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JEREMY SAVES THE WORLD

BOOK ONE

The Shrink and the Psycho

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Preface

About the supernatural and spiritual awakening

The idea for the book you are holding in your hands came to me years ago, when I read in a newspaper about a tragedy that befell the family of a Canadian psychologist. The novel was originally intended as a crime-suspense thriller, but the story evolved into something quite superior on its own. To my surprise, when I finished it, I realized that to advertise it correctly, I had to add the word 'supernatural' before 'thriller' because, alongside the principal crime storyline, it also dealt with various paranormal phenomena and creatures, such as angels and demons.

Since the term "supernatural" made little sense to me, I needed to justify its use, so I looked up its interpretation. Merriam-Webster, one of the most respected US-English dictionaries, gives the following definitions:

"1. of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible, observable universe, especially: of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit, or devil.

"2. departing from what is usual or normal, especially so as to appear to transcend the laws of nature."

These interpretations assume we are well aware of and understand the specific laws of nature in our *observable* universe; however, other creatures and laws exist *beyond* our *visible* world that we cannot yet explain. In other words, it is just another way of saying, *I don't understand it*.

Even the assertion that we do comprehend our visible surroundings sounds highly presumptuous to me. As someone who has studied biology, biochemistry, biophysics, chemistry, anatomy, history, anthropology, and philosophy at university level, I can assure you that what we consider solid knowledge is merely descriptions of specific processes, with no plausible explanation for why they occur. An excellent example of this is the biological sciences. A biologist can attest to the complexity of the cell and the highly sophisticated molecular processes that sustain and determine our lives, but cannot explain why they occur or what drives them. These so-called scientists have reduced the origin of life to simple chemical reactions and complex human behavior to random brain impulses. Such nonsense being labeled

as “science” is what forced me to quit my medical studies years ago, as I could not understand how such venerable, brilliant researchers, with so many years of study, could agree on and teach such absurdities.

However, quantum physics has recently begun to grasp the big picture and has even acknowledged the existence of a higher, invisible level called universal consciousness. And just like the 30 trillion cells that form our human body make a monolithic, sentient organism, life must be part of the one whole, conscious force that rules everything in the universe. Otherwise, it is impossible to explain the complex processes occurring within us, such as feelings, hormones, aging, or the mystery that makes our hearts beat ceaselessly, sustaining our lives. Neither can we understand the brain’s structure, which is so unimaginably complicated that the theory of our accidental formation looks ridiculous. The perfect order in nature, and the behavior of sentient beings, is also inexplicable without considering the invisible level of awareness mentioned above.

Speaking of which, let’s examine the complexity of human behavior—another mystery that has no plausible explanation, despite all the tons of books, research, and billions of dollars spent studying how our brain works. Let’s consider a simple question—would anyone disagree that killing and wars are terrible things? And yet, wars are as old as humanity itself. Even nowadays, after two disastrous World Wars in which about 100 million people perished, we have learned nothing. Since 1945, you can add tens of millions more dead in hundreds of wars, with the possibility of World War III brewing. But these military conflicts are only the tip of the iceberg, and the final result of the violence and self-destruction that is so deeply rooted in man’s mind. Thus, murders, thefts, and rapes have been a part of society since time immemorial. According to statistics, somebody gets killed worldwide every minute. Suicides? Even worse, every 40 seconds. Rapes and thefts? Perhaps every second. So, why can’t anybody stop this horrific brutality? And most importantly, why does humanity never learn from its mistakes and continue to follow this self-destructive path?

Apart from violence and our atavistic, predatory demeanor, the statistics about mental illnesses are no less devastating, and do not speak well of our Western society, which is now all but thriving. According to the sources, between 30% and 40% of people have had some mental disorder during their lifetime. Obviously, in terms of medical and scientific achievements, these are catastrophic results.

My point here is that we must agree that something's wrong with the way we behave and with our perception of the world. So, what do we need to do to correct that? And most importantly, how does modern science cope with its failures?

I'll tell you for free: it doesn't cope at all. It buries its head in the sand like an ostrich, and it denies and discards in the periphery of our mind all those 'incomprehensible' things, classifying them as 'uncanny,' 'inexplicable,' 'weird,' or simply 'rubbish.' Thus, more than a billion nonbelievers worldwide reject the reality of metaphysical phenomena, such as angels, demons, and God, labeling them as nonsense and preferring to stick to their visible, physical world. Their principal argument is that there is no scientific evidence, so they choose to ignore it. These people were the main reason I had to label this thriller '*supernatural*.' It was necessary to warn them that the story might push them out of their comfort zone and prompt discussions of topics they consider 'nonsensical.'

The problem is that such things do exist, and the proof is no less significant than that of other scientific branches. For instance, in the novel, I mention only two well-documented, proven seers with superhuman abilities: Edgar Cayce (also known as the American Sleeping Prophet) and Baba Vanga,[1] referred to as the Nostradamus of the Balkans. Cayce's predictions and healing diagnoses have been attested to by over 14,000 documented cases, some of which were astonishing for their lifesaving and healing outcomes.

As for Baba Vanga, she had around 7,000 scientifically documented cases in which she told her visitors stupendous details of their past, present, and future. She could even predict the day of their death with such confidence that it seemed she was reading from a book. She described aliens, similar to angels, coming from a planet she called Vamfim, and talked about God as a superpower that rules the world, thereby explaining the impeccable harmony in nature. The accuracy of her predictions was around 80%. In such overwhelming numbers, how can one dismiss something as nonsense? What additional evidence and proof are we referring to?

The stories of angels and demons have endured for thousands of years across various cultures and beliefs. Even today, many monks can attest to their existence, not to mention the many written testimonies from not only religious leaders but also contemporary scientists and

[1] A Bulgarian seer and healer who was able to tell the future, travel through time, and contact dead spirits and alien entities that spoke through her when she was in trans. She was recognized as a phenomenon by the international community, and the result was the development of the Institute of Suggestology, which was designed to study her supernatural abilities.

reporters, such as the psychiatrist M.D. Raymond Moody[2] and the journalist Pierre Jovanovic.[3] Here, I can also add my humble personal experience and reassure you that these entities are as real as you are. They can be seen and heard, can guide you or manipulate you, as they do throughout your entire life. The question is where the stubborn denial of their existence comes from, and what blocks our minds from accepting the truth.

Besides the creatures mentioned above, the book explores some other paranormal phenomena, such as reincarnation, bilocation,[4] supernatural human abilities, and the potential connection between mental illnesses and demonic influence. The purpose of dreams (another thing science fails to explain), their impact on our daily lives, and the role of Christianity in chasing the demons, have also been considered. Again, the evidence for some of them, and particularly for reincarnation, is overwhelming and documented by serious scientists, including the psychiatrists Dr. Brian Weiss, Dr. Ian Stevenson, and Dr. Jim Tucker.

The narrative also incorporates some unconventional points of view that are not widely accepted by mainstream historians, such as the presence of Atlantis or the claim that the Sphinx was built by Atlanteans 12,000 years ago. As an archaeologist, I agree that there is no solid evidence to support such theories, but such hypotheses exist. Considering how little we know about our origins, we need to be open-minded and attentive to every piece of information that could shed light on the enigma of our ancestry.

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasize that the metaphysical phenomena described in the book are not mere fantasy; they are grounded in well-documented facts and real-life events. There are no miraculous occurrences, folks; there are only different levels of knowledge, and for now, we are not advanced enough to truly see the big picture. But there is no need to explain everything either, for we must accept our human limitations. What is essential, however, is to attempt to bridge the gap between our visible, material world and the invisible, spiritual one, which are deeply intertwined and affect every sphere of our lives. The connection between these two worlds is known as spiritual awakening, and this book aims to guide you toward it while entertaining you. Hopefully, it will succeed in its mission.

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[2] Raymond Moody, Life After Life: the investigation of a phenomenon – survival of bodily death, San Francisco, CA: Harper, San Francisco, 2001; Raymond Moody, *Reflections on Life After Life*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1977.

[3] Pierre Jovanovic, Enquête Sur L'Existence Des Anges Gardiens (Aventure Secrète). Paris, 1993.

[4] Ability to be in two places at the same time.

Prologue

3000 BC
Memphis, Ancient Egypt

Princess Ankhet smiled in her sleep, dreaming of walking on fluffy clouds toward a magnificent gate flanked by white marble columns, whose extremities disappeared into the blue infinity. She was about to cross the gate when a gigantic creature with four heads towered before her. Three of them were animal heads: a lion with a fiery mane, an eagle, and a black bull, crowned with curling horns that shone with the sun's fire. The fourth was a man's face, ageless and stern, his eyes filled with stars. The body constantly shifted its form according to the faces, appearing sometimes humanlike before shifting to an animal's or an eagle's shape. The creature turned ceaselessly, flapping four wings covered with eyes and whirling a pillar of fire in front of it. The princess watched it in a reverie, hypnotized by its might and beauty.

"No mortal is allowed to enter here!" boomed its voice, resembling distant thunder. "You were summoned because you were entrusted with a vital mission. Follow the lead of the messenger and obey his orders."

The creature spun around, approaching her, and Princess Ankhet woke up with a gasp in her huge ebony bed. The torches in the chamber had long since burned low, leaving only the moon's pale glow filtering through the carved stone lattice. Still dizzy and confused by her vivid dream, she propped herself up on an elbow and let out a faint cry. The room was filled with a soft light that gradually grew more intense until it took the form of a tall human silhouette, clad in shining, flowing garments resembling shifting clouds and light. From its back, in the place of shoulder blades, two wings unfurled, vast as sails upon the boats of the Nile and shimmering with a mix of white and fiery hues. She looked at the chiseled, enchantingly beautiful face, framed by golden hair, and met the creature's bright, piercing eyes. Overwhelmed with awe, the princess slid down from her bed and touched the cool floor with her forehead.

"Goddess Maat!?" she whispered, but it sounded more like a question than an affirmation. As a High Priestess of Ptah,[5] she knew all the deities in the Kemet[6] pantheon. Yet, this magnificent creature matched no description, so her assumption was made because of the wings.

"My name is *Mai-en-Neter,*"[7] his mighty voice resounded inside Princess Ankhet, making her bones vibrate. "I am the messenger you were told to follow. Do not be afraid, Daughter of the King! I'll lead you to the vizier's secret storage room, where you'll find the *Heart of Atum.*"[8]

As if in a dream, Princess Ankhet rose, slipped into her kalasiris,[9] took two steps towards the entrance, then stopped short, realizing the gravity of Mai-en-Neter's words.

"*The Heart of Atum,"* she uttered. "Impossible! It is supposed to be in the temple."

"Tjaty[10] Merka stole the sacred slab. He intends to deliver it to the forces of darkness."

"But why?"

"Because he is possessed by *Kah-Sehdjet*[11] and does not realize what he's doing."

"The mighty demon *Kah-Sehdjet*? The child of Kek and Kauket?"[12] whispered the princess, overwhelmed with fear.

"No more questions, Daughter of Djer![13] Follow me," ordered *Mai-en-Neter.* He glided several steps and Ankhet staggered after him. The palace was quiet and sleepy. The flickering flames of the torches attached to the walls illuminated the dim corridor, flanked by a high colonnade. The princess noticed guards lying on the floor here and there and realized that the usual distant echoes of the night watch's sandal-clad feet were replaced by quiet snoring. She arched her eyebrows in astonishment—the punishment for sleeping on watch was so severe that it was very rare to witness such a disgrace.

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[5] Ancient Egyptian creator god.
[6] The ancient name of Egypt
[7] Lion of God
[8] Atum was the first God and the creator of the world in ancient Egyptian mythology.
[9] A long linen dress worn by women in ancient Egypt.
[10] Vizier.
[11] The Spirit of the Serpent.
[12] Kek and Kauket were deities, representing primordial darkness, obscurity, and chaos. Kek was the male aspect, and Kauket his female counterpart, with both names referring to darkness. They were often depicted as snake-headed figures.
[13] The third pharaoh of the First Dynasty, who ruled for about 40 years.

"Don't worry about the guards. They won't wake until I say," she heard *Mai-en-Neter's* voice speaking inside her head.

Now fully awake, Princess Ankhet processed the recent information, her thoughts whirling like angry wasps.

I hope I'm dreaming, and tomorrow I won't need to tell everyone that Tjaty Merka is a thief and a traitor! Because if I do, I can never marry Kaneb, she thought.

They had just walked past the chambers of Tjaty Merka's elder son, and Ankhet blushed, remembering the wild sex she had had with Kaneb two days earlier. Pretty i*ndecent for a priestess,* she thought, then she focused on the glowing silhouette ahead.

As they approached the vizier's dwelling, *Mai-en-Neter* turned left. They passed two snoring soldiers and took a short corridor that finished in a dead end with a thick mud-brick wall.

"Find the loose link," he said.

Ankhet kneeled and ran her hand all over the wall's smooth surface. She felt a miniature protuberance about half a cubit[14] from the floor and pressed it. The brick moved, and she heard a clicking sound inside. A section in the wall opened with a screech, large enough for the princess to slide inside a dark area that was illuminated only by the *Mai-en-Neter*'s glowing body.

The room was long and narrow, with a low ceiling supported by palm beams. Along the walls stood reed shelves, stacked with ceramic jars, linen-wrapped bundles, and wooden archival boxes. The messenger pointed to a huge, sealed coffer at the far end of the chamber, carved from imported cedar. Princess Ankhet tried to lift the heavy lid, but it did not budge. She looked helplessly at *Mai-en-Neter* and heard his mighty voice boom, "Step back!"

She jumped backward and the lid burst open, splinters flying everywhere. She shielded her face, but miraculously, not a single chip touched her. Ankhet approached cautiously and looked inside. The chest was filled with precious objects—gold armlets, bracelets, rings, ivory knives, amulets, perfume vessels of obsidian and alabaster, some epigraphs carved on stone, and many scrolls of linen or papyrus. And there, erected in the corner, stood the oval slab called *the Heart of Atum.*

[14] Ancient Egyptian measure, about 0.5 meters.

Made of some crystalline substance, the slab, hued in shades ranging from aquamarine to turquoise blue, was constantly changing color. Despite these apparent instabilities, though, it was the firmest, most resistant crystal on the planet. Years ago, there had been a rebellion during which some dark cult followers had tried to destroy the sacred plate. It turned out that it was impossible to scratch it or break it. Thus, nobody could explain how, in the middle of the slab, a seven-coiled spiral was depicted, encircled by carved symbols in an unknown language. They appeared to form an inscription that filled the entire surface, revolving around the spiral in three more circles. Moreover, the engraved glyphs sometimes pulsated and glowed from within as if alive, while the spiral seemed to turn slowly on its own—another miracle without a plausible explanation, but worthy of praise and worship all the same.

As a high-ranking priestess, Ankhet knew the story of *the Heart of Atum.* Legend had it that Atum, the god who created the world, engraved his true name on his heart at the very moment of creation and sealed it in stone, marking the sign of eternity. The three circles with symbols were believed to be his name and a sacred incantation that he had given to the first people. The saying went that any man who succeeded in reading it would summon God, and the heavens would open. God's grace would pour over people, who would then return to their God-like form and reveal their true nature, which was presently hidden under the oppression of demons. The light would chase away the darkness and lead to the purification of all humanity. People would start living forever, in harmony, in a place without borders, violence, and disease, as in the ancient times of the world's creation. They would worship only the One True God and lack nothing, as they could create everything with their imagination alone. Ankhet was taught that the sacred crystal had been brought to Kemet long ago, by men who claimed to be descendants of the first humans. They had fled their native land due to a devastating natural disaster and settled in the Nile region, bringing their remarkable knowledge to Kemet's society. Rumor had it that the first Pharaoh, Ankhet's great-grandfather Narmer, had used the magic of this same slab to rise in power. Since then, it had been kept inside the Great Temple of Ptah, where it was protected and considered the most important relic in the entire kingdom.

"Get the sacred stone," *Mai-en-Neter* ordered. Princess Ankhet grabbed it and lifted it with effort.

"It's pretty heavy," she complained, and put it on the floor.

"Look beneath the chest now," said *Mai-en-Neter*.

The princess pushed the chest and noticed a rectangular trapdoor with a metal ring set in a deep groove so that it did not protrude above floor level. She carved it out and strained with all her might to heave the lid open. As she drew it aside, damp air hit her in the face and she retched, suffocated by a foul odor floating upward from below. She looked into the black hole's darkness and felt goosebumps crawl across her skin.

"This is a hidden passage that leads to the riverbank," Mai-en-Neter's voice vibrated within her. "You'll find a skiff waiting for you there. Get in the boat and let it take you."

"I won't go down there!" Princess Ankhet was shaking with fear. "There's something terrible lurking in the darkness. You should have chosen a strong and brave man. I am a king's daughter, after all."

"You are stronger than any man I know! It must be you, for you were the first priestess of *The Hearth of Atum*, chosen by the *Eternal* in the times your kind appeared. Your destiny is forever connected to the sacred stone. Don't be afraid, Daughter of Djer. Nothing will happen to you as long as I protect you. The demons try to scare you and dissuade you from accomplishing your mission. Go now, and I'll guide you through the maze." There was an unmistakable urgency in *Mai-en-Neter*'s voice.

Princess Ankhet did not move.

"I'm not going down there for anything in the world," she whispered, shaking like a leaf.

Without a word, Mai-en-Neter glided towards her and disappeared. A second later, Ankhet's eyelids flew open, and her eyes shone with iron determination. A hot wave crept from her womb upward, transforming her from a frail princess into a mighty giant. She felt so powerful that for a moment she had the impression that her body had swelled and her limbs were elongated. She glanced at the slab that lay on the floor, bent down, and lifted it with no effort, as if it were as light as a feather. She passed through the opening in the floor, descended some invisible stairs and, with a petrified heart, sank into the impenetrable blackness.

It was terrible inside. The unbearable stench of mold and moisture, mixed with the putrid odor of dead animals, made Princess Ankhet dizzy. Thick spiderwebs clung to her face. Rats squealed and scurried, snakes hissed, and scorpions crawled around her feet, but she was unmoved. Her sharper vision and hearing enabled her to navigate the tunnel with perfect clarity. Questioning how this could be, she also discovered that her body emitted light in the darkness.

Even stranger, she recalled events from millions of years ago and possessed knowledge that surpassed mortal comprehension. Astounded, she looked at the slab she was clutching.

Am I feeling so powerful because of this sacred stone? Or am I about to become a goddess? As soon as this thought crossed her mind, a familiar voice shattered her hopes.

"No, I'm just using your body," *Mai-en-Neter* spoke inside her head. "Take the left branch here," he added, and she turned left at the fork. After about another 300 cubits, she heard water running nearby, but the tunnel suddenly came to a dead end. After wandering for some time, a whiff of fresh air hit her, revealing a small, almost invisible crack in the rock, overgrown with thick vegetation. Princess Ankhet slid through the opening and found herself on the Nile riverbank, in an area densely overgrown with reeds and bulrushes.

The Nile stretched before her, black as onyx, its surface rippling with the reflection of the stars. The slight breeze fondled her face. Hidden among the reeds, a single-seated papyrus skiff bobbed in the water.

"I cannot drive this," Akhmet complained. The supernatural force she had felt until that moment was gradually fading, and her legs were softening.

"Get onto the boat and lie down!" *Mai-en-Neter's* voice echoed in her ears. "*The Heart of Atum* will show you the way to a hidden place beneath *Hery-Sesheta-Neheh."*[15]

"What was that?" said the princess aloud.

"This is the real name of what you call *Hor-em-akhet,"*[16] the messenger explained. "Don't lose more time now… go!"

Princess Ankhet stepped onto the boat, which stood firmly as if it were on solid ground. She lay down, put the slab onto her chest and, overwhelmed with emotion, closed her eyes. Propelled by an unseen force, the skiff detached from the shore and was taken by the current. The river's cool dampness made her shiver, but the crystal radiated heat, warming her.

The river carried the boat swiftly northward, away from *Ineb-Hedj*[17] and toward *Imentet*.[18] A fragrance of water and faraway date palms wafted in the air. The princess drifted off, lulled by the steady splash of ripples, the boat's gentle sway, and the general quietude, which was only occasionally disturbed by a leaping fish or the slap of a crocodile's tail. When

[15] Guardian of the Secret of Eternity
[16] Horus of the Horizon (the Egyptian name of the Great Sphinx of Giza).
[17]The White Fortress (the ancient name of Memphis).
[18] One of the ancient names of the Giza Plateau, meaning "The West."

she woke up, the upper edge of the majestic sun appeared on the horizon, chasing the gloom away and casting a golden glare on the Nile's shimmering surface.

Ankhet moved the slab aside, rose into a sitting position, and looked around. The skiff rested, caught by reeds near the water's edge. The princess felt exhausted; there was nothing left of her previous superpower. She scanned the surroundings for *Mai-en-Neter,* hoping he would appear and give her strength, but he was nowhere to be seen.

She glanced at her legs, covered with bruises she had gotten while crossing the tunnel. Her hands weren't better, and her kalasiris was tattered and dirty.

I certainly don't look like the king's daughter anymore, she thought. *It's time to stop this stupid game and return to the palace, although it would be embarrassing for me if my servants saw me like this.*

Desperate and frustrated, and on the verge of tears, she grabbed the sacred stone and rose abruptly, but this time the skiff swayed violently and capsized.

Drenched to the bone but still gripping the slab, she climbed out of the water and pushed her way through the thick vegetation. When she finally emerged from the tangled greenery, the plateau cliffs loomed above the sand. And there, regally outlined against the blue sky, stood the Great Guardian of the Horizon, *Hor-em-akhet.*

According to the legend, *The Guardian* was built many years ago, in Zep Tepi,[19] when gods walked in flesh and mixed with the First People. From their relations were born giants, the mighty, glorious half-humans, half-gods. They were so strong that they could lift a hippopotamus with one hand, snap its neck with the other, and eat it as one meal. These people were venerated as equals to the gods. They built *Hor-em-akhet* to welcome the rising sun in its divine personification of the solar god Horus, and to keep his eternal secrets from the abhorrent serpent Apep.

At the sight of the crouching colossus with a lion's body and a human face, Ankhet fell to her knees and touched her forehead to the ground in a sign of profound humility. She remained in this position for a long time, filled with awe, as something stirred inside her, creating a connection with the majestic creature. It was like a thread had formed in her solar plexus, an invisible string linking her to the Guardian, as if he were beckoning her to approach. She lifted her head and met the beast's eyes, deep and brilliant, as if they consisted of thousands

[19] The First Time

of stars. She rose, grabbed the slab and, limping slightly, started along the winding path toward him.

The rough track hurt her feet, and the sparse shrubs scratched her, but she felt no pain. Bewitched, she felt an inexplicable, fiery passion. Despite the heavy plate she carried, she did not slow down until she had almost climbed the plateau. Suddenly, she heard a lion's growl and stopped short, panting for air, as she looked in the direction of the ominous sound.

There was a boulder on her left that seemed to be part of the plateau's monolithic massif, yet it differed from the other rocks.

She heard *Mai-en-Neter's* voice. "Behind the rock is hidden the entrance to the underground maze below the Guardian of the Eternal Secret. Go there and follow the cord, which will bring you to the place where you'll hide the *Heart of Atum*."

"What cord?" Ankhet uttered. She looked at the immense stone that was half-buried in the ground and said, "There is nothing here."

In response, a mighty quake shook the ground, and the rock moved about a cubit, detaching itself from the plateau and making a crack large enough for her to slide into. She approached and peeped in, still hesitating, when a sudden gust of wind pushed her in the back, and she stepped inside the cave.

"Have no fear of darkness, Daughter of Djer. Just trust your inner intuition," *Mai-en-Neter* said.

She turned, attempting to return, but the crack she had slid through had disappeared. She stood for a moment, petrified, in complete darkness, dread creeping from her heart and paralyzing her entire body.

"I'll die here, alone and eaten alive," she whispered, and tears rolled down her cheeks. She squatted to put the slab on the ground, for it had suddenly grown too heavy in her hands, when she felt the same thread that led her to the Guardian materializing in the pit of her stomach. She stood up, put the slab on her shoulder, and obediently followed the string's lead, taking one slow step after another, and groping before her as if she were blind. The hissing of snakes and the bats' flapping wings terrified her. The stink of mold and damp made her sick, but she slowly advanced, deeper and deeper into the plateau's heart. Dizzy and disoriented, she found herself constantly hitting her head on the hanging stalactites, but she continued wandering, fumbling, and groping around for a long time, convinced that her end had come.

"Never in all my nights did I ever dream that the *Great Shai*[20] would have prepared such a fate for me," she mumbled, sobbing.

After wandering in a labyrinth of caves for what seemed an eternity, she slid sideways through a narrow crevice and found herself inside what appeared to be a small room. She was able to advance only two to three steps in each direction, so enclosed was the area. After a moment, she noticed that the air here was different—dry and warm, in contrast to the damp, cool cave current. She dropped the slab on the floor to rest a bit.

It's nice here; warm and cozy, she thought, as her eyelids grew heavy. She was about to drift off when she started. A claustrophobic fit overcame her and she jumped up, groping frantically in the impenetrable darkness to find the crack through which she had entered. But it was nowhere to be found, and the growing desperation was pressing on her chest, paralyzing her thoughts. Finally, she hit her head on a small protuberance, fell to her knees, and started screaming at the top of her lungs.

This is the end, she thought, and she stretched out on the stony floor, ready to die, as she wept in distress, her body rocking with sobs. And then, something incredible happened—the spiral on the sacred stone and the wall in front of her began to glow simultaneously, bathing the entire room in light. Ankhet looked up, flabbergasted, watching the spiral turning and the slab's color changing from deep green to bright blue as it illuminated the room. She was in a tiny niche, with no stalactites or stalagmites. The entire wall and ceiling were covered with beautiful, colorful pictures, forming sophisticated compositions. They had clearly been painted with incredible skill, creating an illusion of depth unknown in her people's art.

Just in front of her were depicted several pyramids and tall, cylindrical, multi-story buildings, among which men rode gigantic beasts that were unidentifiable to her. There were flying objects in the sky and creatures with wings and heads resembling the sun. On the ground below, people wore gorgeous clothes, crowns, and royal insignia; others were less attractive, presented as slaves with chains around their necks. In the central part of the wall, an old man with a chest-length white beard stood on an elevated podium and clutched at what appeared to be an oval-shaped object—or at least it had done before, but it was now missing, leaving only an empty hollow visible between his arms. It was from this cavity that the light illuminating the

[20] God of fate.

cave streamed. Before the old man, a multitude of people were kneeling, touching the ground with their foreheads.

Ankhet lifted her eyes. The entire ceiling was covered with constellations, some of which she immediately recognized as Sah[21] and Mesekhtiu,[22] but most of the others were unknown to her.

She turned left and gasped. *"Hor-em-akhet!"* she uttered, covering her mouth with her hand and kneeling in awe. The magnificent beast, part lion, part god, with a chiseled human face, took up the entire wall. It crouched as it gazed toward the light between the old man's hands. In contrast to *Hor-em-akhet*, this one had two enormous wings attached to its back.

On the opposite wall, to the right of Ankhet, an island with beautiful mountains was painted, surrounded by a large blue sea. Various fish, big and small, and strange sea creatures with long necks and plump bodies swam around the island, which was being encircled by colorful birds.

As she turned around, she let out another gasp. Painted on the wall behind her was the scenery she had dreamed of the night before. The blue sky with fluffy white clouds and the pillars, guarded by the same strange creature with four faces and four wings, were identical; only this time, it held a fiery sword. Beyond the pillars stretched a breathtaking garden filled with flowers and trees heavy with fruit. Birds, butterflies, and some tiny, winged creatures with human bodies fluttered around the blossoms. In the heart of the garden towered a single, majestic tree. Its branches arched toward the heavens in a graceful crown, their tips disappearing into the high, eternal blue. Leaves larger than a man's hand glittered like gold. Its fruits were like glowing flames. Some of them were hanging, while others were detached, rising toward the sky. A shimmering light surrounded the entire tree. Despite all the trouble she had been through, Ankhet was delighted and couldn't tear her eyes away from the incredible painting. She did not know how long she had been standing there in admiration, but a sudden stab of pain in the chest brought her back to reality.

"The Heart of Atum," she whispered, directing her attention to the light coming from the wall.

[21] The Orion Constellation.
[22] The Big Dipper.

"The hole between his hands is the same oval form," she mumbled as she bent and lifted the slab that emitted the same soft light. She approached the wall and put *the Heart of Atum* in the empty space. There was a faint click as the stone fit perfectly, thus becoming a natural part of the composition. Watching from afar, one could never have guessed that this was, in fact, a detachable plate rather than a simple painted picture.

As the crystal found its place, the light intensified, and the spiral and the inscription began to turn, each in the opposite direction. Princess Ankhet stared at the spiral's center, hypnotized, when all of a sudden, scenes from her previous life flashed before her eyes. She was a beautiful, red-haired woman standing on a marble podium before an immense building with many columns. She clutched the *Heart of Atum* in front of a sea of people who swayed, extending to the horizon. Lifting the plate overhead, she made them all kneel and bow their heads to the ground.

The scene then changed abruptly and she was riding an enormous, terribly smelling beast with a long neck and a scaled hide. They were passing by some crystalline buildings when, deep inside her, the old knowledge slowly rose to the surface and she remembered everything about God and His name, the old language, and the incantation written on the sacred stone. As she opened her mouth to utter the name of God, thunder rattled through the room and light exploded in with blinding brightness. *The Lion of God* materialized, towering above her and covering the entire wall with his body and spreading wings.

"Don't you dare say the *Eternal*'s name!" he said.

"Why not? I remembered…"

"The time has not come yet," said *Mai-en-Neter* sternly, and all recollections were erased in the blink of an eye from Princess Ankhet's memory.

"Wait! What have you done! I could have saved humanity..."

"Not yet! The *Heart of Atum* must stay hidden here for many years because people still have much to learn. They're not ready now to invoke God yet. First, the Prince of Peace must come and teach them how to live and be worthy of God. Then, after an eternity and many lessons learned, the time will come for them to return to their true nature. But for now, let's focus on your destiny. There is something far more important you need to do now."

"Yes, like get out of here and return to the palace," said the princess in her usual, commanding tone.

"Forget about the palace, Ankhet, Daughter of Djer. You must never go back there," said *Mai-en-Neter* firmly. "The vizier will soon learn what you have done and will seek to kill you. Your destiny has shifted irreversibly. Ankhet, the Daughter of the King, no longer exists. From now on, your name will be *Kha'i-Netjer*.[23] Go to *Ineb-Hedj* and find *Tia-Hekayt.*[24] She will take care of you."

"Take care of me? What for?"

"You are carrying two children inside your womb, and it's crucial that they are born. She can help you with this."

"I have twins?" Ankhet uttered.

"You conceived a boy and a girl two days ago. You must do everything to give them birth and protect them from evil."

With these words, *Mai-en-Neter* disappeared and the room sank into impenetrable darkness once again. Ankhet slumped on the cave floor, slowly absorbing the news that she was pregnant but homeless. "What am I supposed to do now?" she whispered. "My whole life is in the palace… all my beloved relatives and friends, my parents, even my slaves and servants… who will help me give birth to my children? And how will I raise them alone, without their father? I love Kaneb so much; how will I live without him? Let's say I do find a way to get in touch with him and let him know his father seeks to kill me, will he even believe me? He must know about his children, though. What a mess my life has become all of a sudden… Divine Ptah, what have I done to anger you so much? What actions of mine have provoked such a terrible destiny to befall me?" The world started spinning before her eyes, and she fell unconscious.

When she came around, the first thing she felt was the scorching sun on her skin. A second later, a cacophony of strange sounds exploded, and she pressed her ears to muffle them out. She opened her eyes, only to yell in pain and shut them again.

It was in the middle of the day, and the sun, bright and unmerciful, cast sweltering heat over the *Ineb-Hedj's* city market. After the silence and darkness of the cave, the din of the marketplace was as unbearable as the heat itself. Ankhet, utterly worn out, lay on the ground near a stall covered with reed baskets and straw mats. As she summoned all her strength to get

[23] Manifestation of God.
[24] Tia the Sorceress

up, the events of the previous night flooded her memory and a pang of anxiety hit her at the gravity of the situation.

Alone in the big city, with two children in my womb and no one to count on… except this old woman… what was her name?

She rose slowly, desperate and dizzy from all the cries of haggling merchants and children's shrieks, mixed with the brays of donkeys, the grunts of camels, the clucking of fowls, and hundreds of other crazy sounds. Scores of stalls made of mudbrick, wood, or reed mats were scattered around, some of them with framed sun shelters. The scent of freshly baked bread, Nile fish, and aromatic oils mingled with the dust that had been kicked up by the sheer weight of foot traffic.

Ankhet glanced toward a nearby man, wondering how to strike up a conversation, when somebody pushed her rudely in the back.

"What are you doing here, tramp? Looking for trouble?" said a young, tall woman whose rough face bore cruel eyes and a knife scar on her left cheek. She was scarcely dressed in a short tunic that revealed far more skin than good manners allowed. Two other similar-looking women sniggered behind her.

Ankhet, who had never seen such clothing in the palace, was disgusted.

Such a rabble, she thought.

"This is our territory here. Scram!" said the scar-faced one rudely.

"Oh, I'm not intending to stay here," said Ankhet peacefully. "I'm just looking for a woman by the name… I forgot her name. Some old sorceress."

"Tia-Hekayt?"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Ankhet.

"Why, everybody knows her," the rude woman snorted, eyeing Ankhet suspiciously. "How come you don't? Where are you coming from?"

"I'm just a foreigner, passing by to see your great city," Ankhet lied. "I heard many exciting things about this woman, and it piqued my curiosity, so I wanted to see her in person."

"Yeah, she's really something, the old hag," one of the other girls said, and her friend giggled, as if they knew some kind of funny secret about her. "You can find her at the other end of the city." She waved northwest.

“Foreigner? Travel alone? My eye!” said the first one, watching her spitefully. “I don’t know what your problem is, but heed my advice—if you want to go there, find some man to protect you because might land up in some brothel and that, believe me, you won’t like at all… Or will you?”

The other two sneered. The scar-faced woman pushed her.

“Now go away while we’re still in a good mood.”

Ankhet stepped aside and hurried northwest, trying to suppress her tears.

“And to think that, until yesterday, I was a princess!”

She burst into sobs while setting off northwest toward her new destiny.

Chapter 1

Dr. Taylor

Tuesday, 02/24/2015
Chicago, IL

The internal line buzzed, diverting Dr. Scott Jackson's attention away from the file he was reading. He pressed the button.

"Yes, Janis."

"Excuse me, Dr. Jackson. My niece just arrived."

Dr. Jackson glanced at his watch.

"Good. Dr. Taylor is coming at nine-thirty, right?"

"That's right, sir. We have about twenty minutes."

"Okay. Bring her over here."

"Thank you, sir."

The leather-buttoned Chesterfield-style door leading to the waiting room opened, and two women entered the spacious room lit by sunshine streaming through a large window. They passed a worn, pale-brown sofa and a round glass table flanked by two womb chairs, and headed toward a massive desk on the right, where Dr. Jackson sat, working on a slim laptop.

"Dr. Jackson, let me introduce my niece, Olivia," said Janis. She was around sixty, but still physically fit, looking sharp and confident in her gray business suit. Olivia was a tall, slim brunette in her late twenties, wearing a straight, knee-length black skirt, a white shirt, and a dark blue blazer. As Dr. Jackson rose from his chair to meet them, her lips parted in a shy smile. She stretched out her hand, and the physician took it, smiling back. Her hand was warm, and her grip firm, in contrast to her delicate physique. Impressed, Dr. Jackson met her striking green eyes, and a jolting bolt of electricity ran through his body. *She doesn't seem so shy after all. Is she ogling me or am I just imagining things?* he thought as he held her steady gaze. At thirty-eight and bald as an egg, he knew that the best of his charm was gone along with his gorgeous blond hair. However, his dark-green eyes behind gold wire-rimmed glasses and short, boxed beard, combined with his sturdy body, still made him look intelligent and sexy.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Olivia. Please, take a seat," he waved toward the pair of armchairs before his desk, as his gaze slid discreetly toward the young woman's ample bust,

which was sharply outlined against her slim body. It had been an eternity since he had felt such excitement when he looked at a woman.

"The pleasure is entirely mine, sir," chirped Olivia.

"Your aunt surprised me with her retirement announcement after working for me for the last eight years," Dr. Jackson said. "However, I'm glad that she could find someone reliable to replace her. Please tell me about yourself, and why do you think you're suitable for this job?"

"I brought my résumé as requested, sir, but I can summarize the main points." Olivia handed him a sheet of paper. "So, I got my bachelor's degree in public relations, after which I enrolled in the master's program at Columbia University. Due to unexpected circumstances, I was forced to skip a year, and I need to work to support myself."

"I assume you're going back to school in the fall?" asked Dr. Jackson.

"I am, and securing this job would be immensely helpful while I await the university's scholarship decision. As you can see, I have excellent communication, computer, and organizational skills. Moreover, I'm fluent in Spanish, and I'm adept at multitasking and speed typing."

Dr. Jackson skimmed through the résumé, hardly listening to her. Judging from the commencement of her high school studies, she should be around twenty-eight or twenty-nine.

"Well, I see you're overqualified for the secretary's position, and it won't be a challenge for you," he said. "There are some specifics related to medical terminology, but Janis can help you with that. However, I need to ensure that you will stay at least until September. Thus, I'll have time to find someone else. Can I count on you?"

"Absolutely!" Olivia said.

"Perfect! Did Janis already explain to you what the job is about?" He glanced at the secretary.

"I did," Janis confirmed.

"Good. There are some standard procedures, such as conducting a background check and processing your applicant file. It'll take a few days, but as far as I'm concerned, you've got the job. Are you available to start by the end of the month?"

"I am," replied Olivia, glowing.

"The most important things in our environment are discretion and confidentiality. Keep that in mind, please," said Dr. Jackson.

"I will," Olivia nodded.

"As I mentioned yesterday, I can use the remaining days of this week for her training," said Janis. "Thus, the transition will be as smooth as possible."

"Excellent! Proceed with your best judgment for the clinic," Dr. Jackson said as everyone stood.

"Congratulations on your new job," he smiled and reached out to shake Olivia's hand again.

"Thank you so much, Dr. Jackson," Olivia said, smiling back. "You won't regret it!"

The bell rang.

"I think Dr. Taylor has just arrived," said Janis.

"You can let her in," said Dr. Jackson.

"Thank you for hiring Olivia," said Janis, and they both left. Two minutes later, Dr. Taylor entered.

"Sara!" Dr. Jackson walked toward her and hugged her. "It's been a while!"

"Rather an eternity," replied Sara. "I'm so glad to see you, Scott!"

"Me too!"

Gosh, how old she looks! Subdued and worried; I don't remember her like that, he thought.

Sara Taylor was a tall, bony woman with gray hair tied in a bun. She wore black horn-rimmed glasses and a brown turtleneck with a matching long woolen skirt. Her posture was tense, and her entire being conveyed a rigid, pedantic severity. She settled on the couch as Dr. Jackson eased himself into the womb chair, trying to guess what wind had brought her here.

They had been in the same medical school for five years and shared many memories, from wild student parties to medical lectures and conferences. They were close friends, and Scott suspected that at some point she had had a crush on him. He was not interested, though, and after graduation, they lost touch. He knew from a common friend that she was working at a Chicago mental hospital, and when Dr. Taylor called him the day before to meet urgently in his office early in the morning, he was both surprised and pleased.

After Janis served tea and cookies, and they finished talking about the good old days, Dr. Taylor got to the point.

"Do you want to hear the weirdest story in the world, Scott?"

"I'm all ears," he grinned.

"Brace yourself! I have a patient named Jeremy. He's been diagnosed with severe schizophrenia, paranoia, multiple disorders, you name it—a very heavy case. I've been trying to stabilize him with proper medication for years, but once discharged from the hospital, his condition rapidly deteriorates, and he keeps coming back in a miserable state. Two weeks ago, his next crisis brought him to us again. And then, during our first therapy session, he asked me if I knew a Dr. Scott Jackson, a psychiatrist in Chicago, born on November 11th, 1977."

"What?" Dr. Jackson jumped, flabbergasted. "How does he know my name and birth date?"

"I have no clue. But wait until you hear the rest. So, I said to Jeremy, 'Maybe I do. What about him?'

"And then Jeremy says to me, 'He has a beautiful family; do you want to see it?' And he hands me this pastel drawing."

She took out a thick folder from her briefcase, put it on the glass table, and pulled out a sheet of paper. On it, in vivid colors, was a depiction of a black-haired woman holding the hands of two little blond girls. The taller one held a golden retriever on a leash. In the background, the immense trunk of a giant sequoia was outlined.

The rich, graduated hues, and the detailed representation of the clothes and faces were stunning. Dr. Jackson stared at it, open-mouthed. Complete silence reigned in the room, so thick that you could cut it with a knife. Finally, he removed his glasses, ran his palm over his face, and put them back on.

"What do you think?" Dr. Taylor asked.

He just shook his head in disbelief.

"Is it your family, though? I knew you were married, but…" Dr. Taylor's voice trailed off as Dr. Jackson rose and walked over to the tall bookshelves behind his desk, filled with many books of different sizes, small souvenirs, and several photographs. He took a framed picture, returned to the glass table, and put it next to the drawing.

"It was last fall," he began, his voice shaking slightly. "We took a trip to the Sierra Nevada to celebrate our wedding anniversary. Look here now." He pointed to the picture. It looked almost identical to the drawing, except for a brass signboard with the tree's name hanging on the trunk.

“The girls’ faces are incredible! Such a resemblance!” whispered Dr. Taylor, feeling shivers crawling down her spine.

“Yes, they’re really similar, right down to even the smallest details. Look at Jennifer’s mole—same cheek, same place.”

“Jennifer is the eldest?”

“Yes, she’s six, and Melanie is four. And this is my wife, Tiffany.”

“I think he mentioned your wife’s name once,” said Dr. Taylor, frowning. “Creepy, isn’t it?”

“Even the way Tiffany is smiling is so close, with the dimples on her cheeks, and her expression, and all,” muttered Dr. Jackson, paying no attention to Sara’s last comment. “And Archie? The same color of the coat and the leash, the same posture…” He shook his head again and looked at Dr. Taylor. “Your guy has definitely got talent—his work is a masterpiece! How do you explain all this?”

“I don’t know,” she shrugged. “At first, I thought he might have seen confidential information about you somewhere. Perhaps a computer file containing your name and birthdate, or stolen information about you, circulating on the dark web; who knows? But then, what about this drawing? He must have seen this same picture somewhere. Maybe it’s on social media?”

“No, not to my knowledge,” the psychiatrist responded. “But I will verify this evening with Tiffany whether she has shared it on Facebook or Instagram.”

“And maybe ask the girls too?” suggested Dr. Taylor.

“No, they don’t have access to the computer; they are still too young for this kind of fun.”

“Well, you never know with today’s youth. Parents complain all the time that their children create secret accounts or use their older friends’ ones.”

Dr. Jackson scratched his head.

“Mel is out of the question,” he said. “As for Jennifer… I’ll double-check with her, but I doubt it. Anyway, this photo must be somewhere on the web, and your patient must have seen it. There is no other explanation.”

“Perhaps there is one,” Dr. Taylor said cautiously. “But if we go there, we have to forget about our medical background.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you remember that lecture on paranormal studies we attended when we were still students? About Edgar Cayce and that old woman, Baba Vanga, who they called the Nostradamus of the Balkans?”

Dr. Jackson snorted.

“How could I forget? Especially the gathering after the presentation in that Irish pub. My stomach has never hurt so badly from laughing...”

“I’d never laughed so much in my entire life, either. Only I don’t find it so funny anymore.”

“Don’t you?” Dr. Jackson lifted one eyebrow.

“Absolutely not.”

“And may I ask why?”

“Because, in Jeremy’s case, there is no plausible medical explanation for some of his abilities, but I found patterns that correspond to Baba Vanga’s story. For instance, he can see things, tell the future, and his dreams are about real events that haven’t happened yet. Also, he has repeatedly told me he communicates with higher beings, such as angels and demons. A few years ago, he had even predicted a plane crash…”

“Oh, come on, Sara, give me a break! You know that everything is in our subconscious, right? I believe in science and not such nonsense—otherwise, we’d have to throw our diplomas away.”

“And I’m approaching a point to do it, if I must be honest,” said Dr. Taylor crossly. “Look, you cannot deny that there are too many things that we don’t understand and that we are unable to explain. Once I had let go of my so-called ‘scientific brain’ and accepted Jeremy’s supernatural gift, I went back and re-read everything about Baba Vanga and Edgar Cayce. And when I finished, I was stupefied by the immense number of predictions and healings that turned out to be true. We’re speaking about thousands of scientifically recorded and proven examples, Scott! This is not a joke! This is a wake-up call!”

“I still have a hard time taking this seriously,” Dr. Jackson shrugged.

“And that’s exactly the problem!” Dr. Taylor exclaimed. “We simply refuse to accept something that’s right before our eyes? Why? Anyway, I won’t argue with you because you’ll see it for yourself.”

“How so?”

“Because you’re coming to the hospital tomorrow to meet Jeremy.”

“Really? And why should I?”

“You must see him, Scott! He said he had to convey a crucial message to you concerning your family’s future,” said Dr. Taylor, her eyes shining with determination. “Look at this picture. It’s your family, for God’s sake. Aren’t you curious to investigate?”

“Investigate what?” Dr. Jackson raised his voice, clearly irritated. “In my book, everything is crystal clear—he found the picture and the information about my name and birthday, and now he’s playing games with me.”

“What for?”

“I don’t know, Sara. Maybe he wants money or something.”

“No, he doesn’t. He said that it’s a question of life and death. Listen, at the beginning, I paid no heed to his delusional babble, but he kept repeating that he must see you and speak to you. He said an angel tortured him every night and he had terrible nightmares. Then, last Friday, he announced he would begin a hunger strike until you both met.”

Dr. Jackson chortled.

“Now that?! And did he?” he asked.

“He did. He said he preferred to die because he couldn’t take it anymore. The doctor on duty called me in urgently over the weekend to intervene because he’d stopped eating. I had to bind Jeremy to the bed and put him on a saline drip. Frankly, I don’t understand where his determination is coming from, but I decided to call you and ask for your help. It seems that only you can resolve this issue.”

“Look, Sara, I don’t have time for this…”

“Please, Scott,” Dr. Taylor cut him off mid-sentence. “I don’t know what to do with him. Have you ever blamed yourself for a patient who died because of you? It happened to me once, and I’m absolutely unable to repeat this experience. If something happens to Jeremy, the whole hospital will be in trouble, and I will be devastated. I cannot live with such guilt for the rest of my life. So please come tomorrow at a time convenient for you, and let’s get this over with. Will you do this for me? For the sake of the good old days? Please!”

“Well, honestly, I’m pretty busy…” began Dr. Jackson, but stopped short as he met Sara’s stare. He sighed, went to his desk, pulled open a drawer, and took a thick leather notebook.

“Tomorrow at noon,” he said, scratching something inside. “I will skip my lunch appointment with an old friend, which will be your fault.”

“Thank you, Scott! I really appreciate it.” She stood up and hugged him, then added, looking at him with dewy eyes. “You have no idea how much I loved you back then.”

“Like half of our female colleagues, I guess?” He grinned cockily.

“Much, much more,” she smiled sadly and brushed him on the cheek. “I was so head over heels about you that I could never get over it and marry someone else. Anyway, that’s history. See you tomorrow at noon,” she turned and quickly paced towards the door, as if she were afraid he could change his mind.

Chapter 2

The Warning

Wednesday, 02/25/2015
Chicago, IL

Dr. Jackson entered the Chicago Behavioral Hospital at noon. Dr. Taylor expected him at her office, a typical, tiny room crammed with metal filing cabinets and shelves filled with books and journals. A curved leather lounge chair placed in the middle faced a desk buried under a pile of papers.

"Thank you for coming, Scott," said Dr. Taylor. "Please take a seat at my desk. Sorry for the disarray; you can push these files aside. Make yourself comfortable while I bring Jeremy."

"Thank you, Sara," said Dr. Jackson, but she had already stepped out. She was back in a few minutes with a gaunt, slightly stooped man in his late twenties. He was of average height, with shoulder-length, tangled chestnut hair tied up with an elastic band. The deep blue circles under his eyes dominated his pinched, haggard face and hinted at many restless nights. His brown eyes darted in all directions, burning with an intense flame. He entered with confident steps, clutching a large, folded white piece of cardboard for drawing, and immediately headed for the lounge chair where he slumped, paying no attention to the man behind the desk.

"Jeremy, let me introduce you to Dr. Scott Jackson," Dr. Taylor said. "He came to meet you at your request. I hope you'll take the situation seriously and won't waste our guest's precious time." She turned to Dr. Jackson. "I'll give you some privacy. If you need me as his treating doctor, call me, and I will be here in a minute."

"Fair enough," nodded Dr. Jackson.

While Dr. Taylor was leaving, Jeremy stared at the physician and stretched his thin lips into an ominous grin, revealing yellowish, rotten teeth.

"Hi, Scotty," he croaked. "You look like a copy-paste of the jerk from my nightmares."

Dr. Jackson took out a thick pad and pen, ready to take notes.

"Hello, Jeremy! I'm pleased to meet you," he said with a pleasant smile. "I'm sorry to hear that you have nightmares about me. Can you be more specific? Maybe tell me some of

them?" He noted something on his pad. Jeremy was still grinning at him with a complicit expression, as if they shared some secret knowledge.

"Are you sure you wanna hear one, Doctor? Perhaps you won't like it?"

"Oh yes, I insist on hearing all of them. But let's start over and put everything in order, shall we? So, first things first: how long have you been dreaming of me, Jeremy?"

"I don't know. It's been a while. Since you fucked this chick in Atlanta, in room 411, I guess? It was some performance, making her scream like this! Ah, Scotty, you naughty boy!" he wagged his finger as though Dr. Jackson was a child and burst into laughter.

Dr. Jackson stopped writing and looked nervously around. *I hope there's no camera here*, he thought. *But how does he know that? It's absolutely insane! He was obviously stalking me for years! Have I seen him somewhere already?* He strained his memory, ignoring the common sense telling him it was impossible for someone to follow him into a hotel at night and listen at the door to what he was doing. It was at the two-day Annual Mental Health Conference in Atlanta five years ago. On the first evening after the presentations, he went with two old friends from his student days for a drink at the hotel bar. There were a bunch of young female physicians sitting nearby, and it didn't take long to strike up a conversation and join their table. After the third shooter, the blonde facing Scott began to smile dreamily at him. She was pretty tipsy, and he was not entirely sure of her intentions until she took off her shoe and pressed her foot against his crotch under the table. The party broke up around midnight, and they went into her room. The number 411, indeed—he remembered it because of their attempt to enter the wrong room while they impatiently made out in the corridor and then looked for their correct door's number. What a wild night it was! Unforgettable! They did not stop until dawn, and then slept until noon, missing the morning session.

"But they said you will be judged for that, Doc. You'll pay the price for your infidelity, as nobody is allowed to cheat on their partners." Jeremy's voice brought him back to reality. Dr. Jackson felt ants crawling down his spine.

"Who are 'they'?" he asked, sweating profusely.

"Oh, some weird creatures, you know. It was Ariel who spoke about the judgment. She's gorgeous, man! She has wings, imagine! Large and white, swan-like. A wingy chick, I call her! And there is another one, Lily. She's red-haired, very beautiful, too, but she has no wings. She comes into my dreams naked, climbs on top of me, swinging her long hair, and I bang her all

night. She's pretty intense, man. It feels so real that when I wake up, sometimes it's like she's still in the bed with me." Dr. Jackson only nodded rhythmically, scratching on his pad.

"What was her name, again?" he asked, as he marked in capital letters SUCCUBUS[25] and underlined it twice.

"Lily or Lilith, something like that. There are also some other, pretty ugly fuckers that I can see and hear sometimes. They speak crap, awful stuff… Want me to kill Dr. Taylor, and call her 'ugly cow,' and all." He chuckled. "Sometimes they try to convince me to cut my veins or to throw myself down the subway. But Dr. Taylor said things like that don't exist. Whatever I see and whomever I am talking with, they're all just a figment of my imagination. Is she right? What do you say, Doctor?"

"Well, I think she's absolutely right, Jeremy," Dr. Jackson said. "The creatures you describe resemble angels and demons, but there are no such things, as there is no Santa Claus, either; even children know that. But let's focus on my visit here. Why did you want to see me? I mean, is there any other reason besides your nightmares?" Dr. Jackson's heart was pounding, and cold sweat trickled down his spine. He knew he would not like the answer. He had already had enough of this creepy man.

"Yeah, I've got two messages for you," said Jeremy casually. "Here's the first one: Don't go to Egypt during spring break."

Dr. Jackson jumped in his seat.

"How do you know about that? Who told you I am going to Egypt?"

"Ariel did. But as she does not exist, it's impossible, right? So, I don't know, man… Are you going for real?"

"It does not matter. Let's say I am. Why shouldn't I go there?"

"Got no fucking idea, buddy."

"Wait, Ariel did not tell you the reason?"

"Oh, now you believe in Ariel, then?"

"Jeremy, there is no Ariel," Dr. Jackson explained patiently. "It's all in your mind. But since you think Ariel gives you the instructions, let's keep it that way. Again, what did she say about Egypt? Is it dangerous somehow? Does she want to prevent me from a plane crash or something?"

[25] A female demon believed to appear in dreams to have sex with men to sustain its life.

"Nah, she said that it all started there, and will finish there, and crap like that. I understood nothing. She jabbered something about not setting foot inside the pyramids, because your life would be destroyed within nine months. One pregnancy, Scotty—it's all it takes. Women give birth to babies, but you'll give birth to a monster that will destroy you. That's what I was told."

Dr. Jackson scribbled vigorously. Jeremy yawned and stared absentmindedly at the ceiling. After a few minutes, Dr. Jackson glanced at him and spoke.

"And the second message?"

"What?" Jeremy looked at him as if he had seen him for the first time. "Scotty, it's you, man. The wanker from my fucking nightmares! What are you doing here?"

"It was you who summoned me, remember? To convey to me some message."

"Yes, that's it," Jeremy slapped himself on the forehead. "Did I tell you about Egypt?"

"You did. And you said there was another one." Dr. Jackson's voice betrayed his desperation. He pulled a Kleenex from the box on the desk and dabbed his face.

"Please, Jeremy," he said. "Tell me what was so important to convey that you were ready to starve to death."

"Yeah, I was ready to die, indeed," Jeremy grinned. "Meet you or die. And you wanna know why, buddy? 'Cause I hope that after I tell you, I'll stop seeing your ugly mug in my dreams. Never again! That's worth dying for, right?" Jeremy burst into laughter and started shaking, clutching his stomach. The more he laughed, the more he worked himself up, and the fit continued for so long that finally, he fell from the chair and rolled over on the floor, whining like a puppy. Dr. Jackson watched him desperately, cursing the moment Sara Taylor stepped over the threshold of his office. Suddenly, Jeremy stopped laughing and became deadly serious. He rose and took a step forward.

"In fact, there is nothing funny, Doc," he said. "I simply wished to point out that anyone capable of such horror must be far crazier than I am."

"Capable of what?"

"It's so awful that I cannot bring myself to say it," Jeremy declared.

Dr. Jackson snorted, running his hand brusquely across his head. Jeremy was gaping at the ceiling again, and the psychiatrist lost patience.

You motherfucker! Don't tell me I came to see you in vain, only to listen to your bullshit and waste my time, he screamed inwardly, but he forced a smile and said,

"If you cannot tell it, how about writing it instead?"

"I did something even better. I drew it," Jeremy said, agitated now, like a little child. He took the folded cardboard and handed it to Dr. Jackson.

"What is it?" he asked, taking it from Jeremy. He opened it and stared at it, saucer-eyed, his mouth ajar. In the same pastel drawing style, the composition depicted his kitchen—the table, four chairs, the counter in the middle, the sink on the left, even the wall calendar with a mountain peak. But instead of all the days on the calendar in bold black capital letters, it read: November, Friday the 13th.

On the countertop stood the knife stand, with five knife handles sticking out of it and a narrow slot marking the missing largest one, which they called "the chopper." It was in his right hand, stuck into his wife's abdomen. They were positioned beside the table, and he clutched her throat with his left hand, slightly lifting her from the ground, her back pinned against the wall. The blood, dripping from the wound and trickling from the knife's handle, had made a pool on the floor where his two beautiful blond daughters lay, all covered in blood. The precise execution of the drawing, the striking facial resemblance of all the figures, and especially the pained expression on Tiffany's face, were so ill-boding that Scott Jackson felt nausea rising in his throat.

"What on earth is this insanity?" he hissed through clenched teeth, tossing the cardboard. "Only a mentally sick brain can produce something like that!"

"My point exactly, Doc! No normal man would do such things to his family. Only a psycho would do it. But you are supposed to be the normal one, right? You, the respected physician who must heal nuts like me," Jeremy chuckled while Dr. Jackson stared at him open-mouthed, pale as a sheet, and numb with dread. "And yet, look what you've done. Oh, sorry, I meant, what you *will* do. Remember November, Friday the 13th, for on this day, you'll massacre your entire family."

Chapter 3

Scott Jackson

Wednesday, 02/25/2015
Chicago, IL

Dr. Jackson drove through the dense evening traffic on Highway 290W, towards his home in Oak Park. He was still in shock, contemplating the events of that terrible day. By the end of the meeting, Jeremy had become so distracted and uncooperative that the physician had given up. He took the drawing Jeremy had offered him as a gift, and it was now securely locked in the physician's safe. Before departing, Dr. Jackson briefed Dr. Taylor, omitting most of the information, including the picture. He told her that Jeremy had been trying to convey some kind of incoherent message about his family, and although Dr. Jackson had understood nothing of his babble, the patient had seemed relieved at the prospect of speaking directly to him and eventually calmed down. Judging by the skeptical look on Dr. Taylor's face, he could tell that she did not buy a single word of his story, but she offered no comment.

Back in his office, Dr. Jackson canceled all his patients' appointments and spent the rest of the afternoon researching contemporary seers. He started with the old, blind Bulgarian woman known as Vanga, but he did not like what he learned. Baba[26] Vanga had thousands of scientifically recorded instances of predicting the future, communicating with the dead, locating lost objects, and healing severe medical cases that traditional medicine had failed to cure. The accuracy of all her interventions was over 80%, a figure that posed a serious challenge to his scientifically leaning brain.

Come on! She was blind and almost illiterate, this old woman! He brooded, trapped in the endless column of cars. *It can't be true. The Internet teems with weirdos like this, all of them liars and con artists. No man of science could ever accept such nonsense.*

He hit the steering wheel with his palm.

And this Jeremy, with his ill-boding predictions… It's simply unthinkable that I'd kill my family! They're the light of my life; everything I do is for them! I will never harm them; on

[26] Bulgarian word for an old woman or grandmother.

the contrary, I'm ready to die to protect them! But the question is, how did the psycho know such details of my personal life? Especially about Atlanta? I really can't explain it.

He was sure nobody was aware of gorgeous Evelyn. After that memorable night, they saw each other several times over the years. It was complicated, however, as she lived in Minneapolis and they would meet halfway in some fancy hotel. Then, she found a guy whom she married, and they lost touch. But Evelyn wasn't the only one he had fun with during his marriage. He had never had the slightest remorse for cheating on his wife, but now Jeremy's remark that he would be judged for it made him consider his past actions.

As he took Exit 23A, turned right onto Austin Blvd., and then continued via Harrison St to S. Ridgeland Avenue, his thoughts drifted to Tiffany and their first date.

He had met her in his senior year, when he was at the peak of his fame. A star of the high-school football team, he was so popular among the girls that, by twelfth grade, there were almost no cheerleaders who had not had a history with him. For them, it was a matter of bragging, self-assurance, and seduction, but he quickly began to tire of these empty-headed beauties with their pretty faces and perfect bodies. After so many conquests so young, he quickly realized that choosing a girlfriend by her looks was not a very smart strategy. In any case, he was fed up with the endless drama that inevitably followed every separation.

One day, he was eating with his teammates in the school cafeteria when, by chance, he met Tiffany's gaze. She was staring at him with such intensity that he was compelled to look away. She was two grades below him, and he had never paid her any attention. She looked pretty ordinary by his standards, with her olive skin, bushy black hair, and short legs. And yet, he felt some connection with this girl on a profound level, much different from the usual lust he would usually feel when looking at one of the more conventionally 'hot' cheerleaders.

Over the next several weeks, wherever he saw Tiffany, he felt himself attracted to her. Worse still, he began thinking about her most of the time and even dreaming about her occasionally.

Have I got a crush on this plain gal that I don't even know? He asked himself repeatedly. In the end, he decided to take the bull by the horns and ask her out.

He followed her after class one day and stopped her in the schoolyard.

"What time is it, darling?" he asked her rudely. She looked up at him and simply smiled.

“Maybe you should look at your wrist,” she suggested, motioning with her head to his large Boss watch, which shone proudly in the bright sun.

“Oh no, it’s broken. Doesn’t work,” he explained, turning red. She chuckled, amused.

“Liar,” she said.

Scott froze. He had not expected such a bold reply. He didn’t like to be put on the defensive, considering he had always had the upper hand with women, but she had caught him off guard.

He was silent for a while, watching her. She held his gaze steadily, and while he could not explain it, he felt her inner force, and it turned him on.

“And if I prove to you I’m telling the truth? Then what?” he asked.

“If that’s the case, I’d apologize to you and grant you a wish,” she said, smiling.

“A wish? Like going out with me tomorrow?”

Tiffany beamed.

“Something like that,” she said, blushing.

Without saying a word, Scott removed his watch, but instead of handing it to her, he swung his hand and, with a mighty fling, hurled it against the ground. Even today, twenty years later, he was unable to explain what on earth had driven him to do such a thing.

Tiffany’s jaw dropped as her facial expression changed from mocking to astounded.

“Is it broken?” asked Scott, lifting it from the ground and showing its cracked glass to her.

“It certainly is,” said Tiffany quietly, staring at the watch for a second and then looking up at him. The moment their eyes met, time stopped for a split second, and Scott knew she would be his forever.

“So, it’s a date?” he said.

“It’s a date,” she nodded and extended her hand. “By the way, my name’s Tiffany...”

A great deal of water had flowed under the bridge since then. They got married two years later and went through many challenging and happy moments after that, but he never once regretted his choice. Tiffany was a fantastic woman, a devoted spouse, and a perfect mother. She was always forgiving, supportive, patient, and always by his side; without her presence and her inner light, his life would be bleak. She was coziness embodied, and warmth, and love, the

living spring that bedewed his dry soul. She was, in fact, his entire world, and he could not imagine his life apart from her.

Dr. Jackson slammed on the brakes, noticing the red light at the last moment. He stopped halfway across the intersection, blocking the pedestrian walkway. An angry middle-aged man banged on the hood as he walked around the car, and the physician attempted to reverse, nearly catching an obese, elderly lady, who raised a great commotion and delivered multiple slaps of her own to his trunk.

"Gosh, how much I wish this awful day were over," he sighed out loud. When he finally pulled up in front of their house, it was almost 6 pm. He parked in the alley before the garage door and stayed in his Mercedes for a moment, staring at the broad façade, clad in pale rectangular stone blocks. Built in the Prairie style at the beginning of the 20th century, the 5,500-square-foot, two-story house stood like a quiet monument to craftsmanship, its several low-pitched rooflines stretching wide above the arched art-glass windows. It was huge indeed, containing no fewer than seven bedrooms and four baths, and although Tiffany always complained that it was too big for them, he liked it very much. He got out of the car and moved wearily to the recessed central entrance, which was covered by an arched canopy supported by two deep-brown pillars. He climbed the three concrete steps and unlocked the door, inhaling the delicious smell of cooking as it hit him square in the face. Melanie and Jennifer ran towards him, shouting, "Daddy's home!"

He hugged them and entered the hall. The entire first floor was an open space, with a vast living room on the right. This was his favorite place, where two big brown leather sofas at right angles faced a massive hearth clad in river stone. A merry fire crackled in the fireplace, making the home warm and cozy. On the wall to the right of the fireplace was a 55-inch TV screen, where Tom was in the midst of wildly chasing Jerry.

Scott walked to the left, crossing the dining room, where a large, eight-place table stood, and headed to the kitchen to greet his wife.

Tiffany stood behind the large marble countertop in a blue cooking apron, her hair tied in a ponytail, as it always was when she was cooking. When he saw her, a warm feeling of love suffused him, but then his eyes slid toward the big knife on the countertop that lay beside a cutting board, both of which were considerably smeared with blood. Jeremy's ominous drawing flashed in his mind, and a sudden wave of nausea came over him.

"Hi, honey," Tiffany smiled at him. "The stew will be ready in half an hour, max. How was your day?"

She was a medium-sized brunette, but her olive skin, Nubian nose, broad forehead, and oval face gave her rather the look of an Egyptian princess than a descendant of Germanic tribes. She was a quarter Greek on the mother's side, though, so her dark complexion made sense to a certain degree. She often joked about her looks, citing the famous Roman law: *Mater semper certa est*, *pater semper incertus est,*[27] before saying that this proverb obviously did not apply to her family, as neither of her children had anything of her. They were both blonde, blue-eyed and bore a striking resemblance to Scott.

"Terrible," he said, giving her a peck on the cheek. "Yours?"

"Not so bad," she said. "You tell me what's going on after dinner, if you'd like. Go see the girls now. Melanie said she had a present for you."

"Alright," Scott said and returned to the living room.

"Daddy, Daddy, see what I got!" cried Melanie, waving a sheet of paper in her little hand. She was only four years old and by far her father's favorite.

"What is it?" asked Scott, slumping on the sofa and lifting her onto his knees. He took the sheet and looked at the basic, pastel-colored picture of a winged creature resembling something between a human and an insect. It was hovering above a girl, pulling her upward by her long hair.

"Did *you* draw this?" he asked, although the answer was obvious.

"Yep," said Melanie proudly.

"And what's this with the wings?"

"This is an angel taking me to heaven."

Scott took his glasses off and ran his hand across his face.

"So, this is an angel, huh? Did you dream of it or what?" His voice was harsh and desperate.

I've had enough of angels today, he thought.

"Yes, I dreamed how he took me up with him into another world. It was so beautiful there, like a garden filled with flowers. And then the angel said, 'See, it's your new home here.' And I asked him, 'But where are my Mom and Dad?' And he answered, 'Your mother is here,

[27] The mother is always certain, the father is always uncertain.

but your father is not.' 'Why?' I asked, and he said, 'Because he never listened to…' somebody. I forgot his name. Why didn't you listen, Daddy?"

"Jeremy? Was it… Jeremy I should have listened to?" he realized he had said before even thinking about it. He raised his hand to his forehead and found it was beading with sweat.

"I don't remember, Daddy." Melanie turned and hugged him with her small arms. "I woke up and rushed to draw this picture before I forgot everything else, too. Are you mad at me?"

"Never, my little princess!" Dr. Jackson pecked her on the forehead and sighed. "I just want this day to be finally over."