

## [30] Keeping the Faith

When Carla entered the kitchen late that morning, Ken was on the phone and his mother was squeezing orange juice. From a pot on the stove came the gentle “plop-plop” of oatmeal cooking. The wholesome fragrance, the homey sound, the instant welcoming hug that Mrs. Inman gave her lent a restorative normalcy to life.

“I’m so glad you felt comfortable about coming here!” came the sincere words from the matronly figure in the blue-sprigged apron. “And then in *this house* to have something like that happen—I couldn’t believe it! Ken told me just a little bit. I hope you were able to get some sleep after that.”

“Believe it or not, I zonked out completely and just woke up a few minutes ago. But I still feel exhausted.” She smiled, took Mrs. Inman’s hand, and added, “You’re both so kind. I appreciate it more than words can express.”

“You just make yourself right at home.” She turned her attention back to the orange juice and carried on over her shoulder. “I’d apologize for this Spartan breakfast but Ken tells me you eat the same stuff. I don’t even have a slice of bacon in the house. He calls it ‘junk food.’”

“You’ve got some plain yogurt, I bet.”

“Lots of it. And lecithin granules by the quart, if you want any.”

“*Toujours*, of course,” laughed Carla. “You manage to survive in spite of Ken’s dietary paranoia?”

“Well, I do sneak something *unhealthy* once in awhile, but I don’t think he’s that paranoid. A bit wiser than some of the rest of us, perhaps. But he tells me you’re just as fanatical.”

“Almost.”

Ken hung up the phone. “So, you slept well—no more ‘visitors.’ That’s great.”

“I don’t even remember having a dream.”

There was the usual small talk as the three ate at the kitchen table together. Ken seemed reluctant to bring up the events of the previous night or carry on

their discussion unless Carla was ready. When she did broach the subject, he was surprised by her question.

“What do you think about UFOs?” she asked.

“They’re ‘real,’ but certainly not physical,” replied Ken without hesitation, giving her a questioning look and wondering what this had to do with the horror she had just been through.

“Why do you say that?”

“There are lots of reasons. I think you know them as well as I do. For example, they’ve been tracked on radar making a 90-degree turn at 7000 miles per hour. Physical objects just can’t do that without disintegrating. UFOs hover motionless, then accelerate through the sound barrier without making a sonic boom. Again, a physical object couldn’t do that. And there are other reasons. But why do you ask?”

“I’ll give you one more reason,” interrupted Ken’s mother. “You can tell them to be gone in the Name of Jesus, and they vanish. You didn’t ask my opinion, but I’ll give it to you anyway: They’re demonic manifestations, and I wouldn’t have anything to do with them!”

Carla looked from mother to son in mock surprise. “So Ken swept you into the fold, too! You’re not the same lady I remember visiting in Maine a few summers ago.”

“I hope you like this one better,” said Mrs. Inman. “I certainly do.”

“You’ve got my vote on that.” Carla contemplated her oatmeal for a moment then reluctantly continued. “In fact as much as I don’t want to admit it, you’ve both got a peace and contentment and a quiet confidence that I, uh... well, frankly, admire and envy. This place is like an oasis.”

There was a long silence. Carla took a swallow of orange juice, leaned back, and studied the glass. “I’m almost afraid to ask these questions. You know very well that before what happened last night I wouldn’t have wanted to hear your opinion.” She fell silent again.

“Why do you have UFOs on your mind?” asked Ken.

Carla hesitated and then decided to tell part of it. “I was sworn to secrecy on this, but after what *they* tried to do to me last night, I’ve got some legitimate questions.”

“We’ll keep it confidential,” promised Ken.

“I’d appreciate that. Well, whatever they are, I saw my first UFO yesterday afternoon—very close.” Carla tried not to sound dramatic. “And last night—both at the hotel and over here—when all of that horrific stuff came down on me, the

same lights that were on that UFO were just outside.”

Mrs. Inman was shocked. “You really saw a *UFO*? Close up? That frightens me for you, Carla! I don’t even want to know what it looked like!”

“I presume it was related to the Archons,” said Ken.

“That’s right. The Archons told us to be there. Apparently Frank, Del Sasso, and Kay have been meeting with them this way for some time.”

Ken was grim. “Carla, you know my opinion, so I won’t state it again. You don’t fool around with this stuff! You could get into this so deep that you can’t get out. What was your reaction when you saw this thing?”

“It left me shaken—and very confused. It was a horrible experience one moment, but the next I seemed to be drawn into it like I was being hypnotized, and from then on it seemed wonderful and desirable. It’s really strange: It was *evil* and *repulsive* and yet *good* and *attractive* at the same time. There was something very seductive about it that drew me.”

“That’s what I was afraid of,” said Ken. “What did the UFO do—I mean, what was the purpose?”

“It was an incredible encounter with the Archons, but I really shouldn’t say any more. I just wanted to know what you think of UFOs, and you said pretty much what I expected you would. I saw this whole episode with my own eyes and still can’t believe it. Viktor saw it, too. The Archons and their craft had to be real, but I’m not sure anymore what that means.”

“Like Del Sasso and the serpent last night,” Ken reminded her. “That was real, too, wasn’t it?”

“And even more frightening and confusing.”

“They’re the same kind of event, Carla. And I think you can see that your consent to be involved in the one—and then having doubts about it—brought on the other. If you won’t believe their lies, then their only option is to destroy you before you believe in the One who will deliver you from their power.”

She winced at the oblique reference to Christ and lapsed into thoughtful silence again. At last she reminded him, “As I said last night, I don’t think they’re trying to destroy me. They could have done that if they’d wanted to, but they stopped the manifestations when I pleaded with them to leave. Well, there was something after that but—”

“Look, Carla!” said Ken earnestly, “there’s a lot of prayer going up for you, and if the Archons didn’t destroy you last night in the hotel, I’d give God’s mercy the credit rather than their benevolence.” He leaned across the table. “I don’t want to give you the wrong impression, either. All the prayer in the world

isn't going to protect you if you make that final rejection of Christ—and only God knows when that happens.”

“I do appreciate your prayers,” said Carla softly.

“Even if you leave God and Satan out of this,” Ken continued, “surely it must occur to you that whether you think the Archons are demons or highly evolved extraterrestrials, you have the knowledge and the power, as a journalist to become a threat to them.”

“That’s what frightens me.”

“If they no longer look upon you as an asset but as a liability in their scheme —” He left the sentence unfinished.

After a long silence she said, “Do you think they can really read my mind?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure what demons can and can’t do. Their power is limited by God and by our relationship to Him. If you play by their rules, you’re going to suffer the consequences. I despise them utterly, and I have no fear of them at all.”

“I respect and admire you for that, Ken,”

“That’s nice to say, but how do I get through to you? How is God going to get you to the point where you’ll admit the truth? Jesus Christ is your only means of escape from the destruction that Frank and Del Sasso are dragging you into. If you don’t open your heart to Him—”

“Are you trying to get me to accept Jesus for self-preservation?” she asked accusingly.

“That can’t be the only motive, but it’s legitimate. In the final analysis, however, you really have to believe that His way is best. If the Archons are actually more loving than Christ and can do more for you, then you’d be a fool not to follow them—and I wouldn’t try to persuade you otherwise. But if Christ wins in those departments, then—well, I don’t have to tell you.”

Carla withdrew into silence again. Her lips were trembling when she spoke at last “You know what this kind of discussion did between us before. It’s best if we avoid it.” Her eyes met Ken’s in a moment of shared sorrow. Briefly her hand touched his, then she drew it back. She turned quickly to Mrs. Inman. She was just opening her eyes. The possibility that she might have been praying was strangely comforting. “It was a delicious breakfast” Carla proffered. “Thank you so much. May I help with the dishes?”

“Oh, don’t be silly. I’ve got all day to putter around here. You’ve got far more important things to do.”

Carla pushed her chair back from the table. “Well, I really should get out

there, Frank will wonder what happened to me.”

“He ought to wonder about more than that,” said Ken pointedly.

The doorbell rang and Ken jumped up. “I’ll get it. If you can spare another few minutes, Carla, it’s someone you really should meet.”

In a moment Ken returned with a sandy-haired man of pleasant manner and military bearing. “Carla, I want you to meet my good friend Don Jordan. He’s got something extremely important to tell you.”

Ken pulled out a chair for Don and they both sat down. “You don’t need me,” said Mrs. Inman, getting up and gathering the remaining dishes from the table, “and I’ve got work to do. Now, before I go, can I get something for you, Don?”

“Some coffee, if you’ve got it.”

“Will instant do?”

“That’s great—I take it black.”

Carla had been looking from Ken to Don questioningly. “That name is familiar for some reason.”

“I’m with the FBI,” Jordan began. “We talked on the phone a few days ago, if you remember.”

“Yes, I do remember. You were in charge of the men who were watching my room and following me everywhere—using me as a decoy to catch those Russians.”

Don looked a bit uncomfortable. “We did all we could.”

“Oh, you misunderstand me,” cut in Carla quickly. “I’m not complaining at all. I appreciated the protection!”

Jordan smiled. “Thanks. Ken says you have to get back out to the research complex, so I’ll be brief. What I’m about to tell you must be held in the strictest confidence from everyone, and that includes Leighton, Khorev, Morris, Del Sasso, and anybody else. Are you willing to abide by that?”

Carla hesitated and glanced over at Ken, but he had looked away. This was to be her decision. “If you think it’s something I really ought to know, and if those are the conditions—okay, I’ll agree to that.”

Jordan leaned forward. “You have a Russian agent working inside that installation,” he declared bluntly. Carla drew in a quick breath. Ken looked grim. “I’m telling you this in part because of my friendship with Ken and his concern for you, which I share. But also I want to enlist you as our eyes and ears to let us know anything at all you learn from the inside that might be even remotely related to this case. I don’t think that will place you in any danger. In fact, it will

probably contribute to your safety.”

Carla was trying to digest this information and assess its implications. “I don’t know who it could be,” she said thoughtfully. “Certainly not Viktor or Leighton. One of the security men, perhaps?”

Jordan took a sip of the coffee Mrs. Inman had placed in front of him. “As far as we’re concerned at this point” he said, “everybody who was there that night is under suspicion.”

“Well, I suppose I should ask why I’m not on that list, too,” said Carla with a wry smile. “Or I guess I should thank Ken for that. Well, this is interesting! Mike Bradford—you know, the head of security—is convinced it was an inside job, too. Yet Leighton won’t hear of it. In fact we were told that the FBI was convinced it was *not* an inside job.” Carla gave him a questioning look.

“It’s a bit like poker,” said Jordan. “We’ve had to mislead them as to what we believe, and we have our reasons for that. As for whether someone on the inside was the key to this operation, there simply isn’t any doubt. I won’t take time to give you the many reasons. One of the most interesting is something that Mike doesn’t know: The person who killed the two guards at the gate gave the murder weapon to Colonel Chernov, the leader of the Russian team. He had it with him in Leighton’s office at the time of his death. It was American-made, not Russian. We’re trying to trace it.”

Carla was staggered. “I see what you mean—there doesn’t seem to be any doubt at all! But why not let Frank know the truth? Surely he isn’t one of the suspects!”

“For two reasons. First of all, we want to give the Russian agent a false sense of security. Second, we want everything to proceed normally. It would be very difficult for Leighton to provide normal leadership if he knew what I’ve just told you.”

A sense of helpless incredulity gripped Carla. “I thought I was hot on the trail of a big story, but I had no idea it would develop into this! It’s going completely berserk.”

“If you hang in there, which I wish you wouldn’t” said Ken, “it’s going to get even wilder if the Archons push it to a conclusion.”

“I’m not backing out now,” declared Carla firmly. “And I don’t think Mr. Jordan would want me to. My major motive at one time was a Pulitzer prize. There’s a lot more than that at stake now. It’s ironic, Ken, that even if your arguments about who the Archons are and what they’re up to are all true, that gives me even more reason not to back out!”

Ken looked at her in alarm. “You lost me, Carla.”

“I got into this because I just happened to be in the right place at the right time to save Viktor Khorev’s life. And I certainly won’t abandon him now—demons or no demons!”

“I don’t know exactly what the two of you are talking about,” said Jordan, standing to leave. “You understand, Miss Bertelli, that someone on the staff out there, someone that you may work with every day, is a ruthless murderer who shot two guards in cold blood, undoubtedly let the special assault team into the base, and is probably still committed to the same objectives. Does anyone at all stand out in your mind as a possible suspect?”

“Not really,” said Carla. She hesitated. “Well, perhaps I should say that Viktor told me he thinks Kay Morris is Russian. Of course, she could be Russian and not be the one—”

“We’ve already checked her out along with everyone else, and she certainly isn’t Russian!” said Jordan. He pulled a pad from his inside pocket and made a notation. “We’ll go back over the data.”

“Well, I guess I’m game for whatever you want me to do,” said Carla.

“Great,” said Jordan. “We’ll count on you to tip us to anything you think we ought to know. Nothing is too insignificant. Anything at all that strikes you as suspicious or out-of-the-ordinary, let me know about it right away.” He handed her his card. “Don’t call me from the phones out there. I guess you know they’re all bugged.”

“I assumed that,” she said. “And I won’t carry this card with me. I’ll memorize the number.”

The three of them walked toward the front door together.

Jordan reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a snub-nosed 38r revolver and held it out to Carla. “Do you know how to handle a weapon like this?”

She took it broke it open, and spun the cylinder. It was empty. “I’ve done quite a bit of target practice. Yes, I can handle it—and even hit what I’m aiming at believe it or not.”

“Ken said you could, but I wanted to see for myself.” Jordan opened his briefcase and brought out a box of ammunition. “Here you are. I’d load it right now, and don’t go anywhere without it. I’ve taken care of the paperwork, so you’re authorized to carry a concealed weapon. Don’t hesitate to use it if you have to.”

Carla looked grimly from the weapon and ammunition in her hands to Jordan and Ken and back again. “Well, I sure got myself into something, didn’t

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