

Land of Lost Souls

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Chapter 1

Simon Connor was not a happy fifteen-year-old boy. Ever since he mentioned his theory to his mother Sarah, she had been taking him from one psychologist to another. Each time, they had prescribed one drug or another. Thankfully, she was no fan of drugs for her child. “Mom, if this doctor wants to give me pills, I’m not taking them.”

She nodded. “I know, Simon. Sometimes it seems that’s their solution for everything. Doctor Adams is the last psychologist in the city. If it’s drugs again, we’ll just forget all about your little problem.”

He rolled his eyes. “It’s not a problem, Mom. I think it’s kind of cool, although I’ve never seen the other side. I just feel if I could turn my head fast enough, I’d see everyone who’s in Heaven.”

“Maybe I’m the idiot for suggesting counseling in the first place.”

Simon laughed. “Mom, you’re super smart, and certainly not an idiot. I appreciate that you’re concerned, but I’m not.”

“Let’s just get through this appointment, and we’ll see what happens next, okay?”

“Okay, Mom.”

They arrived at the same medical offices building they had visited before. She led her son to the elevators and to the door of Doctor Joshua Adams’ office. She kissed her son’s head and opened the door. The waiting room was empty, and a receptionist sat behind a counter. As they approached, Sarah said, “Good afternoon, we have an appointment with the doctor.”

The receptionist stood and offered her hand. “We’ve been expecting you, Mrs. Connor. I’m Claire Klein. Please have a seat and the doctor will be with you shortly.” She handed her a clipboard with several pieces of paper and a pen. “These are our standard forms. Please fill them out.” She sat.

Sarah and Simon sat nearby. While his mother completed the paperwork, Simon browsed a few magazines on a nearby table. He was surprised to see an article by Dr. Adams entitled, “Visions of Paradise, a Clinical Analysis.” He began to read. His mother took the forms back to the receptionist, but Simon hardly noticed. This paragraph grabbed his attention:

“The prevalence of visions and encounters from those who have passed seems impossible to ignore, although no physical evidence has yet been found. Clinical study of this phenomenon is warranted, although the likelihood of obtaining concrete proof is low. In the author’s opinion, the common prescriptive solutions prevent scientists from fully understanding this complex topic. The author believes that approach is of limited

benefit to the patient and likely hampering our understanding of the human mind and the resilience of the human spirit.”

“Mrs. Connor, the doctor will see you now,” Nurse Klein stated.

Sarah stood. “Come on, Simon. Let’s go.”

“Mom, this article is so interesting. It’s by the doctor we’re going to see.”

“You can tell me about it later, son.”

He sighed and set the magazine down. He stood and followed his mother into Dr. Adam’s office.

Dr. Adams was six feet tall with dark hair and a neat beard. He smiled. “I’m very happy to see you today. Mrs. Connor, I’m Josh Adams.” They shook hands. He offered his hand to Simon. “Nice to meet you, Simon.”

“Thank you, Doctor. I was reading that article you wrote in the magazine out front.”

“Let’s sit where it’s more comfortable,” Josh said. He led them to a corner of the office where sat a single chair and a small sofa. The doctor sat on the chair. “Please sit. Would either of you care for a glass of water before we begin?”

After they sat, Sarah replied, “No, Doctor, we’re fine. First, let me make a couple of points. Simon and I have visited quite a few doctors recently to discuss this issue. In each case, they wanted to prescribe drugs. I’m not going to allow that for my son. If that is going to be your suggestion, we’ll leave now and save your time.”

Adams eyes widened and then he chuckled. “Mrs. Connor, I’m aware of the penchant for others to medicate problems away. While that can be beneficial in certain cases of chronic pain and the like, I have no intention of suggesting such a thing in this case.”

Sarah exchanged smiles with her son and continued, “Good. Now, about my son.”

Adams turned his attention to the boy. “Simon, please tell me what you’ve been experiencing.”

“Well, it’s not so much an experience as a feeling.”

“Please go on, Simon.”

Simon glanced at his mother who smiled back at him. “Doctor, for some time, I’ve had the feeling that those on the other side were next to me. I also felt if I could turn my head fast enough, I’d see them. Pretty weird, right?”

Adams finished his notes and looked up. “I wouldn’t say it was weird. You mentioned the article in that magazine. I’ve met many people who have unusual experiences. I’ve made it my life’s work to understand those memories and put some meaning behind them. Of course, I’ve dealt with patients whose hallucinations were caused by legal and illegal drugs, but those are very different from what my primary patients have experienced. Have you ever seen the other side, Simon?”

He shook his head. “I’ve tried many times. Sometimes I try so hard that my neck hurts. I guess I’m not supposed to see.”

“That’s a possibility, but not the only one,” Adams noted. “Mrs. Connor, I have a group that meets weekly with me to discuss their most recent experiences. Most are children like your son, although a few are adults. I believe your son would benefit from those group encounters. Most of the patients have become close friends, which is likely due to the similarities of their experiences. I would like Simon to join us. This group is

part of a major project I'm compiling. As such, there is no cost to you. I believe this could be just what your son needs to bring reason to some of his past experiences, and potentially to improve his abilities."

Sarah sighed. "I don't know, Doctor. What do you think, Simon?"

"It's better than drugs, Mom."

"That's for certain," Doctor Adams added. "I do need to tell you both something before we go forward."

"Is something wrong?" Sarah asked.

"No, I just should have told you both at the start. One of Simon's classmates mentioned his name to me. She said Simon has some unusual talents, although she didn't elaborate. She told me that if you and I met, I should mention her name is Kelly Forrest."

"Do you know her, Son?"

"Yes, Mom. She's in my homeroom and a couple other classes, but we never really talked before. Doctor, how could she tell I have a talent?"

The doctor shrugged. "I don't really know. Perhaps you should talk to her the next time you meet. She seems to be a very nice young lady."

"Anything else, Doctor?" Sarah asked.

"Today's meeting is free. If Simon decides to join the weekly session, that's free as well. If you prefer one-on-one counseling, my rate is \$150 per hour. I do believe the group session will be more helpful to your son, Mrs. Connor."

"I have to say I'm a bit confused right now, Doctor."

"I understand, Mrs. Connor. Take your time and let me know your decision when you're ready. Our group session meets on Saturdays at 1:30PM, and generally takes one to one and a half hours. I believe the sessions are important, but the camaraderie among the group is the best dynamic." He stood as did the others. After shaking hands, Sarah and her son left the office. Adams returned to his desk and sat. He pressed the intercom, "Claire, please let me know when the next patient arrives."

"Of course, Doctor."

Simon did not sleep well Sunday night. He was nervous about approaching Kelly Forrest. He had seen her every day, but she seemed out of his league. When he arrived in his homeroom class, his eyes met hers. She smiled, but Simon moved to his usual seat in the front row. "I don't know if I'm ready for this," he thought.

"Hi there."

Simon looked to his left and saw Kelly now sitting at the next desk. "Oh, hi."

"You saw Doctor Adams, didn't you?"

"How did you know that? Did he tell you?"

She smiled. "He didn't tell me anything, but I could see it all over your face. So, what did you think?"

"He seems really nice."

She frowned. "That's not what I mean. You're a shy guy, aren't you?"

"I don't know. I guess maybe. Is that bad?" He shook his head. "I'm sorry that I'm blathering on and on."

"It's okay. Did he tell you that I mentioned you to him?" Simon could only nod his head. "Did he say why?"

"I don't remember. Why did you tell him? Do you think I'm crazy or something?"

Kelly laughed. "You're a funny guy, Simon Connor." She extended her right hand. "We haven't been formally introduced. I'm Kelly Anne Forrest."

He shook her hand. "I'm Simon, wait, you already know my name."

She giggled. "Yes, I do. Do you know why I mentioned your name to him?"

He shrugged. "I guess maybe you're like me. Can you sense people on the other side too?"

"No, but I could tell that you can. Want to know how?"

"Yes, Kelly."

"Thanks for saying my name. I thought you were afraid to say it."

Simon put his hands in his lap. "I guess maybe I am a bit shy."

"Don't worry, I think you're cute. First, you don't really sense people on the other side; you attract them. I can see them."

"You're kidding," Simon replied.

"Meet me in front of the school after classes. I'll show you in person. Then you can walk me home and meet my folks."

The teacher entered the classroom and moved to her desk. "Good morning," she said.

Kelly and the others said, "Good morning, Mrs. Carter." Kelly winked at Simon and moved back to her original seat.

Simon took a deep breath and shook his head.

Simon went through the morning classes without speaking to Kelly. He was beginning to feel like himself again as he worked his way down the cafeteria line. The line seemed more crowded than usual, which was odd since the school population had been flat for years. After leaving the line, he looked for his friends to sit with, but could not see them. The tables seemed full, but some boys made a space for him to sit. He glanced at the faces but did not recognize them. He decided to focus on his meal.

A minute later, Kelly said, "Please make some room for me, guys." The others squeezed tighter together so she could sit with Simon. "Quite a crowd, right?"

Simon looked at her smile and almost melted. "It's strange to see the room so full, don't you think?"

She put her hand on top of his. "Don't think. Do me a favor and close your eyes for a few seconds." He closed his eyes. After a few seconds, she said, "Okay, now open them again."

He opened his eyes to find he and Kelly were sitting alone. He looked around the room and could not find those boys anywhere. "Where did they go?"

"Simon, they were never here. Those were some of the spirits that you're attracting. I asked you to close your eyes for a bit so you could see they were just lost spirits."

His face paled. "I don't feel very good."

She giggled. "Don't be afraid. They weren't here to hurt you. They thought you might be able to rescue them."

“Rescue them from what?”

“I don’t know. Salvation, damnation, whatever. That’s why I mentioned your name to Doctor Adams. This talent of yours is amazing.” She blushed. “Frankly, you’re amazing, Simon.”

He shook his head. “I don’t really think I’m anyone special, Kelly. How do I know those boys weren’t here for you?”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, from time to time I’ll see a spirit, but never anything like this. There were ten or twelve boys sitting at this table. The only time I’ve seen anything like that is when you’re around.”

“Kelly, what am I supposed to do? Become a priest or something?”

She took his hands in hers. “I want us to be a team. If we both go to Doctor Adam’s weekly meeting, we might get help from some of the others. We need to find out why those spirits are seeking you out, and then what we can do to help them.” She released his hands and extended her right hand. “Are we a team, Simon?”

He smiled and shook her hand. “We’re a team, Kelly.”

“Awesome. Now we both need to eat fast before the bell rings.”

By the time the bell sounded the last classes of the day, Simon loaded his backpack with books and papers and headed for the exit. When he passed through the doorway, he saw Kelly talking to two of her friends just outside the gates. He headed toward her.

As he approached, she said goodbye to her friends and smiled. “I was afraid you’d forget our date.”

“Date?” he squeaked.

She laughed. “Sort of. Don’t chicken out just yet. Remember our partnership?”

“I remember. It was just three hours ago.”

“Yeah, but lunch was anything but ordinary.”

“That’s for sure,” he replied. “I’m still trying to understand what happened.”

“Let’s go,” she said as she headed down the sidewalk. “My house is about six blocks from here, and we need to talk before we get there.”

“Is something wrong?”

She shrugged. “Not wrong, just a bit complicated. You see, my dad is a religious man. I never discuss my talent with him. I’ve talked to my mom about it, and she agrees that he just wouldn’t understand.”

Simon shook his head. “Then I won’t say anything about my talent either.”

“Good,” she replied. “Dad would probably think we’re both crazy, but with you, it might be worse.”

“How so?”

“If you’re attracting spirits, he might be able to sense them. I realize there’s nothing you can do to stop them from coming, so we’ll just have to see how it goes.” She forced a small smile. “By the way, where do you live?”

“About five blocks from school, but in the opposite direction.”

“That means you have about a mile’s walk after I get home. My mom could drive you if you prefer.”

"That's very nice, but after lunch today, I could use the time to think. I already told my mom that I was walking a friend home and would be late."

She nodded. "Just a friend, huh?"

"I did say it was you."

She nudged him with her shoulder and then removed her backpack. "Hold this for a moment." When he had it, she unzipped a pocket and withdrew a black book, which she showed him. "This is a Bible. We've got quite a few at home. Can I put this in your backpack? It might ward off evil."

"Thank you, Kelly. That's very nice."

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "You're welcome." Then she slung her pack back on again.

Simon took her hand in his.

"That's nice," she replied. "We turn right at the next corner. My house is halfway down the block."

"Time is going by so fast."

"Simon, one of these days we can have a real date. Unfortunately for you, today, you meet my folks."

He chuckled. "I don't think they can be that bad."

They turned the corner and continued. "Almost over," she said.

"Except for meeting the parents."

She stopped suddenly. "Where did that van come from?"

"Huh? Wasn't it already there?"

She shook her head. "No. I looked up once and there was nothing. Now that van is parked next to the sidewalk."

"Maybe we should cross the street, or just walk faster."

"I don't know," she said with a gasp.

The van was twenty feet ahead of them. The sliding door opened.

Searing pain burned through Simon's head, and he bent over in agony. "What is going on?" He looked up to see Kelly walking slowly toward the van. "Kelly, stop!" She did not hear him. He forced himself to move forward as quickly as he could. The noise from the van was like thunder.

She was less than ten feet from the van when Simon grabbed her around the waist. "Kelly, stop! Please stop!"

She tried to free herself and scratched Simon's face. Her face was contorted with anger. Her voice was a hiss. Simon was holding onto her for dear life, but the two were now only three feet from the open door.

Someone passed in front of the two and tossed something into the open door. The object exploded into a ball of intense blue flames. In seconds, the van had dissolved into thin air.

Simon and Kelly fell to the ground. She looked at him. "Simon, what happened to your face, and why are we down on the sidewalk?"

Simon panted for air. "I don't know what happened. You tried to get into the van, and I knew I had to stop you."

She looked around. "What van? I don't remember a van."

The stranger pulled both to their feet. "Kelly, it's good to see you again."

"Mr. Van Clief, where did you come from?" she asked.

He smiled. "I live two houses down from you, Kelly. You go home and I'll send this young man to you in a couple of minutes, okay?"

She smiled and walked away.

"Excuse me, sir," Simon began.

Van Clief put his finger against his lips. "Wait till she's inside, Simon?"

"How do you know my name?"

Van Clief rolled his eyes. Once Kelly had entered her house, he said, "Kelly said your name when you fell, but I could sense you from blocks away. I'm Reginald Van Clief, and I am also a member of Dr. Adams group session. I've been waiting for you to join us for some time, young man. Each of us has unique talents, and yours is the most valuable. I don't want to say much out here in the open, but I sincerely hope you'll come to those sessions. Your importance cannot be overstated."

Simon touched his sore face and saw blood on his hands. "She scratched me, but I don't know why. I can't meet her folks like this."

"I have just the thing." Van Clief pulled a vile from his pocket. He removed the stopper and poured some liquid onto his palm, which he then applied to Simon's cheeks. "There, all better."

"Sir, can I ask you what you did to that van?"

Van Clief leaned forward and replied, "Yes, but not here in the open. Perhaps we can have a private chat at the session. There is much you need to know. For example, what is the weight of a human soul? Now go meet Kelly's parents. After what you've witnessed today, it will be very easy. I pray I see you Saturday, Simon." He turned and walked across the lawn to his wraparound porch. He opened the door and stepped inside.

Simon walked over to Kelly's front door and rang the doorbell. After a few seconds, a man answered. "Hi, my name is Simon Connor. I just brought Kelly home."

The man extended his right hand. "I'm her dad, Everett Forrest. Please come in. She's told us so much about you, young man." He stepped aside and Simon entered. Everett led him to the living room where Kelly and her mother were seated on a loveseat. Everett led Simon to a chair so he could sit. Then he walked back to his leather armchair and sat. "Simon, what do your parents do?"

"Mr. Forrest, my mom stays at home to take care of me and my sister. My dad is an Air Force pilot. He's gone a lot of the time. In fact, right now he's somewhere in the Middle East training other military pilots."

"What's your mother's name?" Mrs. Forrest asked.

"Her name is Sarah."

Everett nodded. "Great biblical names. I'm impressed. Do you folks go to church regularly?"

"I don't think that's any of our business, honey," Mrs. Forrest noted.

"It's okay," Simon replied. "No, we don't. My mom is Lutheran, and my dad focuses on his duty full time."

Everett nodded. "Not everyone is cut out for the military. It demands a lot from those who serve. When you talk to your dad next, please thank him for his service for me."

"Of course, Mr. Forrest." Simon glanced at his phone. "Well, it's getting late. I'd better be heading home soon."

"Cindy or I can drive you, if you prefer," Everett noted.

There was a knock on the door. Everett rose and headed to the door.

Cindy leaned toward Simon and said, "Don't worry about my husband. He's very protective of Kelly. It's nothing personal about you. Please tell your mom that I'm Cindy, and she can call anytime." She stood. "Let me go write down my number."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Forrest," Simon replied as she headed away. After she left the room, he continued, "Well, how did I do?"

Kelly gave a thumbs-up. "Great." She stood and hurried over to Simon, who stood as well. "Tell me about the van. I remember something about a van, but nothing specific."

As Simon was about to reply, Everett returned to the room with Mr. Van Clief. "It turns out that Reggie already offered a ride to your young man, Kelly."

"Thank you, Mr. Van Clief," Kelly replied.

Cindy Forrest returned and handed a folded paper to Simon. "Here's my number. Please ask your mom to call when she has a minute. I just want to say hello."

"Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Forrest. It was a pleasure meeting you both." Simon and Van Clief walked out of the house.

As Van Clief drove away from the Forrest home, he said, "Simon, about the experience you and Kelly shared. First, there was no van. It was a specter, and more specifically a portal from this plane of existence to another."

"I don't understand, sir."

"Don't try to understand right now, just listen. An entity wished to separate you from Kelly Forrest. Combined, your abilities to sense and see lost spirits is dangerous to the entity. It wished to take one or both of you someplace where you would no longer be a threat."

"It was going to kill us?"

"I didn't say that!" Van Clief reiterated. "Perhaps to your families, you might be considered dead, but you would live, just on another plane of existence."

"I'm confused."

Van Clief pulled his car along the curb outside Simon's house. "Okay, I understand there's a lot to grasp and it all sounds like voodoo or witchcraft. But this is very real. There is a physical reality we all live within. In this reality, our bodies age, grow old, and eventually die, but that isn't our truth. There is a spiritual plane as well, and it has many layers." He pointed at Simon and then himself. "Our goal is a return to the layer where God is supreme. It is our birthright and the purpose for this life. Some are not so lucky. Their spirits may be trapped here, or on one of the other layers. They exist for eternity with no connection to God, which is basically the same as Hell. Come to the session on Saturday."

"I will."

“If you do not, don’t believe the entity that attempted to capture Kelly and you will stop. The only way to stop it is to defeat it utterly. If you value her life or your own, be there on Saturday.”

Simon opened the door, stepped out, and grabbed his backpack. “What happens if I get sick or something?”

Van Clief laughed. “I hope one day soon you realize the true nature of life, Simon. You have an important role to play in this universe of ours. I’ll see you Saturday.” Simon closed the door and headed toward his house. Van Clief drove away.