



# TIME FRAMED

ROGER CHIOCCHI

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This is in part a work of fiction. Although somewhat inspired by actual events, the names, persons, places and characters are inventions of the author. Any resemblance to people living or deceased is purely coincidental.

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## DEDICATION

*To the greatest generation, particularly my parents, aunts and uncles - Phil,  
Joe, Bea, Mike, Kay, Roger, Vi, Adolph, John, Terry, Ren, Doris, Lon, Ace,  
Nat, Pat, Audrey, Sandy.*

*You taught us great lessons.*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This one was tough.

Perhaps if I was a more skilled writer it would not have been to the same degree. Nonetheless, this one stretched whatever skills I had to their natural limits.

I had this idea of writing a story about the present battling with the future to change the course of the intervening period connecting them, each to its own advantage, a conflict of wills and might.

Perhaps I did it out of stubbornness. One of the nicknames my mom crafted for me as a youth was “testa dura,” or “hard head.” With that one, she was right on.

Why?

Because I hardly knew all the implications I would have to deal with: parallel universes, grandfather paradoxes, wave-particle duality and the nature of human consciousness, just to begin.

So it was of little surprise when it actually took me 12 years to complete the story.

But now it's done, the result of all the storytelling might I could muster.

Not only was this quest a fantastic journey, but an education — it lead me to question such basic concepts as reality, the nature of time, the relationship between mind and brain, the future of our political society and world and, ultimately, the nature of humankind itself.

I enjoyed the journey immensely.

And, of course, there were those fellow passengers and tour guides who

helped me throughout the struggle. First, I have to acknowledge Caron Knauer who was my developmental editor, muse and provocateur. She pulled no punches, sending me back to the drawing board time and time again as I simultaneously cussed her out and was awed by her. Whatever she did was always in defense of a better book.

I hope I didn't let her down.

Then there was Molly O'Donnell — or should I say *Dr. Molly O'Donnell* — who artfully copyedited the final draft while also helping me with some final developmental editing. And, as a Professor of Philosophy, was aptly able to school me on the writings of Spinoza and a few others.

And, of course, my creative partner, Victor DeCastro, who willingly listened to the entire first draft— well, actually, more like the *one hundred and first draft* — as we carpooled to work each day. He also designed the book's wonderful cover. Bravo.

Great people, great collaborators.

Then, there's my daughter Catherine who is a constant source of pride and inspiration, a tremendously talented writer herself. And my many friends who have provided guidance and support, too many to list here, plus I don't want to risk leaving anyone out.

And, lastly, all of those out there who are willing to at very least ponder the possibility that what we see as and call "reality" on an everyday basis is really just the tip of a humongous iceberg.

Peace.

Roger Chiocchi

June 5, 2018

Norwalk, CT

## TIME FRAMED

*“God does not play dice with the universe.”*  
*-Albert Einstein*

*“Einstein, stop telling God what to do.”*  
*-Niels Bohr*





**Greenwich, Connecticut, Indian Harbor, December 22, 1963**

The annual family Christmas party at the home of the Percival Pennfields' in Greenwich, Connecticut was as much a marker of the season as the carols heralding from the churches, the twinkling colorful lights strung along Main Street and the lush green wreaths adorning front doors throughout the storied town. Everything about the family event held each Sunday before Christmas was the product of a well-rehearsed script, with only slight details changing from year to year.

This year, however, the serene procession of warm family greetings, clinking tumblers of scotch, Christmas cookies, and festive seasonal garb was abruptly hijacked. Without warning, some unknown force sliced a riptide through their holiday ritual. The incident occurred right behind the Pennfields' grand Dutch colonial, even as a warm glow emanated from its windows, floating into the frosty indigo evening over Indian Harbor.

"SHIP! *SHIPPY!*" Jonathan vigorously shook the shoulders of his younger cousin, who was sitting naked, shivering with goosebumps at the end of the old rickety dock.

"Shippy, what happened?" Jonathan shook the seven year old's shoulders once again.

Breathing heavily, Cousin Lance ran over. "Did you see the glow Jonathan? Did you see it? It was right above the water."

"A glow? What kind of glow?" Jonathan asked, confused.

"Over the water. I saw it. I really saw it."

Jonathan shook Shippy once again.

Nothing.

Shippy remained unresponsive and shivering as his vacant eyes stared out to nowhere.

"Go get Ophie," Jonathan shouted at Lance. "Go get Ophie now!"

OPHELIA PENNFIELD, Shippy's twenty-two-year-old sister, arrived quickly, her older cousin Christopher running beside her, with Lance trailing behind. She looked at her little brother sitting naked and shivering, his bare feet dangling off the dock in mid-winter. The site was so odd— so out of place and unexpected— her mind could not fit together the juxtaposition of images.

"Jesus!" cousin Christopher exclaimed.

"I think he saw something," Lance said. "I'm sure he saw something."

The other two young boys nodded.

When Ophie could fully process it, finally grasp the reality that the boy was sitting naked and unresponsive at the end of the dock on a cold, blustery night, she screamed.

Christopher turned towards her, held her face in both hands and commanded her to run back to the house for help.

"FATHER, FATHER!"

All heads in the library turned towards Ophie shaking in the entranceway. The contrast between her stark-white face and jet-black hair was more extreme than usual.

"Ophie? What's wrong?" Her father rushed over.

"It's Arthur. Little Shippy," she blurted.

"What? What about Arthur?"

"Something's wrong. Outside. Something's terribly wrong!"

SPRINTING OUT THE DOOR, Ophelia dragged her father to the inlet and over the rolling, clacking slats, rushing to the end of the dock. Christopher was looking deep into the boy's eyes, calling his name, as Jonathan, Charles and Lance hovered nearby.

“You see, father, you see,” Ophelia began anxiously, “there’s something wrong. He’s not responding to anyone. We’ve been calling to him. He hears nothing!”

“There was a glow, a glow, Uncle Perce,” Lance said as he tugged at his uncle. “It was strange. And then it went away!”

Ignoring his nephews, Percival Pennfield stared directly at his young son.

Shippy’s glazed eyes were penetrating and focused, but only at some vague, obscure point.

The men from the library swarmed onto the dock but stood back.

“Arthur! Arthur! *Talk* to me.” Percival Pennfield shook his son vigorously by the shoulders.

The young boy shivered, his arms wrapped around his knees, frost clinging to his soft white skin, oblivious to where he was or whom he was with.

“Arthur. Arthur, it’s your father!” Pennfield shook more vigorously.

Nothing.

“Ship. Shippy! What’s wrong with you?” This time he shook with a fury.

A series of vacant-eyed shivers.

“Arthur! Shippy! *Answer me, damnit!*” Enraged with frustration— *wham!* — Pennfield slapped his large hand across his son’s face.

Nothing.

The young boy wiped his face as if the slap was a minor itch and gazed again out into nothingness.

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**Greenwich, Connecticut, Indian Harbor, December 22, 1963**

Up until that moment, nothing out of the ordinary had occurred at this year's episode of the Pennfield family's party. The fire crackled in the marble fireplace and the player-piano cranked out Christmas tunes as clusters of Pennfield scions from throughout the northeast exchanged holiday greetings in the main vestibule, bunching into a bottleneck of goodwill and cheer.

*"Bonjour, mon jeune cousin brilliant,"* Christopher Pennfield bellowed joyously stepping through the doorway and dusting snow from his coat as he spotted his little seven-year old cousin Shippy galloping down the staircase.

*"Et comment vos études à Paris avaient-elles progressé?"* little Shippy responded, bounding towards his cousin.

*"Stimuler, mais difficile. Et vôtre?"* Christopher whirled Shippy around in his arms. Ever since little Arthur Shipkin Pennfield was an infant he had formed a special bond with his cousin Christopher. Although separated by twenty years, the two shared a simpatico that transcended age.

*"Très bien. J'apprécie en particulier la géométrie,"* the young boy answered. The two were widely considered the most brilliant members of the family: Christopher, pursuing post-doctoral work in philosophy at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, and Arthur, a child prodigy, precocious beyond his years, fluent in French since the age of five and already a master of geometry and algebra. The slight, freckle-faced young boy could hold his

own with his older cousin in discussions of mathematics, science and even politics.

*"Tres bon. Tres bon."*

"AND HOW'S Paris treating you, Chris?" a familiar, raspy voice interrupted.

"Uncle Percel!" Christopher pivoted to greet his uncle, with little Arthur draped on his shoulders. A distinguished investment banker, Percival Pennfield was tall and striking, his silver hair swept back fashionably across his scalp.

"Paris? Well, the professors are unbearably sadistic, the work is difficult but stimulating, and the women are... well, I think you know..." He winked.

His uncle grinned.

"SO, THE PRODIGAL SON FINALLY RETURNS!"

*"Ophie!"* Christopher exclaimed the moment he caught a glimpse of little Arthur's older sister.

Ophelia Pennfield, a petite dark-haired beauty with classic features and boundless energy, rushed over to Christopher and hugged both him and her brother. "Chris, how are you? It's been months!"

"Only six, but who's counting," he responded, kissing her on the cheek.

"You must tell me about Paris."

"Indeed."

*"Jonathan! Charles! Lance!"* little Shippy exclaimed with glee the moment he spotted his young cousins entering the vestibule. He sprang from Christopher's grasp and darted towards them.

"Well, it has to be the most beautiful city in the world," Christopher continued with Ophelia, "the food is beyond heavenly and, of course, the wines are—"

Shippy barreled into the crowd and tugged at his mother's festive green and red dress. "Mother, can we go outside and play?"

Margaret "Bunny" Pennfield shook her head. "No, Shippy. It's getting dark and it's viciously cold."

Shippy looked over towards his sister, Ophelia.

Defenseless against the expressive eyes of her spry, freckle-faced brother, Ophie was an easy mark.

"Oh Mother," Ophelia Pennfield twirled towards her mom, "let them go, they hardly see each other."

"Okay," Bunny answered. "But only for twenty minutes, and bundle up."

THE FOUR YOUNG boys barreled out the front door, caroming off arriving guests and bouncing playfully into the mounds of crusty snow bordering the inlet. The narrow beach was cold and brittle, with bristling water brushing back and forth against its thin shoreline.

"Hey, Shippy!" Jonathan Pennfield's voice cast a frosty echo against the slight whistle of the cold December breeze.

"Yeah?" His little cousin Arthur turned around.

"Heads up!" Jonathan lofted a snowball towards Arthur's face.

"Moron!" Arthur scowled, wiping snowflakes from his cheek.

Embarrassed, Arthur scooped up a pile of snow and ran towards his cousin. Larger and faster, Jonathan easily pulled away from Arthur's chase. Little Shippy was an easy target for his stronger, faster cousins; doted upon by his parents and sister, he was protected as if he were a fragile egg, its shell still too thin to weather the vagaries of the world. He made a half-hearted attempt to heave the snow towards the others before they ran off.

"Hey, Charles," Jonathan called over to his other cousin, "bet you I can throw one across the water."

"Bet you can't," Charles answered.

Alone, Shippy walked off towards the dock in a huff. The rickety gray slats on the lone dock protruded out from the beach to cold, dreary waters. He looked up into the twilight dotted by faint twinkles of early evening stars. The setting sent a chill up little Shippy's spine as the boy's oversized intellect conspired with his small, wiry frame to leave him both in awe and fear of his surroundings. Anxiously, he threw a snowball into the water and then looked up with innocence and wonder. After a moment of sheer elation— marveling at the stars and the deep blue sky— his jaw suddenly dropped. He blinked twice, observing a mysterious, shimmering glow.

When he realized what it might be, he gasped.

A blurry oval hovered over the inlet; it appeared as if it might be some sort of figure, but the colors and shapes were too diffuse. The voice emanating from the odd shape was thunderous. It echoed, audible only to Shippy.

The young boy answered it:

*"How do you know who I am? Who are you? Are you a Pennfield?"*

"Ship! Shippy! Come over here. We're throwing snowballs!" Jonathan called out to him.

"Ship? Shippy..."

When Ship didn't answer, Jonathan sprinted towards the dock.

*TIME FRAMED*

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**Lenox, Massachusetts, Gladwell Sanitarium, January 2, 1964**

A neglected, brick, ivy-covered structure, Gladwell Sanitarium jutted out from the Berkshire countryside with an inflated sense of self-worth. The tired old structure could easily have once been a shining castle, a home to the landed aristocracy, but no longer. That passage of time had sapped away all suggestions of ebullience and color. It stood now like a giant mausoleum, surrounded with acres of crunchy brown grass and a spiked, wrought-iron fence. A melancholy pallor hung like a dark veil from above, as if the elements conspired to assume the disposition of Gladwell's residents.

Percival Pennfield adjusted his omnipresent bowtie as he walked around the Cadillac to open the doors for his wife and daughter. As they approached the portico, he surveyed the old red-brick structure, his eye following a vine of ivy up to a third-floor window. He had serious reservations about entrusting his son to this institution. But his close friend Chuck Edwards, a Yale classmate and renowned internist, assured him this was the very best facility of its kind. So with a degree of hesitation, Pennfield agreed to have Shippy transported to Gladwell for observation several days prior to their visit.

"I'M PERCIVAL PENNFIELD," he announced to a Germanic looking woman with short blonde hair at the front desk. "We're here to see Dr. Hazard about our Arthur."

“Of course,” the woman answered with a slight accent, and an awkward squint in one of her eyes. “We’ve been expecting you, Mr. Pennfield.”

PERCIVAL PENNFIELD HAD DEVELOPED a set of keen, uncanny instincts over his years on Wall Street, and his instincts sent unsettling signals the moment he first met Dr. Emilio Hazard.

“A *pleazzzure*, a *pleazzzure*, indeed,” Hazard announced in his thick, Swiss-German accent as he offered his hand to Pennfield.

Pennfield clasped firmly. *A dead fish*, he thought, assessing Hazard’s flimsy handshake.

“So what the hell’s going on with my son?” Pennfield blurted as he disengaged hands with Hazard.

“I certainly can understand your extreme concern, Mr. and Mrs. Pennfield, Ophelia,” Hazard nodded and then smirked, exposing his misaligned, yellowed teeth.

“ ‘Concern’ is an understatement, Dr. Hazard,” Percival Pennfield answered with his sharp, raspy whisper, looking Hazard right in the eyes, sizing him up: a short, unattractive man with a shock of oily black hair brushed across his balding scalp.

“Excuse me, but it’s Ha-ZAIRD, eh?” Hazard again smirked and raised his eyes above his glasses.

“Of course, Dr. Ha-ZAIRD,” Pennfield conveyed his impatience by over-exaggerating the name.

“What can you do for our son, Dr. Ha-ZAIRD,” Bunny Pennfield asked, almost begging.

“Come with me,” Hazard directed, leading them up a flight of stairs to Shippy’s room.

UPON ENTERING, their faces turned white. The young boy appeared to be some sort of puppet with flesh, returning nothing but a blank stare, a few incoherent mumbles and some facial twitches. Bald spots dotted his scalp, each a connection point for an EEG sensor. The two bright lights added an eerie illumination to his small, freckled face creating menacing shadows behind him. He sat motionless on a beige, steel-framed bed with a Spartan mattress as the hypnotic rhythm of the heart-monitor pulsed somberly, its green line scrolling endlessly across its screen, leaping with each beat.

“We’ve examined him quite thoroughly, quite thoroughly, indeed,” Dr.

Hazard explained as he approached Shippy's bed and flipped him around allowing his legs to dangle off the side.

"And?"

"Watch," said the doctor.

The doctor struck the young boy's knee with a mallet. No response. He pricked his arm with a pin. No response. He brushed his cheek with a small feather. Nothing.

"What in the name of God are you doing, Dr. Hazard?" Pennfield growled. "What's all this poppycock with pins and mallets and feathers?"

"Be patient, Mr. Pennfield," Hazard continued probing the child.

"But I don't think you're getting it. This is *my* son, my own flesh and blood!"

Bunny Pennfield put her hand on her husband's shoulder. "Perce, please—"

"You have to understand, Mr. Pennfield, this is a very complicated diagnosis," said Hazard.

What do you mean?"

"He has limited motor-nerve response but then the X-rays show no lesions on the brain. So we have neurological symptoms with no neurological etiology, at least none that we've been able to discover."

"So you're saying he has a *psychiatric* disorder?" Ophelia asked.

"The signs are pointing in that direction," Hazard answered. "At first we thought his symptoms were consistent with some sort of delirium, but usually a delirium episode is set off by some external factor like a disease or a traumatic experience."

"The boys did say they saw a glow out on the dock, but we checked, there was nothing we could confirm," Ophelia mentioned.

"So then we thought, perhaps it's what we call catatonic schizophrenia."

"*Schizophrenia*?" Shocked, Bunny Pennfield covered her mouth.

"Yes, it's a rare form. But some of his symptoms lead in that direction. Watch." The doctor walked over to the young boy, propped up against his pillows, almost to a seated position. He pulled Arthur's right elbow up even with his shoulder and allowed his forearm to hang limp.

"What are you doing?" Percival asked, confused.

"Just watch," Hazard answered.

The doctor let go of young Arthur's elbow.

Pennfield gasped. The arm remained in the exact position, jutting out from the young boy's shoulder, his forearm dangling limp from the elbow.

"Jesus!" Ophelia cried.

“Oh my God,” her mother gasped.

“What the hell is that?” Percival barked.

“Catalepsy,” Hazard answered. “It’s a state of muscular rigidity or what we call *waxy flexibility*. We can place his limbs in any position, even a contortionist’s position, and they’ll stay there. It’s a pretty strong marker for catatonic schizophrenia.”

“What are you trying to do, make my son into some sort of a side show?”

“Not at all. We’re just trying to hone in on the proper diagnosis.”

“And that would be...”

“As I said,” Hazard explained, “we are leaning towards it not being a neurological affliction, but rather a psychiatric one, catatonic schizophrenia. That’s as close as we can get right now.”

“Well, I’m sorry Dr. Ha-ZAIRD,” Pennfield barked, exaggerating the pronunciation of the doctor’s name, “but that’s just not good enough!”

“I understand, but let me ask you this: has there been any history of any traits like this in your immediate family, or your wife’s family?” Hazard had an ingratiating habit of nodding his head, half-smiling, and raising his eyes above his glasses as a punctuation each time he spoke. Although the gesture was intended to be deferential, Pennfield took it as patronizing.

Percival Pennfield swallowed hard. “Well, we’ve had our share of...” he stopped and asked himself how far he should go, “...of what I would call... uh...eccentric characters.”

“Eccentric, you’re saying?” Hazard raised an eyebrow and flashed that ingratiating smirk, exposing his crooked teeth.

Pennfield swallowed again. “Well, yes, you know, I had um, an Aunt Sarah who was very depressed and ended her life in an institution, if I remember correctly. And there may have been a few others, and of course some alcoholics here and there, but how the hell is this relevant to the health of my son?”

“So, Mr. Pennfield, you do not think that a family history of despondency can have anything to do with your son’s condition?” Hazard raised his eyebrow, then wrote something down in a notebook.

“We may have had our share of issues, but no more than any other family.”

Hazard looked up again and addressed the family. “The young child has a condition which most closely resembles the symptoms for catatonic schizophrenia, eh? And he has at least one relative— a great aunt— who had to be institutionalized for depression and perhaps some other serious psychological conditions.”

“So you’re saying Shippy might have inherited this condition?” Bunny asked.

“Perhaps,” Hazard responded.

“So, what does this treatment entail?” Pennfield asked.

“Unfortunately, there is no simple answer,” Hazard responded with an almost condescending smirk. “We hardly see anything of this sort in more industrialized countries. You can count on your fingers the number of cases we see in North America and Europe. This is a phenomenon which we see mostly in third world countries.”

“Then why did it happen to Shippy?” Ophelia asked.

“Very good question. Very good, indeed. At this point we can only ponder upon it.”

“*Ponder?*” Percival growled, “You’re supposed to be one of the world’s leading psychiatrists and all you can do is ponder?”

Hazard nodded and smiled in deference, “Mr. Pennfield, unfortunately, this is a very, very intriguing malady.”

“So when the hell is it going to be over and done with?” Pennfield demanded.

“Hard to tell,” Hazard answered, “The symptoms may disappear, moderate, or last forever, quite impossible to determine.”

“Goddamnit!” Pennfield punched his fist on his son’s bed frame.

Bunny put her arm around her husband. “Please, Perce. Please...”

“I certainly understand, Mr. Pennfield, certainly,” Hazard responded. “But there is no established protocol of treatment for your son’s condition.”

“Then let me ask again,” Pennfield rasped, “what are we doing here if you’re incapable of treating my son?”

Hazard smiled deferentially. “Quite frankly, Mr. Pennfield, if anyone is capable of treating your son, it would be me.”

“Then—”

“I have examined more patients with these symptoms than any psychiatrist in the world. I have several well-developed theories of what treatment regimen might be most successful.”

“So let’s get going,” Ophie responded.

“Unfortunately, Ophelia,” Hazard nodded and raised his eyebrows again, “it’s not quite that simple. I have applied numerous times for funding for clinical research which— in my humble opinion— would help moderate this condition. But, regretfully, the funding has never materialized. They say the affliction is far too rare.”

“Funding, eh?” Percival Pennfield knew the subject of money would come up eventually, his only question had been how Hazard might slip it in.

“Yes, funding.” Hazard answered. “For fifty or sixty thousand dollars, we would be able to make serious strides in the treatment of young Arthur’s affliction.” Hazard nodded at Ophelia. “An unfortunate affliction. Very, very unfortunate.”

Inside, Pennfield chuckled. The way Dr. Hazard pandered to Ophelia was so transparent it was almost comical. He looked Hazard in the eyes. “Can I speak with my wife and daughter in private for a moment, Dr. Hazard?”

“Yes, of course. Of course, Mr. Pennfield.” Hazard nodded and then backed his way out of the room.

“WHAT DO YOU THINK, PERCE?” Bunny asked.

“I don’t know. Frankly,” Percival answered, “I expected him to ask for much more.”

“Father, does everything in life have to be about *money*? Just give it to him.” Ophelia raised her voice.

“Perce, will you do it?” Bunny asked.

“Well, you can’t deny it,” Pennfield rasped, “the man’s credentials are impeccable. Yet there’s something about him that bothers me, makes me queasy.”

“But he’s the best in the world, Father,” Ophelia countered. “Doesn’t our Shippy deserve the very best?”

Silently, Pennfield focused on the catatonic Ship, then gazed out the window at the rolling countryside. He thought for several moments, and then swallowed hard. “Perhaps it might be worth giving Dr. Ha-*ZAIRD* an opportunity. This place is close enough to visit, but far enough away from the New York riff-raff. Yes, it could work for us.”

“Percival, is that your only concern, staying away from the New York riff-raff?” Bunny admonished her husband.

“Whatever you may want to think, it’s important, Bunny,” Pennfield said, “extremely important.”

“DR. HAZARD,” Percival Pennfield immediately addressed the doctor as he re-entered the room, “My family and I are in agreement. I’m prepared to fund all of your research personally.”

“I see. Of course.” Hazard nodded, stunned.

“So, it’s settled,” Pennfield stood up from his chair and offered his hand. “Arthur will stay here at Gladwell, and you will take steps to begin your research immediately.”

“Yes. Of course.” Hazard was taken aback by the suddenness of the Pennfields’ decision.

Pennfield led Bunny and Ophelia towards the door. “You can expect a check in three days, Dr. Hazard. Certified, of course. Just get our Shippy back to normal.”

Hazard saved his largest smirk for last.

\* \* \*

**Lenox, Massachusetts, Gladwell Sanitarium, January – June, 1964**

**F**or days, the young boy sat straight up in his hospital bed, comatose and oblivious to his surroundings: his head shaven, his eyes vacant and deep, his face expressing a bland state of indifference. Sensors on his head and chest sent a rhythmic set of beats to the monitors above. Ostensibly, he was a seven-year-old boy sitting up in a hospital bed, nothing radically unusual, but the vacant eeriness of his expression, his hollow unresponsiveness, and the rhythmic expansion and contraction of his chest with each breath—the sole evidence of his existence—formed a jolting, disconcerting sight.

Each moment little Ship endured this condition— this stranglehold on his senses— the affliction matured; what began as a presumed acute attack which would hopefully inflict its damage and then be over and done with, soon deepened into something more chronic, one that might last forever. His family gradually resigned themselves to the unsettling possibility of permanence.

Ship's days were not without minor deviations from the norm. During his second month at Gladwell, Drs. Hazard and Hoq noticed some slight twitching around his nose and eyes. Although hopeful— since this slight response by Ship might be a nascent sign of the efficacy of their care— the doctors cautiously reigned in their enthusiasm, restraining themselves from over-reacting. Anxiously, they waited for a more concrete sign.

Several weeks later, such a sign came.

The young boy's eyes bulged, the veins in his neck quivered, sweat poured



down his face as he battled with his faculties. He struggled to move his lips even slightly. Gradually he formed a sound, sapping every ounce of energy his body could muster.

“...*Spuh...Spuh...*,” Ship stuttered in a soft whisper, “*Spuh... Spuh...*” He took a deep breath, held it in for a moment, and let out a sound: “... *Spuh... Spuh...Sparrrrrrr...*”

Hazard and Hoq hovered over him, noticing every little movement, hanging onto every little grunt. The young boy struggled once more, white-faced and clammy from his sweat. He was not yet done.

“*Ruh... Ruh...*” his neck turned red, his veins popping as he struggled, “... *Ruh...Ruh... Rowwwww,*” he blurted.

He took a deep, deep breath. He held it in, then spouted hastily as the air rushed out: “*Spaar-rooowww.*”

“What was that he said, ‘*Sparrow*’ like the bird?” Hoq asked Hazard.

“That’s what I heard,” Hazard responded.

“What do you think it means?” Hoq asked.

“I have no idea.”

\* \* \*

*GREENWICH, Connecticut*

*Indian Harbor*

*Time: Unknown*

A SPONGE FOR KNOWLEDGE, Shippy Pennfield loved nature and loved to explore. On weekend days he would spend hours in the nearby woods weaving between the houses on Indian Harbor, even wandering right on to their properties, alone or with friends, climbing trees, playing games, chasing squirrels and all other types of animals. On this clear Spring day in April, he and his friends—Tommy Murphy, Jake Sunderland and Allie Johnson—were deep into a series of games of Hide and Seek. This time, Shippy was “It,” his hands over his eyes and his face pressed to a tree trunk as his friends scurried about the woods, rushing to find their hiding places.

“... *Seven... Eight... Nine... Ten...*” Ship removed his hands from over his eyes and shouted, “*Ready or not, here I come!*”

He listened for rustling sounds. He tried to sense his friends’ last-second attempts at camouflage, tried to pick up sounds that would lead him to their hiding places. He heard some rustling, but it sounded much too close; it certainly couldn’t be his friends.

He looked down, sensing motion. Something covered in leaves jittered around a small puddle. *Some tiny animal*— he thought. He went down on his knees and observed more closely. Whatever it was didn't seem to be moving properly, as if limping. As he leaned closer in, he could see the feathers: a small bird.

"Hello, Mr. Bird," Ship said, surprised it didn't fly away.

Sadly, the little bird just looked back at him.

Ship could tell something was wrong. The bird hardly struggled when Ship picked it up, lifting it to eye-level. Quickly, Ship could see the problem. The little bird's right wing was broken. When he tried to rub his thumb across it, the little bird chirped.

"What happened to you?" Ship asked.

The bird seemed comfortable in Ship's cupped hands, almost as if in a nest, peaceful and nurtured.

"We have to do something about your wing, don't we?" Ship said to the bird. "I think I have an idea."

Ship began to walk off, the bird securely in his hands.

"Ship! Shippy!" his friends shouted, wondering what had happened to their game. "What's going on?"

"Got something I've got to do," Ship shouted back. "Follow me!"

The four of them traded one adventure for another as they followed Ship down the street to his house. He led them over to a little tool shed in the back. Musty and damp, the shed was full of wooden shelves with all sorts of boxes randomly stacked. Ship's eyes roamed across the shelves until he noticed an old shoebox. He pulled it down. It was greasy and full of screws, nuts and bolts. He dumped the contents onto the floor and then ran outside the shed, picking up leaves, grass and twigs. He placed them in the box, patting them down, creating a comfy home for his little guest.

"You think it's gonna stay in there?" Tommy asked.

"Sure," Ship answered, "he has a broken wing."

"But how's it gonna eat?" Jake asked.

Ship thought for a moment, then said, "good point. I'll be right back."

Ship rushed over to the house, leapt up the back steps and into the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator door and searched for a loaf of bread.

"Shippy, what are you doing?" His mother called out to him from the living room.

"I need a piece of bread to feed a bird we found."

"Be careful, they carry germs you know."

"Don't worry, Mom."

Ship bolted out the door and back over to the shed. Carefully, he pulled the

piece of bread apart and crumbled it into little pieces. He spread them in the shoebox. At first, the bird was cautious, then began to peck away.

“Welcome to your new home, Mr. Bird,” Ship addressed the little animal.

“Yeah, but what are you going to do about his wing?” Allie Johnson asked.

“Tomorrow at school, I’ll go to the library and look it up,” Ship answered.

THE NEXT DAY, Ship found a book in the school library titled *All About Birds*. Mostly a picture book, it allowed Ship to identify his little friend as a sparrow. He flipped through the pages until he came to a chapter on Care and Feeding. Several pages into it, he spotted a series of drawings demonstrating how to care for a broken wing. Immediately, Ship took the book over to the librarian and checked it out.

“OPHIE, can you take me to the store?” he asked his big sister when he arrived home.

“For what?”

“I need to get some stuff,” he answered. “I want to fix my little sparrow’s wing.”

His father sat nearby in his leather chair, his face buried in his daily copy of *The Times*, his tumbler of scotch on the side-table. “And what do you want to do that for?” he asked, still shielded behind his newspaper.

“Of course, to help him, Father,” Shippy answered.

“He’s probably gonna die, you know,” his father said tersely. “Why waste the time?”

“Oh, phooey, Father,” Ophie admonished him. “Who knows? Perhaps we have a doctor in the making.” She looked over towards Shippy. “C’mon Ship, let’s go.”

THAT EVENING, Ship went to work. He pulled on the chain to the tool shed’s overhead light and laid out his supplies. First, he washed the little bird with a special soap they bought at the drug store, then sprinkled him with water. He dried the little sparrow carefully, making sure not to hurt his damaged wing. Ship then cut a twelve-inch length of bandage and methodically placed it over the wing, securing it to the bird’s tiny body, but not so secure as to interrupt its breathing. He wrapped the bandage underneath the bird’s good wing and made several loops around its body. When he reached the end of the bandage, he

fastened it to itself with tape. Then he placed the bird in a brand-new cage they purchased at the pet store.

“There, Mr. Bird,” Ship lifted him up and looked in the little creature’s eyes. “I know it may be uncomfortable, but soon you’ll fly again.”

FOR THE NEXT FOUR WEEKS, Shippy nursed his little sparrow back to health, each day visiting the tool shed at least twice, feeding him birdseed and bread crumbs, placing drops of water in a little plastic container and checking on his wing.

Then came the day.

The book said to give the bird four weeks to recover after the wing had been properly wrapped, then another few days for the little creature to regain its bearings once the wrapping was removed. Halfway through the fifth week, the little sparrow seemed to have regained its strength, moving briskly around his cage. Ship decided it was time.

He called Ophie outside to view the event.

Carefully, he cupped his hands and lifted the little sparrow out of its cage. He held out his hands and prepared to release it.

“Aren’t you going to say anything to your little friend?” Ophie asked.

“What should I say? Ship answered.

“Tell him... good luck, or, you’re going to miss him.”

“I am, but,” he hesitated, “he’ll be happier flying around instead of staying in that old cage.”

Ophie smiled, impressed by Ship’s maturity for an eight year-old.

Ship looked at the little bird in his hands and whispered, “have a good life, Mr. Bird.” In one swift motion, he un-cupped his hands, springing the little sparrow into the air.

When the sparrow flapped its wings and flew over to a nearby tree. Ship giggled. “There you go, Mr. Bird. It was good to know you.”

Ophie wiped her eye.

EVEN BEFORE SHIPPY launched his adopted little sparrow back into the wilderness, he had developed an itch. His itchy skin—especially around his hands and arms—hadn’t been unbearable. But now, after doctoring his own sparrow, the itch had begun to interrupt his concentration on schoolwork and prolong the time it took him to fall asleep at night. Ship’s scratching had increased to such a point that Bunny Pennfield finally took him to see the family doctor.

“Bird mites,” Dr. Stevenson explained after a brief examination.

"You see, Ship, I warned you about germs," she reminded him.

"Don't be too hard on him, Mrs. Pennfield," Stevenson said. "He saved a little bird. I'll prescribe some ointment and everything will be fine in a week or so."

THAT EVENING, when Percival Pennfield returned home from his Wall Street office, he was much less forgiving.

"I told you not to fool around with things like that," his father admonished him, pouring his nightly tumbler of scotch, "the damn bird's probably dead already. Was it really worth it?"

"Of course," Ship answered. "Don't you realize he flew again, Father?"

\* \* \*

*LENOX, Massachusetts*  
*Gladwell Sanitarium*  
*March 30, 1964*

"*HAS HE DONE IT AGAIN?*" Ophie exclaimed as she rushed out of her parents' Cadillac and bolted toward Drs. Hazard and Hoq in the hospital's foyer. "Can we actually *see him* do it?"

"Well," began Dr. Hazard, "we will have to be—"

"He said a word, '*Sparrow*,' he actually said it?" Ophie asked excitedly.

"Yes," Dr. Hoq answered. "We were curious if you could ascribe any significance to it?"

Ophie thought for a moment. "No, not really, he loves the outdoors, though, so it wouldn't be—"

"Dr. Hazard."

Mid-sentence, Ophie was abruptly interrupted.

"Exactly what's going on?" Percival Pennfield continued in whispered, strident tones as he and his wife entered the foyer. From his sour expression, it was obvious he was not happy about driving all the way up to Gladwell based upon a few mere grunts.

"It's true that we shouldn't get too enthusiastic, Mr. Pennfield," Hazard responded, "but certainly we would consider this a positive sign, at least directionally."

"*Directionally?*" Pennfield scoffed. "Either he's responding or he's not. What's happening, Dr. Hazard?"

“Perhaps we should take a look at him?” Hazard suggested.

THE PENNFIELDS HAD SEEN Ship in this state before, yet the horrific impact did not diminish over time; each time they saw him— their poor little Shippy hovering in some gelatinous semi-state between life and death— it discomfited them even more.

Undaunted, Ophelia rushed over and tried to break through his seemingly impenetrable shell. “*Ship!... Shippy!*” She called out to him hugging him brusquely. “*Talk to me, Ship. It’s me, your Ophie!*”

Despite embracing him with all the might she could muster, Ship sat straight up: quiet and undisturbed.

“Ophelia, perhaps you shouldn’t disturb him,” her mother suggested.

“No, no, Mrs. Pennfield,” Dr. Hazard said. “It’s quite alright. Something has to eventually break through, disrupt his stupor.”

Percival Pennfield scowled. “If a hug from his sister can eventually cure him, what the hell is he doing here?”

“Mr. Pennfield, I’m sorry if I sounded cavalier, but that was not my intent. We are experimenting with different protocols of drug therapy combined with electroconvulsive therapy. It’s just a matter of finding the right balance. Perhaps a display of warmth from a loved one in combination with the optimal protocol will be what finally breaks through.”

“How’s your clinical study coming?” Pennfield asked tersely.

“Through your generous contribution, Mr. Pennfield, we are recruiting more and more patients each day, so we are able to test many different regimens simultaneously.”

“The sooner, the better, Dr. Hazard. We want our boy back.”

“Of course. Of course.”

Throughout it all, Ophie’s eyes remained fixed on little Shippy, exploring the contours of his face, searching for some sort of slight movement— his lips, his eyes, his ears, anything—some real sign that he was among the living. She had to believe that he was somehow aware of her presence, yet unable to respond. She gently grazed his forehead with the back of her hand. Could he feel her hand, she wondered, or was his mind in another place altogether, creating his own special world? Was she a part of it?

\* \* \*

*GREENWICH, Connecticut*  
*Indian Harbor*

*Time: Unknown*

“*OPHIE, Ophie, c’mon, let’s go out on the Sound!*” Ship called out from their old rickety backyard dock.

The New England summer day was perfect. The full strength of the sun’s rays reflected off the waters of Long Island Sound as the afternoon breezes provided a tranquility accented by the pungent odors of a salty sea.

“Okay, okay,” Ophie answered from the back porch.

“Make sure he puts his life jacket on,” Bunny Pennfield admonished her daughter.

“Of course, Mother,” Ophie shouted back as she ran out towards Shippy.

Tethered to the dock, a wooden Sunfish with a bright blue and white striped sail rocked back and forth to the gentle roll of Indian Harbor’s waters. Still not an accomplished swimmer, the nine-year-old Shippy was not allowed to take out the small boat on his own. Ophie’s presence was just as necessary as a gentle sea and forgiving winds for Ship to enjoy a jaunt on the family’s Sunfish.

“Can I work the tiller?” Ship asked anxiously as he jumped onto the small skiff.

“Watch yourself, Shippy, don’t jump like that,” Ophie warned him as she removed her robe, revealing a classic blue one-piece bathing suit. “And put on your life jacket.”

“Do I have to?” Shippy exclaimed.

“Even if you were Johnny Weissmuller, you’d have to,” she answered, stepping carefully onto the boat.

“Tarzan wears a life jacket?” Ship questioned in disbelief.

“Yes, Tarzan wears a life jacket,” Ophie answered. “Now man the tiller, Captain.”

They shoved off onto glassy waters, Ophie letting out the sail to catch a light breeze crossing from port to starboard.

“Steer to starboard,” Ophie instructed him as she let out the sail even more, repositioning the small boat for a smooth ride downwind.

“Should I pull up the centerboard?” Shippy asked.

“Sure,” Ophie answered.

Free of its dagger keel, the boat sped up, hydroplaning across Indian Harbor’s waters and into Long Island Sound. Ship’s cheerful enthusiasm soothed Ophie in a way that would be impossible to match. She loved seeing the slight little Shippy enjoying himself so. And, likewise, she loved that he needed her so.

“Can I work the sail?” Ship asked as they skirted across the water.

“Sure, I’ll take the tiller,” Ophie answered.

They shared a memorable few hours on the Sound, navigating their way past Mead Point, around Tweed Island, across the Sound to Rocky Neck, dipping in and out of Smith Cove, then downwind to Indian Harbor Point where they set course upwind for their ride home.

“Ready to come about?” Ophie asked.

“Ready, Captain!” Ship reveled in his role as a master of the seas.

“Okay, *hard-a-lee!*” Ophie ordered.

Ship let out the sail, and as Ophie steered the boat into the wind, Ship allowed the sail to backwind. He tugged hard on the sheet, so forcefully that the taut sail stood hardened as a strong puff of wind collided with it, tipping the small boat to port.

“*Ship, Shippy, let it out!*” Ophie screamed.

Panicking, Shippy grabbed for the sheet.

The tip of the small boat’s sail dipped perilously close to the water, the boat bouncing on its side. Ophie and Ship struggled to keep their balance.

*Plop!*

The small boat fell over, capsized. Its port side and colorful sail dipping in the water. The small vessel dunked both Ship and Ophie into the Sound.

“*Help! Help!*” Shippy yelled as he floated aimlessly in the waters, kept buoyant by his life jacket. “*Help me, Ophie, help me!*”

“*Don’t worry, don’t worry, just float,*” she reassured him.

A strong swimmer, Ophie dove towards his legs, got a grip and then worked her hand up his torso. She wrapped one arm around his chest while treading water with the other.

“*Ophie, Ophie!*” Ship exclaimed, hanging on to her.

Clutching Ship, she swam him over to the capsized boat, propelled by a strong scissor kick.

“But what do we do now?” Ship asked shivering.

“I’m going to let go of you for a second.”

“*No, no, don’t!*” Ship begged.

“Don’t worry. Just float. I’ll be right here.”

Ophie swam over to the boat, pushed down on its starboard side steadying the small craft, then grabbed the mast, tugging it upright. She lifted herself onto the boat then dipped her hand in the water, propelling the vessel with short strokes, guiding it toward Ship.

She pulled him on board.

Ship breathed heavily, goose-bumped and shivering.

“So why did this happen?” she asked. “What did you forget to do?”



“Ummmm....” Ship began, still shivering, “uhhh... maybe... forgot to put the centerboard back in?”

“That’s it.” She held up the centerboard, then slid it into its notch. “Lesson learned.”

Shipped hugged Ophie, holding on tight.

“I love you, Ophie,” he whispered.

“And I love you, too, Shippy.” She tightened her grip. “More than anything else in the world.”

\* \* \*

*GREENWICH, Connecticut*

*Indian Harbor*

*May 30, 1964*

A CHILD OF PRIVILEGE, Ophelia Pennfield had her quirks, a set of indulgences most ordinary folk could never imagine. An Aquarius, she would visit her astrologer twice a week— more when the situation warranted— never undertaking a major venture nor finalizing a critical decision without first consulting Miss Felicia. It was a habit her honors professors at Wellesley would have never guessed she had.

Then there was her Ouija board habit, an almost hourly addiction to conjuring up messages from the netherworld. Her elder cousin Xenobia— an odd sort, but with an incisive intuition rivaled by very few— had taught her to read Tarot at an early age.

Perhaps Ophelia’s most interesting quirk was what she called “talking to the window.” Almost daily, as twilight darkened into night, she would retreat to her third-floor bedroom, darken the room, place two scented candles on the window sill, look out and converse with the darkness.

At times, it would be a moment of silent contemplation, nothing more than a ritualistic respite from the humdrum of daily existence. At other times she would drift into a trance-like state, conversing with all sorts of people— real or imagined— on the other side of the glass. Occasionally, she would embellish her trance with a puff or two of cannabis.

During these window-sill rituals, she had observed many odd visions on the other side. Her grandfather, Benjamin Pennfield, as well as her aunt Sarah Pennfield Morton, the black sheep of the family, were known to converse with her now and then. She felt sure she had spoken with Joan of Arc, Sir Isaac

Newton, Cleopatra, Abraham Lincoln, a slew of family members and even Jesus Christ.

Tonight she stood at the window searching for solace. Ship's condition had preyed upon her, taken its toll. She was known to be emotional, passionate, but this inexplicable assault upon Ship's very humanity stifled her, dragging her into despondency, then mild depression. She was anxious, obsessive, yearning to help him, her little Shippy. Now, she could not bear that he was several hundred miles away, by himself, sitting upright in a hospital bed, doing nothing, experiencing nothing, and she was here at Indian Harbor, helpless and hopeless, impotent to improve his condition.

She gazed outward, awaiting a sign from somewhere, sometime, someone. Gradually, the scenery framed within window—the trees, the inlet, the twinkling stars—became one and the same. Everything darkened, the elements coalescing into some vast somber grayness, a canvas, perhaps, for a painting yet to emerge. Soon the canvas expressed itself, emanating a mysterious glow in the middle, a white spot, confirming her instincts: fuzzy at first, the blurry white spot grew as it sharpened into clarity.

An egg-shaped face, shoulders, arms: monochromatic, the shades of gray more than just an artist's palette; a spectrum of moods and feelings. Soon she could make out a wall, and a bed.

She gasped as the blur became real.

IT WAS SHIPPY, little Shippy, sitting comatose in his hospital bed, just as she had seen him during her last visit. His face—his sorrowful, vacant face—grew larger, closer. She could feel the pulse of his heartbeat, count his freckles, breathe with him in synchrony. He could see her, too. She was sure of it. He knew she was watching. Very slowly, very deliberately, he spoke, his lips quivering:

*"Help me, Ophie, help me."*

\* \* \*

*LENOX, Massachusetts  
Gladwell Sanitarium  
June 1–19, 1964*

HER VISION at the window left Ophelia with only one alternative. She had to be near Shippy. And it had to be *now*! She needed to watch him, touch him, be

there for him, maybe even save him. She had no choice but to go to Gladwell immediately. Undoubtedly, her appearance there on a Monday afternoon came as a complete surprise to Gladwell's Chief Medical officer.

"I'll be staying in the area for several weeks, Dr. Hazard," Ophie announced to the esteemed doctor as he greeted her in Gladwell's lobby. "I want to spend as much time with my little brother as possible."

"Of course, of course." Dr. Hazard muttered. "You are welcome here whenever you desire."

"Thank you," she answered. "Now can someone take me to Ship?"

HAZARD WAS NOT sure how to interpret this development. He could sense the strength of the bond between Ophelia and her little brother— absolute and extreme love and affection— but Hazard had an inherent distrust of Percival Pennfield. To him, Pennfield was a domineering bully and he wouldn't put it past him to have sent Ophelia here as a spy.

"Dalipe, I must talk to you," Hazard announced to his assistant. "Please join me in my office."

"What is it, Emilio," Dr. Hoq asked as he sat across from Hazard.

"It appears that we will have a visitor for several weeks," Hazard said.

"Oh?"

"Yes, Ophelia Pennfield will be staying nearby and I would venture to say she'll be spending a good deal of time here with her brother."

"And why is this?" Dr. Hoq asked.

"Frankly, I don't know and it bothers me."

"So, what should we do?"

"Cooperate with her fully on anything to do with her brother."

Hoq nodded.

"But be careful around her."

"I will."

"And Dalipe?"

"Yes, Emilio."

"Make sure she never gets near the basement," Hazard ordered.

"Surely, Emilio."

OPHIE WATCHED over Ship as if she were his personal caretaker. She learned how to help feed him through his tubes, deal with his catheter and bedpan, monitor his EEG and take his blood pressure. But her caretaking skills were far overshadowed by the warmth and comfort she provided, dividends of a

truly deep and undying love. She would sit beside him for hours and talk to him, engage in a one-way conversation with his blank, inert stare, peering into his eyes while always yearning to understand what was going on inside.

She regularly read to him, not children's books, but works reflective of his elevated intellect prior to his incident on the dock. She read him the classics: *Ivanhoe*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Captains Courageous*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. Rarely did he respond, but Ophie continued undeterred, convinced that somehow the words would get through and when his inevitable return to normalcy occurred, his intellect would be as fine-tuned as ever.

"Today let's talk about politics, leadership..." she began her conversation with him one morning as she did all others, opening with a daily topic for discussion. "There have been many great leaders of men, those who have liberated thousands of people. But there have also been tyrants, those who use their power and charisma to twist the minds of their people, leading to terrible, terrible things..."

Typically, she would go on and on and on, conversing with the glassy-eyed, unresponsive mannequin. On this day, though, when she mentioned the word *tyrant*, she sensed a stir, or perhaps a slight shiver. She went on, mentioning the names of some of history's most hated tyrants.

"Hitler... Mussolini... Lenin... Stalin... Trotsky..."

She stopped short, sensing something.

His lips quivered, he trembled all over, attempting to muster up greater strength. Silent, Ophie focused, grasping for every little sign of movement: another slight twitch, a blink, a quivering lip.

"Buh..." he grunted out.

Elated, Ophie encouraged him. "Go on. Go on, Shippy."

"Buh..." he strained. "Owwwnnnn..."

"Buh... Owwwnnnn," he struggled. "Bonnne."

"*Bone*? Was that what you meant?" Ophie asked.

"So...so...sorrtrrrr...", His face reddened as he conjured up the sounds. "Ruh...ruh...eeeeee... Saw-Reeee."

"*Sorry*?" Ophie translated his grunts into a word. "*Bone? Sorry?*"

"HE SAID SOMETHING, Dr. Hazard, he said something to me!" Ophie spouted the moment she flew through his office door.

"Really?" Hazard looked up, rose his eyes above his glass frames and responded softly, undaunted by her abrupt entrance.

“Yes. Yes.” Ophie blurted into his face. “He spoke. He actually spoke. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“I suppose so,” Hazard mumbled. “Exactly what was it he said?”

“Two words,” she answered. “‘Bone’ and ‘Sorry’.”

“And you believe the significance of this is?” he asked.

“I’m not sure,” she responded feebly. “He loved animals, loved the outdoors. Maybe it has something to do with a bone he gave to a dog or something. Or maybe he’s... *Sorry*... about taking it away? Who knows?”

“It’s hard for me to work with something so vague, Miss Pennfield,” Hazard responded. “Can you give me anything more?”

“No, I can’t right now. But I’m sure there’s something to it. *Something*.”

\* \* \*

*LENOX, Massachusetts*

*The Berkshires Country Inn*

*Twilight*

*June 19, 1964*

OPHELIA SUSTAINED her ritual of “talking to the window” throughout her stay in the Berkshires. Set on a hill surrounded by a grassy meadow, the Inn where Ophelia lodged offered majestic views of the mountains. Just as she did at Indian Harbor, Ophelia lit two small votive candles and set one on each side of her room’s window sill. She placed her hands down on the middle and leaned forward, her eyes shut tight. She concentrated mightily, hoping on this special night—the end of a day when Ship actually displayed signs of life, signs that gave her hope—her time at the window would not be in vain. Tonight, she hoped for some real, concrete insight.

She strained, then opened her eyes and gazed outside. Despite the twilight, the panorama of flattened, languorous mountains extending across her window was a sight to behold. Spring had bequeathed them with such plentiful and robust colors that even the sun’s daily departure could not mask their vibrancy.

She struggled to achieve a tranquil state, one which freed her mind and opened it to a higher level of consciousness. Perhaps the adrenaline flowing from her encouraging session with Ship was a deterrent. She would try something else. She stepped away from the window and opened the top door of her dresser. There, in a small pouch, she kept her rolling papers and a supply of marijuana. She carefully rolled a cigarette and began to puff, holding the

smoke in her lungs long enough so every cell in her body would be soaked with its calming effects.

She walked back to the window, took another puff and breathed in deep once more. Now she could relax, absorb. She looked out over the landscape. It melted away into something different: visions—provocative, resonant visions.

FIRST, Ship in his hospital bed, unresponsive and comatose.

Then, cousin Christopher, but an older cousin Christopher, his face hardened and aged, sitting in a dark room with large windows, sipping a glass of wine.

Then Ship again. Followed by cousin Christopher again.

The images flipped faster and faster, back and forth, swirling together into one composite picture: a transparent Ship over a transparent image of the aged Christopher.

They flipped more and more rapidly, so rapidly they finally melted away into a plain, homogenous white. She rubbed her eyes. *What was the meaning of it? What was she to do?*

She looked up and savored the vista once again. She couldn't stop now. She needed to find out more. She took another puff of marijuana, breathed in and looked up. This time, the quaint Berkshires panorama melted quickly away, replaced by a more startling vision.

*A MAN, perhaps about fifty, sitting in a cell in some sort of jail— but the jail looked old-fashioned, perhaps third-world. The vision focused in on the man's face. It looked oddly familiar. The more Ophelia studied it, she became absolutely convinced it was Ship, an adult Ship. She could see it in his eyes.*

*Then, suddenly, four armed guards marched into the scene and stood before his cell. One of them spoke:*

*"It's time."*

*The man gulped.*

*They pulled him out of his cell and surrounded him, two guards in back, two in front. They pushed him forward. His ankles shackled, he struggled to keep up. After he fell, they dragged him up the cold, sharp-edged cement stairs, scraping his knees and shins along the way.*

*They pulled him through the door. The sun shone brightly and the sky was an inviting shade of blue. A retinue of officials stood waiting.*

*One of them stepped forward and read from some sort of official document:*

*“Dr. Arthur Shipkin Pennfield: By order of the Apexian government and Prime Minister Izan Bonne-Saari, you are hereby sentenced to death by guillotine on this day of May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011.”*

*What!*

She breathed deeply, her face went flush, her horrific shock wiping the vision away.

*Bone. Sorry.*

*Did that man say Bone Sorry?*

She was sure of it, the man in her vision repeated the exact same words Ship had struggled to blurt out earlier that day. She closed her eyes again, trying to find her way back in, trying to learn more.

SHE HAD SEEN Ship and cousin Chris. They merged into a homogeneous oneness in some cryptic sort of way. And then she saw what had to have been an older Ship, being led to an execution, an execution ordered by someone named *Bone Sorry*. She opened her eyes and took another deep long drag, wondering what it all meant. But why would today's Ship, catatonic and flawed, blurt out that name? How could he possibly know it?

*Think, think, concentrate!* She goaded herself.

There's today's Ship, flawed and afflicted. And then, perhaps there's some future Ship: ostensibly healthy but in some sort of deep trouble. What does this juxtaposition of Ships mean? Was it some sort of choice? Young or old. Flawed or un-flawed. Sheltered or shamed.

Is a healthy Ship somehow destined to be shamed as an adult?

Yet, if Ship stays afflicted with this mysterious condition, any semblance of a normal life is snatched away from him.

Which is better: *healthy and shamed or sick and sheltered?*

And was there even a choice?

\* \* \*

COUSIN CHRISTOPHER, studying in New York for Spring semester, was a constant phone companion of Ophelia's throughout the ordeal. For years, they had always been there for each other, celebrating each other's accomplishments, salving each other's wounds, sharing each other's thoughts and ideas, even to the point of completing each other's sentences. They shared many

traits in common: an exuberant, playful *joie de vivre*, intellectual curiosity, an understated urbane refinement and, of course, a deep love for little Shippy.

After her experience at the window earlier in the evening, there was no one's voice in the world Ophelia would rather hear than that of her cousin Christopher.

"HELLO," the familiar voice answered.

"Christopher?" she whispered.

"Yes, yes, my dear," he answered. "How's everything up in Massachusetts?"

"Nothing's changed really. The doctors still don't have a clue."

"My God. That's criminal!"

"I wish you were here right now," she said with a somber seductiveness.

"I know, I know, sweetheart."

"I need you."

"I know. I know. But right now that would be quite impossible. I'm up to my neck in my dissertation, teaching two sophomore sections at Columbia, and... Elizabeth's here with me."

"I understand," she answered resignedly.

"But I'll get there. I'll be there for you. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course," she answered, then paused for a moment. "*Christopher?*"

"Yes, my dear."

"I want you to know something."

"Yes?"

"No matter what happens. No matter what happens to you or me or Shippy, I love you. I'll always love you."

"And I do you," he whispered. "I will love you forever my darling. Nothing will ever change that."

\* \* \*





**TIME FRAME: 20 YEARS  
LATER**

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**Upper Manhattan, Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, November 13,  
1984**

Columbia Presbyterian Hospital towered over the West Side Highway, keeping watch over the Hudson and the GW Bridge. The day was damp and chilly, as grey as the giant steel stanchions suspending the majestic bridge. A mist, similarly somber, tinged the air with gloomy wretchedness.

*If anyone were to choose a day to die*, Christopher Pennfield thought as he entered the hospital's reception area, *today would be the kind of day to do it*. He still did not believe he was here, paying a visit to say goodbye to someone whose presence in his life transcended family, transcended love, transcended romance. He felt more like a shell-shocked automaton progressing through a series of pre-determined motions.

If there was any place he didn't want to be, any circumstance he didn't want to face, this was it. But he had to be here, had to see her one last time. It would be both comforting and deeply depressing. He would be there with her, and for her, for her last moments. But the thought of living in a world without her was unbearable. A bright light in his life was to be extinguished forever.

"I'M HERE to see Ophelia Pennfield," Christopher Pennfield announced as he approached the hospital's main reception desk.

The receptionist on duty checked her list. "Are you an immediate family member?"

"Yes, I'm her cousin."

"You do realize the intensive care ward does not have the same visiting hours as the rest of the hospital?"

"Yes, but she's dying. I have to see her."

"I'll call up and see if they can take you. And your name?"

"Christopher Pennfield, *Dr. Christopher Pennfield*," he answered briskly. "I told you, I'm her cousin." Perhaps his academic status would add a little heft to his request, he hoped.

"You may have a seat over there." She nodded towards a couch in the waiting area.

Pennfield fidgeted anxiously. He had little patience for the bureaucratic ways of large institutions, particularly hospitals. Annoyed, he waited, as a knot in his stomach began tightening with each moment. Finally, after what seemed like an hour, he jumped up and marched brusquely to the desk.

"Have they responded *yet*?"

On the phone, the receptionist held up her finger, dropped the mouthpiece, and whispered, "I'll call again in a minute."

Pennfield looked at his watch. Only ten minutes had passed since he walked in the doors. He marched back to the couch.

Finally, the receptionist summoned an orderly who escorted Pennfield up to Intensive Care. Two large doors swung open, exposing a methodical chaos of nurses, doctors and attendants crisscrossing the room, intermittently hovering over one of the ten or so hospital beds draped with an array of tubes, monitors, respirators and IV-bags hooked and connected in all sorts of ways to all sorts of body parts. The orderly lead him over to Ophelia's corner. Pennfield braced himself.

"*Jesus Christ!*" he exclaimed. As much as he had prepared himself, he was shocked. This was not his cousin, not the femme fatale who had broken hundreds of hearts, leaving scores of suitors in her wake: the sassy English Lit major from Wellesley, the Park Avenue socialite.

Pennfield's eyes fixated on her now: a chalky white carcass, the bandage around her forehead rendering her androgynous. Yet, still, as his eyes seeped deeper, he could sense her inner beauty, her inimitable sense of style and spunk, her *essence*; those would never die, couldn't possibly, he assured himself.

"Sir? Your visit will be limited. About 30 minutes."

"Right. Is she coherent?"

"Off and on," answered the nurse.

He pulled up a chair next to her bed and clutched for Ophie's hand. He squeezed it. "Ophie, Ophie, what has this terrible cancer done to you?"

For a moment, she opened her eyes and squeezed back.

"Oph! It's me— God bless you my dear, God bless you," Pennfield whispered, squeezing back.

Her lips made a futile attempt to move.

"Shhhhhh," Pennfield hushed her. "Relax, save your energy."

Still, her lips struggled to form coherent speech. It came slowly and deliberately. "*Pain...*"

"What?" Startled, Pennfield at first did not comprehend her message.

She squeezed his hand and summoned up the strength to speak again. This time her meaning was clear. "*Pain...*"

Pennfield grasped her hand tightly. "I know. I know you're suffering Ophie, sweetheart," he whispered. "And as hard as it is for me to say this, soon your suffering will end, you'll be at peace."

Abruptly, she shook her head, her massive effort resulting in minimal movement. "No..."

"I know. I know, my dear," Pennfield responded. "But always know that I love you. I'll love you always."

"No..." She struggled. "You..."

"*Me?*" Pennfield answered quizzically.

"*Yes... You... Pain...*"

"What do you mean?"

"*You... Pain...*"

Gently, he touched her cheek, rubbing it with the back of his hand. "Don't strain yourself, my dear. I understand. I understand it all."

He stood there, clutching her hand for as long as he was allowed. Her eyes remained closed, she laid silent and still until he traced his finger down her cheek once again, preparing to leave.

Her lips moved sparingly, but deliberately. "*Protect...Shippy...Protect...*"

"Ophie! Wait, '*Shippy?*' What do you mean?"

"*Protect... Shippy... Protect...*"

"From— yes, but, Oph?"

She closed her eyes.

\* \* \*

*Various Locations*  
*1995-2007*