depend on it."

Charles's threatening words stuck in William's mind. He knew that these men meant business. He also knew that if he could not help them find their missing baby and they could not be reasoned with, his life was in danger. William wanted to wake up from this dream but the problem was, he knew it was no dream. Everything about his predicament was so real to him.

As his captors led him forward, William tried to make sense of what had happened in the last hour. He thought that he had become lost in a different time and somehow ended up in an era not his own. Yet, his rational mind

doubted this and he shook his head in confusion. Nothing seemed to make sense! These men were dressed in a style similar to the turn of the century, their weapons antique to him, his surroundings bearing no images of modern-day elements such as posted signs, concrete construction or litter.

Litter! William realized that there must be litter of some kind that would give away the era in which he found himself. William's eyes searched the landscape. Nothing! The area was totally unspoiled. He considered asking Charles, the elder, to clarify for him some of the nagging uncertainties that were bombarding his brain. The group was moving at a walking pace, two men on foot holding William, the others following on horseback. William turned his head to search for Charles's face. One of the men holding him pulled at his arm as if he was directing his horse to stay forward.

"Please keep moving, Mr. Monterey."

Charles did not invite William to speak his mind and so William now rethought his immediate plan. He had no idea how he could convince these men that he was not responsible for the disappearance of their child. He realized that he must escape somehow. The group was approaching the small stream that William recalled crossing earlier. As he stared at the small cavern the stream emptied into, a thought came to him.

"I need some water!" William heard himself blurt out, while he studied the cavern and considered his next move.

"Very well, Mr. Monterey, you may stop for a moment to splash some water on your face."

Charles was maintaining diplomacy; Matthew was nervous about the stranger's request. William walked toward the stream, headed diagonally three steps and was now at the point where the stream entered the cavern. On

his first attempt to cup water in his hands, William stared forward into the cavern, the direction of his gaze invisible to the others. He studied the darkness of the opening, its size and shape, and immediately saw that it could easily accommodate his size. In fact, the water had eroded a slippery slide downward.

Without thinking about it for another moment, William leaned forward with his hands cupped as if to take some more water and then dived downward into the rushing water. The men behind him scrambled to the opening, terrified by the sight they had just witnessed.

“He must be mad! This cavern will surely lead him to his death! Now we will never find Daniel!”

They stared into the dark opening, convinced the stranger they had just met would rather commit suicide than face the wrath of their lawless justice. Charles was in disbelief.

“Well, Matthew, now we must go home and report to Sarah that you scared to death the only person who could have helped us find her baby.”

Matthew turned away and mounted his horse.

“There is no certainty that man knew the whereabouts of Daniel.”

“Matthew, I am telling you I could see it in his eyes, Daniel was very familiar to him. I suggest not telling Sarah how close we came to finding out what happened to her baby. She may never forgive either of us.”

William was still very much alive. In total darkness, his body traveled through the cavern like sewer waste in a pipe. His body cold in the frigid water barely felt the slamming of the rocks as he traveled downward with the rushing water. William's mind was telling him that this would soon be over, that the purpose of his regression in time must have a superior meaning than to die in a watery hole never to be found again.

Finally, William's body dropped down a last sliding path, landing on his side with water still gushing around him. As he lifted his head, he could see light reflecting on the wet rocks above him. He could hear the faint echoing of ricocheting voices.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please be careful as you follow me in this direction," instructed John Spencer, in the slightly pompous tone adopted by tour operators of every era.

"Watch your step. The decline toward the Natural Bridge Caverns is very steep. And if any of your candles should become extinguished in the draft, please turn to your fellow man... or lady," Mr. Spencer said, bowing to the four daring women who had joined the twenty gregarious men on one of the cavern's first tours.

"Col. Henry Parsons himself asked me to caution you, to tell you to always be aware of who is in front of and behind you at all times. We don't want anyone getting lost down here. The colonel spent nearly two years exploring the tunnels down here, but even he is not familiar with

every twist and turn,” he said, directing the group deeper into the cavern and closer to its walls.

The visitors were spending scant attention to their tour guide. They were too enthralled with stalactites and stalagmites that were new to their eyes but had taken hundreds of thousands of years to form. This was hardly an exploration for the timid. It took a gregarious man, and a daring woman, to risk entrapment inside caves that had been buried for hundreds of thousands of years, dug out fewer than three years earlier, in 1889.

Mr. Spencer’s warnings, however, were not completely disregarded. A few visitors held a little more tightly onto their candle-holders, which had been specially designed to reflect light forward.

“In front of you, ladies and gentlemen, is Dead-man’s Drop.” The guide stopped to look at the faces of his group. Seeing the usual reaction to his announcement, he resumed.

“If you look closely, you can see three levels, an underground stream flows at the bottom, some of us have been down to the first and second levels, placing the candles which illuminate the emptiness below, but the third level is much too dangerous a climb. No one really knows where the water in the stream comes from or where it eventually ends up...”

“Oh my God!”

One of the ladies was screaming at the top of her lungs. Everyone else now was puzzled and reacting to her scream.

“What is it, miss?” asked the guide.

“A man! I saw a man move in the stream below.”

Some of the others in the group were now seeing the mysterious figure, wearing a strange suit with reflective stripes, its movements now catching and reflecting the candlelight. The suit, made out of a material they did not

recognize, was visible to those looking closely into the deep hole.

"Please remain calm, it is impossible for anybody to be down there."

"It may be impossible, Mr. Spencer, but I believe I saw something move as well."

"I did as well, we'd better help whoever is down there!"

Those in the group closest to the wall looking directly into the hole reached a consensus that they had all seen someone or *something*.

"Please move aside. I need to see what all of this concern is about." Mr. Spencer moved through the crowd, pushing his way to the front.

"There he is again!"

"Let me through, please, I don't believe there is... Oh my God!" Mr. Spencer yelled out in disbelief.

"There is someone down there. I must inform the Colonel. I have no idea how this can be." Mr. Spencer ran from the group, breaking the first rule in his profession:

"No matter what happens, never leave our guests alone in the caverns," Col. Parsons had intoned on his first day of hire. "This will be the golden rule in keeping your job... and the caverns available to the public. If anything goes wrong, there won't be another private citizen permitted in the caverns during my lifetime..."

Mr. Spencer was well aware of the rules, the Colonel had repeated them almost daily but there was nothing in his instructions that included the circumstances he now found himself in. He hurried off to seek Col. Parsons's help in rescuing the mysterious stranger.

This left the tour group with no one acting as their leader. For a short minute they did nothing but stare into the hole, pointing candlelight in the direction of the brightly colored clothing. Finally, one of the taller, well-

dressed men of the group spoke out.

"Hello, down there, can you hear me? Are you all right?"

William, hearing this seemingly friendly voice, reached upward and replied in a weak voice barely audible to those above.

"Help!" One loudly shouted word was all he could manage in his condition. Under his breath, he added: "Can you please help me?"

"Hold on, sir, we will try to reach you."

By now Thomas Byronville was removing his overcoat.

"Rachel, please hold my torch and overcoat. I am going to attempt to reach this poor soul."

"But Thomas, please wait for Mr. Spencer to return with help."

"It may be too late by the time that brain-dead excuse for a guide returns. Besides, for all we know, in his panic he may even lose himself in these caverns, and we will be rescuing *him* next."

Thomas Byronville lowered himself toward the first level. He could see the candles placed below. The first level was easy to reach, but Thomas's descent toward the second level appeared more challenging as the rocks became more cold and slippery. Slowly he climbed downward, and in a few minutes he found himself on the ledge of the second level. The group above all gathered around the opening of the hole, positioning themselves in shifting motions on tip-toes to get a better glimpse at the proceedings below.

"Sir, are you hurt?" Thomas asked William in a lower tone than earlier.

"Just superficially, I think nothing is broken."

As Thomas positioned himself to descend to the narrower and less visible path to the third level where William still lay on his side, he continued to familiarize

himself with his new friend's situation.

"Are you able to move toward me?"

"Yes, I think I should be able to climb toward you."

"How is it that you find yourself stranded in this part of the cavern?"

"My friend, I would like the answer to that myself."

It has been quite some time since anyone spoke to Thomas with such confidence. Thomas Byronville did not have many true friends; this was due to his stature and wealth and not his demeanor. Most people Thomas associated with did not match his education, wit or position in society. For the most part, people were intimidated, but this individual in need seemed different.

William had come up farther than Thomas expected. Thomas was impressed with William's handling of the jagged slippery rocks. One more step for both of them and they would be able to touch the other's hand.

"Take my hand!"

"Thank you, I know that at this point I could not make it up alone."

The candlelight from the second level was reaching the face of William. Thomas moved toward William; he moved down to reach out for his hand and froze in a statuesque pose. His face was alarmed. Thomas, with as little light as was available, realized that he was staring at almost a twin of himself.

"Is something wrong? I will need you to lean forward just a few more inches."

Thomas knew that with the light behind him, his face was not visible to his new similar-looking friend. "No, nothing is wrong. Your attire startled me that's all."

Their hands met, William reacted to this contact with a shock similar to that of Thomas's reaction a few moments before. William always played an almost subconscious game whenever he grasped the hand of someone new.

William knew he had a sixth sense that told him a great deal about the character of a person by the feel of their hand. The strength of a handshake's grip, the texture of the skin, and warmth of the touch revealed to William a person's sincerity. William, for the first time in his life, felt a hand square-on that was similar to his own.

The need to get out of danger overcame both men's curiosity about each other's origins. Thomas pulled himself back and drew with him the weight of William. Both men were now settling on the second level, positioning themselves to catch their breath.

"Thomas, are you both okay?" A woman's voice that sounded familiar to Thomas boomed down from the awaiting audience above.

"Yes, Rachel, please throw down my overcoat." Thomas realized he could wait until they reached the top to clad his new friend in warm clothing but his intent to cover him sooner was motivated by another reason. Thomas was certain that if the small crowd above was to see this stranger in his odd clothing it would be detrimental to the man's well-being.

William now was staring at this new friend's features. The man before him appeared to be William's age and to have the same color hair (although of different length). His nose, eyes and ears also bore a resemblance to William's features. The coat was flung down and immediately pulled over William's wet and cold body. William noticed the quality of the fine wool coat and was surprised by the perfect fit over his broad shoulders.

Instinctively, Thomas reached forward to button up the front of his own coat now on a stranger for whom he was feeling a certain concern.

"My name is William Monterey, I would like to thank you for risking your life to rescue me."

"I have confidence that the risk will prove itself to be a

worthwhile investment. My name is Thomas Byronville. I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Monterey.”

“Thomas, please call me William.”

Thomas brought his left hand over William’s right hand already in his.

“William, let’s proceed up to join my sister and the others above. I am very anxious to learn more about you!”

Both men turned and resumed climbing upward; they had very little problem reaching the next level.

As the two men reached the top, other men in the group joined in to help pull Thomas and William out of the remaining few feet of the hole. Thomas knew that the brief words he and William had shared in the cavern below were not audible to the crowd, so the next statement he made in the form of an announcement shocked his sister Rachel.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is my cousin. He joined our group late and straggled on his own, he did not see this hole before him and fell in. He was waiting for us to come up to this point when he passed out. I am very grateful to the young lady who took notice of him. Now if you will excuse my sister and me, we will be taking him home to recover from this ordeal.”

Thomas grabbed Rachel’s arm and that of William and commenced walking in the direction of the exit. Both Rachel and William followed Thomas’s lead with complete confidence in his plan, whatever it may be. Those in the crowd who saw both Thomas and William together found the claim Thomas made very easy to believe. The two men could have passed for twins; they must have certainly been related. As the candles only provided light from the waist up, William’s white leather track shoes were not noticed. The rest of the crowd had seen enough for one day and almost on cue decided to follow them out.

John Spencer was now on his way back with three oth-

er men in tow. Thomas could see the approaching candlelight and anticipated the confrontation with the returning guide.

“Where are you all going? I specifically asked that no one move until I returned.”

“Mr. Spencer, these two members of my family and myself are sick of this tour and experience. We are leaving forthwith! Your Colonel will hear from us in writing with regard to the maltreatment we received today. I suggest you see to the remainder of the group to ensure they all get out unharmed.”

Thomas did not wait for a reply from Spencer. He pushed through them and vigorously continued forward. Spencer realized this man was superior in education and stature to him and proceeded to challenge the group approaching.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please stop until everyone is together. Then I will escort all of you safely out. You two men proceed to Dead-man’s Drop and check out who is down at the third level.”

“Mr. Spencer, the man in the cavern was pulled out by the couple ahead of us,” the lady who first noticed William volunteered.

John Spencer did not know which way to turn. If he didn’t sort this out properly, he knew he would most likely lose his job as a guide. At this point his hesitation was causing those people who remained in the caverns to disperse in every direction. To Spencer, it was his worst nightmare come true, and he spent the next hour clearing up the chaos left behind by Thomas Byronville and William Monterey.

8

Thomas led the way directly out of the caverns. The daylight was a dim late afternoon absent of direct sun, but was still enough to cause a discomfort to eyes now conditioned by darkness. Rachel shielded her eyes momentarily from the new light, breathing heavily. She had yet to study the similarities between her brother and their new friend. Thomas wanted to confirm his reaction to William's appearance by gauging Rachel's. Rachel, bent over recovering from the sunlight, heard her brother announce in a pointed tone:

"Rachel, I would like you to meet someone I just met for the first time: Mr. William Monterey, This is my younger sister, Rachel."

William remained silent, taking in all of this newness.

"Thomas, I know you've never met Mr. Monterey before." Rachel started to raise her head.

"We do not have any cousins in these parts that..." Rachel stopped, dumbfounded. She had just seen William's features. Stopping in mid sentence, she was silent for a minute, glancing at William, shifting her gaze to different parts of his face and body.

"...Any cousins that I am aware of. Hello, Mr. Monterey, is there something I need to know with respect to the fact that you are just as handsome as my brother?"

William blushed slightly. He was certain the compliment was directed more his way than Thomas's.

"Actually Rachel, it is a pure coincidence. I am quite certain your brother and I have no common ties! By the

way, I am very pleased to meet you. Please call me William. You folks still practice formalities long forgotten where I come from. I cannot tell you just how much I appreciate you both helping me like you did."

"Well, Thomas, our Mr. Monterey..." Rachel stopped again. "William," she corrects herself, "must have certainly come from the same mold as you. He not only looks like you, he sounds like you. His words may be of different origin, but his speech, mannerism and tone are identical to yours."

The three of them had traveled a short distance from the building at the entrance of the caverns. Now Thomas could see the front end of the tour group that had entered the caverns with him only hours ago, emerge. Stoically, he maintained an intense focus on his surroundings. He was determined not to expose William to anybody in the area. The law of the land in Virginia during this time was simple: if you were strange or acted strange, then you must be guilty of a crime. Persecution for those found to be outcasts from society was severe. Thomas interrupted Rachel's idle chitchat to convey to both of them the seriousness of the situation.

"We best get on our way. I will summon Bentley to fetch the carriage."

William was able to surmise that Bentley was a servant, and the carriage was horse-drawn. He was correct. Bentley was an African-American man, fifty years old or so, who was very attentive to Thomas's instruction. William could tell that Bentley was a loyal servant and that Thomas appeared to have treated him well. The carriage they were riding in was the most beautiful example of fine detailed craftsmanship William had ever seen. Rachel and Thomas chatted about the dinner that awaited them at home and which dishes and cooks were their favorites.

"Mrs. Brown made the best grits. I miss her cooking the most!"

"Yes, Thomas, I do not think anyone ever cooked for you as well as she did."

William could hear their voices but closed his eyes, seeming to be asleep until both Thomas and Rachel were quiet for more than a minute. Then the silence was broken.

"What year is this?" William asked without shifting his head from its resting position nor opening his eyes.

"William, you are awake after all!"

William opened his eyes wide now, a somber look on his face. He stared directly at Thomas and then to Rachel and then returned to Thomas.

"I need to know what year this is!"

"Why is it William, that you do not know what year this is?" Thomas asked, concerned that perhaps the stranger in his carriage had escaped from a mental institution.

"Are you mentally ill in some way, William? Do you think that the bang on your head has affected your memory in some way?" Rachel was less reluctant to speak her mind.

"Rachel, please be polite to our guest!"

"I apologize, William, this is the year of the Lord 1892, it is Saturday July 22, 1892."

"Well, at least I am at the right day and month, which I was at when I awoke this morning. This morning at precisely 8:00 AM, my digital radio alarm clock awoke with The Who singing *My Generation*. I did not think anything of it then." By then, the realization that William was in the year 1892 began to set in.

"1892 huh? *People try to put me down.*" William was now singing. "*Just because I get around.*" Thomas and Rachel were both bewildered. "*Things I do look awfully dumb*". William was starting to raise his voice. "*Talking*

about, my generation."

Bentley was attempting to look into the carriage from his perch to investigate this commotion.

"*My generation.*" William now lowered his voice to a soft whisper. "*My generation.*" Thomas and Rachel looked at each other and back at William, expecting him to continue. He was not paying attention to their reaction but continued for his own sake.

"My dad loved The Who. It must have rubbed off on me. I have seen them six times live in concert. One of my favorite albums is *Quadrophenia*. When it was released in 1973, it was hailed unequivocally as a masterpiece. Townshend masterfully created a story of a young rebel, into an astonishing 17 songs. And you know even though Roger Daltrey did not speak a word in the movie *Tommy*, he was so perfect in the part. Most people did not know that he almost drowned while filming an underwater scene in the movie. The crew realized he was in trouble just in time to dive in and help him. Today I almost feel like I did in 1979 when 11 people were trampled to death in Cincinnati waiting to see one of their concerts. My dad and I were caught in the middle of it. Little did I know people were dying a few feet away."

With his head now turned outward staring at the moving scenery, William continued recounting his day. Purposely William set out to include as much reference to his modern day technology so as to convince his hosts that he was from another time.

"When I woke up, I kissed my wife Kate good morning, walked across the Saxony Stain Master wall-to-wall carpeting on our apartment floor. Can you believe there is even wall-to-wall carpeting in the bathroom? I stepped in our one-piece acrylic shower stall, twisted the washerless faucet all the way to hot and soaked my skin with almost scalding water. I should have stopped right there

and then, and gone back to bed. The heater under our waterbed mattress had been acting up ever since we moved. I told the salesman who sold it to me at Waterbed World that I wanted a good quality heater. 'Don't you worry!' he said. 'The heater comes with a lifetime warranty. If you are not completely happy with it just bring it back and we will exchange it: No questions asked!' It sounded good at the time. But then if you think about it, why go through the trouble of emptying out your water bed just to return a heater that acts up once in awhile?"

William hesitated. Rachel and Thomas stared in complete wonderment of the meaning of William's words. They had no inclination to interrupt him. William continued. "My Volvo started this morning without hesitation. Kate had the electronic fuel injection serviced. I was a little concerned about the car. I asked her in the elevator when we left our fifth floor apartment, 'Kate are you sure the mechanic found the problem? Did he test-drive the car? Did he get it to travel at a highway speed of at least 75 miles per hour? Did the car hold its speed for more than five minutes?' She assured me the car would be fine, she was right. The car ride this morning was so peaceful; I didn't even take my cellular phone. No two-way radio, no cell phone, no fax machine, no computer, no e-mail... E-mail, Shii-oot I completely forgot to send the e-mail to Tony Torco last night." William shook his head and added, "Too bad! Say, you wouldn't happen to have a cellular-equipped hand held PDA unit that I could use to send an e-mail to the twenty-first century would you?" Thomas and Rachel sat captive in their seats unsure how to react. "No I guess not, then why would you? This is 1892!"

"William, do you really mean to tell us that you are here from another time and place?" Thomas asked as if he really wanted it to be so! William unbuttoned

Thomas's overcoat and slipped it off. Rachel quickly reacted with embarrassment.

"William, really have you no concern with my presence, disrobing to your undergarments!"

"Feel my suit. In the time I come from, people wear a suit like this as outerwear. Do you know this fabric?" Both Rachel and Thomas leaned in William's direction almost in slow motion to feel the fabric of his track-suit.

"Which animal of the future does this material come from?" Thomas asked.

"Please do not tell me you believe this impossibility!" Rachel added.

"Rachel, I am telling you the truth. I have no reason to make up such an impossibility. This fabric will not be invented for forty years. It is called nylon; it does not come from any animal but rather a chemical.

"I need your help," William continued, "to determine how this has happened to me and how I can rejoin my family."

Just then, Bentley shouted from his outside perch. "Mr. Thomas, we have company approaching."

By now dusk had painted the early evening sky of Virginia with dark gray and soft black shadows on the horizon. Peering out of the window of the carriage door William was able to make out approaching horsemen. Remembering his earlier encounter with a group on horseback, he hurriedly replaced Thomas's overcoat over his body.

"Please do not let these men know I am with you, please let your driver know not to reveal me."

"Do not concern yourself with Bentley, he is my loyal servant and only acts as I instruct him to do so."

The horses pulling the carriage drew to a halt. Thomas emerged even before the carriage completely stopped.

"Good evening, Mr. Byronville."

"Mr. Brookfield, Mr. Bulow, any luck in the search for your child?" William was startled that Thomas knew these men, and more so that he knew of the disappearance of the baby they talked about earlier. A new fear overcame William, and his mind raced to find a means of escape.

"We found..." Matthew Bulow was quickly interrupted by Charles Brookfield.

"Nothing, Mr. Byronville, our search today was futile. We will resume our efforts tomorrow and continue for as long as it will take to locate my nephew's lost child."

"Uncle, Daniel is not lost. He was abducted by a stranger in the area."

Rachel's eyes darted to William's. He returned the stare, looking directly at Rachel without blinking, as if to dare her to find any sign of guilt in his soul. Rachel, believing William's stare to be a confirmation of his friendliness and vulnerability, slowly lowered her head as if to accept William's plea for sympathy.

"Well, please let me know if I can send some help. I would be glad to have my men assist you in your search," Thomas offered to the tired group as reassurance of his sincere concern.

"That will not be necessary, Mr. Byronville," Matthew replied, "but thank you just the same."

"Matthew, tomorrow it may be wise to split up and search the ravine on foot. We need to comb the entire area, every square inch for any sign of Daniel. I am convinced he is still in the area. If you can spare some of your men, we can use the help."

"I will have ten of my worker men at your home at sun-up tomorrow, now if you will excuse us we must be on our way."

Thomas realized he said "us" and that he would not be expected to include his servant when referring to the plu-

rality of those present in the carriage, so he quickly qualified, "My sister Rachel and I have had a long and tiring day."

Just as he finished mentioning that Rachel was accompanying him, she pulled Thomas away from the opening of the carriage door, and addressed the men on horseback. At first this restrictive change of face visible through the carriage door seemed odd to Matthew, but his thoughts were interrupted by the quick exchanges of greetings.

"You will have to excuse my brother if he seems callous. I am certain that your day has been considerably more tiring than ours. If you men care to join us?" Both Thomas and William were notably startled by Rachel's invitation. "We would be happy to host you at our home for dinner."

"Thank you for your generosity, Miss Rachel, but we best be getting back to Sarah." William was relieved to hear that reply from Charles.

"Very well. Please ask Sarah to spend the day with me tomorrow. Bentley and I will be over mid-morning to fetch her."

"I think that to be a good idea, Miss Rachel. I know she will appreciate your company."

The men bid Rachel a good night and Thomas echoed the salutation from within the carriage. As the carriage pulled away, Matthew and the others directed their horses back on track in the direction of their homes.

"Uncle, did you notice that the stranger who eluded us today bore a strange resemblance to Thomas Byronville? Did you not find it strange that the Byronvilles chose not to completely exit their carriage? Did you have the feeling as I that they were trying to hide something?"

"The stranger we found today was scared out of his mind, he is now dead. Coincidentally there was a resem-

blance to Byronville, but I can assure you they were worlds apart. What could they possibly have to hide from us? No, Matthew, I just think they were as anxious to get home as I certainly am at this point.”

With that Charles whipped his horse and sped away. The others fell in speed and were now riding as a group. Matthew got the message that his uncle was disappointed with his actions earlier in the day and, as hesitating to reflect would leave him alone in the dark, he whipped his horse, harder than needed. He knew that perhaps he had overreacted, but he felt he had done what he had to under the circumstances.

9

William was feeling hungry and cold; the ride to the Byronville home was longer than he would have imagined. A part of the day was missing from his memory. He knew that he had been at the Natural Bridge with his family early in the morning and that only a few hours had passed since he had first encountered the men at the bridge, yet it was already dark. William summarized that it must have taken some hours for him to be transported from his time to this one.

Not another word was said between the time they left the horsemen and reached the Byronville home. William did not want to volunteer any information regarding his earlier encounter with the men nor did Thomas and Rachel want to know at the moment what ties, if any, William might have to Bulow.

The Byronville home was every bit a mansion. William had the feeling they were entering an old established country club. The mansion resembled an English Tudor castle. William noticed that there was no outdoor lighting, and the pathways were cobblestone. As the carriage came to a halt at the large double-arched front doors, a team of servants emerged to greet them. To William, they seemed like a pit crew as everyone had a role, no one spoke, and no one inquired why someone new was in their midst. Outside it was still too dark to make out individual faces. Thomas escorted William into his home. The pride he had for his castle was visible even in the candlelight.

“Rachel, please see to it that dinner is prepared forth-

with. Let the servants know that my cousin is here with us and he is to be treated as I am treated.”

“As you wish, Thomas.”

“William, please join me in my quarters.” Thomas spoke as if he knew he had the full audience of his servants listening to his every comment. William followed Thomas up a marble winding staircase, wide enough for six people to walk up side by side. A large chandelier with fifty or more candles in the center of the entrance lit up the house. “Right this way.”

Thomas led William into his private bedroom. Fascinated, William was occupied by the finishes in the room. Everything was detailed in a way that seemed priceless to him. Everywhere he looked, antique treasures were displayed. Realizing that his surroundings were not antique to his host, he dropped in disbelief onto a chaise-lounge.

“William, please make yourself at home. The room next to mine, to your left when you exit, will be yours. It seems that we wear the same size clothing, so you will find clean undergarments and outerwear as well as shoes in the armoire. I will explain to my chambermaid that your luggage went missing during your journey. She will see to it that everything you need is transferred into your room during dinner.”

“I don’t know what to say, your kindness overwhelms me.” William noticed he was falling into step with a speech pattern similar to Thomas’s.

“This evening we will eat, and then rest. I will make sure you are allowed to sleep for as long as you wish. Tomorrow you and I will spend some time in the gardens away from my servants so that I can understand you and your origins better. During dinner we will limit our discussion to current politics and the weather.”

“Current politics! That should be fun, history was my worst subject.”

“Simply amazing, my whole world has changed, William. I do believe you. If you have come from another time then anything is possible.” Thomas turned, walked toward the door and added: “Please feel free to join us as soon as you are dressed in more proper attire. Given our tardiness, dinner must be ready, we will wait for you before we commence our meal.”

William found all the necessary clothing he required to blend in with his surroundings. He joined his hosts for dinner; the meal was unlike anything he had ever tasted before. Absent were the manmade preservatives or chemicals used in his modern day food. Everything tasted pure and strong flavored. The dinner was a repeat performance of their arrival, with more servants than dinner guests, everything handled by awaiting human statues reacting and anticipating every requirement.

William was amazed that not a word was said to the staff. It was as if they did not exist. But they did and Thomas’s speech was carefully delivered for their presence. Thomas did most of the talking during dinner. Rachel joined in when addressed. William from time to time agreed with Thomas’s comments by adding general gestures and safe phrases.

After dinner, the group exchanged pleasantries for a good night’s rest, and Bentley escorted William to his room. The candles in the chandelier had burnt down a lot. Still slightly disorientated and confused by the day’s events, William had no sense of what time it was in the present. He only knew that he was feeling extremely tired and wanted to sleep forever. Before he fell asleep, he recalled slipping his borrowed shoes and outerwear off and climbing into a very high bed. Naturally, his last thoughts were about wanting to see his family again and hoping to awaken back in his own time.

10

Seconds after Kate fainted, four people flipped open their cell phones and dialed 9-1-1, the Natural Bridge tour guide radioed his supervisor, and two women sought to reassure Nicole and Tara that their mommy would be okay.

People became less helpful, in fact they pulled back in fear, when the medics revived Kate and she started ranting that her husband had dissolved into a puddle of water.

“He was there! Right there!” she screamed, pointing to the area beneath the span of the bridge. “He was right there, and then there was this downpour, and then, and then, he vanished!”

“It’s all right. Everything’s all right, lady,” soothed one of the EMS workers.

“No, it’s not all right!” Kate shouted, pulling out of the worker’s gentle hold on her elbow. “William turned into water! His body is evaporating into the air. Please help me!”

The two medics, both in their late-twenties, exchanged troubled looks behind Kate’s back and resumed their grip on Kate, this time a little more tightly.

“Come on, Miss, you probably hit your head when you fell. Let’s get you checked out at the hospital and...”

“No-o-o-o-o! I’m not going anywhere. That’s my husband there. William’s there, in that puddle of water, I can’t leave him!”

The tour guide operator was speaking furiously into

his two-way radio and trying without success to move visitors away from the scene.

"Let's give these medical men some room, folks, while we take a look at the other side of the bridge. Come on, let's move along." To the EMS workers, he hissed. "Get this crazy lady, and her kids, out of here *now*!"

The medics started to pull Kate to her feet, but she broke away and started cupping the water from the puddle in front of her.

"William, come back! William!"

"Look lady," said a security guard that was assisting the medics, "if you think you can make yourself a husband out of that puddle of water, then how 'bout you give me some of whatever you're smoking 'cause..."

His remark was interrupted by a punch square in the jaw. He fell backward, dazed, as one of the medics grabbed Kate in a bear hug.

"We're trying to help you, lady, and we know you're in shock from... something... but if you don't calm down, I'm going to have to take you to the hospital in a strait jacket. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes, I know I sound hysterical, but really, my husband was there and..."

"We understand, and we'll get this sorted out at the hospital. If you promise to remain calm, I'll help you up, and we'll get you looked at. All right?"

"All right," Kate agreed and was complacent when the medics began to guide her toward the awaiting ambulance.

Yet as soon as they released their grip, she darted to the spot where she had last seen William. Kate dropped to her knees and placed her hands flat over the wetness on the asphalt walkway.

One medic hastily followed her. The other, rushed to the ambulance and returned with a hypodermic needle in

hand. Unsure what to do next, they both hovered over Kate, who was staring into the wet pavement.

“William, please come back.”

She felt the presence of the medics directly over her, she turned and faced them, demanding:

“Don’t just stand there. Help me collect this water. Please, don’t let it evaporate. Someone must be able to bring my husband back.”

People in the crowd voluntarily stepped away now, mothers clutched their children tightly, with a few casting sympathetic glances toward Nicole and Tara, who were in too much shock to react. They didn’t know what had happened to their daddy, or to their mommy; they just held onto each other.

While one medic tested the hypodermic needle, the other alerted his dispatcher via his two-way radio.

Kate remained over the wet area staring at the edge of it, as if able to magnify her focus like a hi-power camera lens recording the evaporation of what was her husband a few minutes ago.

“No!”

She screamed as she reached upward with both hands trying to grasp at the escaping water vapor. One medic grabbed her wrists, as the other plunged the hypodermic into Kate’s arm. He didn’t know if he’d found a vein or not, he just wanted to return some of the pain he had inflicted on his fellow public servant, but his aim was better than he realized.

The tranquilizer acted quickly. The blue jeans cladding Kate’s legs folded under her weight as if they were filled with straw.

This was too much for Tara and Nicole. They broke out of their trance and ran screaming towards their mother. Strangers grabbed at them and held them back, but they could not silence their cries.

“What have you done to my mommy?”

“I want my daddy!”

“Please help us!”

The chambermaid's early-morning knock on Rachel's bedroom door didn't awaken the 24-year-old beauty. She had been lying languidly beneath the duvet, caressing her most intimate parts, fantasizing about the stranger who had become their house-guest.

Odd that he so resembled her brother. Maybe she just held all men up to his standards, which might explain her break-up with Clarence... but without a father against whom to measure potential suitors, Thomas took on the role by default.

Rachel and her brother lived together; their parents had died at sea in a shipwreck en route to Europe. As much as Rachel loved the comforts that came with the wealth she and her brother inherited, she hated the fact that it was that wealth that had allowed her parents to travel so much. When she was young, her parents left her often with a nanny. Each time they left, Rachel feared she would never see them again, until one day her fears became reality.

To offset that pain, Rachel sought what pleasures she could. Among them was a morning bath. Her chambermaid was instructed to fill a tub with warm water and have it ready for her at perfect temperature at 7 AM sharp each morning and to knock twice when it was ready. The knocks were meant to be a wake-up call but on some mornings, such as this, the raps interrupted an earlier indulgence.

Rachel sighed, pushed away erotic, conflicting images of the stranger and her estranged lover and climbed

down from her high, soft canopy bed. She disrobed, removing over her head the only item of clothing she wore to bed, a long white linen nightgown. Her naked body was perfect in every way; she knew this, in her mind it was a shame not to share it with someone who must surely crave physical affection as much as she. She entered the bathroom and lowered herself into the waiting tub; the warm water felt so good to her she allowed herself to drift almost back to sleep.



Bentley had the horse and carriage ready for Rachel as he had been instructed to do the night before. Rachel had dressed and eaten her breakfast. As she crossed the entrance floor from the kitchen in the rear of the house, Thomas was emerging from his room descending down the stairs.

“Good morning, Rachel. I trust you slept well?”

“Yes, Thomas, thank you, how is our guest this morning? Have you checked up on him?”

“As of yet, I have heard not a peep from his room. I will allow him to sleep for as long as he cares to! I can just imagine after the ordeal he went through yesterday he must need a lot of rest.”

“Well I am off to fetch Sarah Bulow. Thomas, will you take her out on the lake when I return? It may take her mind off her situation.”

“Yes, of course, I will prepare the row boat. I know how much she loves the peacefulness of the lake, it will be my pleasure.”

“Thomas, please promise me you will be sensitive to her loss, she must be heartbroken. I am not even sure if she will return with me, but I am certain she needs to get away from her sorrow. I shall be back in an hour or so.

Please make sure William, Mr. Monterey, is fine.”

“Not to worry.”

Rachel did not wait for Thomas’s reply; she was already out the door when Thomas finished his words.

Thomas walked into his kitchen and helped himself to a cup of coffee from the kettle on the stove.

“Good morning, Mr. Byronville.” Thomas was startled. He did not realize Mrs. Gates, the cook, was in the room with him.

“Oh, good morning, Mrs. Gates, I didn’t hear you enter.”

“Actually, Mr. Byronville, I was already here before you walked in, your mind must be on some important business, pay no attention to me. Would you like me to fix you some grits?”

“Yes, thank you Mrs. Gates. I feel very hungry this morning. Can you also cook some bacon and prepare to make some omelets the way I like them?”

“Will your cousin join you?”

“I am sure once the aroma of our fine bacon fills the house he will not be able to resist its invitation to join us.”

Meanwhile Rachel and Bentley were charging at full gallop toward the Bulow farm. Rachel studied the countryside; she could see clusters of men working in the fields. Further ahead the road forked. In the distance on the left she could see a trail of dust; at the beginning of it was a large group of men on horseback, twenty or so. She assumed that the group included the men Thomas sent to help Matthew Bulow search for his son. Bentley veered the carriage to the right at the fork; the Bulow farm was just a short distance ahead.

Sarah Bulow sat all alone on her verandah staring at her feet; her hands were holding a baby’s blanket. She appeared to be in mourning over the death of someone very close, her eyes, puffy and tired from having hardly

slept during the last thirty hours. She was in a silent conversation with herself but wanted the next statement to be delivered with real meaning so she spoke out loud.

"I deserve death, my baby is an innocent child. Please, Lord, return him to me unharmed."

No one heard her.

"Sarah!"

Sarah looked up; she heard her name being called out. Sarah recognized Rachel Byrtonville's face framed in the opening of a window on the side of a carriage. She and her driver had arrived just as her husband, Matthew, said they would. Rachel was assisted by Bentley out of her carriage, and quickly walked up the pathway to the front steps of the verandah and over to Sarah.

"Good morning, Sarah, how are you feeling today?"

"Hello, Rachel, I am trying to keep my sanity. I don't know how to feel anymore. I feel broken, I feel tired, I feel sad, I feel cheated, but most of all I feel despair!"

"Sarah, I want you to come with me back to my house and spend the day with Thomas and me."

"Thank you, Rachel, but I do not feel like visiting with anyone just now."

"Sarah, it has nothing to do with you visiting us. I want you to be with us. Thomas will take you on the row boat out on the lake, I will make sure you eat a nice lunch, we will wait together until the men return from their search." Rachel almost did not finish the word "search"; she realized it was a painful reminder for Sarah that her infant was missing.

"Thomas said he would take me out on the row boat?"

"Yes, he did. Please join me, I would love for you to spend the day with us." Sarah nodded her head in reluctant approval. Rachel helped her out of her chair. Bentley walked forward and held Sarah by the elbow, and escorted her into the carriage.

12

William was slowly turning, the bright light of the new day was screaming at him to awaken. He lifted his head up off a very soft, down-filled pillow, and opened his eyes. His surroundings, although now in a brighter light, had not changed from the night before.

As he looked around him, he realized that he had gone to sleep believing his surroundings would not have changed when he awoke, for he knew the experiences of that day were very real.

William climbed out of bed, and dressed himself in clothing that was prepared for him the night before. The clothing was from another time than his, very well tailored and the fit was perfect. He did not shave, his hair was hand-combed back, the reflection in the mirror of his room was that of a man he felt he wanted to know more about. Something told William he had fallen into another time for a reason.

The aroma of something cooking in the kitchen beckoned William to exit his room and follow it to its source. William walked down the exceptional staircase; bright beams of diffracted light flooded the entranceway of the stately home of Thomas Byronville. He remembered his host and wondered where he might be. As he entered the kitchen, he saw the activity of three servants busily preparing a large meal.

“Good morning!” William startled the servants who did not see him enter the room.

“Well, actually, a good afternoon to you, sir!” ex-

claimed one of the young male servants in a somewhat disapproving tone.

"Anton, mind your manners!" an elder female cook scolded in the direction of the young man.

"Mr. Byronville, it is twelve noon sir, lunch will be ready in an hour. Would you like something to eat to hold you over?"

"Some coffee if it's not too much trouble. Where is Thomas?" The cook now stepped toward him as if to indicate she was the one appointed to answer any questions he might have.

"Mr. Byronville is out on the lake with Mrs. Bulow, Miss Byronville is out in the garden. If you care to join her, I will send some coffee out for you."

"Yes, thank you. Which way to the garden?" William was looking around and just as he finished asking for directions to the garden, he saw Rachel sitting outdoors through a window to his right. The cook was pointing to the rear door; William had already started walking toward it.

The sound of a door opening alerted Rachel that someone was about to join her. Rachel saw William and greeted him with a smile, waiting for him to say the first words.

"Hello Rachel, how are you today?"

"Fine, William, good day to you. I am pleased to see you slept for a long time. After what you must have been through yesterday, I am certain your body and mind needed all of the rest you could find." Just then William realized how beautiful was this creature before him. He was impressed with her genuine concern for him.

"Actually I still feel a bit weary, mind if I sit down?"

"What a silly question, please join me. I have been looking forward to seeing you again this morning."

The rear door opened with the familiar sound announcing the arrival of fresh coffee.

The young male servant proceeded to pour William a cup of the steaming brew.

"Sugar, sir?" The servant, in anticipation of a positive reply, had already filled a teaspoon and directed it toward William's cup.

"No, thank you, I like my coffee black, no cream, no sugar." William reached forward and covered his cup with his hand momentarily.

The servant raised his eyes and tilted his head without moving his hand, lingering as if to say coffee should not be savored in that fashion.

"That will be all, Anton," Rachel announced in an authoritative tone of voice.

"Yes, Miss Rachel." The servant, having instructed to do so in the past, left the coffee decanter on the table and retreated into the house.

"I don't think he likes me, but I am glad he left the coffee behind," William commented as soon as the door shut behind Anton.

"Why would you care if Anton likes you or not? He does his work without questioning what he is told."

William lowered the coffee cup from his lips.

"This is great coffee. Well, Rachel, I guess there is no Service Employees Union in these parts. Management of the Byronville manor is very fortunate."

"William, is it true that you have come to us from another time or have you escaped from an insane asylum?"

"Rachel, I can see why you would think I am crazy, but I am telling you the truth. I need to return to my own time and my family, not to mention work tomorrow morning."

Rachel, realizing William had finished the small amount of coffee in the petite china cup in one gulp, leaned forward to pour him some more.

"Thank you!" William was quick to acknowledge her attentiveness.

“William, please tell me how you arrived here and how you plan to get back to your own time and what year would that be?”

“Would you believe the year of the Lord, as you would say, 2002?”

Rachel’s face expressed disbelief.

“You must be joking. Why, that is more than one hundred years from now!”

“That’s the thing, I am not joking. I wish I were. I have a feeling your brother can help. When will he return?”

Rachel, concerned that William was more interested in being with Thomas than with her, answered nonetheless.

“He should be returning soon. He and Sarah Bulow are on the lake. They probably will circle the small island in front of us as they often do when they go out with the row boat. The lake is so calm today, God only knows Sarah needs the peace and tranquility...” Rachel paused as she completed the word “tranquility,” pondering a burning question she now felt compelled to ask.

“William, do you know anything about the disappearance yesterday of the Bulow baby?”

“Rachel, I swear to you I have no awareness about the disappearance of the baby they seek. All I know is that the father is determined to hold anyone accountable who is strange to him. Yesterday when I first found myself in this strange time, I was confronted and abducted by him and his men. They almost killed me.”

Rachel was listening attentively, staring deep into William’s eyes with compassion. She leaned forward toward him and reached for his forehead.

“Did they do this to you?” Her thumb now gently rubbed William’s forehead just adjacent to the wound he received from the rock. Her fingers were resting on the side of his face and as she lowered her hand, she slowly followed the contour of his face and across the bottom of

his chin. William glanced in her eyes for a split second then lowered his glance. Her intimate touch unnerved him.

“Yes, actually in an indirect way they did.”

Thomas was rowing the oars of the small boat with gentle sweeps on the surface of the calm lake. In his hands they seemed like physical extensions of his powerful arms. He showed no sign of fatigue. He had just rowed for forty minutes out to the small island on the lake in front of his main house. Sarah had exchanged minimal words with Thomas when they first embarked. She sat silent the whole time while Thomas rowed, staring at her pensive face.

“Sarah let’s go in the lake house for a spell. I could use some water, and rest before we head back.” Sarah just took in a deep breath, lifted her chin then dropped it with a slight bounce, indicating she accepted Thomas’s request.

Thomas maneuvered the small boat up to the wood dock at the shore. The lake house was a small one-room log cabin on the shore opposite the main house. It was only a few feet away from the shore directly at the dock. Thomas jumped out of the boat first; he tied the end of the rope he had thrown up on the dock ahead of him to a wooden post. He reached down for Sarah’s hands. As she began to rise from her seat, she met his and was pulled on the dock with him.

As soon as both her feet were on the solid platform, she threw her arms around Thomas, one over his shoulder and one around his back, and hugged him with all her strength, her face now on his chest, and tears in her eyes. Thomas placed his arms around her and his chin on top of

her head. After a long moment, the silence between them was broken by Sarah's loud sobbing gasps. Thomas lifted his right hand onto the back of Sarah's head and began stroking her hair.

"Shh, shh, please don't cry, it will be all right."

Sarah lifted her head and pulled slowly away. She reached for her face with her hands and pulled the skin downward from her forehead to her chin.

"Sarah let's go inside. It will be all right." Thomas turned and grabbed Sarah in a similar way to how Bentley had in the morning led her into the carriage. They walked up the few steps to the door of the cabin, and while still holding onto Sarah, Thomas reached with his left hand and opened the unlocked door and led Sarah in. The door shut loudly behind them. As they stepped inside they turned, embraced and found each other's mouths.



Sarah lay naked on the bed next to Thomas with eyes wide open. Their lovemaking was more passionate today than even the most frenzied experiences before in this hideaway. Sarah needed the escape from the pain she had felt so deeply over the past two days. Thomas wanted to demonstrate to Sarah, the best way he knew, how much he loved her in her time of sorrow.

"Thomas, I believe the sin in loving you is why the Lord has taken Daniel away from me."

Thomas opened his eyes. "Darling, don't be silly. There is no sin in our love. Your son will be found!"

Sarah remained still on her back. Thomas turned on his side toward her, and lay his arm on her chest, caressing her shoulder.

"*Our* son."

The words "our son" sent a burning rod through

Thomas's brain.

"Our son?"

"Our son? How can that be?" "How can that be?"

Thomas realized that he did not want to appear insensitive to such a possibility and quickly changed his speaking to soft, controlled tones.

"You said you were certain Daniel was Matthew's. What are you saying, that Daniel is mine, ours?"

Sarah's eyes were watering again.

"Yes, darling, Daniel is your..." She paused for a moment. "...*our* baby."

Thomas leaned back. His hands moved off Sarah's shoulders as he dropped back on his side of the bed and rolled on his back. He repeated, "How can that be? You were certain Daniel was Matthew's."

Sarah turned to lay her arm over Thomas's chest, and softly kissed his cheek.

"At first I did not want things to be complicated, I told myself Daniel was Matthew's baby. His birth was almost nine months to the day you and I first made love in this very room. For days, Matthew and I had been arguing. I denied myself to him for two weeks. His temper finally won, he raped me while I slept. When he found out I was pregnant, he was the happiest man alive. He actually changed, and began to care about my feelings. For a period of time he was gentle, like the man I first fell in love with. He never lost his temper with me the whole time I was pregnant. When Daniel was born, he was so proud. 'All my brothers have had daughters, it was up to me to show them.' When Daniel cried, he blamed me for being a bad mother, when the baby got a rash, he cursed me for neglecting him. I started to hate him again more than ever. If it was not for Rachel spending all those hours with Daniel when you and I came to this spot, I do not know what I would have done. My instincts, Daniel's noticeable

resemblance of you and your character, the timing of his birth, but most of all a birthmark on the inside of his leg.” Sarah pulled up on Thomas’s left knee and gently rubbed a red birthmark on the inside of Thomas’s leg just below the knee. “Just like this one. Daniel is your son, Thomas. I know for certain, just as certain as I know he has been taken from me.”

Thomas leaned over to kiss Sarah.

“From us, Sarah, taken from *us*!”

William and Rachel had spent almost an hour together, no one else, just the two of them. Now they were walking along the shore of the lake in anticipation of the return of Thomas and Sarah.

"Thomas must have rowed completely around the island. They have been gone for some time now." Rachel was looking in the direction of either side of the island to see if the small boat with the silhouette of two figures was about to emerge.

"Tell me, Rachel, is it not odd for Thomas and Mrs. Bulow to be out alone? I mean to say, does Mr. Bulow approve? He seems like a temperamental man?"

Rachel was caught off guard by William's straightforward question.

"Temperamental is an understatement. I personally think Matthew Bulow is certifiably criminal. He treats Sarah with so much disrespect, that the only time she is at peace is when she escapes him to spend time here with me."

Rachel realized Sarah was not with her now or for the most part of other times she visited. She was with Thomas.

"William, I believe in true friendship, and the right of each and every one of us on this earth to be happy. All I know is when Sarah and Thomas are together, especially when Thomas takes Sarah row boating around that island in front of us, they both find happiness in the tranquility of the lake and in each other's company. I have been hap-

py to care for Sarah's baby in the past, allowing her some time to be with someone like my brother, who, unlike her husband, treats her with the respect she deserves. Her husband spends so much time out on his fields, he is gone usually from sun-up to sundown, and I for one never had the nerve to mention to him that his wife enjoys being treated like a lady. To answer your question more directly: Mr. Bulow does not care or know what Sarah does with her time while she is with me."

Just then the rowboat emerged from the left side of the island. Rachel had been on the rowboat with her brother many times, and she knew it was a twenty-minute ride to either side of the island, and another half hour around the island. Two hours was the usual time Thomas and Sarah spent on the lake together. Deep down Rachel knew her brother had strong feelings for Sarah, and she was sure Sarah felt the same for Thomas. She knew that many outings on the lake were longer than one would expect of a man and a married woman. Rachel felt that even if Thomas and Sarah were more intimate than anyone realized, then that was wonderful. They both deserved any happiness they could steal in their brief secluded rendezvous out on the lake.

William could sense that, based on the sensitivity of the matter and the way Rachel answered him, there was more between Thomas and Mrs. Bulow than just innocent boat outings. But this subject was not a concern to him; he realized his concern lay in finding a way back to his own time. He watched with Rachel.

Thomas was rowing the boat closer to shore. Rachel had walked a few steps ahead of him. All of a sudden William realized that he had allowed himself to think more about the plight of Thomas than his own. He looked upward to the sky and cupped both his hands over his forehead, and spoke with his hands still there but with

eyes now lowered in Rachel's direction.

"I need to get back to my family."

Rachel turned away from the lake and toward William.

"I am sorry, William, did you say something?"

William began pulling his hands downward over his face, and with his fingers pulling on his cheeks, he repeated:

"I need to return to my family."

William turned and commenced walking toward the house.

"Wait, William, where are you going? I would like you to meet Mrs. Bulow." William turned to face Rachel.

"Rachel, I do not want to seem rude. I do appreciate everything you and your brother are doing for me. I am sure Mrs. Bulow has her own concerns that to her are worse than mine. At this time, she could not care less about meeting me."

Rachel reacted with surprise, and her reaction conveyed to William she disapproved of his tone. William rolled his eyes as if to say he understood his tone was harsh.

"All I know is that I need to calculate how this time transfer phenomenon occurred to me, and if I can, I must reverse it so I can return to be with my own family."

William did not wait for a reply from Rachel; instead he continued hastily toward the house.

By now Thomas had rowed the small boat to within one hundred yards of the shore, and he could see Rachel heading toward the wooden dock. Thomas could also see the figure of a man leading up the rolling hill in the direction of the house.

"That must be William."

"Who?"

Sarah was caught off guard. Thomas had spoken the first words since they embarked back.

"William. He is someone Rachel and I met yesterday."

"A stranger! Thomas, why is he still with you at your house, how do you know that he is not dangerous?"

"Sarah, I need you to keep a secret. William is lost here. He is staying with Rachel and me at the house."

"Well, where did he come from?" Sarah asked as if to say the stranger's place of origin must be known to him.

"I am not sure where exactly he came from. If I told you where he told us he is from, you would not believe me!"

"Thomas, stop being so dramatic. Where did he say he is from?"

"Listen, Sarah, please trust me on this one. I have told my staff he is a cousin of mine visiting with us. For now I would also like you to think of him that way."

"Thomas, I do not see what all of this effort on your part is to cloak a stranger's presence in make-believe, people already know you do not have any relatives in these parts."

"Sarah, William has traveled from a great distance, and there is something peculiarly familiar about him. Once you see him, you will swear you have met my long-lost twin brother; he certainly can pass for a cousin." As Thomas finished his words, Sarah's face became startled at his comments.

"Thomas, you say you met this man yesterday and he resembles you?"

Thomas was wondering if Sarah knew anything in particular he had not told her himself regarding William.

"Yes, Rachel, and I met him yesterday, while visiting the Natural Caverns. You might say we rescued him. Why? What is it that you know besides what I have told you about William?"

Sarah looked away. Thomas had stopped rowing for some time now, and the small boat was drifting in the di-

rection of the shore.

“Thomas, Matthew told me last evening when he returned from his...” Sarah stopped. She knew her speech was shaky. It was very difficult for her to verbalize her son’s name. She took a deep breath and found the strength to continue. “...his search for Daniel, that they had found a stranger who resembled you and that he was certain the stranger had something to do with Daniel’s disappearance. He told me the stranger escaped into an underground stream, most likely to his death.”

“Look Sarah, William and Matthew may have had a run-in with each other yesterday. I think that is very possible judging from the condition we found William in. William seems to be a good person who found himself at the wrong place at the wrong time. I will speak with him on my terms regarding Daniel. I for one do not think he had anything to do with the disappearance of...” Now it was Thomas’s turn to stop without completing his sentence. He glanced to appreciate the distance he was from his sister who now was waving at him to resume rowing in her direction. Thomas resumed rowing.

“The disappearance of our son, Sarah, our son.”

With the help of Bentley, William had found pen and paper. He sat at the dining room table, writing and sketching. His pen was moving rapidly, ink from the ink well was splashing on the pages. William frantically dipped the pen at regular intervals to keep the ink flowing as rapidly as his ideas.

William had detailed an account of his last morning with Kate, Tara and Nicole. Hour by hour he listed all that he could recall. Adjacent to his notes he sketched small diagrams, indicating direction and indicating relationship of the subjects in his notes. His diary of the morning's events finally placed him at their destination.

William now scribbled *The Natural Bridge* as a new heading on a new page. William stopped for a moment and looked at all of the large pages arranged on the table in their proper time line. He realized they told him nothing about what had caused him to be transported in time. William glanced at the blank page before him with the three-word heading. "The Natural Bridge," William heard himself say in the empty room. He continued sketching and noting everything he could remember about his visit to the Natural Bridge, his eyes glittering as if they had found some partial answer to his quest.

The silence within the house was broken in adjacent rooms. William could hear doors opening and closing as well as footsteps and voices now coming in his direction.

"Hello, Thomas, how was your boat outing?" William heard himself say while he still studied his last page.

Thomas had entered the dining room; his hands were busy buttoning the remainder of his many buttons on the front and sleeves of his shirt. Thomas did not answer too quickly; instead he glared at the paper trail on the expansive table, following it directly to William and to his eyes.

“Good afternoon, William, I see you have found something to do to occupy your time.”

William was not sure if he detected a tone that was less friendly than the one displayed by Thomas yesterday.

“Do I detect some concern with me in your voice today? If it’s this mess I will clean it up so that you will never have known I was here.” William paused for a moment inviting a response from Thomas.

Thomas waited a few moments, and sensing that William was anticipating his response, spoke softly and directly. “No, Thomas, I do not mind your work whatever it may be. Please make yourself at home. I have instructed my staff to provide you with anything you require.” Thomas stopped.

“But?” William asked, visibly puzzled.

“But...?”

“There must be a ‘but’ coming up here. Look, Thomas, you and your sister have been very kind to me, and I have tried to be honest with you. I assure you I am not hiding anything from you. Last night I told you the truth, I am here from another time. This paper work...” William stopped speaking to move forward to the first page. “This paper work represents what happened to me yesterday morning. Here, see for yourself!”

William collected all of the penned sheets and stacked them in order. William presented his notations to Thomas, explaining the events that led up to the incident at the Natural Bridge.

Thomas handled some of the sheets as William passed

them forward; he carefully studied the notes. The style of the writing was a technical lettering used by technicians or architects, all upper-case printing. Thomas was becoming more convinced there must be some element of truth to what William was telling him.

Thomas wanted more than anything else to believe William, but even if his story were true, it did not absolutely preclude him from being a suspect in the abduction of his son.

"William, I do believe your story, even though it seems impossible. You do display some certain knowledge and mannerism that I have never before experienced. I very much want to believe you. I do appreciate that you say you have been honest with us. However, there is something that I promised someone dear to me that I would ask of you." Thomas hesitated again as if he were keeping his question a secret.

"I may be from the future, but let me assure you that in the next 110 years they have not figured out a way to read minds, so if you want to ask me something, you'd better spit it out while you have your chance!"

Thomas looked William straight in the eyes and blurted out, "Did you abduct Sarah's baby Daniel at the Natural Bridge, where you claim to have been in the future?"

William stepped away from Thomas.

"Of course not." William dropped the wad of papers on a chair next to him. "Thomas, I swear to you I had nothing to do with the disappearance."

Loud banging on the front door of the house interrupted the confrontation between the two men.

"Bentley, who is at the door with such aggressive knocking? William, I think I believe, at least I want to believe you. You best remain here. I have a feeling this intrusion has something to do with you."

Bentley had reached the front door and as soon as he

released the latch, Matthew Bulow barged in. Thomas was stepping through the entrance from the dining room.

"Mr. Bulow, I certainly hope you have a logical explanation to..." Thomas realized Matthew Bulow was armed. "How dare you storm into my home with a weapon!"

Bulow was in a rage. He did not say a word but just looked Thomas straight in the eyes and raised his weapon and took aim at his head. By now Rachel had heard the noise and was emerging from the second floor.

"Mr. Bulow! Have you gone insane?"

William was attempting to listen to what was happening while hiding behind the dining room door.

Thomas trembled, certain there was a bullet in the chamber of the rifle Matthew Bulow was holding, a bullet meant to snuff out his life. Matthew Bulow meant to make him pay for the crime of falling in love with his wife.

"Mr. Byronville, please ask your sister to not interfere."

"Interfere? You come into my home and point a weapon at my brother's head and you have the nerve to suggest that I not interfere! Sir, I demand that in the name of God you remove your weapon from that position at once!"

Bulow ignored Rachel. He stared at Thomas's forehead, cold with sweat, and his knees shaking against the creases of his woolen trousers. Bulow was savoring the feeling of power over someone wealthier than he. Purposely, he waited longer to make his demands known than he had originally intended.

"Bulow, go ahead and shoot. I can only tell you I have no regrets!"

Bulow was not listening to the meaning of Thomas's words; he was determined to get what he came for. As Thomas attempted to continue confessing his proud and profound love for Sarah, Bulow shouted:

"Where is *he*?"

William heard that statement loud and clear. He looked around to see how he could escape. A second door in the dining room to the kitchen was in the opposite corner of the door to the entrance. He scrambled to it, knocking over a chair in his path.

Bulow stepped in the direction of the dining room. Thomas found the strength to step in his path.

“Byronville, do not try to protect the person responsible for the disappearance of my son. I will shoot you dead in your own house in front of your sister.”

With the rifle still aimed at Thomas's head, Bulow walked around Thomas toward the dining room door. Bulow backed up near the dining room door and turned sideways, kicking the door open all in one motion. He side-stepped into the room while keeping Thomas at bay with the pointed rifle. Bulow looked around the room. It was empty of all but the large table and chairs with paper flung on one of the chairs. He crouched slowly to check under the table, but no one was there. He glanced back in the entrance; no one had moved. He felt powerful now, very much in control. As he pondered his next move, he glanced in the direction of the dining room windows and back to the entrance. He had seen something outside.

Quickly he jammed a chair under the doorknob of the dining room door to the entrance and took aim at the figure running away from the house.

William had found the rear door of the kitchen and had run outside away from the house. He was running as fast as his legs would carry him, his style mimicking a modern-day track sprinter, unaware that a gunman inside the house was carefully taking aim at his back.

Thomas had darted for the blocked door and rammed into it; his upper body strength was no match for the solid oak chair that kept the door from opening. He quickly turned and opened the entrance closet and removed a

pistol. As he took time to load his gun, he heard the loud thunder of the rifle explode in the dining room, its bullet shattering the glass of the window in its path.

Smoke filled the room. Bulow was certain he had hit his mark and quickly headed for the kitchen door.

William heard the shot being fired and the simultaneous loud shattering of glass. His brain was just about to send a message to his body instructing it to duck, but just as quickly as he heard the firing of the rifle, he felt the burning of flesh in his right shoulder. His body was flung to the ground. William had just arrived at the top of the rolling embankment leading to the edge of the lake. The momentum of his speed and his fall carried him into the water.

Bulow was exiting the rear kitchen door, witnessing the figure of a man lifting himself at the edge of the lake. As Bulow prepared to reload his rifle, he could see the man was injured, his right arm now covered in blood.

Thomas was armed and running through the kitchen. Through the open rear door he could see Bulow closing the barrel of his rifle and lifting it in the direction of the lake. There was no time to yell. Thomas threw himself from within the room through the opening of the door, tackling Bulow, causing the rifle to once again fire in the direction of the lake.

As William lifted himself out of the water, holding on to the top of his right arm, he heard another shot. This time the bullet entered the water twenty feet in front of him. William didn't want to give the shooter time to reload. Without hesitation, he turned in the direction of the horse barn and ran for his life.

Thomas was now on top of Bulow, hitting him repeatedly with his pistol.

“Thomas please stop!”

Rachel had followed him out. Thomas checked his downward swing and delivered his next blow directly into the ground adjacent to Bulow’s head. Thomas stood up and grabbed the rifle at his feet. Holding it by the barrel, he swung it at the stone wall of the house. On the first blow, the rifle’s wooden stock fell off, but Thomas’s rage remained unspent. He continued to strike the rifle against the wall, rendering it useless. Rachel looked in the direction of the barn and could see William now attempting to mount one of the horses.

“William. Wait!” She shouted as she charged toward him.

William had found an unsaddled horse tied to a pole. He struggled to untie its bridle and mount its back. After two attempts, he managed to sit astride the horse. William’s only focus was to get as far from this place as possible. At any moment he expected a third bullet to imbed itself into his trembling body.

Rachel had lifted her ankle-length skirt in both hands and was running toward the barn. She could see that William had managed to mount the horse and was already at a full gallop.

“William, wait!”

Thomas heard his sister and could see the figure on horseback galloping away from the barn. By now Bulow

lay on the ground unconscious, his head bleeding. Bentley and two other servants had arrived.

“Bentley, see that Bulow’s hands are tied and tend to his wounds. Send one of the men to fetch the sheriff. Before anything else, saddle up one of our fastest horses so I can catch up to our guest.”

“Sir, Lightning, the horse Mr. William is riding, is our fastest horse.”

Thomas was already running in the direction of the barn. Rachel was standing like a statue, staring at the now distant horseman. As her brother ran by her she whispered:

“Thomas, please bring him back safely.”

William was not aware of what transpired back at the house. He was certain that many riders on horseback were already in pursuit of him. He sensed that the horse beneath him was strong and fast. As William held on for dear life, he realized his injury was not too severe, since each arm was equally strong in its grip.

Thomas was slow in preparing a horse. By the time he gave chase, William was not visible. Thomas rode his horse for an hour or so until he lost hope of catching up to William. When he finally stopped, Thomas knew he had lost him, and it was futile to continue further. Thomas turned his horse around and headed back to his house.

William had galloped at full speed for over an hour without stopping. He wondered when he would hear the thunder of countless horses behind him. Finally, he found the nerve to bring his horse to a slower pace. By now William had climbed up a hillside, which afforded him a view of the countryside for miles behind him. There was not a soul in sight. The late afternoon sun was poised on the horizon, and William knew that it would be dark in a few hours. A small stream was visible in the distance. As he made his way toward it, he wondered if he was about to awaken from a very long dream. Now more than ever since this ordeal commenced, he felt alone, as if he were the only man left on earth. William dismounted his horse, whose mouth had already found the refreshing cool water at his hoofs.

“Hey, save some for me.”

William lowered himself on all fours at the water's edge, now upstream from the horse that he was certain saved his life. He placed his hands on large boulders in the six-inch deep water, and lowering himself in a push-up position, proceeded to drink directly from the surface of the stream. When William quenched his thirst he clutched at his wound. By now the blood on his shoulder and arm had dried up. He removed his shirt and, turning his head, stretched his neck over his shoulder to visually inspect the area that was hit by the bullet. William's sigh of relief was even louder than the noise made by the horse beside him as it continued to gulp up water.

"Thank God it's just a flesh wound."

William realized he was speaking to the horse and what was even more peculiar was that he was expecting the horse to join in on a "That was a close call" type of conversation that two comrades would have during battle with the enemy. William proceeded to clean the blood from his wound and surrounding area. He clenched his teeth as he stroked the area that was directly injured. A small trickle of blood emerged from the edge of the wound. William quickly created a makeshift bandage by tearing strips of cloth from one of the sleeves of his borrowed white shirt.

"Well, horse, you must have a name, but I guess you can't divulge that information." William needed to amuse himself. "Go ahead, speak horse. Tell me your name." William was looking around, pretending to make sure no one could hear him.

"Listen, I know you guys can speak when you want to, I saw Mr. Ed do it on television when I was a kid a hundred years from now. If you don't tell me your name I will have to call you Trigger or Lightning or some dumb name like that, or how about Bullet since you seem to fly like one?"

Clarence Adams was shaking his head. From his vantage point, lying in the tall grass about twenty yards in the distance, he could hear speech from a man directed at his horse. Clarence patiently waited as the man walking his horse approached him. He could tell the man was unaware of his presence. Still speaking to the horse, the man just about jumped out of his skin when Clarence, now a mere twelve feet away, spoke.

"I thought I was the only crazy one around here."

William almost rushed to mount his horse, but as he took a good look at the man sitting on the grass ahead of him, he could see this stranger seemed friendly and, more importantly, unarmed.

"Are you lost, my friend?" Clarence wanted to set a friendly tone. Clarence was not at all concerned encountering this total stranger. Visibly, William conveyed the appearance of a lost, injured child.

"Actually, sir, I am more lost than I can ever explain."

"Well, I have been known to be a good listener. I could offer some food and rest for you and your horse, you look like you need some."

William looked at Clarence and smiled. "You must have heard me talking to my horse, you must think I am crazy, and you are still prepared to be hospitable! The people of your time are something else. They are either extremely pleasant or extremely violent!"

Clarence stood on his feet and walked toward William. Both men met each other's handshake. "My name is

Clarence Adams, and I can assure you violence is not in my nature.”

William looked at Clarence square in his eyes. “Clarence, my name is William Monterey. I can honestly say that I am very happy to meet you.”

Clarence led his new friend down a rolling hill to his cabin. As they approached the picturesque setting, a large dog ran up to meet them. The barking of the dog startled William’s horse. William pulled on the bridle of the horse and rubbed the horse’s neck. “Easy, Bullet, it’s only a dog.”

Clarence placed two fingers to his lips and let out a loud whistle.

“Sergeant, come here, Sergeant.” The dog quickly changed his course of direction, lowered his head and walked slowly toward Clarence, wagging his tail. “William, this is Sergeant, my loyal companion.”

Sergeant was a yellow Labrador, just like the one William had when he was a boy. William knew that this breed of dog was very friendly.

“Hey, Sergeant, nice to make your acquaintance!” William bent down to play with the dog, just like he remembered doing with his dog when he was a kid. Sergeant took an immediate liking to William.

“William, you passed my test for making sure that you are a good guy!”

William looked up at Clarence a little confused. “Oh, and what test is that?”

Clarence let out a small laugh. “William, if Sergeant likes you, then you must be a good guy. You see Sergeant hates my brother-in-law Matthew; he is a bad guy!”

William was a bit startled. “You don’t mean Matthew Bulow, do you?”

“How is that you know my brother-in-law?”

“You see this wound?” William was pushing his shirt

away from his injury to allow Clarence a close inspection.

"Well, I was going to ask if the blood stain on your shoulder was a serious wound. Did Matthew do this? Well it does not surprise me. It looks like you and I have something in common! You see this bruising on my cheek? This is also a compliment of that son-of-a-bitch. You don't have to worry, William, there is no love lost between Matthew and me! Now tell me, why did he do this to you?"

"It sounds like I do not need to tell you that your brother-in-law must be out of his mind."

William was not sure if it was safe to go on. Clarence sensed William's apprehension.

"Listen, William, I tried so hard to convince my sister Sarah not to marry him, the man is a walking storm. She deserves better than him. He is a real asshole. You don't have to worry about me. If I can help you, I promise to." William felt a little reassured.

"Clarence, why don't you tell me the reason why Matthew assaulted you?"

Clarence smiled.

"You know, don't ask how, but I have a feeling it has something to do with why you were shot. Did Matthew shoot at you near the Natural Bridge? Did he blame you for the disappearance of my nephew? I know for certain you had nothing to do with it."

Now William was even more perplexed. "How do you know for certain that I had nothing to do with the child's disappearance? I mean to say, *I* know for certain I had nothing to do with it, but it seems everybody else seems to feel I was involved. What makes you different?"

"For the last two days I have been walking around in a daze. I was the closest human being to Daniel when he disappeared. As a matter of fact I was closer to him than you are to me now. I was this close." Clarence extended

his arm outward, slightly bent, indicating he was less than an arm's length away. We were under the Natural Bridge, the others were forty feet or so away."

"The others?" William interjected with great interest and anticipation.

"Matthew, Sarah and another couple. I was feeling a bit out of place, and my sister begged me to join them earlier in the day. I should have stayed here with Sergeant. After we ate, I strolled over under the bridge and lay down in the grass. The others were talking, mostly about married life and various antics of each other's spouse. Sarah brought the bassinet carrying Daniel over to me and asked me to keep an eye on the baby. I was mesmerized by the falling water droplets from the underside of the rock of the bridge above. Some of the droplets were hitting the baby. All of a sudden Daniel lets out a cry. But something was strange about this cry. It abruptly stopped in unison with splashing from the bassinet. It was as if the baby turned to water. I was shocked. When the others came over in concern for the baby it was gone. Needless to say Sarah was devastated. I had no time to think about what had happened, her husband was all over me. I actually blacked out. I still do not know if it was from the shock of what happened to the baby or from the blows inflicted by Matthew."

By now William was dumbfounded. He was not sure if he could make sense of what he just heard.

"You mean to tell me the baby just vanished?"

Clarence seemed to have momentarily allowed his mind to take him back to the Natural Bridge and was not responding.

"Clarence?"

William nudged him.

"I do not know what to say!"

Clarence was back; he looked at William puzzled. "I

am just wondering how you fit into all of this, William. Can you help me understand what happened out there?"

William looked at Clarence and then looked away; he let out a sigh.

"Maybe I can."

Clarence was surprised by this reply.

"You can? How?"

Before William could answer, the stomping of an approaching horse nearly caused him to flee. He was starting to mount his horse and head for safety when he heard a familiar voice.

“William, wait!”

William turned to see a female riding toward him and Clarence; it was Rachel. William was not sure what to do. He tried to look beyond her to see if anyone else was following. He saw no other forms behind her so decided to wait, but to remain on horseback.

Rachel quickly reached the men. Sergeant was now barking at the horse in motion, but his yelps did nothing to intimidate the much larger animal. Rachel pulled up on the reins, and her horse stopped directly in front of William’s horse, facing the other animal.

“Rachel, how did you find me? Is Thomas all right?” Rachel caught her breath before she spoke.

“Yes, he is all right, I was more worried about you.” She dismounted from her horse, hoping William would do the same.

“Hello, Miss. Byronville,” Clarence greeted Rachel with forced formality. “I see you have already met my guest.”

William looked once again in the direction that Rachel came from and cautiously began to dismount his horse.

“Just how did you find me, Rachel? Are you alone?”

Rachel handed the reins of her horse to Clarence almost like she would to one of her servants. She darted over to William and threw her arms around him.

"I am so glad you are safe!"

William looked at Clarence as if to say, "I really do not know her this well." He guided her arms from behind his back and held them in front of him.

"Rachel, I am okay, a little tattered perhaps, but okay for the most part. Why did you follow me? And for the third time, how did you find me?"

Rachel realized it may have appeared to William that it was too forward for her to embrace him. She did, however, want Clarence to feel she was closer to William than she really was. She pulled her arms away, and adjusted her clothing and hair, imagining it was in the worst of condition. As she did so, she finally explained her reasons for being there.

"Well, to start with, I found you by chance. I just headed out in the direction you did and Clarence's place is the first ranch in that direction. I was headed here to see if Clarence saw you pass through. Please do not worry about others following me. There is no one after you. You do not need to hide any longer. Thomas has had Matthew Bulow arrested for causing a disturbance and damaging our home. The sheriff detained Thomas from coming after you himself. It was my own initiative. Do I detect...?" Rachel hesitated before continuing. "...You do not seem pleased!"

"I am sure after whatever ordeal you both have been through you must be starving," Clarence interrupted diplomatically. "I know I am. Why don't you settle this inside? I will look after the horses and fetch some fresh vegetables. Rachel," he continued more pointedly, "since you know your way around my cabin, why don't you help William find some clean clothes and tend to his wound?"

Rachel realized Clarence was getting back at her for throwing herself at William. Why else would he announce so smugly that Rachel was familiar with the *interior* of his

cabin? She chose not to respond; she would not reward Clarence with a reaction.

William was beginning to understand why Rachel had been so forward with him. He sensed there was more going on between Rachel and Clarence than either acknowledged.

“William, are you hurt badly?” As she spoke she once again moved toward William, pulling his clothing away from his shoulder to better inspect his injury.

“It’s not that bad, Rachel, it’s just a scratch. I can manage. Why don’t we take Clarence up on his offer and head inside?”

Inside the cabin, Rachel started a fire in the fireplace. As William washed up, she located and brought over to him some of Clarence’s clean clothing. William had flung a towel over his neck and down both sides of his chest. He extended his reach to accept the clothing and smiled at Rachel.

“Not to be nosy, but you would have to be stupid not to see there is something between you and Clarence. Why are you so cold toward him?”

“I swore I would never return to this place.” Rachel realized she had just confirmed Clarence’s assertion that she was familiar with the cabin’s interior. It must have been obvious to William anyhow, given she’d acted as if she lived there herself.

“William, I apologize if I was too forward earlier, but I was relieved to see you safe, and I guess I wanted Clarence to think we were close.”

William smiled as he pulled the towel from around his neck, exposing his bare chest and a small flesh wound on the top of his right shoulder.

“Does it hurt?”

Rachel was focused on the superficial wound.

“Well, just a little. I guess I was lucky, it could have

been worse! Listen, Rachel, I appreciate your concern, and all of your help, but right now I need to find out more about how I arrived here. I have a feeling Clarence can help me!”

Rachel was startled to hear William say Clarence could help him.

“Well I do not see how he can help. He has no money or servants. This place is all he owns and it is no bigger than this entire room.”

Rachel had not finished speaking when Clarence entered, carrying a coat full of vegetables he’d grown in his vegetable garden.

William was bracing himself for a rebuttal from Clarence. Instead Clarence pulled a wad of papers out of his coat.

“Rachel, I found these in your saddle bag.” Clarence was holding the folded papers out for her.

“I believe they belong to William,” Rachel said, turning away from Clarence. “I brought them along, William, knowing you might need them.”

William wasn’t going to allow Rachel to continue to ignore Clarence.

“Rachel, would you please bring the papers to me from Clarence?”

Rachel walked toward Clarence, making eye contact with him for the first time since she arrived. As she approached, Clarence held the papers closer to his chest. She held out her hands and Clarence stepped toward her as if to give her the papers.

As Clarence got close enough he flung the papers in William’s direction and grabbed Rachel’s hand; she gasped but followed his lead. Clarence pulled her into his arms and commenced kissing her. Rachel made a faint effort at resisting, but slowly gave in. The two kissed for the longest time, almost ignoring William.

“Well! Well! I am glad to see you two kiss and make up!” William picked the papers up from the floor and commenced unraveling them. Rachel remained silent for a moment, holding Clarence’s hug.

“Clarence, I am sorry for what I said. Please forgive me!”

“Rachel, I am glad you are here. I have missed you, and lately I have needed you. Please give us another chance.”

Rachel moved her head away from Clarence’s shoulder and kissed him on the chin. “Let me get some water boiling. I will make us some stew. Why don’t we talk about it later? For now, let’s help William find out how he arrived here.”

William was glad that the tension between Rachel and Clarence seemed resolved. The three of them shared a modest meal and cleared the table, working as if they had done this together a hundred times before.

When the small, heavy wooden table was cleared, William opened his papers in an arrangement similar to the one he had created at Thomas's house. Clarence was standing nearby, not sure how he could help.

"Clarence, what I am about to tell you will be hard for you to believe."

"Try me!"

Clarence was quick to respond. William looked at Rachel knowing she already had the benefit of his claimed predicament.

"Go ahead, William, tell Clarence. I am certainly starting to believe you. All I know is I could make no sense of your notes."

Rachel sat on the rocking chair close to the fire. She pushed on the balls of her feet, tilting the chair as far back as she safely could. Both men watched her as she closed her eyes in a resting position and gave them a gesture to proceed without her attention. William's glance returned to Clarence.

"Clarence, I arrived here just a little after Daniel went missing. As a matter of fact, I presume I arrived at the very spot he went missing." William was pointing at his notes to a diagram of the Natural Bridge.

"Here, directly under the bridge and slightly left of

center. When looking into the canyon, right next to the edge of the stream.”

Clarence stepped forward and studied the sketch.

“Yes, that is where we were when Daniel disappeared, but what exactly are you saying?”

“I am saying that I am finally realizing that the disappearance of Daniel and my appearance are tied somehow!”

Clarence was visibly perplexed.

“Appearance? What do you mean, appearance?”

William looked at Rachel once again.

“Go ahead, tell him William!”

Rachel remained in her chair with her eyes closed. It was obvious she was listening closely. Clarence was shifting his glance back and forth from Rachel to William like a pet dog waiting for either one of them to throw him a bone.

“Tell me what? Why are you being so evasive? Get to the point! I am just as concerned to learn what happened out there!”

“Clarence, I am not from this time. One hundred and ten years from now I was visiting the Natural Bridge with my family; my wife Kate and my daughters, Tara and Nicole...”

Clarence did not let William continue.

“Wait a minute!” Clarence covered his forehead with his right hand, and with it still there he blurted:

“Did you say one hundred and ten years *from* now? Did I hear you correctly? One hundred and ten years *from* now, you mean in our future, are you trying to tell me you are here from the future?”

Clarence still had his hand over his face, rubbing his forehead as if a serious migraine was setting in. He slowly pulled his hand all the way down his face and stared at William in disbelief. William picked up one of the pieces

of paper, and continued.

"You see, this is a note I made earlier today at the Byronville house. I did not understand any of this until you told me how Daniel disappeared. One hundred and ten years from now, I too, was entranced by the droplets of water from the underside of the Natural Bridge. I remember the sensation of my body going to a liquid form and suddenly appearing in the same place but at a different time."

Rachel released the pressure in her legs, the rocking chair rolled upright, without moving her body she opened her eyes widely. No one had anything else to say for the moment.

The silence between them was long. Finally they felt they had to speak at once.

"I..."

"Let me..."

"I must be..."

Within a split second of each other, they all spoke without completing their individual statements. They looked at each other in amusement. William took charge, inviting Rachel with his hand to complete her sentence.

"I must be on my way. It will be dark in an hour, and I will need that much time to get back home."

"It's funny you should say that. I was just going to offer to accompany you back."

"No, Clarence, that will cause you to return in the dark, it's best I go alone. I will be all right. But promise you will visit me tomorrow. William, I will let Thomas know you are here unless you wish to return with me?"

"Rachel, I think one of us should go with you. If Clarence has a place for me to sleep, I would like to remain here. I have an idea! Clarence, you take Rachel home and spend the night at the Byronville house, and I will stay here, seeing as you have only one bed anyway."

William quickly glanced at Rachel to gauge her reaction to his suggestion. She seemed fine, more than fine, with the plan.

“Clarence, you are welcome to stay in our guest room for the evening. Thomas will not mind.”

Clarence looked at both of them back and forth very quickly as if to think they had planned this out beforehand.

“Well, I had not considered staying at your house, Rachel, but it does seem to make the most sense all around. I do not want you to return alone. We certainly could not all sleep here.”

“Certainly not!” Rachel interjected as she got up from her chair and headed for the direction of the door.

“Well, it’s settled then. Clarence, I will take good care of Sergeant, you both best be on your way.”

When Kate awoke, she felt the pain in her head pounding like the many feet of a chorus line on a stage floor. Visions of the Natural Bridge flooded into her mind, each one bringing with it a kick to her brain.

"Tara, Nicole?" She called out. Her efforts to sit up or to rub her sore right arm with her left hand were unsuccessful. It was no use. She was tied down to her bed. A nurse was summoned by a beeping tone.

"Please relax, Mrs. Monterey, I will call the doctor."

Kate was alone for a few minutes while the nurse went to alert the doctor, who had left specific instructions to be called the moment Kate gained consciousness. Kate was able to use this time to put things into perspective. She was able to understand why she was restrained and that she was in a hospital. She still felt the shock in her system of witnessing her husband turn to water directly in front of her. She decided that it would be in her best interest if she could remain calm when the doctor arrived and to speak as slowly as possible. She had some work to do to convince the hospital staff that she wasn't crazy.

Some five minutes passed, the same nurse was back.

"Where is my doctor? I would like to see Dr. Hanson!"

The nurse wrote something down on her clipboard and placed it on the foot of her bed.

"Mrs. Monterey, Dr. Sorentino will be here to see you very shortly, he is only minutes away. I am sure he will notify Dr. Hanson immediately. Can I get you some water?"

Kate realized the nurse was doing the best she could.

She decided it would be best to cooperate.

"Fine, I will wait for the doctor, and yes, I could use some water. Please tell me, where are my daughters?"

The nurse picked up a cloth already soaking in a tray on the night table near the bed. She rung it and placed it on Kate's forehead. As the nurse wiped the perspiration from Kate's forehead, cheeks and neck, she explained that from the contents of her purse they were able to contact her husband's employer. Ray Letender the man who worked with William was outside waiting to see Kate as soon as the doctor said it was okay. For the moment, the girls were with him. Ray had tried to reach William's mother and had left a voice message on her answering machine. Just as the nurse finished reassuring Kate that her daughters were fine, Dr. Sorentino entered.

"I see we are awake. Hello, Mrs. Monterey, my name is Dr. Sorentino, but please call me Doc."

The doctor was already checking her heartbeat, still a little fast for someone who had been sedated.

"I seem to recall hitting a guard earlier. Is he okay? My fist sure is sore."

Kate was shrugging her shoulders in the restraints.

"Can I please come out of these?"

"As long as you promise not to fracture *my* jaw, slugger."

The doctor began unbuckling the belts on Kate's right arm; the nurse was in step with him on the left side. Free from the bindings, Kate rubbed the knuckles of her sore fist and then the soreness in her arm.

"Did I really fracture his jaw?"

The nurse smiled as she commented.

"He probably deserved it, honey. Most men do!"

The doctor snickered as if to say: "See what I put up with around here?"

He ignored the nurse's comment and conveyed to Kate

that the guard would be fine and he had not suffered a fractured jaw.

Kate was not listening to the doctor.

"Mrs. Monterey, it seems to me you are not listening!"

Kate was startled.

"Yes, Doctor I heard you say the guard is okay. I am glad to hear that. Can I please see my daughters now, and please tell me, when can I be released?"

The doctor looked at the nurse, nodding his head in the direction of the hall. The nurse was quickly off to call in the waiting threesome.

"Mrs. Monterey, I will be honest with you, I see no reason to keep you here, but since you were brought in restrained, for your own safety, a psychologist will have to examine you to make sure..."

The doctor stopped, uncertain how to put the next words mildly.

"Crazy? That is what you were about to say, isn't it? To make sure I am not crazy, that is what you need a psychologist to tell you?"

Kate paused and silently reminded herself to stay calm.

"I need to call my sister in Chicago. How can I do that?"

The doctor looked at Kate and realized she was trying hard to remain calm. He proceeded to push away his lab coat from his hip and pulled out a slim flip phone.

"Do you know her number?"

Kate proceeded to recite her sister's number including the area code. She had called the number a thousand times before. Kate was pleased that despite her condition, she recalled the number without skipping a beat.

"It's ringing!"

The doctor handed Kate his phone and picked up the clipboard from the foot of the bed to enter his comments.

“Helen! It’s me. I need you to come and get me. I am in a hospital. They think I am crazy. Something terrible has happened to William. Helen, I need you! I do not know what hospital I am in or even what time it is, my head is spinning... and... I think I am going to be sick!”

Kate held the phone toward the doctor and threw her head back. With her eyes closed and her voice barely audible, she asked the doctor to let her sister know which hospital she was in and to ask her to hurry.

“Hello, my name is Dr. Sorentino. Your sister is exhibiting PTSD, or Post-traumatic stress disorder. Can you come here as soon as possible? I think your presence here will be a good thing.” As the Doctor spoke he stared at Kate purposely wanting his words to be heard by her.

Just then the door opened and Ray ushered in Tara and Nicole.

“Mommy, Mommy, are you alright?”

Tara climbed on the chair next to the bed to hug her mom.

William slept very soundly. He might have slept all day if not for Sergeant waking him by washing his face with his tongue. For the second time when William woke, he surveyed his surroundings to see if maybe, just maybe, he might have awakened at his own home.

William walked around the lonely cabin listening to the wind outside attempt to penetrate the solid logs making up the four perimeter walls. William was determined that on this day he would make some progress in his quest to return to his family. All the things he needed to prepare himself for a yet-to-be-determined plan of attack were quickly found.

Clarence had a modest selection of clean clothing that fit William a bit loosely, but comfortably. He found some dried beef jerky in a clay jar. Sergeant smelled the treat as soon as the lid was lifted. The dog was rewarded with a piece of dried meat.

“There you go, Sergeant, thanks for sticking around.”

There was no time to waste. The beef jerky would make a perfect source of on-the-run energy and so he ate as he walked toward the door to the exterior. As he stepped outside, he was not prepared for the directness of the morning sun, square in the face. Still chewing and using the pieces of jerky as a momentary shield, he lifted his right hand to his face.

On horseback, Sarah was approaching her brother's cabin. As her horse came around the hill, the cabin was now in sight.

“Clarence!”

She yelled out as she saw what she believed was the figure of her brother, shielding the sun from his eyes.

William froze in his steps. The woman’s voice he heard was new to him. He realized this lady was mistaking him for Clarence. No wonder, he was at his cabin and wearing his clothes. William could tell the voice was near. He remained with his back to her, not sure how to handle the situation or what to expect when he turned to face yet another character in his very real, perplexing dream. Sarah dismounted. She was turned away from William. “Clarence, I need your help. Matthew di...”

“Please do not be startled!”

William paused. Sarah was about to get back on her horse.

“Clarence is at the Byronville house,” William was quick to interject. He could see Sarah’s chest pulsating with deep gasps.

“I am a friend of Clarence. My name is William Monterey, I...”

“Why are you wearing my brother’s clothing?”

William looked down at himself.

“Look, I have been through a lot the last two days. I know you must be frightened. Please let me reassure you, I have your brother’s permission to be here.”

“Are you a kin of Mr. Byronville?”

Sarah moved slowly toward William so as to see him better.

“You look just like Thomas, you must be the stranger he told me about. You are the one my husband and uncle found near the Natural Bridge, aren’t you?”

“I...”

“Did you take my Daniel?”

Her voice was so stern and full of emotion, she was appealing to William for help. William could see the tears

emerging from her eyes. He moved toward her slowly, placing the jerky still in his hand in the side pocket of his borrowed trousers.

“You must be Sarah Bulow! I am the stranger Thomas told you about, the one your husband almost killed on more than one occasion. I am not, or at least I think I am not, a kin of Mr. Byronville. Sarah! If you will permit me to call you Sarah?” Sarah bobbed her head, approving the request. William continued.

“I can assure you I did not have anything to do with the disappearance of your son.”

“Why is it that I feel your presence here is related to Daniel missing? It may be a woman’s instinct, but I can feel your kinship to Thomas. Who are you, really, Mr. Monterey?”

William realized Sarah did not hesitate to refer to Thomas by his first name. Her sincerity impressed him and he was beginning to like her as a person more and more.

“Yes, Tara, Mom is okay.” Tara proceeded to climb on the chair next to the bed to hug her mom, with Nicole scrambling up behind her. “Even better now that the two of you are here.

“Hello, Ray, thanks for coming, and thanks for taking care of the girls with so little, or rather no, notice!

“I know Bill would be...” Her voice was weak and started to trail off. The doctor noticed and interrupted his phone conversation with Helen.

“Please hold on a moment!”

The doctor was now holding the phone to his chest.

“Nurse, Kate is experiencing Post-traumatic stress disorder. Girls, your mom desperately needs some rest. I am going to ask your uncle to take you back in the waiting area. I will be out shortly to let you know how she is doing.” The doctor turned to Ray and without introductions, informed him that he had spoken with Kate’s sister. He also requested Ray take the children out of the room.

Ray witnessed the nurse inject something in the intravenous tube attached to Kate’s arm and was quick to oblige the doctor’s request.

The doctor returned to the cell phone.

“Helen, your sister is at Harrisonburg General Hospital in downtown Harrisonburg, Virginia. If you are able to, it might be a good idea to get here soon. It seems to me that Kate could use your help.”

When Kate next awoke, her only sister, Helen, was holding her hand and smiling down at her.

William and Sarah were both on horseback, heading in the direction of the Natural Bridge. After exchanging more controlled words, both agreed to return to the area where all of their problems began. After a long horse ride of more than two hours, during which neither of them said a word, they were close enough to tie up their horses and walk the rest of the way. Now they both stared at the very spot Daniel had disappeared and William had found himself, under the span of the Natural Bridge. Sarah stared at the ground beneath her feet, then slowly around her, and then at William.

“Mr. Monterey, why is it that you seem to be familiar with this spot even before I identified it as the place where Daniel disappeared?” William looked back at Sarah.

“Sarah, it seems to me that I am forever informing people around here that they are about to hear something they may not believe, but what I am about to say is true! I am here from another time. I was visiting this very area with my wife, Kate, and my daughters, Nicole and Tara.”

William’s voice cracked as he mentioned his family. His sincerity was so obvious to Sarah that she was prepared to listen to his strange tale. She looked directly in his eyes, indicating her interest and anticipation of his explanation.

“All I know is that one minute I was with my family in the year 2002, and the next, I was here in the year 1892. Your husband, along with your uncle and his men, were over there.”

William pointed downstream.

"They shot at me and chased me almost to my death to the end of the this gorge. If it wasn't for my escape, I am sure they would have killed me. At the time, I had no idea they were searching for a baby. Now I think I know where he is!"

Sarah had longed to hear those words from the moment she met this stranger. Her face flushed with redness in her anxious state to hear the next words from the lips of this saint who seemed could help. She tried desperately to utter a word, but was overcome with emotion. Short of breath, she reached forward with both hands as if begging for mercy. William was unprepared for Sarah's reaction. Sarah dropped to her knees and grabbed William's legs.

"Please, tell me Daniel is alive, please take me to him."

William reached down to collect Sarah.

"Sarah, I have only a theory as to what may have happened to both Daniel and me. The more I think of it the more frightened I am. I have been thinking about it all the way to this spot. Being here gives me even more reason to believe what I feel is possible. However, you may find it very hard to accept my explanation. Are you sure you want to hear it?"

Sarah was in William's arms. She felt something familiar in his embrace, a warm feeling she could not explain.

"Please, Mr. Monterey, tell me what you know!"

"Sarah I think at this point it would be best if you call me William. Please, sit over here, let me see how I can best try to break this to you."

William helped Sarah position herself on a rock. They were still holding hands. William sat beside her, looking at her and then forward to the spot on the ground marked by their many steps in the pebbles.

"Your brother Clarence made me realize the way

Daniel disappeared and the way I appeared are connected. As a matter of fact, I think it happened in the same manner. The difference is that Daniel disappeared from here in 1892 and I disappeared from here in 2002. You see, Sarah, I was found as a child when I was three months old. I became an orphan of the state, *this* State. My parents adopted me about ten months after I was found. I never knew my true birth date. I was given July 22, 1972, as my date of birth. July 22, as it was here two days ago, for me; two days ago it was also July 22, in 2002."

William stopped for a moment.

"I know this must sound confusing."

Sarah was listening to every word. She was shaking her head as she spoke.

"No, please go on, I want to hear how my Daniel fits into this."

William was pleased that Sarah had not questioned his claim to be there from her future and that she had attentively followed his story so far. To William, Sarah's intellect seemed equivalent to his own.

"My parents were not told exactly where I was abandoned. I have never felt any compulsion to find out. One thing that was odd on our outing with my family to this location was that we were headed elsewhere until I saw the image of this bridge in full color in a book I was reading. When I saw that image, something compelled me to visit this place first. I think, now, that I must have been here before and was somehow compelled to return. I think someone's love and torment pulled me back here, returning me here in a similar fashion to how I was removed. I think that when I was a baby of a few months old in 1972, I was found here. No one ever found my birth mother. Just a baby wrapped from head to toe with a tensor band like cloth. Similar to the way babies were wrapped at the

turn of the century. That is all I knew. Now I know it may mean something to you, Sarah. I think your Daniel is that baby!”

Sarah was feeling faint. She felt so vulnerable. Could it be possible that what this man was saying was true? How could it be?

“What are you saying? That you are Daniel? You are my baby! Please do not play games with me, William, my mind cannot comprehend such an impossibility!”

“Sarah, I know this is very difficult to believe, but for me it is not difficult now. The reason it is not difficult is I know that I am here from your future. Just as sure as I am standing here in front of you now, I have been here with my wife, I have been here with my daughters. I have been in front of buildings that are five times higher than this gorge. I have been in vehicles that can travel safely ten times faster than a speeding horse. I have been in vehicles that fly in the sky, that carry more than four hundred passengers at a time and can reach Europe in less than ten hours. I have studied the history of our country and can generally tell you what will happen in the next 110 years. If I am here now, and I know where I have been, then the reality of me traveling in time is one that I must believe. If I have traveled back in time then Daniel must have traveled forward in time.”

“Even if what you are saying were true and you did come here from the future, even if my Daniel was taken there, what makes you think that you are him?”

William could sense that Sarah had not completely ruled out the possibility of what he was saying. William knew that what he was about to say would prove his point.

“Sarah, I do not want to seem presumptuous, but I know you also feel whatever it is that I am feeling between us. It is nothing I have felt before. It is not a feeling

of romantic love, but in the few hours I have known you, I feel closeness to you that I have never felt for another person. I think I now know why I resemble Thomas Byronville. I believe you are in love with him. I also believe he may be Daniel's father."

"Stop!" Sarah was sobbing. "I do love Thomas! He is Daniel's father! I know he is! You do look just like him. How can it be that you are Daniel? Daniel was here with me! My three-month-old baby was here with me only two days ago! Why has this happened to me? It's the Lord's way of punishing me for sinning against my husband."

"No, Sarah, it is not, please do not look at it that way. There is nothing wrong with your love for Thomas..."

"Wait a minute. I know how to verify what you're telling me!"

Sarah interrupted William. It now seemed that she was the one who knew how to solve this mystery.

"My Daniel, and his father, Thomas both have a birthmark..."

Sarah realized how great it felt to make this statement out loud. She was noticeably regaining her composure, and it seemed to William that now she felt she had a way out of this predicament. If only she could find a way to challenge William's story and prove it to be wrong. She would not have to deal with the harsh reality that she would never see her son grow up, or that her son stood before her as a grown man.

"...both have similar birthmarks on the inside of their left legs, just above the knee."

It was William's turn to be completely dumbfounded. Until now he was having fun with his theories. Sure he felt they were possible, but he also had his doubts. It was all calculated speculation on his part and in some ways he wanted to shock Sarah with his anecdote. In the moment, he was angered by this interruption in his own life and

wanted to sway Sarah with false hope. Why not give this nice woman hope that her son was alive and that William was her son? After all, she was just another character in this very real dream. But although he was hesitant to admit to himself, he did have feelings for her, the way a son should care about his mother.

And yes! He did have a birthmark on the inside of his left leg just above the knee.

His hands reached down to the bottom of the wide pant leg of Clarence's pants. He watched himself slowly roll up the trousers. This was the closest that William had ever been to an out-of-body experience. His mind was already flying ahead to the next moment. He was witnessing Sarah's reaction before it was displayed.

Sarah's mind had seen William's reaction to her challenge. She had played out William rolling up his pant leg. She knew the appearance of the birthmark too well. She had kissed it many times passionately and playfully. William, his stare fixed on his left leg like a beam of light, rolled up his pant leg one more gather.

There it was, as big as life itself, her son's life. Daniel was there with her. She felt faint. Her head started spinning. She told herself not to collapse from the shock. Until now, William's story seemed far-fetched and impossible. Sure, it was nice to fantasize that his claim could have happened somehow, but there had been no proof. William did make his case very strong, but without hard evidence she would have taken the easy way out and simply dismissed the thought of having to accept this grown man was Daniel. Even if she felt a motherly affection towards William, an affection she would feel if it was her own child... her child! Sarah had to stand. Her legs found the strength to do so; her mind had a different plan, it chose to shut down. She collapsed.

A rat found its way into the prison cell it visited daily. The scavenger was searching for minuscule morsels of dried and moldy breadcrumbs. The rat had learned in its short life that food could be found in the crevices of the cobblestone floors. His food quest was a risky one. Much larger, threatening animals inhabited the space. But the need to find food before the competition emboldened the rat. He also knew the resting habits of the larger animals and timed his forages around these cycles.

On this day, the rat completed a thorough inspection of the cell without disturbing Matthew Bulow, whose body lay dormant on the cold floor of his cell. The rat, unable to find food on the floor, climbed atop the man's chest and started licking at the blood coagulating there. The scent and feeding activity attracted a second rat; soon dozens were shoving their way into the food line, prancing on Bulow's legs, torso, arms and face. Bulow, the perfect host, lay unmoving during the feast.

Bulow's bleeding body had been ignored by guards who had tossed him into the cell the day before. Medical attention was not a priority for anyone who attacked the keepers of the law. Bulow had been unable to resist fighting with his captors even though he knew he was wrong for invading the Byronville house. The soldiers had responded by beating Bulow about the face and head, then ignoring him in his cell. Other prisoners mocked Bulow's screams. He was thankful for the stretches of unconsciousness, when he didn't have to deal with his pain or

the stench of his surroundings.

Approaching footsteps alerted the rats. They scrambled, returning deep into the bowels of the walls of stone. Bulow remained motionless, undisturbed by the rats' activities or the sounds of the soldiers banging chains against the heavy wooden doors. Bulow's cell was opened. "Bulow, get up on your feet!"

There was no reaction to the command, or to the soldier's boot kick that followed. The other soldier dumped the contents of a wooden bucket over Bulow's head. Nothing. Bulow was dead.

Thomas and Rachel returned with Clarence to his cabin to check on William. They found the cabin empty.

“He probably headed to the Natural Bridge,” Rachel suggested. “That’s where all this started and that’s what he was drawing in his notes.”

Unaware that the three of them were only thirty minutes behind both William and Sarah, they followed the same countryside to the Natural Bridge. Thomas was the first to spot the pair as they neared the entrance of the gorge and was alarmed to see Sarah coughing and waving her arms as William held a cloth to her forehead.

Thomas kicked at his horse. Clarence and Rachel followed on their horses at full gallop. William, hearing the horses racing in his direction, quickly turned, visions of armed men ready to attack formed in his mind. He was relieved to see it was a friendly and familiar group approaching.

“Sarah, are you alright?” Thomas shouted as he dismounted at her feet.

“William, if you have harmed this lady in any way I will personally deliver you to the law. I am sure they will let you share Matthew Bulow’s cell.”

Sarah, recovering from her fainting spell, responded: “Thomas, I am fine. William has not harmed me. Did you say Matthew is in jail? He did not return home last evening.”

Concern for her husband was noticeably missing in Sarah’s voice. She turned her attention instead, to Rachel,

who had dismounted from her horse and was standing next to Clarence.

"Hello Rachel, I am glad to see you here with my brother." And, then to Clarence:

"Clarence, I went to your cabin this morning, hoping to find you, but instead, I found William in your clothing. We came here together. He has just shared with me the most incredible revelation. So incredible it made me faint. Even now, I'm not certain I could stand on my own."

Thomas was uneasy about William and Sarah having traveled to this place alone. He was also beginning to wonder what William was up to.

"What is it, William? Do you know the whereabouts of Daniel? Is he okay?"

"Thomas, I..."

William was dumbfounded. The reality that this man, who stood before him, was his own age and his biological father hit him like a speeding train. He was not sure if he should throw his arms around him or quickly pull Sarah away to insist that she not reveal his identity.

It was too late.

"Thomas, William..."

Sarah stopped and looked at William, who lowered his head slowly indicating no real objection to what she was about to announce.

"What I am trying to say is that... William is Daniel."

Overcome with emotion, William heard Sarah but her voice was beginning to sound distant, as though her words were not really being spoken. He, too, felt somewhat removed from the scene, as he focused intently on Thomas's face, on his father's face. Clarence looked at Rachel, puzzled. Both remained silent, understanding that this was an important moment for their mutual siblings and this man they had been wondering so much about.

“Sarah, what are you saying? William, explain to me what Sarah is saying!”

Thomas was holding Sarah’s shoulders with both hands and turned to face William.

“Thomas, I am not sure how to explain this to you. I am trying to make sense of it myself.”

William turned to Clarence and Rachel. They remained silent and frozen in place. He looked from face to face, hoping to get some help to clarify his thoughts.

“Clarence, you recall Daniel disappearing without a trace from beneath this bridge?”

Clarence was not expecting to be asked to take part in William’s explanation, but he found the nerve to answer.

“When he vanished, there was no one around me to take Daniel.”

Clarence did not want to say anything else. He lowered his head as if to accept responsibility for Daniel’s disappearance. William continued.

“You must have thought you were losing your mind.” William took a moment to gaze directly into each person’s eyes. Slowly, he made contact with Clarence, Rachel and his parents, Thomas and Sarah. He wanted to make certain they believed his sincerity as he told what must have seemed an unbelievable tale.

“If I have come to you from the future, then anything is possible. I have theorized that Daniel was sent forward in time thirty years before I was sent back in time. I arrived here shortly after Daniel vanished, but that does not mean Daniel grew thirty years in a few hours. Daniel as a baby from this time is gone forever.”

Sarah was stronger now. She listened seriously, but without breaking down, to what William was telling them. Thomas’s attention was also rapt. He began to realize that he should not discount anything coming from a man who could be here from the future. Rachel and

Clarence, less profoundly affected by William's words, were equally enthralled. William knew he had everyone's complete attention.

"This is my mother," William said to himself, stopping his explanation to ponder the weight of his thoughts. Sarah's voice now sounded different to him.

"Please continue, William."

Sarah sounded so motherly to William that he felt comforted enough to continue. His eyes fixed on Sarah's as he began to explain his story to the others.

"Daniel was transported in time to when I was found as a child his age. I was raised by adoptive parents and returned to visit this bridge with my family at my present age. Somehow, whatever phenomenon transported Daniel forward in time, transported me back to you. It's ironic that Sarah's husband almost killed his own son."

William turned to look into Thomas's eyes.

"Except that I am not! Fortunately for me, I'm not Matthew Bulow's son, but rather..."

William sensed Sarah's support and continued.

"I am your son, Thomas!"

Kate returned home, released from the hospital three days after she was admitted. She was given a prescription for anti-depressants, and a blood pressure kit with instructions to monitor her diastolic and heart rates. She was also asked to see Dr. Fisher, a clinical psychologist, once a week until he felt she was fit to be on her own again and care for her girls without assistance.

Kate sat at her kitchen table, both hands clutching a mug of tea.

“How is your tea, Kate? Would you like some oatmeal cookies I picked up from the convenience store at the gas station?”

Kate’s sister had insisted on staying with her for as long as she needed help. Helen was trying hard to act as normal as possible. It was no use. The police had no leads as to the whereabouts of William Monterey and no one believed his wife’s explanation. Kate was in a deep depression.

“I do not want anything, Helen. I just want my husband to come home!”

Her voice was almost a whisper. The girls were in the living room watching TV, and they knew something was wrong with their mother. It was late and she had said nothing to them about watching TV so much that day.

“Kate, I called a friend of mine from the University of Virginia. He’s a professor of physics and natural science. We dated when he studied at the University of Chicago. I have asked him to stop by and listen to your story about

William's disappearance. Maybe he can..."

Kate did not let her finish.

"What, Helen? Maybe he can tell me that it is impossible for a grown man to vanish leaving behind a downpour of water?! Helen I know what I saw, and I know it sounds crazy, but one minute I was staring at William only six feet away from me..."

Kate stopped to look around her so she could make the distance more clear.

"...from me and the fridge. You see how close we are to the fridge, can you see the fingerprints around the door handle? Can you see that scratch? That is how close I was to William!"

Helen did not want to upset Kate. She just sat there waiting for Kate to think about what she was asking her to believe.

"Look Helen, you are my sister. I do not have anybody else here, I am telling you the truth. I know what I saw. You must believe me!"

Helen reached out to touch Kate. She grabbed both her hands.

"Kate, I want to believe you. Something did happen to William. If he is not here with us then something strange must have caused him to disappear. William would not just leave, and I know he would not let someone take him from you without a fight, which I am sure would have been noticed by others. But that is what I am saying! Something strange is responsible for William's disappearance! The police will not find him. We need to get to work and try to help William. Please talk to Paul. We need to speak with someone more knowledgeable in these matters than we, or the police are."

Kate was beginning to accept that her sister was only trying to help the best way she knew how. She started to think that maybe it would be a good idea if she spoke to

someone else who might take her seriously.

"All right Helen, I will speak to your Paul, whom by the way, you never told me about!"

The two of them smiled at each other until one of them initiated an affectionate hug. "Boy talk" had broken the tension.

The next day, Kate awoke earlier than anyone else in the house. Her system was returning to normal, and her internal clock beckoned her to get up at 7 AM, as usual. Except this day was not usual. Kate remembered that Helen was sleeping on the futon in the living room. The usual warm area adjacent to her in the bed was very cold this morning. Her husband had not left the bed an hour ago as usual. His tossing and turning had not interrupted her sleep during the night. If she snored at all, as she sometimes did during the night, no one had reached over to pinch her nose shut. It was best for her not to allow herself to get too depressed. Instead, she decided to shower and prepare breakfast.

Helen was awakened by the smell of bacon sizzling, as her futon was only a few feet from the kitchen. She wondered who might be in the kitchen this early. The girls were too young to be cooking, and her sister was in no condition.

"Good morning, Helen! How would you like your eggs this morning?" Kate was walking through the kitchen archway and came to stand at the foot of the futon, holding two eggs in one hand and a towel flung over her shoulder in the other.

"Kate, I am glad to see you in better spirits this morning! How are you feeling? Are you okay?"

Kate turned and was in the kitchen as she replied.

"Sunny side up as always, with finger toast on the side and some bacon coming right up! I am feeling fine. You had better get up and doll yourself up since..."

Kate stopped speaking.

"Since what? Kate are you...?"

Kate had returned to the archway and was staring at the back of her sister's head. Helen stood up from the futon and turned toward the kitchen.

"Oh my God! Kate, what's gotten into you today?"

Helen was not expecting to find Kate propped in the archway.

"...Since Paul is supposed to be stopping by this morning. You did say he was coming over? You did ask me to arrange for my mother-in-law to come over? My mother-in-law, who practically had a breakdown herself when she heard about William, and who canceled the rest of her trip to Atlantic City? Didn't you ask me to have her watch the girls today so that Paul and us could return to the scene of the crime?"

"Oh my God, what time is it? I have not seen him in three years. I need to get ready."

Kate turned and walked into the kitchen again.

"Relax, it's only ten after eight. You have plenty of time and it's not like you have to do much to look great! Here, sit down. Your eggs are ready."

Kate was serving the eggs on a large flat plate that she put next to the bacon and toast that was already in place.

"Kate, you eat those. I am going to jump in the shower and tidy up my futon. I don't really want a large breakfast this morning!"

"Good morning, Mommy, is Daddy home?"

Nicole was running through the living room from the hall in the direction of the kitchen.

Helen turned and grabbed her niece under her arms and, utilizing the momentum of Nicole's speed, raised her up to greet her.

"Hey! How is my pumpkin today, is your sister up?"

Helen did not notice Tara was in the room, making her

way slowly to the kitchen and rubbing her eyes with both hands.

“Yes I am up, tee Helen.”

Tara still had difficulty pronouncing the word Auntie. Helen was quick to react to Tara’s voice and put Nicole down.

“Nicole, go give your mom a big hug.”

She proceeded to lift Tara up.

“Good morning, Princess, give your auntee Helen a big kiss.”

Kate was trying so hard to be herself again. She almost had succeeded this morning. She had confidence, she had strength, and most of all, she had a mission to get on with her day and get to work! Even if the work meant finding out what had happened to her husband. She was going to maintain control and focus. But composure was impossible when she heard her daughter’s plaintive voice:

“Good morning Mommy, is Daddy home?”

She broke down on cue, her sobs uncontrollably loud. Helen heard her sister and rushed to the kitchen with Tara still in her arms.

“Mommy, what’s the matter? Please don’t cry!”

Nicole was at her mother’s side as Kate wiped the tears from her eyes and controlled her sobbing.

“I am okay, Nikki, come here and give Mommy a hug.”

Nicole jumped up on her mom. Helen reached them, and with Tara in her arms, joined in holding her sister with both her nieces between them. The doorbell buzzer interrupted the moment.

“Helen, that must be Paul. You better answer the door since you invited him!”

Kate had regained her composure and a slight tone of sarcasm was noticeable in her voice.

"Kate, I have no make up on, not to mention no bra!"

Helen set Tara down. As she stood back up, she raised her tee shirt to her neck, exposing her breasts.

"Hi, Paul, nice to see you, how have you been? I might as well open the door like this! Kate please..."

"Mommy, somebody is at the door!"

The buzzer was ringing again. Nicole was overanxious to see who it could be.

"All right, Helen, I will let Paul in. Go and take your shower, but please do not be long."

The girls had left the room and were both at the front window trying to look outside to see if there was a car they recognized in front of their building.

"You know, Helen, if I still had tits like yours and I was trying to impress an old flame, I *would* answer the door like that"

"I know you would. Now let him in!"

Helen gathered up some clothing from the futon and headed in the direction of the bathroom.

Kate told herself that she would treat this visit as a business meeting and that she would try to get her sister's friend to help. During the night she had convinced herself that there was a logical explanation to what had happened to William and that someone educated might be able to make sense of it. She was actually looking forward to Paul's arrival.

Kate opened the door. No one was there!

"Hello!"

Kate was leaning into the doorway looking down the hall, and a man, having heard the door open, was headed back toward her.

"Hello!"

"Good morning! You must be Paul. I am pleased to meet you. I am Kate Monterey, Helen's sister. Please come in."

"Hi Kate, I was just going to leave and come back in thirty minutes or so. I figured you guys were still sleeping. I did come over a bit earlier than you were probably expecting."

"It's not too early, you're here just in time to join us for breakfast. Helen is in the shower and will join us shortly. Can I get you a fresh cup of coffee?"

"Yes please. Just black will be fine."

The girls had gone over to their mother and were holding onto their mother's legs, one on each side.

"Hello, ladies, and what are your names?"

Nicole was not shy. She stepped right forward while Tara stepped back and around her mother's back.

"My name is Nicole and this is my sister Tara."

Nicole was pulling at her little sister's arm but Tara was not letting go of her grip on her mom.

"Paul, please sit down and make yourself comfortable. I am going to get these guys some cereal and I will be right back with your coffee."

Kate had just stepped into the kitchen when the door buzzer sounded again.

"Paul, could I trouble you to answer the door? It's most likely my mother-in-law, Mrs. Monterey."

Paul had just arrived and felt a little strange to be answering the door.

"Sure, no problem."

Reluctantly, he made his way over to the door, not sure what to say when he opened it.

"Good morning, you must be Mrs. Monterey!"

Rose Monterey was a very alert and beautifully featured petite lady, always dressed like she was going out for a special occasion.

"You must be Helen's friend." Rose stepped in and held out her hand.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is

Paul Portelli. I just arrived myself.”

“Hello, Mom!”

“Grandma! Grandma!”

The girls darted into the living room to greet their grandmother. Kate brought out a cup of coffee for Paul and followed the girls to their grandmother. After the exchange of heartfelt kisses all around, Kate excused herself and proceeded to finish feeding the girls.

“Portelli? Is that of Maltese origin, Paul?”

“Yes, Mrs. Monterey! How did you know?”

“Well, I suppose Portelli could be Italian, but Paul Portelli is definitely a Maltese name, and your features are very Maltese. My husband, who passed away five years ago, was stationed in Malta before we were married. He never stopped talking about Malta. Just before he died we went back there for three months. A friend of his let us stay in his guesthouse in Valletta. We had found a place of our own that we planned to purchase so that we could spend the summers there, but Sam got sick... Oh, well!”

“I am sorry to hear about your loss!”

“Thank you.”

Helen could hear voices in the living room. She had showered and dressed more quickly than usual. With her hair still wet and slicked back, she walked out of the bathroom.

“Hi, Paul, how are you?”

Helen could see that Paul had not changed. Still as handsome as ever, she thought to herself, and blushed as they embraced and kissed on the cheeks.

“Good morning, Rose, I see you have met my Maltese friend!”

“Good morning Helen, I am always delighted to meet anyone familiar with Malta, it's place very dear to my heart.”

Kate returned into the room with a nylon windbreaker on, looking very much like she was ready to leave.

“Mom, the girls have had their breakfast, there is plenty of stuff they like in the pantry and the fridge and I am sure they will show you. They will probably play in their room for a while. And by the way, thank you for coming so early.”

Kate turned and looked at her sister and then at Paul.

“Well, are you guys just going to stand there? We have a bit of a ride ahead of us. I don’t know about you, but I’m ready!”

William had a blinding thought. While the others comforted each other and tried to absorb his startling news, he slowly walked away toward the Natural Bridge. He was focused on the underside of the bridge. He could see droplets of water being released from the rock above. There was a missing piece to this puzzle! He felt compelled to find out what exactly caused the time transfer to occur at this very spot. He knew it was something to do with this place, this bridge, these droplets.

“The droplets!” William had blurted out loud.

“What is it, William?”

Thomas was holding Sarah’s hand and had turned in William’s direction. He realized something was amiss with William and commenced walking toward him.

“The droplets! They are responsible for the time transference phenomenon. I can feel it! They seem to be calling me. I must find out how this can be.”

William approached the center of the bridge, walking trance-like, ignoring the others. William’s eyes were locked in a frozen stare at the underside of the bridge. William was focusing on the droplets of water forming on the underside of the bridge and falling to the grass below. As Thomas came to within a few feet of William, he called to him. William did not respond.

Thomas turned to face the others. He noticed that they moved forward, but remained just behind him.

“I think there is something wrong with William!” Thomas whispered.

“Do you think it is safe to interfere?” Rachel whispered back. The others were not sure what she meant.

“Rachel, I am sure William will be okay. Let’s leave him to try to understand what happened here with Daniel.”

William now was focusing on the origin of the droplets bombarding his shoulders, hair, forehead, cheeks and chin. His eyes closed momentarily, and as a droplet hit the bridge of his nose, his left eye opened to see a droplet just leaving the underside of the bridge. His eye followed the individual droplet down, catching it head on. William let out a scream that was only heard for a split second. As the water droplet hit the surface of his open eye a second droplet directly behind it found his open mouth and entered the center of his throat.

Thomas was just turning back toward William and stepping closer to him. The others were also stepping behind Thomas, huddled as if they were walking through a haunted house.

A downpour of water met their feet. As the water splashed up onto their legs, Sarah was the first to scream. Thomas pulled back and stood up on his toes.

“Aaaa!”

Thomas’s hands were up in the air, as if he were standing at the very edge of a precipice, afraid of plunging to his death. Clarence was holding Sarah by the shoulders. His face cringed at the painful reminder that he had witnessed this occurrence before. Clarence, not wanting to see any more, turned his head down and away.

“No!”

Rachel did not react to Clarence’s scream; she did not turn in his direction; she did not say a word, she just looked in amazement as water slammed to the ground. The quantity of water now splashing on her clothing and that of the others as well as the grass around them, equaled in volume to what a grown man the size of

William would displace if fully immersed in a tub filled to its rim. A puddle quickly soaking into the grassy ground now lay where William used to be standing.

Thomas looked up to the ceiling of the bridge. He was shaking like a leaf, his complexion white, and he appeared to be chilled solid. Thomas's vision and hearing blurred as he fainted.

Helen was driving the Volvo. It seemed odd to Kate. Just four days ago her husband William was sitting where her sister was. Her daughters were in the rear. They were headed in the same direction, to the same destination. The time of day was about the same; the weather was very similar.

But now a man she'd known for only twenty minutes was sitting in the back seat, her daughters were at home with her mother-in-law, and her husband was missing.

"It's funny how everything seems so different today than when we drove through here only a few days ago!"

"What exactly do you mean, Kate?"

Paul pulled himself forward from the back seat. He was holding onto both front seat headrests. Helen looked at her sister, expecting a quick response, but there wasn't one.

"Kate!"

"Oh! Sorry, I was thinking about my feelings now as compared to the other day as we drove toward..."

Kate stopped in mid sentence, let out a deep sigh. She bit her lower lip.

"I have no idea why this has happened! Last Saturday my mind was taking in the passing scenery, the same one we are currently passing, and thinking of the silliest things. Today it all looks so different."

Helen and Paul exchanged eye contact, uncertain what Kate was talking about.

"Kate, can you tell me a little bit about what happened

last Saturday?"

"Well, Paul, where do you want me to start?"

"Since all I know for now is what Helen told me on the phone, why don't you start from the beginning of the day? Just in general terms for now... I mean, of course, when you tell me about William disappearing, try to give me more details."

"To start with, Saturday was William's birthday!"

"Really!"

"Paul, do you think that it's strange that William disappeared on his birthday?" Helen asked, both out of interest in the answer and interest in turning Paul's attention toward her. She wasn't going to sacrifice learning about William's whereabouts for her own personal gain, but at the same time, she wasn't going to waste a chance to rekindle a romance with Paul.

"I'd better take some notes! No, Helen, it isn't necessarily strange, but at this point anything that is a noteworthy point like the fact that it was William's birthday on the day he went missing could be a very important detail. Okay, Kate! By the way, how old was William?"

"He was thirty!"

"William looked more like twenty-five and acted more like thirty-five. My sister hit the jackpot when she met William. Paul, you would really like him..."

Kate's eyes began to tear. Helen had not considered how her comments might affect her sister. Helen was driving and looking straight ahead but turned momentarily when she heard Kate's breathing change in rhythm and pitch. She quickly realized her comments were upsetting her sister.

"Oh, Kate, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to go on and on. You know how much I... like your husband."

Helen was careful not to say "liked". She made up her mind that she was not helping matters much and, flirting

opportunity or not, it would be better if she just drove and let Paul control the conversation.

"You know guys, I'd better pay attention to the road. Never mind me, go ahead and discuss things. I will just keep my mouth shut."

Helen made a motion with her right hand across her mouth as if to pull a zipper shut.

"Helen, I do not want you to shut up! I like it when you talk. It's me. I need to be more in control. Look, I promise that if you help me convey to Paul what a great guy William was, then I will not break down."

"You got a deal, Sis, but for now I am going to concentrate on driving. Go ahead, Paul, she is all yours!"

"I am glad you guys cleared that up. Listen Kate, I have a feeling that we are going to get to the bottom of this so let's get to work! Let's treat this like an assignment. I think we should structure a plan of action and then the three of us should focus on individual tasks. We can resolve this. I need both of you to be strong and clear-headed. Do you both think you can handle it?"

"Paul, are you saying you will help us through this until we find William?"

"Helen, your sister appears to me to be very level-headed and sincere. I think something happened to William that is out of the ordinary. I am accepting the challenge to help you find out what that is. Plus, you never know what might become of us spending time together again."

Kate could see Helen blush a bit. She was waiting for her to say something. Helen just lifted both her hands off the steering wheel, flipping her palms back as if to say "You never know." Then dropping one hand back on the wheel, she made another zipping motion across her mouth indicating she had no further comment and then shooed both of them away, back to their discussion.

Kate turned to Paul.

"Paul, I like your attitude and, by the way, if I have not mentioned it yet, I really want to thank you for taking the time to help me."

"Don't mention it! Now, to get back to business, how did you guys decide to visit the Natural Bridge?"

"Well, actually we started out going to the Lauray Caverns."

"The Lauray Caverns? How did you end up at the..."

"Well it was William's idea. He was watching me flip through a guide book, and as I turned the pages, there it was!"

"What was?"

"A full color image of the Natural Bridge."

"And then?"

"And then? And then we changed our minds, or William changed them for us, and we changed directions and went to the Natural Bridge."

"And?"

"And?"

"And did anything else happen on the way that seemed out of the ordinary?"

"Well, I don't seem to remember anything out of the ordinary along the way. That's what you mean, don't you?"

Paul just nodded. He was becoming a bit concerned since it seemed that Kate was not concentrating, not supplying him with the facts he wanted. Kate sensed Paul's frustration.

"Look, Paul, I am not trying to drive you nuts! I guess I am a bit over-anxious to get to the part where William turns to water right in front of me! There! I've said it!"

"What I want to know... before you tell me more about that part is..."

"You mean you don't think I'm crazy? I am telling you William disappeared by turning into water right in front

of me! Are you not going to ask Helen to turn the car around? Are you not going to say that there is nothing you can do to help me since I must be crazy?"

Helen understood her sister's frustration, but she also knew Paul wasn't the source of it and couldn't help but tell Kate this.

"Kate really! Please give Paul a chance! He is after all here to help!"

There was silence for a moment, which seemed to all of them to be forever. Helen forced herself to say no more. This was not the time to be her usual ranting self. Paul was committed not to say the next word, either. He felt caught in the middle.

"Paul I am sorry! But I need to know what you think about me, and the fact that I know in my mind William vanished in front of me into a downpour of water!"

"Kate! First of all, I do not think you are crazy! I guess you will have to accept the fact that I, unlike most people, believe that absolutely anything is possible. You will have to accept this as fact. I believe in divine intervention. I believe in supernatural powers. I believe that we use only fifteen percent of the true potential of our minds and that exponentially if we could harness the remaining eighty-five percent, we could communicate without using dialogue. We could travel without using mechanized vehicles such as this automobile! We could vanish in a downpour of water!"

"Wow!"

Kate had turned to the rear and was staring at Paul straight in the face between the front seats the whole time he spoke. She turned and looked at Helen, who met her eyes.

"I told you Paul was different! Please give him a chance!"

"Paul, I am both sorry and ecstatic. I can't wait to show

you the very spot where William vanished, and I promise to be more cooperative. Now, tell me, do what you want to know next?"

That was the turning point. Everyone let out a sigh of relief. Helen relaxed her shoulders. Her sister had accepted Paul as someone she could trust. Paul had impressed Helen. Kate had let down her guard. They continued their trip toward the Natural Bridge.

William lay unconscious in a fetal position. Most of his body was on the grassy banks of a stream, his feet in the water's edge. Directly above William was a natural span of land from one elevated bank to another.

This time, unlike the last, William knew where he was; he just didn't know *when* he was. He tried to grasp what was happening. He knew he had passed through some sort of phenomenon, which caused his body to completely liquefy, and that the liquid that used to be his body completely collapsed onto the ground. William had felt the speed of the liquid falling from the underside of the bridge above him. He had felt the sensation of his body recomposing. What was missing was knowledge of how this could happen or how to control it. He had hoped to return to his own time, to his own world his own life and, most of all, his own family.

William knew he was not back to his world. He knew before he even lifted his head that he was neither with his family of 1892 nor with his loved ones of 2002. The ground below him was still soft, not the asphalt he had hoped for. He wanted to have found himself surrounded by countless strangers. He wanted to hear the noise of cell phones ringing. He wanted to open his eyes to see a pair of Nike or Adidas athletic shoes walking past him.

Instead he heard men shouting and firecrackers or, no... guns! Guns, shooting! Still crouching, William opened his eyes and saw a scene from his high school history class. He'd never paid much attention to details like

dates and battle sites but he recognized the uniforms. Red coats! He'd landed himself right in the middle of...

The whistle of a bullet rushing past his ear convinced William he didn't want to stick around long enough to test his memory. He'd barely escaped the angry gunfire of Matthew Bulow in his last transformation. He wasn't about to introduce himself to soldiers in the middle of a war zone and attempt to explain his bizarre time-travel story. He'd be dead from either a stray or intended bullet before he spoke a single sentence.

William dropped to the ground, hoping he would stay alive long enough to plan his escape, praying he'd figure out a way to see his wife and daughters again.

William felt the earth tremble beneath him as bullets flying in all directions landed in the grass surrounding him and splashed in the river below his feet. His only hope was to flee to another time.

William ignored the noise of gunfire and fallen men, shut out visions of flags hoisted high above horses' heads. He forced his attention to the center of the bridge. His eyes locked in a frozen stare at the underside of the bridge. William was focusing on the droplets of water forming on the underside of the bridge and falling to grass below. He was vaguely aware of more bullets flying around him, some so close they created a chill breeze around William. William now was focusing on the origin of the droplets bombarding his shoulders, hair, forehead, cheeks and chin. His eyes closed momentarily, and as a droplet hit the bridge of his nose, his left eye opened to see a droplet just leaving the underside of the bridge. His eye followed the individual droplet downward, catching it head on. William let out a scream heard only for a split second. As the water droplet hit the surface of his open eye, a second droplet directly behind it found his open mouth and entered the center of his throat.

A soldier, seeking cover beneath the bridge, had heard William's scream and started toward the sound, rifle at the ready. He was less than five feet from William, debating whether to shoot or offer assistance, when a downpour of water met his feet and splashed up onto his legs.

The soldier looked up to the ceiling of the bridge and was shaking like a leaf, his complexion pale, and he appeared to be chilled solid. The soldier's vision and hearing were blurred. He fainted. His rifle discharged as he fell.

Helen parked the car in front of the gift store that led to the entrance of the Natural Bridge.

"This is it!" Kate shouted.

"This is it? Where is the Natural Bridge?"

"Paul, if you want to see the Natural Bridge, then we must enter this gift store first and purchase tickets, then take a bus... Come on!"

Kate led the trio inside, opening her purse as she walked. She proceeded to purchase the tickets and lead Paul and Helen onward as if she had been there a hundred times before. The roadway down to the canyon was covered with a canopy of green. Tall trees reached up and over to the center of the narrow lane. The bus driver seemed to have memorized a series of winding curves, maneuvering the vehicle as if he could do it with closed eyes. At the bottom of the last straight stretch of the road, the small bus came to a stop. Kate was the first passenger off the bus after the driver opened its doors. She rushed forward, walking quickly, nearly jogging toward the Natural Bridge. Helen and Paul followed, but their pace was slowed by wonderment as they took in the sight of the rock spanning the gorge.

"Kate, wait!"

"Let her go, Helen, I am sure she has no intention of going any farther than the bridge."

"How do you know where she will stop?"

"If something unusual happened here, it must have happened under that bridge!"

"What makes you so sure Paul? How did you know Kate was going to stop there?" Helen was surprised that Paul was right; Kate came to a stop directly under the bridge.

"I will explain later, let's join her!"

Kate was looking around her for a moment, trying to find William's face in the small groups of people walking by. Nothing! Kate had to accept that her mind had witnessed her husband vanishing in a downpour of water before her very eyes. Kate looked down at the pavement. She knew it was futile to look for William amongst the people around her.

Paul and Helen arrived where Kate was standing. They both looked down at the spot of pavement where she stared.

"This is the very spot William was standing !" Kate was aware that Helen and Paul had joined her. She turned to Paul and waited for him to say something.

"Look, Paul, I need you to help me understand what happened at this very spot."

"Go ahead, Kate, I'm listening. Tell me exactly what happened; try to remember every detail."

"William was standing here like he was in a trance, I was trying to tend to the girls when I noticed something was amiss with him. All of a sudden I heard a fraction of a scream from William, not a complete scream, but a scream like someone cut him off in the dream's midst. Then a wall of water starting at the height of his head dropped to the ground, it knocked me over, and he was gone. Just like that... Now tell me, Paul, does that sound possible to you?"

Helen spoke before Paul had a chance.

"Well, Paul, what do you think? I know I am starting to doubt my earlier doubts; maybe it's like you said, that anything is possible!"

Paul was not speaking; his mind was racing, he knew sincerity when he heard it, and he could feel the atmosphere of this place held mystery. He was afraid of what he might say.

He did not want to give Kate false hope that he had any answers for her, and he certainly did not want to appear to Helen that he was anything less than analytical.

"Paul?"

"Helen, I do not know how to say this... I believe your sister!"

"You do?"

"Gee, Helen, thanks!"

"Oh, Kate, I didn't mean it that way! Like I said, I am starting to believe you myself. I am just glad that Paul thinks what you are telling us is possible... That is what you are saying, Paul? Isn't it? You believe what Kate is saying is possible?"

"Helen!"

"Sorry guys, I guess I am just getting in the way; maybe I will just wait in the car!" Helen turned and took a step, but she was stopped by the tug on her elbow.

"Helen, your sister needs you right here... And I would like you to stay!"

"Alright... I'll stay."

"I'm glad that was easy!" Kate smiled at her sister and turned to Paul.

"Paul, please explain to me why you feel what I'm saying could be possible."

"Well... First of all, I can feel something is mysterious about this place."

"That's funny. I don't feel anything!"

"Helen, please!"

"Sorry..."

"No, that's alright, Helen! The same is true for most, if not all of the people here. Except for the magnificence of

this natural wonder, there is nothing strange here! Unless of course you believe that something here could be different, that something here could transform a grown man into water.”

Paul stepped back from them and looked around. He looked at the ground and at the stream, and stared at the wall of the canyon opposite them, following it up to the rock ceiling above them. Until now the water droplets that had been falling all around and on top of them from the underside of the bridge were not of any importance. Until now a droplet had not hit Paul’s forehead.

Paul now was focusing on the origin of the droplets bombarding his shoulders, hair, forehead, cheeks and chin. His eyes closed momentarily, and as a droplet hit the bridge of his nose, his left eye opened to see a droplet just leaving the underside of the bridge. His eye followed the individual droplet down, catching it head on. Paul let out a scream.

“That’s it!”

People around them were staring and then moving on. A guard walking at a distance heard Paul yell out and walked in their direction.

“That’s it, I think this bridge and in particular these droplets have some power beyond our comprehension!”

“These droplets?”

Helen looked up and realized for the first time that water had been dripping on her as well.

“Are you folks alright? Anything I can do to help?”

Kate did not turn; she anticipated that the voice belonged to a guard and God forbid that it might be the guy she assaulted. “Yep,” she thought, “that’s the guy!”

“No thanks! We are fine, I just got excited about being here.” The guard found it strange that Kate was not turning toward him.

“Are you alright, Miss?”

"Yes, I am alright." Kate realized it was no use; she would have to face him. She slowly turned in the guard's direction and kept her eyes and head low. Kate was expecting the guard to explode at her with accusations of how she almost killed him.

"You folks enjoy your visit here with us! Please try not to disturb the peacefulness of this place for others."

Kate was relieved the guard turned out to be someone else, and not the guy she had slugged. The three of them just nodded their heads and waited until the guard had walked far enough away before they simultaneously broke out laughing.

"I can't believe that eight dollar-an-hour guard made me feel like the CIA had just confronted us while we planned to overthrow the US government."

"Helen, please let Paul continue! Paul, what do these droplets have to do with William disappearing?"

"Tell me something, Kate, was William staring at the underside of the bridge just before he disappeared?"

"Well... Yes! Yes, he was!"

"Helen, can you please walk over to the refreshment window at the pavilion and ask for a clean, unused plastic cup and lid if possible?"

"Sure, Paul, I will be right back!" Helen was glad to do something useful. She figured Paul needed the empty plastic cup to collect some droplets and if they were responsible for her sister's husband disappearing then her role in retrieving something as simple as a plastic cup was very important.

"Paul, can you bring William back?"

"Kate, I do not want to give you any false hope. I am not some type of magician. I can't really promise that I... that is to say, I personally can't bring William back. But what I hope to do is try to find out what caused him to vanish."

“Paul, please help me bring him back! I know you can do it!”

“Kate, it may take a while... A few days or so, but I promise I will set aside all my other projects for the next week and research this situation with as much focus as I can muster! That’s all I can do! It may not be up to us to bring William back. I think it may be up to William, wherever he is, to find a way back. And I strongly believe that your love for him will play a role in his ability to find his way back. Do not give up hope, Kate!”

“Hope! Hope is all I had before you came along. Now because of you I have my sanity back, and I have complete faith in you, Paul! I know you will bring William back to me and the girls!”

“Paul, here is your two-dollar-and-fifty cent empty plastic cup, the lid was free!”

“You actually paid for an empty cup, Helen? Have you lost some of Dad’s characteristics? Dad would not in a million years have paid for an empty cup... Even if our lives depended on it!”

“Kate, William’s life is worth more than a lousy two-dollars-and-fifty cents! What could I do? The number of cups is how they keep inventory. Why are we actually discussing this?”

Paul was ignoring Kate and Helen discussing such a trivial matter; rather he was busy collecting droplets released from the underside of the bridge. Paul moved the almost clear plastic cup with such precision that before long a half inch of water had accumulated in the cup.

“There, that should be enough! I think we can go home now!”

William lay unconscious in a fetal position. Reacting to the cold water at his feet, he pushed his face deeper into the wet, small round pebbles covering the ground. He regained consciousness slowly. The vivid vision of soldiers and bullets made him grab his chest. No blood, no wound! No noise! William had traveled to some moment in time that was silent. Silent and safe, he hoped. William looked around to see if the scenery had changed, to see if he'd landed in further hostility... that's been the pattern so far. He noticed the vegetation was different; he was disappointed to find no sign of modern elements such as pavement or tourists. He also found no sign that people were near. For the first time in his travels, William was alone. "Can anybody hear me?"

The wind and water gently flowing through the stream and birds chirping were the combined noises that answered William, nothing else.

"This is crazy! What do I do now? I am not sure what is more frightening, finding hostile people to deal with or finding myself all alone in a period of time that is... God only knows when! I suppose that I could take another trip to... who knows where!"

William looked up.

"There is something about these water droplets!"

William quickly broke his focus on an individual droplet as it released from the underside of the bridge. He now knew that if he were to maintain the focus, almost certainly he would be transported to another time.

William's mind considered the likelihood that he could be taken back to the Revolutionary War battle amidst the line of fire. The thought was not comforting. He focused, instead, on analytical reasoning.

First, get out of the open; second, find shelter where he could rest and think without being in fear, and third, figure out the mystery of this Natural Bridge and a way to return to his family.

His first objective was easy to accomplish, William threw his body up against the vegetation of the vertical wall of the canyon and followed it closely in the direction of the waterfall. At least this time William knew what to expect in the way of geography ahead of him. His mind was made up, and the vision of the wide cave he recalled just ahead drove him to run faster. His second objective would be met, knowing that he could find temporary refuge in the cave.

William ran along the wall of the canyon trying to be ready to defend himself should the need arise. After running for a while it became apparent to William that this time he was alone. There was no one. Just as he slowed down, completely out of breath, the cave was visible ahead. William stopped and folded over. Dropping his head down, he grabbed his knees and allowed himself to catch his breath. It took a few minutes for William to find the strength to stand up straight and walk slowly toward the larger opening of the cave. William entered the cave. It felt like he had not been there in many years. The cave seemed different. The contours of the walls curved differently than those he remembered studying only a few days before. The vegetation at the large opening was not there while, on the other hand, the smaller opening that saved him before was completely filled in. William realized that now he would be trapped if someone cornered him.

"William, you could just give up right here, right now!

You could return to the bridge and travel even deeper in time away from your family. Or you could get organized and figure a way out of this mess.”

William spoke aloud to himself. His mouth vocalized the choice to his immediate options; William was relieved to hear his own words...

“Get organized and figure a way out of this mess!”

William dropped down onto an elevated ledge. Sitting, he pondered what to do next. Hunger plagued him. Instinctively William’s hands pulled up from his knees and over his legs searching for something in his pant pockets. The beef jerky was still there. He wished he had grabbed a bigger handful of jerky back at Clarence’s cabin.

Having finished his meager meal, William decided that peaceful rest was what he needed now. The soft sand making up the floor of the cave was inviting. It did not take long for William to fall asleep.



Hours later William awoke. His heart was racing; he found himself in total darkness. William could hear the wind blowing furiously outside the cave. He elevated himself in a pushup position and moved toward the opening of the cave, crawling on his knees. A very dark sky was almost lost as it merged with the pitch-blackness of the ceiling of the cave. Behind him in the cave, total darkness seemed balanced with total silence. In front of him, the opening was cold and loud with noises and uncertain perils. The choice was an easy one! It was night the exact time did not matter. William crawled on the ground back into the cave until he was sure he had found the very spot his body had warmed during the many hours he had just slept. Many hours! William figured he could either sit there and think of all the bad things that

could happen to him next or he could put his rested mind to work analyzing his next options.

With his eyes shut and already in total darkness, it seemed redundant to cover his eyes further with the fullness of his hand; but this was William's way of feeling at ease. Almost as if he was watching himself and at the same time feeling the reality of his imagined thoughts, William in his mind acted out exactly what he would do right at that moment if he had simple conveniences that once were taken for granted.

The first vision that came to him was that of a large, soft green slanted top of a drafting table. A full pad of quad paper in front of him, the blue thin lines spaced a quarter of an inch apart both horizontally and vertically were sharp in his mind. William imagined himself picking up a 2h mechanical pencil and starting to scribble a list:

Time travel through the Natural Bridge.

Is it possible?

Yes.

How?

Something to do with the water droplets.

Why only backwards in time?

Why me?

Each time the following happened:

- 1. Mesmerized by droplets falling*
- 2. Focused on individual droplet*
- 3. Droplet hits eye*
- 4. Droplet enters throat*
- 5. Body collapses and faints*
- 6. Each time traveled deeper in time*

How do I travel forward?

William could see the list he had constructed in his mind so vividly that he read it over and over until he com-

menced verbalizing the memorized list out loud. William was stumped. No answers to the questions on his list were apparent to him. He could only find more questions to add to his growing list.

Soon the first page of his pad was full of comments and questions. William saw his hand reach out in front of him and turn the page. He commenced a fresh list:

What do I do now?
Think
Rest
Find something to eat
Wait
And wait
And wait
Until I find a way to travel forward in time!

The mental exercise was exhausting. William turned his thoughts to his family. Images of his wife's beautiful smile and that of his daughters flooded his mind. Memories of playful times filled with hugs and kisses and laughter were more than he could take. Tears flooded his eyes. It felt good to let it out; it gave him strength to know the passion within him to return to his family would persevere.

Matthew Bulow had been a powerful man, and his funeral reflected his social status. Mourners were plentiful and flower arrangements were abundant. But there was little sorrow expressed by those in attendance and none by his widow, Sarah.

Casual observers may have thought Sarah was in shock or unusually stoic to appear so calm after losing both a husband and a baby in a single week. Some whispered that Sarah must be horribly cursed; their sympathy was mixed with a certain fear.

Sarah was in shock... to learn that her baby boy was a grown man from another century and then to watch him dissolve into water in front of her was certainly unsettling. But she didn't consider herself cursed. Her cruel husband's death was proof of that! And she was relieved to know that, as bizarre as her son's circumstances were, she had a mother's comfort of knowing he was alright. She missed them... both baby Daniel and grown William... and prayed that one of them would return to her. And maybe someday she and Thomas would have another child, one they could show off to the world and share with each other, a baby that would share his father's name as well as his birthmark.

Thomas was among those surprised at how well Sarah was holding up. Maybe it was because he, himself, was still reeling from the triple blow of learning that he was a father, that his first-born son had disappeared to a different time and that the woman he loved was free to marry him.

Thomas's normal self-confidence was more than a little shaken. He could accept that William was his son – indeed he'd never met a man so like himself in character – but what if it were to happen again! Was a person's place in this world so uncertain that he could just vanish in an instant? Thomas feared losing Sarah in the same way. Already she'd talked about taking up a vigil by the Natural Bridge in the hope of precipitating Daniel-William's return. But what if she disappeared the same way? He'd like to forbid Sarah to go anywhere near the bridge, yet he would lose her love if he tried to control her in that way. The last thing she needed was another domineering man in her life! He'd have to find some reasonable way to dissuade her, which would be difficult. There was no reasoning behind a mother's love for her child. And what of a father's? He was tempted to set up guard beneath the bridge. Maybe if they disappeared to another time, they'd disappear together... Thomas's practical nature was being put to a profound test. And so was his self-image. He thought he'd be too busy supporting Sarah to give sway to his own emotions. Now she seemed to be the stronger one; he might have to seek comfort from her.

Clarence and Rachel were feeling guilty - but not too guilty - that the recent string of events had been cause for personal celebration. The issue that had separated them seemed trivial now. For too long, they had stifled their passions for reasons of pride - Rachel hanging onto her parents' notions of class distinction and Clarence giving in to his own male ego - but they had returned to each other's arms - and beds - since the strange occurrences of the past week. They loved each other, had loved each other for years, but had repeatedly disavowed their affections because they were from different worlds. Then William showed up, both proving the real definition of "different worlds" and illustrating the fragility of any-

one's existence. Clarence and Rachel had wasted time being apart because they believed that they had unlimited time to reunite. From William - and from Bulow in his own way - the pair had learned to live in the moment. They couldn't help but share surreptitious smiles throughout the funeral proceedings.

When the final words were spoken over Matthew Bulow's body and his casket lowered into the ground, Rachel and Thomas and Sarah and Clarence walked as siblings back toward the horse carriage that had brought them to the cemetery. But when they returned to the Byronville estate, they separated as pairs of lovers. Sarah and Thomas retired to one wing and Rachel and Clarence to another.

A spider was crawling on the sandy cave floor. William fell asleep again, and daylight, which flooded the wide opening of the cave, failed to awaken him. The spider's long legs had reached an obstacle in their path. William's forehead sent a message to his brain that something was crawling on the surface of his skin.

"Aaah!!!"

William was on his feet in seconds. He slapped the spider off with one sweep to his brow and shielded the new light from his eyes with the same stroke of his arm.

William's first reaction was to head out of the cave and see what this new day was like. Not a soul was in sight. He must have traveled so far back in time that he was the only human in the area. Just as well, William figured, less to worry about.

William was losing track of time. Was it three or four days since he had arrived at this place and time? He pondered why he was so tired and slept the better part of the day and through the night in the cover of the cave. He felt it would be best to remain in the cave since it provided shelter. He had prepared a fire pit near the opening. Starting the fire was more difficult than he ever imagined. It took him almost two hours, but finally he was able to ignite the small twigs and dried leaves he had gathered. He kept the fire alive by burying embers beneath the ash so that if the flames died, he could quickly restart a blaze.

William spent as little time away from the cave as possible, staying inside except when he had to search for

food. William was amazed how quickly he adapted to his new primitive existence. He caught fresh water fish in the nearby stream and picked berries, which were plentiful. But William had always been a red-meat eater, and today he craved some. He had seen rabbit droppings near the cave, but he had not actually seen any of the furry creatures. He set out on a mission to hunt and kill an animal smaller and less intelligent than himself.

The grounds immediately around the cave were now all too familiar to William. As he stared at the same rocks and the same vegetation, he realized that today it was time to go beyond his comfort zone. William tried to calculate the time of day by staring into the sun. By its position in the sky, he calculated that it was still morning. He was hungrier than ever.

As William turned, he saw another creature that appeared to him to be equally or perhaps more hungry than he was. A gray wolf, with white fur making up most of its face, was staring at him. The wolf was standing alone at the top of a small hill, but not for long. Two other wolves joined the leader then four more crested the small hill. And to William, it looked like the lead wolf was telling the pack, "Look, boys: breakfast!"

William's mind raced with fear and the possibilities for escape. He knew that the cave behind him would be no help. Hope was lost. He accepted the harsh reality that he was alone and there was no way out. The wolves started moving toward him, splitting about as if they were about to execute a predetermined plan of attack.

William closed his eyes. In his mind it was pitch black; no light was visible. There was no opening through which he could escape. Just then he saw images of his daughters; he felt their touch. Kate was with them. They were calling him; they were there to save him. They were pulling him out of this nightmare. He looked at Kate, but

his vision of her was blurred. William could make out that Kate was saying something to him, but he could not tell what it was. William was shaking. His entire body was trembling as though he had just emerged from a pool filled with ice water.

“Fight!”

William saw Kate clearly now. She was telling him to fight. As he opened his eyes, he could see the wolves were now very close. He could see his image in the eyes of the lead wolf. William reached slowly behind him, and his hand hit the vertical wall of the cliff adjacent to the cave. As he made contact with the wall small rocks fell away, making noise that startled the lead wolf.

“That’s right, be afraid. There is no way that I will let you and your friends hurt me.”

William was speaking softly as if to reassure himself that he was now in control. The wolves were sensing that their prey was about to defend himself. They moved sideways now but not away. Some of the wolves in the rear were growing impatient and now dared to make quick forward movements in William’s direction. One particular wolf emerged from the pack in an attempt to advance towards William. The others did not approve and scolded the brazen wolf.

William could feel the loose earth behind him, his right hand now frantically searching for something large enough to defend himself. The lead wolf was sensing the pressure from the others to commence the attack. The wolf launched forward at his prey with his teeth leading. William had found a jagged grapefruit-sized rock. His focus was on the teeth of the wolf that was about to tear into his neck. William placed all of his weight behind the rock. He could see the other wolves already following the lead wolf. He knew that his aim would have to deliver a fatal blow to their leader.

A deafening howl ensued upon a perfect aim by William. The rock landed heavily just over the wolf's eye socket. The wolf fell to the ground in front of William, the fur at his head and neck saturated with dark red blood. The other wolves stopped in their tracks, growling at William but now hesitant to replace their leader. William, sensing their apprehension, quickly grabbed at the embankment, finding smaller rocks. He flung the rocks in succession. The wolves, now leaderless, having witnessed that a simple rock could be deadly, retreated toward the hill. William, now overcome with how close he had come to being harmed, continued to rifle more rocks at the animals. Finally the wolves seemed to reluctantly turn and run away until they were no longer in sight.

For the longest time, William stared at the dying wolf in front of him. The animal's body twitched a couple of times and after all movement in the wolf's side stopped, signs of breathing were gone. The wolf was dead. William felt compassion for the creature; it deserved to live as much as he did. He felt bad that he had actually killed an animal, worse knowing that he would probably have to do it again in order to survive. His hunger beckoned him to consider if the carcass before him was edible. In all of his recollections of western movies and in all of his reading, he did not recall a single time where the meat of a wolf was eaten. All of a sudden he realized that he was actually contemplating finding a way to dismember the animal that lay lifeless before him for his supper. The thought was repulsive. After all, this animal was a canine, and who knew what disease it might carry? On that thought, William found the strength to grab the hind legs of the dead animal and drag it away from the cave. After covering the wolf with rocks and sand some distance from the cave, William walked over to the edge of the stream. The water was cold and fast, removing the soil and sweat

from his hands, arms and face, which was momentarily polluting the clear water directly in front of him. William waited a few moments; he scooped up some of the cool water into his cupped hands, drinking until he felt refreshed.

“Kate, can you tell me about William? What kind of person... is he?” Paul was careful not say “was he?”

They were sitting at a booth inside a Harrisonburg restaurant that, while normally bustling during the business lunch hour, was nearly empty now, at three in the afternoon. Paul’s research efforts - examining the water droplets and revisiting the Natural Bridge - were not getting him far, and he thought another interview with Kate might help. At the restaurant, they were away from distractions - Kate’s caused by the normal demands of her daughters and Paul’s caused by his uncertain feelings, but definite attraction, for Helen.

Kate detected Paul’s attempt to choose his words carefully. She tried to smile but fought tears. Kate wondered how long it would be until people started talking about William as if he were gone for good. She had to make Paul believe that William was not gone, but lost, and that if anyone could find her husband, it would be him. She rushed her next words:

“William is a hardworking, intelligent man who loves his family and worships his mother. His biggest fault is that he rarely thinks about himself. He is always thinking about others and what he can do to make them happy. He loves to make me happy. Most of the time I think I do not deserve him.”

Kate realized that her last words were heavy, as she might be suggesting that losing William was something she had coming to her. “I don’t really mean to say I do not

deserve him now! I need him more than ever. Paul, there must be something you can do to help me.”

Paul looked into Kate’s eyes and he could see her despair. He was not sure if he could help her, but believed that if there was a way to get her husband back, he would do his very best to help.

“Kate, I am not sure if I can help you, but I do promise to do my best. Can you tell me more about William’s past? Where was he born? Where did he grow up? Where did you meet? What did he like? Music, food, hobbies, and anything else you can tell me.”

Kate was pleased to hear Paul wanted to know so much about her husband. It reassured her to know that Paul was genuinely concerned.

“Well, where do I start? William was adopted. Actually no one really knows where he was born, not even his mother. It didn’t really bother William... he said that his past was not important to him, just his future...”

“What do you mean he did not know where he was born?” Paul interrupted Kate just as she was about to continue.

“Every time I brought up his childhood, William would...” It took Kate a moment to realize that Paul was not asking more about William’s past, but rather why he didn’t know about his origins. “What did you want to know?” Kate turned to Paul and brought her face closer as if to say, “I need you to speak louder.”

“What do you mean he did not know where he was born? Do you mean what hospital or what city?” Paul had found his notebook and was starting to take notes; he scribbled the date at the top of the lined playing card-size sheet of paper. And jotted bulleted notes:

- William adopted***

Paul had included three stars next to this first note as he was surprised to learn this fact about William.

Kate waited for Paul to finish writing. When he looked up, she tried to read what he had written but found it hard to see the text. So she reached over and grabbed Paul's wrist with her right hand and pulled it over in front of her within inches of her face. "Why did you add the asterisks next to this first note? Is it important that William was adopted?" Kate had not let go of Paul's hand and as Paul pulled back to look at the note, Kate found herself allowing her hand to be dragged toward Paul's chest, holding onto his wrist as if the key to this mystery was in Paul's notepad. She wanted to turn this odd moment into something that would compel Paul to help.

"Paul, I can only let go of your wrist if you tell me that you will help me! Can I count on you? I have a strong feeling you can bring William back to me."

Paul realized Kate was not completely at ease. He placed his free hand over Kate's and shook it once, then shook his head. "Listen, Kate, I am not sure what I can promise you. I have no idea why your sister, who I had not heard from for over a year, felt I could help. I do know one thing though! And that is that I want to be here and I want to help you. I feel this is something that needs me. I believe that something happened to William that is beyond a conventional explanation. This is why I put the asterisks next to the note about William's origins: You see my father was adopted. He spoke very little about his past. When my grandparents, who were wealthy merchants from Malta, decided they wanted an American baby, they purchased my dad as an infant. He never knew where he was born, when his true birth date was or who his real parents were. The only difference with my dad and your husband was that his parents were not as loving and my dad always craved to find out more about his origins."

Paul, noting Kate's rapt interest in his story, continued.

“My dad grew up in Malta and married my mother there. I was born here. My dad left Malta a week after he was married. They left without telling either of my grandparents. My mother was heartbroken at first, but later she adjusted. My dad moved to Virginia for some reason. My family was the only Maltese family in these parts. My mom is still alive...” Paul stopped suddenly. Up until now, he had been holding onto Kate’s hand but he felt the need to release it and sit upright in his chair.

“What happened to your dad, Paul? Has he... I mean, did he die?”

Paul let out a deep breath. “That may have been easier to accept. I have not seen my father for four years now. We were close. I miss him so much. I was searching for him for the longest time. I did believe that one day I would find him.”

Kate momentarily forgot about her problems and felt moved by Paul’s emotions. “I am not sure I am following you. How did your father disappear?” Kate wanted to learn Paul’s story and if it in any way tied into her situation. “Paul, do you think your father and my husband might be in the same place, is it possible?”

Paul was noticeably startled... that was not what he had been thinking at all. But what if there was a connection? Was it possible that the answers he had sought for so many years could present themselves through the dilemma of this person in front of him? “Kate, that is not what I am trying to say, that is definitely not what I was thinking about. On the other hand, I would have to say that anything is possible, and up until now I have found no clues as to what happened to my father. Then again I found absolutely no one to help me. And I have no one who can tell me they were with my dad just before he disappeared. The one thing that is peculiar is that we lived in this area right before he left and that he, too, was

adopted. Although, I'm not suggesting my dad and your husband were at the same place. Actually I really doubt that to be the case."

"How do you know it is not possible, that your dad is not with William?" Kate spoke in a very stern voice as if she was scolding a child. "I mean, Paul, anything is possible. I am telling you that I saw William vanish... now that is beyond normal. It was outright paranormal! And perhaps fate has connected us. Paul, I need to believe your dad is with William. I want you to find them both and bring them back to us."

Paul had allowed himself to think for a moment that it was that easy: bring William back and his dad would follow. Then he realized that for him it was different, he had given up hope two-and-a-half years ago. "Kate, do you believe in dreams?" Paul wanted to tell Kate everything; he wanted her to know everything he felt about his dad and what he had experienced.

"I, I guess I do... But what do dreams have to do with it?"

Paul grabbed Kate's hand again. To strangers nearby they must have seemed like lovers, sitting closely huddled in intimate conversation. But neither cared about such appearances. They were so deep in discussion the waiter could not get their attention after trying for a second time.

Realizing, finally, that the couple did not wish to be disturbed, he pointed his nose in the air and walked away.

"You, see, Kate, I believe in dreams. That is one thing my mother instilled in me, to believe in my dreams and to never underestimate the power of the subconscious. My mother is a bit clairvoyant. She can feel things. I mean she has strong premonitions. When her mother died, she knew it that morning. I took the call from Malta. The

phone only rang once, and she cried louder than I had ever heard her cry before. I did not know what to do, answer the phone or go to her. I stared at the phone, and I knew that the person on the other end was going to give me bad news; I knew it so clearly that I did not say anything when I lifted the receiver. My aunt was on the other line, my mom's older sister Jane was speaking in Maltese... She, unlike my mother, did not believe in any of this... She was very close to my mother. They spoke almost once a month by phone. They had not seen each other in twenty years. I still think she should have known it was me on the line and not her sister... I can still hear her Maltese words: "omm Carmelina mietet." I just hung up the phone. I could not find any words to say to my aunt. But my mother knew as soon as the phone rang that the dream she had that night was true... her mother had died. As a matter of fact she knew it before the phone rang. She was just telling me about her dream and the phone rang. It could have been anybody on the phone. At that time of day, the phone rang off the hook. We got a lot of calls at the house on account of the fact my dad was partially self-employed but, no, my mother knew it was the call she was dreading."

Paul realized he had allowed himself to ramble. "Sorry, Kate, I do not mean to carry on like this. You see I have given up hope of finding my father. About two-and-a-half years after he disappeared I, too, had a dream. I never told anyone. But things changed for me after that dream. It was so real, so strong. I actually forced myself to wake up so that I would make sure it was a dream. As soon as I woke, I concentrated on going back to sleep so I could continue the same dream, and I did. In my dream, my dad came to me and asked me to stop searching for him. He told me that he was somewhere I could not go to, a place where he was happy, and that he loved me very much. He

asked me in the dream to take care of my mother. I found myself having a conversation with him. It was the most amazing dream I have ever had. I asked my father if he was alive and he said that in his new world he was. He used the words "new world," and then something really freaky happened. In my dream, I saw my dad as a young boy about ten or so in between a couple who were holding his hands. They were his real parents. I could see their faces and they were so happy to have him back. They were American, blond like my dad. I could see they were so much in love. I was so happy at that very moment I realized my father had left my mother and me so that he could be with his parents. And I stopped looking for him. I know he is where he wants to be. I know he is happy. I am happy about that. I do not feel that I have been cheated out of anything. I had many great times with my dad and I do miss him so very much, but he grew up without any love, not like the love he gave me. He found his parents, and he is with them now. He deserves to be with them. My mother has remarried, and she is happy. She and I have never spoken about this. Actually I have never shared this story with any living soul. But my mom did love my father and she, too, must know where he is and that he is happy and I am sure she knows that I feel the same way. We do not feel a loss when we are together. We feel a wealth of closeness and a common bond that we were fortunate to be part of my dad's life."

Kate was dumbfounded; she did not know what to say to this new friend whom she felt so close to now. Somehow she needed to believe him. But his story was not giving her hope. If anything it was frightening her. Could William be gone from her forever? Would she have to accept that he would not come back to her, that perhaps he, too, vanished so that he could be with his true parents?

"No, Paul!"

Paul was surprised by Kate's sudden reaction.

"No? What do you mean 'no', Kate? No you do not believe me? Well, all I can..."

"No, that is not what I mean. I do believe you. I honestly do, and thank you for finding the strength to share your story with me. I truly understand the way you feel..." Kate paused. Now it was she who reached over to hold Paul's hand. "No, Paul, I do not think William is at the same place as your dad!"

Paul pulled back, his body language was saying it for him, but he said the words anyway. "Kate, I was not saying William is with my dad in an after life..." Kate would not let Paul finish his words.

"I know you are not saying that. I know you are not saying that William is in the same place as your dad. All I am saying is no, Paul, William did not go to a place he would rather be than with his family. The girls and I mean the world to him, and he worships his mother. He did not feel any void in his life like you said your father felt. He has not watched his daughters grow up like your father watched you. No, Paul! No, Paul, William is not anywhere he wants to be. You must help me bring him back."

Killing the wolf now seemed less wrong to William than at first. He remembered his high school friend, Cosmo, who was born in Italy. Cosmo came from a small Italian hill town. He immigrated to the U.S.A. with his family when he was fourteen. Cosmo told stories of how he grazed sheep on the mountains near his town and how he lost many of his lambs and full-grown sheep to wolves. He never saw a wolf attack his flock; all he would find were the dismembered remains of his animals. For a moment, William thought of this kill as revenge for his Italian friend's sheep. Cosmo had estimated that he lost over twenty sheep in one year alone. It had stuck with William how Cosmo spoke about his sheep as if they were members of his immediate family. William could see the pain in Cosmo's face when he talked about finding his dead sheep. He knew each sheep individually. Cosmo missed his flock. In the U.S.A. he was a loner. He did not belong.

William recalled in his senior high school year, the day that he and Cosmo became friends. They were in the cafeteria eating lunch. William was sitting with his usual group of friends, telling jokes; Cosmo was sitting a seat away from him, eating alone. William's friends poked fun at the type of sandwiches Cosmo brought to school. Thick homemade bread with peppers, or an egg omelet, a "Frittata," said Cosmo. William knew that Cosmo was different, but he also felt he was way more mature than his friends. His mannerism was that of a grownup. He did not act childish at all. To Cosmo, everything was serious. His

outlook on life was genuine. He loved nature, and he would give the shirt off his back. On this day William had left his lunch money at home, and he figured that when he joined his friends, one of them would spot him a dollar or two until the next day. His friends were too busy acting up so William just sat there. He felt awkward interrupting their antics to borrow money from one of them. Cosmo always brought more to school than he could possibly eat. It was obvious his mother made and packed his lunch. He was probably the only guy in the cafeteria who had never stood in line to buy anything.

"Would you like to try my mother's Frittata?" William was caught off guard. This was the first time Cosmo had spoken to him, and as far as he could remember, the first time he had seen Cosmo speak with anybody. William looked at Cosmo and he could see he was being very sincere and that he had noticed he had nothing to eat. William shifted his stare to the wax paper that Cosmo had slid in his direction and to the wedge of shiny yellow and white, inch-thick omelet. He looked over at his friends, who seemed dumbfounded. Some years later when he saw the TV commercial where Mikey ate the cereal his friends would not try, he always thought back to this moment.

William's need for food overcame his reluctance; he reached for the Frittata.

"Thanks, I guess I should try something different."

William's friends looked at him like he was about to take a forbidden drug for the first time and waited for his reaction to his first dose.

"Wow!" William had not imagined how good this Frittata would be.

"This stuff is great, what did you say it's called?"

"Frittata," Cosmo answered proudly. "It's made with asparagus and 'porcini' mushrooms," he added.

"This is really good! Hey you guys, want a taste?" William turned to his friends, who seemed to be shocked that he had actually accepted food from some weird Italian kid who was the biggest loner in school.

"You need to eat it with bread." William turned back to Cosmo, who had slid a full slice of thick homemade bread in front of him.

"No man, that's all right, I don't want to eat your whole lunch. This Frittata is great, I'll just finish it."

"You are not supposed to eat it without bread, that would be impolite."

The outburst of laughter from William's friends was so loud that some of the kids at distant tables actually stood up to see what had happened.

"Yeah, Will, where's your manners?"

"What's the matter, Will, don't you know how to eat frettette?"

"Hey guys, why do you think they call it free thatha? Hey, 'cause it's free!"

Just then William realized how immature his friends were. Cosmo had not blinked at the smart remarks. He looked at William and simply said, "Try my mother's bread; I think you will like it."

William reached forward and took the slice of bread; he broke off a piece about the size of the remaining Frittata and placed the Frittata on top. William was doing what he had seen Cosmo do when he ate his lunch. He was trying very hard to show his friends that he did not appreciate their outbursts.

"You know what? This is the most amazing bread I have ever eaten."

William turned and looked at his friends, who were silent but smirking. "And since none of my other friends noticed I had no lunch today, I may just have to finish the rest."

“Hey Cosmo, what’s on this bread? Talk about tasty!” William turned away from his friends and slid closer to Cosmo.

“My mother rubs olive oil and just a bit of salt on the bread so it doesn’t go dry.”

“Hey thanks, this is really good! I wish my mom made stuff like this.”

From that day on William never bought his lunch again, and he and Cosmo became best friends. The funny thing was that Cosmo brought the same amount of food he had brought before he shared his lunch with William; the only difference was he never took anything back home now.

William and Cosmo could talk for hours. Cosmo loved talking about his hometown of Miranda in Italy. How he missed his mountains and the fresh water from the natural springs. How he wanted to return. One day Cosmo got his wish. His father decided that he also missed his homeland and made arrangements to take his family back.

When Cosmo left he was eighteen, spoke perfect English, and worked harder than anybody William had ever met. William remembered saying goodbye to his friend and telling him to get the wolves before they got to his sheep.

Cosmo smiled and said, “The wolves, they are God’s creatures and they have to eat like we do. If I work so that they can survive, the balance of nature will be kept and my mountains can remain as they have been for thousands of years.”

William knew he would miss Cosmo. They never wrote each other and William never again heard his voice. But William was grateful for his friendship and the lessons Cosmo taught him about survival and respect for nature. William knew those early lessons contributed to the person he was at that moment. Now, more than ever, he re-

membered his old friend and also longed to return to his home and his family.

William forced himself to end his reverie and focused once again on the need to find food. As he turned, he caught the sight of a rabbit crossing the path ahead and disappearing into a hole in the ground that was almost hidden by vegetation. Instinctively he raced to the rabbit hole. After some probing with a stick and rock, William had killed yet a second fur-clad animal. William's only tools were sharp rocks and sticks. Before long a fire was under the suspended skinned rabbit. The nourishment from the bountiful meal was making a difference, and William was concentrating more on resolving his dilemma. He was staring ahead at the Natural Bridge, realizing that his only escape from this time and place was to return the way he had come.

Under the span of the bridge William could see no sign or any clue that would lead him forward in time. He knew that with each passage he experienced he found himself deeper in time. At that moment William had an idea, that if under the bridge he was traveling backward in time, what if on top of the bridge there was a way to travel forward in time?

This thought had not even concluded and William was now racing toward the steep canyon walls, attempting to find a way up to the top of the banks. Frantically, he grabbed at the trunks of small trees and grasses and pulled himself higher and higher. William did not feel the sharp edges of the rocks gouge his legs. He ignored the thorns that stabbed his palms. Sweat was streaming down his face, but William was focused on one thing only, to get to the top of the bridge. William could see the top of the bank was within ten feet. He was perched on a small dirt ledge with a steep wall above him. There was no way he could go up from there. The ledge narrowed; about five

feet away it ended completely, but at that spot the upper bank dropped to within four feet in height. William made his move and inched slowly forward on the ledge. The first step he took proved to be too close to the edge, and the ground gave way.

William slammed down on the remaining ledge. His left knee dangled down while his groin area landed solidly on the only rock that made up the most solid part of his perch. As he fell, his body naturally moved outward in the direction of danger. William grabbed at everything in his arms' path to try to secure himself. Nothing. His body was moving downward and he had no way to hold himself on the ledge. His only way to hold on was to slow his fall by creating friction on the dirt wall he was falling against. He held on with his right leg that now firmly lay on the rock. His left hand found a solid rock point on the wall that gave him the support he needed to avoid falling completely. With his right hand William began to feel the collapsed ledge in front of him until he found a second rock point he could grab onto. Slowly William began to pull himself up, pushing on with his left arm as he pulled with his right. His weight was equally distributed on his two arms and one leg. His left leg was still dangerously dangling. As his weight began to shift more to his right hand he was trying to find the courage to release his secure grip on the lower rock. He had reached a point where if he wanted to pull himself up he would have to let go of the lower rock and rely only on the rock in his right hand. Before pulling himself totally upward, William tested the surety of the higher rock by pulling on it a bit more than his weight. The rock gave a bit but seemed to remain in place. After a few seconds of contemplating his next move, William realized he had to pull himself upward soon. His right leg was now trembling with the responsibility of holding most of his weight. In one launch,

William pushed off his small finger from the lower rock and pulled up with his right hand. He made it and stood up again on the ledge. William's yell of joy caused a number of birds in nearby trees to spur into flight. Slowly, William backtracked on the remaining ledge behind him until he stood on a section wide enough to actually squat down on bent knee. As though in prayer, William clasped his hands over his face. With his nose trapped between his hands, he looked along the wall and studied the portion ahead of him. About five feet was solid, then the collapsed length, about two feet and then what seemed like a rock and four remaining feet to the lower bank. As the bank curved toward him, the lower wall was directly in his path. William looked down and realized he could probably return downward without much difficulty and he should find an easier way up. But just then something came over him and, without giving it a second thought, William jolted up. He dropped his right hand as his left leg shot out to propel him over the ledge. He jumped over the narrow collapse in the ledge and landed with his right foot on the rock he had seen just ahead of the gap. With all of the strength he could find he pushed off his right leg and extended his arms forward reaching for the lower top of the back. Landing on his sore groin area was not the best way to slam on the ledge, but William ignored the pain and smiled anyway, for he had made it. He pulled his body the rest of the way forward and lay on the ground breathing heavily at the very edge of the wall that had almost beat him.

Walking along the top of the bank was very different than being in the valley below. The wind was blowing stronger here. Trees making up a forest on each side of the canyon prevented William from seeing anything beyond the vegetation. He could see the top of the Natural Bridge ahead of him and the subtle curve of the canyon

behind him. He was only fifty yards or so from the rock that spanned to the other side. He noted that the sheer mass of the rock could easily accommodate a future two-lane roadway.

Finally William had arrived on top of the bridge. He was walking across it, exactly in the middle. From this vantage point he was studying it, trying to find any hint of mystery. At the other side of the bridge a clearing in the forest was evident directly in the path of the bridge. The clearing went into the forest thirty feet or so, only to close up v-shaped. William turned in a fast motion to stare at the other bank, and he was not surprised to see a shallower clearing directly in line with the center of the bridge. William calculated that at some time in the past either large animals, perhaps dinosaurs or possibly ancient man, had used the bridge as a crossing point between the two banks. But how did this help him find a way to travel forward in time?

Walking back across the bridge William now looked skyward and then toward the distance into the canyon in both directions. As he looked again at the ground beneath his feet, he was certain it held no clues. Just as William felt helpless he noticed the sun was setting to the west. At the middle of the bridge, William stopped. He looked down the path of the canyon in the direction of the waterfall he had encountered during his confrontation with Matthew Bulow. As he looked at the distance he saw that the canyon narrowed to the point of the waterfall. Turning in the opposite direction the canyon widened and there was no end in sight. The sun was setting over the waterfall picture perfectly. William commenced walking again and then he stopped and looked again at the waterfall in the distance and the abrupt end of the canyon. He then turned to the openness of the other side of the canyon and saw something. William looked to his right

and saw the beginning of the canyon again and said out loud, "The beginning of time." He then looked to his left and said out loud, "The future."

William's head started looking to the ground, remembering how he had entered the bridge and the direction he had faced each time he had traveled back in time. He was now shifting his head left to right as if he were watching mice playing tennis at his feet. As the reality of his thoughts came to him he started to race in the direction of the bank, looking for a safe place to descend into the canyon. From the top it was easier for William to control his point of entry. He was also now more respectful of the canyon. Within minutes William was safely down at the valley of the canyon. William ran toward the underside of the bridge. The area under the bridge was shadowed and dark as the sun was no longer visible at the falls.

William believed he could initiate the time travel again this time, in the direction of the future to travel forward in time.

There was no time to think. His mind was made up. He walked as forward as he could and then looked up. His stare saw nothing. The jet-black ceiling of the bridge was too dark to follow any droplet down, let alone see any at all. His hands started to move around him as if feeling for the coming rain. Nothing, there wasn't a single droplet. William realized his dilemma; no light, no droplets, no time travel backward or forward. His eyes closed, then his hands fell to his side and he dropped his head. With his head tilted down and his eyes still closed, his lips parted as he uttered the words, "Tomorrow I will be with my family or I will die."

William did not sleep much. His cave was dry and he felt safe within in it, but all he could think about was getting back to his family. Daybreak could not come soon

enough. Finally his heavy eyes overcame him and he reluctantly dozed off to sleep.



The sun was strong and the day was clear with very little wind. William still slept. But as the light in the cave grew stronger with the rising sun, William's wake-up call came with the sun's rays finding his face through the opening of the cave. William opened his eyes, then closed them again and turned away from the light. Then his mind caught up with him, and he realized that this morning was not a morning he should spend trying to prolong his sleep. He darted to his feet and turned to the direction of the cave opening and wandered out. As he stepped out, he shielded his eyes from the light and wiped his dry mouth.

After washing his face and drinking some water from the cool stream, he stood up and stared at the bridge ahead. William knew what he had to do now. There was no delaying the need to prove or disprove his theory. He could travel forward in time simply by heading in the direction of the future. William heard The Who in his mind, and as he walked he partially closed his eyes so that he could barely see shadows in front of him. The Who's *Baba O' Riley* was one of William's favorite Who songs. He had memorized the beat and the words and whenever he felt excited about a challenge, he would recall the memory of the song in his mind and hear it perfectly. This time the words to the song seemed so appropriate:

*Out here in the fields
I fight for my meals
I get my back into my living
I don't need to fight*

*To prove I'm right
I don't need to be forgiven
Don't cry
Don't raise your eye
It's only teenage wasteland
Sally, take my hand
Travel south crossland
Put out the fire
Don't look past my shoulder
The exodus is here
The happy ones are near
Let's get together
Before we get much older...*

As William recalled the lyrics to *Baba O' Riley*, he smiled, thinking how appropriate the words of his favorite song were at that moment. He wondered if he was drawn to the song because he knew that someday it would be his guiding force.

"The exodus is here." William had stopped walking and was voicing parts of the lyrics out loud. "The happy ones are near." William started running and as he ran he screamed out: "Let's get together, before we get much older."

As William reached the underside of the bridge, he started to shake a little. Could this be it? Had he really solved this mystery? Could he travel forward in time? Was it this easy? For a second he felt apprehensive and wondered if he was being too gullible believing that he could actually travel in time forward and backward. But then after all he was there, deep in time, not in his own dimension. If he had traveled backward, and it happened, he told himself, then he could travel forward.

William made sure he was facing toward the future and started slowly walking toward the center of the un-

derside of the bridge. He commenced turning his head upward to focus in on the water droplets that had been there each time with the exception of last night. The droplets were there. He could see them, many of them, and he felt the trance begin.

As William braced himself he was amazed how familiar this was becoming to him. In the few seconds he had, his mind started racing, thinking up all the sensations he had felt before when he had traveled in time. The places in time he had traveled to flashed in his mind. In the blink of an eye William saw the last place in time he had visited. The bullets flying over, around - and toward him! Horror crept over William's body. He felt the force overcome his brain. He was losing consciousness. William started to resist. He let out a yell and tried to remove his stare from the underside of the bridge. Like pulling away from a very powerful magnet, William successfully pulled away and fell hard on the ground in front of him. His body slapped the ground hard. Fortunately he was able to place his arms and hands in front of him to stop his face from hitting the jagged rocks all around him.

William remained on the ground breathing heavily. He was thinking about the fact that he had just interrupted what he wanted most: to travel forward in time. He was convinced, however, that if he was successful in traveling forward and ended up exactly at the last place in time he had come from, he might quickly die of a bullet wound. For some reason William was convinced that traveling forward would place him precisely in step with where he had come from. Before he could return to Kate and his girls, William believed he would have to return to the point in time in which he had been in the midst of a battle in the Revolutionary War. He also wanted to return to his parents in the 19th Century to say good-bye before he could go home.

It all seemed so attainable, so easy. The gateway was above him. Why was he waiting? What could happen? He had come too far to be killed by a bullet. He had survived Matthew Bulow; he could survive this too, but how? William slowly got on his feet and shook the dust from his clothes. He grabbed his chin with his right hand and looked up again at the underside of the ceiling and saw the continuation of the falling drops. William quickly looked away. He wanted to keep his mind clear. He needed to calculate his next move carefully.



William was hesitant; he decided that it was best not to rush this next dive into time. William went back to the cave and sat for over an hour thinking about his predicament. He decided that he should eat and feel that he was absolutely certain of his next move. Another hour passed after his meager lunch of some berries he had gathered, William figured he had waited until two in the afternoon or so, it was now time to make a move. All at once William had a thought. He realized that if he could prepare himself for his anticipated predicament on the other side, he could survive to complete his journey.

William believed, from his limited experience, that when he traveled through time, any item that was on his body traveled with him. He calculated that his only choice was to prepare himself to be the target of a stray bullet at his next destination. All he had to do was to protect his body with makeshift armor. William had no trouble finding a large flat rock. There were many near the water. The rock he chose was large, about half the size of his chest. It was heavy, but he could hold it where he thought it would protect him without much effort.

Now it was time. William could walk toward the future

and feel that if he faced danger, then at least he was prepared. The underside of the bridge was still releasing droplets. William stared upward, focusing as he walked with his body pointing straight ahead. As William became entranced, his body was no longer in his control. He started to relax. His arms began to drop. The rock began to drop. Finally the rock hit the ground, just missing William's toes as it toppled forward away from his feet. William was not in control of his thoughts any longer. William's body was visibly transparent. His head fell downward and followed the rest of his body. A waterfall hit the ground.

William was lying in a fetal position on dry earth. His face was blistered from the heat and sweat was beading down his forehead. He could feel the hot sun pounding on his head. He opened his eyes and in the distance he could see what looked like a building. As his brain realized the vision before him was familiar and modern, he darted his eyes open and attempted to spring to his feet. He was weak, weaker than the other times he had traveled in time, and felt dizzy. And as he stood up, he lost his balance and fell down to one knee. William rubbed his head while he stared at the ground in front of him. He could no longer see the edge of the water. As a matter of fact, William noticed as he looked toward the middle of the stream under the Natural Bridge, that it was no longer there. All he could see was scorched earth and what looked like litter. Litter! Did he see garbage? William crawled a few feet and stretched to grab a plastic wrapper that was rolling like tumbleweed over the dry bare soil that was once the bottom of a stream.

The material he grabbed disintegrated in his hand as soon as he touched it. It turned to dust like a piece of burned newsprint does just before it breaks down to ashes. He was not able to read it before it vanished. Just ahead, another item that seemed to be an empty plastic bottle was flat as if a car tire had run it over. William moved closer; immediately beside it there was a second plastic bottle also flat, but this one was almost gone. It had decomposed to the point it was barely visible. When

William rubbed his hand over the bottle, the particles that had once made up the shell of the bottle disintegrated as if he had rubbed a light dust print. The cap of the bottle was denser and remained more intact. However, as he tried to pick it up, it too broke down like a wet cookie does when it is saturated with milk.

William decided to study rather than touch the remaining bottle. William could clearly see the label and was instantly horrified! The label on the bottle confirmed his fears:

COCA COLA
A PEPSI PRODUCT
WE WON THE WAR!

And in small writing under the large caption he could see clearly:

THIS IS A BIO-D CONTAINER-GONE-IN-FIVE COMPLIANT-GLOB-
AL ULTRALAW 2345-23

Paul had been spending time at the James Madison University library. His return to the Natural Bridge had not resulted in anything. He spent time at the Natural Bridge evaluating the droplets. He stood underneath them for many minutes trying to see something in them that would reveal a mystical secret explaining how William Monterey had disappeared. But nothing happened. Paul could not solve this mystery; he was stumped. He decided to spend his week researching the Natural Bridge, hoping to stumble onto something that would give him the clue he needed to help Kate Monterey bring her husband back.

Paul had grown close to Kate; he found her attractive and liked her sincerity. Helen had hinted on many occasions that she wanted to rekindle their brief romance, but Paul was not sure how he felt about Helen. She was attractive like her sister and had a beautiful smile, but Paul felt odd making a pass at her or asking her out on an actual date in the middle of this family tragedy.

Paul sat at a study table in the library; he had a mountain of history and geography books in front of him. Most were books with information about the Natural Bridge and some were books of ancient tribes and witchcraft. He had a notepad in front of him and made a number of notes but nothing concrete so far.

Helen was going to meet him shortly. She said she had something to do nearby and that it would be nice if they met for lunch. Despite his reservations, Paul was pleased

Helen was taking the initiative to express her interest. The day before when they made plans to meet, Helen had taken the girls swimming and Paul had stopped by to let Kate know about his trip to the Natural Bridge that morning. Helen was wearing a two-piece swimsuit with a sheer wrap around her waist. Paul had a hard time not noticing how perfect her body was shaped. Perhaps he needed to see her like that more often.

Paul looked up from his reading every two minutes or so in the direction of the library's main doors. Helen was just walking in when something in the book he was reading caught his attention. It was a black and white photograph of tourists under the Natural Bridge in 1922. Everybody was dressed in early 20th century attire; the ladies wore long dresses, couples walked arm-and-arm, and the men sported white straw hats like the kind they used in the political campaigns of the seventies.

"Good morning, Paul, are you ready for lunch? I'm starving!" Helen's voice broke Paul's concentration. Paul looked up to see Helen standing there looking better than ever. Her hair was made up and she was wearing the most amazing lip-luster he had ever seen on a woman's lips. He closed the book he had in his hands and sprung to his feet.

"Hi Helen..." Helen had leaned forward to give Paul a friendly hug and Paul was receptive. He lightly held her extended right hand, put his left hand behind her back and kissed her on the cheek. "You look great today! And whatever perfume you're wearing sure smells nice. I need a break. Let's get some lunch." Paul started to gather up the books he had in front of him.

"Find anything interesting?" Helen was looking at Paul with a coy smile.

"Well, nothing really that I can use. But I do know a lot more history about the Natural Bridge than I ever knew

before. You know they mined saltpeter near the bridge and early American soldiers dropped hot lead bullets from the top of the bridge so they could solidify and cool down when they hit the shallow water at the bottom? Interesting! Oh, yeah, and this is also interesting.” Paul reached for the book he had closed and flipped through the pages to find the black and white photograph he had seen when Helen appeared. “It is the only black and white photo I have found where you can see people visiting the Natural Bridge. Want to see?” Paul slid the only open book in Helen’s direction. “And you know what is unique about this photograph?” Paul continued as if to take pride in his observational skills. Helen was looking at the photograph, glancing at the figures under the bridge and in particular the clothing the women wore.

“Look at all those women wearing those heavy full dresses. Judging from the parasols it sure looks like a warm day. Today I know I’d be out there in shorts and a tank top. But if any of those ladies had gone there dressed like that back then, I am sure they would have been arrested. We have come a long way! Thank God!” Helen pushed the book back in Paul’s direction.

“Did you notice the men are wearing the old flat straw hats?” Paul had picked up the book and held it open in front of him. “That is, all but these two men... here!” Paul’s tone changed on the word “here”. “Hold on, Helen. I need to have a closer look at this before we go. Can you pass me my notebook bag?” Helen looked down in the direction Paul had pointed to on the chair beside her. Paul grabbed the bag from Helen and opened a side pocket to extract a square handled magnifying glass.

“What do you see peculiar about the photo?” Helen had leaned over Paul’s shoulder to see through the magnifying glass.

“Oh my God!” Helen shrieked.

"You see it, too? That these two men are not wearing hats and they are concentrating on the underside of the bridge, just like William did?" Paul seemed to be pleased that she noted the same thing he did.

Helen's face had changed its complexion; she was white and speechless. Paul looked at her to gauge her response to his question.

"Helen?" Paul now noticed that Helen was dumbfounded. "Are you okay? What's wrong?"

"Let me see your magnifying glass." Helen sat beside Paul with her left arm around his chair and with her right hand she held the magnifying glass over the image. "Oh... my... God!" Helen dropped the magnifying glass and placed her hand over her mouth. "I, I can't really bring myself to say it!"

"Say what, Helen? C'mon, you're killing me! What is it you see?" Paul reached over and put his left hand on Helen's right wrist to pull it away from her mouth.

Helen pulled her hand toward the magnifying glass and with Paul's hand still over her wrist she placed the magnifying glass once again slightly over the image of the two men in the photograph looking up to the underside of the bridge. One man's face was clearly visible and the other had his back turned.

"You don't know what William looks like, do you?"

"I can't say that I have met him and for some reason I did not think to ask your sister to show me a photo of him. Anyway, no, I have no idea what he looks like."

"Like this guy! He looks just like this guy! Actually if this photo was not taken in..." Helen moved the magnifying glass to the caption at the bottom. And in unison Paul removed his hand off her wrist. "1922!"

"1922!" Paul voiced in sync with Helen.

"Like I was saying, if this photo was not taken in 1922, I would have to say that this guy is William!" Helen had

moved the magnifying glass over the side of the face of the man clearly visible. "I know this is not the best photograph, but I do know William's face and profile and this man surely looks just like him. Amazingly so!" Helen turned the book more square to Paul and laid the magnifying glass over the image.

"Wow, that is amazing! Helen, what if I told you that this guy could be William? What would you say to that?"

"I would say that if that photo was taken in 1922 like it says in the caption, then you are crazy! William was born in 1972. If he was around in 1922, then he sure looked good for a one-hundred-year-old man when I saw him last! Paul, what do you mean it could be him? Are you serious? What makes you think this could be him? Boy, this keeps getting more and more interesting, am I glad I came over to stay with my sister for a while."

"Helen, for some time now I have been thinking that the Natural Bridge has powers beyond our comprehension. We have to either totally believe your sister is nuts, or we have to find an explanation that would make sense. If William disappeared the way Kate says he did, then it could be possible that he found some type of time travel portal under the bridge and he was transported to another time. Ancient tribes believed time travel was possible. They often sacrificed newborn infants to the gods. By killing an infant they believed it was sent to a better time than their own. This was done primarily after prolonged droughts, floods or plagues. If times were bad for a tribe and if there seemed to be no end in sight, then they reached a point where the youngest child in the tribe, usually a male, was sacrificed in order to appease the gods. Oddly enough, they usually held off sacrificing a child until most disasters would have ended naturally anyway. The fact that the disaster usually ended within a short period of the sacrifice strengthened their belief that

this was a good thing to do.”

Helen was listening to Paul and she wanted to show him how impressed she was with his vast knowledge of topics she had never heard about.

“Wow, you got to be kidding, you mean many children would have been killed in an attempt to send them to another time and place? Too wild! But how does that tie into William’s disappearance?”

“Well, I know William was not sacrificed. But if time travel was possible for persons who found themselves in a specific set of circumstances, then only that person at that time could fall through a hole in time. You see I feel there is something mystical at the Natural Bridge. I am not sure if I have my mother’s intuition, but I get vibes there that are real to me. I also think there could be a key in the water droplets that form on the underside of the bridge and drop to the ground.”

Paul paused for a second and looked at Helen to see if this was too much for her. “That is why it’s fascinating that the two men who look out of place in the picture are the same two who are studying the underside of the bridge. The fact that one of them may be William makes it more than fascinating. It’s amazing and may be our first real breakthrough to solving your brother-in-law’s disappearance.”

“Please go on, this is fascinating me!”

“Helen, I do think time travel is possible. I’ve always believed it was. This is the first time I’ve been close to an occurrence where it might have actually happened, and if I can prove it did happen to William, then the next thing for me to do is to figure a way to go after him and bring him back.”

“Go after him! Paul, you can’t be serious! Even if you prove that William has traveled in time... and let me qualify one thing: I am not sure I believe that right now. But

the person in this photograph to me looks to be William Monterey one hundred percent. Having said that, I still find it hard to believe it is possible, but if it were why would you risk your life going somewhere you know nothing about and possibly somewhere you could not return from?"

Helen was quiet for a few seconds before she spoke again. And for some reason Paul was certain she was not finished speaking her mind or perhaps she needed to think a bit more about what she was saying.

"The last thing I want to do here is to appear to be insensitive to my sister's loss. You know, if you can bring William back and if you truly believe chasing him through some dark tunnel will do it, then by all means go get him. But, Paul, if I lose you as well... Then what are my sister and I to do then?"

Paul was flattered to hear Helen speak that way about him. He looked at her and something came over him. He leaned forward and kissed Helen on the forehead ever so gently. "Thanks for making me feel wanted. I appreciate that very much. I promise not to do anything stupid. I wish I could say to you that I know how William traveled in time and that I could go after him and bring him back. Now that I know what he looks like, the best I can do is to keep looking for him in history. Let's go have lunch!"

Now that William had read the label he did not care if the bottle disintegrated. He picked it up, and with the limp material in his hand, he stood up and dared to look forward so that he could get a real good look at this new world he was in. William had to adjust his eyes. The sun was so bright he had a hard time looking into the distance. The light in that direction was almost blinding. He looked back to his hand that was holding the bottle and by now the bottle had shriveled up like it was a thin layer of cellophane. William dropped the flake of new-age plastic to the ground and looked around at his surroundings. He could see the remains of the concrete sidewalk he had left behind when he was together with Kate. And the stone walls that had created the curbing at the edge of the walk had crumbled and most of the stone was gone. He turned toward the concession building and could see it had been left in abandonment. But how could this place be deserted, it was one of the Seven Wonders of the World?

William had walked forward about twenty feet or so from where he had first stood up. He realized that he had not looked up yet and he had not turned in the direction of the bridge. He was trembling now. His fingers were shaking and he could feel a large dry lump in his throat. He was afraid to look back and up, he feared what he would see or more so what he might not see. If nothing else there was no water in sight. He was certain there were no droplets to be found in this God-forsaken heat.

No droplets! Was he now condemned in this future hell forever? William turned around and as he did he closed his eyes. As he faced directly in the direction of the bridge he opened them to a horrific sight. What used to be the bridge was a collapsed mountain of rocks and dirt.

William's body sprung from the water like a mousetrap that had just caught its prey. William's yell of "Nooooo..." was so loud that it woke him. He was under the bridge at another time, a better time than that of his nightmare. There was water and the air was moving and the sun was perfect. It was okay, he'd just been dreaming.

Looking up, he could see the bridge above him and he felt the steady breeze blowing over his face. He needed to know what year it was. Where had his time travel taken him to this time?

He had already ruled out in his mind that he was back with his family or anywhere near them in time. He could not see any of the familiar modern-day surroundings such as the concrete walkways or stone walls. Nor was there any shooting or soldiers on horses, so he hadn't returned to the war battle as he had feared. That still left a lot of unknown choices. One thing was certain to him though and that was that he had traveled forward from his last destination. The first indication was that he could hear music.

Happy music. From a distance, it sounded like the kind you'd hear coming from a carnival calliope ride. He could also hear voices; it sounded like a crowd. He could see what looked like a log cabin in the distance and smoke coming out of the chimney. But why were there no people around? William started to walk toward the cabin. It was located where he remembered the concession stand was. All of a sudden a loud explosion startled him. Immediately turning in the direction of the explosion, he could see a plume of white smoke drift into the wind. The trail of a

second shot was climbing the sky and it, too, exploded. He could see a brief flash of white light followed by a loud sound a quarter of a second after the explosion. Another shot rang out and another. He could hear the crowd, who must have been watching this daytime fireworks display, reacting to each burst.

From the sound of the crowd it seemed this was happening nearby, and that would explain why the immediate area was deserted. Any people nearby were gathered to watch this display.

For some reason William did not think he was in danger this time. He felt he would find people closer to his own time and that this was certainly a step in the right direction. The thought of getting closer to his family gave him a burst of energy, and he picked up his pace and headed out of the ravine. William remembered the main entrance of the park-like area when he first arrived with Kate and the girls and he remembered that the bus ride down the paved road to the bridge was relatively short. He started to jog now, as he was so looking forward to finding a new person who could help him. It had been too long since he had spoken to anyone, and he was starting to feel very isolated and alone.

As William ran up the road he could see tracks on the dirt road that had been made by narrow tires. But they were tire marks for sure. He was starting to smile to himself. He was surprised how good he felt physically. Even though he was running uphill, he felt strong and wanted to get to the top of the hill as fast as possible.

As William ran he could hear the noise of the crowd still muffled in unison with the fireworks. All of a sudden, he heard the grand finale, a barrage of shots so loud and so close together they sounded like machine gun fire. As William turned the corner coming out of the pathway, he was amazed to see a full-blown carnival directly in front

of him. He could see a Ferris wheel in the distance and tents, including a big top that must have been for a circus. Just as William stopped to appreciate the sight before him, the last bang of the final fireworks exploded and the crowd applauded the show.

"Mom, they were bigger than last year," said a young boy who looked like a miniature Huckleberry Finn, complete with a round straw hat, bare feet and suspenders, running directly in front of William. William followed the boy and saw him join his family just a few feet away from him. He decided he would have to make his move and join the crowd. He headed for the opening in the picket fence that appeared to be a perimeter for the fair.

"Hey mister, want to try your luck? Step right up, all it takes is one ring to win!" William was too enthralled to realize the carnival worker was yelling at him. "Hey mister! C'mon, try your luck!"

"Who me?" William was communicating with someone! He just realized that he had confirmed that these people were real and that he was somewhere in turn of the century America. People were walking by him in every direction all dressed in similar turn-of-the-century attire. It seemed that everybody was wearing a hat of some type, the ladies in particular. William ignored the carnival worker and kept walking by. Now the carnie was pitching another person. William was amazed, and for a moment he forgot completely why he was there and how he had gotten there. All he could do was take in the sights and sound of a time he had only seen in the movies. A time he knew had occurred not too long before the one his family was in. His family! Of course! How could he let himself forget? He was there to get one step closer to returning to his family.

After walking through most of the carnival, William realized he would have to make a decision, and that was to

either return to the bridge and see where his next hop in time would take him, or to stay in this time for awhile so that he could figure out how to control his travel to a time where he could be with his family again.

For William, the decision was an easy one. He would stay here, he decided. He liked the atmosphere and, for the most part, he liked the faces of the people. They were smiling and friendly. Some of the people he had passed during his walk had said hello to him as they had walked by. Something his generation did less of. He felt safe and wanted to know exactly where he was in history and what surprises this chapter held for him.

All he had to do now was to determine which way he would go. As he stood in a field where many people had parked black model T's and other vehicles of the era, including some horse-and-buggy transportation, he could see many families making their way out of the park and toward what must be the nearest town. William walked along the side of the road. As he looked back, he could see a car approaching with a lone driver. William thought he could probably get a ride into town and, as quickly as the idea had come to him, the driver was already beside him, and as William put his arm out to get his attention, the driver whisked by.

Oh, well, William would have to try his luck with another vehicle, or simply walk all the way into town, regardless of how far or near it was.

As William turned to face the oncoming traffic he could hear a car horn that sounded like the one Harpo Marx of the Marx Brothers tooted on TV. The car that William waved to had stopped after all. He quickly raced ahead to catch up to it.

"Need a ride to town?" As the driver asked the question, he was reaching over to the passenger door to open it for William. William got in and smiled at his new friend.

“Thanks for stopping. I really appreciate you stopping. My name is William Monterey, pleased to meet you.” William extended his hand to greet the driver.

William spent the next three weeks working at the local automobile repair garage owned by Stan Wilson. William felt fortunate that the man who stopped to offer him a ride had also offered him a place to stay and a job while he contemplated how he would return to his family. William helped Stan in the garage, performing menial tasks such as changing the motor oil and tires for Stan's customers. He mostly kept to himself, but during lunch and coffee breaks, William joined Stan in friendly chats with the regular clientele, people who seemed to have perpetual problems with their motorized vehicles.

Sometimes William and Stan would be alone and, during those times, they discussed life and the antics of the people of Glasgow. William liked Stan; the pair got along nicely. Stan marveled at William's quick learning ability. The fact that William was intelligent was clear to Stan and it seemed odd that he was content to work as a low-paid hand.

William found the town's library and spent a couple of Saturdays there. On each visit, William stayed until the librarian asked him to leave at closing time.

At night, William sat at the small table in his room above the repair garage and sketched and wrote anything that came to mind relative to what had happened to him and what he could possibly do to get back to his family. He scribbled on sheet after sheet of paper and still nothing seemed to make sense to him.

By now, William had started to blend in with his sur-

roundings. Stan had given William clothing that no longer fit the garage owner; fortunately the two men were the same height and, since William was a slimmer man, the borrowed clothing looked better on William than its owner. After spending a number of evenings alone in his room, William decided to venture out. He discovered the local movie theater that was showing new releases. On one Saturday night he saw two movies: one was *Payday*, a movie just over twenty minutes in length by Charlie Chaplin. In this silent movie, Charlie Chaplin played a woefully inept day laborer with a crush on the boss's daughter. William found himself laughing with the audience and enjoying the performance to the point of wanting more. He stuck around for the Mary Pickford feature *Tess Of the Storm Country*. In this film, Mary Pickford played a land squatter who struggled to survive while living down the hill from a rich man. The rich man's daughter fell in love with one of the squatters, and another squatter tried to frame the wealthy man for murder. Unlike the Chaplin flick, the Pickford movie went on for well over two hours. William was dumbfounded by the way the scenery and the story itself mesmerized the audience. His concentration swayed back and forth from the screen to witnessing the reaction of the audience. The innocence of the people watching the movie was so powerful that William found that watching them in the dim light of the movie theater was more entertaining than the film itself. William was moved, however, by the black and white scenery of Pebble Beach and Point Lobos, familiar to him from a trip he had made the year before with Kate and the girls. William found it interesting that the area known as 17 Mile Drive was still as famous for its scenic oceanfront, sand dunes and delicate habitat four generations after the movie he was now watching had been produced. It was amazing, he thought, that Pebble Beach in his modern

day was one spot on 1,100 miles of the U.S. coastline that remained completely unspoiled.

William studied the people as they left the theater, enthralled by the reaction of the exiting audience over the moving pictures with no sounds. He started to wonder who was better off, these naïve moviegoers or modern-day viewers grown too jaded to appreciate a simple art form such as silent film.

The Saturday night cinema gave William a much-needed mental break. He had relaxed more that night than any other during his journey.

The next day he joined Stan Wilson for breakfast at the local diner and saw some of the faces he had seen at the movie theater. And to William's surprise, the table talk was still focused on the entertainment of the evening before.

William told Stan how impressed he was by the townspeople's appreciation of the picture show as well as some of his feelings about life in this simple town. Stan listened with curiosity to this outsider's view, and then told William that his somewhat odd comments were similar to those expressed by one of Stan's customers.

"There's only one other person I've ever met who thinks the way you do," Stan mused. "You and this other fellow, Frank Porter, both have this mysterious wisdom about the future. You ponder things the rest of us here in Glasgow have never given any thought. It's almost as if the two of you were fortune tellers or something."

"What exactly do you mean?" William demanded, dropping his fork. Stan proceeded to inform William how this Frank Porter used strange terms, like 'computer' and others he could not pronounce.

As soon as Stan gave him Frank's address, William hastily dropped a dollar on the table, excused himself and practically ran out of the restaurant.

For Frank Porter, it was easy to decide. He knew right away that the person in front of him was from the future. Was he sent here to take him back? Was he a good guy or was he somebody who would cause him grief? Regardless of the answers to his questions, he was sure this person was there for him.

“Can I help you?” Frank asked with a tone that let his new guest know he was not impressed with the intrusion.

“Well, I think you might be able to! You are Frank Porter?” William had asked the question as if to say that he knew the answer and he knew he had found the person he had been looking for.

“Well what if I am? Who are you and why have you come here?”

“I was telling a friend of mine in town how I have been looking for a way to get back to my family for many days now. You see, this friend is someone I have come to trust. I believe it is a mutual friend of ours, Mr. Stan Wilson, who runs the local repair garage. I have been renting the room above the shop and working for him for the last three weeks.” William was speaking as if he had finally found somebody who should know exactly who he was and how he got there. This small talk was just something that had to be done to get to the business at hand.

“I know you need to know who I am, Frank. By the way, do you mind if I call you Frank?”

“Well that just depends, my friends call me Frank, and I have not decided yet whether you are a friend or some-

body I should kindly ask to leave.”

Frank did not want to give William the impression that he was concerned or felt threatened by his visit in any way, so he punctuated his statement with a smile. This was very important for William. Up until now he was not sure if Frank Porter was inclined to help him.

William extended his hand out and made sure he returned the smile. “Nice to meet you, Frank. My name is William Monterey. I hope you will be kind enough to give me a bit of your time.”

“Okay, Mr. Monterey, you have piqued my interest. Would you like a cold drink? Let’s go inside.”

“Bill...”

Frank stopped his walk toward the front porch and looked back to William and, before he could acknowledge him, William spoke again to make sure to cement this new friendship.

“I want you to call me Bill. All my friends do!” This was the first time William had asked somebody to address him as Bill. He just realized how important that was. Prior to meeting Frank Porter, he did not think Bill was an appropriate name for himself. Bill was too modern a name to be used by any of the people he had met so far. Except for this person. William was positive Frank could relate to the name Bill perfectly.

Frank smiled and shook his head as if to say “Okay, you made your point, you are not here as a bad guy, now get your ass in the house and tell me what you really want!”

William was astounded that this new person on his journey was the only one who seemed to act in a mannerism he was comfortable with.

“Can I get you a beer, Bill?”

“A beer would be great, Frank, thanks.”

Frank looked at him again with a look a father usually

gives a son after having made a smart remark. "I am going to get you a beer out of my icebox here and then I need you to tell me what I can do for you!"

A thought came to William. He figured he might as well get to the point and ask Frank a question that would give him an idea where he was from. "From your icebox, huh? Tell me, Frank, do you ever miss a refrigerator?"

Frank stopped in his tracks. He was about to open the icebox, but all he could do was stand there statue-like. He decided the beer was no longer important. He turned to William, who was standing there looking at him with a bit of a smirk on his face, meant to say "gotcha!"

"A what, you say?" Frank wanted to make sure he had heard William correctly, or perhaps not admit that he knew what a refrigerator was.

"Well, don't tell me you have forgotten how great it was to just plug in the icebox back home and not have to bother putting ice in it or running out of ice, not to mention the mess these things make. I decided that the one in the room I rent from Wilson is not worth the hassle..." William was carrying on intentionally as if trivializing the fact that he was from a place Frank was trying to forget.

"Look, Bill, why don't you get to the point, what is it you want from me?" Frank's voice had noticeably changed. It crackled as he spoke, and he almost appeared to be frightened. At this point, he was not sure what to make of William's intentions. Was this new so-called friend sent to take him back to the place where he did not want to return?

"I apologize for not being more straightforward. I guess I am so elated to have found you that I am not sure what to say. I almost feel like taking two steps toward you and doing a high-five with you, like we're watching the Super Bowl together on TV and our team just scored a touchdown. There I go again speaking like you know ex-

actly what I am talking about. The television, as you might remember, won't be invented for another 30 years or so and I am sure the NFL does not exist yet."

Frank was visibly shaken and growing very impatient. "Bill I am going to ask you..."

William did not let Frank finish. "Wait... wait a minute. Let's sit down, and I will start from the beginning without all this dancing around."

Frank looked at William and said "You sure you can do that?" and motioned with his hand in the direction of the small dining room table. William was already walking toward the dining room and quickly sat down before Frank had taken a step in the same direction. Frank shook his head, not sure what to expect next, and proceeded to join William.

"Look, Frank, you do not need to pretend you do not know what I am talking about..."

It was Frank's turn to interrupt William. "I did not say I do not know what you are talking about." Frank paused so that he could choose his next words carefully, but the only thing he could say was: "How is my son doing? And since you brought it up, who won the Super Bowl this year? And I have to admit if there is one thing I miss the most, it is my double-door fridge."

William sat back and let out a sigh, and then on the spur of the moment, he lifted up his hand and waited for Frank to do the same. Frank was more than willing to do something he had not done for a few years now. The two men slapped a high-five so hard that they both simultaneously shook their respective hands to react to the stinging sensation that came with every well-delivered high-five.

They both started laughing, almost uncontrollably. William blew at his hand and Frank stood up and walked across the room to where the icebox was and placed his

hand on the half-melted block of ice that was inside.

"You probably never found an ice cube this big in your refrigerator." Frank actually lifted the dripping cube of ice out of the icebox and held it up for William to see. "Let me get you that beer since I am here. I bet you have not seen anybody else in these parts put their beer in an icebox. I do miss the aluminum cans." Frank put the ice back and quickly wiped his hands with a towel that was nearby. He proceeded to take two pint-sized brown bottles out of the icebox. The bottles had an old-type of stopper with the flip lock and ceramic top and rubber washer that William remembered seeing a number of times when he was a kid. Frank handed one of the bottles to William. "You know how to open that type of stopper, don't you?"

"Sure I do!" William had already found the flip part of the stopper and the bottle made a small pop sound as soon as he released the top. He pulled the stopper back and took a drink of the beer directly from the bottle. "Well, Frank, I think it is time I cut to the chase and tell you about my story and see how it compares to yours'."

Frank smiled and lifted his beer from the table a few inches and tilted the top slightly toward William. "I am all ears, amigo, let's hear what you have to say."

"Frank, I need you to help me. I am not sure if you want to go back to the time that sent you here. And by the way, I do not know who your son is. I hope you do not think I was sent here for you, because I am sure I was not. I think you and I have traveled in time for our own reasons. I still am not sure what mine is. But I know one thing and that is that I am glad this happened to me and I will go back. At first I was really upset about the whole thing, and I was worried I would never see my wife and daughters again, but I never gave up hope and I have always believed I can get back to them. I still do, especially now that I have found you."

Frank was listening very closely to what William was saying. He was staring at the beer bottle in front of him but hanging on every word William had said so far.

“Tell me, William, what year have you come from and how did you get here?”

“What year? You know it never occurred to me that you could be here from any time in the future. I figured we came from the same year. You see when I told Stan Wilson I was from a place he could never know and that I longed to return there, he told me my words sounded a lot like yours in the way you described the place you came from. I did not think much of it until he told me he thought you were crazy. He said you always explained fixing your car by methods he had never heard of. He told me that when you go in to use his shop to work on your car, you talk about things he does not understand. Okay, so that might not be so strange. I take it you were a mechanic in the future.”

Frank nodded in agreement. “I specialized in English cars, mostly Jags, MGs and Morgans. I had clients who would not let anyone touch their cars but me. I loved to work on those cars. Wiring was one of the things I did best. English cars are known to be a nightmare. They referred to Lucas, the company that made most of the wiring in English cars, as the Prince of Darkness. I would solve problems that other mechanics could not. I was the best!”

“Well even if Wilson thinks you’re crazy, he does believe that one day a mechanic will hook a car up to a machine that will troubleshoot the engine. He said you told him that you know for sure that one day a mechanic will be able to ‘scope’ a car’s problems just by hooking the engine up to a machine that will compute any failures and suggest repairs. Compute! That was the word I needed to hear. Compute as in computer, scope as in computer

scope! I was shocked when he told me. I had to know who you were and where I could find you. That was an hour ago, and here I am.”

Frank was noticeably relieved to hear William tell him how he had come to find him. Something so simple and so straightforward, not some plot created by a superior being designed to take Frank back to the place and time he had come from. He did not want to leave his life here and, most of all, he did not want to leave his mother and his new wife. “Bill, I am sort of relieved you are here to seek my help and not because you were sent here to carry out some deed that would make me want to kill you before you could.”

William was startled a bit by Frank’s comments and Frank could sense it.

“Actually I may have been kidding about the kill you part. But I would have forcibly removed you from my house if you were here on some mission to take me back to a time I left behind for good. You see, unlike you, Bill, I do not want to go back. Sure I miss my son, but I know he is doing fine, and I am sure he is getting on okay on his own. He is grown up now, and I gave him a very good upbringing, well a lot better than the one I had, let me tell you.”

“Did you have only one child, and what about his mother?” William wanted Frank to talk about his story so that he could get to his situation and find out what Frank knew and what he could use to help him get back to his family.

“Paul was my only son. His mother, Carmen, could not have any other babies after him. I hope she is okay. She and I got along, but we were not in love any longer. Actually I am not sure if we ever were. As a matter of fact now that I have found Linda I know we were not. I have come to know real love with a woman only because of my

wife, Linda, who is out with my mother. They both live here, and I do expect them home anytime now. Bill, you will have to stay for dinner. Linda is an amazing cook."

"Wait a minute! Did you say your mother? Are you telling me your mother, your real mother is here? You came back from the future to find your real mother here? By the way, when did you come back, I mean what year did you leave behind?"

William was racing with his questions; he had placed both hands flat on the table in front of him and leaned forward slightly toward Frank.

"Whoa, slow down a bit, you're likely to blow a gasket." Frank got up and turned around toward the window. He pulled back the curtain to see if the car he had heard was his own pulling into the driveway and, of course, he had recognized the engine. Sure enough, his wife and mother had arrived.

"I need to help the ladies bring in the groceries. We will have to continue this conversation after dinner. I would appreciate it if you did not mention a word about this topic, I mean the coming from the future part and where you are from, and that you still have to tell me... there is a lot you need to tell me, but it will have to wait. Understood?"

William nodded a yes and stood up as well. "Frank, I have waited this long, I can wait a couple of hours, so if you don't mind I will take you up on your offer. I have not had a good home-cooked meal in awhile. Why don't I go out to help you so you can introduce me to your mother and your wife? I am really looking forward to meeting them."

Kate was alone in bed for yet another night and wishing that she had given into the girls' desire to sleep with her. Earlier that night, Kate had very affectionately convinced Nicole and Tara that they would be better off in their own beds where the good dream fairy could easily find them. But now, Kate wanted their company. She missed feeling the warmth of another human body beside her in bed. She wanted to be close to her daughters now more than ever, but she felt inviting them to sleep with her was too much an indicator of acceptance, acceptance that William was gone and perhaps was not coming back.

Kate's mixed feelings kept her awake. It was late and she was not about to go to their room to wake them so that she could selfishly have them close. They belonged in their own room, which was their place after all. William belonged with her in their matrimonial bed and the girls needed to be in their Powder Puff-theme room. Kate was so proud of her girls and her husband. She had achieved her longest-held dream: the perfect family.

As tears flowed down her face Kate was very careful not to let her grieving moans be heard and so, muffling her sobs, as she had done the last four nights, she cried herself to sleep.



"Wake up, Kate!" The intrusion of Helen's voice into Kate's brain was far worse than the light that had flooded

the room by now. "Kate, are you going to sleep all day? You know, it is already 10:30. The girls have eaten. They are watching TV. C'mon get up, I need to show you something." Helen pulled the covers off her sister, revealing a comfortably-dressed body curled and moving slowly toward the edge of the bed.

"You know, Helen, you are very lucky I like you as my sister, 'cause sometimes you can be really annoying. I was actually sleeping deeply for the first time since I went to bed." Kate was talking with a soft and slow voice, still groggy from her sleep. She was not as annoyed as her words might indicate. She did want to get up. She wanted to hug her daughters this morning more than any other morning.

"I need to wash up and then have a coffee. Can I wash up in peace or would you like to spoil that too?" Kate smiled at Helen and stood up directly in front of her. She leaned forward and gave Helen the longest, strongest hug she could muster. "Thanks for being here, I do love you! I am so glad Dad told us when we were small over and over that it was good for us to be close because..."

"When you guys are big you must take care of each other!" Both Kate and Helen shouted out in a perfectly matched pace as if reciting a sorority slogan.

"Mommy, Tara won't let me watch Sesame Street!" Nicole had burst into the room and was already in her mother's arms.

"Come with Aunt Helen, Nicky, and let Mommy get ready." Helen pulled Nicole from Kate and started to walk toward the bedroom door. "Oh, yeah, I was saying I have something I want to show you so hurry up."

"Okay, I will be out in a minute, can you put on some coffee?"

Helen gave her sister a military salute and marched out of the room with Nicole in tow.

It wasn't long before Kate walked into the living room with a towel wrapped around her head. She had dressed in a pair of jeans and a tank top and was feeling much better after having taken a shower. "Tara, are you being nice to Nicole? Can you come here and give Mommy a big good morning kiss? Helen, what is it that you have to show me this morning? Why are you so anxious about it?" Kate had turned away from Tara while she held her tight in her arms and was speaking louder toward her sister in the kitchen. "Let me see what your aunt wants to show Mommy. Do you guys want to go out today?"

"Okay, Mommy."

"Kate, let me get something I have here and let's sit at the kitchen table so you can have your breakfast and I can show it to you." Helen had walked out of the kitchen and was retrieving a hard-cover novel she had been reading. She had purposely left it on the entranceway closet shelf pushed back so Kate would not easily find it.

"What is it, Helen?" Kate was behind her sister and, as Helen turned, she had to stop to avoid bumping into her. "What is that you have to show me? Did Paul find anything out about William?" Kate was focused on the white piece of photocopy paper in the closed pages of the book now in Helen's hands.

"Paul did not think it was a good idea to show you this, but I know you better than he does, and I also know... William better than he does." Helen said William's name with a noticeable hesitation.

"You do not have to hesitate when you say his name. William will come back. I know he will. Paul has to help us. What is it, Helen? What did he find? Please let me see." Kate pulled the paper out of the book and turned to study the photocopy of the old black and white photograph.

"It's a copy of an old black and white photo of the Nat-

ural Bridge, so...?"

"William! Helen this is William, where did you find this, 1922?" Kate had found the image of the person who appeared to them to be William and scanned the sheet to see the date captioned below the photograph.

"You think it is William, too? I was convinced yesterday, but I had to see your reaction to be sure." Helen had finished her sentence and Kate was trembling and rifling off a series of questions, one after the other.

"Helen, what does this mean? What did Paul make of it? How did William get in this photo? Tell me is this for real or is it some kind of joke?"

"Kate, slow down. Come on, let's go into the kitchen and sit down, have some coffee." The girls were still watching television, unaware that their mother was becoming very emotional. Helen held Kate's elbow and led her into the kitchen like a nurse does when she assists an elderly person to the bathroom.

They sat down at the kitchen table, but Kate was up and darting away almost immediately.

"Now where are you going?" Helen stood up and then decided to sit down again.

Kate was gone for less than a minute. She returned from the bedroom with a magnifying glass extended over the photograph directly over the figure of two men standing under the Natural Bridge.

"Helen, I am scared." She looked up from the magnifying glass. "Helen, this is William, what is he doing in the photograph? Please tell me how you or Paul found it and what it means."

"Listen, take a deep breath, come and sit here with me and I will explain." Helen stood up again and helped Kate over to the table as she had done before. Kate was still staring at the photograph with the magnifying glass. She moved it over each figure to see if she recognized

anybody else. "Paul has been researching the Natural Bridge at James Madison University. He's spent hours in the library there and really did not find anything particular beyond historical facts and other geographic references. We had lunch yesterday..."

"Lunch! Helen you had this from lunchtime yesterday and you show it to me now? Why didn't you tell me about it sooner?"

"Well, actually I did want to show it to you yesterday. But Paul asked me to at least wait until this morning. He called me just before I came to wake you. You didn't even hear the phone, did you? I came to wake you because I couldn't wait any longer to show you this. Paul needed to check out the age of the book and the authenticity of the publisher. He found out that a famous turn-of-the-century photographer who photographed many American natural wonders and American cities took the original photograph. The original does exist, and it is larger than this copy. We should go and see it today. It is at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton.

"I do not need to see the original, I can see this is my husband. Helen, do you think this is William or do you think I am crazy?"

"Kate, how can I say that I do not think it is William? I am the one who almost had a coronary yesterday when I saw it. Paul does not know what William looks like. He was interested in why the two men were here, I mean why William and this other man are staring at the underside of the bridge."

"Oh my God, Paul is so smart! They are staring at the underside of the bridge. This is what William was doing when he vanished! You mean to tell me Paul found this photo odd because he saw these two men stare at the bridge the way I told him William had? Exactly the way he is doing it here? Helen please tell me what Paul thinks.

Has William traveled back in time, has he vanished to another era and is this his way to let us know he is alive?"

"Kate, if William knew we would find a photograph taken of him he would be standing front and center smiling at you with a sheet of quad paper on his chest with his construction printing reading GONE TO 1922 FOR A LITTLE WHILE, WILL BE HOME SOON."

Helen had lifted both her hands at the side of her chest as if holding an invisible sheet of paper and was rocking her head from left to right.

"No, Kate, I think William has somehow traveled back in time and he happened to be there the day this photograph was taken, probably trying to find a way to get back to us. This guy with him is probably trying to help him. Both you and I know that if William is back in history somewhere and if there is a way for him to return he will figure it out. I know he will get back to you. And when he does I want to be here, I would not miss his story for all the tea in China." Helen had said her last sentence with a smile. Kate was staring at her sister and finally she too had to smile.

"Helen, I am so happy you found this. This proves to me that I am not crazy. I did see William vanish into a downpour of water. The Natural Bridge is a gateway for time travel. I know it. What does Paul think? Can we... can he bring William back? What can he do now that we know this?"

"Yes, Kate, Paul believes that time travel is possible. He also thinks that we want this person to be William and yet it could just be somebody who happened to look like him..."

"Helen, how could he say that!" Kate picked up the magnifying glass again and hovered it over the photograph. "This is William! I know it just as sure as I know you are here now. Did you convince Paul this is William?"

“Kate, I tried to, but I do not think I was as convincing as you are right now! Based on your reaction, I have no doubt it is William. Yesterday was a different story. I did not know what to believe. Besides if the photo was taken in 1922, how can it be William?” Before Kate could reply, Helen placed her hand up to stop her sister from speaking. “That was yesterday. Today I am sure this is William, and I do believe he must have traveled to another time. It is the only thing that explains your story, this photograph and the fact that he is not back. Only being temporarily trapped in another time could keep William from returning to you. Like you do Kate, I also believe William will find a way to get back to us.”

“Thank you, Helen, I needed to hear you say that.”

“That was the best meal I have had in a long time. Frank, you sure were not lying to me! Both your mother and Linda are amazing cooks. Thanks for having me.” William was sincere. Not only was the food delicious but it was the first complete meal he’d had in days.

“Well, thank you for the compliment, Bill. I must say that both Mother and I were surprised to learn we had a guest for lunch today, but it was our pleasure to have cooked for you. We certainly hope you will join us again, you are welcome any time,” Linda replied.

In William’s eyes Linda Porter was a saint. She spoke with such a sincere voice. William certainly believed Frank had found a very rare person, and he could see why he did not want to leave her. She was the type of person who could make any stranger feel completely at home, and she genuinely cared about people. William could tell she really loved her husband. Linda seemed like Kate in many ways.

Frank’s mother spoke less than Linda but she, too, seemed to be a good lady who also loved her son very much.

“Well, ladies, Bill and I will do the dishes and then we need to go for a drive...”

“No, Frank you go right ahead... spend some time with Bill. We will take care of the cleanup. Can you believe my son? Sometimes I am convinced he is from another planet, he is the only man in Glasgow that actually cleans the dinner dishes and enjoys doing it!”

William and Frank exchanged an eyebrow-raised look, both relating to a different time.

"Actually I must be from the same planet." William looked at Frank as he said it and smiled. "I am also the one who does the dishes at my house. I don't mind helping out if you let me."

It was no use; the ladies insisted the men go out for their drive.

William and Frank had driven in silence for nearly five minutes when Frank decided to speak. "You know you are right. It seems that referring to you as Bill can only be done by someone who grew up listening to the Beatles! Did you notice my mother had a problem with calling you Bill? As soon as you told her your formal name was William she had to use it."

"I am a big Who fan."

"Really?"

"Seen them seven times live. They are actually on tour now. The tour was almost canceled."

"Oh? How come?"

"It was strange, on the eve of their tour that started in Vegas, John Entwistle the bass player..."

"I know who he is," interjected Frank, "And?"

"Don't tell me! You like The Who as well?"

"I meant to say that growing up, listening to the Beatles was unavoidable but I preferred The Doors, Moody Blues and The Who. Anyway, what happened to John Entwistle?"

"He died!"

"Died?"

"Up and died on the eve of the tour, he was 57."

"And?" Frank was noticeably interested in knowing more.

"He had a heart attack, they canceled the first two concerts in Vegas and Los Angeles and went on to do the

rest of the tour with a replacement bassist, an Italian guy, forget his name just now, anyway I have tickets at home to see them in Cleveland September 27th. Care to join me?"

The sound of a car horn interrupted their conversation. William looked behind him and he could see a young kid speeding along, trying to catch up to them. Frank did a shoulder check and smiled.

"Bill, if we had seat belts in this car now is the time I would say: You might want to fasten your seat belt, but since we don't make sure you hold tight."

With that said, Frank floored the accelerator and William's head jerked back. For some reason, William did not expect this antique car to go so fast.

By now the kid had caught up to them and was riding Frank's rear bumper. William kept looking back. He could hardly see the face of the kid behind them even though he was so close. Frank's car was kicking up a huge cloud of dust, and the car behind them was for the most part lost in it. Ahead of them a wider road crossed their path. As Frank approached the dirt road intersection, he looked over to William and yelled out to him to hold on tight and indicated he was going to turn a sharp right. William barely held on as they made the turn. He could see the kid behind them speed through the crossing and then immediately stop. Frank stopped his car at the same time the kid did.

"Do you know that kid?" William asked Frank breathing a bit hard from the scare he had at the last turn.

"Yeah, I know him, this is our Sunday ritual, he was waiting for me to drive down this road." By now the kid had turned back and was turning left toward them onto the same road. He pulled up directly beside Frank's car and came to a sliding stop about three feet ahead of Frank and William.

"I see you got yourself a co-pilot, Frank. Today I am going to beat you. I modified the carburetor like you said, and this baby is faster than ever, not to mention you have some extra weight. I guess that finally puts us at par."

As the kid finished his last word, he put the car in gear and gave it all the gas his foot could deliver. Frank saw the kid's hand move, and immediately put his car in gear and was quickly in front of the kid's car by about ten feet. This time the road was wide enough for the two cars. They were racing side by side. The kid glared at the road in front of him and then at Frank's car evenly back and forth like he was watching a tennis match. William could see the determination on the kid's face. This was serious competition for him. Frank remained cool and collected. He was focused on the road. It was clear for miles ahead. The kid's car started to pull away. William looked over to Frank's foot on the accelerator and he could see that Frank was letting up.

"You are going to let this kid beat you?"

"I just want to play with him. Watch this."

Frank steered his car behind the kid. William wasn't prepared for the blast of dust that hit them. He quickly covered his eyes and pulled his cotton shirt over his mouth. Frank slowed the car down and then all of a sudden, William felt it jerk to the left. In a few seconds the dust cloud they were in trailed off. William could see the kid still racing as fast as ever, thinking they were in his dust. Frank sped the car up through what seemed like a potato field and William struggled to hold on and avoid bouncing out of his seat.

"Hold on tight!" Frank steered the car behind some trees and found a narrow dirt road that followed the tree line. The road consisted of two tracks and a ribbon of tall grass in the middle. William figured it must have been some type of wagon trail used by the farmers. The tall

grass under the car was creating a new sound and for some reason the car actually sounded quieter than before.

"This is how the muffler was invented. Look!" Frank had pointed at the trees at William's right. They could see the kid almost parallel to them on the road they left behind. Now the kid's car seemed to be drifting into the distance and getting left behind. The bigger road was curving while the path Frank found was straight. William figured that Frank knew about this path and had planned this diversion. He could also see that the trail they were on eventually merged with the main road.

Now the kid's car seemed to be gaining speed as the road started to curve back in the direction they were traveling. Clearly the kid was going faster than they were. William could now see the point where the road and the trail merged. At this point, the tree line between them was gone and there was a clear view of the kid's car. William could see the kid looking behind him to see if Frank's car was still there. The only thing visible behind the kid's car was a cloud of dust large enough to hide a two-story house. It seemed to William that the kid was so focused on the road that he was blind to the fact the Frank was on the path beside him. As the kid looked behind him one more time he stopped his turn mid-way.

Now he had seen them! They were so close William could see the kid's surprised look on his face. Frank realized the kid had "made" them. The trail was about to merge with the road ahead.

Frank sped up the car, mindful of the closeness of the road ahead and the condition of the trail they were on. William held on to his seat with all his might. As much as he was concerned for his safety, he was enjoying the race and the challenge. The two cars were coming closer together. The trail had now become smoother and wider, as it got closer to the main road. The narrow strip of grass in

the middle was gone and Frank pushed his car's speed to its limit.

The kid was not slowing down. William gathered that there was no way both cars could merge on the main road at the same time. One of them would have to slow down. Frank was not letting go. If anything, his car was finding more speed and now Frank was a few feet ahead of the kid.

As the two cars reached the merge in the roads, William was certain Frank was going to collide with the kid's car. He pulled his body away from the passenger door anticipating a collision. At the last possible moment, the kid put on his brakes and Frank sped onto the main road, missing the front of the kid's car by only inches. The kid came to a full stop and once again found himself in a cloud of dust.

Frank turned the car right at the next crossing just ahead, let out a long yell and held his hand up for William to give him a high five. William looked back to the main road and as the dust cloud around the kid's car settled, he could see the kid hit his steering wheel hard with his hand and turned the car around, accepting defeat.

By now Frank had slowed the car down to a more comfortable driving speed. No more dust.

"Young Tommy has not yet beaten me. I had to resort to sidetracking him as his car was actually faster today. It probably was your extra weight."

"You can blame your wife's cooking for the extra weight. But for some reason I do feel lighter than when we finished lunch, and I may need to change my pants. I thought for sure you were going to hit his car when we merged into the road. Good thing he stopped when he did!"

"For some reason I do not think that scared you much. I know that once you have experienced the physical

transformation during the time travel there isn't much else that can frighten you."

"Speaking of which Frank, we're only a few miles from the bridge. Can we go there? I still desperately need to see it with you."

"I am one step ahead of you. I was already heading in the direction of the bridge, we should be there in five minutes."

William was elated to hear that Frank was willing to visit the bridge with him and to get directly to the business at hand. In a few minutes Frank's car arrived at the field where the carnival was set up. He turned the car down the road leading to the bridge. Within a minute of following the winding road, they arrived at the end and came to a stop. At least a dozen other cars were parked in the area. William was surprised that so many people were there.

"On Sunday is crowded, many people travel from miles around to visit this place. None of these people know the true powers that this bridge holds. That is, except you and me, Bill." They remained sitting in the car. It was quiet now, and this was a good time for William to find out just how much Frank knew about this phenomenon.

"Frank, this is the perfect place for you to tell me what you know. I respect the fact that you want to stay here, and I think the world of your wife. She is a saint, you are very fortunate to have her and you should do everything possible to keep her. Your mother treasures you and the best thing is that I get the impression she and Linda are the best of friends. How ever did you manage that?"

"I am lucky William. I believe I was brought back here for a reason. First of all, it is where I belong and it is where I should have been."

"Your mother, she is... old enough to be your mother? I

need to tell you that I, too, found my mother in my travels and when I found her we were about the same age. I found my father, too. At my age, he and I look like twins. It was the strangest yet most important thing that has ever happened to me. How did you manage to find your mother at her present age?"

"Well, I thought it would be more natural for us if I was with her at our normal age gap. When I first found her, my dad was alive. They did not know I was their son and I had very little contact with her.

I did not look like my dad much, but I knew he was my father. I spent most of my time with my dad when I first found them at my own age than I did with my mother. I only saw her once, and that was from a distance. I realize now that was a good thing. My dad passed away ten years ago and when I found my mother two years ago he was gone. I could try to go back and see him again, but that would not be natural and then what would I say to him? I really do not have any unfinished business with him. I left him at peace and I will always remember him as the kind and loving person he was."

"Tell me more, how did you arrive, what made you come here? How did you first find your father and, most of all, how did you figure out a way to get to this time, I mean how did you get to the time you wanted to be at?"

"Well, at first I did not have this time in mind. I wanted to travel throughout time. I bounced around for a couple of years. I have not found any other place, other than this one, that will allow for this to happen so I have not ventured too far from here. Though a few times I did get to the bigger cities. I went to New York and worked with a crew erecting the Statue of Liberty for a week. I went to Detroit and met Henry Ford and helped him out a bit, but not as much as I could have. He was amazing, definitely the highlight of my many trips. I was at the Ed Sullivan

theater when the Beatles came to America for the first time, but the worst part was going to Dallas in '63 and witnessing Kennedy getting shot. I just stood there and watched it happen. I do not know what would have happened if I stopped it. Nowhere did I mess with history. Not even with Henry Ford, everything he did he knew to do it naturally. I am positive that if we mess with history, we could erase people we care about who are part of our future. All I could think about was my son, and that if I stopped Kennedy from getting killed my son might not be born. When you are at another time and you know the outcome of what is about to happen you don't dare mess with it. It is like standing at the top of a twenty-story building and looking over the edge. You appreciate the ground below and you respect it. You don't dare take a step forward for you know it will kill you. It is like that. If you find yourself at a point where you know you could change history, you don't dare mess with it."

"Wow. I never looked at it that way, but then again I never gave a single thought to exploring time. All I have been thinking about is getting back to my wife. I guess we are very different that way. I really do not have any ambition to go back to the past and I really am not interested in going to the future. I am only interested in getting back to my life. But I do see how somebody could get addicted to moving around in time at will."

William stopped and took a deep breath. "And that is the million dollar question: How did you do it, Frank? How did you travel to those times? How did you know where you were going?"

William held his breath in anticipation of Frank's answer.

"I guess I need to start at the beginning." Frank gave William a teasing glance as if to indicate he would hold back the knowledge William was so anxious to learn.

“Well that would be a good place to start, I guess. Tell me, how did it happen to you? How did you first discover this place?” William sensed that Frank was open to telling him anything he needed to know.

“It was a strange day to begin with. My wife and I had a stupid argument that morning. On my way to work I was thinking that I wanted to do something different with my life. My route to work took me on the main road to this place. When I got to that large intersection surrounded by wonderfully tacky roadside Americana, I did not see the light change and this poor lady with a car full of kids ran right into me. It was definitely my fault. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but my car was toast. While waiting for a tow truck to show up, I strolled into that incredibly large souvenir shop below the hotel.”

“Yeah, I remember that shop. My girls were so caught up with the huge selection of merchandise that they almost kept us from visiting the bridge! But I guess if that had happened I would not be here right now,” William interjected but quickly added, “so let me guess, something compelled you to buy a ticket and come see this 900 ton rock span for yourself?”

“You guessed right. I am not sure why, but it was like fate. I know I was meant to come here. First the move to these parts, then landing some part-time work at a garage near the Natural Bridge Speedway and Drag Strip, and then finally crashing my car where I did; all that to get me here. When I arrived at the bridge, I was in a trance. I remember thinking that I must have been shaken up by the accident, but I did not stop walking until I was directly under the bridge.”

“Wow! That is exactly what happened to me! What happened next?”

“Well, you *know* what happened next! The same thing that happened to you. The next thing I remember is that

I was lying on the ground still under the bridge but everything around me had changed. As I got up I could see a man sitting alone on a rock near the edge of the stream right over there." Frank pointed to a large boulder forty feet or so from where they were standing.

"What exactly went through your mind? Was anybody else around?" William asked, anxious for Frank to get on with his story.

"No. It was just me and this man who appeared to be crying."

"For a time I did not know what to do or where I was and what was going on. Then I found the nerve to approach him. I scared the shit out of him, he jumped in the water and nearly drowned in six inches of it."

"The first thing he asked me was, 'have you seen my child?' He was begging me to help him find his son. I had no idea what he was talking about."

"Did he accuse you of kidnapping his son?"

"No, not at all"

"Well, then I take it you didn't get shot at."

"Shot at?" Frank wanted to make sure he heard William correctly. "Did you say shot at? Like with guns."

"My story might take too long. Tell me about what happened between you and your father and how you came to realize that he was your father."

"Well it's funny actually, he told me, how the day before, his son had disappeared from under the bridge. He told me that he was there by himself and he had his son with him in a bassinet. He had wanted to give my mother a break, and he came here to rest. He said he was lying just under the bridge over there with the bassinet at his side. He was resting with his eyes shut, opening them every so often to check on his sleeping son. He said at one point his son let out a cry and, as he jolted to see what was wrong, he saw that the bassinet was flooded with water

and his son was gone. He had no idea what happened. He did not know how to explain it to anyone, let alone his wife. He frantically searched the area for the baby, and he returned with an army of people who searched well into the night, but nothing! I was not found!" Frank said the last statement with a smile. He wanted to let William know he was aware of what had happened.

"You were not found? So you know that baby was you? When did you know?"

"Well, I did not know it at the time my father told his story. I mostly felt sorry for him and offered to help him look for his baby. In time, I realized I felt a strange closeness to him and one day it all hit me like a ton of bricks! It was me that had traveled forward in time. I was his son who had disappeared. I didn't figure it out while my father was alive. I never told him. He died stricken with grief, convinced he was somehow responsible for the disappearance of his only son. When I realized I was the son my mother lost, I returned to her at the time in her life when we were at a natural age gap. I wanted to let her know I was the son she lost. That was two years ago."

"Did she believe you? I mean how did she react?" William was hanging on every word Frank was telling him. He was so amazed that he found another person who had a similar experience to his and that he was there with him at the Natural Bridge.

"When I first met her, I was not sure how I would approach her. I was worried she wouldn't believe me. I felt I had to give her some type of proof. But the weirdest thing happened. When she greeted me on her porch, she looked into my eyes and started crying. She knew it was me before I said a word. All she had to do was look at me and she knew I was her son. It was the most amazing thing I have ever experienced. As it turned out she gave me the proof I thought I had to give her. Until that mo-

ment I was not one hundred percent sure. But I can tell you for certain that after that reunion there was no doubt in my mind! The lady you had lunch with today is my natural mother. She really did not care where I had been or how I disappeared. She could only thank the Lord that I was returned to her. She told me about my father and how much he loved me and that he never stopped looking for me." Frank stopped talking, his eyes telling William that he had completed his story.

"That is amazing! I mean our stories are so similar! We were both taken away from our natural parents as infants; we traveled forward in time to a similar modern world; and for some reason we returned as adults back to the place we came from. Have you found anyone else like us?"

"No! Until I met you I thought I was the only one that this had happened to. I do wonder now how many other people have experienced this. But I would have to say that there must not be that many. It may be just you and me, kid."

"Why do you say that?" William really wanted to hear what else Frank knew that he had not already told him.

"The reason I say that is: If it can only happen when an infant is under the bridge in a certain position at a certain time of the day, then how many people do you think actually would have taken a baby in a bassinet and placed it under that bridge at the right time and place to cause the baby to be transported in time the way we were?" Frank extended his right hand in the direction of the bridge as he made his point.

William could not help reacting to what Frank had said. "A certain time? What do you mean by a certain time?"

"You have not figured that out yet?"

"Figured what out?"

"The time of day makes a difference. In order to control your travel forward or backward in time, you need to be under the bridge at a particular time of day."

William was finally hearing what he had been waiting to get from Frank from the minute he found him, and that was specific information regarding controlling his movement in time. "You mean you know how to control the direction you travel in and the time you arrive at? Frank, you have to tell me: What is it? How did you find out? Is it accurate?" William could not ask his many questions fast enough.

"As I told you, I traveled in time for more than two years, it was a matter of trial and error. Before long I was able to calculate the pattern and I got to a point where I could travel to a time I chose to go."

"You mean you can tell me how to get back to my family?" William had not allowed Frank to finish speaking. Visibly excited, he wanted Frank to get to the point as fast as possible. "Well, tell me! Frank, how exactly do you do it? I really need to know. As a matter of fact it is all I want to know!"

"You see it is all in the sun. It is very simple actually. If you are under the bridge in the morning, you travel backward in time and if you are under the bridge in the afternoon you travel forward in time."

"But the direction you face? Does that have anything to do with it?"

"Not that I have noticed. Why?"

"It was the only thing I could think of. I did travel forward to this time, and now that I think of it, it was in the afternoon. When I traveled back in time it was morning, including the first time when I left my family behind. But how do you control the amount of time you travel?"

"What I found is that you can only travel back in time from 9:00 AM 'til noon and you can only travel forward in

time from noon 'til 3:00 PM. In the morning for the first hour you travel back 110 years; the next hour you travel back double or 220 years; and the last hour you travel back 330 years. For some reason, traveling forward in time only happens in ten-year increments. There is one exception and that is if you travel during the last half hour, or between 2:30 and 3:00 PM, it is like a wild card into the future. I did this three times and believe me it is the last thing you want to do."

William was listening to every word Frank was saying as closely as he could. He also managed to find a small pencil and piece of paper and was writing down small symbols reflecting what Frank had said so far.

"Tell me about traveling forward in that last half hour, how many years was it for you?"

"Well, that's just it! It was irrational. Three times I traveled forward in time during the last half hour and in each of those occurrences I ended up at an odd time in the future. The first time it happened I went from 1520 to 1936. From there I went back to 1826. From 1826 I had hoped to travel forward 10 years so that I could see the Alamo before it was taken by the Mexicans. For some reason I waited till late in the day and again I traveled forward in time over 150 years. As I experimented more it became apparent that as long as I traveled in the afternoon prior to 2:30 the movement forward was always in increments of 10 years. On one other occasion I wanted to test this and sure enough traveling at shortly after 2:30 PM took me to a very ugly future. When I arrived I had no idea what year it was. I did not stick around too long to find out. The next morning I traveled as late as I could. I wanted to make sure that if I was very far in the future I would go back 330 years. That took me to the year 2001."

"You mean you were in the year 2331? I can't imagine what kind of world awaits us that far into the future!"

“That was the last time I traveled that late in the day. For the most part I stayed out of the future beyond my time. I figured why risk it? You never know; you could end up at a time when the bridge is no longer here and then what? The only other thing to remember is that when you arrive, it is the next day on the calendar from the day you left.”

“Wow. So how many times have you traveled in time overall?” William turned towards the bridge as he spoke to Frank.

“I sort of kept track, I would say I moved around about twenty times. The only other thing I need to warn you about is that you should not travel forward or backwards for that matter, in the same day. Whenever I did that I became disoriented and even ill. I think it is too much for the body to take. If you rest at least three days or so between trips you will be okay.”

“That’s it? No other dangers, no other unexplained phenomenon that I need to know about? It is that easy? I just need to wait a few days between moving forward in time? Wow!” William looked at his borrowed pocket watch. “It is 2:45. I could walk up to the bridge right now and travel forward to a year most likely close to my family!”

“Look, Bill, I was not kidding. If you move forward too fast you can risk getting lost or getting killed. It is not a good thing when you get to the next stop and you have no idea where you are in time! I really think you need to keep your wits clear, travel forward in ten-year increments every three days and you will see that things will go smooth. Also, try not to travel while so many people are around you like today; this place is deserted on weekdays. Don’t forget that for either back in time or forward, you arrive the next day from the day you leave: if you leave on Monday you arrive on a Tuesday and so on. I am

also convinced that only those who have traveled forward originally as infants like you and I, can travel back and forth. I have experimented with others, like one friend I met along the way – without him knowing it of course. When we were here together under the bridge, I asked him to look up. I wanted to see if the droplets did anything for him, like they do to us. I planned to stop him from going anywhere if I saw any sign that he might, but nothing happened. The droplets had no affect on him. I am convinced that only infants like us who came forward in time can experience this. I am also convinced that the first time you travel back, you end up where you came from. That would explain why you and I both returned to the time we left, even though we both traveled back at a different age. I guess you can say we are gifted with this!”

“Well, Frank, you really have impressed me, you know that? I think you are one hell of a smart guy, and I am sure glad I found you. What do you say we take a walk and have a closer look at the bridge? Please tell me anything else I should know.”

William and Frank walked toward the bridge. People were still walking under the bridge admiring the natural wonder. Many children were playing in the area. William passed a photographer and his assistant who were setting up a wooden tripod with a very large camera that was aimed toward the bridge. Frank continued recounting some of the visits he experienced over his time travel. When the photographer took the photograph that became his choice for the day’s best take, William and Frank were almost directly under the bridge. They were careful not to get directly under the path of the droplets. Frank had his back to the camera and William was looking up, his face clearly visible to the lens.

Paul had been looking through as many history books as he could find that included older photographs of the Natural Bridge. He found many but none were as defined as the one both Helen and Kate were certain they saw William in. Paul was alone in the library. Helen and Kate had been helping over the last three days but had found nothing of great interest. Consequently, Paul convinced the pair to spend some time with Kate's girls and promised to call them as soon as he found anything of interest.

After nearly three hours of leafing through books, Paul decided to take a break and head toward the cafeteria. He desperately needed a coffee and by now he was getting used to the muffins that were delivered fresh every day first thing in the morning. It was that time. The library was busy with students researching and preparing themselves for exams that concluded the summer semester.

As Paul took the escalator down to the main floor, he could see that more people than usual were seated at the study carrels on the main floor. Most of the microfiche monitors that usually sat darkened in the mornings were turned on, and students were winding newspaper articles up and down and sideways looking for information that could help them make their papers more complete.

Paul stepped off the escalator. As he did so a thought came to him that caused him to remain frozen in his tracks. He turned to his left and stared at the microfiche carrels, and it occurred to him that he needed to study old newspapers to see if any sign of William could be found.

Paul completely forgot about his craving for the coffee and muffin and headed directly to the librarian who was managing the microfiche desk.

“Can I have a copy of the Daily News-Record for the entire year of 1922?” It only took the librarian a minute or so and she returned with six small boxes each containing two months’ worth of Harrisonburg’s daily paper.

“Here you go, sir, please return them to my desk when you are finished, and if you need any others do not hesitate to let me know. I will be happy to get them for you.”

Paul searched through the entire 1922 issues of the News-Record. After three hours of non-stop scanning and loading and removing reels of microfiche, he finally sat back and decided that perhaps he should have taken the coffee break when he needed it earlier. In all of 1922, he had found nothing about the Natural Bridge, let alone any articles about William. He stood up and collected the microfiche boxes but then just as Paul was about to return them, he thought of something. Paul had scanned only front-page articles and any other editorial text contained in each issue of the paper. He had ignored the classifieds. What if William had left a message in the personals? Paul had not scanned the personal ads at all. He knew he would have to look at each issue again. His coffee break would have to wait. Paul commenced at the beginning of the year and moved forward. This time he was able to go through the two-month reels faster than before since he was targeting only one section of the paper. The personals were in the same place in each issue so they were easy to spot. For the first seven months Paul found nothing. On a few occasions he stopped to appreciate the news and the ads displayed in the eighty-year-old newspaper. Things like an ad for a Victrola for \$37.50, a lady’s silk lined Bolivia wrap for \$7.85, men’s suits for \$10.00 and Columbia Motors Company Detroit, U.S.A. advertising

their touring car for \$1,475.00. Paul started reading some of the ads in the personals out loud but not audible enough for anybody to hear him. "*Widower wishes to place 9-year-old girl with Catholic family; willing to pay reasonable board and room.*" He slowed the pace of the reel to glance at each ad in that day's personals, occasionally stopping to read something that caught his eye. "*Gent's bicycle for sale: Reason for selling, owner leaving town. Apply 324 Pine, between 6:30 and 7:30 \$10.*" When he reeled through the first week in August of 1922, he almost missed what later would become the most exciting news Kate would hear since William disappeared.



"Helen, is Kate with you?" Paul was whispering into his cell phone. He ignored the legible sign that no cell phones were allowed in the library and called Helen as soon as he saw the posting in the August 24th issue of the News-Record. "I need you and Kate to come to the library as soon as possible."

"We will be there in fifteen minutes!"

Kate heard Helen say over her cell phone. She was there when it rang but she did not know who it was at first.

"Was that, Paul? Has he found something? Is he still at the library?"

Helen knew one statement would answer all of Kate's questions.

"Let's go Kate, get the girls, I will have the car ready in front of the door."

It did not take Helen long to get to the library. Paul had told her to join him at the microfiche carrels when she arrived. With Kate and the girls behind her, Helen was running through the library totally ignoring the stares of peo-

ple interrupted by the vision of two adult ladies and two small girls flying by.

"Slow down, Helen, what did you do, take a rocket to get here?" Paul had heard the sound of the stampeding feet, and he walked toward the arriving ladies.

Kate moved forward past Helen and placed her hands on Paul's shoulders. "Paul, have you found something? We got here as fast as we could..."

"I can see that. Hi, girls, did your mom and aunt run over any elephants trying to get here so fast?"

"Aunt Helen drove through a red light!" Nicole was quick to rat on Helen.

"I did not Nicky! The light was still yellow." Helen spoke loudly and quickly turned to see if she had disturbed anybody nearby.

"Never mind that, Nicky. Helen, please take the girls over to the magazine area? Paul what have you found?"

"Well..."

Before Paul had a chance to answer, Helen interrupted.

"Kate, I almost killed us getting us here. I went through a red light and stormed into a library and now you want me to take the girls to the magazine area?"

"I told you she went through a red light!" Nicole was happy to hear her aunt admit she did something wrong.

"Ladies, how about you all follow me? Please keep your voice down before we get kicked out of here." Paul picked Tara up, turned away from Kate and Helen and headed toward the microfiche carrels.

While Paul was waiting for them to arrive at the library, he had obtained a printout of the posting in the classifieds that caught his attention. With Tara still in his left arm, he picked up the eight-and-a-half-by-eleven sheet of white copy paper and handed it to Kate.

"What year is this?" she asked.

“It is 1922, and it was placed just two days after the date of the photograph William is in.”

Helen was surprised that Paul for the first time spoke about the photograph like he had accepted the fact that it was William. As she started to say something to Paul she stopped.

“Kate, what’s wrong?” Helen noticed her sister had dropped to a chair beside her as if her legs had given out from under her.

Kate quickly saw the bold circle Paul had made around one of the ads in the classifieds. The words in the ad were more than her emotions could bear:

KATE I AM NOT LOST. I WILL RETURN TO YOU. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME NOW. TEN YEARS FROM THIS DATE, I WILL POST A MESSAGE TO YOU AND EVERY TEN YEARS AFTERWARDS UNTIL I KNOW I AM ONLY HOURS AWAY FROM BEING WITH YOU, WITH NICOLE AND WITH TARA. LOVE WILLIAM.

Kate started crying. She could not help herself. Nicole stepped closer to her mother and hugged her. “Please don’t cry, Mommy.”

Helen did not know what to do next. She looked at Paul and begged with her eyes to be informed as to what he had found. She did not dare interrupt Nicole while she was with her mother. Finally Kate, realizing Helen needed to see the paper as well, held it up in her direction. Helen took the paper and quickly saw the highlighted ad. As Helen finished reading, she looked up at Paul and smiled at him.

“You see, Kate, I knew Paul could do it. He has found a direct connection with William in the photograph at the time it was taken. Although I must say that I am hurt that William does not mention me at all.” Helen laughed and hugged her sister and the girls. “Paul, what does he mean

‘every ten years’?”

Paul handed Helen a number of sheets of copy paper he had on the tabletop. Each was a photocopy of a page of the classifieds and had the date and one ad boldly circled. Kate heard Paul’s voice, but to her for a moment it seemed she was dreaming.

Paul was speaking to Nicole and Tara, the girls made so much noise upon hearing the news that a librarian nearby was moving in to evict them. Paul’s words stuck with Kate: “Girls, your father will be back at the Natural Bridge next Tuesday afternoon!”

William was alone in his room above the garage. It was Monday morning, and the day he had with Frank Porter yesterday stuck vividly in his mind. He did not go down to work on this day. Stan had called for him at 7 AM, yelling to him from below, wanting to know why he was not already in the garage. William had told Stan he was not feeling well on this day. Or at least not well enough to work. In fact, he felt better than he had ever since he left his own time. William felt a high from knowing he was one of perhaps only two people who had traveled through time. But the most amazing thing for William was that he knew how to get back to his family.

The math was simple. His trained engineering mind calculated the steps he would have to take to return to his family and how many days it would take him to do it. He was ready. All he had to do was wait for the afternoon to begin his travel forward. But there was a problem. Every time William considered leaving that very afternoon he felt a hesitation to go through with it. Something was missing and he knew what it was. His focus to find a way back to his family overshadowed the feelings he had felt for his mother and new-found family he left behind in 1892.

Now that he had the information he needed to get back to his wife and children, his mind was tormented with emotions for his natural parents. William knew that it would not be possible for him to leave them behind without a goodbye. He realized that if he left without see-

ing them again he could never forgive himself. He was also convinced that traveling in time was not something he wanted to continue to do. He knew that as soon as he got back to his family, he would treasure every moment he had with them and live out a natural life that did not include the interference of movement in the fabric of time for any reason.

“William, are you feeling better? I could use your help!” Stan Wilson yelled to William as he opened the door leading up the stair to the room William was in above the garage. How insignificant, William thought, a simple request coming from Stan. How insignificant was it that Stan needed his help to change a tire or drain the oil out of an old car engine.

William chose not to answer Stan. He knew it would be difficult to use words to convey to Stan how he felt at that very moment. Instead, William made up his mind to move on. He knew there was no reason for him to be in this room any longer. He stood up and gathered the papers he had scribbled his calculation on, and he carefully folded his summary sheet and placed it in his shirt pocket.

William had saved a small amount of cash that he kept under the bread box near the small sink that constituted the presence of a kitchen in his room. He stepped over to the counter and leaned over to move the bread box. Twelve dollars. William opened the folded money and smiled thinking how many times he had left a twelve-dollar tip at a restaurant.

A car horn sounded directly under William’s window, startling him. William leaned out the open window and saw old man Carter’s Model-T pull up to the garage door. He decided that now was the time to move. He placed the twelve dollars in his shirt pocket next to the calculations he had made and took one last look around his room and headed down the stairs.

"Stan, I have an important errand to run, can I use your car?" William was standing over Stan who was under a car. Old man Carter was entering the garage through the main door built into the overhead door.

"Stan, are you open for business today?" Carter interrupted William's request of Stan.

Stan pulled himself out from under the car and grabbed a cloth to wipe his hands clean of the grease he was working with.

"William, what is up with you today? I am knee deep in alligators and you need my car to go out for an errand?"

"Look, Stan, can I have a word with you?"

"What is it, William? Is something wrong?"

Stan ignored Carter who was talking to him from the door.

"Carter can you wait for me outside? I will be with you in a minute!"

"You know what? I will be outside for sixty seconds. After that I am taking my business to another mechanic!"

Carter stepped through the main door again and slammed it shut behind him.

"I guess we can talk now, William. I can give you at least... say five minutes or so, let me pour us a cup of coffee."

They walked toward the coffee kettle, a familiar ritual to William who had joined Stan for daily coffee breaks during the last three weeks he had worked there. "You know, Stan, I really appreciate all you have done for me."

Stan realized quickly that William was giving him a farewell speech. "I knew you would move on, but I did not think it would be this soon. Where are you headed?"

"Stan, I need to go see my folks. I never told you, but they live near here. I was hoping I could use your car. I will be back later today, but..."

"But you will be moving on after that anyway, am I right?"

"Stan, you know I could never lie to you... You have been so good to me. I think you need to hire a young lad from town who can apprentice with you and eventually buy your business from you so you can retire and spend more time at your cabin. You also need to find yourself a nice lady who will take good care of you."

"Now you're talking!"

Stan and William laughed for a short moment and then William knew he had to get going. He decided it would be best to let Stan know that his days working with him at the garage were over. "Stan, after I see my folks I need to get back to my wife and kids. If you do not mind I will leave your car at the Natural Bridge, at the bottom of the road where people park when they visit the Bridge. It will be there later today. Do you think you can get a ride there after four or so to pick it up?" Stan nodded that he could.

"I would love to know why you need to leave the car there, but then I guess it makes sense since it is where I found you. It took me a couple of days to realize it, but I know now for sure that you were not traveling with the fair."

"No, Stan, I was not. Let's just say I was traveling through and I needed some time to get my bearings. And now I am ready to go back. Listen, Stan, I want to let you know that I might be back in the future. I will be passing through again and I want to visit with you. Actually now that I think of it, I may need a place to sleep for a couple of nights."

"William, you are welcome to come back anytime you want!"

"Thanks, Stan, now I better get going."

Stan reached into his pocket and pulled out a ten-dollar bill. "William I want you to have this. I do owe you two

days' pay and consider the rest a bonus for your good work."

"Thanks, Stan, I really appreciate it. I hope to see you again. Take care of yourself." With that said, William left the garage. As he opened the main door and stepped outside, he saw old man Carter speed away in his car. William smiled, opened the door of Stan's car, got in and drove toward town. For the first time, he felt like he actually belonged behind the wheel of the vintage automobile.

As William drove through town, he looked closely at the facades of the wooden buildings he was leaving behind. He wondered what they would look like over the increments of time that would pass between his returns here. He smiled at the thought that he would witness the growth of the town in ten-year increments, all over the next couple of weeks.

A thought came to William that scared him. What if along the way of his journey something happened to him and he did not make it back to Kate and the girls? What if Kate by now was in a deep depression grieving him? What if she was convinced he was dead?

According to his calculations it would take him over a month to travel forward in time in two-day increments. But he knew his wife well enough, she would not give up hope, she would be searching for him every day, looking for him in every possible place he could have gone. William knew Kate would know he had not abandoned her intentionally.

William realized this was the first time he was considering what Kate might be doing to find him. He wondered if she knew that he had traveled in time. But then how would she know? There was nothing that could indicate to Kate where he had gone. William remembered how, the day before, the photographer at the Natural Bridge was taking photographs of the bridge and the people under it. He remembered how he was directly in front of the camera lens and that he was certain he would be in one

of the photographs clearly. What if Kate saw an old photograph with William in it? Would she figure it out? But then why would she be looking for old photographs of the bridge?

Just as William asked himself that question, he felt a strong urge to send Kate a message somehow that would give her hope and that would tell her that he was, in fact, on his way back to her. He was certain the timing of his visit to the bridge yesterday and that of the photographer being there was not a coincidence but had occurred for a reason.

If Kate had certainly somehow seen the photograph, she would now be searching for him in past records, trying to figure a way to bring him back. William knew the modern world would not be kind to anyone suggesting a loved one was stuck in the fabric of time. How could he assure Kate he was on his way back to her?

As William drove through the center of town he could see the time on the town hall clock was half past eight in the morning. He was glad to see the day was still young. His stare on the clock remained there for a good few minutes.

William was thinking how the time the clock displayed did not matter to him. After all, he had traveled in time without regard to the laws of physics. In his mind, William imagined the clock spinning at the speed of a fan and the clouds overhead moving as fast as speeding automobiles on a busy highway. In his mind, he could see the days fly by him and cycles of darkness and light spinning by him like the frames in a super eight movie projector. William eased off the brake and moved forward while he continued to stare at the clock. His speed was slow, but the thump of the car hitting something was loud and he felt his passenger wheel run over whatever it was.

“Hey mister!” A young voice yelled out loudly.

William stomped on the brake and looked toward the dirt road ahead of him. As he did, he could see the figure of a person rolling on the ground directly in front of the car.

"Oh my God! What have I done?" William opened the car door and quickly darted to the side of the young boy he had hit with his car. A bicycle lay on its side with a bent front wheel, and a boy with his newspaper sack still over his shoulder was attempting to sit up.

"Hold on, let me help you. Are you alright? I am so sorry. I did not see you. Are you hurt? Can you stand up? I know I was not going fast. I am so sorry. Do you need a doctor?"

The newspaper boy jumped to his feet and took his hat off and dusted his pants with it. "Look what your automobile did to my bike, mister! My mum is going to whip me! She said I should deliver the papers on foot."

William's car had run over the front tire of the bike. The bicycle wheel clearly seemed destroyed, even worse, the forks of the bike were badly twisted.

"I am sorry kid, I will pay for your bike Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay, it is my fault. I was not looking when I crossed the street. Did I damage your car, mister?"

"Here kid, take this." William pulled the ten-dollar bill Stan had given him out of his shirt pocket.

The kid looked at the ten-dollar bill and then at William. "No, mister, a new front wheel and forks will cost about two dollars, heck the whole bike was only eight dollars and forty cents."

"Listen, I need to get to somewhere in a hurry today. I have just realized I want to place an ad in the classifieds of your paper. Can you do that for me? Is there enough here for that and to repair your bike?"

"I think a small ad in the classified runs twenty-five cents a day so I would need to bring you some change.

Where do I find you?"

"Listen kid..."

"My name is Lester!"

"Okay, Lester, nice to make your acquaintance. Sorry it was under these circumstances. Are you sure you are okay?"

"Will you stop asking me that? I am fine, I tell you." Lester picked up his bike and turned the handle-bars so that it stood perfectly upright on the bent front wheel.

William was writing something on a piece of paper on the hood of the car. Lester tried to stand on his toes to see what he was writing.

"If you write down your address I will bring you the change."

"Lester, here is what I need placed in the personal section of the classifieds in tomorrow's paper. Can you do that for me? As far as the change goes, please keep it. You deserve it. I have given you enough trouble."

Lester took the paper from William and read the writing out loud:

"Kate I am not lost. I will return to you. It is only a matter of time now. Ten years from this date I will post a message to you, and every ten years afterwards until I know I am only hours away from being with you, with Nicole and with Tara. Love William."

Lester looked up from reading the note with a look on his face like he had just read a secret message and had no idea what it meant.

"Lester, can I trust you to place the ad for me? And I may need to place another ad in the future. Can you tell me where the newspaper office is?"

"It is just around the corner, we can walk there together. I am finished delivering my papers. I was just going there anyway. Do you want to come with me and you can pay for it and they can give you change for this ten-dollar

bill. Mr. Roberts's bike shop is two doors further down. We can go over there next and he can tell you how much the repair to the bike will be. I hate to take this much money from you. It is far too much."

"Look, Lester, I need to go now. Please see that the ad is placed. Get your bike fixed, buy yourself an ice cream, put the balance in your piggy bank, save it for the next time your bike needs repair. But please promise you will be careful on the streets."

William shook the kid's hand and climbed into the car and drove off waving at Lester. The kid remained there staring at William, holding the ten-dollar bill and the note William had given him.

"Hey kid, get off the road!" A man in a small delivery truck honked his horn and yelled out at Lester to move out of his way. He braked just in time. If he had stopped a few feet farther ahead, he would have demolished the remainder of the bike.

William felt pleased he had thought of placing the ad in the personals section of the paper. He knew for sure that the kid would place the ad, and for some reason he was convinced Kate would find it. William stopped the car. He was back at a familiar house and a familiar person was on the front porch drinking a cup of coffee. William got out of the car and opened the front gate leading to the porch.

“Good morning, Bill.” Frank had walked down the steps to meet William as he entered the yard.

“I came by to say goodbye, Frank. I am going to start my journey home today.”

“Did you forget you move forward into the future in the afternoon? Why are you off so early in the morning?”

“Well, I am not going to the future just yet. I have some unfinished business in the past, actually in the present.”

“Are you going to visit your mother and father before you leave? Can’t say that I blame you for wanting to do so, it may be the last time you will see them.”

“Listen, Frank, thanks. I will never forget you. And I wish you all the happiness you deserve. I really respect the fact that you have chosen to remain here and that you want to lead a normal life with your wife and mother. Is there anything I can do for you? Would you like me to give your son a message for you?”

“It may be better to leave well enough alone. I would hate to think what Paul would do if he knew I was living somewhere in the past, or what he would do if he knew

one could travel in time. Paul would be the first one here to save me. If I ever see him here I will know you have sent him and as much as I will be happy to see him again, I will curse you for having told him where I am. So just pretend you never met me, and go back to your family and live every day to the fullest. Promise me that!"

"You got a deal, Frank."

The two of them shook hands, and they hugged the way old friends do. And as William turned to leave, he held his hand up and they exchanged a high-five that only the best touchdown at the last minute of a football game could merit.

William arrived at the Byronville home. It was less than a month since he was there last, yet the house looked so different. The small trees at the front of the house were fully grown. The dirt laneway from the front gate was now paved with cobblestone. A new structure stood to the left of the main house that was not there before. A three-car garage had been built and in front stood a beautiful convertible sports car being polished by a young lady.

"Excuse me, miss, can you tell me if Mr. or Mrs. Byronville are home?" William had walked over to the young lady polishing the car. The woman did not stop. She continued to polish the windshield.

"I hate removing the remains of insects from the wind screen of my automobile. There!" Having removed the stubborn spot, the young lady stopped and threw the towel in her hand into a pail at her feet. "May I ask what your business is with my parents, sir?"

William remained there dumbfounded. He could not find any words to speak. He could only stare at the person in front of him and hear her words over again in his mind.

"Sir?"

"I-I, do not know what to say! Are you a daughter of Thomas and Sarah Byronville?" William realized he was being presumptuous that Thomas had married his mother. But in his heart, he knew that this most likely was the case.

"Yes, I am their daughter. And who might you be?"

"Are you the only one? Do you have any siblings? What is your name?"

"Look, sir, unless you make your intentions known to me, I must warn you if I lean on this horn, there will be more men here in seconds than you could possibly overcome." The young lady had her hand on the center of the steering wheel and the look on her face was one of concern for her safety.

"Let me explain, please. I do not mean to frighten you. My name is William."

"William? Did you say William? Are you the William? William Monterey? That William?"

"Yes I am, you know about me?"

"Know about you?" The young lady released the steering wheel and moved forward toward William. She stepped forward and grabbed each of William's hands. "Let me look at you. Wow, you do resemble Father! We do not have any other siblings, I am your only sister, and my name is Danielle. I guess I was named after you. Mother told me that one day you would return to visit us. She referred to you as William Monterey. I never understood why you changed your surname and Mother could not explain it to me.

"How old are you?" It was the only thing that came to William's mind. All of his other thoughts seemed to be blurred.

"Twenty-five tomorrow. What a beautiful birthday gift." Danielle leaned forward and kissed William on the cheek. She hugged him and led him by the hand toward the house.

Kate and her girls were passengers in the small bus leading down to the Natural Bridge. Along with Rose, her friend George Tyler, Helen and Paul, they were the first people in line when the souvenir shop opened at ten in the morning. On this Tuesday morning, there were no other people lined up so early. They were the only ones on the bus. When the bus came to a stop, Kate was the first one out the door. She ignored the driver who had asked her to be seated until he stopped the vehicle. Kate ran toward the Natural Bridge. She looked around her and saw no one.

“William!” Kate was calling out William’s name and looking in every possible direction. “William!”

“Kate, you need to calm down.” Helen was holding her sister. Kate broke away.

“William!”

“Kate, you are scaring Nicole and Tara.” Helen whispered in her sister’s ear. Helen looked at Paul, who was studying the underside of the bridge.

“Paul, do something, bring William back. You said he would be here today. Where is he?”

Rose was speechless. She did not know what to say. By now George was convinced Kate needed to be hospitalized again.

Nicole started crying, she was noticeably frightened. Tara had no idea what was going on. She just stood there by her sister with her thumb in her mouth, silently unaware of the importance of this visit.

“Listen, Kate, you need to calm down. William’s last message in the ad said he would be back here on this date. It did not say what time he would be here. We may have to wait out the day. You have waited this long, let’s sit here and be patient. If William is meant to return here, we will have to allow whatever it is that must happen to happen on its own. We cannot control his return nor can we be certain it will actually be at this very spot. Let’s sit here for a while.” Paul led Kate over to the side of the pathway to a park bench and Helen followed with Nicole and Tara.

Noon hour arrived and visitors were now coming and going. Couples were arm in arm, and a young mother was pushing a baby carriage with a hungry infant crying to be fed. Helen took the girls over to the concession stand and got them some food. She brought back some wrapped sandwiches for her sister and Paul, who had remained vigilant on the same bench. Kate refused to eat. Paul ate half of his sandwich and then wrapped the remainder and placed it in the paper sack with Kate’s uneaten sandwich.

Rose and George finally left, they were not able to convince Kate to return home. It was 4 PM when Kate finally broke down. She started crying and could not stop. Helen had walked in the distance with Nicole and Tara. Paul put his arm around Kate and tried unsuccessfully to calm her.

By 6 PM, the girls grew impatient. Helen decided she would take them back to the gift shop and see if she could buy them each a toy to play with. She took along Paul’s cell phone and they decided that if anything happened Paul would ring her from the pay phone at the concession stand. Helen never got a call from Paul.

By dusk, the girls were asleep in the car while Kate and Paul waited to the last possible minute. Kate was not able to look at the powerfully visual light show that happened every night. A guard who noticed that Kate and

Paul had sat on the same bench all day came over to see if they were sick or something. He mentioned that in all his years there he never saw anybody sit and look away while the light show went on. They were finally asked to leave the Natural Bridge. When the last small bus drove up the road to the parking lot, Kate and Paul were the only ones on it.

As they approached the car, Helen saw her sister was in a devastated state. Paul was speechless and sad as he helped Helen place Kate in the back seat of the car next to Nicole and Tara. He closed the rear car door. Helen was still beside him. He had no words for her. He hugged her and kissed her on the forehead. He helped her sit in the front seat of the car and got in himself, stopping for a second to ponder the day and how unproductive and sad it was. He started the car and drove back to Kate's home minus the one passenger he had hoped would be with them.

Kate did not sleep all night. She was devastated. Helen had not been able to find any words to console her. Paul had kissed Helen good night and left them after midnight. He, too, was disappointed. He had believed strongly William was going to return on the date he said he would. The tense emotional atmosphere of their home had exhausted both Nicole and Tara. They were too young to comprehend the things that were happening around them. They were confused and not sure why their father had been away for so long.

It was four thirty in the afternoon the day after their visit to the Natural Bridge. Helen was sitting on the couch with Nicole and Tara beside her. The television was on. The girls were watching *Recess*, a cartoon Helen had not seen nor was she interested to watch. She was very concerned for her sister. They had not spoken at all this day. Finally Kate came out of her bedroom dressed. Helen walked over to her sister and kissed her on the forehead.

"Hi, sis, can I make you something to eat?"

"That would be nice. How about a boiled egg and toast?"

Helen smiled at her sister and got up to go to the kitchen.

"Mommy, are you feeling better?" Nicole was hugging Kate, and Tara had already wrapped herself around her mother's neck.

"Yes, honey, I got some rest. Did you eat..."

The doorbell rang and Helen shouted from the kitchen

that she would get it. Kate gave her girls each a kiss and stood up to see who was at the door.

“Oh my God!” Helen’s voice was piercing.

Kate was momentarily concerned that an intruder had shocked her sister. But as Helen opened the door completely, there he was. It was a vision her eyes almost did not believe but her brain gave her a shot of adrenaline that her body could not ignore.

“William!”

Kate ran across the room and jumped on William almost knocking him over. She had lost weight and wrapping her petite body completely around him seemed like the only thing to do. Kate smothered William’s mouth with passionate kisses.

“Kate I love you so much!” William was almost in tears.

“Honey! You’re home! It is you, I am not dreaming! I love you too. I knew you would come back to us. I have never stopped believing it!”

Helen stepped aside and looked towards the girls. Nicole and Tara had run towards the entrance both yelling for their dad. Kate could not stop kissing her husband. She was crying; tears of joy were heavily streaming down her face. She had so many questions for her husband yet she could not say another word. She needed to feel his body over and over again in her grasp. She needed to make sure he was real.

William was sporting a new style of haircut; he was very neatly dressed but noticeably different than when they saw him last. He was cleanly shaven and smelled of lavender. He bent down to greet his daughters. And as he did so he pulled two beautifully crafted linen dolls from the inside of his jacket.

“These dolls are for us? Thank you Daddy! We waited for you yesterday, where were you?” Nicole questioned her dad as though he failed to call home while away on a

lengthy business trip.

"Nicole, it is my fault. I missed my transportation home by one day. Hello Helen... thanks for being here. And how is my Tara? Let me look at you! Wow! Have you ever gotten bigger! Do you know how much Daddy missed you?" William did not wait for a reply from his youngest daughter; he was overcome with joy. "I missed you and I missed Nicole and I missed Mommy so much!"

"But Daddy where did you go? Mommy was worried sick about you!" Nicole's question went unanswered for the moment.

William looked into Kate's eyes and started to say something but was unable. So he turned to the girls and spoke to them realizing that he could never explain what had happened to him in a few statements. He knew that Kate would give him all the time he needed; he so much wanted to share his amazing journey with her. "To answer your question Nicole, Daddy went away to a magical place. I met some people who tried to keep me from returning home. But I am happy to say that I met a very nice man who helped me get back to you. I also met people that were very close to me and cared for me very much."

The girls were listening to their dad but it was clear to Kate and Helen that William was speaking to them as well.

"You remember how I told you that Grandma Rose adopted me? Well, I met my real parents."

"William you did? How?" Kate was sobbing with happiness. She could not let go of her husband.

Just as William was about to continue there was a knock on the door. Helen leaned forward and looked through the peephole. "What great timing," and as Helen opened the door she greeted Paul.

"Hi Paul. You have great timing. Guess who else just

arrived? William you were just speaking about nice people who helped you return home, well, I want you to meet my friend Paul Portelli. I am sure Kate will tell you how amazing he has been. Paul found your ads in the old personals and as we are, he too is dying to hear how you got those to appear in eighty-year-old newspapers. By the way, as soon as you finish shaking Paul's hand I still need a hug. You might not believe me but I actually missed you too!"

"Paul I am pleased to meet you and thanks for helping my family out..." William hesitated and stared at Paul. But Helen broke his stare as she hugged him. He returned her warmth with a big kiss on her forehead and chin.

"William, I am glad to see you made it home. I know you will need some time with your family. Perhaps I can convince Helen to join me for lunch and I can meet with you later in the week. I am really looking forward to hearing more about your journey and the people you met. Helen, care to join me?"

Kate answered for her sister. "Of course she will. I think you two are perfect for each other. Now Sis get out of here and do not come back until you are engaged or something!"

"Kate!" Helen was quick to yell somewhat embarrassed.

"Paul go ahead, I give you permission to take my sister out for lunch today and the rest of her life for that matter!"

"Kate... really! What's gotten into you?"

"What's gotten into me? All I can say is that you will never know how much you love somebody until that person is so lost that it seems impossible that he will return. And when I see you two and I think of how much hope Paul gave me and how intelligent and attractive he is, I want him for you because I love you both dearly. Thanks Paul for what you did from the bottom of my heart."

"That goes for me too Paul. I want to thank you for helping my family out while I was away, and yes I do want to get together with you. As a matter of fact Kate and I have four tickets to the Who concert in Cleveland coming up September 27th. Since Kate does not like to drive so much and Helen dislikes driving even more, why don't the four of us go and you and I can split the four-hundred-mile drive? What do you say? Do you want to go?"

"Four hundred miles! Wow, you guys certainly are devoted fans! You know, my dad liked the Who! The 27th is a Friday. Yeah, I will go. Thanks." Paul was humbled and touched by the praise and the fact that William accepted him into the family with open arms.

"Okay I get the message, you guys need to be alone. I have an idea. Why don't Paul and I take the girls out for ice cream and pony rides and you can rest up and catch up." Helen was smiling at her sister so as to let her know she could play the match-me-up game too.

"Daddy is it okay if we go out for ice cream?" Nicole favored her aunt's suggestion.

"Yes Nicky, Daddy can get some rest and I will cook dinner. Helen bring the girls... and Paul of course, back in three hours or so and we will have a nice dinner together." Kate gave her sister a sly smile and hugged Paul and the girls as they left. As the door shut behind her she turned to William and kissed him again more passionately than ever. "When they get back how about we go to Mario's for dinner and we spend the next three hours making up for the many nights we spent alone?"

"Honey, you read my mind." William had his wife back in his arms. As they kissed he could not help but think about how much he had missed Kate. He was equally happy to be home and that he had been fortunate to experience such an unbelievable journey.

A young mother was yelling at the top of her lungs. The language she was speaking was that of an ancient tribe. If one could understand it they would hear the words. "Not my baby! Not my baby! Please do not kill my baby!" The young mother was terrified.

Her screams were deafening. But it was no use. She was restrained and her child was in the hands of a high priest. The tribe was on the top of a natural stone bridge. They had been there many times before gathered for the same ritual. Many mothers before her had witnessed their infants being sacrificed to the gods. The men of the tribe chanted and gave the high priest the rhythm he needed to perform the ritual. On this day yet another infant would be sacrificed. This ancient tribe sacrificed an infant as a way to appease the gods and to bring the rains back.

It had not rained for months. The tribe strongly believed that the sacrificed child would travel in time and deliver rain to the area. The droplets under the bridge had to continue. For it was only after an extended period of drought that they would stop. Spilling the blood of an infant on the top of the bridge brought rain within days. This was the way of these people. The rock bridge developed a memory of the suffering of the mothers whose infants were sacrificed. It was a place that if an infant was left for even a moment unattended the bridge would claim that infant and send it forward in time where it could not be harmed.

Thank you for reading *A Bridge of Time*

Your feedback posted on the AMAZON page of this
novel would be greatly appreciated.

<http://www.amazon.com/Bridge-Time-Lou-Tortola/product-reviews/8890094508/>

Your feedback directly to the author is also welcomed.

lou@eliquid.com