



OUTTAKES

OF A UFO

INVESTIGATOR

DAVID HALPERIN

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Chapter 1: Danny Takes Flight

APRIL 1965

1.

Danny Shapiro was at dinner with his parents when the phone rang. His father let out an irritated sigh and, halfway standing from his chair at the kitchen table, plucked the receiver from its place on the wall over the sink.

"Yeah," said Leon Shapiro. "Yeah. Hold on a minute."

He covered the mouthpiece. "It's for you," he said to Danny. "Somebody named Butch Harrison. Friend of yours from school?"

Danny tried to remember if there was anyone in his tenth-grade class named Butch Harrison. "Don't think so."

"You tell your friend Butch Harrison that supertime is not when you go phoning people."

Danny nodded, wondering if he needed to apologize. Did this call have something to do with UFOs? He hoped not. He and his father had more or less made peace over Danny's adolescent "obsession," as Leon called it, with the mysterious flying disks that could be anything and mean anything, but were most likely visitors from outer space. It was never a good idea, however, for his father to be reminded of its existence. He went to the sink and took the phone. "Hello?"

"Is this Daniel Shapiro?"

"Uh-huh."

"This is Butch Harrison."

“Uh-huh?”

“Butch *Harrison*. From the Sky Rangers Airport.”

“Uh-huh.”

There was a moment’s silence. Then Butch Harrison said irritably, “Look, is this Daniel Shapiro? In – what the hell is it? – Kellerfield, Pennsylvania?”

“Yes,” said Danny. “That’s me.”

“The office gave me your letter. You said you wanted to talk to me.”

Shit. It *was* about UFOs. At another time Danny would have been thrilled to receive this call. But not now, with his father glaring, and their food getting cold on their plates. “Tell him you’ll phone him back after dinner,” Leon hissed, while Anna Shapiro gazed at her husband, frightened, unhappy, imploring, her frail stick-like arms halfway raised from the table as if in self-protection.

Danny held up his hand, palm toward his parents, as if to hold them off for just a moment. Fifty miles away in New Jersey, at the small private airport called The Sky Rangers, Butch Harrison drew in his breath impatiently.

“It’s about those reports,” Danny said, trying to bring back the facts that once had been at his fingertips. “That there were radar sightings of unknown objects after midnight last--last--uh, March third. And lights in the sky at the same time.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Butch Harrison. “You said so in your letter.”

He said this in a completely matter-of-fact way, as if he and Danny both knew that the radar-visual UFO sighting, which the Air Force said had never happened, was for real. Danny drew in his breath, watching to see if his father’s expression was growing any angrier. It didn’t seem to be.

"I was up there," said Butch Harrison. "So was Pete Lucci. Don't know what the damn thing was, though. We couldn't catch up with it. Couldn't even get close."

"You went up in an airplane? After – whatever it was?" Danny saw that Leon was staring at him, a puzzled look on his face. "It's somebody from the Sky Rangers Airport," he whispered, holding his palm as tightly as he could over the telephone's mouthpiece. "In New Jersey. By Sanford."

"Sanford," said Leon. Danny barely noticed.

"Yeah, me and Pete Lucci," said Harrison. "The people in the radar tower in the Camden airport wanted us to go up and take a look, so we did. Not that we saw anything, except for that light. It was in the papers, wasn't it? Pete told me it was."

"The papers had some reports. But they weren't very detailed. And the object *was* picked up on radar? At the Camden airport?"

"Yeah. At the Air Force base too. Both of them were in contact with us, maybe for an hour, maybe more. Why do you keep asking? Is there some problem?"

"Camden airport has denied it," said Danny.

"*Denied* it? They were on the radio with Pete and me for a goddamn hour, and they *denied* it?"

Denied it, and hung up on Danny when he asked to speak with the people who were on duty that night. "The Air Force has denied it too," he said.

"Sonofabitch," said Butch Harrison.

Danny looked at his father and mother. Anna's peaky, bespectacled face still seemed scared and unhappy, her fragile body hunched and tense. But in Leon's face there was something new, something Danny hadn't seen before. Interest, perhaps? Curiosity? He couldn't concern himself with that now. "What did you

say the other man's name was?" he said, reaching for a pencil and a used envelope on the sink. "Lucci, was it?"

"Yeah, Lucci. Pete Lucci. Listen, Mister Shapiro, I don't know who the hell you and your organization are. But if you're some government agency, I'm hanging up this phone right now."

"No, no," Danny assured him. "We don't have any connection with the government. We're a private research organization. Our concern is purely scientific."

"Scientific, huh?"

"Yes, scientific."

"Yeah? Well, then you need to hear our side of it. From Pete and me. And not go believing every cockamamy story those assholes in the radar tower tell you about us."

Danny could hardly believe what he was hearing. "When would be a good time for me to phone you? Talk with you and Mr. Lucci?" He looked at Leon, expecting to see his father's face contort with rage over the prospect of a long-distance phone bill. *No, no, no!* he was sure Leon would shout silently at him. But Leon shouted nothing. That strange new look – perhaps of curiosity, perhaps something more akin to nostalgia – didn't leave his face.

"Phone, hell. Come on out here to the Sky Rangers. We'll both be here all Saturday afternoon. There's a coffee shop. We'll sit and talk, for as long as it takes."

"Come out there Saturday? I—I don't think I can."

"Why not? You busy? We'll make it another weekend."

"I don't have a car. I mean, I don't drive."

"You don't *drive*?"

"I mean – well, it's like – it's like this." Danny took a deep breath. He had no choice but to say it. "I'm fifteen years old."

Silence at the other end of the line. Danny felt the hot redness in his face, the sweat beginning to drip from his armpits. His glasses, which he intermittently hated, were beginning to slide down his nose, the way they tended to do when he had to do something scary like talk to a girl. He wanted to hang up, leave the dinner table, go back to his schoolwork, forget he'd ever heard of UFOs. He could only imagine the rebukes he had in store.

"Well, hell," said Butch Harrison. His tone was lighter now, and friendlier. "Why don't you see if you can find somebody to drive you?"

"To drive me? Well, I don't know – I don't think –"

"Danny," said Leon.

"Excuse me a second," Danny said into the telephone. He cupped his hand over the mouthpiece, and looked toward his father.

"Do you need a ride to that airport?"

Danny nodded.

"This Saturday?"

He nodded again.

"I can take you. If you want me to." And, apparently reading the expression on Danny's face, he added: "Ask him what time he wants us there."

For the first time in this conversation, Danny found himself stammering. He managed, though, to arrange with Butch Harrison that they'd meet him and Lucci at the Sky Rangers coffee shop on Saturday afternoon at three o'clock. He managed to describe himself so Harrison would recognize him: thin, medium height, dark brown hair, black horn-rimmed glasses. With *very* thick lenses, he said; and Anna, whose glasses were also pretty thick, laughed at hearing this.

Danny hung up the phone. "Well, *me bai-i-i*," said Leon. "You see the advantage of working for the state. I have Saturdays off these days. Can do what I please."

2.

The fine April weather continued into the next Saturday, when Danny and Leon got into the ancient Chevrolet and set out for the Sky Rangers Airport. The engine started up all right, but died as soon as Leon put it into reverse and started to back out of the carport. It died again when he backed out from the driveway.

"Mom's waving to us," Leon said to Danny. He looked and saw his mother through the kitchen window, in her rocker, smiling gaily as she waved goodbye. They both smiled and waved back.

Leon started the car again and sighed deeply. "Afraid she's on her last legs," he said. "Hanging on by a thread, as it were."

Danny stared at him, alarmed.

"I just hope she's not going to start overheating on us," said Leon. "Once we start going at highway speed."

Good. It was the car he was talking about. His mother's heart attack was twelve years in the past and since then she'd been fine. Perfectly fine, except she was what the family called a "semi-invalid" with a heart condition and restricted in her activity, which didn't seem anywhere near as bad as being a real invalid. Danny settled back into his seat.

"And I think," Leon went on, "that when the new models come out this fall, that'll be the end of our time with this good old Chevy. Any idea what kind of a new car you'd like us to get?"

"Not really," Danny said.

"No, I don't suppose you would," said Leon. "You don't give very much thought to cars, do you?"

He didn't, although he gave a great deal of thought, most of it in daydream form, to what he might do with a car when he was sixteen and finally would be able to drive. Meanwhile they crossed over into Jersey at Burlington, and continued southward. Danny cast an occasional glance at the temperature gauge, reassuring himself each time that the car wasn't overheating.

"All built up, my boy," Leon intoned as he drove. "One development after the next, each with its stores, each with its shopping centers. Did you notice that new shopping center we just passed? Did you? I bet it's no more than a year or two old. And you know what used to be there, before they put up the buildings, before they covered the place with concrete?"

"Trees?" Danny said.

"Right with Eversharp!" Leon said, laughing in that strange artificial way he sometimes had. "Trees. South Jersey used to be woods. Mile after mile of pine trees. And where there weren't woods there'd be farmland. We'd go for drives here, you and Mom and me. Back before Mom got so sick. We used to call these the wide open spaces. We'd all drive through it together and we'd sing that song about the wide open spaces. You remember that?"

"A little," said Danny.

"Hope you do remember," said Leon. "Because they're all gone now. All the wide open spaces. Most of them, anyway. You see any wide open spaces here now?"

"Uh-uh," Danny said. He gave this answer because it was obviously the one Leon was looking for. As far as he was concerned, the whole area still looked rural enough.

"There were lakes here too," said Leon. "One time we stayed by a lake. It was just outside of Sanford; that's what it made me think of, when you said 'Sanford'

over the phone. You, me, and Mom. We took out the rowboat the next day. You must have been two years old. You remember any of that?"

"Mom told me about it."

"Oh, of course," said Leon sourly. "I'd forgot. Mom tells you everything." And he said nothing more for a long time.

3.

Signs for the Sky Rangers Airport began to appear along the roadside, and they found the place without too much trouble. It was 2:47 by Danny's watch when they pulled into the parking lot.

"You're Shapiro, right?" Pete Lucci said to Danny as he and Leon stepped into the coffee shop.

Actually, it was Butch Harrison who said this, but Danny thought at first it was Pete Lucci because he naturally expected Pete Lucci to be the one with the dark curly hair and not the blond crew cut. But it turned out to be the other way around; and when Danny said, "And you're Pete Lucci?" both men laughed, and Butch Harrison said, "I look like I ought to be Pete Lucci, right? But that's Pete. I'm Butch." They were both husky young men, in their mid-twenties.

"I'm Leon Shapiro," said Leon. "I'm Danny's father."

Leon pulled out his wallet when they reached the cash register. "Nah, nah," said Butch Harrison. "This is on us. You're our guests. *Real* nice of you to drive Danny out here, Mister Shapiro."

They all had coffee. "Well, fire away, Danny," Butch Harrison said when they had all sat down. "What would you like to know?"

“One thing I’m a little confused about,” said Danny, fishing out a ball-point pen and opening his small blue notebook. “How many objects were there? The newspaper stories spoke of several UFOs, but you mentioned only one light.”

Harrison and Lucci both began to answer at once. Lucci quickly fell silent, though, and let Harrison give Danny the details of the episode, nodding his confirmation at key points. Danny had more questions. As the men spoke, the full story of the Sky Rangers UFO sighting began to take shape. Leon sat silent, listening closely.

Neither Harrison nor Lucci, nor anyone else who had been at the Sky Rangers airport after midnight on March 3, had actually seen more than one object. The people at Camden airport, however, had had up to three unidentified blips on their radar screen at any one time. The objects, whatever they were, seemed to be moving around in the skies in the vicinity of Sanford. So someone named Ken Seagroves, with whom both Harrison and Lucci were distantly acquainted, had radioed the Sky Rangers to see if there was anyone around who wanted to take a plane up and have a look.

The object was clearly visible from the ground, Harrison said. It was a kind of orangey-red, egg-shaped light which seemed to jump about irregularly in the night sky. Harrison remembered that it was a little before one in the morning when he and Lucci had climbed into Harrison’s plane and taken off after it.

“For a minute there,” Harrison said, “we were scared we were gonna catch it.”

“Or it was gonna catch us,” said Lucci; and all four of them laughed.

“It looked like you were gaining on it?” Danny asked.

“Gaining isn’t the word,” Harrison said. “It got so close to us, so fast, that we figured it had to be coming at us. We figured, if we were Martians or something trying to catch us some specimen earthlings, we might do just what they were doing. Hang out in the sky, just high enough to get people curious so

somebody'd be dumb enough to come up to see what we were. And then we'd nab 'em. Know what I mean, Mister Shapiro?"

Leon nodded. "But it looks like they didn't nab you," he said.

"No they didn't. What do they do then but make a hundred and eighty degree turn, zoom right off, till they're so far away they're just a tiny little point of light. I said, 'Pete, we're not gonna be able to catch them, if anything we'll just get ourselves killed trying.' So we radioed Seagroves we were coming back down, the Camden boys could chase them if they wanted. He was pretty pissed but there wasn't nothing he could do about it."

"Except lie about the whole thing a couple weeks after," said Lucci. "Say they never got anything on radar." He shook his head. "Pisses me off, what some people will do."

"The object was pretty high up, you think?" said Danny.

"Way up," said Harrison. "About like this." Lifting his hand, he pointed to a light fixture in the ceiling of the coffee shop.

A disagreeable thought crossed Danny's mind. Harrison had earlier spoken of the UFO as being in the south, and now it appeared that it had been fairly close to the zenith. Hadn't Arcturus been in the south, near the zenith, in the early morning hours of March 3? He'd studied his star chart carefully; he was pretty sure he remembered that. And Arcturus was supposed to be orange-colored, not that the stars ever were the colors the books said they were supposed to be. He raised this possibility gingerly, so as not to insult the two pilots, who surely had seen Arcturus once or twice before.

"Who said the UFOs were Arcturus?" Harrison demanded.

"The Philadelphia *Inquirer* quoted that from the 'experts,'" said Danny. "The reporter didn't say who the experts were."

“The geniuses of the newsroom,” said Harrison. “Wish one of those geniuses was in the plane when that thing came flying straight at us. He wouldn’t be making genius talk. He’d be down under his seat, peeing in his pants.”

“The reporter I talked to wasn’t such a genius,” Danny said. “He kept calling Arcturus a planet. When I told him it was a star and not a planet, he said, ‘Sir, did you phone to demonstrate your knowledge of astronomy?’ And when I tried to explain, he said, ‘Sir, I suggest that you and the rest of you flying saucer nuts all go knock your thick heads together. Then you’ll see more stars than you can count.’ And then he hung up on me.”

“Sheesh,” said Harrison, shaking his head. “That’s one hell of a way to talk to a kid. Isn’t it, Mister Shapiro?”

“Yeah, I guess it is,” said Leon.

“Really pisses me off,” said Harrison.

“Pisses me off too,” said Lucci.

Lucci looked at his watch and saw it was nearly five o’clock. He pushed away from the table and stood up. “Thanks for the coffee, Butch,” he said. “Nice meeting you, Mr. Shapiro. Danny, you keep chasing ’em.”

Chasing what? Danny thought. UFOs, no doubt. But he wasn’t entirely sure that was what Lucci had meant.

“I guess we’d better be going too,” Leon said. “We’ve got a long drive. And Danny’s mother is home waiting for us.”

“You really gotta run, Mister Shapiro?” said Butch Harrison. Leon hesitated. Harrison went on, “Seems to me, if you got some time, you and Danny might like to go up in the plane with me. Just for a ride. You spend so much time driving to the airport, it’s a shame if you never even get into the air.”

Danny said nothing, tried to keep his face pure of any expression. "Well, that's mighty kind of you," said Leon. From the tone of his voice, Danny could tell his father was pleased and excited. "I don't believe Danny's ever flown in a plane. Have you, Danny?" Danny shook his head no. "Would you like to?" said Leon.

The three of them walked to Harrison's airplane, through a field bathed in the late afternoon sunshine. It was turning a bit chilly; you might need a coat by the time it got dark. The sky was a pure deep blue, so dry and clear that the daytime moon shone vivid white in the southwestern sky, though it was still hardly more than a crescent, hardly even halfway full.

"Who wants to sit next to me?" Harrison asked, climbing in behind the controls. Danny deferred to his father. "No, no," said Leon. "You sit there, Danny. I'll sit behind you. I've been in the pilot's seat a few times." He said to Harrison, "I did a bit of flying when I was in the service. Back during the war."

"Is that so?" said Harrison. "Were you in the Air Force, Mister Shapiro?"

"Army Air Corps, they called it back then. But no, I wasn't. Just the regular Army. But they taught a lot of us to fly, back then."

They all fastened their seat belts. Harrison switched on the engines. The racket was terrific. Danny wondered how Harrison and Lucci had communicated with each other that March night, as they climbed in pursuit of a UFO that was about to turn and pursue them. They taxied down the runway, then launched themselves, more abruptly than Danny would ever have expected, into the sky.

The ground fell away rapidly. The trees, buildings, automobiles became almost at once tiny and toylike beneath them. The airport's main building reminded Danny, for just a moment, of that miniature toy house made of Lincoln Logs or possibly American Bricks that he'd built and unbuild a thousand times during the endless afternoons in his grandmother's living room when he was three years old and his mother lay in her bed upstairs, too sick even to see him. Then it became too small even for that, just one tiny red hotel on the great Monopoly

board that spread beneath them. Somewhere by the horizon, a distant lake glittered in the sun.

Their right wing dipped suddenly. The plane wheeled sharply. Danny again felt, for a few seconds, the thrilling rush of ascent in his stomach and his genitalia. The moon lay directly ahead. They climbed steeply toward it; as though Harrison had decided, without telling them, to fly away altogether from the earth and set his course for the moon. Danny felt it leaping toward them out of the blue.

Gentlemen, Danny imagined Harrison announcing over some loudspeaker, mankind's first ever journey to the moon is underway.

He turned around to look at his father. Leon sat with his head back, his face set in an expression of anticipated or perhaps remembered ecstasy. His eyes were half shut. His mouth was slightly open, his tongue pressed expectantly against his lower teeth, as though sensing the approach of some enormous nipple filled with milk all for him.

Disconcerted, yet strangely pleased, Danny did not stay to watch. He set his face forward again, and lost himself in the moon's looming countenance.

Chapter 2: Alien Landing

APRIL-MAY 1965

1.

The last months of tenth grade; and Danny had begun to live for the mail.

He came home from school each day sunk in thought, hardly speaking to his mother except to ask, the moment he walked into the house, "Any mail today?"

He might be happy if there was a letter or two, mostly from the teen-age boys in distant towns with whom he exchanged long letters discussing UFO sightings and the three men in black and what he called the "Allende mystery" – something about an invisible ship and three gypsies and a mysterious annotated book. When no letter came, he looked dejected.

Anna Shapiro tried to coax a smile from her son but got nowhere. This annoyed and even embarrassed her. She'd been assuring her husband for years now that Danny's perpetual state of un-smiling-ness was temporary, that as he became a teenager he'd get over it. Nothing of the sort had happened. If anything, it had gotten worse. Leon was continually irritated at this, blaming it on the cloud of gloom Anna and her illness had diffused throughout the house. This was obviously unfair. No one could have tried harder to be cheerful than she had. So she concealed her irritation under a smile even brighter than before, and said:

"Anything the matter?"

"Nothing."

What could he have said? That he was hopelessly in love with a Gentile girl who refused to give him the time of day? His mother would probably assure him this was OK, things were better this way, there would not be the heartbreak down the road. He didn't need a lecture from her about how interdating and

intermarriage posed a danger to Judaism. He knew it well enough. Months ago he'd read the books in the Bible that told how Ezra and Nehemiah had made the Jewish men divorce their Gentile wives, because intermarriage was a sin against God. Obviously Ezra and Nehemiah had done the right thing.

"Any mail today?" Danny asked as he stepped through the door.

"Tons of it," said Anna, smiling her broadest smile.

Danny lit up. He'd actually been having a pretty good day even before this. The weather had decided to turn nice, after what seemed like weeks of being cold and blustery even though it was almost the end of April. His clogged sinuses felt like they might begin to dry up and heal in the new warmth. In English class he had been asked to read aloud a short story he had written for the class, and it had kept the kids in stitches. And now there was plenty of mail for him. Perhaps today was the day things would begin to turn around.

"Daddy got a letter too," said Anna. "*A mysterious letter.* Maybe you can figure out what it might be about."

"Let's see it," said Danny, mildly curious. Anna handed him a small envelope with the name and address of Mr. Leon Shapiro typed very neatly in the center. It was postmarked somewhere in Long Island, April 24, 1965. That was Saturday, three days ago. No return address.

Danny switched on the light above the sink and held the letter up to it. But the envelope was made of thick, good quality paper, and he could see nothing of what was inside. He tried to think what other clues one could find on a sealed envelope but came up with nothing. He shrugged and handed the letter back to his mother, who laughed.

He was slightly puzzled. He hadn't said or done anything that was funny, had he?

His own mail consisted of four letters, the largest number he'd ever received on a single day. Although he saw at once that one of them was a piece of junk, the sight of so much mail addressed to *Mr. Daniel Shapiro* made his heart lift with pleasure and anticipation. There was a crisp envelope, imprinted with the words OFFICIAL BUSINESS, which had the Department of the Air Force in Washington as its return address. A letter from Lawrence, Kansas, obviously from Mark Ferris; and another one from Gainesville, Florida, just as obviously from Anson Cole. And a colorful junk-mail envelope from The Mind Explorers, with a boldly printed note beside the address, **This may be your last chance to EXPAND YOUR MIND POWERS!!!**

Danny hesitated for just a moment before writing RETURN TO SENDER on the outside of the letter from The Mind Explorers. He took a kitchen knife from the drawer and slit open the OFFICIAL BUSINESS from the Air Force. As expected: one more official denial of a string of radar sightings over Philadelphia, which Danny knew for a fact to have taken place. In the next envelope, two pages of Anson Cole's lunacy about the green, white and red "hovering UFOs" that Cole, a bachelor in his fifties, saw every clear night over his home in Gainesville. Only recently had it dawned on Danny, who for months had been begging Cole to rig up a photographic telescope to get good pictures of the "hovering UFOs," that they were really stars seen through cheap binoculars.

Which left Mark Ferris's letter – meaty, articulate, and this time eight single-spaced pages long. Danny was in the middle of reading it when he realized his mother was watching him hungrily, her smile still fixed on her face.

"Well," Anna said. "What's old Mark got to say for himself?"

Not much, Danny wanted to tell her. But, given that the letter was eight pages long, this was obviously not true. "He's writing about the Allende mystery," he said. "He thinks Basil Richard may have a copy of the Varo edition of *The Case for the UFO*."

Anna looked bewildered. Danny tried to explain. "That's the mimeograph edition the Navy had made up. Of the book the gypsies sent them in 1955. You

know, *The Case for the UFO* by M.K. Jessup. With all their marginal annotations. The gypsies' annotations, I mean."

"Uh-huh," said Anna. "Well, that's interesting, I guess." She paused, and her smile turned just a little bit sly. "Actually, Danny, I think *I've* got some UFO news for you."

"UFO news?" He stared at his mother as if this was the first time he was seeing her. "What?"

"I was talking with your grandmother this morning. Over the phone."

"Uh-huh?"

"She said there was a piece in yesterday's *Trenton Times*, that she thought maybe you might be interested in."

"Uh-huh?"

"Seems like one of your UFOs landed in New Jersey, just last weekend."

"Landed? In New Jersey? Where?"

"Take it *easy*," Anna laughed. "You don't have to get so excited. It was down in good old Scofield. You remember Scofield. You were there."

"I was? When?"

"Back when you were little, and you and Daddy and I used to go on drives. All over South Jersey. There was a pretty lake, not far from Scofield. We stayed in a motel there, and we all went out on a rowboat on the lake. We took slides of the lake. You used to love to look at those slides."

"I don't remember any of that," said Danny, annoyed. Though actually he did have some dim recollection of the slides. They'd project them onto the wall, and he'd run up to the wall and touch the image of the blue water and wonder why it wasn't wet, and everybody would laugh.

“Tsss!” said Anna. That hiss of hers, her way of showing mild amusement, as if to say, *Much you know.*”

“But when did it happen?” said Danny, eager to get back to the real issue. “The landing, I mean. And who saw it, and what did they see?”

“I told you, it was last weekend. No, I don’t remember which day it was. And I don’t know the details, either. I just heard it from Grandma. You’re the one who’s the great UFO investigator, not Grandma. She just thinks of you and notices things you might be interested in. She said something about two boys saw a red glow landing in the woods, and the next day they found a big hole and tripod marks. I phoned Daddy at his office. He said he’d stop by Grandma’s on his way home and pick the paper up for you. That’s pretty nice of him, don’t you think?”

2.

Anna handed Leon the mysterious letter, the one from Long Island with no return address, as soon as he walked through the door. He hadn’t even taken off his hat, hadn’t put down his briefcase. She sat down again in her rocker, smiling, gazing at Leon expectantly. Danny, who had come running from his typewriter, stood by smiling. The aroma of the paprika chicken that was their dinner filled the small kitchen. “How was work today, Dad?” said Danny.

“Not bad, not bad,” said Leon. He slid the letter, unopened, into his briefcase, and pulled out yesterday’s *Trenton Times*. “How’s *me bai-i-i?*” he said. “Got something for you, *me bai-i-i.*”

Danny wanted more than anything to start hunting through the *Times* for the news from Scofield, but patience seemed the wiser course. Leon had been nice enough to pick up the paper for him; he didn’t need to be reminded that Danny wanted it because it had something in it about UFOs. There would be time enough to read the article after dinner, when Leon was doing something else.

"You're almost as tall as me now, *me bai-i-i*," said Leon. He squeezed Danny's upper arm. "And you got nice hard muscles! They're working you out in phys ed, are they?"

"We're learning to climb ropes," said Danny. He enjoyed the rope climbing. It was the only thing in phys ed that he did enjoy.

Anna laughed, relieved at Leon's good mood.

"The mailman brought something real exciting today," she said as they sat down to eat. "For Danny. From his friend Mark Ferris."

"Mark Ferris?" said Leon. "Is he that kid out in Kansas?"

"Uh-huh," said Danny.

"The one who writes you those Ph.D. theses for letters?"

"Uh-huh."

"He's in tenth grade, like you?"

"Eleventh."

"What kind of a family does he come from?"

"What do you mean?" Danny asked.

"I mean, like what do his parents do? What does his father do for a living?"

"I don't know," said Danny.

"Does he have any brothers or sisters?"

"I don't know," said Danny.

"Does he go out with girls?"

"I don't know," said Danny. "I don't think he does."

"He doesn't talk much about himself in those letters of his, does he?"

"No," said Danny, "I don't guess he does."

"So then what the hell do you and he write to each other about, in your ten-page letters?"

"UFOs," said Danny.

Leon cracked a chicken bone between his teeth and stared sullenly at his plate for what seemed a very long time. The mood had soured, and neither Danny nor Anna knew what to do to retrieve it.

3.

Danny had phys ed the next day. As he waited in line to use the parallel bars, which he hated, he took care to stand next to Jack Bingham.

Jack was a tall, fair-haired, good-natured boy with a fine resonant voice, who wanted to be an actor. He was often the one who read the morning's announcements over the school PA system, even though he was only a tenth grader. What was more to the point, he worked afternoons at WKLR, Kellerfield's own radio station.

"Did you hear?" Danny said to him. "There was a UFO landing last Friday. At Scofield, New Jersey. That's about twenty miles outside Philly, to the south."

"No!" said Jack. "You don't say."

"I'm going down to Scofield this weekend," said Danny. "To investigate."

"Well, now, that *is* exciting," said Jack. "Just watch yourself, Danny. We don't want any little men to get you."

"I was wondering," said Danny. "Would you be able to write a letter for me? On WKLR stationery, I mean. Saying that I'm a representative of the station, that I'm doing the investigation for WKLR."

"Oh, my," said Jack. He laughed nervously. "Well, what the heck. Let's give it the old college try. Anything to chase those flying saucers. Down to the last cup and saucer, right, Danny?"

"Right," said Danny.

That was Wednesday. On Thursday, Danny waylaid Jack after his morning geometry class. Jack said that he had written the letter, but he had forgotten to bring it to school. He would bring it tomorrow, he said.

Danny phoned Jack on Thursday evening, to remind him.

On Friday, Jack had the letter. *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: The bearer of this letter, Mr. Daniel Shapiro, is a representative of the WKLR Radio News team. It would be appreciated if you would extend complete press privileges to our reporter in covering the Scofield UFO landing.* And Jack had signed it.

4.

The bus pulled to the curb. The driver yanked the door open. "Last stop, Scofield!"

Danny stepped down to the sidewalk and looked around. Downtown Scofield, he saw, was bleak and unwelcoming under the thick gray sky. Although it was the first of May, the weather had again turned cloudy and cold; Danny wore a flannel shirt, heavy pants, and a tan raincoat. He looked at his watch. 11:43 already. These buses, you can spend the whole day riding back and forth on them.

Where does one begin to investigate a UFO landing?

In the luncheonette on the corner, where he had a cup of coffee and a hamburger, the lady at the cash register directed him to the town library. There he could find the past week's copies of the local paper, which he imagined would give fuller and more accurate accounts of the landing than the garbled story in the *Trenton Times*.

Which it did. And quoted Jerome Bauman, Scofield chief of police, as saying that they thought a hoax unlikely and were continuing to investigate. Danny put on his raincoat and inquired his way to the police station.

He looked at the sky. He wished he'd brought an umbrella.

He reached the station at just the right time. Chief Bauman had just got back from lunch. Danny pulled his WKLR credentials out of his pocket and showed them to the young policeman who sat at the desk by the entrance. "Down the hall, first door to the left," said the policeman. "Just go on in."

The chief was a burly man who looked to be about forty, with a blond crew cut. For some reason Danny couldn't imagine, he was wearing dark glasses. Danny showed him the letter from WKRL Radio. Bauman glanced at it and handed it back. He reached into his breast pocket and produced a pack of cigarettes.

"Smoke?" he said, tapping the bottom of the pack.

"No thanks," said Danny. He tried, successfully, to hide his surprise. He'd never been offered a cigarette by anybody, much less a grownup. He sat down in a chair across the desk from the chief and opened the small, dark blue notebook he'd brought with him on the investigation, along with his Brownie box camera.

Bauman replaced the cigarettes, not taking one for himself. "They're saying now it's a hoax," he said.

"Who're saying that?"

“Couple professors. One of them from the University of Pennsylvania. The other from some place in New Jersey – what was it? – Rutgers. Come down here with three fellas from the Air Force. They go out to the hole Thursday, all of them together, stand for five minutes looking at it. Ten minutes at most. Then they go back to the Air Force base. Three hours later I get a phone call. ‘Chief Bauman’” – here Bauman began speaking in a falsetto – “ ‘Chief Bauman, we’ve determined that hole of yours, the UFO was supposed to have made it, is really a hoax.’ I ask them just how the hell they determined it. ‘You’ll have to phone Rutgers,’ they tell me. I ask them, ‘Who do I have to talk to in Rutgers?’ I’m on the phone the next five minutes while they’re shuffling papers trying to figure out who the damn expert is who can tell me why they think it’s a hoax. Then the line goes dead.”

Standard cover-up, Danny thought. The chief laughed bitterly. Danny laughed too.

“Isn’t as if there was still anything to see there Thursday,” Bauman said. “Newspapers printed the story on Monday. By Thursday we had *three thousand people* here to look at the hole. The holes, really; there’s four of them. People from all over New Jersey. Parts of Pennsylvania, too. If I didn’t know better I’d of thought they were bringing in tourist excursion buses from Philly.”

“And they trampled all over everything?”

The chief nodded. “Curiosity seekers,” said Danny. He wondered, with some annoyance, why Bauman hadn’t had the area roped off as soon as the landing was reported. Now the curiosity seekers had probably managed to destroy whatever physical evidence there’d been.

“You been out there yet?” said the chief.

“Not yet. I wanted to talk to you first.”

“Uh-huh,” said the chief. “Well, it’s really too bad. You’re not gonna see what you would have seen if you’d been out here when we first found them. Like the

big hole, the one in the middle. It was absolutely, perfectly circular. I've never seen a hole dug like that in my life."

Danny tried to keep his eyes on Bauman's face while scribbling this into his notebook.

"And those other holes, the tripod holes. *They were not dug.* I tried to tell this to those Air Force people, but they were too busy to listen. They were *pressed* into the ground. The leaves were flattened at the bottom of them. Whatever did it must have come down with *tremendous* force. You won't see that any more. Too many people been poking round the holes. But you got to go out there anyway. Got your car with you?"

"Uh, no," said Danny.

"That's OK. I'll have Smitty drive you out there. Here now, take a look at this."

Bauman pulled a piece of paper out of a folder and pushed it across the desk to Danny. Danny felt his heart pound with excitement as he looked at it. The diagram, drawn by a policeman named Stuart Hauck, showed a perfectly circular hole, its diameter labeled as 2' 4", located at the center of a regular triangle of three smaller holes. The distances from each of the tripod holes to the others, and to the central hole, had been neatly marked. Each side of the triangle was about twenty-five feet. The tripod, and whatever had rested on it, must have been enormous.

"Mind if I copy this?" said Danny.

"Don't bother. I'll do it for you."

The chief took the paper to a large machine that stood in the corner. He lifted a metallic lid, inserted the paper beneath it, and pressed a button. A brilliant light shone beneath the lid, and a motor whirred loudly. Of course; a photocopy machine. Danny had heard of them. This was the first he'd ever seen.

The photocopy the chief handed him was still damp, and had a strong acrid smell. Danny carefully folded it and inserted it into a pocket in the back of his notebook. "Thank you," he said. "Very much."

"Don't mention it. Got anything else you want to ask, or should I give Smitty a holler?"

"Just this," said Danny. "Have the witnesses come forward yet?"

"Nope," said Bauman. "We have appeals out for them to come forward; so far no luck. All we have to go on is the description Frank Crenshaw's two boys gave. The kids were fishing out at Curley's Lake Saturday afternoon. These two young fellas come up to them, real excited. Say they saw something glowing red, landed in the woods about dusk on Friday. Say they've come back to see if it left any marks, and it did. In a clearing in the woods, they said. And they want the boys to come into the woods with them and look at the marks."

"Curley's Lake?" Danny said. This was not in the newspaper accounts.

"George Curley owns the property. About sixty acres, most of it woods. There's a lake on it. He lets the kids fish there weekends." The chief lowered his voice.

"And, Mister – Mister –"

"Shapiro."

"Mister Shapiro. I got to tell you, Frank wasn't too comfortable with that business of his two boys going into the woods with those two young fellas. He questioned his boys about, did they do anything with them, besides show them the holes in the woods, you know what I mean. He questioned them *real* carefully. And so did I."

"Uh-huh," said Danny. He couldn't quite read the expression on the chief's face, and was afraid he'd done something to offend him.

"But there was *no* funny business. Frank and I are both sure of that. They saw a UFO land, saw the marks it made, wanted the Crenshaw boys to see the marks

too. Then the young fellas left, and the Crenshaw boys went running for their Dad.”

“And the young men were – ?” There was an odd detail in the newspaper story, which now came back to Danny.

“Barefoot. The reporter got it right. They were dressed OK otherwise, but they were barefoot. You got some idea what they were doing barefoot, Shapiro, you tell me. We can’t figure it out. Wasn’t that the day was so pretty. It was damn cold, for April.” The chief paused, looked at his watch. “Damn if it isn’t almost three o’clock. Let’s get Smitty, have him drive you out there. *Smitty!* Got a fella here, needs a lift.”

5.

Danny rode in the patrol car with Smitty, a husky young cop with freckles and a shock of blond hair. They drove out beyond city limits, where Scofield’s Main Street became a narrow country road. Smitty slowed and then stopped. Two cars were parked on the right shoulder, barely off the road. Danny could see a trail leading into the woods, with a large NO TRESPASSING sign posted on a tree where the trail began.

“Don’t pay no attention to that sign,” Smitty told him. “Mr. Curley doesn’t mind people on his land. There’s been three thousand out to the clearing since the UFO landed there. The chief musta told you that. Beats me why he even bothers to put the sign up.”

Danny thanked him and began to walk down the trail. The rain began, at first just a drizzle, but getting heavier by the minute. He tucked his camera inside his raincoat to protect it. He passed two teenage girls walking in the opposite direction. They were holding a newspaper over their heads to keep themselves dry, and giggling. When they saw Danny they said to him, “Are you a space scientist?”

“No, I’m not,” he said. They kept on walking.

By the time he reached the clearing his glasses were too wet for him to see very well. He fished out his handkerchief and dried them, which worked OK. But it was clear he’d have to repeat the operation every couple of minutes.

Curley’s Lake was visible through the trees, a few hundred feet away. When the chief mentioned it, Danny had vaguely wondered if there might by any chance be a motel by the lake where they rented rowboats. But there was no motel here, and Danny couldn’t see any sign of a rowboat. There was, however, a water storage tank by the lake. A teen-age boy and girl, who’d obviously come out to have a look at the holes, had taken refuge beneath it from the rain.

Danny located the central crater easily, and, with a little more difficulty, the three tripod holes. Just as Bauman had said: the curiosity seekers had managed to erase whatever of UFOlogical interest there might once have been. All that was left were four nondescript holes, one fairly big and the other three smaller.

And the tree. Danny noticed it as soon as he had stepped into the clearing. It was within the triangle formed by the tripod holes, not far from the crater. Obviously the sassafras tree mentioned in the newspaper accounts.

The reporters had been right. The tree had been partly uprooted, three of its branches partly broken by some force from above, so that they drooped down toward the crater. The end of the longest branch lay on the ground only about five feet from the crater, its leaves brown and wilted.

The rain hadn’t eased. If anything, it was getting worse. Danny looked toward the water storage tank and wondered if he should take shelter with the teen-age couple. Better not. They’d been necking there under the tank, and were now starting to kiss.

He pulled out his camera and began to take pictures – of the holes, of the sassafras tree from different angles, and, stepping back as far as he could without actually going into the woods, of the entire clearing. One or two shots of the lake

might be useful too, but he didn't want the couple under the water tank to think he was photographing them. Afterward he would have to measure the holes and record the measurements in his notebook. Ideally, he should measure the distances between the holes as well, to make sure Stuart Hauck had got them right in his diagram. But he couldn't quite see how he could do that without someone else there to hold one end of the tape measure for him. And it would be a trick and a half to write down the figures without the whole notebook getting soaked.

"Would you like to share an umbrella?"

Danny looked up and saw a large handsome dark-haired woman in her forties, wearing a blue raincoat and holding a huge umbrella over her head. She was standing and calling to him from the entrance to the clearing, about twenty feet away.

"There's plenty of room under here," she said. "Bob and the girls will be along in a minute, and they'll have umbrellas too."

"No, that's all right," said Danny. He walked over to the woman but didn't step under her umbrella. "I'm already about as soaked as I'm going to get."

"Yes, I can see that," the woman said. "We live out on the other side of Scofield, weren't able to come out and see the holes till this afternoon. And what a day we picked for it, too. I'm Elaine Jameson, by the way."

"I'm Danny Shapiro."

"Danny Shapiro." She paused for a moment, as if trying to recognize the name.

"Are you from around here, Danny?"

"No, I'm from Kellerfield. Pennsylvania. That's up across the river from Trenton."

"Gracious. You've come quite a ways. You must be very interested in this kind of thing."

"Oh, I am," said Danny. "I'm doing an investigation for PURA. That's the Pennsylvania UFO Research Association. Whenever there's an important UFO sighting, or a landing even, we try to get whichever of our members lives closest to the place to go there and investigate. And I guess I was the closest."

"*Poora?*" said Mrs. Jameson. "Oh, of course. *Pee-you-ar-ay*. Pennsylvania UFO Research Association. How stupid of me."

"It confuses a lot of people," Danny assured her. "A lot of people think that *pee-you-ar-ay* is how we ought to pronounce it." He didn't add that this was a subject of considerable controversy among the PURA membership, or that there was a third faction that thought the group ought to change its name to PUFORA, pronounced *poo-FORE-ah*. Danny himself thought the whole argument was ridiculous. Let people call the group whatever they wanted, as long as they went out and did the research.

"*There they are,*" said Mrs. Jameson. Three figures emerged into the clearing, struggling with several umbrellas and a mass of photographic equipment. "Everybody, this is Danny Shapiro. He's down from Pennsylvania, investigating the hole for the Pennsylvania – the Pennsylvania UFO Investigators. Danny, this is my husband, Bob Jameson. And these are our daughters. Melanie's the one with the kerchief. And this is Christie, our youngest."

"Sorry we can't quite shake hands," said Melanie. She looked to be in her twenties, and was wearing a heavy raincoat in addition to the kerchief. Christie seemed to be more Danny's age. Chilly as it was, she wore only a light windbreaker. And shorts. Rather shortish shorts, if truth be told.

Danny nodded to each of the Jamesons. He realized with irritation that he'd forgotten to mention he was also investigating the landing for WKLR Radio News. He couldn't say that now; it would sound lame if he did.

"Got some weather for your investigation, haven't you, Dan?" said Mr. Jameson, setting up the tripod. "I could hardly believe it this morning when I turned the calendar to May. But April's been pretty awful too, hasn't it?"

“Last week it seemed to be getting better,” said Danny.

“And now here it is May and it’s winter again.” Mr. Jameson screwed the camera onto the tripod. “Well, now, Dan, what do you think we ought to photograph here?”

“I’m afraid there’s no longer much to see in the holes themselves,” said Danny. “It was different a week ago, I’m told. But with all the people that have been through here —”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mr. Jameson. “*Five thousand* people tramping through this one clearing, can you imagine that? And this rain isn’t helping matters, is it?”

“As far as I’m concerned,” said Danny, “the most interesting thing is the sassafras tree. With the broken branches.” He pointed to it.

“Oh, *yes*,” said Mr. Jameson, gazing at it. “The UFO broke the branches when it came down here, didn’t it? That’s what they say, anyway.”

“Charred the leaves, too,” said Danny.

“They say it had something like a corkscrew on the bottom,” said Melanie. “Like what they use to dig for oil. That’s how it made the big hole. It was after a soil sample, or something like that.”

“I think that’s very probable,” said Danny.

“Frank Crenshaw thinks they wanted a soil sample *and* a water sample. That’s why they picked a spot so close to the lake, so they could get both at the same time. That’s what Frank told me yesterday. Make sense to you, Dan?”

“I think so,” Danny said carefully. He tried to think of any precedents for the UFO beings landing to collect water samples. “There was a case back in 1953, at Brush Creek, California. The witness saw a little man with a pail, taking water from the creek. The sources for the incident may not be entirely reliable, though,” he added.

"Wow," said Christie. "You really know your stuff, don't you?"

"Frank Crenshaw?" said Danny. "Is he the father of the two boys? Who met the men who said they'd seen the UFO?"

"That's him," said Mr. Jameson. "Quite a fellow, that Frank. You need to talk to him, get his angle on all this."

"I was planning to phone him, after I'd seen the landing site."

"Why don't you come to our house," said Mr. Jameson. "After we're done taking pictures. You can phone him from there. Or better, I'll phone him, introduce you, put you on the line. Otherwise Sally might be the one who picks up the phone. She'd probably hang up on you. She's been prickly with strangers, since all this happened. She's not letting *anybody* talk to the kids."

"I can understand that," Danny said.

"Your car is the brown DeSoto, isn't that right? We're parked right behind it. We'll drive slowly, you can follow us."

"Well, actually, Mr. Jameson, I don't have a car."

"I know you don't, Dan. Most teen-agers don't. Your Dad's car, I meant."

"No, what I mean is I didn't drive here. I don't drive yet. I'm still in tenth grade. Next year's the year I get my license."

"You're lucky," said Christie. "I wish *we* lived in Pennsylvania. I'm already in eleventh grade and I *still* don't drive. In New Jersey they won't let you get your learner's permit till you're seventeen."

"So I have one more year of sleeping soundly," said Mrs. Jameson.

"How did you get out here, then?" said Mr. Jameson.

"I took the bus into Scofield, from Philly. The police gave me a ride out here."

Mr. Jameson looked impressed, as far as Danny could tell through his rain-streaked glasses. "Bob," said Mrs. Jameson. "Why don't we take the pictures and get ourselves packed up? This poor boy is so soaked we'll have to wring him out and hang him up to dry."

"OK," said Mr. Jameson. "We're going to need people in the pictures, to give some idea of the scale. Christie, Melanie, why don't the two of you stand next to the hole?"

"Just *stand* there, Dad?" said Christie.

"They could be measuring it," Danny suggested.

"I'm afraid we didn't think to bring a tape measure," said Mrs. Jameson.

"I have a tape measure," said Danny.

So the two girls crouched by the central crater, one on either side, and stretched Danny's tape measure across it. Their father photographed them in that position. So did Danny. The girls did not smile for the camera, or pretend to be anything other than two young women squatting on sandy dirt in a cold pouring rain, measuring a vaguely circular hole in a clearing in a New Jersey woods that had been left by an extraterrestrial vehicle in search of soil samples. Christie's firm, shapely legs, bare to the thigh, shone in the rain. They were the only bright spot in Danny's view finder. He snapped the photo.

"Twenty-nine inches!" Christie sang out.

Danny recorded the measurement in his notebook, bending over it to shield it from the rain. He heard the click and whirr of Mr. Jameson's camera.

"Took a picture of you writing in your notebook, Dan," he said. "Hope you don't mind."

"My turn now, I suppose," said Mrs. Jameson. "Oh dear." She stood beside the sassafras tree, holding her umbrella with one hand while gesturing awkwardly

with the other toward the spot where the limbs had been broken. The camera again clicked and whirred.

“What else should we get?” said Mr. Jameson.

Danny suggested they photograph the shore of Curley’s Lake, with the water storage tank somewhere in the picture. The teen-age lovers were no longer beneath it. They’d presumably figured out the rain wasn’t going to let up any time soon, and they might as well get soaked now as later.

When they were done they disassembled the equipment, and Danny helped them carry it to their station wagon and pack it into the back. They all climbed into the car. Danny sat by the right window in the back seat as they rode. Christie sat between him and Melanie.

6.

“Shoes off, everybody!” Mrs. Jameson called out as the five of them slogged their way in through the front door. “Socks too! Slippers are on the floor by the grandfather clock. Danny, we’ll find a pair for you.”

“Mom has this thing about tracking in dirt,” Christie whispered to him.

Danny could see why. The floor of the Jameson home was creamy wall-to-wall carpeting from the vestibule onward, as far as the eye could see. All of their shoes, and their socks as well, were soaked and muddy. Even getting his shoelaces untied was a trick.

The moment her shoes were off, Mrs. Jameson vanished down the hallway. Danny heard an oven door open and close, smelled a trace of some marvelous aroma. A minute or two later she was back.

“You’ll stay and have supper with us, won’t you, Danny?” she said. “There’s plenty.”

“Oh, it would be wonderful,” said Danny. “But I don’t think I can.” He pulled out his notebook. “The last bus for Philadelphia leaves at 6:45. And, actually, I told my parents I’d take the 5:30 bus out of Scofield. That’d get me home about 8:30. And if I didn’t leave here till 6:45—” He turned to the next page, where he’d copied the schedule of the Saturday evening buses from Philadelphia to Kellerfield.

“Why don’t you give your folks a call?” said Mr. Jameson. “See if they mind you being late. It won’t be any trouble to get you onto the 6:45 bus, after we’ve had dinner. I can drive you to the bus stop on the Scofield-Castle Rock road. It’s only five minutes from here.”

“I’ve got a date tonight,” Christie told him. “And we’re going to a seven o’clock movie. So we’ve got to finish eating by 6:30 anyway. You’ll catch your bus, no trouble.”

“We’ll go to the study right now,” said Mr. Jameson. “You’ll call your parents, see if it’s OK with them. Then we’ll see if we can’t reach Frank Crenshaw.”

Danny began to follow Mr. Jameson from the living room to his study. He was now confused as well as wet. The prospect of staying for dinner with the Jamesons, and particularly the Jameson girls, excited him. But he wasn’t sure whether he ought to be doing it, or even whether he really wanted to. Or what Anna and Leon would think about it all.

“Wait a minute, Danny,” said Mrs. Jameson.

He stopped and turned toward her.

“You’re Jewish, aren’t you?” she said.

“Yes. I am.”

“Are there any foods you don’t eat? I mean, that you aren’t allowed to eat?”

"Well," he said, "I don't eat ham or pork. Or any kind of shellfish, like shrimp or anything. Otherwise it's all pretty much OK. There are other rules, but I don't follow them too strictly. I'm not all that orthodox."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Jameson. "We're having pork roast, I'm afraid. And it's already in the oven. Bob, help me think this through."

So this is what pork smells like, Danny thought. The flesh that is unclean unto you because it cheweth not the cud, even though it does divide the hoof. He didn't know quite how he'd expected it to smell. But not like this.

"Here's what I think," said Mr. Jameson. "We'll let Danny take the 5:30 bus home tonight, so he won't have to bother his parents. Then he'll come back to Scofield next Saturday and have dinner with us then. Maybe we'll have Frank and Sally over in the afternoon. Frank'll tell you everything about the landing, Dan. There's nobody in Scofield knows more about it than he does. Sound good to you?"

"It sounds wonderful," said Danny. He was afraid only that he couldn't express how grateful he felt.

"There was a Jewish holiday a couple of weeks ago, wasn't there?" said Melanie. She'd changed into a clean skirt and sweater, and was now back in the living room. "I saw something about it in the Philadelphia paper. It was on a Friday, or was it a Saturday?"

"Passover," said Danny. "It started Friday night, two weeks ago."

"Yes, Passover," said Mr. Jameson. "That's when the Hebrew people all sacrificed lambs, wasn't it?"

"Uh-huh," said Danny. He was starting to feel uneasy with the turn the conversation had taken, and wished they could get back to talking about UFOs.

"They don't still sacrifice lambs nowadays, do they?" said Mr. Jameson.

"Dad!" said Christie. "Of course they don't sacrifice lambs." She said to Danny, "We had a unit on world religions in ninth grade. My group gave the report on Judaism. I think it's the most *interesting* religion."

"Well, Christie, I wish you'd tell us some of the things you learn in school," said Mr. Jameson. "Then I wouldn't have to embarrass you like this."

"You do a – a cedar something, don't you?" said Melanie. "It was in the newspaper."

"Cedar?" said Danny. "Oh, the Seder. It's like a kind of special holiday meal. Sort of like Thanksgiving. Except you eat special foods. And you drink four cups of wine. Only," he corrected, "most of the time you don't really drink all four cups. You just take sips from them."

"That's right," said Melanie. "I remember now. It was in the article. They said that Jewish people now drink red wine –"

Danny nodded.

" – but a long time ago you used to drink white wine, right? Because Christians would see you drinking the red wine, and think it was the blood of children you were drinking."

"No!" said Mr. Jameson.

"Is that true, Danny?" said Melanie.

Did she mean, is it true that Jews once drank white wine instead of red, because people used to mistakenly believe that the red wine they were drinking was the blood of Christian children? Or, is it true Jews really did drink children's blood? The former, probably; but Danny wasn't sure. He ransacked his knowledge of Jewish history, which now seemed to him so inadequate and fragmentary, for some answer that might serve both questions.

"Well," he said, "about the white wine, I don't really know about that. But I know that back in the Middle Ages they had a lot of superstitious beliefs about Jews. Like they had about witches. So just like they burned witches at the stake, sometimes they rioted against the Jews, because of all sorts of crazy impossible things the Jews were supposed to have done. And *that* part I know is true. So I guess whoever wrote the article probably had his facts right."

"Ignorance and prejudice will do terrible things," Mr. Jameson said loudly. "Ignorance, mostly. Dan's telling us about the Jewish Passover," he said to Mrs. Jameson, who had just appeared in the doorway, wearing her apron. "Very interesting indeed."

"You be sure to come back next week, Danny," said Mrs. Jameson. "I want to hear all about this."

The grandfather clock began to chime five. "Mr. Jameson," said Danny. "I wonder if we shouldn't try phoning Mr. Crenshaw. I'm going to have to catch my bus pretty soon."

"Yes, Dan, that's a good idea."

"I'm going upstairs," Christie announced. "And get ready."

For the second time, Mr. Jameson led the way to his study. Danny sat in a huge leather armchair while Mr. Jameson dialed the telephone.

"Sally?" he said. "Frank there? Oh. Oh, I see. Well, tell him I called, will you? No, no, nothing special. Just tell him I called." He replaced the receiver. "It's just as well," he said to Danny. "You wouldn't have had more than a few minutes to talk anyway. We'll try to arrange something for next week."

"Thank you," Danny said. "I really appreciate that."

Mr. Jameson walked over to a bookcase and contemplated it. One of the shelves seemed to hold ten or fifteen copies of the same paperback. At this distance, Danny couldn't make out what it was.

"Dan," said Mr. Jameson. "I don't suppose you're much interested in politics? I'm sure your schoolwork and your UFO investigations keep you too busy for anything else."

"Most of the time, I guess that's true. I did get pretty interested last fall, though, during the election."

Mr. Jameson nodded. "Of course. That's natural. And which candidate do you think you might have voted for? If you were old enough to vote, that is. If you don't mind my asking."

"Johnson," said Danny. "I was involved with our school's Johnson campaign. We had a student election."

"Well, there's nothing to be ashamed of in that, Dan. You're in good company. A majority, it now appears. They've managed to fool a lot of people."

"Fool a lot of people?"

"Yes indeed," said Mr. Jameson, nodding again. "People in this country are sleepwalking. You, me, most of us. Most people have no idea what our government really is. It's time we all woke up, before it's too late to do anything."

"What our government really is?"

"That's about it." Mr. Jameson turned back to the bookshelf, pulled down one of the multiple paperbacks and handed it to Danny. "Might be worth your time to read this. It'll open your eyes *real* fast."

The book was entitled *None Dare Call It Treason*. Danny glanced, with growing horror, at the blurbs on its front and back covers, then at random pages inside it. Its argument seemed to be that the entire Federal government was on the verge of being taken over by Communists, if they didn't control it already. Chapter after chapter hammered away at this single point. Danny looked up at Mr. Jameson, expecting to see the crazed eyes of a right-wing fanatic. Yet Mr.

Jameson didn't look particularly fanatical, any more than he had all afternoon. Earnest, indeed, but hardly fanatical.

"Well, thank you very much, Mr. Jameson," Danny said, hesitantly holding the book out to him. "I'm not sure that I'll have time to read it this week, though."

"I didn't expect you would. I know you're a very busy young man. Keep it. Read it this summer, or whenever you find time. It might save your life. Stop you from dying in Mr. Johnson's Vietnamese adventure."

"That's one thing I don't understand, Mr. Jameson. If everybody in the government is a Communist, then why are we sending troops to contain Communism in Vietnam? Why –?"

"Dan, Dan," said Mr. Jameson, shaking his head and smiling. "This is not the way you fight a war. You don't *contain* your enemy. You *beat* your enemy. You send in all the force you've got and you smash him. That's *if* you really want to beat him. We knew that during World War Two. You ask your Dad about that; he'll tell you. If back then we hadn't known that very simple fact, there'd be a swastika flying over the county courthouse in Scofield. Right this moment."

Danny stared at him. He knew there was a good reason why we couldn't simply smash the Vietnamese Communists with all the force we had, why we had to respond to their aggression with moderation and restraint. But he had not the smallest recollection of what that reason might be.

"*He's here!*" Christie yelled from upstairs. "Ted's here! Somebody get the door!"

"That's Ted Kraeling," Mr. Jameson told Danny. "He's the young man Christie's been dating." He looked at his watch. "We'd better get a move on, Dan. I just hope he didn't park behind the station wagon. Don't forget your book and your notebook."

Dan followed Mr. Jameson back down the hall. He glanced, through a doorway to his right, into the Jameson dining room. He saw with a pang that the table was set for five, obviously including this Ted Kraeling. Not including himself.

While he was struggling to get his wet shoes back on, he and Ted were introduced. They shook hands. "Pleased to meet you," said Ted. He was a tall, broad-shouldered boy with high cheekbones and a very powerful grip. He wore a blue sport coat, a white shirt, and a narrow dark tie. Danny felt ridiculous in his plaid flannel shirt. He couldn't remember why he'd chosen to wear this shirt to investigate the Scofield landing. He had difficulty remembering why he wore such shirts at all. Christie hadn't yet come downstairs.

It was still raining, though not as heavily as before. The bus stop wasn't sheltered, so Mr. Jameson insisted Danny stay in the car while they waited for the bus to arrive. A minute or two later its headlights appeared, tiny and distant down the long straight road.

"It was good meeting you, Dan," said Mr. Jameson, shaking his hand. "Do come back and see us next Saturday. See if your Dad won't let you borrow his car. It'll make everything a good deal easier."

"I don't drive yet, Mr. Jameson. I'm still in tenth grade."

"Yes, that's right. You told us that. It'll be all right then, Dan. We'll work around it."

"Thanks for everything. Thanks for contacting Mr. Crenshaw and arranging things with him. And thanks – thanks for the book."

"Read it," said Mr. Jameson. "Ponder it. Ignorance will do terrible things. Not only by action. By *in*action as well."

Danny nodded, though he wasn't sure just what he was assenting to.

A moment later he was climbing onto the bus.

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. Triumphantly 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.

Chapter 4: Mystery Within an Enigma

FEBRUARY - MAY 1966

1.

Basil Richard's letter arrived in February – a long-awaited crack in the endless clouds of that dreary season.

Danny had dragged himself home from the school bus stop and through the door, when Anna presented him with the letter with the New York City return address. He ripped it open, his heart pounding.

"Mom!" he cried. "They want me to write them a book!"

Cloverleaf Press wanted it very much, it seemed. So badly did they want it, according to Basil, that it had been with the greatest difficulty he'd persuaded his editor to give Danny until July to send a draft of *Mystery Within an Enigma*, which was what he'd suggested they call Danny's book. "What the hell does he need five months for?" Max Levinthal had demanded of Basil. Danny had already gathered his facts; he knew exactly what he wanted to say. Why not just sit down and write it?

Basil had managed to assuage the lion's wrath while avoiding all mention of the real reason Danny needed five months to write the book – namely, that he was in the eleventh grade and couldn't stop going to school without running afoul of Pennsylvania state law. It couldn't be concealed forever, of course. Sooner or later Max Levinthal would have to be told that Cloverleaf's latest author was a sixteen-year-old prodigy. But that was best done when Levinthal had the manuscript in hand, and could see for himself what the prodigy was capable of.

Danny blurted out the marvelous news to his mother in a great jumble of excitement. Anna listened with a serene, patient smile, which would have communicated to anyone who knew her well – a category which ought to have

included Danny but didn't – that she didn't believe any of this was going to happen. This Basil Richard had struck her from the word go as a *luftmensch*, his head filled with crazy ideas. Danny kept saying he was a famous author, but if he was so famous it was funny she'd never heard of him except from Danny. The New York *Times*, as far as she could remember, had never reviewed any of his books. And now this Max Levinthal sounded just as crazy.

Still, she wouldn't have cheated Danny of the excitement and anticipation. In her own experience, anticipation was by far the greater part of any joy. When what you were so eagerly looking forward to actually happened, it was normally a letdown. If for some reason it didn't happen, at least you had had the fun of looking forward to it.

Besides, she never saw Danny so happy as when he was at his typewriter, surrounded by books and papers, working away on one of his projects, UFOs or whatever else.

2.

Monday afternoon in art class, Danny announced his news. It wasn't a very big class. There were only about a dozen kids plus Mr. Herrero, the art teacher. They worked at their art projects at long tables, or at easels, while they gossiped and joked with each other or with Mr. Herrero.

"My, my," said Mr. Herrero. "Danny's headed for fame and fortune. Soon he'll be on the best-seller list. Sandra, you can go out with Danny then, when he's a best-selling author. He'll have money then. Him and Phil Carlisle."

"I wouldn't go out with Phil Carlisle," said Sandra Gilbert. She was a tall, striking redhead who'd made sure from the first day of classes that everyone in school, students and teachers alike, knew her name wasn't Sandy but *Sandra*. "I'd go out with Dan, though," she said. "Dan has personality."

"It's too bad Danny didn't tell us about this last week," Mr. Herrero said to her. "You could have gone to the Valentine's dance with him."

"I've never known what's so special about Valentine's Day, anyway," said Sandra Gilbert.

She stepped back from her easel and contemplated the painting she was working on. It showed a young girl sitting tensely on a stone wall, rigidly holding a red umbrella over her head. Beyond the wall was a beach; beyond the beach, a dark, threatening sea. The girl's eyes were wide and staring, as though in terror. But her face seemed otherwise calm and composed. Her dress was red, like her umbrella.

"I'm not so sure it's going to be a best-seller," said Danny. "Basil keeps saying there's a great market for UFO books nowadays, but I've never heard of anybody who got rich from writing one."

Nobody replied to this. Sandra kept examining her painting, and Danny looked at it too. Was the girl's hair in the painting supposed to be red? He couldn't tell. It was in shadow.

"Do you like it, Dan?" said Sandra.

Danny nodded enthusiastically, if a bit jealously. Her painting, he had to admit, was much better than his own. He was trying to paint one of the scenes of idolatry described in the Book of Ezekiel, the one where the prophet crawls into a small chamber in the Temple and sees people worshipping "every detestable form of creeping things and beasts." He wanted the monsters to look terrifying, but the effect so far was more cartoonish than scary. There was more menace in one line of Sandra's painting than in all his "creeping things and beasts" put together.

3.

The first of the packets from Murray Whitaker arrived a week or so after Basil's letter. Anna handed Danny the envelope when he came home from school, asking for his mail.

It was postmarked Minneapolis, and was relatively slender. It consisted of four sheets of onion-skin paper covered with faint blue typescript, obviously made by one of a long series of carbon paper sheets. Nine newspaper stories from different parts of the country, reporting UFO sightings from the first two weeks of February, were quoted in their entirety. A note was attached, written on a piece of stationery with the letterhead of a Minneapolis ball bearing manufacturing firm, its address different from the return address on the envelope. *Basil wrote me to send these to you. Very truly yours, Murray Whitaker.* There was no explanation of who Murray Whitaker might happen to be, or how he'd gotten hold of the newspaper stories he'd copied.

Danny excused himself and went to his room. He pulled out a large map of the United States and plotted the sightings – there were eleven – to see if any patterns might emerge. None did. He set the map aside and went to his typewriter.

4.

Do drop Murray a note, Basil wrote around the middle of March, just to let him know you've been getting his stuff. For some reason Danny couldn't imagine, Basil was using a green typewriter ribbon; the result was the oddest-looking letter Danny'd ever seen. *I gather it's been coming in thick?*

Well, yes, it had. Danny, sweating in the heat of his desk lamp and the torchier that stood beside his typewriter, felt a pang of guilt that he hadn't had time to write Murray Whitaker, whoever he was, and thank him for it. He hadn't even had time to digest it all. Every week the mailman brought Danny two and

sometimes three envelopes from Minneapolis, each thicker than the last, each filled with nearly unreadable carbon copies of sighting reports culled from newspapers all over the country.

Danny should have begun at once to write to Whitaker and to Basil himself, whose letters he hadn't yet found time to answer. Instead he pulled a large manila envelope out of the file folder he'd labeled SCOFIELD LANDING, and took the photographs out of the envelope.

They were a half-dozen large glossies. Bob Jameson had taken them, the afternoon he and his family had met Danny in that rain-drenched clearing, and a few weeks afterward he'd mailed them to Danny as a gift. The two Jameson girls squatted, in one of the photos, to measure the crater the UFO had left behind.

Danny stared at the photo. An immense, overpowering longing paralyzed him. What a pretty girl Christie Jameson was. What very pretty legs she had, and what very short shorts she'd been wearing that day. Her squatting position had pulled up those short shorts to reveal even more of her attractive legs than they did when she was standing. What a pity it was he'd never seen her again, that the Jamesons' idea of having him back for dinner hadn't worked out.

Not that it mattered. Christie had a boyfriend. And even if she didn't—how could he imagine a girl that good-looking would ever be interested in him?

There was a knock at the door. He shoved the photograph under a pile of typescript on his desk. "Come in!" he called out.

Leon came in.

"Danny, you know what time it is?"

Obviously Danny knew what time it was. The clock on his desk was in plain view of them both. It ticked so loudly you couldn't hear yourself think. "It's eleven-oh-eight," he said.

"I *know* it's eleven-oh-eight," his father said angrily. "What I mean is, it's *late*. How much longer you think you're going to be up working?"

"About another half-hour," Danny said. He'd actually planned to be up another hour at the least, but now seemed a good time for a tactical concession.

"Another half-hour," said Leon, shaking his head. "And you'll be up for school at six-thirty. Tell me, Danny. How do you get by without sleep?"

He didn't sound angry now. He sounded curious, as if he genuinely wanted to know.

Danny looked over the wilderness of typewritten pages on his desk. He wanted to say, *This is my path. This is my destiny. Solving the UFO mystery is what I was put on earth to do.* A great wave of exhaustion came over him with this thought. He said to Leon, "I don't know. I just don't need much sleep, I guess."

Leon looked, as Danny had, at the papers that covered the desk. He picked up one sheet. "One hundred sixty-eight," he read from the upper right corner. "You've written *one hundred and sixty-eight* pages of this thing?"

"One hundred and seventy-four," said Danny. He couldn't keep the pride entirely out of his voice.

"How many more you got to go, you think?"

Danny did a rapid calculation in his mind. The results were not very comforting. "I'm not sure."

"Well," said Leon. He thought for a moment. "Well, worst comes to worst, you can always use it for a paperweight."

A joke? But Leon didn't seem to be in a jocular mood. "Your *mother* needs sleep," he snarled. "Even if you don't. Think she likes listening to that endless goddamn racket from your typewriter? She's up half the night listening to it. Haven't you noticed it keeps her up?"

Danny knew that wasn't true. Once, two or three years ago, when he was sitting with his mother and they were talking about his UFO friends and the long letters he wrote them, she'd said, *Don't worry about keeping me up if you have to work late. The sound of your typing doesn't disturb me. It actually comforts me* – she'd said, smiling – *to know you're there.*

Leon didn't smile. He hardly ever smiled these days, at least not at Danny or his mother. For other people, outside the family, Leon had plentiful smiles. Danny had noticed this, and it grieved him.

"I want you to go to bed," Leon said. "Right now."

5.

"The *Times* ran an editorial on UFOs today," Leon said to Danny one evening the next week. "Would you like me to read it to you?"

It was six-thirty, and the Shapiro family was finishing dinner. More accurately, Leon and Danny were finishing dinner. Anna had stopped eating a while ago – she hadn't had much appetite lately – and had moved from the table to her rocking chair. She found it difficult to sit at the table for any length of time.

Spring, in theory, had begun a few days earlier. Amazingly, it actually felt a little like spring. The day had been warm and delightful. They had begun their meal, in fact, by leaving the doors open so they could get a bit of fresh air; till Anna had complained of feeling a chill, and then they closed up again. The sun had set in splendor as they were starting to eat. They could see a little bit of the sunset through the wide dining room window.

The meal had been unpleasant. Most meals in the Shapiro household were, nowadays. Leon sat in long brooding silences, punctuated by jumping up nervously and rushing to the back door to make sure the neighbors' dog wasn't invading their back yard. Sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn't. He'd had several long telephone conversations with the neighbors, an Italian family named

Vincenzo, which always ended with their promising to keep the dog leashed. But they didn't. Or they did only sometimes.

As soon as he'd swallowed the last of his food, Danny asked to be excused to his room.

"You going to do homework?" Leon asked. "Or work on – that thing of yours?"

"That thing" was Leon's standard designation for Danny's book. The first few times he used it, Danny had reminded him that the book's title was *Mystery Within an Enigma* and not "that thing." By now he'd grown used to the gibe, tired of protesting. "I thought I'd like to do some writing this evening," he said softly.

That was when Leon asked him if he wanted to hear what today's New York *Times* editorial had to say about UFOs.

Danny wanted to answer, *Not really*. He knew already what the editorial was going to say. The *Times* was notoriously anti-UFO, worse than any other newspaper or magazine except possibly *Time* magazine. Leon's voice, moreover, had a nasty, didactic, gonna-set-you-wise tone that convinced Danny something unpleasant was bound to follow. Still, he couldn't afford to give the appearance of shrinking from criticism.

"Sure, why not?" he said.

Leon rose from the table. He ceremoniously picked a newspaper from the pile that was on the small table in front of Anna's rocker, and folded it to the editorial page. He stood leaning back against the sink, his left foot resting on the seat of the kitchen chair on which he'd just been sitting, the newspaper laid on his left knee. Anna smiled timidly, expectantly, like a neglected little girl who's finally getting a story read to her but isn't entirely sure she'll like it.

"*Those Flying Saucers*," Leon read aloud. He looked up and said to Danny, "That's the title of the editorial."

Yes, I gathered, Danny wanted to say. He nodded.

“Men have a strange propensity,” Leon read, *“for seeing what they expect or want to see, as any magician knows. This trait, probably more than any other, accounts for ‘flying saucer’ episodes like the ones reported yesterday and Monday in Michigan.”*

“Is he going to give an explanation for the sightings?” Danny asked. A glowing football-shaped object had been seen near Ann Arbor and Hillsdale, Michigan, on two successive evenings. It hovered just above the ground, sometimes within a few hundred yards of the witnesses, who included twelve policemen and eighty-seven Hillsdale College coeds, plus the assistant dean of women.

“Un’ momento,” said Leon, raising his hand. *“Just ho-o-old your horses. You’re going to hear everything, my boy. I’m going to read it to you.”*

He went on reading. *“The scientific community and the armed forces, as such, have dismissed such reports with thinly disguised scorn.”* He paused slightly before the words *thinly disguised scorn*, and enunciated them with particular care. *“The astronomers say other worlds that could support beings like ourselves are so distant that travel here would border on the impossible and frequent visits would be”* – again, pause and special enunciation – *“preposterous.”*

Danny listened silently, boiling in helpless fury, as the smug, dismissive phrases rolled forth from his father’s mouth. He’d heard such arguments a thousand times over. The editorial was not merely glib and pretentious, but utterly predictable. Of course the writer didn’t even mention the details of the sightings, much less try to explain them. Why should he? UFO skeptics can’t be bothered with details. They insist on arguing in generalities, and couldn’t tell a good sighting from a poor one if their lives depended on it.

All that remained, finally, was for the writer to come up with some snide flippancy for his conclusion. Sure enough, here it was: *“The flying saucer enthusiasts demonstrate human frailties that are likely to sail on forever.”*

Leon set down the paper and looked up at Danny, as if waiting for applause.

“Well, my boy,” he said. “That’s what the finest newspaper in the country has to say about your UFOs.”

“They’re entitled to their opinion.” Danny had thought of asking how a human frailty might go about sailing. But he didn’t want to argue. Tonight was a night for work, not arguments.

“And you’re entitled to yours? Is that right?”

“That’s right.”

“And your opinion is just as good as theirs? That’s what you think, isn’t it?”

“I’ve studied the evidence. They haven’t.”

“And just how do you know that, my boy?”

“Because they don’t have one single thing to say about it!” This burst out of Danny without his quite willing it. Apparently there was going to be an argument after all. “All they do – all they do –”

“You don’t have to raise your voice,” said Leon. Danny saw that his mother, too, was looking at him sternly. He forced himself to speak softly.

“I’m sorry I shouted. But you read that editorial again and you’ll see. They don’t talk at all about what’s important. I mean, the sightings. The observational data. All they do is sneer, and ridicule, and quote their dogmatic authorities, and drag in irrelevancies. Mostly ridicule. Like that passage about *scorn* – what was it? at the beginning – *the scientists scorn*, or something –”

“*The scientific community and the armed forces, as such, have dismissed such reports with thinly disguised scorn,*” Leon read.

“That’s it! What they’re saying is, the dogmatic scientists ridicule us, the Air Force ridicules us, so why don’t *they* go ahead and ridicule us. That’s some argument, isn’t it? Some great wonderful argument! So that anybody who dares

to disagree, anybody who dares to question, anybody who dares to think for himself –”

“Well, maybe they ridicule you because you’re pretty ridiculous!” Leon bellowed. He leaned over the table toward Danny, clutching the newspaper, nearly crumpling it with the violence of his grasp. “Has that ever occurred to you? *That you are ridiculous?*”

Anna let out something between a sigh and a wail. Danny felt the waters of bitterness rise within him, as though they might rise to his nostrils and drown him. Has that ever *not* occurred to me? he thought. I am after all one of the damned, those who are scorned and ridiculed and cast out ...

A procession of the damned, Charles Fort had written. By the damned, I mean the excluded. We shall have a procession of the data that Science has excluded. Battalions of the accursed, captained by pallid data that I have exhumed, will march. You’ll read them – or they’ll march. Some of them livid and some of them fiery and some of them rotten ...

The words were his aid and comfort, allies in the desperate struggle to keep from crying in front of his father. *They’ll march*, Fort had written, and the words echoed over and over inside him. *We’ll march, we’ll march, we’ll march ...*

6.

The sky darkened outside their dining room windows.

“ – that troop of horny college girls,” Leon declared, his voice loud with anger and contempt. He was delivering his own analysis of the Hillsdale UFO sightings, which consisted essentially of his opinion on the character of the witnesses. “Getting themselves laid, out on the campus lawn, first nice warm night in spring; needed something to tell their den mother why they were so late getting back, didn’t they? So along comes a nice football-shaped flying saucer, and –”

"They weren't out on the campus lawn!" Danny cried. The girls had been inside their dormitory all during the sighting. They had watched the UFO from their windows. The assistant dean of women had sat and watched it with them. All these details were right there in Leon's precious *New York Times*. Hadn't he read them?

"Vass you dere, Char-lie?" Leon asked, in his comic German accent. It was one of his stock jokes, something he said when he wanted to be funny. Anna laughed happily, out of relief that Leon was starting to make jokes again. He shot her a murderous look.

"And that drunk *shvartze* up in New England? Gets home five in the morning, says, *Wa'n't mah fault, boss; ah done got kidnapped by some big ole you-eff-oh*. He's one of your *reliable witnesses*, too, isn't he?"

"Drunk *shvartze*?" This hadn't been in the *New York Times* stories, not that Danny could remember. "What are you talking about?"

"You haven't heard about him?" said Leon. "I'm amazed. I thought there wasn't one damn flying saucer story you hadn't heard."

He looked genuinely surprised, also uncomfortable, as if he expected Danny to pump him for details he didn't know. "Colored man," he said, "in New England. Pete Radford was telling me at work. He says this UFO came and picked him up while he was driving, took him aboard. A while later they let him go. Him and his wife. That's why he didn't get home till five in the morning. Of course he *doesn't* mention the sixteen bars they stopped in earlier that night. That's not really *relevant*, you know." Comic British accent, this time.

Danny didn't answer. He didn't know what to say. He supposed this Radford character had got hold of a distorted version of some contactee story and passed it on to Leon, who no doubt had managed to distort it still further. He thought of trying to explain, as he had several times in the past, that the contactees weren't reliable and objective UFOlogists didn't take them seriously. But there was something different here; it puzzled him, gave him pause. All the contactees

he'd known about were white. The spacemen they met, male and female, were Nordic types with flowing blond hair. He'd never heard of a Negro contactee.

"So his wife came with him for the flying saucer ride, did she?" said Anna, trying to get her gracious smile back in place. "That's nice, isn't it? I mean, it would have been so *mean* of him not to take her along."

"Uh-huh," said Leon. He looked at Anna for a moment, hesitating. Then he said, "His wife was a *veisse*. That's what Pete told me."

Danny saw his parents smile at each other, in a manner sly and conspiratorial, yet at the same time awkward and ashamed. A *veisse*. A white woman. What in hell was going on here, between Leon and Anna? If ever there was a mystery within an enigma, and a further enigma tucked inside the mystery, this was it. This slyness, this sense of fumbling around some embarrassing and painful secret ... what did it remind him of?

Of course. Basil Richard's tone of voice, that evening in the Stuyvesant Hotel. A *salt-and-pepper couple, if you take my meaning*. And the way Glickman burst out laughing when Basil said that ... It came to him then: Betty and Barney Hill. It was their abduction by the UFO that Leon was talking about. John Fuller's article in *Look* magazine must have just come out.

Only he hadn't understood until this moment that Barney Hill was a Negro.

"That part about him being drunk," Danny said. "And that they'd stopped in sixteen bars that night. Was that what Pete Radford told you? Or did you just make that up?"

When had he spoken to his father like this? Leon stared, his eyes bulging in fury. He tried to open his mouth, then closed it.

"Just because he's a Negro," Danny said, "doesn't mean he was drunk."

“No, that’s right,” said Leon. The rage was still in his eyes, but his voice stayed quiet and level. His let’s-discuss-this-reasonably voice. “Just because he’s a Negro *doesn’t* necessarily mean he was drunk. You’re right about that.”

He walked around the table to Danny, and put his hand on Danny’s shoulder. Danny tried hard not to flinch.

“But let me ask you this, my son,” he said, his voice rapidly rising in volume till, at the end, it was a hoarse roar. “How many *sober* people do you know who get kidnapped by flying saucers?”

7.

The rocking chair creaked. Anna leaned forward, grasped the little table in front of her with her left hand and the kitchen table with her right, and heaved herself up out of the chair. She stood unsteadily on her feet for a moment, panting from her exertion. Then she said, with her gracious smile: “I’ll leave you boys to finish your conversation. I’m going to lie down and rest for a little bit.”

They watched as she shuffled off, still breathing heavily.

Abruptly Leon turned and ran to the back door. It was almost totally dark. If there was anything in the yard outside, Danny couldn’t see it. But Leon opened the door and bellowed “*Geddaddahere!*” in a voice so loud and intense that the neighbors surely must have heard it, even with their doors and windows closed. From the back yard, Danny heard an animal scamper away through the dry grass.

Leon shut the door and turned his gaze on Danny. Danny looked at his father’s chalky face, at the eyes wild with rage, and thought, *The man is insane*. He pushed the thought away, and a moment later had forgotten he ever had it.

“They send that goddamn dog over here,” said Leon, “just to shit in our yard. They’ve been doing that for months now. They do it one more time, you know what I’m going to do?”

“No, I don’t,” said Danny. He wasn’t frightened; he didn’t know why not.

“I’m going to get me a nice doggie bowl. And some nice doggie food. And I’m going to make a meal for Poochie. A *real* nice meal. A meal he’ll remember for the rest of his short doggie life.”

“You’re going to poison their dog?” Danny said, not so much shocked as puzzled.

Leon pulled his head and shoulders back, raised his hand in a strange gesture. Danny couldn’t read the gesture or his father’s expression. Almost as if Leon was disowning, recoiling from his own intention. He was about to speak, it seemed; but Danny never knew what he was going to say. From Anna’s bedroom came the noise of something falling, crashing to the floor. Then Anna’s terrified cry. “*Leon!*”

They ran to the bedroom, Danny following his father. They found her lying on the floor beside the bed, in the few feet of space between the bed and a huge overstuffed chair she sometimes used as a kind of way-station between resting in bed and moving around the house, where she could sit if she needed to and gather her strength for that final push. Her eyeglasses had flown off her face; her large eyes stared blindly, focused on nothing. Her face was a twisted mask of terror. She sobbed and gibbered, over and over, “I fell, Leon! Leon, I *fell!*”

The yellow light of her bedside lamp surrounded her fallen body like a spotlight. In that light, her skin seemed to have turned yellow.

Leon took her gently by the shoulders and helped her up into bed. The covers were already turned down. She’d apparently been all ready to climb into bed when she somehow slipped. He began probing her, pressing and poking at

different parts of her body to see where she was bruised, if anything was broken. "It hurts *here*, Leon," she wailed, pointing to her thigh. "It hurts *here*."

Danny watched from the doorway of the bedroom. He took two steps forward, with some vague idea of helping, but then stopped, paralyzed. On some impulse he looked down to the floor; her glasses, unbroken, lay a foot or so in front of him. Leon pulled up her skirt. Sure enough, there on her left thigh was a huge, ugly bruise, already turning vivid purple and yellow. He pressed it with his fingers. She moaned in pain.

"I don't think anything's broken," Leon said. "You'll be all right." He laughed then, comfortingly, and said again, "*You'll be all right*"; pronouncing it this time in a kind of comic tone, as if he were saying, "*And a-way we go.*"

She laughed with him. But the tears were at the same time flowing down her withered cheeks.

"Dad," said Danny. He'd picked up the glasses; now he stepped forward and handed them to his father. Leon turned to take them, and gave Danny a look that seemed to say, *She's hanging by a thread, my boy.*

Danny looked at the hideous purple and yellow on his mother's thigh. He looked at, and perhaps for the first time actually saw, the swollen puffy legs that contrasted so dreadfully with her withered arms. He knew then that it was true, that she was hanging by a thread. A deep grieving began, or began again, inside him.

Very gently, Leon replaced the glasses on his wife's face. He pulled the covers over her, and sat by her, stroking her, comforting her.

At no point did Anna speak to Danny, or even look at him. Even now, when she had her glasses back. He stood watching a few minutes. Then he went into his room and began typing furiously.

8.

He went to sleep with the image in his mind of his mother as a dying infant, bruised and frail and unable to breathe, and she was hanging by a thread and he must somehow keep that thread from snapping but he knew he couldn't. He woke, hours later, from a hideous dream in which he was running, using all his strength, trying to gain momentum so he could hurl himself through a vast, tangled spiderweb that had been spun across the inside of an arch that was the beginning of a tunnel through which he must pass. He didn't know why he must pass through it, but he must; and there was no stopping or turning back. Only, he could not get enough momentum, and the web went on endlessly, and sooner or later he had to stop and be caught in it.

The spider was there, although he couldn't see it; suspended, terrifyingly, just outside his field of vision.

9.

Haven't heard from you in ages, Basil wrote to Danny around the middle of May. Danny cringed in shame as he tore open the envelope; he'd let Basil's last two letters go unanswered. *What's happening with you? What's happening with our book?*

A whole lot had been happening. For one thing, Danny had won a national contest on the Bible, which he'd competed in almost without thinking about it, his mind caught up in the book. The first prize was a summer trip to Israel. The money was provided for the plane ticket; he'd have to make his own arrangements once he got there. The finals of the contest – from which he'd emerged with a *First Prize Winner* certificate, his name hand-lettered in the blank – had been held in New York City on Sunday, the first of May. That day no longer seemed quite real. Months ago he'd ached to win the contest, to claim the prize. Now it felt like nothing at all.

Dear Basil, It hurts like hell for me to say this, but I don't think I can write the book –

There'd been dismaying news from Scofield. His grandmother had seen it in her Trenton *Times* and faithfully relayed it to his mother, who passed it on to Danny without prelude or warning. She'd then sat back in her rocker, smiling her everlasting serene smile. As though she hadn't noticed Danny looked like he'd been punched in the stomach and was about to crumple up.

I don't think I can write the book because the Scofield landing, which was the centerpiece of the whole thing, which all my arguments depended on – it's turned out to be a hoax. Some dirty lying cheater of a chemistry student, name of Marty Fogleman, who probably cheated his way into college, too dumb to get in any other way – he dug the holes and set off gunpowder and then told Frank Crenshaw's kids he'd seen the UFO land. And then he sat there laughing. While we were investigating, studying, reasoning, doing our best to find the truth – it was all a joke to him, the damn shitfaced hyena; he just sat there and laughed –

No. Mustn't talk this way. Mustn't lose faith.

Marty Fogleman was lying. He'd made up his confession out of whole cloth, so he could sell it for a hundred dollars to some Philadelphia newspaper. Frank Crenshaw had told Danny all about it, when Danny phoned him from a public phone the dreadful evening that followed that dreadful afternoon. The truth was that Crenshaw's sons had been approached by *two* young men, neither of whom, Crenshaw assured Danny, had looked anything at all like Marty Fogleman.

He was lying. The Scofield landing was real. Danny had shown that, in his *PURA Bulletin* article. He'd prove it again in his book.

Dear Basil, It hurts like hell for me to say this, but I don't think I can get the manuscript to you before next fall. I don't think I told you, but I entered a Bible contest this spring and the first prize was a trip to Israel, and somehow or other – surprise, surprise! – I won the contest.

I really want to spend the summer in Israel, Basil. I want it more than I think I've ever wanted anything, to go to Israel and learn Hebrew from the lips of a pretty little Israeli girl. I've always wanted to learn Hebrew, because the Bible is written in it but also

because it's really my own language, in a way, but I can't learn it here because all the teachers here are idiots who don't know anything and can't teach anything and all the kids are shitfaced hyenas who always laughed at me because I didn't know anything about baseball and then because I couldn't dance. And also I've always wanted a pretty little girl so I could learn from her lips, not only Hebrew but all sorts of other things. But I've never had a girl, Basil, I've never even had a date, because all the Jewish girls here are shitfaced hyenas just like the boys and I can't go out with a shiksa, you see, because my mother is dying and I don't want to make her die any quicker –

Impossible.

He couldn't tell this to Basil. He couldn't tell it to anybody.

He stared for a moment at the blank piece of paper in his typewriter. He then began writing, fast and furious as ever, on his book.

10.

Outside his windows the warm spring evenings darkened softly. The sounds of children playing baseball, across the street, drifted in through the window with the occasional breeze.

Danny hardly heard them. He typed all evening, every evening, by the torchier's hot light. He typed and sweated, caught in the blazing vise between his typewriter and his chair, as the book stretched, endless, ahead of him.

You chose this path, he told himself. It was his incantation: against the weariness, the staggering loneliness, the unspeakable weight of the burden fastened upon him. *No complaining, now. You chose it.*

Anna was in the house with him, but he hardly spoke to her. He thought only of the book.

One afternoon, passing by the kitchen table, he found a newspaper clipping left on his place-mat. It was from the *New York Times*. Anna had seen it during her wanderings back and forth through the *Times*, and had cut it out for him.

He read it. It was a story about how some big organization in New York had given a whole bunch of research grants, five to ten thousand dollars apiece, to college professors who were doing research on one thing or another.

She'd written, at the top of the clipping: *And you work for nothing???* You **FOOL** you!!

FOOL, in big block capitals.

She sat in her rocker, smiling her eternal smile. She watched him, and she laughed. It was only a joke, he later told himself. She doesn't really think I'm a fool.

Chapter 5: In the Promised Land

JULY 1966

1.

"Yesh lekha mikhtav," said the clerk from behind the counter.

Danny, sweating heavily, had just walked through the open door into the lobby of the Tal-Or Hotel, his three new books in his hand. This was probably the last time he'd pass through that door. The realization gave him a sad sense of leaving, even though he had just arrived in Israel, hardly ten days ago now.

He must have looked blank for a moment, because the clerk, whose name was Shlomo, went on to say in English: "You have a letter." He peered into the cubbyhole marked with Danny's room number. *"Two letters, even."*

He didn't need to translate for me, thought Danny, slightly hurt. *Mikhtav* means "letter"; I knew that. I just needed a second to put it all together.

"Todah rabah," said Danny as Shlomo handed him the letters. Thank you very much. *"Todah rabah,"* he said again.

"B'vakashah," said Shlomo. The word meant both "please" and "you're welcome," which made sense when you came to think of it. Somebody gives you something, you say *thank you*, and he says *please*. Sort of like, I was pleased to do it.

"Kanita sfareem?" Shlomo said. He pointed to the three books, which Danny had laid on the counter.

"Kayn," Danny said, meaning Yes. Yes, he had bought books, at Eisenberg's Bookstore in downtown Tel Aviv, where he'd dawdled away most of the afternoon. He'd then carried them back to the hotel, walking at double speed through the damp afternoon heat so he wouldn't be late when Yitzhak Vered came at five-thirty to take him to his new home.

Shlomo began thumbing through Danny's new books, no doubt trying to see how much of the English he could understand. Danny hardly paid attention. His two letters – the first mail he'd gotten since arriving in Israel – had pushed Shlomo, and Danny's project of learning Hebrew through conversations with Shlomo, right out of his mind.

One was an aerogram, a flimsy piece of blue paper folded over itself several times and then sealed on three of its sides, the cheapest way other than postcard to communicate by air mail. It was from Kellerfield, addressed and return-addressed in his mother's familiar handwriting. The other was a real letter. It was in a real if lightweight envelope, with AIR MAIL and PAR AVION printed on it and several sheets of lightweight paper inside. The address – *Mr. Daniel Shapiro, c/o Tal-Or Hotel, 78 Hayarkon Street, Tel Aviv, Israel* – was typed with a green typewriter ribbon that could mean only one thing. Basil Richard.

He borrowed a letter opener from Shlomo, who by now was absorbed in one of the books. Heart pounding, he betook himself to one of the lobby's wicker chairs to find out whether the answer was yes or no.

July 10, 1966

Dear Danny,

Writing to acknowledge receipt of yours of the 4th (or of the 5th really, the wee hours of the morning, wasn't it?), with the enclosed MS., which I was of course delighted, and more than delighted, to receive. Not that I quite expected to be sending my acknowledgment of receipt to quite so exotic an address; for which I must say –

Dammit, friend, what I must say is that I am thoroughly pissed at you!!! Congratulations on your marvellous achievement and all that, blah blah blah, but I am thoroughly pissed nonetheless!!! No doubt you have had a thoroughly hectic spring, winning trips to the far corners of the earth and mastering the internal combustion engine and all that, and on top of it all writing me this perfectly splendid book of yours

—So he liked it. Danny breathed deeply for the first time since seeing the envelope. The sweat poured off him, though whether that was because of the accumulated afternoon heat in the tiny lobby, or the trans-Atlantic tongue-lashing he was now getting, he couldn't have said.

but couldn't you have taken ten minutes out of it all at least to acknowledge my letters? Don't forget, Danny: we live by our correspondence, we UFOlogists. Neglect that rule, my friend, and you turn into a crotchety isolate. And we don't want that to happen, do we?

So I am furious at you, Danny; and my warmest congratulations to you, Danny, for being where you are at this moment and doing what you've done, UFOlogically and Biblically and all sorts of other things, no doubt, that I don't even know about. You are an amazing young man.

Danny read on. There was good news and bad news, Basil told him. Mostly good, to be sure, but there was a touch of bad.

The good news was that Max Levinthal had *loved* the book.

Basil had shown the book to Max that very morning. It was Sunday; Max had come up to the Richards' apartment for brunch with "his latest," somebody named Lucinda. They'd gotten themselves all stuffed with coffee and danishes; at which point Basil had judged it the right moment to lure Max into his study to have a look at the brand-new MS. that had just turned up in his mailbox.

So he plops himself down in my easy chair – still puffing and snorting, you understand – and opens it to someplace in the middle and starts reading. And twenty minutes later, damned if he isn't still reading it!

Lucinda had called to Max to come back out of the study. She had pleaded, threatened, demanded. It was no use. Danny's book had Max riveted. The only hard part had come when Max demanded to know just who the hell this Shapiro guy was, anyway.

So I've got to tell him you're a very young sort of guy, a very tender sort of guy; no, Max, not really a fresh-minted college graduate in journalism, all wet behind the ears, but rather

Well, Max hits the ceiling, of course. When I get him scraped off – the ceiling, that is – and sitting back down in his chair, he tells me, No, no way, we're not going to publish a UFO book by some highschool kid, we'll be the laughing stock of the business, blah blah blah. And I tell him, what about your commitment to quality ideas and top-notch writing, and all that great idealistic B.S. of yours, and anyway how old was Einstein when he came up with dear old $E=mc^2$? And Max says, O.K., Basil, we'll go with this teenage Einstein of yours. BUT.

And with that BUT, Danny, I'm afraid the bad news begins.

2.

"This Stewart Perowne," Shlomo said angrily from behind the counter. "Who is he?"

Danny looked up, dazed. The gist of the bad news, he had grasped, was that substantial revisions would be needed before Cloverleaf Press would be ready to put its reputation on the line for an unknown author who wasn't yet old enough to be trusted with a bottle of bourbon, not even in New York State where the legal drinking age was only eighteen. Page after page of Basil's letter, which he couldn't bring himself to do more than glance through, were filled with the details. Now someone was calling him from what seemed another world.

"Stewart Perowne?" he said.

"Did I pronounce wrong?" said Shlomo. He peered closely at the cover of the book and read aloud: "*Pee, ee, ar, oh, doubleyou, en, ee.*" He pronounced each letter very distinctly, and with considerable relish.

“No, no,” said Danny. “You pronounced it right.” He now recognized the name. Stewart Perowne was the author of *The Pilgrim’s Companion in Jerusalem and Bethlehem*, which he’d bought at Eisenberg’s this afternoon so he could learn something about the Jerusalem that he himself could never see, could never set foot in.

“No Jews here – anywhere!” said Shlomo.

His face, normally genial and tranquil, was so pained that Danny was startled. He held the book up, so that Danny could see it from where he sat, as though challenging him: *Here! Can you see any Jews here?*

“No Jews?” said Danny.

He was still a little confused, his mind still in the world of Basil and Max Levinthal and this Lucinda, whoever she was. He thought he’d seen a reference to Scofield somewhere in the letter, toward the end. Had Max Levinthal had some problem with Scofield?

“No Jews!” said Shlomo.

“Oh, well,” said Danny. “The book’s about the *Jordanian* part of Jerusalem. And Bethlehem’s part of Jordan too, I think. There aren’t any Jews there now, are there?”

“I know where Bethlehem is!”

Shlomo stepped around from behind the counter and sat down in the wicker chair next to Danny, carrying Danny’s books in his large soft hand. He was a plump, balding man, dark-skinned, in his forties. Like most of the men Danny had seen around the beachfront area of Tel Aviv, he wore his light summer shirt open most of the way down to his belly. He carried with him a strong odor of cologne, mingled with the sweat of a clean body. That smell would turn out to be one of Danny’s most persistent memories of Israel.

“Listen, Danny,” said Shlomo. He spoke in English, not the simplified Hebrew in which he and Danny normally tried to conduct their conversations. “Jews were in Jerusalem maybe three thousand years. Not just in what now we call *Jerusalem, the capital of Israel*. This Jerusalem, the one you can get on a bus and go visit tomorrow if you want, is the *new* city. A hundred years old, maybe. We were in the Old City too. The part the Jordanians now have. You understand me?”

“Uh-huh,” said Danny, nodding.

“So why we’re not there any more?” Shlomo didn’t wait for Danny’s answer. “Because in the War of Independence, back in ’48, the Jordanians *take* the Old City for themselves. They take it and they make it *Judenrein*. You know what is *Judenrein*?”

Danny nodded again, biting his lower lip.

“They make the city *Judenrein*. And then this man, this Stewart Perowne” – Shlomo tapped the book with his forefinger, hard, angrily – “he writes this book and he makes it *Judenrein* all over again! Three thousand years, no Jews. Read the book: there’s no Jews in Jerusalem. Never were any Jews in Jerusalem. There’s Christians, there’s Muslims. No Jews.”

Danny had read parts of the book already, while squatting beside the cluttered shelves in the coolness of Eisenberg’s. There were a lot of quotations in it from the Old Testament. But maybe that wasn’t quite the same thing as there being Jews.

“And why?” said Shlomo. His voice came to a climax of pain and anger. “I’ll show you why.” He opened the book to the dedication. “There! ‘*To the king, government, and people of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, this book is respectfully dedicated by the author.*’ You see?” He handed the book to Danny. “He wants to please the Arabs, so he makes Jerusalem *Judenrein*.”

“But—,” said Danny. He had the sense that Shlomo was being unfair to Perowne and his book, but didn’t know just how. “But, surely he mentions the Wall, doesn’t he?”

“No!” Shlomo cried triumphantly. “I looked for the Wall. It’s not there! He gives you guided tours around Jerusalem, this Perowne, in his book. He shows you the—the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He shows you the Dome of the Rock. Which the Muslims built where *our* Temple used to be, so we wouldn’t build it again, ever. But our Wall, our Western Wall? Not there! As if King Hussein dropped a bomb, and—poof!—it’s all gone.”

“Are you sure?” said Danny. “I thought I saw something about the Wall.”

“Not there,” said Shlomo. “Read the book.”

He left Danny’s books on the floor beside the chair where he was sitting, and stood up. He stopped for a moment and pointed to the letter, typed with green typewriter ribbon, that lay on Danny’s lap.

“From New York City,” he said. “From your father?”

“Oh, no,” said Danny. “Not from my father. From a friend.” He added in Hebrew: “*Mey chavair shelee.*” From my friend.

“*Very good,*” Shlomo said wearily. He stepped back behind the counter. “Be healthy, Danny my friend. *Very good indeed.*”

3.

All this stuff can be fairly easily fixed, Basil wrote at the bottom of the fifth page of his letter, though I know it will be a rotten nuisance, and will probably mean a few less evenings with the fair young maidens on the back seat of your Dad’s jalopy. What won’t be so easy to fix, and what will require a pretty thoroughgoing rewrite, is that blessed “Scofield landing” of ours.

I've got to be blunt with you, Danny. (Though not quite as blunt, I need to tell you, as Max was with me!!) What you've written about Scofield is just not convincing. It's the only part of the book that's not convincing. And you've got to get rid of it.

Basil himself had originally been convinced, when he'd read Danny's perfectly splendid article in the *PURA Bulletin*, that the Scofield landing was the real thing. But they were in a new era now, Basil explained, the era of "A.F." or perhaps "A.M.F." Which, of course, stood for "After Marty Fogleman."

Now, I can see you right now jumping up and down and yelling, "No! No! No! Fogleman's a liar! Dammit, I spent seven pages of the MS. proving he's a liar, didn't I?" That's right, you did. You've shown conclusively that he's a liar, a cheat, a money-mad conniver, and all in all an absolute nogoodnik. But you haven't shown that he wasn't the feller who dug the hole in the woods and set off the cherry bomb in it, just like he says he did. Matter of fact, the more you show he's a liar and a cheat and all the rest, the more likely it comes to seem that he's a UFO hoaxer as well!

Danny had mentioned, in a footnote, that Frank Crenshaw had plans to confront Fogleman, together with his two sons, and force Fogleman to admit that his "confession" was one big lie.

Well, all I can say is: more power to Frank Crenshaw! I hope he pulls it off. If he does, then maybe it'll be a horse of a different color. Maybe then you can make a case for Scofield; keep the "Scofield landing" in its current place of honor at the center of your book. But as things stand, it's got to be demoted. Demoted, dismissed, and gotten the hell out of the MS. Or the word from Max will be NO NO NO.

And what's so all-fired marvelous about Scofield, anyhow? That a UFO touched ground? Big deal. They've done that dozens of times. You know that, better than anybody else. That it left some kind of alleged mark? Again: big deal. At Socorro, to name just that one example ...

What's so all-fired marvelous about Scofield?!!!

Danny flushed with anger, frustration, and grief. The feelings passed; his head cleared. Somehow he hadn't made his point adequately: how important the

Scofield landing was, and how essential it was for understanding the developing pattern of UFO activity in the mid-sixties.

Perhaps Crenshaw and his sons had already confronted Fogleman. Perhaps they had already forced him to retract his bogus confession. Danny really should write to Crenshaw, as soon as he was settled into his new room, and find out.

“Danny, *habibi*, come. The truck’s outside. Shoshi’s waiting for us.”

He sat facing the door. He really should have seen Yitzhak Vered come in. But he’d been lost in his thoughts, and was startled to hear the familiar soft voice.

“Does he have your suitcases?” Yitzhak asked, gesturing with his head in Shlomo’s direction. But Shlomo was already heaving the suitcase up onto the counter. “Don’t forget your typewriter,” Shlomo said in a jocular tone, even though Danny had given no indication that he was about to forget his typewriter.

Danny stuffed into his bulging plastic folder his letter from Basil, which he hadn’t yet finished, and his letter from his mother, which he hadn’t yet opened.

4.

“Shalom, Danny,” Shoshana Vered said sleepily, from the back of her father’s truck. She pronounced it *DAHN-ee*, which flattered him, made him feel more Israeli. More one of them.

“She’s had a long day,” said her father. “Haven’t you, *chamodeleh*?”

She murmured something in Hebrew, to which Yitzhak replied in Hebrew. To Danny he said: “No, no, Danny. We’ll leave Shoshi in the back, with the suitcases. Today you ride up front. With me.”

Ten days before, Danny had ridden in the back with twelve-year-old Shoshana and her little brother Uri, and with his suitcase and folder and typewriter. The Vereds had just picked him up at Lod Airport. They were driving him to the Tal-Or Hotel in Tel Aviv, for his first night in Israel.

Yitzhak Vered had explained, as he carried Danny's suitcase from the baggage claim area, that he was a building contractor, very busy these days what with all the new developments springing up all around Tel Aviv. That was what he used his truck for, he told Danny: hauling building materials for his men.

It was dark in the back of the truck, that first night. The only windows were up front. Dalia Vered sat next to her husband on the front seat, which was the only seat the truck had. Shoshana and Danny and Uri sat in the back, on cinderblocks. Danny held tight to the back of the front seat, so he wouldn't fall off his cinderblock as the truck lurched down the narrow and poorly paved road from the airport to Tel Aviv, at what seemed to Danny to be a very high speed. Yitzhak Vered caught a glimpse of Danny awkwardly hanging there, and chuckled. "Danny's used, in America, to a little more luxurious – how you say? – *veehicles*."

It wasn't clear who Yitzhak was talking to. Neither Dalia nor Uri seemed to know a usable amount of English. And Shoshana? So far she'd said almost nothing in any language, only stared at Danny with what seemed to be curiosity.

"Oh, this is just fine," said Danny, smiling although it was doubtful if any of them could see whether he was smiling or not. These were his first Israelis. He was anxious to be pleasant, agreeable, complimentary.

No one answered for a minute or two. Then Shoshana spoke from the darkness.

"Why are you alone?"

Her question took Danny by surprise. He began gabbling a complicated story about how his mother couldn't come with him to Israel because she was sick – not anything to be concerned about, of course, but she was sick and it did

prevent her from travelling – and his father couldn't come because he had to stay home and look after his mother, and of course his brothers and sisters couldn't come with him because he didn't *have* any brothers and sisters, and –

“Why are you so frightened?” said Shoshana.

He didn't try to answer. He didn't know why he was so frightened.

5.

That had been his first ride in the Vereds' truck. Now that same truck was taking him to the coastal town of Herzliya, where the Vereds lived and where they'd arranged for him to rent a room from a widow named Mrs. Rozenshtayn. In the week and a half that had passed in between, he'd been outside Tel Aviv only once. This was for a three-day tour of the Galilee, which Yitzhak had booked with a company called Promised Land Tours Ltd.

Danny was waiting in the Tal-Or's lobby at eight-thirty the preceding Monday morning, when a man who introduced himself as Chaim, and as his guide, came to pick him up in a white Pontiac. Normally, Chaim explained jovially, they'd have gone in a tour bus. But they were lucky today. Their party was very small. He would drive them in the white Pontiac, and would be with them to answer all their questions.

Jovial. Chaim was always jovial. That was the word Danny used to describe him that night, as he recorded the day in his blue notebook. *He is a jovial, multi-lingual chap, with a squat and powerful body and a serious yet pleasant face. He is extremely personable and easy to get along with. Nevertheless I do not like him.*

They stopped at one of the other hotels along Hayarkon Street to pick up old Mr. Abramsky from Australia, and at a third hotel for the two girls from Los Angeles. Then they were off on the road heading toward the Galilee. Danny carried on his lap his blue notebook, in which he would record his observations,

and Zev Vilnay's *Israel Guide*. There was a map in a pocket at the back of the *Israel Guide*. Danny unfolded it and examined it as the car headed northward.

Galilee was in the north of the country; Danny hadn't realized that before. It looked on the map sort of like a basketball, attached on its left-hand side to a long vertical pole. Further down on the map, the pole thickened abruptly, extending itself toward the right. Then it narrowed again, ending at a point at the bottom of the map.

That was Israel.

The vertical pole was the narrow strip of land along the Mediterranean, which Tel Aviv was part of. Where it thickened on the bottom was the beginning of the Negev desert. The basketball at the top was the Galilee. Between the basketball and the Negev, it seemed, there was a huge chunk that wasn't Israel at all. According to the map, it was part of the Kingdom of Jordan.

"So what you girls do in your spare time?" Chaim said to Robin, who sat next to him on the front seat. She was the brunette, the nursery school teacher. "Chase boys?"

Sandy, the blonde secretary, answered from the back seat, where she sat between Danny and Mr. Abramsky. "No. They chase us."

The two girls, who both seemed to be about twenty, burst into a fit of giggling. Danny turned away in disgust and looked out the window. The trees — planted a few decades earlier by the pioneers of Israel, Chaim had explained, in what had once been a swampy marsh — whizzed by.

The farther northward one got, the more Arabs one saw by the side of the road. This surprised Danny, who hadn't known until then that there were Arabs in Israel. The Arab men were heavily dressed in spite the heat, wearing thick dark jackets over their caftans. They didn't look like they were comfortable, or exactly uncomfortable. Stoic, rather, as if the categories of comfort and discomfort meant nothing to them. Often they rode donkeys, or led donkeys. The donkeys

were often loaded, heavily, with clumsy bundles. As the Pontiac zoomed by them, Danny felt an immense sadness for them, although they were Arabs and therefore to be presumed his enemies.

In the Arab town of Nazareth, where they stopped after lunch, the donkey manure was everywhere. Danny took care not to step in it.

Chaim took them to the Church of the Annunciation. "This is a holy place," he told them, in a loud hoarse voice that was obviously accustomed to addressing groups larger than four. "For the Christians. This is where the angel Gabriel—that's *Gav-ree-AIL*, as we say it—came to Mary the Virgin, and told her she was going to have a child."

"Ridiculous!" Mr. Abramsky cried out.

"The Christians tell the story," Chaim said, in a somewhat milder tone. "They tell it in their New Testament. Their *Evangelion*."

"The Gospels, you mean?" said Danny.

"Yes, that's right," said Chaim. "The Gospels."

"Which Gospel?" Danny asked.

Chaim ignored his question. "Ridiculous!" Mr. Abramsky said again. "What did she think, this *virgin* of theirs, when this big angel flies down to her all of a sudden with his big wings and says to her, *Whoo, you're going to have a baby!* Wasn't she a little bit *surprised*, don't you think?"

Mr. Abramsky spoke with a heavy Yiddish accent. He'd grown up in Poland; he lived there during the Holocaust. He'd been in the Warsaw Ghetto, where the Jews were kept before being hauled off to the death camps. He had escaped.

"Yes," Chaim said vaguely. "She must have been surprised."

Sandy and Robin had greeted Mr. Abramsky's initial outburst with a flurry of giggles. Then, apparently bored with the conversation, they'd ambled over to

the church and were taking pictures of each other in front of it. Chaim went to join them, leaving Danny with Mr. Abramsky.

“Absolutely ridiculous!” Mr. Abramsky said to Danny. “So much ridiculous, in religion!”

“Christianity especially,” said Danny.

“All religion!” said Mr. Abramsky fiercely.

Danny didn’t reply. He wasn’t sure he wanted to endorse this statement. On the other hand, how could he show it wasn’t true?

“I like to *laugh* at religion, and all its foolishness,” said Mr. Abramsky. As though to illustrate, he gave three or four barks of angry laughter. “I, I am an atheist!” he announced, so loud that Sandy and Robin, who’d finished taking pictures and were laughing together with Chaim, turned to stare.

6.

A few miles outside Nazareth they saw an Arab plowing his field beside the road. Two animals pulled the wooden plow while the Arab held it, walking behind.

“Oh, Chaim!” Sandy exclaimed. “Can we stop here, please?”

Chaim was already slowing the car, pulling it over to the side of the road. They stopped a few hundred yards past the field, past the Arab, past his two animals.

“You see that Arab over there?” Chaim said to everyone in the car. “Plowing his field?”

It was a fairly stupid question. Of course they’d seen the Arab. How could you not see him?

"Look at him," said Chaim. "He plows with an ox and a donkey, together."

So he was. Danny hadn't noticed that. It was interesting. But he wished they had not stopped to look at the man.

"That's the way Arabs do," Chaim said. "Jews are forbidden! By our Torah! The Torah says, *lo tacharosh b'shor v'chamor yachad*. You shall not plow with ox and donkey, together!"

Mr. Abramsky snorted derisively, as if this was a parade example of religion's foolishness, more ridiculous even than Mary and the angel. Danny wanted to reach out and punch the old man. He remembered the passage Chaim was quoting. It was from Deuteronomy, toward the end of the book.

"I'm getting a picture of this!" cried Sandy, opening the car door.

"I don't think you should," Danny said.

"Why not?" Sandy said to him. She turned to Chaim. "You don't mind, do you, Chaim? It'll only take a second."

"Sure, why not?" Chaim said. To Danny he said, smiling: "No hurry. Nobody's chasing after us."

"That's something you don't see every day," Robin said to Danny, gesturing toward the Arab.

It was the first time either of the girls had spoken to Danny for the past several hours. Back at the beginning of the trip they'd teased him about how he was always writing, writing in that little notebook of his.

Sandy stood outside the car, snapping her pictures. The Arab hadn't looked up from his plowing, or given any sign that he saw them or their car. "Damn this film," said Robin, trying to force it into place in her camera. "I want a picture too, Chaim. We have time, don't we?"

"Nobody chasing after us," Chaim said.

"I really don't think we ought to photograph him," said Danny.

"And why shouldn't we?" said Sandy. She was back in the car, settling herself on the front seat next to Chaim. "These are *wonderful* pictures, Chaim. I got the mountains, in the background."

"He's got his dignity," said Danny.

"*Dignity?*" Robin exploded. She'd apparently gotten the film to go in right, and now clicked the camera shut. "How's he any less dignified, if we take pictures of him?"

Red-faced, hot, Danny groped for the words. How to explain what he was feeling, that the shame and the sorrow of those left behind are not to be used for the entertainment of those riding in white Pontiacs? ... This old Arab, stranded in the middle of the Jewish country, still plowing with his wooden plow and his stupid ox and donkey together, which the Jews had known three thousand years ago you weren't supposed to do.

"Listen," Chaim said to Danny. "You go to Acco, to the old city. You'll see – we visit Acco tomorrow. The Arabs *want* you to take their picture. They *beg* you. They say, 'Meester, come take my picture. *Geev* me a dollar, *Meester*, take my picture.' "

Sandy whooped with laughter at Chaim's imitation. Even Mr. Abramsky chuckled. The only one who didn't laugh was Robin; and that was because she was already outside the car, taking her pictures. Danny felt his face burning. He looked out through the car door, which was still open. The Arab had reached the end of his field and had now turned; he was plowing in the opposite direction, *their* direction. Surely he must see this foolish American girl, turning him with her camera into a piece of scenery.

Surely – Danny found himself hoping, perversely – he would march over to them, shaking his fist, screaming curses. He would show them that Chaim was wrong, that Danny was right.

But the man looked straight at the space where they and their car and their camera stood, and saw nothing there.

7.

“So how was the *Galeel*?” said Yitzhak Vered. Danny had gotten back from the three-day trip, sunburned and depressed, the night before.

They passed a sign saying WELCOME TO HERZLIYA in Hebrew and English. The scenery didn’t look much different than it had since they’d left Tel Aviv twenty minutes ago: brown, hot, weedy fields, interrupted by an occasional orchard. But now there were also a few clusters of oblong apartment buildings, on one side or the other of the narrow road, so Danny supposed they were getting into a town. He wasn’t sure what he should tell Yitzhak about how the Galilee had been. He didn’t want to talk about Sandy and Robin, who since their quarrel that first afternoon had entirely stopped treating him as if he existed.

He said: “It’s very commercialized.”

“I’m sorry?” said Yitzhak.

He must not know the word *commercialized*. “It’s like one big market,” Danny explained. “Everything’s for sale. Everywhere you go there’s souvenir shops, gift shops, people trying to sell you things. Everybody wants your money.”

He was exaggerating, and he knew it. But it was true that they’d spent a remarkable amount of their time in souvenir shops. Almost everywhere else, they hadn’t been there two minutes before Chaim told them they needed to leave – especially at places like the ancient synagogue at Capernaum, which had interesting ruins that nobody but Danny had wanted to look at. For the souvenir shops there was always plenty of time.

“Commercial-ized,” said Yitzhak Vered, as if he was committing the word to memory. Then he said: “Commercial-ism.” Then he said: “Well, Mr. Danny,

money makes the world go round. In America, people want money too, don't they? Of course they want money. That's what capitalism is all about, isn't that right?"

"Well, yes, but –"

"In Israel, we are socialists. But still we want money."

What makes you so superior then? Danny thought. He'd noticed it was a central article of Yitzhak Vered's personal credo that Israel was a better place to be than any other country in the world, most especially than America.

He heard the sound of heavy, rhythmic breathing from the back. Shoshana must have fallen asleep. How she managed to keep herself seated on the cinderblock while sleeping, he couldn't imagine. He didn't turn around to look.

"You're going to Jerusalem tomorrow," Yitzhak Vered said. "In Jerusalem you'll *really* see what is commercialism. Jerusalem's a holy city. Holy people want money *a lot*."

8.

They'd turned off the paved road. The oblong apartment buildings of Herzliya were all around them. So were the young people – children and teen-agers, in couples and in groups. They wandered and they played, in the broad, straight, dusty streets. Yitzhak Vered weaved his truck among them, occasionally sounding his horn.

The children waved to the truck as it passed. Yitzhak waved back. So did Danny.

Yitzhak parked in the street in front of one of the buildings. He and Danny hoisted Danny's suitcase and typewriter out of the back of the truck. Shoshana, it turned out, hadn't been sitting on the cinderblock at all. She was curled up on

the floor of the truck, her small dark head resting on the cinderblock as on a pillow. She smiled at Danny as he took his typewriter, then closed her eyes again.

Mrs. Rozenshtayn, Danny's new landlady, was a thin, nervous woman with streaks of gray in her brown hair. Her son was in the Army, which was why Danny would be renting his room for the next month and a half. She didn't speak much English. She and Yitzhak had already worked out the terms of the rental, which sounded reasonable enough to Danny.

She showed Danny, mostly with gestures, how to light the gas burners in the kitchen. "Here," she said, pointing to one of the shelves. "Coffee. Tea. All right? *B'seder?* You take. Any time you want, you take." She pointed to the refrigerator. "This, no. This you don't take. *B'seder? B'seder?* All right?"

She opened the refrigerator, which was very small and seemed to be filled mostly with small containers of yogurt. There was also a tall silvery jug with a lever and a spout at the top, which Danny recognized as a seltzer bottle. You filled it with water, attached a cylinder of gas, and, *voila!* seltzer. "*This* you take," she said, pointing to the seltzer. "But this, this, *this*" – indicating the rest of the refrigerator's contents – "this you don't take. Please? All right? You understand?"

"I understand," Danny said in Hebrew, nodding reassuringly.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Rozenshtayn," said Yitzhak, who'd been watching all this with an expression of quiet amusement. "We'll keep Danny fed. Danny, you come to supper with us right after this, all right? You unpack later."

"*B'seder*, all right," said Danny, perhaps to both of them. To Yitzhak he said: "Thank you very much."

Mrs. Rozenshtayn beamed with relief. She groped for a pack of cigarettes, and held it out to Danny. "Cigarette?" she said.

"No, thank you," said Danny. "I don't smoke."

Yitzhak Vered laughed and said, "Danny's a *good* boy, Mrs. Rozenshtayn."

She gave him a key to the apartment. It was the first house key Danny'd ever had. In Kellerfield his mother was always home; the door was never locked. What would he need a key for?

"Danny," Yitzhak said to him as they walked down the stairs. "Do you have with you a — a wake-up clock?"

"An alarm clock?" said Danny. "Yes, I do. I packed one."

"Good. For tomorrow morning, you set it for five o'clock. Then you come over by us, have something to eat. Then I take you in with me, to Tel Aviv. To the Central Bus Station. From there you take a bus, straight to Jerusalem. *B'seder?*"

"Well, thank you. I really appreciate —"

"You wake up early like a working man, you have a working man's breakfast. *B'seder?*"

"*B'seder,*" said Danny, laughing.

"You come back to America, you'll be so much like an Israeli they won't know what to do with you!"

Danny laughed again at this thought. Then he said: "Yitzhak?"

"Yes, Danny?"

"Do teenagers here smoke cigarettes? I mean, is it accepted for them to smoke?"

Yitzhak shook his head, clicked his tongue. "Not till the Army," he said. "Why? Because Mrs. Rozenshtayn offered you a cigarette?"

"Uh-huh."

“Well, you see, Danny. By her you’re not a *teenager*. By her you’re a *world traveller*. Something completely different, you see.”

Danny thought about this as they walked to the truck.

“By the way, Danny,” said Yitzhak. “I forgot to ask. You got mail from home, haven’t you? Tell me, how are your parents?”

9.

The very first thing Danny did when he got back to his room, from having supper with the Vereds, was open the aerogram from Kellerfield. His hands were shaking.

Dalia Vered had asked him almost right off the bat, maybe fifteen seconds after Yitzhak had shepherded him and Shoshana through the door of the Vereds’ apartment: “How is your mother? Your father?” What was Danny to say? That he’d gotten a letter from home but he hadn’t opened it yet, because it arrived at the same time as a more important letter, from a friend in New York telling him he was about to be a published UFO author? That he’d needed to read and digest his friend’s letter first, before finding out what his mother had to tell him?

So he lied. “Oh, they’re doing fine,” he said.

Yitzhak asked, as Danny and the Vereds sat eating their eggplant salad, if it wasn’t true that Danny’s mother had been sick for a long time with heart problems. He then translated the question into Hebrew so his wife could understand.

Danny nodded. “She was very sick a long time ago,” he said, while Yitzhak translated. “Maybe—oh, about thirteen years ago. But then she recovered. And since then she’s been doing fine.”

But what if she weren't? What if she'd written in her aerogram, which he'd been too busy to read: *My son. I am sick. I am dying. Come home.*

His hands trembled as he cut the folds of the frail blue paper.

But he'd told the Vereds the truth after all. His mother was fine, cheerful and chatty as ever. She was writing the letter, she said, because it seemed like she'd *never* be able to get Daddy to sit down and do it. They were all fine at home. Nothing much was new, she said, unless you wanted to count the news that Cousin Peter, who was the oldest son of his father's brother and was three months younger than Danny, had just gotten his driver's license.

Well, hooray for Peter. Danny had taken his driver's test twice before leaving for Israel, failed it both times. He read on, and saw his mother had one other bit of news to report. The latest *PURA Bulletin* had arrived for him – wouldn't you know it? – the very day after he had caught the plane for Israel. She and Leon assumed he would want to read it, in preparation for his homecoming, so they had already mailed it to him. They had used sea mail, of course. It was too heavy for air mail.

She's her old self, he thought as he set the aerogram aside. Still joking, still kidding. The thought relieved and comforted him, as though he were now assured that when he came home he would find everything just as it had been.

But he awoke after midnight and lay awake for hours in the hot, close night. His sweat poured onto the meager pillow. His mind boiled over with furious harangues, none of which made any real sense. At last he dozed off and dreamed briefly of a strange dying infant, who repelled him and whom he wished he'd never seen, but whom he knew he must love and nurture and protect and rescue even if it cost him his own life.

He saw her lying awake in her bed, her eyes wide open with fear. He heard her loud, gasping breaths. He could feel her poor lungs struggling helplessly to extract life from this world's ungiving air.

Chapter 6: The Dying of Anna Shapiro

JULY-AUGUST 1966

1.

In the beginning, Anna remembered, it had seemed like it might be all right.

They had dinner, all of them: she and Danny and Leon, and her mother and her sister Ida. The whole family was there, except of course her father, who had died more than twelve years earlier. Grandma Sophie made her chicken, with its rich aromatic sauce no one but she knew how to make.

Anna had said to her mother, more than once: *Mom, you ought to teach one of us your recipe before it's too late.* But Sophie always refused, with a laugh. Anna had already found a husband, she pointed out, even without knowing how to make the chicken. And as for Ida – well, it was too late for Ida. Chicken or no chicken, she'd stay an old maid.

Besides, Sophie would say, I'm still here to make it for you. Right?

What could Anna say to that? *Well, who knows how much longer you'll be here?* Of course you couldn't say that. She instead said, *Right!* and laughed along with her mother, and everybody around laughed. And the subject was dropped.

They'd eaten the chicken, and the chocolate cake that Grandma had made special for Danny's last evening before his trip to Israel, and then she sat in her rocker and watched Danny climb into the car with his father.

He moved awkwardly, the way he always moved these days. She didn't know why he seemed so graceless. Maybe it was that the real Danny was still a small boy, who rode inside this adolescent body of his as though it was a bicycle too big for him, and he was always frightened of falling off.

There was a brief flurry of misunderstanding between Danny and his father about where the suitcase was to go. First Danny brought it around to the trunk. Then Leon made a peremptory gesture and Danny hastened forward to a spot outside the door on the passenger side. He stood there waiting while Leon looked baffled and angry, evidently having forgotten that Danny didn't have a key to the car. Typical of Danny, he held the heavy suitcase in his hand while he waited for his father to open the car door. It didn't occur to him just to set it down on the driveway.

Did they exchange words, angry or otherwise? She couldn't tell. She could see their expressions and gestures through the window that separated them from her. But she couldn't hear what, if anything, they might be saying.

Eventually the suitcase was in the back seat, and her two boys were in the front. Leon backed the car into the street, and she and Ida and Sophie smiled and waved to them until they were out of sight.

"Well, I just hope he'll be all right," Ida said, as soon as the car had vanished. Her smile had vanished too. Her hand, though, was still part way up in the waving gesture.

"Oh, he will," Anna said dreamily. "God looks out for fools and drunkards."

Ida took a deep breath, let it out noisily, and went to the sink to start in on the dishes.

Anna's mind wasn't really there with her. She was thinking, instead, of another chicken dinner that Grandma had made for them, sixteen and a half years earlier, only with cherry pie for dessert and not chocolate cake. That was the Shabbes dinner the Friday night before Christmas, right before they'd taken her to the hospital to bring Danny into the world.

Sixteen and a half years ago, and the same people had been around the dinner table eating Grandma's chicken: Ida, Grandma, Leon, and of course Anna herself. The only difference was that Pop was there and Danny wasn't; except as a fetus

in her womb getting ready to come out. Now Pop was gone and Danny was here. Or rather, he'd been here until a few minutes ago but now he was gone too, just like Pop. Off to an alien land called Israel, which all of them knew existed and was where they somehow belonged, but which none of them could quite imagine.

The silence in the house, now that Danny and Leon were gone, might have been welcome if not for the future silences it foreshadowed.

The house was free, for the first time in ages, of the everlasting clack-clack-clacking of Danny's typewriter till all hours. It was free of Leon's repertoire of sighs and groans, his ostentatious and noisy stalkings between his den and the kitchen. Free of the complaints and accusatory questions he would suddenly spring on her, in which he'd probe like a sadistic dentist at a rotten tooth, at everything that was wrong with their home and their world and their life.

For a few hours at least, there'd be none of their quieter, more earnest conversations, in which Leon would ask some variant of his eternal question: how had it happened that their son had turned out so damn *strange*? Any other night she'd have been on call continually, expected to answer such questions patiently and knowledgeably at a moment's notice. That was her special and irreplaceable expertise, acknowledged by her husband and perhaps also by her son: authorized interpreter of Danny's strangeness.

For a few hours tonight she was free of all this, and she should have felt relief.

2.

"How long did you say you wanted us to stay, Anna?" said Ida.

Ida put the last of the dishes in the rack to dry. Anna, meanwhile, was gathering strength to heave herself to her feet and walk to the couch in the living room.

There she'd lie for the rest of the evening while her mother and sister sat near her and the three of them watched television.

"Oh, just till Leon gets back from taking Danny to the airport, I thought," Anna said lightly.

"Well, jeeppers, that's likely to be pretty *late*, isn't it? I mean, the plane isn't supposed to leave until one in the morning, and I imagine he'll stay there and wait, won't he, until he's sure Danny got off all right, and ... "

And and and and and. She went on and on in that put-upon tone of hers, just as if she hadn't done these calculations until this minute. As if she hadn't known a week and a half ago, when the three of them made their plans for this evening, how late it was likely to be before Leon got back.

"I do have to get up for work tomorrow morning, Anna," she finished bleakly.

Ida cast a glance at her mother then, and Anna also watched Sophie carefully out of the corner of her eye. If Sophie were to say, for example, *Yes, it will be pretty late, won't it, before we get back home*, or something like that, then Anna was all prepared to laugh graciously and say, *Well, I don't see why you need to stay with me all night here. I'll be perfectly all right.*

But Sophie made no response to Ida's speech. So Anna laughed graciously and said nothing, as if to say through that laugh: *Yes, it's a shame, isn't it, that Danny's flight had to be scheduled for the middle of the night, but what can you do?*

3.

She dozed on the couch while the TV blared. She let her mind wander.

She was a young girl; and the couch she lay on was her mother's, in the old house on Abingdon Avenue in Trenton. She was sick, but recovering from her sickness. It was

winter, and the big wet snowflakes kept on falling. It was perhaps the scarlet fever that she had in seventh grade, or perhaps the rheumatic fever that came the year afterward –

They'd assumed back then that the rheumatic fever was a sickness you could recover from.

You enjoy being sick! Leon yelled at her sometimes, during the bitter fights they used to have during the early years at Kellerfield, when Danny was a little boy. *You love being an invalid!* That, allegedly, was why she was sick and not healthy, why her heart was flawed and couldn't be mended.

She sobbed bitterly, and the tears poured down her cheeks. It was so unfair! Let him walk in her shoes, even for one single day. – Walk! it was all she could do even to stand up, even to get out of bed. – Then let him say she enjoyed it. Let him see for himself how much fun it was to be sick.

He couldn't answer her tears because he knew he was wrong. But he wouldn't admit that. He'd pout silently for a while, as was his habit; and then go prowling around the house. He'd find something Danny was doing wrong – brushing his teeth the wrong way, maybe – and yell at him for it.

She was a young girl, lying on her mother's couch; and the radiator whistled its spooky tune and when it wasn't doing that she could hear the loud ticking of the clock from the breakfast room, and Mom was always coming in from the kitchen to bring her something good, maybe hot tea or hot chocolate, or sometimes a plate of cinnamon toast –

They didn't know back then that *that* couch would lead to *this* couch, her rheumatic fever to her heart disease, such that her whole frail body was now filling up with this awful fluid which her diuretics could no longer drain from her, and her heart was drowning in it –

She was a young girl; and Sy Ginzberg put his ice-cold stethoscope to her chest and listened. He said: "I don't like that sound." Then he said, to Mom: "She had rheumatic fever six months ago?"

Then he said: "Anna, could you go out to the waiting room, please?"

She'd been relieved, at first, that the examination seemed to be over. She'd been uncomfortable with him holding the stethoscope to her chest. She wasn't wearing anything on her chest, and that embarrassed her, partly because there was so little there for her to be embarrassed about.

Soon she was scared, and worse than scared.

"How did she get the germs?" Mom kept saying over and over, as they waited for the streetcar at the stop outside Sy Ginzberg's office. She meant: the germs for the rheumatic fever. She couldn't imagine how her girl could possibly have picked them up.

Anna sweated in the heat of the August noon, and withered inside for shame. She thought back to eight months ago, to the first New Year's Eve party she'd ever been to: where there were darkened lights, and an empty bottle spinning on the floor, and more boys to kiss than she could quite remember –

4.

She was awakened by the hideous feeling of something pressing hard against her lungs, not letting her breathe. She propped herself up on her feeble arms. The pressure in her chest eased. Sitting up, she took a few quick gulps of air. *Something's wrong*, she thought, and when she struggled in her mind to grasp just what might be wrong, it was: *The clock isn't ticking any more!*

How silly of me.

This is Kellerfield, not Abingdon Avenue. We don't have an old clock in the breakfast room, ticking away day and night, so you can hear it all over the house. We don't even have a breakfast room.

She heard her mother's deep breathing from the chair next to her, and thought: *God bless her. She's still here. I'm not alone.*

She looked at her watch. It was nearly three in the morning. Ida had gone off to sleep in Danny's bed while they waited for Leon to get back. He still wasn't here. She thought: *He's not coming back, this time.*

She'd explained to Danny, when Danny was little and Leon was late coming home one evening, that when Danny was late she worried he'd gotten run over by a car or something. That wasn't what she worried about when Leon was late, she told her son, because Leon wasn't the kind of person who got run over by cars. No, with *Leon* her fear was that he'd finally decided to leave and not come back; which of course she *wasn't* concerned about with Danny, because Danny listened solemnly to this convoluted recital of his mother's anxieties. His eyes were big with sadness, and perhaps also with fright. He nodded and said nothing.

For all she knew Danny wasn't coming back this time, either.

She would wake up Mom, she decided, and tell her to go wake up Ida. The three of them would get into the car and Ida would drive them all back to Abingdon Avenue.

Let's face facts, now.

Her experiment in being a normal wife and mother hadn't worked out. Time to admit that, and salvage what we can. She'd tried. She'd done her very best. But she was just too sick to make it work.

Time to admit failure, and let's get in the car and go home.

5.

"Well?" said Anna. She smiled through her weariness and fear. "Did our boy get off all right?"

Leon, who'd just gotten in – it was three-thirty by now – seemed confused by the question. He looked more dazed than Anna or her mother, or Ida who'd just shuffled in from Danny's bedroom.

"Get off? Yeah, he got off. Sure, he got off."

Because Sophie was there he couldn't say, as Anna dreaded he might: *Yeah, he got off, and now I'm off too, and go back to the car and drive away for good.*

"Was the plane on schedule?" Anna asked.

"On schedule? Yeah, the plane was on schedule. Why shouldn't it be on schedule?"

Then why weren't you home an hour and a half ago?

Leon might have sensed the unspoken question. He went on, in his most authoritative and assuring voice: "El Al's a *fine* airline. When the El Al people *make* a schedule, they *keep* to that schedule. Don't they, now?"

None of the women answered. They were too tired, at three-thirty in the morning, to realize Leon had given them a cue to which they were supposed to respond. "Isn't that right?" said Leon, louder than before.

"Oh, that's right," said Sophie, laughing.

Anna, for a change, didn't laugh with her, didn't even smile. She bowed her head and looked like she wanted to cry.

6.

She was a young woman still, with a three-year-old son; and she floated up from that awful dark tunnel where they were suffocating her, where they were squeezing the breath out of her; and she saw Sy Ginzberg's big sad face looming over her. She's fibrillating,

he kept saying, over and over, to everybody else standing around there, not to her. But the look on his face said: She's a goner.

She woke, and groped around her in her large empty bed. It was dawn: of that first and most vulnerable morning, the first morning with Danny gone. She could hear Leon snoring from the den.

He was kind that day, to her relief. Also the days that followed. He didn't yell; he didn't pick fights. He didn't demand answers to impossible questions. He didn't complain that first bleary-eyed day they were alone together, when what should arrive in the mail but the latest *PURA Bulletin*, with all its UFO news for a teenage UFO buff who wasn't around to read it any more.

"Why don't you take it to the post office with you tomorrow morning?" she said, "You could mail it overseas, to the Vereds' address." She added: "For Danny."

Of course it was for Danny. Why should an Israeli family like the Vereds want to read the *PURA Bulletin*?

He didn't fly into a rage, as she'd half suspected he might. Nor did he launch into his usual demands and pleas that she help him understand their son's lunacy. He just nodded mildly, and agreed, yes, surely Danny would want to see the latest *Bulletin*.

He smiled often, softly. Sometimes he made jokes.

On Sunday he mowed the lawn. "Wouldn't you know it?" he said, as he came in all sweaty. "Soon as the kid makes his escape, the lawn all of a sudden starts growing."

She laughed at that.

They didn't talk much. When you've been married twenty-two years, what's left to talk about?

They didn't even talk about the Vincenzos' dog. It wasn't prowling around their yard at suppertimes any more. Why not? Who knew why not? Maybe Leon's unending telephone complaints had finally had their impact. Or maybe the dog had died.

"Suppertime" wasn't really suppertime, anyway, with Danny gone. Anna hardly ate any more. She had no appetite, with all the fluid inside her pressing against her lungs, her stomach. She was too weak to fix anything, no matter how simple. She simply couldn't stand up, not even for a couple of minutes. Leon saw no point in preparing a whole evening meal just for himself. It was easier, and actually more pleasant, to take a snack from the fridge every couple of hours and eat it while standing by the sink, reading the *New York Times*.

Anna weighed herself every hour or two, and carefully recorded the results in a special notebook she'd been using for that purpose for the past ten years. She weighed herself all day, and then all night. There was no way she could sleep for more than an hour or two at a time, day or night, lying down or sitting in her rocker.

Her weight, she observed to herself with what felt like the last bit of hopefulness of which she was capable, was holding steady.

Leon teased her, that she seemed not to know what to do with herself, now that she didn't have Danny to look after. She looked almost *scared* to be without him, Leon said. As if it was Danny who'd been keeping her alive, and now that he was gone —

"What will you do next year?" he said. "When he goes off to college?"

"I figure we'll cross that bridge when we come to it," she said, laughing.

It wasn't true. Already she'd begun thinking about when Danny would go to college. Her thoughts consisted largely of a fantasy that he could do that without leaving home. The idea wasn't altogether absurd. There were fine schools right

here in Philadelphia. The University of Pennsylvania, for one. And there was Temple

Leon seemed to have read her mind. "Maybe he won't *have* to go away to school," he said. "Whattaya say we try to get him into the U. of P.? He can live here, take the train into Philly. I can drive him to the station every morning. He won't even have to learn to drive. Whattaya say?"

He was kidding, of course. She laughed. But there was relief in her laughter, like a little girl who's been ordered harshly to leave her home and go live on the streets; and then they tell her, their faces covered with smiles: *We were only fooling, honey. We love you. You'll always be our little girl. You'll stay here with us always, as long as you live.*

Only once, during those days in the Kellerfield house, did Leon snap at her. It felt especially bad, because it came at the end of what until then had been one of their best days.

It was Wednesday, a week from the day Danny had left for the airport. The mailman had brought Danny's first letter from Israel. They'd been asking each other, joking-like: *You think the kid's really going to write to us, now he's off having fun? Or you think he's forgotten all about us?* And now here it was: a letter.

She showed it to Leon when he got home from work that evening. He enjoyed it too, as she had.

But late that night, while she was getting up from her rocker to see if she might be able to doze a little bit in her bed, and Leon was standing by the sink all absorbed in his paper, she said to him in what she thought was an inoffensive tone of voice: "Leon, you think you might want to sit down at the typewriter and write Danny a letter? So he'll know we got his, and how glad we were to have the inside scoop on his flight?"

He looked up and glared. It was like the worst of his glares, from the worst of the bad old days, which apparently weren't over quite yet.

"Why don't *you* write to him?" he snarled. "You're his great buddy, aren't you?"

She shuffled off to bed, her head sunk in sadness and shame.

7.

She was sitting in her rocking chair by the window, toward the end of the following week, when she saw to her surprise an old blue DeSoto pull carefully up to the curb in front of their house. She was even more surprised when the driver emerged from the DeSoto, and it was none other than Danny's old friend Jeff Stollard.

So they do grow up. She wanted to smile and cry at the same time.

She'd known in her mind that most of Danny's friends, the little boys he'd had over to their house under her beaming gaze and to whom he'd given Pepsis from their refrigerator, were grown up now and were driving cars. But it hadn't hit home until this moment, when she saw with her own eyes Jeff Stollard emerge from behind the wheel of that car and come walking up the driveway toward her kitchen door.

She offered him a Pepsi. "You'll have to take it yourself, though," she said. "It's hard for me to get up." She gave him a smile of gracious regret, as though this were some trivial inconvenience, a nuisance barely even worth mentioning.

He said no thank you, and smiled, and took the kitchen chair she'd offered him with her gesture.

Still as polite as ever, she thought. Still shy and quiet. His glasses were still thick, nearly as thick as Danny's, and his complexion awful. Some things even a driver's license can't improve.

"I came by to see if you'd heard from Danny," he said. "If there were any letters from him."

A good thing she had both his letters right there with her, on the little table in front of the rocker, so she didn't have to get up for them. The second had arrived the day before. It included a description, disappointingly curt, of a tour he'd just come back from in the Galilee, an even more disappointing description of the Vered family, and lavish praises of somebody named Shlomo who Danny said was helping him learn Hebrew.

Jeff read the letters. "It sounds like he's having a good time over there," Jeff said.

Anna agreed that was the way it sounded.

"Last time you were here," she said companionably, "I think you were riding a bicycle."

"I think I may have been," he said, nodding politely.

"And now here you are, a big man, driving your own car."

"My *mother's* car, really."

"That's what I meant."

He asked: "Did Danny ever get his license? I mean, I didn't see him after school was over, before he left for Israel."

She shook her head no, smiling her regret.

"It's not so easy to learn to drive," she said, "if you're like Danny."

Jeff nodded, very cautiously.

"I mean, you always have to be *alert* when you're driving, don't you? Isn't that what they're always telling us?"

"Yes, you do," said Jeff.

"And Danny isn't exactly what you'd call *alert*, is he?"

She laughed. Jeff smiled nervously.

"You, I imagine you've always been alert, haven't you?" she said. "You're the kind of person who keeps his eyes wide open, knows what's going on around him. Aren't you?"

Jeff cleared his throat slightly. He tended to do that when he was pleased and embarrassed at the same time. "Well, *I think I am*," he said. "But I don't know if you could get my father to agree."

They both laughed at that.

What a nice lady, Jeff thought as he drove home. What a nice, friendly, agreeable lady. It's just a shame she's so sick.

I really ought to go visit her again, he thought; and knew even as he had the thought that it would only mean he'd feel guilty. Because he knew even at the time that he'd never come visit again.

8.

They took Anna to the hospital on Saturday, two days after Jeff's visit. Friday night for the first time she hadn't been able to sleep at all, not even doze. Although she'd stopped eating almost entirely, her weight had begun to edge ominously upward. Clearly her latest diuretic had stopped working.

Leon phoned Sy Ginzberg, who told him they'd reached the limits of what he could do for her, and it was time she be taken into the hospital. Leon assumed

he meant the hospital in Trenton, where she'd gone for her heart attack in 1952. He began to make plans accordingly.

"No, not *Trenton!*" Sy snapped. "They don't have the facilities there. She needs to be in the hospital in Philadelphia. *Philadelphia!*"

He didn't have to bite my head off, thought Leon, who hadn't got that much sleep last night either. I heard him the first time.

I haven't been to Philadelphia in years, Anna thought, as she watched the traffic thicken around them. These neighborhoods, all sprung up beside the highway — who knows if they'd even been built, last time I was here?

Leon drove; Sophie and Ida sat in the back seat. Anna tried to remember when was the last time she'd visited Philadelphia. Certainly not since her heart attack; maybe not even since Danny was born. Leon disliked the city, and on those old auto trips of theirs he tried to give it as wide a berth as possible.

The first thing the nurses did, after checking her into the hospital, was give her a chest X-ray. She and Leon and Ida and Sophie sat around a small, bleak white room while they waited for the doctor, an intern named Dr. Rycard, to come back with the X-rays and explain to them what they meant.

They didn't like Dr. Rycard. Leon didn't, at least. You had to call him "Doctor," because he had his M.D. for what that was worth, but as far as Leon was concerned he was just one of those rich fraternity kids whom he'd had to wait tables for back when he was in school at Carthage. Same snotty attitude, same nose stuck in the air, same I'm-the-lord-high-muckamuck-and-you're-dirt-so-kiss-my-feet-peasant kind of way of treating you. He didn't like the kid's name, either. It reminded him of something bad, dishonest, something that affected him like fingernails drawn across a chalkboard. He couldn't quite remember what that was.

Leon was still trying to recall what Rycard's name made him think of, when in came the good doctor in person, X-rays under his arm. He started telling them how there was a "butterfly pattern" visible on the X-rays.

"Butterfly pattern," said Anna in a cheerful tone, smiling, as if this made it sweet and nice, as if from having been a caterpillar she'd been turned into a pretty little butterfly and could fly away whenever she pleased.

Rycard gave her a stern look. "It's not such good news, Mrs. Shapiro," he said. "A butterfly pattern on the X-rays is a sign of pulmonary edema."

She didn't look cheerful then. She looked scared.

When Leon saw that he felt scared too. But also oddly excited, as if it had been an overcast day all his life and now there was an opening in the clouds, a blue tunnel in the sky, and he was being sucked up into it even though he didn't really want to be.

9.

The nurses wheeled her to her room. Leon and Ida and Sophie walked behind them.

"Who was that nice doctor she had in the hospital?" said Sophie. "Back when she went into the hospital, back then? It was a Dr. Lam — Lam —"

"*Lambdon*, Mom," said Ida. "That was Dr. *Lambdon*."

Her voice had become more harsh and grating these days than Leon remembered it from the past. It was like an old lady's voice: rasping, cackling. For some reason she always spoke very loudly and distinctly when she talked to Ma Berg, even though the old lady had given no sign that her hearing was going.

"Yeah, that's right," said Sophie. "Dr. *Lambdon*."

"But that wasn't *here*, Mom," said Ida. "That was in *Trenton*. At the Mercer County Hospital, in *Trenton*."

“I knew that,” Sophie said irritably.

Dr. Lambdon was dead, anyway. He’d been dead for the past six years.

They’d given her a semi-private room, which she shared with two other patients. There were curtains you could draw across the room, to get yourself a certain measure of privacy. At the end of the room was a single bathroom, and luckily Anna had been assigned the bed closest to it.

“Well, isn’t this nice!” said Sophie.

Anna discovered that the bed came with a control switch, which you could press to raise the pillow end of the bed so it was almost like you were sitting up. When you pushed the switch in the opposite direction, that end of the bed went back down again. You could set it just as high or as low as you wanted it. Leon, Sophie and Ida sat around the bed on straight-backed chairs, watching as Anna experimented with the switch.

The nurse came in and set Anna up with an I.V. She also gave Anna a lunch menu, and a pencil Anna could use to circle the choices she wanted. Anna examined the menu for a moment, circled *Hamburger* for the main course and *Fruit cocktail* for the dessert, and handed it back to the nurse.

“She looks better now, doesn’t she?” Sophie cried out.

It was true. In this hospital bed, Anna felt more comfortable than she had for weeks, maybe months. The lunch menu also had helped. Seeing the different kinds of food they had listed, and knowing that she could circle any she wanted and they’d bring it to her, had comforted her more than she could have imagined.

They all agreed that Anna looked much better already.

They wouldn't have had anything to talk about after that, except that Leon had remembered to bring with him Danny's second letter from Israel, which Sophie and Ida hadn't yet seen.

"Read it to them, Leon," said Anna.

"Well, isn't that *wonderful*?" Ida said when he was finished. "He sounds like he's having the most *wonderful* time. Doesn't he, Anna?"

From the bed, Anna beamed proudly.

"Where was it he said he went for three days?" said Sophie. "To the Galilee?"

"To the Galilee, Mom," said Ida, pronouncing the words very loudly and distinctly. "But he doesn't say much *about* the trip, does he, Anna? It sounds like he went with a group, doesn't it? But he doesn't say what kind of a group it was."

"Well, *I'll* tell you what kind of a group it was," Leon roared, his face already split into a big wide smile because he knew the joke – which he hadn't yet made, of course – was going to be so funny. "It was a group of sexy *girls*, that's what it was! Danny picked them all up on the boardwalk, said, '*Hey, girls! Whattaya say we all take ourselves a little trip up to the ol' Galilee?*' And *that's* why he doesn't want us to know what kind of a group it was."

"Oh, *you!*" said Ida, and gave a few of her peals of girlish laughter. Leon felt the first stirrings of the headache he invariably developed whenever he had to be in Ida's company for any length of time. Anna and Sophie also laughed, though in a more subdued and dutiful manner.

"And what about that – what's her name? – Shoshana?" Leon went on.

"Shoshana Vered," Anna said primly. "She's the daughter of the Vered family."

“Daughter of the family,” said Leon. “Maybe Danny’s finally met himself a girl. Maybe she’ll stay still long enough for him to get something started with her. Maybe – who knows?”

“Maybe Danny won’t be coming back here when the summer’s over, then,” said Ida, laughing at the thought.

Anna didn’t laugh. Unlike Leon’s joke about the girls on the boardwalk, this didn’t seem so impossible as to be funny. “Leon,” she said. “The girl’s only twelve years old.”

“Well,” said Leon, pulling a mock-serious face. “That’s about Danny’s social age, isn’t it? Twelve years.”

All of them, even Anna, had to agree that that was true.

10.

After Anna had her lunch, Leon drove Ida and Sophie back to Kellerfield so Ida could drive the two of them back to Trenton.

“Will you be writing to Danny?” Sophie asked Ida, as she backed out of the driveway.

Leon stood outdoors, in front of the house. He waved goodbye absently for a moment. Then he stared across the street toward Morgan Elementary, where Danny had once gone to school. *Poor man, he* – Sophie directed a look of hatred and contempt toward Leon, who wasn’t looking at them – *he certainly isn’t going to.*

“I wasn’t planning to, Mom. Do you think I should?”

“Who else? Anna’s too sick to write. And *he*” – Sophie directed a look of hatred and contempt toward Leon, who wasn’t looking at them – *he certainly isn’t going to.*

“What do you think I should tell him about – about his mother?”

“Don’t tell him *anything*,” Sophie said.

“You don’t think I should?”

Ida said this in a doubtful tone, but what Sophie said had relieved her. She couldn’t imagine how she could tell Danny his mother was so sick she’d needed to be put in the hospital without going on to say he must come home at once. Which would require all sorts of complicated arrangements and rearrangements, with airplane tickets and heaven knew what else, which Danny’d be entirely incapable of doing for himself. And guess who was bound to get volunteered for the job?

Besides, the last thing the family needed at a time like this was Danny underfoot.

“We don’t want to get him upset,” said Sophie. After a moment, she added: “She’ll be out of the hospital in a few days, anyway. So why should Danny be worried?”

And, after another moment: “Why should we ruin his whole vacation?”

11.

Leon had planned to drive into Philadelphia every couple of days to visit his wife. But things tended to pile up on him, so it wasn’t until the following Thursday that he was able to make it, and then only because Laurie, the colored girl who’d cleaned house for them almost since they moved to Kellerfield, wouldn’t leave off pestering him until he agreed to drive her to the hospital so she could visit with Anna and see how her old boss and chum was getting along.

The real problem, he thought as he drove into the city with Laurie beside him on the front seat, had been what to do with Ida and the old lady. You couldn’t really go to the hospital without phoning them and at least making the gesture of

asking if they wanted to come along, which meant you'd be stuck in the car for nearly two hours with Sophie's digs and Ida's stupid yammering. That was under the best of conditions, too. Just let the freeway traffic get backed up, as it usually was in the late afternoons, and the ride home would be like being buried somewhere in hell.

Even worse, though, to show up in the hospital room, and find the two of them sitting there like solemn old vultures. One or the other of them was bound to say something like: *Oh, isn't it a shame Leon didn't let us know he was planning to come in today? We could have ridden with him, we poor old ladies wouldn't have had to make the long drive all by ourselves, et cetera et cetera.* He could just see himself standing there, making excuses. They would, as per usual, sit giving him their sorrowful put-upon looks. And Anna, again as per usual, would lie in bed and watch them fight it out, smiling her grand-lady imitation-Eleanor-Roosevelt smile, like old Queen Elizabeth with her whole damn court in attendance.

And what if Ida and Sophie *weren't* there? What if somehow he were to find himself alone in the hospital room with his dying wife?

That hardly bore thinking about.

He was shocked at how bad Anna looked, how much more withered and emaciated she'd become in only five days. He didn't even notice at first that Ida and Sophie were in the room with her. They jumped up and gave little cries of pleasure when they saw him come in; still more, when they saw he'd brought Laurie with him. Everybody hugged everybody else.

Wouldn't you think they might have tried giving me a phone call? he thought in the middle of all the hugging. Just to coordinate a little bit with me, maybe? I am her husband, after all.

"Well," he announced when they were all sitting down again. "Anybody want to hear the latest *dispatch*? From our Middle East correspondent?"

Everybody perked up at this. Even Anna, who'd seemed pretty much out of it, tried to sit up and look eager and smile.

It was an aerogram. Maybe Danny had finally figured out they were cheaper to send than regular letters. Leon ceremoniously unfolded the blue paper and began to read:

"July 23, 1966. Jerusalem, Israel. Dear Mom and Dad—"

"He hasn't written to *me* yet," said Ida.

She smiled when she said that, but in such a way that you knew that underneath her heart was breaking. Leave it to the Berg girls, Leon thought. They'll make you feel worse, with those smiles of theirs, than any human being alive.

"Not even a postcard," said Ida.

Leon tried again. *"Dear Mom and Dad—"*

"Has he written to *you*, Laurie?" said Ida.

"Uh-uh," Laurie said comfortably.

"May I *ple-e-ease* have your attention?" said Leon, in a comic-stern tone. "Now, then, *if* I may proceed. *Dear Mom and Dad. I am writing this in the courtyard of the youth hostel, where I have been staying for the past few days—"*

"Is that in Jerusalem?" Sophie asked.

"The lodging here is pleasant enough, though not precisely luxurious; and the privacy leaves something to be desired. Still, the people here are a jolly bunch; the cot has not yet given me a backache; and, best of all, it only costs the equivalent of fifty cents for a night's stay here, once you've taken out a year's membership in the Israel Youth Hostels Association (\$6.00), which I did right after I got into Jerusalem last Monday. So I do not think my stay here is going to send me wildly over budget."

Leon stopped reading for a moment. "Fifty cents," he said. "He doesn't say if that's *with* or *without* the bedbugs."

They all laughed.

"A whole year's membership?" said Sophie. "Oh. I guess they don't let you be a member for a shorter time."

"I was going to say," said Ida. "He only needs it for another month, really."

"That's *if* he comes back next month," said Leon. "But just between you and me, I'm not so sure he's going to come back."

No one responded to this. It wasn't clear from Leon's expression if he was joking or if he knew something the rest of them didn't.

"I mean," he explained, "who *knows* what's going on between him and that little Shoshana Vered?"

It was a joke, then. All of them laughed except Anna. They laughed out of relief, not because there was anything particularly funny about the joke.

"Keep on reading, Leon," said Anna.

"Jerusalem is the most beautiful place I've seen in Israel so far. It's in the mountains, so it's dry and the temperature is very comfortable whenever you get into the shade; though the sun can be murderous when you're out in it—"

"He needs to wear a *hat!*" Ida proclaimed. "Do you think he remembers to wear a hat, Anna?"

"—and it's all built of stone, quiet and austere, which reflects the light beautifully in the early evening. It's also the most religious place in Israel. Today is the Sabbath, and everything, I mean everything, is shut down. At sundown on Friday, the buses stop running, the restaurants all close, the museums and the archaeological sites are all closed—"

“So that’s why he’s writing!” Ida cried triumphantly. “There isn’t anything *else* for him to do!”

“ – and if it weren’t for the kindness of a Swiss boy whom I’ve met at the hostel, and who was kind enough to share his box of crackers with me, I wouldn’t have had anything to eat all day.”

Ida burst into a loud, harsh laugh. “That’s Danny for you!”

Anna smiled and nodded, from her bed.

“The bus system here is excellent. The buses run at all hours, and anything I can’t get to by walking from the youth hostel is within easy walk of a bus stop. People do take official-type tours of Jerusalem, but you don’t have to. All you need to see the city is a good guide book and a pair of legs. I’ve been to the Knesset. I’ve been to the Hebrew University. (I looked through the card catalog in the university library; hardly anything on UFOs, I’m sorry to say.) I’ve been to the Hadassah hospital to see the Chagall windows, which I found very dramatic.

“The most interesting parts of Jerusalem, archaeologically speaking, are in the part of the city that’s in Jordan, which of course I have no way to get to (unless, of course, I can get somebody to forge a baptismal certificate for me, so the Jordanians will let me through the Mandelbaum Gate) –”

Leon looked up from reading the letter. “He’s working on that, you understand,” he said.

“ – But there are parts of Jerusalem where you can get pretty good views of the Old City; like Mount Zion, for example, which is part in Israel and part in Jordan. (Mount Zion is the most disgustingly commercialized place in Israel, incidentally, even though it’s supposed to be so “holy” they won’t let you onto it unless you’ve got your head covered.) And there’s a place called Abu Tor –”

“I hope they’ve got the border clearly marked,” said Anna.

“Clearly marked?” said Leon. “Why? So Danny won’t go chasing a butterfly or something, and look around and all of a sudden he’s in Jordan?”

“That’s Danny!” said Ida, laughing.

“ – a place called Abu Tor, where there’s lots of old stone houses, where people are still living; and the border goes right between the houses.

“It’s kind of a weird place. You walk down the street; and then all of a sudden you have to stop. Things don’t look any different, where you have to stop. But it’s like you’ve reached the end of the world, because there’s the border in front of you. You stand there, and you look at the Jordanian houses, and you know that as far as you’re concerned they’re on another planet. And yet you look and look and look, and the more you look the more they look to you just like our houses. (Israeli houses, I mean.)

*“I don’t know what Jordan is like, but at least in Jerusalem it sure looks a lot like Israel ...
.”*

There wasn’t much more to the letter. Danny had apparently reached the bottom of the aerogram faster than he’d expected, and had to end abruptly with a cramped *Love, Danny*.

“Well, that’s our correspondent’s report,” said Leon. “What’s the situation over there sound like, you think?”

Laurie was the first to speak. “Danny always did write *real* good,” she said. “Didn’t he?”

She looked around for approval of this remark. She got none.

Ida said: “He doesn’t say what the border *is*. Do you think they have a fence there, or something?”

“You still worried about him going after that butterfly, huh?” said Leon.

“Well, that’s *just* what Danny would do,” said Ida. She seemed delighted at the whole notion of Danny wandering absently across the border. Her obvious

pleasure disgusted Leon, who'd forgotten he was the one who introduced the idea in the first place.

"Danny's *just* like his mother when she was a girl," Ida went on, laughing. The very *spittin' image* of her. Remember, Anna, how you used to—?"

"Well, you can just quit your worrying," Leon announced grandly. "Because—"

Ida would not be stopped. She practically whooped with laughter. "Remember, Anna?" she cried. "You'd be thinking about some—*poem* or other, and you'd be walking along Abingdon Avenue, and—oh, your *feet* would be on the sidewalk, all right, but your head would be somewhere up there in the clouds, wasn't it, and Mom was always worrying about whether you were going to step off the curb in front of some truck or something. Weren't you, Mom? And Danny—oh, I've always said: he's the *spittin' image*, the very *spittin' image* of his mother—"

Here we go, Leon thought. She's found her phrase of the day. With any luck we'll only have to hear it another twenty times before this freak show is over with. He could feel his headache starting up. He sneaked a look at his watch.

"I don't think so," Anna said gravely.

Leon had been about to give his explanation of why they didn't really have to worry that Danny was going to walk across the border in a dreamy daze, his mouth hanging open. He decided to let it wait. Let her talk, he thought. She hasn't had that much to say.

"I don't think my head was ever *that* much in the clouds," Anna said. "The way Danny's is sometimes. I might get dreamy, sure. But I never got *lost* in my dreams. I always saw what was going on around me. That's the difference."

She rested for a moment, then went on.

"It was a different time," she said. "During the Depression, we all had to face reality, didn't we? You, and me, and—and Pop, and—I mean, we all had to be realists. Didn't we?"

Ida and Sophie murmured their agreement. They had all been realists back then. *Everybody* had been realists. Not like now.

“I don’t think I ever *heard* of flying saucers in those days,” Sophie said proudly. “They didn’t *have* such things. We didn’t have any time for it, did we?”

“That’s right!” said Ida. She added, with a little snicker: “What in the world would Danny have done back then, huh?”

Leon held up his hand, as if to call for silence. It was time he put an end to this discussion. “You know why we don’t have to worry?” he said. “That Danny’s going to go into some dream, and wake up and find himself in Jordan? You know why that’s not going to happen?”

They were silent, waiting upon his answer.

“Because as soon as he steps across that border,” said Leon, “the guns are going to start going off. And then Danny’s going to wake right up. He’ll hear the noise, and he’ll say, *What’s that?* Then he’ll know it’s guns, and he’ll say, *Where? Where? Where?* He’ll start looking all around him, and at first he won’t see a thing—”

Leon mimicked Danny’s stunned, baffled, myopic expression – always looking around him for something he didn’t know where it was and half the time he didn’t know *what* it was. Looking everywhere, except of course where it really was He had them in stitches, with his Danny imitation.

It was so funny, you sort of forgot why they were together in that hospital room.

They all laughed as, improvising from moment to moment, Leon developed a comic scenario of the fate of the hapless Danny. First he would be captured by the Jordanian Army. Then he would be inducted – partly against his will, wholly without his understanding – as the only Jewish boy in King Hussein’s Arab Legion.

Ida gasped out, between bursts of laughter: "Then maybe he *won't* be back here next month, after all!"

They were all in hysterics except Laurie, who, Leon saw to his dismay and faint shame, wasn't laughing at all. Smiling faintly, yes. She had to, to please the white folks. But no laughter. She looked pained. Embarrassed, too; maybe for them, maybe for herself, that she had to be there at that awful moment.

What was she thinking?

– this grotesque circus, this squalid farce. Look at them: all the fine white people! clowning and cavorting around her deathbed, distracting themselves from her dying and from their hating each other, by ganging up on a boy who isn't even here to defend himself; beating up on him, making fun of everything he believes in, everything he cares about –

Was *that* what she was thinking?

Naah.

She probably just didn't understand. Probably just confused, as if she didn't know *what* the heck was going on here.

It was hard sometimes, telling a joke to the *shvartzes*. The joke flew right over their heads. And then you couldn't figure out, when it was all over, how or where you'd missed contact.

12.

Anna's four visitors said goodbye to her and walked down the corridor together.

"I clean forgot to ask!" Leon exclaimed, once he was sure they were out of earshot. "How's the food in this joint agreeing with her?"

It was a joke, sort of, like many of Leon's exclamatory remarks. But this time no one laughed. Ida and Sophie looked at each other.

"She's not eating any more," Sophie said venomously. "Not since yesterday morning. They've been feeding her through tubes."

She added: "But of course *you* wouldn't have known that."

She wouldn't speak to him or look at him again, even when they were outside the hospital and walking to their cars.

13.

"Have you written to Danny?" asked Meg Colton. "To let him know what's happening with his mother?"

Leon's first impulse was to say, *Yeah, sure I've written to the kid*, which was a truthful answer, provided you took only the first part of the question into consideration. If only he'd said it loud enough and promptly enough, it might have had the advantage of drowning out the second part, so maybe she might forget she'd asked it and let the subject drop.

The weather had been dry and cool all this past week, ever since August had begun. There was a nice breeze blowing right now through the window screens. Yet he sweated. His left ear, in particular, was all damp and itchy from his pressing the receiver so hard against it. He had to strain to hear what she was saying. She spoke softly, for fear of waking a sleeping husband. It was half past midnight. They'd been on the phone almost forty-five minutes.

She was Meg Colton now. She'd been Meg Kupferstein when they were students at Carthage University but became Meg Colton when she married Michael Colton, whose family had once upon a time been the Cohens of Brooklyn but

that had changed way back, years before Michael finished his training and moved out to Long Island to become dermatologist for the local hotsy-totsies. Meg had gone with him. That had all happened long ago, before the war.

He and Meg needed badly to talk on the telephone but it had always been like pulling teeth to arrange it. How was she supposed to call him, without old Michael demanding to know when the phone bill came in what the hell were all these calls to Kellerfield, Pennsylvania? Ditto from his end. Not to mention that Anna was never, day or night, more than ten feet distant from one or the other of the telephones in their house.

But now Meg waited by the phone every night. As soon as it was late enough for Michael to have gone to bed, he'd give her a call. There was no one here to listen. And unless he was very much mistaken, Anna would never be back to look at another telephone bill.

"Yeah, sure I've written to him," Leon said. "But I haven't told him anything yet about her."

Silence at the other end; Leon read it as an accusation.

He said: "I figure, he and his mama are so damn tight, if I tell him anything's going on with her, he's not going to sleep nights worrying about is she going to die. And there goes his whole trip, his whole summer."

Silence.

"I mean," he said, "you haven't seen the way that poor kid sweated over that stupid contest of his. It was like he'd bet his whole life on winning it, so he'd have a chance to get away from here this summer, finally live a little bit."

Silence.

"You don't know what it's like," he said, "seeing him here night after night, with his typewriter, always the typewriter. He doesn't have friends. He used to, but not anymore. And *never* any girls. I used to think it was because he was so

weird, but now I think, hell, it's because Anna's brainwashed him he mustn't go out with shiksese, and that's practically all there are here, shiksese —"

"In Philadelphia?" she said. "There aren't any Jewish girls in the Philadelphia area? Are you serious?"

"In *Kellerfield!*" he roared. It was she who needed to speak quietly; he didn't. "In his stupid high school, which I wanted to take him out of years ago and move him and Anna back to New Jersey, so maybe he could try to have a social life! But of course he didn't want to, because all his *friends* were here, he said. Though if he's got any friends I don't know who they are."

He took a deep breath.

"So anyway, I figure let him stay in Israel and have a good time as long as he can. Maybe he'll meet a girl over there, have some fun with her. I mean, over there they don't have anybody *except* Jewish girls."

"And don't you think he's likely to have one hell of a homecoming?" Meg said.

"Look," said Leon. "They've still got a few tricks up their sleeve. When I was there yesterday I got a chance to talk to that snot-nose — what's his name? — Rycard. He said there's another drug they're going to try. He told me the name; I don't remember it. I think that must be why they keep them so long in medical school, so they can learn to pronounce all those stupid names."

"So you think she's got a chance, then?"

"I don't know, Meg. Don't ask me questions like that, will you? All I know is, when something happens, then it'll be time enough to bring the kid back from Israel. In the meantime, what I say is: let him be! Let him have some fun for a change."

Was she going to say, *But hasn't something happened already?*

If she did, what would he answer her?

But she didn't, and he was able to change the conversation to more consoling subjects and they ended murmuring to each other comfortingly, as if through their voices they were already in each other's arms.

14.

Yet he was jolted awake sometime before dawn by a vision of his son. The boy had swollen in size, and now towered over him. His face was strange and terrifying, with an unfamiliar rage. *You didn't tell me?* he howled at Leon. *You didn't tell me?*

Leon shivered in his bed, and tried to think of some way to explain himself. The pressures he had been under.

Danny's mother had died, and now Leon was phoning him in Israel to tell him to come home for the funeral. The boy was physically present, even though he was also on the other end of the line, for in a dream all things are possible. He was enraged, and demanded to know why he hadn't been told to come home while there was still time.

You mean she was sick in the hospital two weeks before she died, and you didn't tell me?

It was a dream, Leon told himself afterward. Only a dream and nothing more. Still, he couldn't get back to sleep. He made himself some instant coffee and sat at the kitchen table looking wearily out the window.

The dawn light was "pearly." The word, he knew, had popped into his mind from that old song about how nothing could be finer than to be in Carolina in the morning. He couldn't remember where in the song it was from.

It was going to be another beautiful day.

He wrote at the kitchen table, between sips of coffee. *Sunday, August 7.* After a couple of paragraphs about the weather, and about how there wasn't much grass to be cut this month, he continued:

I've been writing the past couple of letters, on account of Mom hasn't been feeling too well lately. We are having trouble with the fluid retention and her ankles and legs are all swollen again. The doctors have suggested a new drug which they say may help so we'll be starting to use it.

15.

The drug worked for a few days. Anna didn't die. But she wasn't able to begin eating again, and for long periods of time she wasn't very certain where she was or when it was that all this was happening.

She didn't like the nurses.

At the beginning, when she was new in the hospital, they'd been kind and solicitous. They came promptly when she rang the bell, even if it was for something silly or that was her own fault, like when she dropped the fork in the middle of lunch and didn't think she could retrieve it herself because she couldn't climb out from beneath the heavy tray. But then they changed.

The change was heralded by the appearance of Gwendolyn, on Anna's fourth day in the hospital.

Gwendolyn was a heavy-set woman in her fifties, her shortish blond hair streaked with gray. She moved slowly but with great determination, as if the gravity of this planet was a perpetual challenge which she'd dedicated her life to triumphing over. Her face was set in an almost immovable scowl. This unnerved Anna, who always assumed that if the people around her were scowling it was because she hadn't done as much as she ought to make them smile.

It was also unnerving that Gwendolyn showed such a keen interest in Anna's diamond engagement ring.

Leon had bought that ring for her the morning of their wedding. For the past twenty-two years it hadn't been off her finger. Danny, when he was little, had been fascinated by the diamond. He loved to hold her hand in the sunlight and turn her finger this way and that with his small fingers, and watch the jewel flash its rainbow of colors.

There wasn't much sunlight in this hospital room. But even under the fluorescent lights the diamond sparkled beautifully. It came to hypnotize her, as it once had Danny. She lay for hours and turned the ring back and forth on her finger, and let its sparkle remind her that she'd once been loved.

Her fingers were skin and bone. The ring hung loose. If she were to let her hand droop over the side of the bed, it'd slip away and go clattering onto the floor. All this Gwendolyn saw.

Anna saw her see it, and turned cold and angry as she watched the predatory hunger with which Gwendolyn eyed her skeletal left hand.

You'd think, if the nurses were bad the doctors would bring them into line. Yet these doctors, especially the young one who seemed to be mainly in charge of her, were as bad as the nurses. Worse, if anything.

The nurses, even if they spoke gruffly, at least spoke *to* her. But the doctors spoke only *about* her – to each other, to the nurses, to the troops of students whom they brought into the room to see this medical exhibit lying sick and emaciated on her bed. They discussed her in a rapid mutter, using long and ominous words she didn't understand.

"*What? What?*" she cried out feebly. "What did you just say?"

They gave her angry looks, as if she ought to have known they weren't talking to her. Grudgingly they repeated what they'd said, in language only slightly more intelligible. It didn't sound good.

She wished Dr. Lambdon could come and look in on her, even just once.

Dr. Lambdon had spoken *to* her. He hadn't been frightening. He'd been comforting. He'd told her after her heart attack that she was going to be all right, and sure enough she *had* been all right.

She awoke one evening, her mind lucid and determined. She knew clearly what she should have known all along: *this* was why it had gone wrong. Dr. Lambdon wasn't there.

She rang for the nurse. "Could you please send in Dr. Lambdon?" she said crisply.

"There's no Dr. Lambdon here."

"Where is he, then?"

The nurse shrugged and walked away.

Anna remembered afterward that Dr. Lambdon was dead and, remembering, she sobbed into her pillow. There was no one in the darkness who might have heard.

16.

July had become August more than a week ago. Anna knew at the beginning that it was August and not July, but afterwards she forgot that and, when she thought about it at all, supposed it still to be July.

She thought of her mother and sister, but as they were when she was young, when they were young – not as they were now, when they came every few days

to stand by her bedside and ask how she was feeling and then go away again because Sophie said they were getting her too tired. The way they were now seemed unreal, irrelevant.

She thought most often of her father. Sometimes she remembered he was dead. Sometimes she forgot this, and ached for him to come visit her in her pain and weakness. At times she imagined he was actually there, standing silently by her bed for what seemed like minutes at a time. She yearned for him to stretch out his hand and stroke her hair, and speak to her.

But it was only Gwendolyn, staring at her diamond ring.

17.

Three nights before the end, she awoke to find herself in deep darkness in the middle of the night. She heard her own voice singing in the darkness, clear and sweet and pure. But whether it was in her throat or only in her mind, she didn't know.

*We were sailing along on Moonlight Bay,
We could hear the voices singing, they seemed to say:
"You have stolen my heart, now don't go 'way."
As we sang love's old sweet song on Moonlight Bay.*

She sobbed and cried until the pillow was soaked with her tears.

18.

You wouldn't have thought it was August. Every day the skies were cool and blue. No rain fell. The grass didn't grow.

Danny would love it, Leon thought. There's hardly any lawn at all for him to cut.

He didn't write this in his next letter to Danny. Nor did he describe how, one afternoon earlier in the week, he'd driven into Philadelphia after work to visit his wife. He was alone this time, and the compartment of the hospital room where Anna lay was empty of visitors. She was asleep on her back, snoring heavily.

He didn't awaken her. Poor old lady, he thought, let her sleep. She must be tired unto death, with all she's had to go through.

He sat down in one of the empty chairs beside her bed. He couldn't stand. His pity – the same pity that was on the verge of choking his throat with tears – had taken all the strength out of his legs. It might have seemed to him in that moment that he still loved her.

But then he noticed the tightness of her left hand, clenched even in her sleep as though around something. As if there was something she was afraid, even in her sleep, might slip away from her. His pity turned to a nostalgic regret, which hovered at the border of disgust. She used to be a sweet girl, he thought. Once. Now she's become so grudging. So untrusting. So – so *clutching*. She gets those fingers clutched around you, you aren't ever going to get loose.

He didn't write any of this to his son. He didn't write that Anna was in the hospital, that she'd been there for over three weeks. To give the boy that kind of news, you needed to have just the right words to say it in. Leon was doing his best now, searching for those words.

As yet, he hadn't quite found them.

19.

The second Sunday evening in August, Sophie and Ida went to the hospital to visit Anna. They arrived after suppertime and sat with her until eight-thirty, when visiting hours were over.

They didn't talk much. She was too weak. They sat with her, mostly in silence; Ida looked frequently at her watch. She was careful not to be too obvious about it. Not because she was afraid Anna might notice – Anna was plainly too out of it to notice anything – but because she was ashamed in front of Sophie.

Anna's first week in the hospital, they'd expected she might say during one of their visits: *You know, it's time to write to Danny. It's time to tell him I'm sick, that he needs to come home.*

They'd prepared arguments to dissuade her. They would tell her she'd surely be back home in a week or two, well before Danny was scheduled to return from Israel. There'd be plenty of time to tell him, once he got back, about her hospital stay. In the meantime, why ruin his trip of a lifetime?

But she said nothing about this. They began to think, uneasily, *Maybe she just assumes we've already told him.*

So the second week she was in the hospital, they were on edge pretty much all the time they were visiting, although of course they were bright and cheerful and took care to hide their nervousness. What if she were suddenly to burst out with: *Well? Have you phoned Danny? Have you told him I'm sick? Have you told him he needs to come back home right now, so that he can say good-bye to me before I die?* They'd have had to admit that Ida, on Sophie's instructions, had written Danny two letters filled with cheery inconsequentialities, not even hinting at a problem with Anna's health.

About Danny, they didn't worry. They were trying to spare him concern; whatever happened with his mother, they could deal with it when he got back.

Besides, hadn't he known she was sick when he left for Israel? And hadn't he just up and went anyway?

She asked nothing about Danny. She didn't even ask whether Leon had received any more aerograms. She certainly couldn't have been getting this information from Leon himself. For it was evident that – as anyone who knew Leon might have anticipated – he came seldom if ever to the hospital. Too busy with more important things, it seemed.

To hear Anna talk, you'd hardly have imagined she had a son at all.

By the third week they no longer worried. They knew Anna had already said goodbye to Danny in her heart. She'd made her peace with not seeing him again. She would raise no questions about what they'd told him or not told him, and so they themselves raised none.

It would only have upset her.

The sun set. The sky began to darken outside. Ida fought back the temptation to sneak more than occasional glances at her watch, while they listened to her sister struggle for breath. The fat, ugly nurse, whose blond hair was turning gray and who seemed always to be in a bad mood, stuck her head through the curtain that partitioned the room.

"Visiting hours are over."

They stood up to go, and drew near the bed to hug Anna goodnight. First Sophie, then Ida. But Anna clutched Sophie's arm as hard as she could, and said, "Mom, don't go."

"We have to," Sophie said mildly. "Our time's up."

"We'll see you tomorrow," Ida said.

Anna paid no attention to Ida. Her pleading eyes were fixed upon her mother's face.

"I'm not going to make it, Mom," she wailed softly. "Please don't go."

Ida looked closely at Anna's face, irritated that her sister wouldn't even look at her. "We have to go now," she said firmly, in the harsh, ill-tempered tone that had become more and more her voice as she aged. "We'll be back tomorrow."

She said "*Tomorrow!*" again, more loudly this time, as if Anna was losing her hearing along with everything else that had once been herself. Anna didn't take her hand from Sophie's arm.

"*Please stay,*" she said to her mother.

Sophie smiled, comfortingly.

"You sleep good tonight," she said soothingly. "We'll see you tomorrow."

The tears that spilled from Anna's cheeks to the pillow, as she turned her head to the side, were her last. Perhaps the disease had stolen all the moisture from her tear-ducts, and there were no tears left for her to cry.

She didn't cry even as she pulled the sheet over her head, enshrouding herself infant-like in her blankets, and listened to their footsteps vanish down the hallway and murmured *Please stay, please stay, please stay* into the silent pillow.

Chapter 7: Israel August

AUGUST 1966

1.

She hasn't been feeling too well lately.

It was the twentieth or perhaps the thirtieth time the thought had pushed its way into Danny's mind since the air-conditioned tour bus had pulled onto the highway from Eilat, and he had leisure to think. For the twentieth time, or perhaps the thirtieth, he tried to push it away. He tried instead to concentrate his eyes and his mind on the Pillars of Solomon, which were at that moment whizzing by the bus.

Of course they weren't really Solomon's pillars. They were natural formations, fantastic red cliffs which did look sort of like pillars carved out of the rock. Maybe Solomon had seen them at one time or another. Maybe, like the tourists on this bus, he'd gazed at them admiringly. But they weren't his in the sense that he'd built them, so that by looking at them you could know there'd once been a Jewish king in this country named Solomon, like the Bible said there was. There was nothing you could see in Israel anymore, by which you might know that things had been the way the Bible said they were.

The pillars sped by, outside the bus window. Danny, who knew he'd never see them or anything like them again, stared at them until they vanished in the distance, trying by some photography of his own to imprint them upon his brain.

Just how unwell do you have to be, for someone to write that you haven't been feeling well lately?

2.

He had found Leon's letter waiting for him earlier that week, two days before leaving for Eilat. He'd just come back, exhausted and sweaty and sunburned, from a week of hiking by the Dead Sea, still with a trace of the diarrhea that plagued him all the time he was there. He stopped by the Vereds' to see if any of his UFO friends had written from the U.S. But there was only a blue aerogram from Sandy Creek Drive, in his father's handwriting.

I've been writing the past couple of letters, on account of Mom hasn't been feeling too well lately. We are having trouble with the fluid retention and her ankles and legs are all swollen again. The doctors have suggested a new drug which they say may help so we'll be starting to use it.

Yitzhak and Dalia watched, beaming, as Danny read the letter. The three of them sat in the living room. Shoshana was in the bedroom she shared with her little brother, entertaining a bunch of her school friends, or maybe they were her cousins. They were all laughing and jabbering in Hebrew while they listened to American rock music on the radio. She hadn't bothered to come to the door to welcome Danny back from the Dead Sea, which hurt him a little.

"Well," said Yitzhak. "What do they have to say?"

"Are they all right?" Dalia asked in English.

"Yes," said Danny, frowning. "I think so."

"You think so?" said Yitzhak.

"Dad writes," said Danny, " – he writes that Mom isn't feeling too well."

He expected both the Vereds to erupt with questions and expressions of concern. But Yitzhak sat calmly, smiling in his usual bemused way. This comforted Danny, who'd felt his stomach fall away when he first saw the words *on account of Mom hasn't been feeling too well lately*. Maybe it didn't have to be so bad.

"Her ankles are swollen," he explained.

Yitzhak Vered translated this for his wife. "Well," he said to Danny, "you'll see them again soon."

This was true. July was gone; August was half over. Three-quarters of Danny's Israel trip was past, finished, done. The Vereds would take him to the airport two weeks from tomorrow.

"I'll be back in fifteen days," Danny said. "I'll be there with them." *I'll see how things are with my own eyes*; and the thought made him feel in charge of things and much more confident.

"*Betach*," Yitzhak Vered said soothingly. *Betach* was the Hebrew word for *sure*. "Danny will be back with his mother soon, and *everything* will be all right."

From the bedroom came a sudden chorus of teen-age voices, boys' and girls', singing along with the radio in heavily accented English:

*"Return to sender,
Address unknown,
No such number,
No such zone."*

Elvis. They loved Elvis here in this country. They loved all the American rock-'n-roll garbage, which Danny had come to Israel to get away from.

Dalia Vered said something to her husband, and they both laughed. Yitzhak said to Danny: "Dalia says that you come back from the Dead Sea so *tan*, Danny."

"Thank you," Danny said to Dalia, in Hebrew. She'd surely intended a compliment, hadn't she?

"You'll go back to America so tan," Yitzhak said, "they won't recognize you any more."

"Maybe not," said Danny, laughing.

"You'll get on a bus," Yitzhak said, "and they'll say: *You can't sit in the front. Go sit in the back, you – black man!*"

He's joking, Danny thought. He knows they won't do that to me when I get home. He knows they don't even do that to the Negroes anymore.

3.

Danny woke up again and again that night, in the room he rented from Mrs. Rozenshtayn. The words kept playing themselves in his mind. *Mom hasn't been feeling too well lately. Mom hasn't been feeling too well lately ...*

He sat down at the small desk by his bed and pulled one of his aerograms out from the drawer. *Dear Mom and Dad*, he wrote.

He described the week he'd spent at the Dead Sea with a group of Israelis from the Society for the Protection of Nature. He told how you floated in the Dead Sea without even trying. How the water was oily, sinister, poisonous; how any scratches or cuts in your skin stung and burned as soon as it touched you.

They'd all hiked together to the rock pools of Ein Gedi, where David once fled to escape the fury of the mad Saul. He had bathed in the waterfall in one of those pools. He and the Israelis, he wrote his parents, had stopped again and again during those hikes to drink water and eat snacks of bread and tomatoes and cucumbers, which he sliced for himself with his newly acquired pocket knife. He didn't tell them how he had diarrhea, and spent much of his time by the Dead Sea squatting over the hole in the foul-smelling outhouse that served the Youth Hostel as a toilet, discharging watery stool into the unspeakable pit below.

I was very grieved, he wrote near the bottom of the aerogram, to hear that Mom is not feeling well, and hope she will be feeling better when I return.

4.

It was humid in Tel Aviv the next night, and unusually hot. But in Israel only the most expensive tourist hotels had air conditioning. Danny and Mrs. Ruth Friedlander and her son-in-law sat outside to talk on the balcony, which was the coolest place in her apartment.

“B’vakashah,” Mrs. Friedlander said politely, as she offered Danny a tray on which were a plate of cookies and three glasses of orange soda. She was a small, thin elderly lady with black hair tied up in a bun, and delicate, almost papery skin. She was also the guiding spirit of the UFO Friendship Circle, which was the closest thing to a UFO investigative group that existed in Israel. It had taken Danny the past six weeks to locate them.

From balconies above and below, to their right and their left, came the sounds of conversation and laughter. Directly beneath them, some fellow with a great bull-like voice held forth upon some subject or other. Every now and then one of his friends tried to interrupt, or respond, or object to something he’d said. He just went on talking.

“Todah rabah,” Danny said to Mrs. Friedlander as he took his drink and a cookie.

“B’vakashah,” she said again.

That was about the extent of their Hebrew conversation. Mrs. Friedlander had lived in Tel Aviv since the 1930s, yet she knew very little Hebrew beyond those small courtesy-words. She knew no English whatever. She spoke to Danny in German and her son-in-law Zvi Marcus, who was an English teacher in a Tel Aviv high school, translated for him. There were others in the UFO Friendship Circle, it seemed, but they weren’t there tonight. Danny gathered they were all friends of Mrs. Friedlander, immigrants from Germany like herself.

Mr. Zvi Marcus, a slender man in his forties, spoke very fluent English. His accent sounded partly British, but also something else which Danny couldn't identify. Danny had told them almost as soon as he arrived that he'd need to leave early. He had scheduled a two-day tour to Eilat, and would need to get up early the next morning to meet the tour bus.

"You've not yet seen Eilat?" said Zvi Marcus.

"No," said Danny. He laughed, and added: "I think it's about the only corner of this country I haven't yet managed to see."

"A long trip, to Eilat," said Zvi Marcus, nodding. "But very much worth the seeing."

"We are not interested in UFOs as a *technological* issue," Zvi Marcus told Danny. He spoke slowly and emphatically, as though addressing a classful of teenagers for whom English was an imperfect second language. "Nor even as a *scientific* issue in the broader sense of the word, although of course they *are* a scientific issue. We see them primarily as a *spiritual* issue."

Danny nodded and sipped his orange soda, his heart sinking. Zvi Marcus paused for emphasis. The orator on the balcony below had also paused, perhaps to refresh his weary lungs. Danny could hear the brakes of a bus squealing a few blocks distant. One of those buses had brought him here. Before long another would carry him away.

"I'm not sure I entirely understand," he said, "what you mean by a *spiritual* issue."

Zvi Marcus translated Danny's response into German. He and his mother-in-law conferred. Then he said to Danny: "You must think of it this way. The presence of the UFOs betokens transformations in the human consciousness. Precisely what these will be, we do not yet know. That is the nature of any great transition, any great" — he paused for a second — "any great *passage*, from one

spiritual state to another. Before the passage is undertaken, what lies on the far side of it is literally unthinkable. Unimaginable. Once the passage is completed, we remember only with difficulty the condition from which we emerged. Does the butterfly remember what it was to be a caterpillar, do you think? Can the caterpillar even conceive what it would be like to be a butterfly?"

This was madness. What did caterpillars and butterflies have to do with UFOs? Danny listened impatiently to Zvi Marcus's lecture, while he caressed with his thumb the thick manila envelope that lay on his lap, containing the real UFO stuff. He had brought with him, as proof of his UFOlogical qualifications, the press reports of sightings he'd received – so long ago, it seemed – from Basil's friend Murray Whitaker. Zvi Marcus had glanced at his material, said "Very interesting, very interesting," and handed it back. Then he'd begun to talk about spiritual UFOs.

"What exactly is that *passage* you keep talking about?" Danny said.

"The *chrysalis* state," said Zvi Marcus.

Was this supposed to answer his question? Or restate it? "Yes," Danny said.

"The chrysalis state."

"*That*," said Zvi Marcus, "is the great unknown." He added: "That is why the flying objects remain *unidentified*, you see." He added further: "*That* is what we seek to discover."

How, precisely, did the UFO Friendship Circle intend to go about discovering this great unknown? By reading a lot of Jung, apparently; plus whatever of the American contactee literature they could get their hands on. George Adamski was their particular hero. They believed he had met and communicated telepathically with human-like people from outer space: Orthon of Venus, Firkon of Mars, Ramu of Saturn. They believed he had traveled into space with his extraterrestrial friends. They believed there were twelve planets, not just nine, in the solar system.

Or maybe none of this was literally true. But it didn't matter.

Danny tried to argue with them about whether Adamski's close-up photographs of flying saucers were genuine or, as Danny thought, obvious fakes. They weren't interested.

"You must remember," Zvi Marcus said, "that everything that Professor Adamski experiences and describes is *symbolic*. That toward which it points is beyond our understanding, and probably Adamski's as well.

"What Adamski encountered is not a phenomenon of the nineteen-fifties or the nineteen-sixties. It is ageless. It has been part of us, and our environment, since before we were human. When we first crossed the threshold into humanity, many thousands of years ago, the UFO was waiting for us."

Danny tried to tell them about his own book on UFOs, soon to be published by Cloverleaf Press. He found himself stammering, fumbling for words, unable to express himself with any clarity. Maybe it was because he couldn't think of the book without feeling guilt, that he'd done no work on it since arriving in Israel. He hadn't even gotten around to answering Basil's letter.

By this time Zvi Marcus had grown tired of translating. So he and Danny sat in the humid, noisy darkness of the balcony, talking in English. Mrs. Friedlander smiled upon them with weary benevolence.

At last she cleared her throat. She reminded "Herr Shapiro" that it was getting late, the buses beginning to run less frequently. If he needed to be in bed in Herzliya this evening, it might be time for them all, regretfully, to say good night.

The three of them went inside. They positioned themselves beside the opened door to the apartment. "So you're going to Eilat tomorrow?" said Zvi Marcus. "Yes?"

"Yes," said Danny. He'd told them this at the start of the evening, and it irritated him that Zvi Marcus seemed hardly to remember it.

“Well, goodbye, good trip.” Zvi Marcus shook Danny’s hand vigorously. “It was wonderful meeting you. Very good to hear what the younger generation is doing with UFOs. In the States, that is.”

“I’ll send you – I’ll make a note to myself – when I get home I’ll send you a copy of the latest *PURA Bulletin*. And my book, as soon as it comes out –”

“Yes, yes. Very interesting.”

Mrs. Friedlander shook Danny’s hand. She was smiling again. “Good-bye,” she said in Hebrew. “Good-bye, and all the best.”

“A long journey to Eilat,” said Zvi Marcus. “But very much worth the doing.”

5.

A long journey indeed. Eilat was at Israel’s southern tip; to get there, you crossed a string of Biblical deserts. Danny tried to concentrate on the deserts, and how each desert was different from the others, in order to keep his mind off his father’s aerogram.

When at last they reached Eilat and settled into their hotel, Danny had dinner with a group of French tourists from the bus. Afterward he tagged along with them to a nightclub, the first he’d ever seen. It was called The End of the World, presumably because Eilat was itself at the edge of the world, as seen from Israel. You could write on your post cards, *I’ve been to The End of the World!* The nightclub was in a basement, and very smoky; and you went down a flight of steps to get to it.

Danny didn’t like the French. They weren’t much for conversation, at least not with him; they didn’t speak Hebrew and wouldn’t speak English. He probably wouldn’t have come here at all except that he’d felt so restless and wide-awake after dinner, not at all ready for bed. Now that he was here, he didn’t relish the prospect of sitting by himself with all these people and not being able to say a

word. So it was a great relief as well as a marvelous surprise when, as soon as he'd gotten to the bottom of the steps and was starting to follow the others to a table, he heard a voice cry out: "*Danny! Danny! Over here, lad!*"

Douglas. The bearded Roman Catholic from Scotland, in his mid-twenties, whom Danny had met a few weeks earlier at the Youth Hostel in Jerusalem.

He was with two German girls, whom he introduced as Lisbet and Kristin – though Danny wasn't sure he'd gotten the names right, it was so noisy in here. He was delighted to see Douglas but just a little bit jealous of him, with his girls. Danny had found it as hard to make time with girls in Israel as it was back in America, if not even harder, and the prestige of having won the Bible contest hadn't helped a bit. And here Douglas had *two* of them.

So what was Douglas doing in Eilat?

Pretty much what Danny was doing, actually; except Douglas hadn't come with an organized tour. He and the girls had pooled their money and rented a car. They were staying in a hotel, though not the same as Danny's.

In the same room? Danny wondered. How do you work that out when you travel with two girls?

The nightclub had an excellent Israeli singer. Douglas and the girls drank beer while they listened, sometimes chatting softly among themselves. Danny had coffee. He didn't like the taste of beer, and besides had come to believe it was wrong for people to blur their rational faculties with alcohol. Douglas and the girls smoked, and offered a cigarette to Danny each time they lit up. He always said, No thanks. But that didn't stop them from offering.

Lila, lila, ha-ruach goveret
Lila, lila, homah ha-tzameret ...

Night, night, the wind blows strong;
Night, night, the leaves rustle

It was a lullaby, sung for a baby girl. Danny knew the song; he recognized it the moment the singer began. He imagined the infant snugly blanketed against the wind, her little head on the pillow, mommy and daddy right beside her singing her lovingly to sleep. The tiny girl might be sick, dying. This might be the lullaby that would soothe her into her last sleep, and the thought of this gave the song a sinister and heartbreaking sweetness that was almost beyond his power to endure.

He longed to be home, more than he could remember having longed for anything in his life. Another moment and he'd be in tears. He stood up to leave.

"Danny!" said Kristin. She was the chunky, bosomy one, with the curly blonde hair and the not-so-great complexion. "Where are you going?"

"I think I'll walk back to the hotel," he said, "and turn in."

"Turn *in*?" said Kristin. "You mean, go to *bed*? Danny, it isn't even ten o'clock!"

"I've got a big day tomorrow," he said.

He turned and glanced back, just before he reached the steps that led up out of The End of the World, and was disconcerted to see Kristin still looking at him.

6.

He got back to Herzliya late the next night. In the morning he walked over to the Vereds' apartment to look at his mail. His mind buzzed with hope and dread and anticipation.

Surely there'd be a letter from Leon, with the latest news on what was happening with his mother. Surely it would be good news. It had to be. The new drug

would be working. Her swelling would be down; she'd be breathing normally. She'd sleep through the night, just as in the old days ...

Yes. A letter from his father.

Mom isn't doing so well these days ...

He read and reread the aerogram, all but suffocating in futility and rage. As if there might be something in it he didn't already know; something, beneath all the banal and evasive words, that might give him – if not ground for hope, at least some clue to what was really going on.

Nothing. Nowhere.

She's having trouble getting rid of her fluid, and this makes her very uncomfortable and she finds it difficult to eat well. As a result she spends almost all of her time in bed resting. We are thinking of trying a new drug that the doctor has suggested. I'll tell you how we make out.

Hope you're having good weather there ...

At least they hadn't sent a telegram. So it couldn't be all *that* bad, could it? He reassured Dalia Vered, who was hovering around him looking worried, that everything would be all right. He said goodbye to her and took the bus into Tel Aviv.

There in Tel Aviv, later that day, he managed to lose his wallet.

7.

At about the same time Danny was groping in his pocket for his wallet, and realizing with horrified disbelief that it wasn't there – Yitzhak Vered arrived home from work.

"I'm worried about Danny's mother," Dalia told him. It was the first thing out of her mouth after he walked in the door.

"What's the matter with her?" said Yitzhak.

"I don't know. I don't think *Danny* knows. He said something about her being tired. I don't know what he meant by that. I don't have the impression *he* knows what he meant by that."

Yitzhak Vered didn't want to talk right now about Danny's mother. It hadn't been an easy day. The irritable thought crossed his mind that, for a bright boy who was capable of winning a national Bible contest, Danny seemed to know rather little about some rather important subjects.

"Yitzhak," said Dalia. "Do you think we ought to be doing something?"

They stood in the living room. The telephone was on a small table beside them. Yitzhak gestured toward it. "If they need Danny," he said, "they'll phone him. Danny's on vacation in *Israel*. Not on the dark side of the moon."

The daily newspaper lay on the table beside the telephone. The headline caught his eye. More bad news about the economy, not to mention the Syrians. Their American guest was very *nechmad*, as you said in Hebrew: nice, polite, agreeable, eager to please. But one could not carry him always.

"Yitzhak," said Dalia.

He'd picked up the paper, begun to thumb through it. His wife persisted.

"Should we tell him to pick up the telephone?" she said. "Give his parents a call?"

Yitzhak didn't want to think about this. He'd left his mother behind in Czechoslovakia in 1938, when he set out for Palestine as a young boy, younger even than Danny. He never saw her again.

"Dalia," he said. "We've done *real* good for our young Danny, haven't we?"

“Well, of course we have –”

“He’s not our family. He’s not our friend. He’s a friend of a friend, right? Or a *relative* of a friend of a friend, really. Isn’t he?”

“But he’s here all alone. He doesn’t know –”

“We can’t make things right for the whole world,” said Yitzhak Vered. When his wife didn’t answer, he added: “Can we, now?”

8.

How exactly had Danny lost his wallet? Had he left it somewhere while buying a bus ticket, or perhaps an orange soda? Or had somebody stolen it?

Sure, Tel Aviv had its pickpockets, Yitzhak Vered told him. Tel Aviv was *full* of pickpockets.

“Israel is not a country of – *holy saints*, Mr. Danny. Israel is a *country*. Just like any other country.”

“Well, I knew that,” said Danny. “But still –”

He was going to say he’d been to Philadelphia many times, and had always come back with his wallet in his pocket. Yitzhak would not let him finish.

“You have your *thieves*, in America? You have your *dishonest people*, in America? Sure you do!”

Danny nodded.

“Well, so do we! We have our thieves, here in Israel.”

Again Danny nodded. This conversation was not very comforting. The loss of his wallet seemed to have opened inside him a spurting fountain of grief and

outrage, which now threatened to flood him. He tried to reassure himself the loss hadn't been so bad. He tried, while Yitzhak droned on, to reconstruct how much he'd been carrying in his wallet. Only when Yitzhak's speech reached its peroration—"And *that*, I am sorry to say, is the way it is!"—did he once again find himself paying attention.

He says he's sorry to say it, Danny thought. But he doesn't sound sorry at all. Triumphant, more like. Just like Dad. He loves to tell you what "reality" is supposed to be, and then rub it in as hard as he can.

Yitzhak looked closely at Danny's face. Still distracted as ever, he thought sadly. Still tight and gray with worry, as though this raw young boy were struggling to track, with his thoughts, not only a missing wallet but an entire missing lifetime.

We've got to stop him from thinking those thoughts. Give them free rein and they'll eat him away from the inside. What's left of him will just collapse into itself. Any moment now.

"Danny," he said softly. "Have you written back to your father? About your mother?"

9.

*Karei Deshe Youth Hostel, Israel
Tuesday, August 23, 1966.*

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am writing this on the lawn of the Youth Hostel here, where I am sleeping tonight, there being no room inside the hostel. So pardon the handwriting.

Karei Deshe is at the east of the Galilee, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, about three miles from Capernaum. I'd wanted to make it to Capernaum this afternoon, to visit the ruins of the ancient synagogue; but the buses, and their schedules, were not especially

cooperative. So I'm spending the night here, and will walk out to Capernaum in the morning.

He'd spent the whole day criss-crossing the Galilee in one bus after another, trying to reach Capernaum. He got to the Youth Hostel at sunset, discouraged and thirsty, to be greeted by a sign announcing there was no room. Now he sat cross-legged on the long soft grass, writing his letter. For a desk, he used the backpack in which he carried his change of underwear. The broad sky above him was almost entirely dark. The great lake they called the Sea of Galilee, which had been visible in the distance, was swallowed up in the darkness. It was only thanks to the flickering light of a not-too-distant bonfire that he was able to see what he was writing.

He wasn't part of the group that sat around the fire singing folk-song type music, having what the kids a few years ago used to call a hootenanny. Yet just by sitting near them he felt semi-included, warmed by their presence and the singing.

After I've seen Capernaum, I'll head off across the Galilee to Haifa, for one day. Then to Jerusalem, for one day. Then back to Tel Aviv and from there to Herzliya; and that'll be pretty much the end of my travelling.

How, exactly, to phrase what he must say now?

I am extremely distressed, he began to write.

The blue aerogram, fire-lit, disappeared from his vision. He saw his mother: blanketed from head to foot in the double bed she'd once shared with his father. She slept, or perhaps was in a coma. The muffled noise of her breathing filled the bedroom. If he were to come into the bedroom right now, she wouldn't know who he was.

I am extremely distressed to learn of Mom's condition, and hope that everything is OK now.

Well, I'll see you soon, anyway.

He'd just written those words when he heard a girl's accented voice saying, in the darkness above him: "Danny? Is that you?" He looked up and there she was: a short, full-bodied young woman whom after a moment he recognized as Kristin – his friend from Eilat, from The End of the World nightclub. Kristin. The German girl, the friend of his friend Douglas, the Roman Catholic from Scotland.

Kristin.

He told her, right after they said their hellos, that he was planning to sleep on the grass because there wasn't any room for him in the hostel. She went and filched a blanket from the hostel office and brought it out to him on the grass.

They sat for hours on that blanket, talking.

About UFOs, mostly. Almost as soon as she sat down with him, Kristin had said, "Well, Danny, what do you do?" He hadn't wanted to say, *I'm a high school student, with one year school left to go*, because it was obvious she was a few years older than that, and if he told her he was just a high school kid she might get up and leave. So he said: "I'm a UFO investigator. I investigate UFOs."

She was interested. She didn't believe in UFOs, even after he described to her the evidence and told her about the book he'd written. But she had an open mind, she said.

"If you send me your book when it comes out, I'll read it."

He learned a few things about her too. One of the first was that she wasn't German after all. She was Dutch. This came out early in their conversation, when she asked if he'd mind if they moved their blanket away from the bonfire, because she couldn't stand sitting so near all those Germans.

"Germans! Wherever they go they've got to sing. And at the tops of their voices, too."

The hatred and disgust in her voice puzzled Danny. “But aren’t you a German?” he asked.

She pulled away from him, glaring. He hadn’t realized until then how close they’d been sitting. “Me? A German? Do I *look* German? Do I *sound* German?”

He decided he’d better not try to answer that one.

The people around the fire had earlier been singing Israeli folk songs. But now, sure enough, the words sounded like German. It wasn’t a folk song anymore but something more formal, operatic almost. They sang a line or two, then burst into laughter, then started up again.

“They can’t even do Beethoven right!” said Kristin.

“That’s Beethoven?” said Danny. He couldn’t believe it. Beethoven oughtn’t to sound like this, like something you could sing around a campfire.

“Of course it’s Beethoven. Danny, don’t you listen to music?”

It was Schiller’s “Ode to Joy,” she told him, set to music by Beethoven for the choral movement of his Ninth Symphony. He asked her what the words meant. She translated them, line by line.

“Freude, schöner Götterfunken. That means, Joy, O you beautiful—how do you say it?—spark of the gods. Daughter out of Elysium.

“—Oh, Danny, it’s just so silly!—

“Drunk with fire, O heavenly one, we enter your shrine. ...”

She didn’t like the “Ode to Joy.” It was romantic scribble—hysterical, pretentious. Just the sort of stuff a German would write. If it weren’t for Beethoven’s marvelous music, she told Danny, no one would even have heard of the “Ode to Joy.”

Yet when she got to the part about how *your magic binds together that which custom has strictly divided, all men become brothers wherever your soft and gentle wing lingers*, her eyes shone as though filled with tears. And he realized by the end of the poem that they were again sitting close together, almost touching, though he hadn't been conscious of either of them having moved.

10.

They traded addresses. He promised to send her the latest *PURA Bulletin* when he got back to America, and a copy of his book as soon as it appeared. She promised to write back with her comments. She would be honest, she said, and tell him exactly what she thought.

She went inside to sleep. He rolled himself up in the blanket she'd brought him, and tried to sleep.

It was hard, he found, to lie on top of a blanket and at the same time cover yourself with it. The bonfires around him hadn't died down, though it was past one in the morning. Groups of young travelers sat around the fires singing their folk songs. Some sang in Hebrew, others in languages Danny couldn't recognize.

Night, night, the wind blows strong.

Night, night, the leaves rustle.

A meteor like a large phosphorescent glob passed across the sky, leaving its luminous trail across the blackness.

He awoke in the cool soft light of the very early dawn. His arms, his feet, his face were wet with the dew of the grass. The flies buzzed around his legs as he

dressed. They didn't bother him. A phrase from one of the Psalms, *thine is the dew of thy youth*, kept running through his mind. He'd never felt so splendid in all his life.

11.

Tuesday. The day before he was to leave Israel. With obvious relief, Dalia Vered handed him the letter.

"From your mother?" she said hopefully.

Yes, Dalia. Yes. That *is* Mom's handwriting, on the envelope.

"From my mother," he said.

He tore it open, his heart pounding.

There wasn't any letter inside. Only the *PURA Bulletin*, that she'd sent him by sea mail at the beginning of the summer.

It had taken this long to get here.

"Danny," said Shoshana Vered. "Can you help me?"

At first he didn't hear her. He hadn't moved from the chair into which he'd slumped, although he knew he had to go back to the Rozenshtayns' to begin his packing. Years of weariness lay upon him. He couldn't shake that dreadful image of his mother in her bed: comatose, suffocating in the blankets. The *PURA Bulletin* lay open, unread, in his lap.

"Can you help me, Danny?"

She explained shyly that she'd written out the words of her favorite song, as she thought she'd heard them. Could she read them to him, so he could see if she'd gotten them right? If they made sense in English?

She wouldn't let him look at the paper. She was too ashamed of her spelling. She insisted that he listen while she read aloud.

*"I gave a letter to the postman
He put it in his sack ..."*

Elvis and his girlfriend had had a quarrel, a lover's spat. He wrote to apologize but the postman kept returning his letter. "She wrote upon it, *Return to sender ...*"

Danny explained the words she didn't know: what a *zone* was, and what *bright and early* meant, and that *spat* and *quarrel* meant the same thing, and both were the same as *argument*. Her small face filled with indignation.

"Why do they say *three* words?" she demanded. "Why isn't *one* enough?"

Danny tried to explain.

"Say *argument*," said Shoshana. "Or say *quarrel*. Or say *spat*. Why do they need *all three*?"

"English is a very rich language," said Danny.

"What's *that* got to do with it?" said Shoshana.

He looked into her dark eyes and realized that, yes, here was a pretty little Israelian girl, just as Basil and he had talked about in the Stuyvesant Hotel so long ago. With emphasis on the *little*.

Still, she wasn't much younger than Rosa Pagliano had been when he fell in love with her. Not much younger than he'd been when he became a UFO investigator.

If only he could somehow unravel time. *Unspin* time. Roll up the last four years like a winter rug, then start them over again. If only they'd let him do that.

Four years. It didn't seem too much to ask.

And yes, she told him, she'd like very much to ride with them tomorrow, when her Dad took him to the airport to go back to America.

Chapter 8: A Land of Thick Darkness

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 1966

1.

He sat on a low green metal stool, in the sunlit living room of the house where he'd grown up, and read to himself from the Book of Job.

*"Are not my days few? cease then,
And let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,
Before I go whence I shall not return,
Even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death;
A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself;
A land of the shadow of death, without any order,
And where the light is as darkness."*

"Danny," said Laurie.

He looked up into her broad brown face. "Uh-huh?" he said.

"Would you like me to sit and read the Bible with you?"

He smiled and shook his head no. He didn't say, *I'll be all right*; he meant his smile to convey that. She went back to her vacuuming.

*"Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldest oppress,
That Thou shouldest despise the work of Thy hands,
And shine upon the counsel of the wicked?
Hast Thou eyes of flesh,
Or seest Thou as man seeth?"*

He wanted to shriek these words aloud, his face turned toward heaven, his voice quivering, his hands shaking. He didn't dare. Laurie would hear him, even over

the roar of the vacuum cleaner – she was now cleaning in what had once been his mother’s room – and come running in. She would think he’d gone insane.

He observed his own rites of mourning because he didn’t know what other rites to observe. For the first week after the burial you were supposed to “sit *shiva*” for the dead person, which meant that for seven days you sat on low stools with all the mirrors in your house covered, and you ate the bread of mourners and you did not leave the house, and you immersed yourself in grief for the person you’d lost, now gone from you forever. But that was all past. They’d buried his mother more than two weeks ago, while he was zooming around Israel writing aerograms about how he hoped she’d be feeling better soon. *Shiva*, if it had ever been sat for her, had been sat without him.

The weather seemed wrong for *shiva*. A bright, warm, sunny morning, humid and hazy, the way you expected a Pennsylvania summer morning to be. Yet not quite summer either. There was a touch of coolness, for all the humidity, that told you summer was nearly over, autumn on its way.

Danny recognized that feel. He’d felt it in the air each of eleven seasons before, since they’d moved to Kellerfield: each time in September, before school started with him entering a new and higher grade. Now was his twelfth, his last and strangest time.

2.

Danny’s father had come to Kennedy Airport last night to meet El Al flight 691 from Israel. Danny first caught sight of him through the plate glass windows that were about halfway up one wall of the large, bleak, high-ceilinged room with the maze of long tables, where you had to bring your luggage through customs.

Danny had no trouble with that. He had nothing to declare except the books he’d bought in Israel, and nobody cared about a bunch of books. He did have a

lot of pottery fragments, tucked into the spaces in his suitcase where nothing else would fit. The customs officer noticed them. "Were you on a dig over there?" he asked.

"Not really," said Danny. "I visited a lot of archaeological sites, though."

The officer grunted, looking vaguely impressed. That was when Danny had looked up and seen his father standing some thirty feet away, on the other side of the plate glass window, waving to him.

"*Me bai-i-i,*" Leon said, as he met Danny at the top of the escalator. "You've gotten so *tan, me bai-i-i.*"

Danny didn't remember, afterward, precisely how he'd responded to this remark. He did remember saying to his father, "You know, I did manage to pick up a bit of Hebrew over there" – which his father smiled away amiably, as if it were baby's prattling to be humored, and said that maybe the suitcase *and* the typewriter together might be a little bit too much for Danny to carry, and maybe he ought to let his old Daddy-O help out a little bit. So Leon carried the typewriter, Danny the suitcase, and they walked down the airport corridor together.

Later, in the car, when they were out of the airport and on the four-lane highway, Leon said, "Bet they don't have roads like these in Israel, do they now?" Danny agreed, smiling, that they didn't.

He said: "How's Mom?"

Leon said: "Well, I'm afraid I've got bad news for you."

Danny said: "Very bad?"

– His nightmare had come real: she was rolling back and forth in her bed, her legs thick as cardboard tubing, suffocating in her blankets, gasping for air –

Leon said: "Mom is dead."

3.

"How's it feel, *me bai-i-i?*" Leon said as he switched on the lights in the house. "Being back in the old homestead."

Danny wasn't sure how it felt. What struck him was how it smelled. You never notice the smell of your own house while you're living there, and then you go away for a while and come back, and it hits you like a slap.

Her rocker, brilliant orange as ever, was still by the kitchen window. Her little table, with its pile of New York *Timeses* for her to read and cut clippings from, was still in front of the rocker. He was relieved and reassured to see, when he walked into his bedroom, that his old heavy, solid typewriter was still there, on the metal typing table next to the torchier. The greasy, dark green typewriter cover that said ROYAL had gathered dust, as though it hadn't been removed all summer. That, too, heartened him.

Maybe that was why he couldn't do any work on his book all summer. He just didn't have the right typewriter.

He showered, sweaty from his long trip, and went to bed. Tired as he was, he didn't get to sleep right away. His mind kept flooding with images of his mother. Anna sitting on her rocker, by the kitchen window. Anna smiling, Anna laughing. Anna waving goodbye, as the car pulled away and the house receded in the distance.

He slept. He awoke in the middle of the night with an intense, disquieting sensation that he was very small, and on a swing somewhere in a playground. He was swinging very high and fast – higher and faster than he wanted to go.

He was very small. Everybody around him, as he swung, was so big they seemed like giants.

4.

“Did you expect this was going to happen?” Rabbi Silverman asked.

Danny pressed the telephone receiver against his sweating ear and wished he could just hang up. How could he answer? If he said yes, he’d sound like a brazen-hearted monster, trotting off to Israel for a summer vacation knowing full well his mother was going to die. If he said no, he’d sound like a perfect fool, blind to what everyone else had been able to see.

“Well, I knew she’d been having problems. I knew she hadn’t been feeling too well. But I really wouldn’t have thought – I mean, I really didn’t expect –”

Danny’s throat tightened. He couldn’t finish the sentence.

The rabbi didn’t press him. Nor did he ask, as Danny was afraid he might, why the family hadn’t phoned him to come back home as soon as they realized Anna was going to die. Instead he said: “Do you know what you have to do? As a mourner?”

So that was it. Why the rabbi had told Leon, who’d relayed the message, that it might be nice if Danny were to give him a call. “I think so,” Danny said.

“You know the first seven days are called *shiva*, right? You *sit shiva*, for the deceased person.”

“Uh-huh,” said Danny. He wanted to say, *But those seven days are already past. I wasn’t here.* But he was afraid the rabbi would tell him that you can’t skip the days of *shiva*, you have to make them up if you miss them. Then he’d still be sitting *shiva* next Tuesday, the day after Labor Day, and he wouldn’t be able to go back to school.

“For the year,” said the rabbi, “you say *kaddish* for your mother. Every time you’re in *shul*. Till the first anniversary of the death. You understand?”

“Uh-huh.”

“For the year, you’re not allowed to listen to music. Or go to any entertainments. Movies, plays, anything like that.”

“I thought that was just for the first month.”

“For other close relatives, it’s just the first month. For a parent, it’s the whole year.”

“Oh,” said Danny. He wanted to cry, like he was being gypped. This was something he hadn’t expected.

“People are a little bit different, in what they allow themselves,” said the rabbi. “Some people allow themselves serious entertainments, after the first month. Like, serious plays. Not comedies. Serious drama.”

“Or serious movies,” said Danny.

“But certainly no music.”

When their talk was finished Danny wandered into his father’s den and lay down on the bed. It was neatly made and looked as if it hadn’t been slept in for weeks. Leon had moved back into the bedroom that once had been Anna’s.

He felt very tired. He tried to doze.

He opened his eyes, and for a fraction of a second he saw her. Coming out of her bedroom, as she’d always done. She was going to the kitchen, to her rocker, where she would sit and read the *New York Times*. He heard the rustling of her skirt as she came out the bedroom door. He felt the slight movement in the air as she went by.

No.

It couldn’t be her.

It never would be her again.

5.

He started school. Then came Rosh Hashanah, and Danny went to synagogue both mornings of the festival, staying for the entire service, chanting the prayers and the responses although there wasn't any God to hear them. Then, the new Jewish year having begun – it felt exactly like the old one – he went back to school.

He sat at his desk in his bedroom, in a fog of boredom and exhaustion, trying to hack his way through half a week's accumulation of calculus homework. He'd only missed two days of school, yet already the classes were starting to seem disconnected, only partly intelligible. He knew that he ought to be working on his book for Basil. But the manuscript lay in the top drawer of his dresser, where he'd put it the night he got home. He could hardly bring himself even to open the drawer.

Dear Basil. I imagine you're wondering by now whether I'm dead or alive

But he didn't write those words, or any others, to Basil or to any of his UFO friends; and then it was Yom Kippur. He and his father fasted, and spent most of the day in synagogue, and although he didn't really believe in God he tried to get into the full feeling of Yom Kippur: the burden of sinning that lay upon him, which would be lifted when the fast ended at nightfall. He stood and beat his chest, hard, as he recited his sins.

We have sinned.

We have been guilty.

We have betrayed.

They blew the ram's horn finally, when it was dark outside, to say *it's all over, you can go eat now*. Danny had hoped to hear, as the hymns had led him to expect he might, the divine word *Forgiven!* He didn't hear this or any other word. All he heard was a horn, feebly blown.

6.

He often thought of those few things he'd learned since he'd gotten back, about his mother's final weeks. Leon had told him that at first she'd been home, in the days after he left for Israel. But when it became clear she was getting sicker by the day, they took her into the hospital in Philadelphia. She stayed a little over three weeks. Then she died.

"I think she knew, even before you left, that she wasn't going to make it," Leon said, in that sad, resonant voice of his.

Danny said nothing, but only nodded. He must have looked scared. He felt scared whenever anybody started to talk about his mother and how she'd died.

"She was *so* eager to see you go off to Israel," Leon continued, and shook his head.

Danny nodded again. In his mind, he completed Leon's sentence. *So I wouldn't have to be there at her end.*

On the dresser in what had once been her bedroom, he had noticed a half-dozen or so long, narrow strips of coarse white paper, with lists of foods mimeographed on them. He'd looked closely at them one day, while Leon was at work and school hadn't yet started.

There were some that were labeled BREAKFAST MENU, and some LUNCH MENU and some DINNER MENU. There were two blank spaces printed at the top of each one, where somebody had written in the name *Anna Shapiro* and then a date. Somebody else, presumably Anna herself, had circled the names of different foods in pencil. From the lunch menu for her first day in the hospital, she'd circled *Hamburger* and *Fruit cocktail*.

So his mother had wanted a hamburger for lunch, three weeks before she died.

Had she enjoyed that hamburger?

Had she known she was going to die?

The menus stayed out on the dresser for two or three weeks. Then suddenly they weren't there. Leon had perhaps filed them. Or maybe he'd decided to throw them away.

Laurie had told him, that first sunny warm morning, that somebody had at the very end stolen his mother's diamond engagement ring.

"We was all in the hospital room," Laurie said. "That Monday morning. After she passed. And I looked at her lying there, and I said, *Where's her ring?* I said, *Where's her wedding ring, that she always used to wear?* And the nurses made out like they didn't know what I was talking about. And everybody looked at me, like to say, *Shut up, you!* And they all say, *You sure she was wearing it beforehand? You sure? You sure?*"

Ida and Sophie had visited Danny's mother the night before she died, and they hesitantly volunteered that they were pretty sure she'd been wearing the ring.

"Then this big fat nurse, she say, *Well, look at her fingers. You see how skinny they gotten? Maybe the ring roll off her finger by itself, roll onto the floor.* And I say, *So where is it now, if it roll onto the floor? Somebody just sweep it up, huh? Throw it into the trash?*"

That was as far as Laurie had managed to get in her discussion with the hospital staff. She shuddered with disgust as she thought back on it. Danny was disgusted too, and this feeling grew inside him as the weeks passed.

That's the way people are. That's what you can expect from them. When you're dying and helpless, they'll steal your wedding ring off your finger.

7.

Some time in October, a blue aerogram arrived from Israel. From Shoshana Vered.

She'd written in Hebrew. At first this seemed odd. When Danny was in Israel the two of them always spoke English. But she'd been ashamed of her written English, and maybe she supposed he'd learned enough Hebrew to understand her.

He sat at the desk in his bedroom, with the paperback dictionary he'd brought back with him, and began to read.

Shalom Danny. Mamash hizdazanu lishmoa ...

We were really shocked to hear ...

He closed the dictionary. His eyes were heavy with exhaustion. He had no stomach for hacking through this letter, word after word, no doubt having to hunt in the dictionary for every single one. It had taken him nearly a half hour just to find *mamash hizdazanu lishmoa*.

So much for all the Hebrew he was supposed to have learned this summer.

He laid Shoshana's letter on top of the swelling stack of UFO sighting reports that had been coming in from Murray Whitaker all summer, and now all fall. There it would gather dust.

It was past eleven by the kitchen clock. His father had taken to going out in the evenings, and tonight he still wasn't back from wherever he'd gone. He sat in his mother's rocker and leafed through her old New York *Timeses*.

8.

The long-awaited letter from Basil arrived at the beginning of November.

Dear Danny. Long time no hear from, friend!

He stood outside the front door, shivering in the damp wind, as he ripped the letter open. The ground where he'd laid his schoolbooks was soaked from this morning's rain. There'd be more rain tonight, possibly mixed with sleet.

It wasn't a bad letter, he thought with relief, scanning the two pages Basil had written. He didn't sound angry at Danny's long silence. A bit nervous perhaps, especially toward the end, where he remarked that *the natives* – referring to Max Levinthal – *are getting restless, as they say in the Grade B movies*. But not angry.

The front windows reflected the ragged gray skies. Behind them, behind the reflection, Danny could see the empty orange rocker where his mother once had sat. He went inside, took off his wet coat, and sat in the rocker. Again he read the letter.

Basil was calm, not mad, not worried. He knew by this time how Danny worked. You'd go for months, not hearing a blessed word. Then all of a sudden – *bam!* you'd go to your mailbox, and there'd be some splendid manuscript fresh off Danny's typewriter. Of course Basil had no inkling that the splendid manuscript had lain untouched all these months in Danny's drawer.

By the way, he wrote between parentheses, I take it that you did get my letter of July 10, didn't you? The one that I sent to the Talor Hotel, or the Squalor Hotel, or whatever its blessed name was, in Tel Aviv? I mean, if somehow they didn't give it to you, you won't have the faintest blessed idea what I mean about the revisions to the book. So do be sure to write and let me know as soon as you can, if that's what happened.

Yes, Basil. That's what happened.

I never got your letter. Maybe it was lost in the mail. Or maybe it reached the Tal-Or Hotel after I moved out, and they didn't have my address in Herzliya and I never came back to the hotel. So I don't know what revisions you're talking about. That's why I haven't even started working on the revisions, you see. So please send them to me as soon as possible, so I get to work right away.

But that would be a lie. And Danny was not a liar.

9.

*71 Sandy Creek Drive
Kellerfield, Pennsylvania
November 3, 1966*

Dear Mr. Crenshaw —

Danny stared at the sheet of paper that sat, nearly empty and blindingly white, in his typewriter. He didn't know how to go on. Every sentence that came into his mind felt wrong. His calculus homework, his physics — even his English assignment, which he normally enjoyed reading — lay untended on his desk.

Dear Mr. Crenshaw, It's been a long time since I've been out to Scofield —

A year and a half ago, a fifteen-year-old boy in a tan raincoat had marched into the Scofield police station with fake radio credentials, demanding their help with his investigation. They'd believed him, treated him with respect. He remembered this the way a feeble old man recalls his athletic youth. He could no more do such a thing nowadays than he could fly to the moon.

Leon wasn't home. He'd told Danny there was somewhere he needed to go directly from work, and he might not be back until late. He'd prepared brisket and boiled potatoes and left them for Danny in the refrigerator in a Pyrex dish, with written instructions on how long to heat them in the oven. At what temperature.

Danny sat on the edge of the bed where his mother had once slept, and, trembling, dialed the phone number.

"Could I speak with Mr. Crenshaw, please?" he said in his deepest, most adult-sounding voice.

It was Crenshaw's wife who'd answered. In the background, Danny heard a TV played very loud. A young boy was yelling something over the TV noise which sounded to Danny like, "Dad! Dad!" He was to ponder that for many days to come.

"Who's calling, please?"

"This is Dan Shapiro." He added, perhaps unwisely: "I'm phoning long distance."

"Dan Shapiro?"

"From Kellerfield, Pennsylvania." He sweated, and his heart had begun to pound. He knew this was going to turn out badly; he didn't know exactly how.

"Kellerfield –?"

"Mr. Crenshaw knows me," said Danny. "I was in Scofield last year investigating the UFO landing, and we talked –"

Mrs. Crenshaw said in a voice of ice: "Mr. Crenshaw isn't interested in that – *business* any more."

"I can understand that. But I wonder if I could talk to him, because – I would like to talk to him, if I could, please –"

"Mr. Crenshaw isn't home at present."

But I heard his son calling him! At least, I heard what I think was his son –

"But –" Danny began.

"I'll tell him you called," she said, and hung up the phone.

He sat on the edge of his mother's bed, he didn't know for how long. *What am I going to write to Basil?* he thought over and over. Many other things, too; but afterwards he couldn't remember what they were.

As he stood up to go, his eyes fell upon a shelf in the open closet. There was a small brown leather case, which he knew his mother always used for the letters she wrote to her college friends. The case was propped up against a shoebox, on the end of which his mother had once lettered in felt pen, MOM'S SNEAKS.

His mother's sneakers.

She'd always worn tennis shoes around the house. They were the most comfortable, she said, for her to wear. *They're still there*, he thought, and his heart eased. *Dad didn't throw them away.*

10.

Thanksgiving came and went. The weather, which had been cold for most of November, turned unseasonably mild. Heavy warmish fogs lay over Kellerfield, even in mid-afternoon. The school bus drove slowly, headlights burning. Danny sat in his mother's rocking chair by the kitchen window, and gazed out into the mist.

Sometimes there was mail.

Kristin wrote from Holland. She told him about her studies at the Technical University at Eindhoven, where she was a third-year student in organic chemistry. She asked if his book on UFOs had come out yet. If it hadn't, she hoped it would be out soon because she would like to read it.

She said that she had her doubts, now that she thought back upon the evening they'd spent together on the grass at Karei Deshe, about the nature of the UFO evidence, at least as she remembered it from what he'd said. Mostly it was

anecdotal. Sometimes consisting of lost memories, recovered under hypnosis, hadn't he said?

Or had she read that somewhere?

Supplemented, to be sure, with a few photographs and sometimes markings left on the ground, like holes from which soil samples had supposedly been taken. Yet science has no choice but to proceed on the basis of that which is present and testable, not that which is in the past and now only remembered —

Perhaps once seen and experienced, but present now only in memory —

She went on for two more pages. Danny, weary of this and having no idea how to reply, stopped reading. He set the letter aside.

Basil wrote once more. The first thing Danny saw when he opened the envelope was that Basil had printed at the top of the letter, in large block capitals: FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, FRIEND, WILL YOU PLEASE ANSWER YOUR CORRESPONDENCE?!!!

He didn't read the letter. He left it on his desk, along with Kristin's letter and Shoshana's, in the great blurry pile of UFO reports from Murray Whitaker, which had continued to accumulate all autumn long, like the large wet snowflakes of an endless blizzard.

11.

One evening, when his father was out and wouldn't be back till late, Danny went into his mother's bedroom. There, on the closet shelf, was the MOM'S SNEAKS shoebox. Next to it sat the brown leather case.

Several times in the past weeks Danny had gone into the bedroom. He'd looked at the shoebox and the case for a minute or two, and gone out again. He hadn't touched either one. Now he took the case down from the shelf. Trembling, his

heart beating a little faster than usual, he sat down on the edge of his mother's bed and opened it.

He didn't know what he expected to find. Not a letter to him from his mother. He knew she hadn't written to him. If she had, his father would have known about it and would certainly have mentioned it.

He never came right out and asked, *Did she leave something for me before she died?* It wasn't a question you asked a man with whom you were now alone, whom you'd have to learn to live with whether you liked it or not. Who, moreover, had never liked you all that much to begin with.

He opened her brown leather case and, sitting on the edge of her bed, leafed through it.

There were clippings from the *New York Times*, some of them dating back years, about the latest advances in heart surgery. There was sheet after sheet of unused stationery, and envelopes and stamps and her little black address book, tucked into neat pockets inside the case. There was a decorative bookmark, with flowers and birds and *the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*

He remembered her neatness, her smiling cheerfulness, her trust that somebody would be there to take care of her and of him too ... He should stop here and put the case away, before he found something that hurt even more than these memories did.

He kept on.

There were letters in the case, written on the same stationery. She'd written them in the hospital – so he gathered from the dates – but must have been too sick to mail them. Of course there was none for him; he'd known that from the start. They were addressed to women with names like Rosie and Sylvia, who he imagined were her college friends.

1966 has been a red-letter year for Danny. He came in first in the National Bible Contest, and now is off to Israel to enjoy his prize. He's already become quite the traveler ...

Danny smiled. It was like when he was little, and he'd hear her sitting up in bed talking on her phone. About him, to some friend or relative or other: what he was doing, and how big he was getting, and what stories he was writing, and maybe what costume he was going to wear this year for Hallowe'en –

With such pride in him.

He'd lost all that this summer: while he was off enjoying his prize, being quite the traveler, riding his buses hither and yon. And the really stupid thing was this: he hadn't even known he was losing it, until he came back and found it gone.

His picture.

She had it with her in the hospital. There it was in her case, amid the letters to Rosie and Sylvia, and the sheets of stationery on which she'd no doubt planned to write to more Rosies and Sylvias. His eleventh-grade school photo, taken last January, about a million years ago.

With his mind's eye he saw her in her hospital bed, holding that same photo in her enfeebled hand. Always such an optimist – she thought at the beginning she was going to make it. By the time she realized she was going to die, she was already too sick to write. He felt the pain inside him melting into a sweet remembrance, and understood what it meant, to be “moved to tears,” even though he didn't actually cry.

A strange thought occurred to him. She'd died in the night; they had told him that. In her sleep, then? In the middle of a dream, maybe?

Dreaming, perhaps, about him?

He held the photograph before his eyes, as *she* might have held it before hers as she drifted into the sleep from which she never awoke. He saw then that there was writing on the back:

The kid really CAN smile. But NEVER for the camera!

What?

She'd written his name. The date of the photo. That cheerful little note of embarrassed explanation of her son's unsmiling countenance, for Rosie or Sylvia or whoever she'd planned to send the stupid picture to, before she'd gotten too sick and forgot all about it, and left it in her stupid case with her stupid stamps and stupid envelopes —

The kid really CAN smile —

— as if I *really* had anything so goddamn much to smile about —

But NEVER for the camera! —

— so she can't show me off anymore, like I'm some broken statue or scuffed furniture or tarnished silver —

His legs were hollow, puffed out, immobile. He felt his belly swell with grief and rage.

12.

He was in his bedroom studying when he heard the telephone ring. He paid no attention. Leon was home; he would answer. It would certainly be for Leon anyway. Who ever phoned for Danny?

A moment later he saw Leon in his doorway. "It's your friend Basil," his father said softly.

Danny looked at him. He didn't answer. For a moment he couldn't remember ever having had a friend named Basil.

"He's calling long distance."

The words *long distance* had a strange effect. Danny thought of what it might mean to be called from a long, long distance. He saw, very vividly, his mother lying sick in the room next door to his, while he sat hunched over his typewriter pounding away on his UFO book, making the unending typewriter noises that comforted her ailing heart. The noises had stopped, just for a few weeks, and her heart had stopped too. The magic vehicle that should have carried her to safety had gone down, crashed. The blame and punishment would be his, for ever and ever.

"You all right?"

"Uh-huh," he said, nodding, swallowing.

"You sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Shall I tell Basil you're not at home?"

13.

She came to him in his dream that night.

He was in bed, sick perhaps; and she came dressed in black and sat down beside the bed. She smiled her usual gracious smile. She spoke to him: one word, over and over, which at first he couldn't hear because of the great sheet of glass between them.

Then he heard the word, or felt it: like a bullet, fired repeatedly into his brain.

FOOL.

FOOL. FOOL. FOOL.

He twisted on his bed, in rage and bafflement. *What do you mean, I'm a fool?* And she laughed, and smiled and nodded, as though soothing a child who's not only sick but also very cranky.

FOOL. FOOL. FOOL.

How've I been a fool? What have I done that was so foolish?

She laughed, showing all her teeth.

TELL ME! he sobbed – so loud that he thought, after he awoke a moment later, that he must have cried aloud in his sleep, his father might have heard.

He saw only the blackness of her back as she moved off into the darkness.

Chapter 9: Rumor of War

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1967

1.

"There's gonna be war," Leon said when he came to pick Danny up at his school.

Danny nodded. He'd learned over the past months that it was good policy to nod when Leon expressed his opinions, whether or not you agreed. Right now he didn't quite know what Leon was talking about. It was nearly midnight; Danny had dozed off during the last hour of the long bus ride back from Washington, and he was still pretty groggy. Of course there was going to be war. It had been going on in Vietnam for the past couple of years now, hadn't it? Why should anybody expect there wouldn't be more of it?

Even if the kids had wanted to forget that, and just enjoy their senior class trip to Washington, Sandra Gilbert wouldn't let them. She'd been going with a college boy all this past year, a Rutgers sophomore whom she'd met waitressing in a diner last summer. Her boyfriend was big into the peace movement, and now Sandra was too.

Her idea first had been that the school should shift the trip from Thursday and Friday of this week to Monday and Tuesday, so they'd be in Washington for Memorial Day and could go to the antiwar protests that were supposed to happen then. She circulated a petition but hardly anybody signed it, and the principal told her, forget it. Then she tried to get the kids interested in making signs and having their own demonstration outside the White House. Maybe LBJ would look out his big glass windows across his big green lawn and see them out there and know he'd better stop the bombing. But nobody wanted to do that.

Sandra and Danny had argued about the war during their free hour this morning, walking up Connecticut Avenue toward the bookstore both of them wanted to visit.

“What do you think?” Danny said to her. “We can just pull ourselves out and leave the people who trusted us, so the Viet Cong can do whatever they want to them?”

She was silent. She didn’t have an answer. Danny thought of the stories he’d read about the Viet Cong, how they impaled people on stakes and skinned them alive. He was going to tell her about that but he decided not to. They’d all had breakfast only an hour ago.

He lost his advantage, though, a minute or two later. She was starting in on how most of the South Vietnamese hate us anyway and the government is just lying about it, and he said that as far as he was concerned he’d rather take his own government’s word than anybody else’s.

She gave him one of her withering looks and said, “You’re pretty naive, aren’t you?”

He didn’t have anything to say to that. He felt like he wanted to cry. He knew he was naïve. Leon had told him that, and even his mother, whom he’d begun to imagine as having been unfailingly warm and loving and kind – even she, every now and then, had greeted some passionately expressed opinion of his with a hiss of amusement and a scornful, *Much you know!* He was glad he and Sandra were alone, with none of the other kids around to hear.

His face must have shown how bad he felt. Sandra said something like, “Well, you’re not the only one,” and let the subject of Vietnam drop, which she didn’t do very often. She was extra nice to him for the rest of the day.

2.

“I saved the New York *Times* for you,” said Leon, as they got into the car. “Yesterday’s and today’s. I don’t imagine you read the papers much while you were in Washington, did you?”

Of course Danny hadn't read the newspapers. What did Leon think — kids go on their senior class trip and they spend the time reading the news? And if he had saved the papers, what was special about that? It took his father forever to throw out newspapers. The little table in front of his mother's rocking chair still had the papers from last July. There were more recent piles on Leon's desk in the den.

"They kept us pretty busy," Danny said apologetically.

"Yeah, I imagine they did."

After a moment of silence, in the dark automobile, Leon asked Danny what-all they'd been doing the past two days. Danny told him whatever he could remember of the complicated itinerary. Mostly it had been sightseeing: the White House, the Washington Monument, the Capitol building. They hadn't given the kids any free time to explore the city on their own, until this morning.

Last night they all went to a movie.

"What movie?"

"Barefoot in the Park," said Danny.

Leon thought for a second or two. "That's with Jane Fonda, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh. And Robert Redford."

"Must've been good. Wasn't it?"

"Uh-huh."

"That Jane Fonda's *really* something," Leon said. "*Really* something."

Truth was, Danny hadn't much enjoyed "Barefoot in the Park." Its evocation of young love and carefree gaiety — neither of which had been part of his life so far, or seemed very likely to be — stirred in him an intense and painful yearning. On the heels of the yearning came an embittered grievance: for what he had missed,

and what it was now too late for him ever to have. He tuned out of the movie about a third of the way through. He sat there, amid the laughter from the screen and the laughter from the audience, dreaming up imaginary speeches he might use to harangue the characters and show them the error of their ways.

It had been much nicer this morning, when he'd finally been able to go off by himself – or, as it turned out, with Sandra Gilbert – to explore the Washington bookstores.

He'd gone to the public phone in the hotel lobby right after breakfast, and started to dial the number of the National Aerial Phenomena Research Association, which had its headquarters in Washington and was the largest and most respected UFO group in the country. But then he stopped and pressed the hook back down. What would he say if NAPRA's director were to pick up the phone?

Hi, Mr. Tucker, this is Danny Shapiro; remember me? I wrote to you almost five years ago, when I was in the eighth grade, and I thought maybe I could be a member of your team and we could all solve the UFO mystery together. But you weren't much interested in writing to me, so I investigated UFOs all by myself for the next few years, the way I did pretty much everything all by myself, and I wrote a book on UFOs which Cloverleaf Press was going to publish, only I could never prove that the Scofield landing wasn't a hoax so the book never quite got finished –

And now my mother is dead –

He was still holding the receiver in his hand when Sandra Gilbert came into the lobby and saw him. Before he knew it they were out walking in the sunshine, trying to find a bookstore both of them had vaguely heard of, but neither knew quite where it might be.

3.

It turned out to be the biggest bookstore Danny'd ever been in. Bigger even than Eisenberg's in Tel Aviv, and here when you asked about UFO books you didn't

get lectures about how UFOs were dumb and you were supposed to be *practical*. The clerk directed Danny to the occult section, where they had their books on ghosts and ESP and telling the future.

Once that would have made him mad. Once he'd have protested to the clerk that UFO books were *scientific*, and they ought to be shelved with astronomy and physics and space exploration. But now he didn't care very much. It had been months since he'd cared very much.

He mostly wanted to see who was publishing books on UFOs these days. In particular, he wanted to see if a certain *Basil Richard* had published a UFO book, and if that book should turn out by any chance to bear a strange resemblance to a manuscript the aforesaid Basil Richard had received last summer from a naïve and trusting boy named Danny Shapiro.

He was also scared. Of the grief, of the fury, of the sense of futility and desolation that would certainly come upon him. Most of all he was scared of knowing for sure what he already felt to be true: that Leon had been right about Basil and what a shit he was. That Leon had been right all along, about everything.

There was no book by Basil Richard about UFOs. But Basil did have a book of true-life ghost stories; and it was entitled, *Ghosts That Chirp, Ghosts That Mutter*.

My title, Danny thought, the bitterness rising in him as it often did these days. Which I handed him freebees, on a silver platter.

Sure enough, Basil had the epigraph from Isaiah at the beginning of his book, just as Danny had quoted it to him that night in the Stuyvesant Hotel coffee house.

They shall say to you, Seek unto the ghosts and the familiar spirits, that chirp and that mutter. Shall not a nation seek unto its gods, on behalf of the living unto the dead, for advice and for testimony?

Surely they will speak in this way, in which there is no light

Danny felt a pain so sharp he looked around for a chair, so he could sit and rest a moment. Achingly he remembered that eager and hopeful young boy, ridiculously sincere, who'd sat around a table with the Townsends and Glickman and Basil Richard, and drunk coffee with them –

He didn't deliberately turn to the "Acknowledgments" in search of his name. It was pure accident that he saw it:

– and to a very remarkable young man, Danny Shapiro, who provided the inspiration for the title –

He stood holding the book – not looking at it, just holding it – until Sandra found him and told him they'd better head back to the hotel. He thought how kind Basil had been, and how generous. How badly he'd misjudged Basil, and how unjustly he'd suspected him and how wretchedly he'd treated him, going along with Leon's lying and saying, *oh, sorry, Danny isn't home now*, when all of them knew he really was. He thought of how much he'd lost, how much he'd destroyed.

He'd been naive, all right. But not the way Leon was always saying.

4.

After lunch they took the kids to the Arlington National Cemetery. One of the teachers got up in the bus on the way there, to make sure everybody knew that what they were going to see was a very *solemn* place, a very *serious* place. All the more solemn and serious, in that young men not much older than themselves were arriving from Vietnam to be buried there nearly every day.

"Then we've got to stop the war!" Sandra yelled.

Nobody paid her any attention. They turned the radio on again, so the whole bus could listen for the umpteenth time to the hit songs about boys in love with girls and girls in love with boys, and the kids went back to laughing and talking.

Waste and desolation, Danny thought wearily. He tried to think of lines from T.S. Eliot, whose poetry he'd discovered in English class this year, and to let the sad, resonant words of decades past blot out the licentious drivel of this blasted year 1967. At last the bus stopped. They turned the radio off. Danny made ready to tour the graveyard.

5.

The house looked different when he and Leon got home that night, and Leon unlocked the door and turned on the lights and helped Danny get his suitcase inside.

"I hope you don't mind," Leon said apologetically. "I got rid of all those old newspapers that were lying around."

Why now? Danny felt a staggering weariness. For the moment it was exactly as it had been nine months ago, when he'd come home from a long trip and found the house looking and smelling the same and yet it was different, changed. He felt like he was in a spooky movie, where you unlock the door to a long-familiar home and bring in your suitcase, and have the chilling feeling that *it's all different*, and the scene fades and there you are again, unlocking the door and walking in all over again, and the scene fades again and so on endlessly.

"I saved yesterday's paper and today's for you," said Leon. "They're in your room, on your desk. The rest, I figured, heck, if you haven't read them by now, you're not going to read them. Isn't that right?"

"Yeah, that's right." He was very tired, and wished his father would just stop talking.

"Meg is coming for lunch tomorrow," Leon said. "I told you that, didn't I?"

Danny looked at the newspapers on his desk before he got undressed. On the front of today's paper was a picture of a bunch of Egyptians standing on the

bank of the Suez Canal and waving their shoes at an American warship. The caption said that was a gesture of contempt. The photo had something to do with what happened last week, when Nasser closed the Suez Canal, or the Straits of Tiran or whatever it was, against shipping headed for Israel, and the Israelis kept saying that was an act of war.

So this is the war he was talking about, Danny thought suddenly. Not Vietnam at all.

6.

Leon said again the next day: "There's going to be war."

This time he said it to Danny and to Meg Colton, who was now his ladyfriend. It was Saturday afternoon, and they all sat at the kitchen table eating some sort of cold soup Leon had prepared that morning, before Meg arrived in her car. The soup was greenish-brown in color, and Danny wasn't sure what was in it. Pureed brains of space alien, no doubt. They'd eat his tongue for the second course.

This was the first time Danny had seen Meg since last March, when he'd been introduced to her. He and his father had been in New York for a get-together of Leon's relatives, and late in the afternoon Leon had said to him, *Let's go, me bai-i-i*, without any explanation, and the two of them had driven to a Chinese restaurant. She'd been there waiting for them. Leon had said, *Danny, this is Mrs. Colton.*

Danny saw a short, heavy-breasted woman in her forties, with gray-streaked hair and shoulders that were slightly hunched. He saw she was fairly nervous. She had a present for Danny: a book about the education of Henry Adams, in which he didn't have the slightest interest but which he thanked her for. As they were being shown to their table, she and his father had talked briefly in lowered tones

about somebody named Michael, who'd moved out from somewhere into an apartment of his own.

And now, as they sipped their brain-of-space-alien soup at their own kitchen table, Mrs. Colton asked Danny about those places in Israel you saw in the news these days, now that there was the crisis and everybody was talking about the Middle East. Had Danny visited any of them when he was over there?

He had. There was a photo in yesterday's *Times*, of Jordanian troops doing maneuvers in their part of Jerusalem. The caption said that in the background was the Notre Dame church, in the Israeli part of the city. Danny remembered how he'd stood on the roof of Notre Dame looking in the opposite direction, peering through borrowed binoculars into that part of Jerusalem where he'd never be allowed to go. Searching, among a swirling wilderness of walls, for the one Wall that really counted.

He didn't feel like telling this to Meg Colton, however. So he said there weren't any places in the newspapers that he recognized.

She said: "Did you know anybody over there who was a soldier in the Army?"

Yes, Mrs. Colton. I did.

A good friend of mine is a sergeant in the Israeli Army. He's from Philadelphia originally, and he's a UFOlogist, just like me. He solved the UFO mystery, actually, and that's why the three men in black were after him. They wanted to silence him, and the only way they could do that was by killing him, you see.

They wanted to kill me too. They wanted to tie both of us up so we couldn't move, and then burn us alive. But neither of us was there when they came for us, because he was sitting up all night in a Cuban café and I had escaped from them by getting into a UFO and going down into the underworld.

I don't know how long I spent in the underworld. It felt like centuries. We drank filth in the underworld. Greenish-brown filth, from a desolate lake.

But all he said was: “My landlady’s son was in the Army. I slept in his room while he was away. But I really didn’t get to know him very well.”

7.

The war broke out on Monday, June 5. On Tuesday or Wednesday, Danny happened to walk past a newsstand. He saw a headline in one of the Philadelphia papers: **ARAB ARMIES SMASHED IN BLITZ – ISRAEL PROCLAIMS TOTAL VICTORY.**

He remembered that headline for the rest of his life.

8.

“I’m a little bit surprised,” Meg Colton said, “that you’re not going back. Now that you can get to all the places you couldn’t get to before.”

Danny wasn’t sure if this was a question that required some answer or if he could just nod and say *Ah*, this having become over the past year one of his standard tactics of evasion and deflection. He couldn’t imagine why Mrs. Colton should be surprised he wasn’t going back to Israel. It was August already. Six more weeks, and he’d be starting college at Carthage. He hardly had time now for a trip to Israel. Even if he had any desire for it.

“Any time Danny’s ready to go,” Leon announced, “I’m ready to send him. He knows that. I’ve told him.”

Again Mrs. Colton had driven down to Kellerfield for the day. They’d set up a table in the back yard and tried to have their lunch outdoors. But it was too buggy, and the day was oppressive: heavy, close, lowering. It would feel better if it’d go ahead and rain, but Danny knew it wasn’t going to. This was

Pennsylvania, and this was August. After twenty minutes they went indoors and turned on the fan.

Leon chewed thoughtfully on a chicken bone. "I read in the *Times*," he said, "about how they tore down the barrier between the two parts of Jerusalem, the Jewish and the Arab section. And they ran into each other's arms! It was like a family reunion, the paper said. Like long-lost brothers."

Danny remembered that headline: *Arabs and Israelis Mingle Gaily in United Jerusalem*. It had seemed to him freakish, incomprehensible. He'd been sure that if the Israelis and the Arabs of the two parts of Jerusalem ever made contact with each other, it would be with knives in each other's throats.

Your magic binds together / That which custom has strictly divided.

Not for Danny, though. For him it was too late.

His mind had sunk into a dark meditation, on why it was that when you missed out on something you'd desperately wanted you never got a second chance at it, and how terribly unfair that was to people like him, when Mrs. Colton broke into his thoughts with another of her questions.

"All ready for Carthage?"

Well, yes, he supposed he was ready. What exactly did you have to do, to be ready for college? He'd preregistered for his courses. He'd signed up for the university meal plan. He'd been assigned a dormitory room, and even knew the name of his roommate. Was there more he needed to do that he didn't know about yet?

"I went to Carthage too," Mrs. Colton said. "With your father and mother. Did you know that?"

Yes, he'd known. He supposed he'd always known. It didn't interest him. He asked her no questions, showed no curiosity, as she'd maybe been hoping he would. He didn't know what Meg Colton, formerly Meg Kupferstein, had done

at Carthage, with his mother and more pertinently with his father. He didn't want to know.

9.

It was the third week of September when Leon drove Danny up to Carthage to begin his college adventure. Good-bye, then, to Kellerfield! Good-bye to the whole damn State of Pennsylvania! Danny was sure he wouldn't miss either one.

The night before they left, Danny opened the top drawer of the dresser in his bedroom.

The manuscript of his UFO book, the one he'd written for Basil, was in that drawer. Every now and then, through the spring and the summer, he'd opened the drawer to take a look at it. Perhaps it could be redeemed, resurrected. He might yet be able to publish it, in one way or another. At the very least – so he thought to himself, each time he pulled the drawer open – he could read and admire the work he had done.

How meticulously it was researched! How fluently written! How many quarts and gallons of midnight sweat he had poured into it, in thirst and in burning darkness, all while his mother lay on her bed in the next room gasping for her breath.

She'd died anyway, without a word to him.

Without a sign.

Shuddering in shame, he pushed the drawer closed. He promised never again to open it.

Epilogue: 1969-1990

1.

Barney Hill, the black man who joined together that which custom had strictly divided, died on February 25, 1969. He died without knowing that his harrowing experience, of helpless and terrified captivity in the dead and deathly hours of the night, had buried itself like some alien seed in the soul of his nation. There it would lie for years, quietly germinating.

Some twenty years later, the seed would sprout. Scores, or perhaps hundreds, would begin to remember their own unwilled night journeys into alien craft. They would remember how they had been laid upon smooth white tables, their orifices violated by rods and needles. They had endured strange, pleasureless orgasms. They had begotten and borne children, only half human. The unremembered hung on relentlessly at the edges of their minds. It became their torment and their obsession.

A professor of history at Temple University in Philadelphia, and a distinguished professor of psychiatry at Harvard, were among those who understood that in all this testimony was a real and vital truth, and that attention must be paid. Yet in the end all of them – those who had suffered, those who remembered, those who believed – were dismissed and ridiculed and forgotten. For the truth is that rejection and ridicule are the essence of the UFO, and the three men in black are even more real and vastly more important than spaceships that crash in the New Mexico desert, or tortures by perverted dwarfs in underground caverns, or mysterious red lights that swell and then erupt upon the face of the moon, flooding the scarred and pock-marked surface with blood.

Barney Hill died of a stroke, five years almost to the day after hypnosis had brought him face to face with the enormity of what he'd endured. He was forty-six years old.

2.

Danny Shapiro didn't hear of Barney Hill's death, either then or afterward. By that time he no longer even tried to keep up with the UFO news. His passion for UFOs, his conviction that his destined task was to solve their mystery, had died away almost entirely by the end of his freshman year at Carthage.

His belief died more slowly. He couldn't have told you the morning when he first woke up and knew it wasn't true, the earth is not being visited by extraterrestrial spacecraft. Yet even after the passion was dead, after the belief was dead, there persisted a vague but powerful sense that there was *something*, somehow, important about UFOs. But he could never say just what that was.

Browsing in a bookstore one day in 1987, Danny came upon a book called *Communion*. The book was evidently a best-seller, and its cover was dominated by the enormous black eyes of the smooth, mask-like alien face that was soon to resurface everywhere, in advertisements and comic strips, and among the ghosts and goblins and witches each Hallowe'en. Danny thought: *This is something I have seen. This is something I have known. This is something I used to care about.* He even picked the book up, and started to flip through its pages. But almost at once he put it down again, and walked out of the store.

3.

Often through the years, especially on those occasions when business brought him to New York, Danny thought he ought to look up Basil Richard in the phone book and give him a call. He would apologize, tell Basil he now appreciated what a truly fine friend Basil had been, how very sorry he was that he'd treated him so shabbily. Perhaps he and Basil could now be friends. Perhaps they would sit together over drinks, two grown men together, and Basil would tell him all that had happened in UFOlogy, now that Danny had retired from the field.

But Danny never quite found the opportunity, or perhaps the courage. He never learned that it was too late, that it had been too late for a very long time. He never knew that in the spring of 1971, just two weeks before Danny's graduation from Carthage University, Basil Richard had died of stomach cancer.

4.

Leon Shapiro also died of cancer, in the spring of 1990, when Danny was forty years old. He'd been sick for months. During those months, Danny had come to visit him several times, and gradually removed his remaining books and papers from the house where he'd grown up. Leon had suddenly decided not to leave the house to Danny after all, as he'd always told him he would, but rather to give it to his nephew Peter, his brother Mickey's son.

Leon explained to Danny his reasons for the decision. Danny didn't try to argue against the convoluted string of rationalizations. He didn't even listen to them very closely. He didn't want the Kellerfield house, and he was tired of listening to his father. He'd spent a weary lifetime listening to Leon, believing in Leon, trusting Leon.

After the funeral he went to the house for the last time, to take from it whatever he might want.

The shelves in his old bedroom were mostly empty now. There were suntan pants and flannel shirts, most of them checkered brown and a dull, ugly red, in the lower drawers of his dresser. Some of the shirts went back to Danny's high school years, but some were new, still encased in their plastic wrappers. Leon had stubbornly kept on buying shirts of this kind for him, long after he knew that Danny no longer liked them and would not wear them. He'd bought similar shirts for himself. Danny knew that the drawers in Leon's bedroom were filled with them.

The top drawer of Danny's dresser was empty. The UFO manuscript, which Danny had left untouched since returning from his trip to Israel, he'd already removed on an earlier visit. He'd thought briefly of throwing it away, but something inside him wouldn't let him do that.

Danny had wanted badly, when he took the manuscript from the drawer where it had lain so long, to sit down on his bed and cry. Back then, he could not do that. Leon, sick as he was, still clung to the aging house where for years he had lived alone. Gaunt and withered, he stalked from room to room with the last of his energy, keeping a suspicious eye on his son. It was as if he'd come to believe that somewhere in this house there was something precious—just what it might be, he didn't know, but it still might redeem his life if only he could find it. He must watch Danny carefully, lest Danny get to it first and take it away.

Danny drifted from one room to the next of the empty old house where his father had just died, saying his final goodbye to each one.

It wasn't me who was turned to stone when she died, he thought, marveling at how little had changed in twenty-four years. It wasn't me, the way I always thought. It was him.

I was in the deep freeze, the way you sometimes become when they've made you invisible. But when you're frozen you can thaw. It may take half a lifetime; but eventually you thaw.

You can begin to see.

You can begin to turn.

You begin to heal.

He stopped in his parents' bedroom just long enough to pull his mother's brown leather death-case down from the shelf where it had sat, undisturbed, for twenty-

four years. The *Mom's sneaks* box sat beside it. He pitched both of them, unopened, into a trash bag.

That's enough, he thought. It's Peter's house now. Let him clean it up.

He went back into his own bedroom and threw the top drawer of his dresser wide open. He left it that way. Peter could close it if he wanted to.

By the door he stopped for a moment. He felt in his pocket, to reassure himself that his car keys were there. Leave them inside this house, and I'm sunk, he thought. I'll have to camp out on the sidewalk, till Peter gets here.

He left the key to the house in the house, and locked the door behind him. He got into his car and drove away.