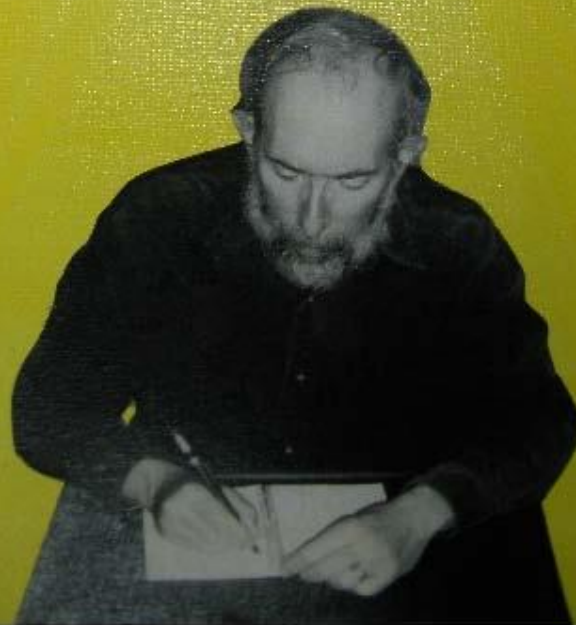


OUTTAKES

OF A UFO

INVESTIGATOR

DAVID HALPERIN



Chapter 3: Stuyvesant Hotel

DECEMBER 1965

1.

"They're not here," said the young man behind the registration desk.

"They were supposed to be," said Danny.

"They're not."

"Could you check again?" said Danny. "Alex Gordon. Eddie Snyder."

The hotel clerk contemplated the boy who stood before him: his thick black-rimmed glasses, his dark green and black sport jacket, his flannel shirt. He flipped the cards in his large, elaborate Rolodex. "Nope," he said, and turned away.

Danny looked around the lobby of the Stuyvesant Hotel. This was the second lobby he'd seen today. All carpeting and marble and mahogany, Muzak in the background and plush easy chairs. The showiness was unnecessary, he decided. The YMCA lobby, in its simplicity, was more to his taste.

Of course Danny was staying at the Y; he couldn't possibly have afforded a midtown Manhattan hotel like the Stuyvesant. But this was where the "Nationwide UFO Consortium" conference was being held, so he'd left his suitcase at the Y and raced over here to meet Gordon and Snyder, who'd flown in from Cincinnati. Only, it appeared, they hadn't.

There would be other UFOlogists at this meeting – at least a couple dozen, Danny supposed. Gordon and Snyder were pivotal, even though they were teenagers, not much older than Danny himself. Next August, they'd be hosting a major UFO convention in Cincinnati, which it was a main purpose of this conference to plan. Plus, to give a public presentation on UFOs, scheduled for tonight, they hadn't yet told Danny where. He hoped to use the occasion to recruit new members for his own Pennsylvania UFO Research Association.

He looked at his watch: eleven-thirty. He sat in one of the lobby chairs, which wasn't as comfortable as it looked, and began reading his paperback copy of *Great Expectations*. The book report for English class was due right after Christmas vacation. Christmas was the day after tomorrow, and Danny hadn't even gotten started. UFO work kept him too busy for such things.

It was past three in the afternoon, and Pip was watching the spiders spin their webs over Miss Havisham's wedding cake, when Danny became aware of a loud voice from the direction of the registration desk, demanding to know exactly the same thing Danny himself had been asking every half-hour. Had Alex Gordon and Eddie Snyder checked in yet?

They hadn't? Why hadn't they? Where were they? They should be here!

Maybe they *did* check in, but the hotel somehow managed to lose their registration?

Yeah? How could the clerk be *sure* that wasn't what happened? Couldn't he take two minutes just to check?

Danny stood up and headed for the desk. The man whose voice he'd heard was of medium height, slightly built. He looked to be about thirty. His hair was thinning but very black; a few strands were plastered across his sweaty forehead. Next to him stood a younger man, tall and powerfully built, with thick wavy blond hair, who looked on with an expression of serene amusement.

Danny couldn't hear the clerk's answers. Apparently they weren't to the satisfaction of the black-haired man, who cried out, "*I don't give a goddam for your whole God-damned hotel!*" He spun around and began marching off, stopping just in time to avoid crashing into Danny.

"New York is turning into a real shithole, you know that?" he said to Danny. "*Real fast.*"

"Mr. Townsend," said Danny.

He recognized the man now. He should have known him at once. Cliff Townsend had printed a full-page photo of himself and his new bride on the

front page of *The UFO Insider*, the magazine he edited and published. But in the photo he looked taller, more substantial. More dignified. More shaven.

Townsend peered into Danny's face. "I should know who you are, shouldn't I? How come I don't know who you are?"

"I'm Danny Shapiro. I'm here for the conference. On behalf of PURA."

"PURA? Oh, yeah, that's right. Pennsylvania UFO Research Association, right? Ray Olsen wrote me. Said he couldn't make the meeting, so he was sending some 'Shapiro' to represent him. You're Shapiro?"

"That's me."

"Yeah, well, nice to meet you, Shapiro. I'm Cliff Townsend. That's right, you knew that already. Call me Cliff, though. None of this 'Mr. Townsend' business." They shook hands. "This big moron over here is Evan Glickman."

"Cliff," said Danny. The word felt strange in his mouth. He couldn't remember having ever addressed by first name an adult who wasn't a relative.

Glickman shook Danny's hand, nearly crushing it in the process. Danny asked Townsend who else would be at the conference, besides the three of them and Gordon and Snyder.

"Oh, the locals, of course," Townsend said vaguely. "Oscar. Needless to say, Oscar. And Basil said he might show up."

Danny had no idea who Oscar or Basil might be, but supposed he would find out soon enough. "Of course," Townsend added, "we can't get down to doing any of our planning, until the Cincinnati people get here."

Of course, Danny agreed. Still, given that the three of them were here together, and given that they all were UFOlogists, perhaps they could go get some coffee and start discussing UFOs?

"No, no," Townsend said, looking around the lobby. "Still arrangements to be made. Tell you what, Shapiro. You stay here and hold the fort. When Gordon and Snyder get here, buttonhole them. Don't let them go wandering off. Maybe

all three of you go up to their room, order something from room service. We'll meet you back here, at the hotel coffee shop over there. Eight o'clock sharp."

Eight o'clock! But when are we going to have the public presentation on UFOs, that was supposed to be on for tonight – ?

Before Danny could ask, the two men strode away across the lobby, laughing together as they went.

2.

They showed up again at ten past eight. Townsend came rushing through the hotel doors. "There you are, Shapiro," he said. He was red-faced, slightly out of breath. Glickman followed in big, easy strides. Danny was relieved to see them. People around here, he was discovering, had a certain tendency to vanish into thin air.

"Where's Gordon and Snyder?" Townsend said.

"I don't know – I mean –" Danny had kept faithfully checking at the registration desk. The answer was always the same. There was a room reserved in the name of Alexander Gordon, but no sign anybody'd ever appeared to claim it.

"Oscar!" Glickman yelled, before Danny could finish his sentence. Everyone in the lobby turned to stare. A heavy-set man, with a brown beard and a shiny bald head, stood up stiffly from one of the chairs and walked over to them.

"Glad you could make it, Oscar," said Townsend. "Danny, this is Oscar Stefanov. He's one of the old guard of New York UFOlogists. From *way* back, in the early fifties. Oscar, this is Danny Shapiro, up here from Pennsylvania. He's representing PURA. *You* know, Ray Olsen's crowd."

They shook hands. Danny felt a reverence for this Stefanov, inspired as much by his beard as anything else. He was the first bearded man Danny could recall having seen, certainly the first he'd ever met. In his long overcoat he seemed a robed and bearded prophet. He didn't smile, didn't say anything to Danny. To Townsend he said, "Is the missus going to be here tonight?"

"I *hope* so. I left a message to tell her where we'd be. Whether the girl gave her the message is another question. I've never known how much English she really understands. Whatever I say to her, she gives me these dazzling smiles and says 'Uh-huh, uh-huh,' about a dozen times."

A waiter with a black vest and a black bow tie led them to a table for four. "We'll need a booth," said Townsend. "There'll be a fifth person joining us." The waiter looked at him and did not move. "My *wife* will be joining us," Townsend said, more loudly. Slowly, grudgingly, the waiter led them to a booth. Why he seemed so reluctant, Danny couldn't understand. The coffee shop was three-quarters empty.

They'd gotten their menus, and Danny was trying to make out in the dim light whether such a thing as toast and jelly might be obtainable in this place, when Townsend cried out, "There she is!" and jumped up.

A pretty, petite woman with curly brown hair and a heavy coat came hurrying over to the booth. She and Townsend kissed. Danny wondered whether it would be good manners to stand up for her, then decided against it. He recognized her from the wedding photo as the new Mrs. Patty Townsend.

"Oscar," she said. "Nice to see you, baby." She seemed about to slide into the seat between Glickman and her husband. But she paused, squinted at the table, and began looking nervously around the room.

"Patty," said Townsend, "this is Danny Shapiro. He's up here from Pennsylvania, representing PURA."

"Yeah, hi," said Patty. She glanced briefly at Danny, then went back to looking around the coffee shop. "What is this?" she said. "Hard times at the old Stuyvesant? You get one ashtray for every three tables? People are supposed to pass them around, like, from table to table?"

"There's one on the table over there," said Townsend, and he went to get it. Patty wriggled out of her coat and sat down next to Glickman. Danny saw that she was not merely petite and pretty; she was what the loud-mouthed and sex-obsessed boys in his gym class would have called "a stacked little broad." He tried to keep from staring.

When, he wanted to know after Townsend had gotten back and Patty had lit up her first cigarette, would the public presentation begin? Where would it be held? How long would it take to get there?

“Public presentation?” Townsend said, looking baffled.

It took a few minutes to sort things out. Oh, yes: there had been talk of a public presentation in connection with this conference. They’d given up the idea weeks ago. Hadn’t Alex Gordon written Danny about that?

Well, no, he hadn’t. Danny had brought twenty copies of the *PURA Bulletin* to the Stuyvesant with him. They were sitting in front of him on the table at this moment. He’d hoped to hand them out to people. Why had they decided to cancel the presentation?

“Public presentation?” said Patty. “*What* public? Who you think would come into Manhattan two nights before Christmas, to listen to lectures on unidentified flying objects? A few bums from off the street, maybe, looking to get warm. *Five, tops.*”

“*I’ll* tell you who would have come!” Glickman announced. “*Jews* would have come. Think of it: suffering from the alienation of being Jewish at Christmastime in goyish America, they search desperately for something that will ease this alienation by reflecting it and yet transforming it. They hear: in the Stuyvesant Hotel will be a presentation on Unidentified Flying Objects. *Alien* spaceships, in other words. They say to themselves—”

“Yeah, right,” said Patty. “Another genius idea from the mental powerhouse of Glickman. All I’m saying is, you’d have got five, tops. More than five, you’d have to call an ambulance to get me out of there. ‘Cause I’d be having a heart attack.”

“And who would have spoken at this public presentation, had it been held?” Stefanov asked Danny. It was the first time Stefanov had spoken to him, and the man wore an unfriendly smile that made him nervous. “Who does Mr. Shapiro think would have been a suitable presenter?”

It took some time, and beating around the bush, before Danny admitted he himself had hoped to be one of the speakers. He might have told people about

PURA; and about the kinds of things PURA was doing to move toward a solution to the UFO mystery, and —

“You’re kidding me!” said Patty. “You were going to get up in front of *people*? In a *flannel shirt*? And that barf jacket?”

Danny looked away, his face flaming.

“Hey,” Patty said. “There’s Basil. Out by the cash register.” She stood up in the booth as far as she could and waved to somebody Danny couldn’t see. “*Basil!* Basil, baby, we’re over here.”

A middle-aged man with crew-cut graying hair ambled over. A moment later Danny found himself being introduced to the eminent author Basil Richard — the very man who, eminence aside, was rumored to be in possession of the elusive gypsy-annotated text of Morris K. Jessup’s *Case for the UFO*. His name, it turned out, was pronounced *Ree-SHARD*.

Nervously Danny shook hands. “How d’you do,” the man said. His handshake was firm and solid, but friendly. You didn’t feel squashed afterwards, as with Glickman. Still, Danny found he was sweating. He hadn’t imagined he’d be spending the evening in such distinguished company, let alone sitting right by his side.

Hardly had Basil Richard sat down, than he asked what everybody thought about the Hills. None of them had ever heard of the Hills. They let it drop. Townsend asked Basil how his latest book was coming.

The book consisted of true-life ghost stories. Townsend and Basil talked rapidly for a few minutes about somebody named Levinthal, who Danny gathered was Basil’s editor. Levinthal had *loved* the book, but *hated* the putrid title Basil had given it. So now Basil was in search of a new title.

Anybody have ideas, of a good title for a ghost book?

“The ghosts and the familiar spirits,” said Danny, “that chirp and that mutter.”

“Too long for a title,” Townsend said.

"I know that," said Danny. Basil looked at him very closely. "I thought you might be able to use it as an epigraph," he explained. "And then use part of it as a title. Maybe switch the words around a little."

It was a passage from the Book of Isaiah, he told Basil. *And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto the ghosts and the familiar spirits, that chirp and that mutter; shall not a people seek unto their God*

"Jesus Christ," said Patty. "You know the whole freakin' thing by heart, don't you?"

Basil grinned at Danny. "Marvellous stuff, that Isaiah, eh?" he said. He took out a small notebook and jotted something down. Danny couldn't see what it was.

"*Marvellous?*" Patty said, making a face. "More like *creepy*, you want my opinion."

"Danny," Townsend said. "You know that Ezekiel-saw-the-wheel thing, in the Bible? 'Ezekiel saw the wheel, way up in the middle of the air,' or whatever that is. Do you think you could find that for me? I mean, there should be a Bible in the hotel room, when Gordon and Snyder get here, and —"

Danny wasn't listening. His old dark fantasy of the swollen moon and the filthy lake and the stunted creatures kneeling to drink its water — and the thirst, the unending thirst — had suddenly come flooding into his mind. There was a female, too; seductive, yet maternal in a weird way, who explained things to him. ... He had once experienced all this, but whether as a memory or a dream he could not determine. As he tried to resolve this, the entire scene in the Stuyvesant coffee shop began to seem dreamlike to him: the table, Townsend and his wife, and all the rest of them.

3.

An hour passed. More than an hour. Still no sign of Gordon and Snyder. While they waited, they drank the Stuyvesant's coffee, which wasn't very good. Then they ordered more coffee.

They made jokes – all of them, except Basil – about the stack of mimeographed paper that sat on the table in front of young Danny Shapiro. Had he really wanted to hand that smeary-looking stuff out at the public presentation – which, as everyone but him had known, had never been seriously planned in the first place?

As if it was the surface that counted, not what was inside ... his own article, for example, about last spring's UFO landing at Scofield, New Jersey –

"The Scofield *landing*?" Glickman hooted. "Did I hear you say the Scofield *landing*? The Scofield *hoax*, you mean."

The Scofield *landing*, said Danny, was definitely not a hoax. If only Glickman would read the article he had written in the *PURA Bulletin* –

"Oh *no*? Didn't you read the analysis of the samples from the hole, that that chemistry professor did? The one from – from –"

"Rutgers," said Townsend, looking bored and sleepy.

"That chemistry professor from Rutgers. Don't you remember what he found? Potassium nitrate, sulfur, and carbon. That's *gunpowder*, my friend. Good old earthly gunpowder. Nothing extraterrestrial about it. Didn't you read that analysis? I'm amazed. You say you did an investigation, and you didn't even –"

"Of *course* I read the analysis," Danny snapped. "I discussed it in my article in the *Bulletin*. You really ought to read that article, Evan."

"I've already *read* it, thanks," said Glickman. "I already know as much about Scofield as I need to know. Somebody digs a hole, sets off a cherry bomb in it, then digs three little holes to look like tripod marks. Then the next day they come back, find two little boys fishing. 'Would you like to come into the *woods* with us, little boys? Come into the *woods* with us, and we'll show you where a *flying saucer* landed.' So the little boys come into the woods with them, and then they drop their pants, and –"

Danny protested against these obscene distortions. And as for the tripod holes, the fact was that no hoaxer could possibly have dug them. The fact was that they had not been dug.

"They were *pressed* into the ground," Danny said urgently. "By some tremendous force that was above them, and located in the space between them. There's *no* way a hoaxer could have done that. If you've read my article, you ought to know that."

"Uh-huh," said Glickman. "And how do *you* know that? How do you know they were pressed into the ground? How can you tell the difference between a hole that's dug and a hole that's pressed?"

I saw the tripod holes, Danny wanted to say. But that was not to the point. By the time he'd reached the site the holes weren't in their original condition, and he really couldn't have determined whether they'd been dug or pressed.

"Bauman, the police chief, saw them the day after the landing," he said. "He could tell they were pressed in, from the way the leaves, and the other vegetation, had been crushed at the bottom."

"*Bauman, the police chief*," Glickman mimicked. "Police chief of Hicktown, New Jersey. Barely knows how to read and write, probably so dumb that if a bug fell into his coffee he'd spend two hours staring at it—"

"In the *first* place," said Danny, furious, "Scofield isn't any Hicktown. In the *second* place—"

But now Basil spoke up. "That's really not true, you know," he said to Glickman. "Small-town police chiefs aren't fools. Not by a long shot, they aren't. I've worked with lots of them on my investigations. They're not educated men, often don't make much of an impression. But they're sharp, sharp as—" He seemed to search for an appropriate simile, and, failing to find one, shook his grizzled head. "My word, they're sharp."

"That's *exactly* how I'd describe Chief Bauman," Danny cried triumphantly.

Basil seemed lost in thought. He turned to Danny and said, "Tell me, what's your opinion of the Hills?"

Danny had to remind him that neither he, nor anyone else at the table, knew who or what those Hills might happen to be.

The waiter stood beside their booth.

"Anybody here named Cliff Townsend?"

"Yeah, that's me."

"You got a phone call."

"Well, you'll never guess who that was," said Townsend upon his return. He didn't wait for them to guess. "His royal highness Alex Gordon, in person. Phoning from Cincinnati."

"Cincinnati?" said Danny. "What's he doing still in Cincinnati?"

"Who the hell knows?" said Townsend. "'Sorry' – shifting now into a mincing falsetto – " *'we can't make it,'* he says. *'Something came up at the last minute. You know how it is.'* "

"Meaning," said Glickman, "that Papa refused to cough up the air fare."

"Yeah, probably meaning that," said Townsend. "Well, screw them, anyway. We'll hold the meeting without them. That's the good news. I forgot to tell you the good news."

"The good news?" said Patty.

"The good news," said Townsend, "is that they sent in a deposit to hold their room. So nobody's there now. I'll pay the balance on it, and it's ours. We can have our meeting all night long, if we want."

"How are we supposed to plan the Cincinnati convention if the Cincinnati people haven't even shown up!"

That was Danny. He felt the Cincinnati convention vanishing, just as the New York conference seemed to be vanishing, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

"So I propose," Townsend said, "that we adjourn this meeting. And reconvene presently in room 614 upstairs, the room that was *supposed* to have been occupied by those nincompoops Alex Gordon and Eddie Snyder. Pending, of course, provision of liquid refreshment. And pending inspection of the room by Mrs.

Townsend and myself, to make sure that it's suitable for a meeting of the Nationwide UFO Consortium. We'll be back in a few minutes. You guys hold the fort here."

Townsend and Patty had risen and were gone before Danny quite knew what was happening. Glickman rolled his eyes and said, "Woo-hoo-hoo!", and he and Basil and Stefanov all guffawed.

Well, Danny thought, they're a married couple. It's all right, then.

4.

They didn't know what was keeping Cliff and Patty. Stefanov suggested, sourly, that they might be going for a double-header. He suggested that they all go trooping up to Room 614 and pound on the door, pound and pound, until the lovebirds finally put their damn clothes on and open up. But no one particularly wanted to do this. The four of them around the table talked, wearily and without much interest, about UFOs.

"Tell me," Basil said suddenly. "What do you all think of the Hills?"

None of them had ever heard of the Hills. They'd told him that twice already. Was Basil losing his memory, or what?

"No, no. I just keep thinking And Cliff hasn't heard of them either, it seems?"

Danny thought again of Cliff and Patty, frolicking upstairs. How long was the sexual act supposed to take? Surely not this long. "Dammit, Basil," said Stefanov. "Will you kindly tell us who in hell these people are? Some new contactee team, or what?"

"No, no, not contactees" Basil sounded vague, fumbling, awkward. "They're a couple, up in New Hampshire. Betty and Barney, I think their names are. You sure that doesn't ring a bell?"

It didn't, at least not for Danny. Basil went on: "John Fuller — you know, the fellow who does the columns for the *Saturday Review* — he's been doing an

investigation. He's supposed to have an article out in a few months. Not in the *Saturday Review*, though. I think it's going to be in *Look* magazine. Yes, that's right: *Look*."

"Who *are* they, Basil?" said Stefanov.

"Well ... a New Hampshire couple. I already said that, didn't I? Salt-and-pepper couple, actually," he said—looking toward Danny, and lowering his voice and smiling in a sly way. "If you take my meaning."

Danny nodded. He didn't know what a "salt-and-pepper couple" was, but Glickman had guffawed as soon as Basil had said it, so Danny supposed it had something to do with sex. He'd find out what it meant later on.

"Well," Basil said, "they had the oddest experience with a UFO. Fuller's sure it really happened. That's what he told me.

"It wasn't too recent, actually. It was a few years back, in September of '61. They were travelling by night, doing a long drive, from Canada I think. This strange light kept following their car. They stopped a few times, looked at it through binoculars. It wouldn't go away. Well, they drove all night, got home in the morning ..."

His voice trailed off. For a moment Danny thought he'd forgotten what he wanted to say.

"What happened," he said finally—looking at Danny, as he spoke—"is that they tried to forget about the incident. With the UFO, I mean. But they kept on having these very peculiar dreams. Which were all the same recurring dream, really. So they went to see a psychiatrist, in Boston ..."

"Those dreams of theirs," Danny said. "What were they about?"

"Well, I can't say I remember too clearly. Something about driving by night, encountering a strange roadblock. Yes, those were Fuller's words. *A strange roadblock*."

He paused, while Danny tried to imagine what it would be like to dream about a strange roadblock.

"So they went to this Boston psychiatrist," Basil went on. "A certain Dr. Simon. And he put them under hypnosis. And then they started reliving what had happened to them. They had forgotten all about it, till then. It was all peculiar enough. But the strangest thing, Fuller told me, was that they weren't remembering it so much as *re-experiencing* it. Right there in the doctor's office."

Basil took a breath. Danny's eyes were riveted to his stubbly face.

"What really happened that night," Basil said, "was that these peculiar men stopped their car, made them get out, took them with them onto the flying saucer ... "

Stefanov gave a loud, exasperated sigh. "Oh, Lord!" he said. "I knew it! Here we go again. One more contactee story."

"No, no!" Basil said. He looked pained. "It *wasn't* like the contactees, Oscar. These — *men*, or whatever you want to call them — they didn't talk to the Hills. Hardly at all. What they did was perform these strange operations on them. Medical experiments. Pseudo-medical, maybe; I don't really know. Tests of some kind. It wasn't terribly pleasant for them, I gather."

He hesitated a moment. "There were needles," he said.

"Needles?" said Danny.

"They used a long needle," said Basil. "Like a knitting needle. They stuck it deep into Betty Hill's navel."

Danny winced and squirmed. He looked at Glickman, for the first time since Basil had begun to speak. He was surprised to see that the grin had at last vanished from Glickman's big face. He looked sober, attentive, almost awed. The Hills' story had obviously impressed Evan Glickman; and that, in itself, impressed Danny as much as anything Basil had said.

5.

"Well now, and what's everyone been talking about?" said Cliff Townsend.

They'd abruptly materialized beside the booth. Patty was bubbling over. Room 614 had checked out just fine, she said. Now it was time to take care of themselves. They'd head over to the Greek's liquor store across the street, and pick themselves up a bottle of bourbon. What the hell, maybe two bottles. Then they'd head up to the room, have themselves a little party –

Almost at once they were out of the hotel and into the darkness and bitter wind of Fifty-Second Street. The group had broken up. Danny found himself walking with Stefanov. The Townsends were ahead of them, halfway down the street, their arms around each other. They were doing some kind of improvised dance, chanting something. Glickman followed behind, chanting with them. Basil Richard was nowhere to be seen.

The cold was brutal. Danny shivered as he walked. He wanted badly to be back inside the hotel. He wished Stefanov would shut up and walk faster. But the bearded man seemed hardly bothered by the cold.

"What about ghosts?" he said. "Does the earnest Mr. Shapiro believe in ghosts, too? Or only in UFOs?"

"No. I don't believe in ghosts."

He hoped Stefanov wouldn't ask him why he didn't believe. He'd read enough to know that there was a very hefty body of observational evidence that would support belief in ghosts, much as there was for UFOs. Yet UFOs were a matter for science; ghosts, for superstition. Danny preferred to keep them as far apart as possible.

"And what about God? Do you believe in God?"

Danny didn't answer. He couldn't have answered. He'd been thinking about God only a moment ago, yet the question took him by surprise. He'd had read almost the whole Bible. A lot of it he could quote by heart. He'd even dipped once or twice into the New Testament. But whether he believed in God or not, he didn't know.

6.

Danny and Stefanov parked themselves outside the locked door of Room 614. There they waited, until at last they heard the elevator doors open, and then the whooping laughter down the dark carpeted corridor.

"Where's Basil?" Danny asked as soon as Glickman and the Townsends were close enough to talk to.

"Had to go somewhere," said Townsend. "Sends his regrets. *And* his best wishes."

This last remark sent Patty and Glickman into another convulsion of laughter. Danny had no idea why. Townsend inserted the key in the doorknob and twisted it back and forth. "*Damn* these hotel keys," he said. "You might enjoy spending the night at the Stuyvesant, if you can ever get into the room."

There were two beds in the room, Danny saw, as soon as they'd at last managed to get inside and Townsend switched on the light. They stood side by side, each with a night-table and a lamp. Both were neatly made; neither bore any obvious sign of the orgasmic delights that must have taken place not long before, upon one or both of them. Their starched, antiseptic neatness baffled Danny. Was there somewhere else in the room Cliff and Patty might have done their screwing? On the floor, perhaps?

Patty had been carrying a paper bag. Triumphant she pulled out two bottles of bourbon and a small stack of paper cups. "*Glorious!*" she sang out, with an operatic trill that reminded Danny of his father.

"Glorious! glorious!
One keg of beer for the four of us!
Glory be to God that there are no more of us,
For one of us could drink it all alone."

"Only there's five of us," she told Danny. "That's why we decided to get two bottles."

Danny said nothing. He wished Basil were here. Townsend, in the meantime, was methodically banging the dresser drawers open and shut. "Where do they keep their Gideon Bibles, do you know?" he snarled to no one in particular.

"How the hell should I know?" said Patty. "Here's your medicine, baby." She handed Townsend a paper cup she'd just filled from one of the bottles. He took a deep drink and went back to opening drawers.

"And one for Oscar," Patty went on. "And for the great Glickman. And for our newest member of the Nationwide UFO Consortium, Danny Shapiro. Good to have you with us, sweetie. Don't worry, there's no dues here. Take it *easy*, Danny. Don't go gulping it down. Savor the rich smoky Southern flavor, OK?"

"Try the night-tables, Cliff," Glickman suggested.

At first, Danny couldn't imagine what Townsend might want a Bible for. Then he remembered. Ezekiel's wheels. He wants me to show him Ezekiel's wheels.

The Bible, as it turned out, was in the night-table.

"How appropriate," said Townsend. "Right by the bed. Sure cure for insomnia."

Patty had kicked off her shoes and flopped down on the bed, managing somehow not to spill her drink in the process. Her husband sat paging through the Bible. "Why don't they ever have indexes?" he said. He stood up and thrust the book at Danny. "There it is. See if *you* can find the story of Ezekiel and his wheel, or whatever."

Danny opened the Bible to the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel, and handed it back to Townsend.

"Oh," said Townsend. "Thanks." He sat back down on the edge of the bed.

Danny took another drink from his cup. He couldn't detect the rich smoky flavor Patty was talking about – the taste of the stuff was fairly poisonous, if you asked him – but it did seem to be warming him up. He still had the cold of Fifty-second Street in his bones, and the bourbon was helping. He drank yet again, sucking the burning golden liquid through his teeth.

"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month," Townsend read aloud, *"as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."*

Danny felt his head swim. He had a sense of something hovering just outside his awareness, just outside the circle of light that was this room, in the darkness beyond. He didn't want to think what it might be. He sat down heavily in one of the armchairs.

The bourbon. I need to go easier on the bourbon.

"The thirtieth year of *what*?" Townsend demanded. "What's this character talking about? What kind of a book is this, anyway?"

"It goes on to explain the date in the next verse," Danny said.

"In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jeho —, Jeho —"

"Jehoiachin," said Danny. "He was king of Judah at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. He was taken into exile —"

Townsend wasn't listening. "My God! This is amazing! *This is a UFO*. Evan, Patty, this is a real UFO! Listen to this —"

"You've got to read it in context, Cliff," said Danny. "In context it's not quite so obvious —"

"No, no, listen to this! *And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it. That's a UFO sighting, if ever I've heard one. And then in paragraph fifteen: Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The disk has landed, you see!"*

"Yes, it could be. But —"

"*Definitely* a UFO. And this was hundreds of years ago! Maybe thousands. This King Jehoosiewhatsie — Danny, when did you say he was supposed to have been?"

"Sixth century B.C.," Danny said faintly. He didn't feel well. His head was spinning, and that terrible image that had been outside his awareness was starting to press in toward him. They were back with him now: the strange crippled creatures, drinking from that nauseous lake. *As I was among the captives*

Should I go to the bathroom now? Go to the bathroom and vomit, or shit, or what?

"And it goes on," Townsend was saying. His voice seemed to come from an immense distance. Yet it was at the same time inside Danny's brain, speaking to him from between his own ears. *"As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four."*

"What's *that* supposed to mean?" said Glickman.

But at that moment Danny had no doubt what they were, those high, dreadful rings. He could see their slit, slanted cat's eyes swarming about him, as the rings spun round his head. He felt himself sucked backwards and upwards, faster and faster, till his stomach tingled almost beyond his endurance from the speed of his flight. All their voices, even Glickman's booming bellow, faded in the distance beneath him as he flew. And he felt himself leaving the lighted circle beneath him, coming to a place where the darkness was everywhere.

7.

He awoke in darkness, to the sound of screaming.

"They're inside!" a woman cried. *"They're everywhere! Run for your lives!"* Then a softer voice, no longer a scream, something more like a grunt of dread and despair: *"Oh – oh. The webs. I can't – move – Somebody – please help –"*

There was a bad moment or two before Danny realized all of this was coming from the TV. Glickman sat cross-legged on one of the beds, as close as he could get to the screen. He was wearing only his underwear. There seemed to be no one else in the room.

"You missed the first hour of it," said Glickman. "It's a cinematic classic. *The Attack of the Killer Spiders*. 1954 or 1955, I think. What happens is, nuclear radiation makes all the spiders run amuck. They invade civilization. People get caught in their webs. *Lots and lots* of people. Then they crawl over the people and suck their blood out. There were some *great* scenes of that, the best in the movie. Too bad you were passed out."

Danny shuddered. Luckily the commercial was on. "Where's Cliff and Patty?"

"They left," said Glickman. "About twenty minutes after you passed out. Cliff walked off with the Gideon Bible. They left the key, though. Said you could stay here for the night."

"They left," Danny repeated. His brain was still fuzzy, and felt like it was about to burst out through his skull. His main wish was to get out of here before the spiders came back.

"A cinematic classic," Glickman said. "The scenes of this movie are unforgettable. I mean that literally. You see them, you'll never forget them. Take that woman, for example, who you just heard screaming. What happens is, she runs to a door she thinks leads to the outside, but really —"

"Spare me, will you?" said Danny. He groped through his pockets to make sure everything was still there. He was fully dressed; he hadn't even taken off his shoes. His clothes were pretty rumpled, though. "Where'd they leave the key?" he said.

"On the dresser," said Glickman. "Next to what's left of the bourbon. What's the matter with you, Shapiro? Why are you in such a hurry to leave?"

But Danny was already outside, in the silence of the corridor.

8.

He didn't know where he was going. The initial burst of energy that propelled him out of the room had dissipated by the time he was halfway to the elevator, leaving him exhausted and aching to lie down somewhere. He was desperately thirsty, and his head was killing him.

It was two in the morning when he stepped out of the elevator into the Stuyvesant lobby. He'd expected the place to be entirely deserted, or else jammed with revelers gathered for some all-night pre-Christmas party. He was surprised to see one man there, sitting in an easy chair in the far corner from the registration desk, poring over a thick document stapled together in the upper right hand corner. He was considerably more surprised to recognize the man as Basil Richard, and, as he came nearer, to see that the document Basil was reading so carefully was the *PURA Bulletin*.

"Basil," he said.

Basil looked up. He didn't seem startled, or even particularly surprised.

"Oh, hello." He put the *Bulletin* down in his lap. "Improving my mind here, you see."

There was another easy chair catty-cornered to the one Basil sat in. If Danny were to sit down in it, the two of them could converse comfortably, for hours if need be. He looked at Basil inquiringly. He might possibly have gestured toward the chair. "Oh, please," said Basil. "Go right ahead."

Danny sat down. Basil went on: "I've just finished reading the centerpiece of the issue. Your Scofield article, I mean. I must say, I'm *very* impressed with it. That loud fellow – what was his name? Glickman – can't possibly have read it very carefully. If he had, he wouldn't have been half so sure of himself."

"Thank you," Danny breathed. His headache, for some reason, had just flared up violently. He hoped it wasn't obvious to Basil how bad he was feeling.

"Clearly, you did the best investigation possible, under the circumstances," said Basil. "You don't own a car, I gather?"

"No, I don't."

"The analytic part was absolutely first-rate. Imaginative, yet cautious. *Always* well grounded. It's all very well to go blasting off into the – the *empyrean realms* of speculation. But you've always got to be sure there's solid earth underneath your rockets. Otherwise, the rockets don't have anything to push against, do they? Many of the younger men in our field don't really understand that. Every action needs an equal and opposite *reaction*, eh?"

“Oh, yes,” Danny said. He wasn’t sure he’d entirely grasped what Basil was getting at. Yet he found himself soothed by the older man’s words, and by the tone in which he’d spoken them. Even his headache was better now.

As soon as he could, Danny turned the subject toward Morris K. Jessup. “Yes,” said Basil, “my old friend, poor fellow.” He told Danny, who sat enthralled, about Morris and Morris’s wife Rubye, who’d left him shortly before his tragic and mysterious death. And of that strange book – Morris’s *Case for the UFO*, annotated by three unknown and untraceable gypsies who’d conversed among themselves, in their scribbled notes in its margins, about things no ordinary human could possibly know.

“That reminds me –” Danny said.

“Yes?”

“It was November, three years ago. Around the time I first started learning about UFOs. There was this boy, Billy Costanzo, who used to wait at the bus stop with me for the school bus –”

Here he stopped, partly because it seemed absurd to be talking about school buses, here in the lobby of the Stuyvesant Hotel in New York, at two-thirty in the morning, in the company of distinguished author Basil Richard. But also, for that moment, he again stood at the bus stop on those clear frosty mornings, watching the smoke of his breath twist upward in the newly risen sun, white against the blue sky. Somehow waiting for the school bus didn’t feel that way anymore.

“Billy Costanzo,” said Basil. “Yes.”

“Well, somehow I got to telling him about UFOs, and he nodded, as if he understood, as if he’d known about them all along. He said to me, *My brother has a book on flying saucers. As soon as it came out the Air Force confiscated it. But they didn’t get all the copies. My brother has it now.* And I got so excited –”

“I can understand why.”

“And I said, *Can you bring it and show it to me? Can I see it?* And he said, *Sure.* And I said, *Can you bring it here with you tomorrow?* And he said he would. And I was so excited I could hardly sleep that night.”

“And the next day –?”

“He forgot to bring it. And I said, *Well, can you be sure to bring it tomorrow?* And he said he would. And I said, *Shall I phone you to remind you?* And he said, don’t worry, he wouldn’t forget. And then the next morning he said that his brother couldn’t find it, that they were looking for it.”

“Oh, my.” Basil stretched himself. “I think I know how this story ends.”

“The next day they were still looking for it. And the next week, every day that week. And every morning, as soon as I saw Billy come to the bus stop, I’d run up to him and say, *Did you find it? Did you bring it?* And then I noticed he was starting to avoid me.”

“I wonder why,” said Basil, grinning.

Danny laughed. “And that’s when I stopped believing in the magic book, that was going to give me all the answers.”

“The coup de grace, eh?” said Basil. “Odd you should talk about a magic book. Betty Hill also had a book that she was going to bring down with her from her UFO.”

“Really?” said Danny; and he felt his heart leap inside him. Perhaps it hadn’t been the coup de grace after all. “What was the book?”

“Nobody knows.”

“Nobody –?”

“Danny, I’ll tell you the story. But you’ve got to swear by – by Jehovah and Elohim and El Shaddai and all those marvellous Hebrew names – that you won’t write it up. And that you won’t tell anybody else. Till John Fuller publishes it, that is. Then you can tell anybody you want. Fuller’s got first dibs.”

“I swear,” said Danny, laughing.

“It was toward the end of Betty Hill’s – how shall we call it? – experience aboard the spacecraft. They’d already done all their experiments with her, or whatever

it was they did with her. With the long needles and such. I did tell you about all that, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did."

"She wanted to bring something back down to earth with her," said Basil. "To prove she'd been – someplace else. And she saw this big book they had, and she asked, *Can I have this book? To keep, I mean.* And they laughed, and said, *Think you can read it?* And she looked at it, and of course she couldn't, because it wasn't in English, not even in Latin script, you see. And she said, *No, I can't read it, but this will be my proof that this all really happened, that it's not just a dream.* And they laughed again, and they said, *Go ahead, why not?* – all that kind of thing."

"So she still has the book?" Danny said excitedly.

"No, no, wait a minute. Let me finish now. They're all done with her, about to let her go, and all of a sudden the leader – of the UFO beings, I mean – comes and takes the book away from her. And she says, *What the hell is this?* – maybe not using quite that language – *Didn't you say I could take the book with me?* And he says to her, *Well, you can't.* And she says, *But this was going to be my proof that all this happened.* And he says, *That's the whole point, you see. We don't want you to have any proof. You're going to forget all this. You're not going to remember anything.* And she says, *Damn you, no, I won't forget! You can take the book, but you can't make me forget.* And he laughs and says, *Yes we can.*"

Basil sighed, sat back in his chair, and closed his eyes. He looked tired, and very old. "And of course he turns out to have been right, because she did forget, all about it, except for her dreams, till she and Barney went to that Boston psychiatrist and he put them under hypnosis. ..."

"Wow," said Danny. Then he said: "You say the book wasn't written in Latin script. Do we know what kind of script it *was* written in?"

"I certainly don't. Some strange script, is all Fuller told me. Maybe written from right to left, eh?" Basil laughed, and Danny laughed along with him, although he was by no means certain why they were laughing. "Too bad they took the book away from her. It'd be fine if you could have a look at it, eh? See what you could make of it."

"Well, I don't know," Danny said, squirming a little. The thought crossed his mind how ironic it would be, if he were at last to find his longed-for book, and it turned out he couldn't even read it.

"Do you read the Bible in Hebrew, Danny?" said Basil. "I know you were quoting it in English, back there in the coffee shop. But I was thinking, maybe you were *remembering* the passage in Hebrew, and then translating it as you went along. Were you?"

"Oh, no. I wasn't. I mean, I couldn't." Danny said this with regret; he wished the truth were as Basil imagined it. I've only read the Bible in translation. I don't know enough Hebrew to read it in the original. I mean, I went to Hebrew school for years, but I never really learned Hebrew. I don't think you *ever* really learn a language that way. What I'd like to do is go to Israel, and learn Hebrew there."

"From the lips of a pretty little Israelian girl, eh?" said Basil.

"Israelian? Oh. You mean Israeli." Danny tried to respond to Basil's sly grin with a smile of his own, but found himself frowning instead. He was afraid he might be blushing, too. The conversation had wandered away from where he wanted it to go.

"Danny," said Basil. "What would you think about doing your own book on UFOs? Eh?"

"My own book? You mean *writing* my own book?"

"That's the only way I know of to do a book," said Basil.