

Chapter 7

["Is this forever and ever and ever?"]

"Good morning, Mr. Royce." Dr. Brent Hoffman said smiling as he opened his office door to greet Scotland Royce:

"Beautiful day isn't it?"

"Marvelous. Good seeing you again, Dr. Hoffman."

They shook hands and Hoffman guided him to a comfortable tan leather chair across from his huge mahogany desk: "How's the world treating you?"

"How am I treating the world?"

Hoffman sat at his desk in front of a thick manila folder: "Scott, I spent all last night studying a mound of paperwork compiled on you. This is your tenth visit. Your memory appears

to be improving, but not as a result of these sessions--and not according to my expectations."

"Go on."

"Simply stating, your memory characteristics as associated with Scottland Royce are not restoring. You, my friend, are developing a disparate personality."

"Hell, I could have told you that. Come to think of it, I have told you that, several times."

"I know, I know, Scott, but facts are facts. You are Scottland Royce, without doubt." Hoffman grasped the folder with both hands. "Medical evidence proves such."

"Doctor, I can only tell you what I think and feel."

"Yes, that's correct." Hoffman grinned: "Say, maybe you were abducted by aliens. There are several case histories I've read in the Enquirer. Maybe aliens drilled those two holes in your skull. A mortal surgeon could very well have killed you doing that. You know that coagulate in one of them, deep inside your brain, cannot be drained--but, fortunately, it's evidently healing."

"Little far-fetched--these aliens--don't you think?"

"Yes. Sorry, I'm being a little facetious." He laughed. "Got to keep you smiling. Hey, maybe you're demon-possessed."

"Could be. But he seems to be a rather nice fellow."

"Yes, okay, now let me try to be a little more serious."
Hoffman grabbed his glasses and opened the folder. "Let me see here. By these records, you are definitely Scotland Royce. Born July 8th, 1931. Mother, Gaeland, died," he looked up, "sorry, resulting from respiratory complications at your birth. Let's move on. Spent your entire life in the Gold Coast. Lived with your father, Lamont, at the Drake Towers Penthouse. Quite a playboy--but very reclusive. Father passed in 1972, age seventy-four. You apparently took an interest in yachting. I found, from sources, that your father bought that Columbus Yacht Club, off Lakeshore Drive. It's recorded here that Dr. Wilburn Wells performed three cosmetic facial surgeries on you--four, after that terrible beating. Say--did they ever find those kids? Well anyway, in our prior sessions, you kept telling me you have no recall of such events and activities."

"Nope," Royce answered, ignoring the question about the kids.

"Isn't that rather strange? Especially with various aspects of your memory returning."

"Yep, strange. Okay. I give up." Royce chuckled, "Let's look further into aliens--or demons."

Hoffman straightened up, frowning, "Mr. Royce, I must be frank. Unfortunately, you have a mental disorder that is beyond my rational limitations. If they were psychotic disorders, like

multiple personalities, even paranoia or schizophrenia, I could very well treat them. However, the telltale symptoms of psychosis are not similar to yours. Your disorder is, shall I say, metaphysical."

"Let's get right down to it, Doctor. What is it you have in mind?"

"Thought you'd never ask. I'd like to recommend behavioral counseling by a Clinical Psychologist. I have one in mind. His name is Dr. Roger Hafton, my brother-in-law."

"Keeping it in the family, huh?"

"Somewhat. He is a Member of the Professional Staff at the Rhine Research Center, which is located in Durham, North Carolina. They delve in the field of parapsychology.... Now, before you make any decision about this, let me give you some background on Roger."

"Shoot."

"About five years ago, Roger was studying for his PhD in Computer Science here at the University of Chicago. Now, about three years earlier, he had married my sister, Joyce. They had a son--named him Brent, after me." Hoffman hesitated as he rubbed his eyes that were filling with tears.

Royce commented, "Something terrible must have happened."

"Yes. Yes, quite so. One day they were driving his new Pontiac on the Eisenhower Expressway when a brick crashed

through the front windshield. Roger lost control and the car swerved around, turned over completely, and then slid, upside down, and crashed into the right concrete barricade. His wife, my precious sister, and their son were killed instantly.... They found Roger out of the car lying on the median several yards away. If he had had his seatbelt on, he would have been dead too."

"Brent, I'm, I'm terribly sorry to hear that."

"Thank you. It was the worst heartbreak that has ever befallen me." Hoffman grabbed a tissue off the desk and wiped his eyes.

"What happened to Roger?"

"He died--yes, literally.... While they were stitching him up in the ER, his heart stopped beating and they could not get it started. He was pronounced dead.... Then, just as they were about to wheel him away to the morgue, a nurse saw movement. They rushed him back, jolted him a few more times and it began pumping again. He made a complete recovery."

"Well that's good."

"But he was never the same--mentally. I treated him personally during his recovery. He told me he had an NDE, you know, Near-Death Experience. Claimed it was not, definitely not, a dream--something real--totally real. Said he was happily walking up a hill toward a bright, sparkling light. He saw his

adoring wife up at the top, with cupped hand calling for him. His laughing son, Brent, right next to her, holding her hand with one and frantically waving the other."

"You know, I experienced something bright and sparkling like that after I was beaten to unconsciousness."

"Scott, I must be honest with you. I have reservations about NDE case histories, including his--yes, even yours. I believe it's a natural phenomenon, a sort of evolutionary defense mechanism to offset the fear of dying. The heart may have stopped, but the brain was still functioning. You see, I am rather skeptical when it comes to psychic mysteries. In fact, I'm a dues-paying member of the American Skeptics Society."

"Was Roger?"

"He WAS! But not after the accident. He became a different person. Was totally convinced he would meet his wife and son again. Would not even finish his Dissertation. Rejected several lucrative offers from Microsoft. Told me he planned to devote his life to mind research. Wants to prove the existence of life after death.... At any rate, a short time later, he sold everything and left Chicago. Moved to Durham, where he entered Graduate School at Duke University, and eventually obtained a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology."

"Now I got it. I gather you want him to study me."

"Scott, you must understand--I'm an Agnostic. That simply means this--I don't know. I may be a skeptic that supports scientific methodology, but I still don't know. In fact, I don't think anybody knows how the mind works. We must rely on case histories.... Now--in the ten sessions we've had, you seemed possessed by somebody other than Scottland Royce, which is contrary to my logic and belief system. Down there at the RRC, they would welcome experimenting with your psychic bodily possession disorder, or what have you.... Just possibly, I don't know, you could benefit from these experiments. Possibly, find your real self. Hopefully, it's Scottland Royce. Believe me--I have thought this over very carefully last night. I honestly can think of no other alternative treatment. And--I am somewhat ashamed to have reached such an irrational conclusion."

"Dr. Hoffman, if you walked in my shoes, you would welcome a witch doctor, if you thought he could relieve the mental anguish I am going through."

"I guess so." He stood to shake. "Let me know of your decision and I'll contact Roger and give him all the particulars."

"Call him up--right now. Send him all my records. Tell him I'm on my way--with a big donation.... Oh, and send me a copy of that manila folder you have there. It will come in very handy. I need to brush up on my past--as Scottland Royce. That

staff of mine is beginning to wonder why I don't talk much about myself."

"So do I--Mr. Royce--so do I."

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