

Everywhere and All At Once

By
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EXP: Experimental Home Publishing

“Sphere of Influence” version 1.0

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214-907-4070, phone rarely gets answers, some delays in responding to texts. Email is preferred. Please put ‘Everywhere and All At Once’ in the subject header so I can better sort you out. A non-response likely means I failed to catch it.

Greetings from the Author. I appreciate the kind correspondence I have received in favor of the Safe Haven series. It was my intent to explore in a fun, meaningful way, philosophy, magic, and sexuality, which we all have, either through adoption, creation, or a combination there of. I am frequently reminded, by friends, fans, and my own eyes, that my biggest failing is grammar. I apologize in advance. There will be mistakes even in here, but I forged onward with the belief that I will improve, and that my writing will eventually find its own, and perhaps become a self-sustaining part of my life. That, and once it is out of my head, I must go on.

In the Ted Talk, “Isolation is the Dream-killer,” by Barbara Sher, she clearly establishes the number one reason for success is our ability to connect with others and network. We are social creatures and not meant to be in isolation. This is what this pre-story preamble is about; a reaching out. If you are fan of this, or other works, under my alias or real name, I would ask you recommend it or share it. My dream is to write professionally, which for me simply means, earn sufficient profits from my work to sustain more work and hire an editor who can suffer me. My perceived obstacle is having connections; the literary world is changing and competition is extremely fierce. Even if an idea or story is reasonably good, it may not get play. Somehow, though, lots of stuff gets through that may or not be good; probably by word of mouth, good or bad, provoking a response from others. Free-ebooks is a great format for sharing, and that’s probably how you found me. So I am extending an invitation to share my work, to recommend Free-Ebooks in general, and to feel free to write me to share your thoughts and recommendations.

And, most importantly, thank you.

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“In our time, when such threatening forces of cleavage are at work, splitting peoples, individuals, and atoms, it is doubly necessary that those which unite and hold together should become effective; for life is founded on the harmonious interplay of masculine and feminine forces, within the individual human being as well as without. Bringing these opposites into union is one of the most important tasks of present-day psychotherapy.” Emma Jung, 1955.

Chapter 1

'Sphere of Influence,' a book compiling excerpts of the firsthand witness reports of the end of Origin became available after the 'Great Fix.' The testimonies and opinions don't necessarily represent those of the publishers... blah, blah, blah. 'Way to cover your ass,' publishers. And who was this publisher, anyway, she thought; 'Mad Reindeer Games Publishing?' Really? That's the best you could come up with? The author was three names, Candlestone, Shackleford, and Emerson, making it seem all officious, like an academic text, which again, might explain why it was available to her and why it seemed obnoxiously in her face enough to grab her attention. But how could have it been done so quickly when 'End of Origin' had just happened! Janet Marie Hallcraft pondered the book. She went by Jane now. Bond, Jane Bond. Magical assassin extraordinaire, available for hire. She had been there, on Earth, what everyone was calling 'Origin,' right before the end. She was from Earth! She felt as if she should have some greater depth of feelings about the end, but all she could muster was "C'est la vie." Jane flipped to a page at random.

Some guy named Ted speaking: "No one heard it coming. How could we? We inundate ourselves with noise. We move from room to room, environment to environment, turning up the volume as we go, never acclimating first. Radio is stacked on top of engine noise, which is stacked on top of tires pawing at pavement. Music is pumped into the parking lots, and distractions follows us through the stores all the way up to the cash registers, where monitors run commercials, as if we require that external input to remind us to buy. And if that's not enough, everyone is nursing their cellphones. Tiny, noisy little babies crying for attention, while ignoring the real babies. Blood thirsty little cell phone babies that suck the lives out of us. At home, there are televisions in every room that never turn off, and still, I am nursing that little blood thirsty rat. I will sit on the porch with it, searching data streams for relevancy and occasionally spy the neighbor's family sitting on their porch, mom, dad, two children, and they are both on their phones. The drivers pass looking at their cell phones.

Noise. People sleep with radios on. Cars go by with their radio so loud that the car bounces down the road and can be heard three city blocks, and it vibrates the dishes in my cabinet as if they were monk bowls that have been struck with a gong. The electric hum of refrigerators, computer noises, air-condition and heating systems roaring, and if you live close to a road you

hear the nonstop roar of traffic, random mufflers intentionally set to full audio distress whine and weave through regular wailing, or random wailing of motorcycles, and if you pretend this might be mistaken for a distant waterfall, or one of those machines that creates “white noise” that people play cause we were taught to not to be satisfied with the sounds of our own thoughts. Who could stand their own heart beating should silence fall? No one could have been expected to hear the slow, incremental build up, and if they did, the explanation given was tinnitus.

“The deaf might have heard it, but no one listens to them. (If you think deaf people are quiet, you don’t know any deaf people. They are louder than the hearing folks.) Of course, all of this is speculation. People trying to construct an explanation for what happened after the event. Some say it was aliens. Some say it was the second coming. Very few people want to examine the thoughts that we did it to ourselves. It’s been said before that our hatreds, our jealousies, our fears, our secrets, these are the things that drive men mad. But it’s more than that, isn’t it? Our lack of compassion for ourselves makes it impossible to hold true compassion for others. Our lack of self-examination doesn’t help. Touching our own thoughts and emotions as artifacts and contemplating whether our perception is wrong just doesn’t happen naturally any more. The sane people, the ones who know their thoughts are awful, they go and get medicated so they can try and think good thoughts. If you weren’t anxious in our world, you were either numbed by Xanax, street drugs, or you just weren’t living. Tuning out is a learned behavior. Unable to examine ourselves, recognize our own biases, how could we have hoped to truly comprehend others, much less deal with what was to come.

“Sorry, it’s difficult to not sound as if I’m preaching. I have my biases and my soap boxes and I am sorting them in an effort to see what really happened, but it’s all tangled. I’m writing this in order to share with those that do not have the Ability, those that came from before the incident, or who simply agreed not to manifest further. Whether it was aliens, evolution, ourselves, an awakening, or God, at 19:00 Greenwich Mean Time, Thursday, September 22, 2016, humanity was changed. I don’t like to say the world came to an end. (I know I died, but I am still here.) Sure, we had the ability to destroy all life on Earth, and we nearly did on several occasions prior to the Ability, and we were living during an extinction event, one that rivaled the previous major five extinction events. Most people didn’t know how close we had come to doing ourselves in until after the Ability, which itself should have been a wakeup call, but we were still too preoccupied with self to sort all of the stuff that came available. And, I say that with all

humbleness, not accusatory at all. No one really knows how they will respond to ‘real’ fight or flight mode until that part of your brain is activated.

“It was initially perceived as a light, as if lightening had struck and the sky had turned that electric blue, only instead of for an instant, the blueness was sustained. Everything was bathed in this light, but even odder was the fact that there were no shadows cast, and no way to determine the source of the light. Collectively, the entire world held their breath. Was this the end? Is this nuclear war? The entire world bore witness to this light simultaneously. The sleeping woke instantly, no transition time, just instant awake. Even babies had the common sense to marvel silently, as if transfixed, reaching up as if towards a mobile.

“A sudden hush fell over humanity. It’s the kind of remarkable silence that sometimes occurs in a group, like a wave of quiet over a cafeteria when all the conversations simultaneously end, as if there is a natural rhythm even to human conversations and we’re all in sync. We’re so use to expecting chaos that we try not to think about these moments of synchronicity, and if we think of it at all, we internalize it as a spiritual phenomenon or simple material entrainment that is shattered by explanations.

“Then someone laughed.

“It was contagious. People joined in, a person at a time, then groups of people, then nations. It was a good laugh, at first. A sigh of relief, really. We were laughing because we were still breathing, not being incinerated by nuclear fission. We were alright. Until someone realized that the laughter could be heard inside our heads. That realization ended the laughter and quiet rained for maybe a second before the first question hit and echoed from mind to mind. If I remember correctly, I think it was “What the fuck?” It wasn’t in English, but it needed no translation.

“In one instance, every human being on the planet simultaneously discovered they were telepathic. The first Ability. Within 24 hours of that moment, half the world’s population would be dead, the direct result of murder or suicide. I survived for 26 hours.

“The old world operated on secrets and lies. Not in a bad, conspiratorial way. Poker games aren’t any fun if everyone at the tables knows what everyone else’s cards are. It’s the same way with the economy. Value is artificially created, and so there can be no negotiations when you take the game out of haggling. And that’s the easy one to understand. It’s harder to understand that every human relationship is built on the same system of micromanaging image.

You only have to take a cursory look at any profile on a dating app to know this is true. Who leads with their bad shit? I snore, I have a roaming eye, I fucked the mailman. If you only knew how much doubt the world carries you would have less bravado and more humility. You would be walking kinder upon the earth.

“Very few men are willing to own that they have wanted to fuck their best friend’s wife or their daughter, or fantasized about the secretary, much less admit that they held inappropriate thoughts about an attractive teenager, dressed trashy or not, or with boobs too big for the girls size and age, or God forbid, even younger than teens. They blame it on the steroids in the milk, and try to disguise it as ‘girls sure develop early these days.’ Did you read the list of gymnastic girls that had come forward reporting sexual abuse perpetuated by their trainers? And this was before the Ability confirmed and revealed the actual number of offenses was much more severe. Further, the companies hiring the coaches hid numerous reports about their trainers because the trainers were successful and it was about getting girls to the Olympics and prestige, not about protecting girls, and even boys. Almost everyone involved, from reporters to actual criminal investigators believed that it was just the top of the iceberg, that there was probably more mischief going on than you might believe, but, if you saw this at all, you probably saw one or two articles on it, and then, silence, back to the rat race, and trainers simply switched counties and companies because ‘accusations’ don’t follow in that world. And if you were one of the perpetrators, and suddenly you have the Ability and realize, fuck, everyone knows! Suicide or death by posse. What would you chose? There are scores of people who had inappropriate thoughts and never ever acted on the thought or impulse, all of humanity, and posse came after them, too. Even some good people who were in some really close calls due to proximity and potentiality that still ended up being pursued by group vigilante. Even if they weren’t subdued by the mental onslaught, they could no more live with everyone knowing they had held this in them any more than the people who had actually gave into the impulse. Suicide was easier than living with the knowledge of this, of the knowledge of the others knowing of this, and their actual and perceived knowledge of the other’s knowledge and reflection of that knowledge. Discovering that everyone holds these thoughts to some degree or another didn’t normalize it or minimize it. Just thinking I would never do that is in itself recognition of it being in oneself. There are shadows attached to that. And the people that went around pursuing ‘sexual child abuse’ as their

platform to raise attention frequently fell into two camps, the predators themselves, and those who were preyed upon. Yep, even the predators used child protection as a way to get to children.

There are, surprisingly, people who never experience this sort of abuse, who could imagine it but simply led their lives believing it happened to other people or it was rare or just the titillation of news and movies. It was more rampant than anyone ever knew. It was in your family, in your neighborhood, and generally, the more money you had, the higher rates of abuse. Child trafficking is not a poor man's game. Yeah, the police will make big headlines about busting a swinger home, or catching a John with a crack whore, but those aren't the people trafficking. They're also not the people spreading diseases. Swingers talk about sex and STD's. The person sneaking around on their partner because they are afraid to get caught by spouse or police, they're the ones spreading diseases, which means, the law is helping that virus by not allowing a legitimate pathway to get that need met. It's the high profile CEOs and politicians attending Superbowl games, though, who are involved in trafficking. Children disappearing spike during games and the bigger the game the higher the rates of kids missing, with Olympics at the top of the list. In the States, California is number one for child trafficking. Texas is number two.

"The Ability turned on a light and there were no more secrets. Sex, and our problems around sex, was the biggest human problem, bigger than greed and pollution. There is a belief that the more wealth you have, the more sex you should have. There is the opposite belief, too: if you're poor, you shouldn't have sex or kids, which just reinforces the other belief. There was real shock, pretend shock, indignant and righteous anger, accusations, discoveries of infidelities, hurt, loss, and that's all with just the normal sexual expectations we hold. Did you know we all have sexual biases and that we assume everyone's libido and normative thoughts about sex are the same as ours? There is even sexual racism, where people hold the ideal partner and have dating patterns based on that ideal, which usually matches the social paradigm, which means our preference slants towards white people on television is what gets played out in real life. Which is why Star Trek's Uhura stands out as a television first: a woman, an officer, and black! Sexual prejudice is a real thing, and so is our prejudices against height and weight and all the little things that we notice in others that turn us off and on that make us categorize each other and scale everyone on a continuum of yes or no or providing circumstantial caveats that need to occur before we will fuck that person. Did you know pottery saw a boost after the Movie Ghost!

Yep if you saw Ghost and suddenly had the urge to make pottery, you were wanting sex. Caveats like, if no one knew, I would so do that. Or, if we were stuck on an island, maybe. If she had a bag over her head. Or, even if you were the last man on earth, I would never. Until the Ability, no one even realize the degree to which ‘attractive’ people got away with shit that the less attractive couldn’t, and if we measured productivity based on looks, we would pay ugly people more. Knowing what our colleagues thought of us, the games we play at work, the petty backstabbing, the discovery of real and imagined value, actual and perceived opalescent, the disparity between real work ethics and what we really think, and the clash between what we really think of our bosses and those who micromanage everything, and the fact almost everyone believes there is a better way to run things and yet we constantly give in to precedent and or bureaucracies because that’s the way the operational structure wanted it, even though everyone involved knew it was stupid! And if they put a cute girl on the video lessons teaching us the company rules and ethics, we are more likely to buy into them! People have the right not to be harassed and people have the right to flirt but we’re all trying to control each other instead of just accepting each other, and so offenses are exaggerate sometimes or inappropriately ignored at others, because we don’t practice empathy first. The underlying problem is that we are all as disposable as the goods we purchase, used and toss without reverence to where they came or where they go, even the CEO’s, who frequently went away thinking ‘whew, that was a close one,’ because if people actually knew them, the real them, no CEO would get paid what they get paid. There is a reason why CEO’s manage their image and company through entourages: most CEO’s are psychopaths. If people really knew what they thought, even their entourages, there would be fewer CEOs. And really, after the Ability, it was very clear that most companies didn’t need a CEO to operate, and many of the companies that went out of business, was simply a way for the CEO’s to cash out of the market and go away with more money, which means a perfectly stable and functional company was destroyed, along with the livelihoods of all those participating, simply for one person to make more profits; and add insult to injury, the new company that comes in to supply the demand met by the other company hire the same people for less and is own by the same guy, just through a handler!

“Suffice it to say, all relationships, whether it be married couples, corporations, or nation states, they all operate on the same principle of micromanaging image. In other words, lies. Who in their right mind would buy a diamond for five thousand dollars when you knew it only cost a

nickel, and that there are enough diamonds on hand in the world to give every human being, that was 9 billion plus people at the time, half their own body weight in diamonds. Every profession was affected by the loss of secrets. Lawyers were made redundant instantly. And, like Shakespeare predicted, most of them were the first ones killed, right after the politicians. Lawyers had more sexual offenses than Doctors or Counselors or politicians combined, and if you believe the hype that counselors have more power differential from their clients than lawyers, you're not thinking right. Most counselors know they have mental health issues. Lawyers think they're clever and perfect and if you submit to their authority or charm and let them fuck you, they just chalk it up to confirmation, where a counselor goes thinking, 'was that transference or love?' Doctors had it almost as bad as lawyers in terms of being deliberately targeted, retaliation for direct abuse to perceived abuse. Most of the CEO's killed themselves. All the CEO's kids that had addictions and social problems suddenly made sense. But out of all the people in the world, the ones who got the worst of it were the celebrities.

“Physical rape is bad, but it has nothing on the brutality of a mental rape. We look to our government leaders and celebrities to inspire us, to lead us, to be role models, but in that we also want to be them, be with them, consume them because they become commodities, not human beings. So imagine you're the most popular actress in the world when suddenly you and the rest of the world become telepathic; you become acutely aware of twelve million men, and even women, actively masturbating over your image. Now increase the intensity, twelve million men in your ear, in your head, all vying for your attention, and the more you scream to be left alone, the more attention you get. Others join in because of the peculiar nature of the assault. Let's face it; there is a segment of the population that gets off to watching rape, hence the popularity of rape scenes in movies. It doesn't even have to be rape. Just tie a woman up and leave her on the train track. Men will get off. They will imagine themselves the hero. Why? Because, heroes get laid. Why do you think we day dream about being Keenu Reeves rescuing Sandra Bullock? And there are many women who want to be rescued, hence knights and shining armor Disney stories prevail. Sports people get laid because of their image, their athletes, they will protect us, I will be safe, I will so fuck that. Knights. All rescue movies is us wanting to get laid. Voyeurism is a learned behavior, and we had been watching television and movies and sports at an increasing rate of consumption for the last hundred years to the point our identities are comprised of the things we watched. Telepathy is 100 times better than television. It's 100 times better than crack.

You tap into sensations pleasant and awful and like the proverbial train wreck, you can't turn away. Your tongue always goes to that gap where that tooth use to be and explores it compulsively.

“It was the mental rapes that taught the world how vulnerable we really are. Our mind and bodies are connected and we can feel sensations by just thinking on it, and even more so when an outside thought directs our attention to it. It didn't take long before there were people trying to live vicariously through other bodies, manipulating people like marionettes. Most people weren't strong enough to kill another with their thoughts as an individual, but whole groups of people could single an individual out and that person would die. The strong minded could block these attempts to be controlled physically, but it takes a tremendous amount of energy, and that's assuming you aren't being ganged raped or purposely pursued by a community holding grievances. IRS employees could be dicks, but they were usually just following 'the law' but it didn't save their asses from the poor people seeking mental revenge. Anger and rage catches and spreads much faster than love and forgiveness. We never learned as a people to be group lovers; that's reserved for our private affairs and family units, and maybe a Grateful Dead concert.

“There is only so much the human nervous system can take. Some minds went away never to come back, as their bodies rolled on the ground to the ongoing assaults, appearing as if they were having epileptic fits. There were retaliations, people struck back at those who refused to respect certain boundaries, and it increasingly took group vigilance to enforce the moratorium on certain boundary infringements, but getting a hundred percent compliance in the week that followed the First Ability was difficult. Some of that was because just holding a sexual thought about someone was enough to connect your mind with theirs. The only other mitigating factor was that sphere of influence varied from human to human.

“Every human being was connected in the beginning to the point where there was literally one super imposed mind, but as the numbers of humans dwindled, so did the range of individuals. Within ones sphere of influence, information flows two ways, as if its line of sight communication; you hear what you hear, you see what you see, you feel what you feel. One could be connected to someone outside of his or her sphere of influence, but it also depended on the focus of the person connecting the two. If the connection point was listening to someone else, was focused on someone else, the surrounding onslaught of information could be reduced to

white noise. And even with that, some were better at tuning into that white noise than most, singling out specific streams of information, and there were still others that if they couldn't discern it, they tried to force the connection point to tune into what they wanted, which made a god awful noise like a record being scratched.

“Alliances began to form as people sought relief from the onslaught. Group minds were better than an individual mind, easier to defend, and some minds worked better together than others. There was always an exchange rate for community life. Those with the greatest sphere of influences were rallied around for support, for focus. Some of these individuals were weak, and gave into the masses, became the conduit for the group mind. Some of the individuals were fairly strong, and they manipulated the groups, even thrived on recruiting more into the growing collectives. Nations ceased to exist the way we once defined them, but the city names remained. There was a prison inmate in Houston who represented North America. He was not a nice mind. He may have been a nice person before he went to jail for a crime he didn't commit, but what you have to learn in prison to survive can turn the best man into a savage. Beijing was probably the second strongest telepath in the world, and she would be considered the most even tempered ruler, but only after she eliminated most of the competition in China and India.

“The strongest telepath, the man with the greatest sphere of influence was Panama. He wanted nothing to do with the group. Houston pressured him to ally, and when that failed, Houston began the assaults. When direct mental assaults failed, Houston began attacking Panama's family and friends, and sent direct agents to assassinate him. It's hard to kill someone who can see it coming, but also, there are no places to escape to. When flight is not permissible, fight becomes prominent. This was when the Second Ability became manifest. Cornered, weary, and vulnerable, Panama discovered he could teleport objects. No one knows what happened to that first assassin, he just 'went away,' but after that the game changed. Awareness of the event rippled across humanity.

“Houston laughed. “Nice trick.”

“Beijing was unable to duplicate it, but she discovered several people within her sphere of influence that could. Using her people's ability to teleport, she lobbed a nuclear weapon at Houston. People in the immediate area of Houston tried to teleport themselves out of harm's way, and humanity learned some interesting things about Abilities. Some people had Sight. They could see where they wanted to go, but they couldn't get there. Some people had the ability to

teleport but without the ability to see they had no control over where they went. Teleporting blind had some curious, but frequently deadly results. Houston combined people with Sight and people with Teleportation and relocated himself.

“An exchange of nuclear weapons began, but instead of launching them, they were tossed through teleportation. They were detonated by mind. Sight or no sight, many humans instinctively began to teleport. Fight or flight. Panama escaped to the International Space Station, where he discovered the astronauts on board had been unchanged by what afflicted the humans on the planet. There were others who tried to join Panama on the Space Station, but only made it into orbit, and the lack of air quickly extinguished their light.

“‘You can’t escape,’ Houston said, lobbing a nuclear weapon towards the Space Station.

“‘You can stop this!’” This was Sydney. She was a nurse and she had discovered the Third Ability. She could heal. She had locked herself into a nursery and was caring for the babies during the crisis, with a number of nurses that had aligned with her.

“For whatever reasons, Panama refused to be pulled into a fight. It was very clear, had he wanted to, he could have removed all the players that were causing problems. He could have killed every man with a thought and made himself king and had all the women to himself. He chose none of this. He brought Sydney and several of her companion nurses up to the station, along with the forty babies they were caring for. The astronauts immediately fell to securing the babies as they floated about the cabin. And then, Panama was gone. The entire International Space Station was gone and only a moment before the weapon detonated. Houston had at first thought himself successful, until he heard Beijing talking to Panama. The Space Station had been relocated to Jupiter. The sudden stresses of momentum change had nearly torn it apart, but it was still functioning. Though the exchange between Beijing and Panama were civil, Panama wanted out of her reach. He relocated himself, the Space Station, and everyone on it to the extent of his sphere of influence.

“Earth lost contact with Panama.

“Teleportation had other profound changes on human beings than the obvious ability to flee. The mind is mostly unconscious and self-regulatory, meeting the needs of the body. If you think your conscious mind is in control of your life, you are not paying attention. Had everyone the ability to teleport, there would have been so much chaos, humanity might have gone extinct in the next few hours. Any perceived threat was acted on, fight or flight, and most the time

fighting was the first response. In the past, flight was the first response, but with the First Ability, telepathy, everyone felt cornered and so, fight was now first response. Fighting came with the threat of being teleported away, or killed when a nearby object was teleported into the threat to neutralize it. Those who could teleport discovered that their bellies were always full and their bladder and intestines emptied of waste without physically eating or relieving themselves. It didn't matter if that food belonged to someone else; they would steal food right from the belly of another. Their bodies took what they needed. Males that could teleport were motivated by an even deeper physical need, the one to procreate and ensure that their genes won out over the competition. Sexual intercourse isn't necessary when one can simply teleport a sperm cell directly into the womb with an egg cell. And if the woman was already pregnant, the fetus was simply disposed of in the same manner that human waste was disposed of. This had already started happening before the moment that teleportation had become a known possibility. Some women found themselves pregnant, and sometimes, it wasn't even their eggs. They were turned into incubators for women who couldn't have children, or men who wanted more than one child with their ideal woman, and so both men and women were unconsciously moving eggs and sperm and making it happen.

“The war escalated on discovery that women were “miraculously” conceiving. Some men completed suicide, unable to live with the fact they were no better than lions killing cubs because they weren't genetically their own. That, and the fact that their method of sperm dispersion was no better than rape. The men without the ability to teleport, unable to protect their spouses or female children, attempted to kill the men known to be able to teleport, blind or not. Those who could teleport were most likely to win those exchanges, but it didn't take long before the men who could teleport were turning against each other. A man could no longer tolerate another man inside his sphere of influence that was equal or greater.

“We were no better than rats in a cage, fighting because there was nowhere to run to, no safe space to call our own. And you may ask how I know all of this when I died 26 hours after the First Ability. Death is not our end.”

Jane just continued into the next person's experience. Some random French girl, Adalene, translated for Jane's convenience, the words morphing before her eyes, but when she looked away, the words returned to their original French print like looking through a magnifying glass, the words magnified were English, the words warping to or from focus foreign: “It's my fault. I

destroyed the world. I received a text and when I looked at my phone, an App had opened. The App said 'enlightenment' with only two options: now or later. I chose now. Come to think of it, the friends I were with, I think they had the same App on their phones, and we all may have simultaneously responded. But I pushed now. I mean, what would you do?

"The sky was blue that day, but suddenly, the sky was more blue than blue. I don't know how else to describe it. Maybe if you imagine there being a thing called blue, or instead of the sky seemingly a canopy overhead but blue in your face, that might be close. Everything was still there, in this blueness, but separate, as if all material things were 'cut outs' placed over a blueness, like numbers floating on a liquid crystal display.

"Oh, the silence that fell was lovely. I have never heard a more peaceful quiet. It wasn't actually perfectly silent. There was a noise, maybe in the background, but not discernable at first because it took a moment to adjust to the silence. Maybe bees humming in a nest? I turned my head slightly, listening intently, thinking this is odd, I should hear the traffic in the background. And that's when things start to get a little freaky. There was no traffic. Oh, the cars were there, but they were stalled. No, better. Everything had come to a stop. Dead stop. The engines were dead. There was an airplane in the air, frozen dead, like we were streaming a movie and there is an internet connectivity issue and the picture froze, only the people moved. The plants moved; leaves of trees rustled in a silent breeze.

"I laughed. Everybody laughed. Oh, this is a dream! How nice is this? And then someone in Russian said, what the fuck. The laughter died. "This is weird." "I can hear you." "You slept with my husband?" It was a question from my friend and my response happened before I could even put a stop to it, because the outbound filter is for the tongue not the brain. "Yes. I slept with all of your husbands..." My friends were suddenly furious. I have never seen them so mad. I am not really surprised, I mean, really, why the fuck do you think I kept that secret, and I heard the voices of their husbands confirming and asking me why I told, and they were furious and making it all my fault, as if I seduced them. I wasn't opposed, but it wasn't like I went out of my way to make those scenes happen. And in every instance, I did ask them about their wives, but I own it, I did give in to the moment and their persistence, because that did feel nice. There were others listening in, and someone asked for details and the details just came, like movie scenes. "Kill her. She will ruin us." My friends were on me, taking me to the ground, one on my neck, another holding her hand on my mouth and pinching my nose, and another kicking me. I screamed for

help without screaming, but no one responded. There were other people crying and screaming. I wasn't alone in my terror. "Kill her" echoed. "Silence her." And then suddenly, I was out. I was out of my body looking down on the scene and the thoughts kept coming and my brain kept responding. My friends had killed me, but it had failed to silence me. My husband shot himself. My friends began to turn on each other.

"We had been near the park and I realized the squirrels were gone. No there was one. It was looking directly at me. It waved. Very odd. Then it jumped into a sky tunnel and disappeared. I wished for my own tunnel, and suddenly there was one. I began moving towards it, but suddenly didn't want to, but by then, it was too late, I was halfway down the tunnel and out of the world."

Janet put down the book as Loxy entered the kitchen. "Hey! You're up early."

"Yeah, had the most interesting dream," Loxy said. She looked back the way she had come and over the people sleeping in sleeping-bags on the floor. "And I figure I better get started on breakfast. Lots of mouths to feed."

"Yeah," Janet agreed. "Want some help?"

"That would be lovely," Loxy said. "What do you think? American traditional?"

"I always enjoyed waking to the smell of pancakes and bacon," Janet said.

"Blue berry pancakes?" Fersia asked, coming up on them rather suddenly, almost cat magic sudden, brushing into them the way a cat might.

"Sure," Loxy said, unperturbed by Fersia's suddenness.

"Oh, and milk, chocolate," Fersia said, hugging Loxy. She touched Loxy's collar. "Nice collar!"

"That is kind of nice," Janet agreed. "When did you start wearing a collar?"

"Oh, a long time ago, in a future far away," Loxy said.

"Enigmatic," Janet said.

"You were collared," Fersia purred.

"Shh," Loxy said. "You'll have everyone here wanting a ceremony."

Chapter 2

Jon Harister woke with a start, sitting up in bed, whispering Loxy's name. It took a moment to orientate, but he soon realized he was at 2nd Home. The bed was empty. He turned to snoring and found the source coming from someone sleeping on the floor. Lester. Jon's first question was 'why is he still here?' but instead of following it to its conclusion, he found the urgency to pee driving him to the bathroom. There were other people sleeping on the floor and it became a dance not step on folks. 'Why are all these people here?' he asked, and then the memory was available. Loxy had rescued a good portion of the student body and though most of them were magicians capable of traveling to their home world, the Safe Haven staff had quarantined everyone to planet Bliss, just in case someone had carried a demon off. Whatever Fribourg had unleashed on Safe Haven was too dangerous to be allowing free range, and the staff was still in a quandary about how Loxy had managed to save everyone by busting through Safe Haven's own quarantine barriers.

He slid the door open to the bathroom and found Keera drying off. He hesitated.

"Don't be silly," Keera said. "Come in, close the door. You're letting the heat out."

He entered and closed the door. As soon as he did, Keera dropped the towel and was on him, hugging him and kissing him. He just accepted it, a little confused by the intensity of her attack, and feeling uncertain of his response.

Keera eased up. "You okay?"

"A little confused," Jon admitted.

"World surfing disorientation, or concern that someone might hear the commotion if we get it on?" Keera asked.

Both of those sounded plausible and he added a third. "I needed to pee and now I am not sure I can."

"You want to be alone?" Keera said.

"No," he said.

"Oh, good," Keera said, locking the bathroom door. "I don't know why, it feels like ages since we last played."

She took him to the wall and his urgency to pee switched tracks to the other urgency.

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