

[26] Close Encounter!

“I see a Pulitzer prize in your future!” The sound of the exaggerated gypsy accent pompously intoned, caused Carla to look up from her computer with a start. Del Sasso was standing in the open doorway to her office, acting the consummate fortune-teller. “Yes, I see the world of journalism worshipping at your feet.”

“Then you can’t see very well,” returned Carla with a laugh. “You’re obviously a cheap phony. The world of journalism would be green with envy, not worshipping at my feet.”

Smiling broadly, he stepped inside and stood there towering over her. “Still working on that first story?”

“You’re badly informed all the way around. I thought everyone knew the big news by now. I finished my first article yesterday, and *The Washington Post* grabbed it. They thought it was *hot*. Other papers won’t be able to pick it up until the *Post* prints it tomorrow. I’m really excited!”

“*Magnifique!* Well, I’ve got to get over to the main lab. Don’t miss the transmission today. There’s going to be something special for you and Viktor.”

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After a short break for lunch, Carla and Viktor walked together over to the lab where the daily transmission from the Archons was received. It was in the first building on the left as one entered the complex through the gate. They took the longest possible route, enjoying the beauty of the well-landscaped grounds and the towering redwoods that could be seen just beyond the wall.

“Do you realize this is one of the very few chances we’ve had to talk alone?” remarked Carla as they started along the winding gravel path that led away from the main building.

“I hadn’t thought of it that way,” mused Viktor, “but now that I look back, you’re right I don’t think there’s been any intention to keep us from talking.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that. We’ve been extremely busy day and night.” Carla stopped and pointed to an exceptionally large redwood just outside the complex.

“Some trees, huh? Did you ever see anything so huge? They’re the oldest living things on earth!”

“The pictures I’d seen just didn’t prepare me for the real thing,” responded Viktor appreciatively. “There’s something awesome you couldn’t possibly understand without *experiencing* it! I’d love to get out there and spend a day just walking through a forest like that!”

“You’ve no idea how awesome they are up close. We’ll take a good long hike through those trees together, Viktor—*soon*.”

He looked at her fondly. “Is that a promise?”

“That’s a promise.”

“We need to spend some time together, Carla, just to talk and get acquainted, and it’s impossible in here. Everything goes at such a feverous pitch. I had no idea Americans worked this hard!”

“Most of them don’t,” laughed Carla. “Frank’s unusual, but he’s driven by a sense of urgency that I must admit I share.”

“Oh, I do too. I’m not complaining about that. You know what I’m trying to say.”

“I know, and I feel exactly the same way.”

There was a poignant silence. When Carla broke it, there was suppressed excitement in her voice. “Antonio says the Archons are going to tell us something special today. Frank thinks the first World Congress and the inauguration of the New Age will come within a month. It’s moving faster than I thought!”

They were nearing the end of their brief walk. Viktor slowed the pace and lowered his voice. “I’ve wanted to ask you something. What do you think of Dr. Morris?”

“Kay? She’s quite a remarkable woman, if that’s what you mean.”

“No, something else.”

Carla stopped and looked at him closely. “Are you trying to say something?”

“Just asking what you think.”

“Well, since you mention it I’ve had a strange feeling about her ever since we first met, but I don’t know why.”

“I think she’s a Russian!” said Viktor abruptly.

“You *what*?”

“In fact, I’m almost certain.”

“Viktor, come on! She’s a graduate of MIT—with a New York accent!”

“I know it sounds crazy, and I probably should have kept it to myself, but

I've been watching her. It's little things that I've noticed, like mannerisms and the way she puts sentences together—even some expressions she uses seem to be peculiarly Russian but translated into English."

They resumed their walk very slowly. Carla was flabbergasted. "Have you said anything to Frank?" she asked.

"Not yet. It wouldn't do any good. I couldn't prove it and maybe it means nothing."

"She left Frank's office that night about 30 minutes before—" Carla began, then stopped. "No, it's not fair even to think such thoughts. After all she's the *director* of the labs, and she works as hard as Frank. She's really committed."

"Do you think Frank's in love with her?"

"So you picked up on that, too. He's smitten for sure, but I think she's very careful not to show too much feeling in public. People do fall in love." Her shoulder brushed against Viktor's. Their eyes met and held for the briefest of moments.

"I've talked to Mike," continued Viktor, "and he says he's certain that someone on the inside shot the guards and let Chernov in—but not to mention it to Frank. Is that because he thinks Kay might be the one?"

"Why didn't you ask him?"

"I couldn't do that!"

"I really feel bad about this whole conversation," said Carla. "It isn't fair to Kay—" She struggled to find the words.

Their walk had taken them behind the building. Before Carla could finish that sentence, they came around a corner just in time to see Leighton, who had hurried directly across the lawn, approaching the front door of the lab at a lope. "We'll talk about it later," whispered Carla.

"Well, look who's been out for a stroll!" exclaimed Frank, obviously in good spirits. "I'm sorry you two haven't had time to get better acquainted." He pulled the door open and motioned for them to enter. "You make a very handsome pair."

"We'll accept that compliment" laughed Carla as she put her arm through Viktor's. He blushed slightly and looked pleased.

Entering the lab, they took their seats quietly. As usual, Del Sasso was already in place. Dr. Morris and an assistant were in the process of connecting wires from various parts of his body to a bank of monitoring equipment. As soon as that was done, the assistant left. Only the inner circle could be present at these sessions. Antonio went immediately into a trance. He breathed rapidly for a few

moments, then settled down to a slow, rhythmic pace.

Suddenly his whole body jerked and his head cocked to one side. An eerie and strangely metallic voice began to speak through him at a high pitch. The Nine give you greetings from another dimension directly adjacent to yours. The recent attack on your installation was a necessary test. You passed it well, but more are to come. The question of entry is a mystery you must confront and solve for your own spiritual growth. Every step is important as we move toward our goal. Carla Bertelli's articles will play a key consciousness-raising role. Viktor Khorev must give the keynote address at the Congress."

"It is therefore essential that these two see us for themselves. They may not approach us, but they will be allowed to enter and witness our meeting with the three higher initiates. This will occur at precisely 3:15 this afternoon. At that time we will announce the date for the coming World Congress. Farewell."

The moment Del Sasso came out of his trance, a euphoric Leighton hurried over to Carla and Viktor, who were very excited but also confused and apprehensive. "Congratulations!" exclaimed Leighton. "You can't imagine what good news this is! We couldn't really go forward until we had that date, and until the Archons accepted you both into the Plan. This is going to change your lives forever!"

"What did they mean—*see* them?" asked Carla. "With our physical eyes? I didn't think they had bodies."

"It has to be a surprise the first time," said Leighton enigmatically.

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Promptly at 2:30 Leighton herded Del Sasso, Morris, Khorev, and Bertelli into a late-model Cadillac. Frank got behind the wheel with Kay beside him and the other three in the backseat. They left the base escorted inconspicuously by a car in front and one just behind, each—in addition to its driver—carrying two heavily armed CIA agents dressed in workmen's clothes. On the other side of Palo Alto they entered a seedy, run-down industrial park and drove along a winding street. It ended in a cul-de-sac, most of which was taken up by the sprawling grounds of an extensive building, apparently abandoned. There were no cars in the parking lot, and the landscaping was noticeably unkempt. The three vehicles pulled into a drive and parked behind the building. Everyone except the two drivers in the other cars climbed out.

"The Company owns this property," confided Leighton as they walked around to the front.

"*Company?*" asked Viktor.

“That’s what we affectionately call the CIA.” Waving a hand at the run-down appearance, Leighton added, “We purposely let it look abandoned and use it for nothing but these meetings. They come irregularly at the Archons’ command.”

The two CIA agents in the lead car had remained at the rear of the building to pretend they were making some repairs, while the other two started to pull a few weeds in front, one near each corner of the wide structure. Leighton led the others up a short brick walk to the front door, where he produced a key and let them all in. He turned on no lights, and in the semidarkness they walked through what had once been an office straight toward a rear door.

Leighton paused before opening it. “Carla and Viktor,” he warned them solemnly, “what you are about to see will shock and perhaps even terrify you. Stay behind us at all times and keep your emotions under control. Don’t panic, and under no circumstances try to approach the vehicle. We three will do so at the appropriate time, but for your own safety you *must* keep your distance.”

“*Vehicle?*” asked Viktor. He was literally trembling with fear. They were actually going to see some Archons? Carla was eager with anticipation, but at the same time almost afraid to go through the door.

“It must be a surprise!” said Leighton. “Remember? So don’t ask any more questions!” Then he added solemnly, “Kay had her initiation here just a week before you two arrived.”

Opening the door, he led them into what appeared to be a huge warehouse with a very high roof. They stood together just inside for a moment. Then Leighton, Del Sasso, and Morris took two steps forward, put their palms together in front of them in the traditional Oriental greeting, and bowed in unison nine times. Puzzled and fearful, Viktor and Carla remained near the door, watching in wonder. Peering around, they tried to adjust their eyes to the dim light that filtered through dusty Venetian blinds drawn tight across lofty skylights. The building appeared to be empty.

Suddenly a vibrating hum began, like a thousand monks chanting the “OM.” It seemed to charge the atmosphere with an almost-tangible electrical current. Then there it was—as though it had materialized out of thin air. “Look!” whispered Viktor in astonishment.

A giant spacecraft, looking like something out of a science-fiction movie and filling the far end of the warehouse, was now hovering just off the floor, its top crowded up against the roof. It was nearly the size of a 747 but without wings and of a futuristic design. Carla nearly fainted from shock and fright. “It

can't be!" she whispered back. "You see it, too?"

"It's impossible!" said Viktor hoarsely, unable to believe his eyes.

At that moment two lights on the top of the object came on and began to rotate, flashing purple and green as they spun round and round, revealing a strange, unearthly sheen to the metallic surface. As if that were a signal, the craft seemingly began to pulsate with life, as though it were about to metamorphose into some predatory creature. Stricken with an unreasoning terror, Carla and Viktor could hardly retain their sanity and stifle the instinct to flee. Involuntarily they shrank back against the wall.

A shimmering pyramid of brilliant white light, with a base of about 35 feet on each side, suddenly appeared in front of the hovering craft. The light had a peculiar radiance that made Carla feel instantly dizzy. The dizziness passed, however, as quickly as it had come. Now she felt an irresistible attraction for the glowing pyramid of unearthly incandescence—as though her mind were somehow being drawn into another consciousness that was merging with something living inside that strange light. An overpowering *presence* could now be felt in the warehouse. Carla sensed it was the same presence she had felt in Leighton's office when Del Sasso had taken control from the Russians.

"That's our signal," said Leighton in an excited voice, motioning to Viktor and Carla to remain behind. "You wait here. Don't move under any circumstances!"

With Leighton in the lead, the three moved slowly toward the mysterious craft. As Viktor and Carla watched in terrified fascination, nine luminous and almost transparent beings suddenly appeared in the center of the pyramid. They wore shimmering robes of light that covered their entire bodies, leaving exposed only their reptilian-like heads that seemed to flare out from their broad shoulders like the hoods of cobras. There was something awesomely supernatural about the creatures. They seemed to be grotesque and beautiful, repulsive and attractive at the same time. In eerie silence they quickly formed a circle around Leighton, Del Sasso, and Morris as the three earthlings solemnly entered the pyramid of light together and prostrated themselves in worship. The leader of the Nine motioned for them to arise.

"I don't believe this, I don't believe this." Carla kept repeating the words to herself through chattering teeth. She was shaking as though from a chilling sub-zero wind.

"We can't both be hallucinating," said Viktor, wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead with a hand that was already damp.

The Nine seemed to be conversing with Leighton and his party. As they did so, fire came out of their mouths and their bodies became a thousand points of light that cast weird shadows of both human and inhuman forms on the warehouse walls. In spite of her terror, Carla found herself unable to turn her gaze from this unbelievable performance. As her fascination grew to almost hypnotic proportions, her fear subsided and the *presence* that charged the atmosphere became benevolent and all-wise. She was no longer shaking, but was now overtaken with a feeling of gratitude for the privilege of witnessing such a scene. How blessed the world was to be visited by such creatures of love who had come to rescue mankind from self-destruction!