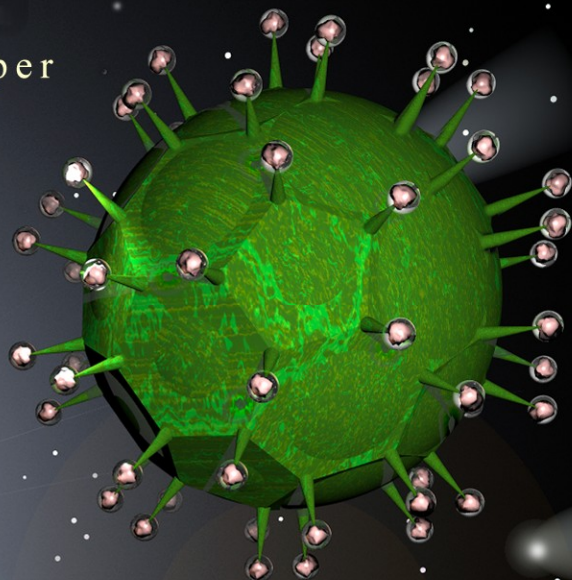


THE
WROUSSARA
TRILOGY

Volume I - Star Hopper



A Science Fiction
by
TIMOTHY M. THOMPSON

Published by ClydeSight Productions

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T H E

W R O U S S A R A

T R I L O G Y

A science fiction by Timothy M. Thompson

VOLUME I
Star Hopper

P R E V I E W

W R O U S S A R A :

Phonetic Pronunciation: (*roo-saw-rah*)

Function: Proper noun, adjective

Etymology: *unknown*

Meaning: *We Who Are One.*



E-Published by [ClydeSight Productions](#)

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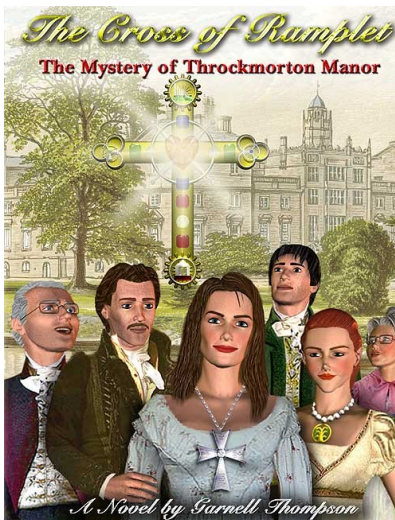
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Prologue

"Is anybody there? Is anyone listening?" he shouted into the empty air of the [Star Hopper](#). He knew the Star Hopper was programmed to recognize and transmit his voice, though there was no object or device visible to hear it. "I need assistance!... uhh, over?"

There was no answer, and the swift winged pursuing ship loomed closer. The spiked, forest green colored sphere of his Star Hopper tumbled and spun among the stars in escape, streaking along its intricately random flight guided only by the preprogrammed navigational skills of the Star Hopper itself.

"I don't know if you can hear me or not," he continued, "the crew is down, I repeat... the crew is down. We are being pursued. I need help... now!" He had no way of knowing if his words were being transmitted, let alone received.

He felt a tingle through the control lines he was holding as the nerve fibers of the Star Hopper sent a message directly to his brain by neural transduction. Someone had heard.

"Your... transmission... awkward... we try... understand."

He clearly heard the faltering words in his mind and ears, though no audible sound had been made. The mental voice was soft-spoken, yet detached.

"Yes, yes! The crew had trouble understanding me at first, but you can hear me?" he tried to help, "uhh... over?"

"Your [Randirian](#) transmission... unusual protocol... out of context... wait..." The voice was so amazingly detached, so seemingly indifferent that his heart sank as his hopes of help dwindled.

"Oh great," he muttered to himself, "I'm on inter-galactic hold!"

"Listen," he shouted, as if his recipient could hear him across the vastness of space, "there's no time, I need navigational guidance... the [Scaradin](#) ship..." Before he could finish he was interrupted.

"The Randirian evasion... insufficient... you need... alternative solution."

He heard and felt the advice in his mind's ear.

"What alternative? I'm not a pilot! I don't even know how to fly this thing! Can you do something by remote?" he asked, forgetting that he was addressing an alien intelligence.

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"Explain... remote," came the terse reply, with a hint of intrigued curiosity.

"Well, it's a box, uhh... an electronic, umm, you can change channels with it," he winced, feeling foolish at that terrible explanation. "No," he tried again, "I mean, it lets you fly the Star Hopper from where you are. Yes, yes, you control the ship from a distance, remotely! Get it, from where YOU are."

There was a long silence, and the Star Hopper flashed a mental image to him. The pursuing ship, elegant, beautiful with its translucent rainbow crystal hull and huge outstretched scimitar shaped wings was getting closer, throwing out its sparkling gossamer [Energy Nets](#), trying to catch his tiny, and spinning Star Hopper.

"Come on..." he anxiously muttered.

"No... remote... you... are your best... defense? Use... think different from them," the alien voice tried to advise, "we... track you... only."

"You mean you have no control? I don't know what to do! How do I pilot this thing?" he shouted in panic.

"Hold... control lines... and see," the voice offered flatly.

"See...?" he wondered, and in an instant his mind was filled with a vision from his own past of TV shows documenting the latest military technology describing tactics and aircraft guided through eye movements tracked by the pilot's helmet.

He instantly understood, and by neural transduction, so did the Star Hopper. His vision blurred for a microsecond and he was looking directly into space ahead. It was as if he had become the Star Hopper itself.

He felt a hard shock on his left side as the Scaradin Energy Net hit the side of the Star Hopper but missed its lock and dissipated. He instinctively leaned to the left and the Star Hopper shot to the left. He stretched up and the Star Hopper shot up. He tried to squat down, though the control lines were hindering him, and the Star Hopper dropped. Slowly, he was learning three-dimensional navigation through body movement.

The maneuvers were confusing to his pursuers, they did not know he was learning, so they assumed this was some kind of evasion and tried to compensate their Energy Nets using logic where none applied. Thus, they sent random shots, missing the Star Hopper entirely.

He wanted to look behind, to see his pursuer yet still escape. He leaned forward, to get the Star Hopper to increase its forward speed, and turned his head. Although the Star Hopper was

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shooting forwards, he could see behind him -- the Scaradin ship, caught by surprise, shrinking in the distance.

He saw the glow on its starboard side as it prepared to fire another Energy Net. He realized that he was looking behind but flying forward so he adjusted his movement to compensate. He leaned to his right, which made the Star Hopper shoot left, to port. The Energy Net missed completely. And then he saw it, his answer. In an instant, his mind flashed his own knowledge of marine life, specifically, the remora fish, and its relationship to the shark, the great predator of the deep.

These clever creatures found a way to use the ocean's most destructive killer for a free meal and a free ride. By attaching themselves to the shark's body, the shark could not harm them, but would drag them along as it swam. And at the same time, because sharks are 'messy eaters', the remora got a free meal by nibbling up the scraps left behind. It was a brilliant adaptation that would work perfectly in this situation!

His realization sent an instant instruction to the Star Hopper. It reversed course and shot directly under the belly of the pursuing ship and used a [Gravity Clamp](#) to attach itself! It had, through understanding his memory, locked itself under the belly of the larger ship, now completely safe. The Scaradin ship could not fire its Energy Nets upon itself!

On board the great ship, his pursuers paused in admiration of a clever prey, and then chuckled as they realized that his strategy was flawed. His protection under their belly meant he would have to travel with them to remain safe. Much better, they reasoned, that he be there, where he can be so easily observed. Laughing to themselves, they turned the ship around and back onto its original course. They had caught their prey after all. They knew he could not leave his position.

Slowly, they accelerated, and were pleased to see the sphere hanging with them, following every move. They chuckled as they prepared for a vortex jump. They knew his Star Hopper would be caught in the energy draft and dragged along with them. They could go back to their original course successfully; their prey was caught. They could knock it off at their leisure whenever they so desired. The ship's great engines whined with power, the fabric of space-time ahead distorted.

But, at the last instant, a fraction of a second before the hyper spatial vortex completely enveloped the great Scaradin ship, the spherical Star Hopper, so tiny in comparison, suddenly reversed the polarity of its Gravity Clamp, shot out from beneath the Scaradin ship and fell to the rear, out of range, and off into normal space.

His pursuers cursed as their ship hurled through the vortex. They would not be able to change course until they emerged from the limits of the hyper spatial vortex and by the time they returned, the Star Hopper would be long gone and untraceable. They had lost their prey after all. Some flight officers chuckled however, admiring the tactic. Clearly, he was a good prey and gave them a fine hunt. He was simply 'the fish that got away.'

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On board the Star Hopper, he tried to communicate again. "Are you still there?" he asked the empty air of the Star Hopper. "I have escaped... I repeat, I have escaped, but I still require assistance. Are you there?"

The lines tingled and he heard the respondent's voice once more. "You are... free and unharmed?"

"Uh, yes, for the moment. The Scaradin have shot into the vortex, I don't think they'll be back soon. But we still have a major problem here. The crew is disabled. They're in some kind of a coma... or they may be dead..." he paused, thinking that probably was not the best suggestion to offer if he was going to elicit aid. Diplomacy can be so tricky. "One of them was poisoned, and the others... they've been affected. I don't know what to do to help them. Can you advise? Umm... over."

"Over... over what? Explain..." the voice replied, revealing nothing of mood or tone.

"Over, it means, I'm finished transmitting."

"Very well. However if you... end transmission... we cannot assist you," the unemotional voice responded.

"No, wait, I meant, I'm finished speaking, now it's your turn to reply," he quickly explained.

"Your protocol is confusing and inefficient. However, we will adjust. Over..." the voice replied, picking up his lesson.

"The Scaradin poisoned one of the crew members. They did it to," he paused as he remembered painful recent events, "well, out of spite... to punish me. I can't explain it right now; I need help to get to your planet so you can help them. The thing is, I don't know how long I can remain conscious!"

The relief from the Scaradin pursuit was rapidly being replaced by other and more deadly concerns that his own adrenaline flow had temporarily averted.

There was no response. "Over," he added.

There was a long pause. He felt a wave of dizziness and nausea, a feeling of passing out. He gasped and gripped the control lines tighter.

"We have... information... from the Randirian... we may understand... however... over," now it was the disembodied alien voice that sounded confused.

"Welcome to the club," he muttered.

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"Can you guide this Star Hopper to your home world?" he asked. "If we get there quickly enough you might be able to help the crew. I have no... training, and I am getting disoriented and woozy. If I could just get some rest... I suddenly feel so strange... I have the most awful headache developing. Over," his voice trailed off as his mind was washed in a wave of confusion and pain.

"NO!" The power of the response came as a shock through the neural fibers he was holding, almost like a slap in the face. "You must stay... alert. You must... speak! Over!"

"Speak?.. I'm suddenly so tired... can't we talk later? If you could just guide us in... uhh, over? "

"The... Scaradin translator... parasite... must be... stimulated or your mind... destroyed... Over!"

"Stimulated?" he muttered, and then remembered the awful warning, the mortal trick the Scaradin used with their captives. "Yes, yes, I remember now. It needs the requirement of speech translation. But, you don't speak Scaradin, do you? Over," his voice trailed off. What if he had contacted Scaradassa itself and this was a trick! All this effort, only to be fooled!

"No. There... no speech, no sound to stimulate..." the voice insisted quickly, as if the alien had sensed what he was thinking. "You speak... it translates, this may be... enough. We... the Star Hopper... it knows where to go. This crew you mention... of us... nothing you can do... the Star Hopper may have sufficient speed to arrive... in time. But you, Speak Now!... over."

"Or forever will I hold my peace!" he muttered. He knew now that silence meant death.

"Tell us... tell us everything... over," the voice commanded.

"Where shall I start?" he blinked in wonderment as his mind now turned to remembrance of things past. "At the beginning I suppose..." his voice trailed off for a moment. "It all... yes, it all started with a dream!" he began. "I remember it now."

And as he spoke, the power of his imagination grew so strong that his alien listeners entered the mental theater of his life as his story was acted out in his mind's eye on stage. The curtain rose as he said:

"My name is Paul, and I come from Planet Earth."

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Definitions In Alphabetical Order:

Energy Net

Phonetic Pronunciation: (*en -err-gee net*)

Function: complex proper noun

Etymology: *unknown*

Meaning:

Term referring to an atomic-sublevel energy field projected by Scaradin spacecraft to capture prey. The Energy Net contains trace electro-magnetic interference patterns that "short circuit" electrical circuits in space vehicles by penetrating the hull on the sub-atomic level and scrambling electrons through extreme frequency modulation based on a variable carrier wave. At the same time, it generates a strong magnetic field that attracts and holds objects and even organic substances through use of the *self-inductive magnetic force*, a *Scaradin* discovery.

The polarity of an Energy Net can be reversed to cause a space ship or object to explode from within by changing the polarity attraction of electrons to repulsion. High frequency alteration of the carrier wave can also shake an object held in an Energy Net apart, scattering its atomic structure into chaos.

Developed and adapted from self-inductive magnetic technology used for transportation on the planet *Scaradassa*.

[to text](#)

Gravity Clamp

Phonetic Pronunciation: (*gra-vuh-tee clamp*)

Function: complex noun

Etymology: *Wroussaran term*

Meaning:

Term referring to an atomic-sublevel quantum mechanical gravity force gripping process employed on Wroussaran *Star Hopper* vehicles to secure them to objects found in space.

By using Gravity Clamps, Star Hoppers can attach to moving objects and even spinning planets, and use their speed and direction to slingshot and travel vast distances using little or no psychotronic energy. They can travel with an object, (as in the case of an asteroid or comet) or use the slingshot effect taking advantage of a planet's rotation. A Gravity Clamp can have reversed polarity resulting in an *anti-gravity* effect.

[to text](#)

Randirian

Phonetic Pronunciation: (*ran- deer- ee- an*)

Function: adjective

Etymology: *Wroussaran term*

Meaning:

Of, relating to, or characteristic of the *Randira* (*ran - deer- ah*), a psychotronic communication organ peculiar to the Wroussara species. Randirian communication is used to control Wroussaran *Star Hoppers*.

[to text](#)

Scaradassa, Scaradin

Phonetic Pronunciation: (*Ska-raw-dah-sa, Ska-raw-din*)

Function: Scaradassa - proper noun, Scaradin - Proper noun, adjective

Etymology: *unknown*

Meaning:

Scaradassa - small planet located in the Ves-Paran binary star system located on the outer rim of the Milky Way Galaxy.

Scaradin - Inhabitants of Scaradassa; of, relating to, or characteristic of *Scaradassa*

[to text](#)

Star Hopper

Phonetic Pronunciation: (*star-hop-her*)

Function: proper noun

Etymology: *Wroussaran term*

Meaning:

Spiked multi-chambered spherical intergalactic spacecraft using photosynthesis to generate energy for quantum gravity force manipulation and psychotronic propulsion. Star Hoppers are managed by psychotronic controls through Wroussaran *Rana*. Developed by, and specifically designed for use by the Wroussaran species.

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Chapter 1- Dreams

A mild murmur combined with the occasional tinkle of dishes and silverware on softly padded tablecloths filled the pleasantly decorated restaurant. It was well recognized by its regular patrons as a house of good food at reasonable prices. The atmosphere was soft and gentle; a little hushed but quite comfortable.

"Good evening, my name is Laura and I'll be your waitress tonight," the young lady smiled as she gave Paul and Diane their menus. "Would you like anything to drink or an appetizer?"

Paul looked over the top of his menu across the table to Diane, signaling her to order first.

"Some sparkling water please, with extra lemon," she said.

"And you, sir?"

"The same, but make mine lime."

"Very Good. I'll be right back," Laura wrote the order on her pad and left on her errand.

"Well," Diane said, settling back into the soft padding of the booth, "it's been a while since we've had dinner together. Thank you."

"My pleasure. Besides, I owe you one for discovering this place." He perused his menu. "Any idea what you want?"

"Mmmm," Diane muttered as she examined the offerings, "I'm not sure. The sole sounds good. You?"

"Well, the 'Chicken Marsala over pasta... chicken cutlets sautéed in a succulent marsala-wine sauce served on a bed of fresh linguini with a splash of herbs and seasonings' sounds very tempting, if the menu is accurate."

"Ooh, maybe I'll have that too," Diane considered.

Laura returned with their water and announced the specials, none of which appealed to them. Paul ordered the chicken, but Diane followed her initial instinct and ordered the sole. The waitress left for the kitchen.

Paul looked down at the table, silent, and adjusted his rose colored, cloth napkin. Lifting his water, he smiled, "Cheers." They clinked glasses, drank, and then fell into an awkward silence. Paul fussed with his silverware, while Diane watched him carefully.

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"Out with it," she finally commanded.

"Excuse me?" Paul replied, looking up.

"What's on your mind?"

"Nothing. Should there be?"

"Oh, come on now, I know you too well. Something's bothering you, I can feel it."

"Really?"

"Why the sudden dinner?"

"What's wrong with dinner?"

"Nothing, except we usually get together like this when we go to a concert. The Symphony's not playing tonight," she smiled and winked.

"Can't we just have dinner?"

"Look Paul, we're friends, and we love to attend concerts together. But let's face it, that's our routine. So when you call me up and ask me out to dinner, without the benefit of a concert, I know something's up. Is it your job?"

"No... no, that's fine... Do you treat your kids like this, driving straight for the point I mean?"

She chuckled, "When you've only got one hour a week to solve the problems of the whole world, you learn to cut corners. I'm sorry, I'll put my school councilor's hat away."

Paul smiled and played with his fork, "Well, maybe not just yet."

"I knew it!" Diane beamed.

Paul made no reply, but looked around the room at the pleasant furnishings, the dark stained wooden shutters on the windows, the watercolors hanging on the wall. It was a pleasant place, and he felt comfortable here.

"They're not very busy tonight," he remarked absently.

"There's no concert," Diane goaded with a smile.

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"Okay, okay. I admit, I do have something to discuss, but now I suddenly feel cheap, like I'm taking advantage of you. Perhaps we should talk about something else."

"Friends can do more than attend concerts, Paul. They can be there to support each other. You were there when I needed a computer, and I didn't feel cheap asking you go with me to buy it. I took advantage of your expertise. So now, it's payback time. Go ahead, take advantage of me... maybe I should rephrase that!"

They both laughed.

He sighed and leaned back, more at ease, "Okay, I'll try and make it brief."

"Take all the time you want, there's no rush. Service here is slow," she smiled, but Paul didn't see her; he was fidgeting with his silverware again.

"Do you ever dream?" he asked quietly, still looking down at the table.

"Everybody dreams, even school councilors."

"Yes, but I mean, do you remember them?" he looked up into her eyes.

"Sometimes. Of course, I've studied dream psychology, and I took a dream work seminar about a year ago which was very enlightening. There are many theories about dreams; why we dream, how to interpret them, why we do or do not remember them. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung both placed a great deal of importance on dreams."

"Did you ever have a recurring dream, one that won't go away?"

"Not personally," she replied, taking a sip of her water, "but they can be quite common, and there's always a reason for them. Are you being plagued by a recurring dream?"

"A nightmare," he looked down for a moment, then back up suddenly. "Diane, it keeps coming back, it's driving me crazy! It's getting so I'm afraid to go to sleep! I don't know if I'm losing my mind or what. I don't know what to do, who to turn to for help. It's so awful, I'm afraid to tell anyone about it." The look in his eyes revealed his desperation.

"It's okay, Paul, I understand. Dreams can be very powerful and seem very real. I certainly can see how a recurring dream can drive you crazy, especially if it's a convincing one. But you are not your dream; it's just a story your unconscious mind is telling you. If you can tell it to me, that probably will make it go away. In fact, hiding it may be what's making it come back. So come on, out with it. Pretend it's a movie that you're telling me about."

"If it was a movie, I'd ask for my money back!" Paul frowned.

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"Now don't judge too harshly. It may be a hidden treasure and cheap at twice the price. Dreams are often gems," Diane encouraged him.

"Well, I don't remember exactly how it starts, but I was walking on the street..."

"Wait," Diane interrupted. "Say it in the first person, present tense, as if it is happening now. Try and visualize it as you speak."

"Why?"

"It makes it more real, clearer. You'll remember it better."

"Diane, the point is that I don't want to remember it at all; I want it to go away!"

"Which is exactly why this will work. The dream WANTS to be remembered. It's telling you something very important. So think of it as a kind of gift from your unconscious. Once you reveal it, you'll understand the message and feel better."

"Some blessing... more like a curse if you ask me," Paul muttered.

"Well, now you've really got me intrigued!" she smiled at him. "I love a good horror story. So, I won't be shocked! Come on, I'm all excited to hear it!"

The waitress returned with their salads before Paul could begin. The food provided a break during which, while munching, Paul collected his thoughts and strengthened his nerve.

"I'm waiting," Diane encouraged.

"Like I said, I was... I AM... walking down the street. It's sometime in the afternoon on a nice, clear sunny day. I don't know why I'm there, or where I'm going. Everything looks normal. People are bustling about, traffic is rumbling and honking, as if everyone has a purpose, somewhere to go-- except me. I seem to be wandering.

Anyway, I start crossing the street when I hear a noise, a clattering and rumbling from deep within the earth. The ground is shaking; I start to lose my balance. A manhole cover begins to steam and suddenly explodes, flying high into the air. Out of the hole shoots this... blob... like in the movie, a huge mass of disgusting mottled yellow and pink jelly oozing out of the manhole, shooting high into the air! I can smell it, and it's revolting!

My heart is pounding but I am frozen to the spot. No one else takes any notice of it except me, and I'm terrified. The thing plops down on the street and begins to slurp and slide towards me. I KNOW it wants to get me! I start to run, but the faster I run, the faster it follows. I don't know what the other people are doing anymore, all I know is that I want to escape, to get away from it.

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And-- this is so awful-- as I run, it's like running on a treadmill. I hardly get anywhere, and that thing is behind me getting closer and closer!

I see a store, an old bookstore... it's an old building, with dark wooden frames around the windows and a black cast iron entranceway, like something from the 'twenties. Somehow, my feet get a grip on the ground and I rush inside. The door has a bell that tinkles as I pass through, and I slam the door behind me, out of breath, panting. I turn around to see where the blob is, but the door glass has suddenly been covered with one of those dark green pull down shades typical of the period. Somehow, I feel a little calmer and I slowly turn around again.

The bookstore is empty of patrons or even the proprietor. It's such an old place, so ancient and dusty, but with a nice kind of dustiness-- musty like something very old but very revered. It has an 'old book' smell, leather and paper mixed with the smell of wood. It seems like it is a forgotten place, where no one ever goes anymore. I can see the glass globe lamps hanging from the tin paneled ceiling, and bookcase ladders, you know, the kind that roll along in front of the bookcases so you can climb up to the top shelf? It's all so real! I can feel the place, smell the place. It's like I'm really there!

There are beautiful tall, dark wooden bookcases with so many volumes, from floor practically to the ceiling, and dark oak tables covered with books, some piled on top of each other in a haphazard fashion, and some are open. The planks of the wooden floor creak and groan as I walk around. I'm afraid to touch anything and I can't read the writing in any of the open books. Some have pictures in them, but I can't quite make them out, only swashes of dark, faded color.

As I am looking at one of the books, I notice that in the background I can hear an old clock ticking. I wonder where it is, and look up. The ticking gets louder and louder. Suddenly, the clock chimes, and I jump. I'm suddenly terrified and must escape. I turn for the door and practically jump out of my skin because there's an old man standing in front of me, so close that I bump into him. I can feel the impact, his soft body. It's all so real!

He asks what I want... No, wait a minute, that's wrong. He doesn't speak, he only looks at me over the rim of his glasses. There is something in his face, a wisdom, something ancient. I tell him about the blob outside. He leans forward, examining my face, saying nothing, then he goes back to his books as if I wasn't there at all."

"What does the man look like?" Diane interjected.

"I don't know for sure... wait, he's old, and he's tall... and bald-- no balding, he has shiny white hair on the sides of his head, but the top is hairless -- what is that, male pattern baldness? He wears glasses of a style... I think they are called spectacles-- gold, wire-rimmed, and he has a thick dark mustache that contrasts with his thin white hair. His glasses rest on the end of his nose so I can see his eyes. They're... blue-gray I think, and set off by jet-black eyebrows. He's very thin; his cheekbones are prominent. I guess in a way he's kind of handsome-- no, he's-- dignified-

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- aristocratic, wise looking. Yes, great dignity in his appearance, a kind of nobility. I think he wears maroon patterned suspenders over a white dress shirt... Yes, I remember now, because he has a curious set of copper colored cuff links. They have a design on them, I think its in the shape of a dragon, like on a family crest. Does that make any sense?"

"I don't know yet. Dragons are often guardians. Never mind. How do you feel about this man, what happens next?"

"I feel drawn to him, I want him to protect me. But he seems oddly distant. He slowly turns and walks away, into the back of the store. He seems to have no interest in the blob, or in my terror. I'm caught between following him and running away, but I'm afraid to open the door in case the blob is just outside, you know, like in the movies where you think it's safe, only it isn't?"

I can't decide what to do. Then something or someone from outside tries to turn the doorknob. It's so terrifying, the slowly turning knob; the creaking sound of its rusty turning. I can see it turning, but the door has been locked. I am very scared and rush through the store to get away, hurrying down aisle after aisle of bookcases. They are like a maze, so many of them, and I turn right and left, as if I am following a path, yet I am lost. I don't know where I am going but I know I must keep on going, deeper and deeper into the core of the bookstore.

Then I find myself in an opening among all these bookcases, a sort of reading nook, with a round oak table, a couple of old oak straight back chairs. There are closed books on the table.

I see that the man is standing by a bookcase, reaching for a book from a high shelf. He almost moves in slow motion as he stretches his thin long body and arm to grasp it. It's kind of fascinating to watch. He seems to get taller and taller as he reaches, as if he is made of elastic. He is ignoring me, but I have an urge to talk to him. I'm not as scared of him as I was when I first saw him. But I am scared that -- as if I am unworthy of him, as if, I have no right to speak to him.

Then, I suddenly feel as if he might be a kind person, perhaps even a helpful one. It's hard to describe this mixture of feelings. I have a feeling, I don't know, like a child in the presence of a respected elder whom you are forbidden to disturb. I don't want him to know how I feel about him in case he would -- reject me or I don't know-- say something demeaning?

I go to the bookcase where he is now standing further down the aisle, looking at his book. I try to pretend indifference and look at one shelf, to read the titles, but I can't make out the gold writing. He comes over to me, the floor creaks from his weight, and without saying a word, points with a long, bony, finger to another round table in a small square opening made among the bookcases.

The table has large volumes on it. These books are very old, yet they seem to be scattered carelessly. There's a bookstand with a large, closed, leather-bound volume on it. The man smiles at me and places his hand on my shoulder. It's an amazing feeling, his hand. His long fingers wrap around the shape of my shoulder so gently and it feels so very comforting. I want to lean

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back into his touch, to lean on him for comfort and security, like leaning on your father for support.

Yet I feel so damned ashamed of the feeling. He points over my shoulder with his other hand to the table and is suddenly gone, vanished, and I am standing there alone! I go to the table and cautiously open the book. I think," Paul smiled as he recalled, "that there are snakes or something going to pop out of it!"

"So, you are afraid of this man, yet you feel a need for comfort and protection from him? He is a kind of father figure to you?" Diane asked.

"Yes, it's sort of like, well, church, wanting to be close to God, but being afraid of God at the same time. I really don't mean to bring religion into it. I don't know why I did!" Paul explained.

"It's only natural that this would come up in a dream," Diane explained, "God the Father and all that. But do go on, I want to hear how this all ends up!"

Paul continued, "I open the book. It's an atlas, but it's positively ancient. I don't recognize any of the geography in it, only that there are colored maps written in some language I can't understand. I am sure the man can explain it.

I walk through the store looking for him, but he's nowhere to be found, only the books, and the endless aisles of bookcases that I seem to be trapped among and the tables with books piled on top of them. At one point, I accidentally knock a pile over. The books fall in slow motion, making this odd, muffled noise, when they hit the floor.

Now, I'm afraid that I'll have to pay for them, and I try to put them back, rearrange them so he won't know. But suddenly, he's there, behind me, smiling. He doesn't move but reaches around me with his long right arm and brushes the books back onto the floor, where they crumble to dust, and then he walks away.

I can see down an aisle of bookcases to the front window of the store, far away, and it is covered with the yellow pink jelly substance of the blob, as if it is trying to get in. You know how in the movies it can squeeze under a door? I'm terrified it can do that and I run to find this strange man.

He is perusing a book, and I grab his arm and I try to shout, but can speak no words, nothing comes out of my mouth. Oh, Diane, the terror I feel is suffocating, paralyzing! I point desperately to the front of the store while pulling on his arm and suddenly, I'm there, back in the front of this store-- and everything is still. The blob is gone, the windows only show the empty street in the late afternoon sunlight. Then, I notice I can't hear the ticking of the clock anymore. I look around for it, and on the wall and I see the mark, sort of the shadow left behind, of an antique regulator clock, you know, the octagonal, 'schoolhouse' style?

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Again, the mysterious man is nowhere to be seen. Then, I hear a muffled buzzing noise coming from a low bookcase. I feel intensely curious, almost compelled. I work my way among all the books, there seem to be more and more of them now, and pull a volume out from the shelf when suddenly from inside the bookcase flies a gigantic wasp, buzzing furiously!

It's horrible, huge, as big as... as a cat! I drop the book and run, terrified. I can see its stinger dripping poison. It darts for me; I duck; it circles and attacks again; I jump under a table. The furious buzzing fills my ears and I feel waves of rage coming from the creature. I am terrified! I feel so much--- hate-- coming from it, and I feel rage and hate in return, but totally powerless to do anything but run and hide.

I feel it doesn't belong here, it shouldn't be here, this is a bookstore, a place of knowledge and truth... and this terrible insect... it's somehow a gigantic lie. But I haven't got the strength to fight or even run. I'm overpowered with some sensation of complete confusion and helplessness. It's above me now, near the ceiling aiming to dive at me and deliver the killing sting! I'm crumpled on the floor and throw my arms over my head to protect myself. I see the old man in the distance, by one of those round oak tables again, watching me, watching the wasp. I want him to help me, to protect me, to kill this monstrous thing that will surely kill me if it can. But I cannot speak, I try to shout, but nothing comes out.

He looks over the rim of his glasses at me; then up at the wasp, which does not seem to have any interest in him, and oddly has not yet made its dive for me. He opens a large book on the table and with just a gesture, spins the table around 180 degrees. I can hear the scraping of the table legs on the wooden floor, and the wasp turns its head and sees the book.

As if it were called to it, the giant insect dives and lands on the pages and crawls around, then begins licking and preening its antennae. I rush to the book and slam it shut on the insect, pressing hard on it. I hear a terrible squishing and crunching sound, I can feel the dying struggle and hear a muffled scream, almost a cry from the dying creature.

I thought I would feel satisfaction from killing this thing that was trying to kill me, but I don't. Instead, I suddenly feel a terrible sense of remorse and sorrow, a terrible sense of pity, and of guilt. This feeling, it just comes over me in a wave and I feel so much remorse and as if I am going to cry.

The old man smiles at me and once more putting his hand on my shoulder reaches around with the other and opens the book. Dozens of stunningly beautiful rainbow colored butterflies flutter up into the air and disappear.

I feel a great sense of relief. I want to hug the man in thanks, but he steps back and points to a wooden staircase that seems to lead to the basement. I stare at him blinking in wonder. He simply turns and walks down an aisle among the bookcases until he disappears."

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Paul sat back in the booth and sighed.

"Wow!" Diane sat back herself, taking a deep breath. "You tell a good dream! This man is very interesting, He can touch you, but you cannot touch him. He is close, yet distant. Dream characters are amazing contradictions, aren't they? And that wasp..."

"It's not over!" Paul interrupted.

Laura, the waitress came by with their steaming meals. They started eating, commenting that everything was delicious.

"Well, tell me the rest of the dream, you've got me hooked," Diane encouraged.

"The stairs lead down into darkness yet I can't resist this man's command, so I descend. At the bottom is a dark green paneled wooden door with cracking, peeling paint. I try the old, worn, brass knob and the door opens. It leads outside, into an alley.

There is a woman there, dressed in a white uniform, delivering milk. She leaves two bottles near the back door where I am standing, taking no notice of me. They are the old glass bottles, and the milk seems to be topped with cream, you know, they was it used to be many years ago?

She then looks up at me and smiles, tips her hat and goes back to her truck, an old-fashioned milk-truck with sliding doors. She gets in and shuts the door. I think she's going to drive away when the truck suddenly starts to rock and sway violently. I can see through the windshield that from inside the back of the thing the blob swells up and engulfs the driver, pushing her forward, smashing her face against the windshield. She is screaming in agony and I can almost feel her pain as the blob pushes her terrified face into the glass, crushing through it, exploding shards of glass everywhere. Blood and milk shoot out of the windshield with the poor woman's crushed head and face and the awful disgusting blob slurps over her head, engulfing it with its bulk. I scream and try to run back into the store, but it's gone, there's only a dirty brick wall where it used to be!

I turn and run down to the main street, stumbling, looking behind to see the milk truck burst at the seams as the blob swells it apart with its great bulk. It slithers after me. The faster I run, the faster it slithers; I can't get away from it!

I run and run, I don't know where, when I see a bank. It looks like a Greek temple, you know, with columns and a triangular pediment, but I know it's a bank because it has bronze dollar signs on all the columns.

I rush inside and bump into the security guard and grab him by the front of his starched grey shirt, pulling at him, screaming for help, pointing outside. He pushes me onto the ground, and shouts something horrible, I can't remember what it is, but I feel guilty and ashamed. The blob is

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just outside the heavy brass and glass doors, squeezing in underneath them and it actually touches me! I kick at it, and somehow shove a part of it against the door with my foot, kicking and kicking again and again. It doesn't get a grip on me and I pull myself away as it pulls itself back from under the door, as if I had actually hurt it. The guard takes no notice but adjusts his uniform and takes his stand by the door again and ignores me, as if I'm not even there.

I can't see the blob anymore; it seems to have disappeared. No one in the bank takes any notice that anything is wrong or that anything happened. I feel that something is terribly wrong inside the bank itself. The sense of danger and panic are awful, I feel nauseated; yet everything looks so normal.

There are lines of people waiting for the tellers, weaving through a maze of paths marked off by deep maroon velvet ropes and brass pillars. For some reason, as idiotic as it seems, I join one of the lines. It moves slowly and I keep looking around to see where the blob is, but it's nowhere. All I see are the high marble walls and decorations of the bank. It seems very cool inside, and there's an echo of voices and machines clicking. Finally, it's my turn. The teller beckons me over. She wears black, horn-rimmed glasses and holds out her hand. I don't know what she wants.

'Your book,' she says.

'What?' I ask.

'Give me your book!' she insists.

I tell her I haven't got a book. She trembles, looking shocked, horrified, and then terrified. Her expression turns to disgust, nausea, as if she's about to vomit. She starts to shake and tremble and then her head explodes and the blob oozes out through the stump of her neck!

Blood is squirting everywhere! The stench, the smell, it's so awful! I gag and run, screaming, bumping into the people who are calmly standing in line, as if nothing wrong is happening. I knock over the brass pillars, trip on the maroon ropes, which seem to be like snakes ensnaring me and fall to the floor. The blob is oozing over the counter, dripping, slopping, coming towards me.

I see a bank of elevators around a corner and scramble for them while the blob slurps and oozes on the floor behind me, engulfing the other silent customers who don't run or panic, but just allow it to take them over and swallow them. Some are even smiling! I feel a surge of anger and stop and shout, 'Run, why don't you run? It's killing you!'

There's a staircase next to the elevators, with marble steps and an iron and brass railing that ascends up and around a corner. But for some inexplicable reason, I don't run up the stairs. Instead, I push the elevator button and wait. The blob is in the bank lobby, consuming

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everything. No one seems to care, they just stand there calmly, like sheep. It's so awful! I pound on the button waiting for the elevator car, panicked.

At last, the heavily embossed brass elevator doors open. The elevator is empty. I rush inside as the blob turns the corner and slithers towards me. I pound on the top button hoping it will take me to the roof. The doors to the elevator close slowly, as if they are stuck, and I back into the car as far as I can. The blob is just outside, about to slither in as the doors finally shut, pinching a part of it off into the car with me. The elevator rises quickly, so fast it that it throws me to the floor, right next to the small, wriggling piece of the blob. I scramble back, try to climb up on the handrails when the elevator suddenly stops and the doors spring open.

I'm not at the roof, but I think I must be on the top floor, because the elevator lobby looks very plush, like I've arrived at a penthouse. There are no offices, only dark wooden doors in the hallway. I jump over the wriggling, stinking piece of blob out of the elevator. The elevator doors bang shut behind me and I'm alone in the corridor. The walls are mahogany paneled and the carpet is a rich, cushy, deep green pile. There are cone shaped glass sconces on the wall throwing light up to the ceiling.

There are many doors in the corridor, each with a brass plate on it, but I can't read the print. I don't know which one to try; I'm afraid to try any of them. Then I notice the bronze elevator indicator. One of the cars is coming up, and I'm sure that the blob is inside it. I know that I have to get out of there. I'm desperate and I start trying the doors, but they're all locked. I pound on one of them, screaming. It slowly opens and a man in a tan janitor's uniform comes out.

He says, 'You need the key.' At his belt, there is a ring of keys, which he touches, and it falls to the floor. He goes back inside the room and closes the door. I grab the ring of keys and try them on the other doors, my hands are shaking so badly I can get them to fit.

Suddenly, the elevator doors open and the blob bursts out. It is making a horrid guttural sound, like belching or farting as it slurps along the floor. I'm trapped; there's only one door available to me now. I see a glint and notice that one of the keys is silver. I'm trembling uncontrollably as I try to make the key work in the lock.

The lock won't give until I turn the key backwards. The door springs open revealing a long staircase. I rush up the stairs; the blob is right behind me. As I run, I get more and more tired. My legs ache and cramp, I don't think I can take another step. Everything gets sticky, slow, as if I'm running through mud. But the blob is just as slow yet always behind me. I grab the banister and pull myself along, panting, struggling and finally make it to the black steel door at the top of the stairs. I rush through and slam it behind me, panting.

I'm out on the roof now. The building has become a skyscraper, tremendously tall, with a narrow square roof, which has no railings. I can see the edge, feel myself pulled toward it. I feel sick

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with the vertigo. There's no place to run anymore, no place to hide. The steel door to the roof begins to bulge as the blob pushes from inside.

I run to the door and pound on it shouting, 'Go away, I want you to go away!' The door relaxes. Suddenly, everything is silent except for the wind blowing across the roof. I back away a little and then, for some reason, I turn the knob and open the door.

The stairwell is empty! The door at the bottom is closed. I think the blob must have retreated back into the penthouse corridor. I start to step inside for some inexplicable reason. Suddenly, the door at the bottom of the stairs explodes and the blob bursts through practically flying up the stairs towards me.

'Stop it! Stop it!' I scream.

It halts abruptly. 'Who are you? What do you want!' I yell.

The blob turns in on itself like folding dough, then rolls over revealing the distorted face of my father, his mouth open in a grimacing rage. It lets out a hideous shriek that chills me to the marrow. I slam the steel roof door; my heart pounding so hard I feel it will burst. I sink to the roof, weeping in terror and anger at this awful revelation.

Then, I feel as if it's over. I have a sense of calm, of peace, yet a terrible sense of loss and anguish, an awful feeling of grief. I start crying so hard that I choke, racked with sobs. The pain, the sense of loss and grief are horrible.

A breeze picks up. It's so strong that it lifts me up off the roof and over the edge. But I don't fall. At first, I feel a terrible sense of vertigo and dizziness. Then I can feel something supporting me, holding me from all over, not grasping, but cradling. I float, float up and away. I have no weight anymore, no substance. It is as if I am a ghost. Yet something is holding me, carrying me, something kind and gentle and loving. And the wind carries me higher and higher until I'm in a fluffy cloud and can see nothing but smoky white.

Then I wake up."

"Whew!" Diane said. "What an incredible dream! I love it! Are you psychic, telepathic?"

"What?" he asked incredulously.

"Telepathic. I was wondering because not only did you recount your dream in tremendous detail, but you told it so clearly, with such an intensity of feeling that I could feel it. I could see it in my mind's eye, as if I was dreaming the dream with you!" she explained. "It was much better than a movie!"

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"Oh, you were just paying close attention, that's all," he offered

"No, it's more than that. Paul, I was there! I was there with you! I know it sounds crazy, but I felt everything just as you were describing it. I can't explain it, it goes beyond word," she replied.

"That's not the scary part," he added, surprising her even more.

"But... you woke up."

"I know, but it doesn't end there. There's something else.

I wake up in a sweat, and lie in the dark... well, sometimes I turn on the lamp. I feel as if I have gone mad. The vision... Diane, the vision is still vivid, alive, even in my consciousness!" He paused to take a drink of water. "I do go back to sleep eventually. I finally relax enough, regain enough confidence to try to sleep, hoping it will be empty, a dead, darkness that rests me, without the visions, and then-- I hear it."

Diane's eyes were wide with anticipation. "Hear what, Paul?" she asked quietly.

"A voice, Diane, a soft, gentle, whispering voice. It says, 'We come'," he paused, taking another sip of water. "It has me petrified, Diane. Who is coming, and why? Diane, I'm afraid it's my own death!" His hands were trembling.

Diane shook her head in negation. "No, not death Paul. I'm not sure what it means, but it isn't death. You're too much alive for that." She leaned forward and took his hand to calm him. "I can't tell you exactly what your dream means, only you can do that. But believe me, it's a wonderful gift. That's why it says: 'We come'. Something wonderful is coming to you, Paul. I don't know what, but something good, not horrid. Our dreams are meant to be helpers and healers. I know a nightmare is a terrible experience. But the core purpose is always healthy. The last words, and I am sure you're not hearing things, they are just a remnant from your highly energize unconscious, are the core message. Something is coming, a new understanding, a new feeling, something comforting and wonderful is coming and your own mind is bringing it... to the surface. "

"Well, I wish it wouldn't."

"How long have you had the dream?" she asked, sitting back.

"About two weeks now."

"Every night?"

"Nearly so."

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"When don't you have the dream?"

"Don't? Uh, Friday, yes, Friday and Saturday was okay, but, yes Sundays, I've been having it on Sundays, and sometimes during the week as well."

"Okay, well we've got a lot of ground to cover. I think I can help point you in the right direction. I think I can help you. First of all, the dream is a message that you are trying to give yourself. There are several ways to solve the riddles it presents..."

"Diane," Paul interrupted, "do you think I'm going crazy?"

She laughed, "Of course not. That dream is one of the healthiest things I've heard in a long time. That's why it's such a gift. It's filled with symbols, images and messages. You've got everything laid out before you; all you have to do is put the pieces together. The fact that you dreamt in color, with sensation, that you could hear, smell and talk to your dream characters indicates a very powerful message, something you really want to understand. Your dream has a lot of clarity, and your dream characters are wonderful helpers."

"Helpers! They don't make any sense! I hate them."

"Oh, no Paul, you should love them-- they're your friends! They're part of you. They want to help you. Now, there are several clues you've got going here; I'll point them out and you'll see what I mean. So, let me trade my counselor's hat for my detective hat, and we'll solve the mystery. It'll be fun!"

"Fun!?"

"Sure, and when you solve the riddles, you'll get a great feeling of accomplishment! First of all, let's take the dream scenario itself. It takes place in common, ordinary, everyday life. You can do everything in the dream that you can in your waking life but one thing. Always look for what's missing in the dream and you'll get an answer. What's the one thing that's missing in your dream, the one thing you cannot do?"

"I'm not sure, come on Diane, help me out."

"Okay, okay," she sat back and sighed. "You're still lingering in the dream mode so you need a break. Let's take a bathroom break. You splash some cold water on your face and we'll start when we return," she offered.

Her suggestion made psychological as well as biological sense. They hadn't finished their dinner anyway, and the restaurant was doing slow business, so there was no hurry.

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She got up from the table and started walking away, then turned to Paul as he was rising, "It's a great dream Paul, a great dream." She winked and went her way.

A few minutes later, feeling greatly refreshed, the two were seated at their booth, taking small bites of food. Paul did feel better, and Diane was in full detective mode, eager to unravel the mystery in Paul's mind.

"Okay let's get back to my first question: what can't you do in the dream? You can talk, you can run, you can see and smell, but you can't READ. You remember the phrase, 'Read between the lines.'? Well, you've got LINES at the bank, but you haven't got the book, and when you do have the book in the bookstore, you have LINES of bookcases. And you still can't read. This reveals the dream's nature. Your mind is asking you to read between the lines, in other words, intuit what it is trying to tell you by understanding the symbols. As you did in the dream with the dollar signs on the bank's pillars. Dollar signs are symbols for currency!"

Paul breathed a sigh of relief. Diane's clarity opened an inner doorway and he began to understand, "That's brilliant, you're absolutely right."

"How can you tell?" she smiled.

"I can feel it."

"Good. Now hold on to that feeling because that's your path. Next, let's look at some of the incongruities. Dreams may leave things out or they may have you do something that is obviously senseless to your waking self, yet makes perfect sense in the dream. You even pointed some of these out when you told me the dream. What was senseless?"

"The blob."

"No, that's your central character; it's the key piece of the puzzle. I'm thinking of a couple of things. Start with the bank. Why a bank? We know why you got on the line now, and why you didn't have a bankbook. Think of what a bank and a bookstore have in common. Can you guess?"

They are both repositories for something valuable. Books represent knowledge, and knowledge is highly valuable to the mind. When you failed to get the message in the bookstore, your unconscious mind sent you to a bank, which also is a repository for something valuable that we think about quite often, money. But the key here is the value and the repository. Your mind is a repository of that which you value, your feelings and your memories. Do you get the connection?" Diane smiled.

Paul's mouth dropped in awe, "Yes, it makes sense! Go on Ms Holmes!"

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"Why did you insist on taking the elevator when you were in a hurry and the stairs were right there? Also, why was a woman delivering milk to a bookstore? And isn't it usually a milkman? Yet, where does milk come from? From a female, a cow or, I guess if you are a baby, mother's milk. Get it? It seems incongruous, but there's a message within it. Perhaps this woman represented your mother."

"I see, I see," Paul smiled, "and then the people at the bank, and on the street, they should have been terrified, panicked, running away, yet they took no notice."

"Why?"

"Because... because it's my problem, not theirs!"

"Exactly! You're doing great, go on."

"Well, let's see, what else doesn't make sense? Uh, the books, they make no sense. Why should I run for protection into a bookstore?"

"Hold that clue, it's important. But go on with the bookstore itself."

"Well, the books are all old, musty... which means... unused!"

"Why not?"

"Out of date? Not interesting? Old information?"

"Try the book you couldn't read."

"It was ancient, an old atlas that wasn't accurate. Which means... oh, wait a minute, I'm getting something... that feeling you talked about," Paul grinned excitedly. "Yes, the books are useless information, that's why I couldn't read them; they were no help to me."

"Go on. What is an atlas?"

"Well, a book of maps... maps are... charts! They give guidance, directions, tell you where to go, but mine could not, they were out of date!"

"So the bookstore was useless, a poor choice for protection or even direction, it wasn't working as a symbol for you. You were unable to READ! But the fact that you chose it tells you about how you solve problems in your life, that maybe, you rely on old, out-of-date information that can't help you in your current situation. This is often the case with emotional problems. People tend to rely on lessons from childhood, childhood strategies that no longer work. You know, history repeating itself."

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"Ow, Diane, that kind of stings. I didn't think I was that far gone. Emotional problems?"

"Which are very common. You're not 'far gone'. Everyone has emotional problems all the time. Life is so complex and the mind is so deep. Let's not worry about that now anyway. And your own words just explained the wasp. Now you know why the book turned into butterflies. Remember the saying about 'exploding old myths'?"

Paul started to say something, his mouth was open, then he closed it.

"What?" Diane asked.

"Never mind," he said quietly.

"Oh, come on now, we're doing so well. You discovered something, let's have it."

"Okay. Well, when you said wasp, I thought of WASP-- White Anglo Saxon Protestant. Then I remembered something I'd rather forget."

"Oh, Paul, are we getting too close? If you can just hang in there, we can get through it. But I won't push you. I can feel your distress," Diane patted his hand trying to reassure him. He looked down at his food, toyed with it in silence as she patiently waited.

"I remember now, something I had forgotten, something from a long time ago," Paul offered quietly.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," Diane suggested. She knew he was very close to something painful. She didn't have to know what it was as long as he did and could manage it.

"No, it's okay," he sighed, "I remember it all now, I understand the dream.

You don't know my father. Thank your stars you don't!

I haven't seen him since I was ten, and now I remember why. He was a religious zealot, all fire and brimstone, with a temper that would rival the angriest god there ever was. Gosh, how clearly I remember it now. All the Bible lessons, the hours and hours of church, the endless dinners with the pastor and HIS hate filled, damnation rhetoric! It's all coming back to me. It's funny, like stepping out of a shadow into the light. Kind of distant now, no feeling, just a memory of events," Paul's voice drifted off for a moment. " Well, anyway, when I was a kid, my father used to take me to a religious bookstore..."

Diane patted his hand reassuringly, "It's okay, I'm here."

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"Now that I remember it, he used to take me there on Saturdays, usually late in the afternoon. It was an old place, like what I saw in the dream. Diane, I was only ten years old, what would I have to do in a place like that? I remember that he warned me that I must be very quiet and not disturb anyone, that it was like church and I couldn't talk or ask questions because it would be disrespectful to God and earn his fiery wrath.

The owner was someone he knew, but she was a woman, yet she seemed tall, thin and very old. I was afraid of her, and I didn't dare speak to her. Oh, and she wore-- she wore these black horn rimmed glasses, and they were always sliding down on her nose! I remember being so bored in there

I used to wander around and get lost among the books. Some of them must have been imported because they were in different languages and I-- Diane!-- I couldn't read them, not the titles, nothing! And, yes, I remember that they had an old atlas-- it was a Biblical atlas, describing the ancient world! Oh, Diane, I remember it now!" he sighed, as if he'd opened a long locked door at last. "I'm sorry Diane, I think the meaning isn't what you were guessing at."

"Don't worry about me Paul, what's important is that you understand what it means," she explained. "Can you go on?"

"Yes, yes... I remember now. One summer's day we went there. My father never bought anything; he'd just spend an hour or so reading, like it was a library. I think I overheard the owner complaining about that to someone once-- and yes, she even told him to leave one day when he'd been there but hadn't bought anything. She threw him out!" Paul chuckled. "Oh, bless her for doing that!

Anyway, this one day, it was summer, early in the afternoon, or late morning, I forget which, but I remember hearing the old clock chime! Somehow, a wasp got into the place and was buzzing around where we were sitting.

I was afraid that it would sting me or worse, him, and he'd fly into one of his rages. I knew I was supposed to be quiet, but I'm afraid of bugs anyway, so at first, I began to fidget and squirm, and he insisted that I sit still in the chair next to him. I tried to tell him about the insect, I was really scared and wanted to run away. The buzzing, that awful buzzing!

He kept pushing me down into the chair as he tried to continue reading, as if I didn't count for anything at all. But then the wasp started getting on his nerves because it kept buzzing him. I remember-- I remember he took a book-- Diane-- it was that old atlas, and he smashed it on the wasp and killed it!

WHAM, what a noise he made! I jumped and shrieked... the most forbidden thing to do, and he grabbed me and shouted at me: 'Now look what you made me do! Thou shalt not kill, boy, thou

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shalt NOT KILL! You have made me sin against God in his creation, boy, sin as you always make me sin! Get thee behind me Satan! I will purge thee of thy wickedness!

He raised his hand to hit me, but the old woman rushed over to him, grabbed his hand and shouted to stop. They got into an argument. And I guess the atlas was an antique or something. She wanted him to buy it, or pay to have it cleaned and he was enraged! He shouted some biblical nonsense like he always did, and grabbed me by the hand and dragged me out of the store! Diane-- I remember all of it now!" Paul was trembling.

"Can you go on, finish it?" she asked quietly, knowing how disturbed he was.

"I remember that we went to the bank. I forget why the bank was open so late on that Saturday, but I remember it was crowded, and he was fuming. We had to wait on line and when we got to the teller, my father didn't have his bankbook. I guess he needed to make a withdrawal to pay for the old atlas. He was furious at the teller and bellowed at her. I remember seeing the security guard start coming over, but my father quieted down, doing a slow boil.

Anyway, we had to go to one of the bank offices, which was up the stairs on the next floor. But he wouldn't take the stairs. He insisted on taking the elevator, still fuming. I felt so helpless, I didn't know what to do! I wanted to run away. When we got upstairs, the office was closed... it has just closed! He was furious, I remember how red his face was and he pulled me over to the stairwell and began slapping me across the face..."

"Oh, Paul..." Diane interrupted, tears forming in her eyes... "please, I didn't mean to..."

"No, it's okay Diane, it's just a memory," Paul continued.

"He was hitting me, screaming about sin and filthy lucre, which I didn't know what it meant, and security guard came up the stairs. He asked my father if there was a problem, and I ran to him in tears and grabbed him begging him to help me.

He pushed me back and yelled at my father not to 'throw his dirty kid at him.' My father was intensely embarrassed and rushed out of the bank dragging me behind him. I wanted to run, I wanted to run away and hide and never see him again! I knew he was taking me home to give me a beating. I was terrified.

We got home, and he was dragging me towards the bedroom. He used to tie me to the bedpost and hit me with his belt. By this time, I was screaming and resisting and trying to get away from him. As we went by the kitchen, my mother came in through the kitchen door from the store. She asked why I was crying and he shouted at her to mind her own business. She was still holding the bag of groceries and said, 'He is my son, he IS my business. What are you doing to him! Let him go!'

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My father went ballistic. He let go of me and hit her. He struck her hard across the face. She screamed and fell, hitting her head, cutting it open on the kitchen counter, and dropped the groceries. There was a bottle of milk in the bag that broke, and the milk mixed with the blood and broken glass and flowed across the floor towards me.

I screamed and screamed while my father kicked her and shouted that she get up off the floor. I tried to stop him and he spun round on me. Something warned me that I was in mortal danger, and though I wanted to protect my mother, I did the only thing I could. I ran for the other door with him right behind me. But I was faster and raced upstairs to my aunt's apartment. When I got there all I could say is, 'He's killing her! He's killing her!' I guess she understood because she left me with my cousin and she and my uncle raced downstairs."

She was my mother's sister, and her husband actually owned the building. In fact, my uncle was the super, and, yes, I remember, he had keys to all the apartments-- he used to carry them on this big key ring attached to his belt. They had always been kind to me, and I remember, my uncle used to take me up on the roof at night to look at the stars. Oh, he was a nice man, I remember. Sometimes, on the roof, he'd hold me up so I could try to touch the stars. Oh, don't worry, it was completely safe, nowhere near the edge or anything like that. I remember, I often had wished he was my father-- he was so kind and loving."

Paul fell silent, brooding. Diane didn't dare speak, this was so unexpected. Then Paul concluded.

"The ambulance came, and there were police, I remember the sirens. They took my mother to the hospital. She had a severe concussion and went into a coma.

I don't know who said what to whom, but I stayed with my aunt and uncle in their huge apartment for the next six months, until my mother could come home again, and my father... he disappeared. They said he left on business. I think he might have gone to jail, I don't know. If he did, there was no trial, or I was never told of one.

After I did go back home, it was just me and my mom. I never saw my father again. We never spoke of what actually happened. We somehow buried it, ignored it, and pretended it never happened. And I guess, for a while, for me, it never did. Until now."

"Oh, Paul, I am so sorry! I should never have pushed you about that dream. I had no idea... I had no idea..." she offered in apology.

"How could you, when even I didn't know?" he sighed. "But, you know, it's funny. It doesn't hurt anymore. It feels like, the dream... it's fading. The feelings, the images... all fading away now." He straightened up a little. "You know, I actually do feel better!"

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By now, their dinner was quite cold, and neither of them had much of an appetite. Diane felt guilty and unprofessional. She hadn't guessed that Paul's dream was so significant. But Paul was feeling better, relieved.

"It's as if this great weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Oh, I get it," he told her as Laura brought them the check, "remember when the old man put his hand on my shoulder-- in the dream?"

"Yes, Paul, I remember."

"That's what I've just lifted. It's gone now... all gone, just floating away, like I did at then end of my dream."

"I'm glad, I really am," she replied.

"Except for that one bit, that one part where someone says 'We come.'" Paul frowned in concentration. "I wonder what that means?" He paused, digging deeply into his memory, "Got it- of course!" he smiled.

"What Paul?"

"A couple of weeks ago Mom called me. Guess who's coming to dinner?"

"No!" Diane's jaw dropped.

"Yes, after all these years, he's coming back! She called me because she wanted me to be there. He's coming to see her next month!"

"Do you think that's wise? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. Mom didn't explain anything, she only said he was coming to see her, and she wanted me to be there. She said he was changed and everything would be all right. Since I have no idea where he's been all this time, if he ran off, went to jail, a mental institution, I can only guess. But she sounded okay about it. She never did tell me what happened to him, so I can't say. But if she needs protection, I can certainly be there for her. Besides, Aunt Betty and Uncle Lars will be there too. I don't think he'll pull anything in front of them. And I'm a man now, he can't hurt me anymore!" Absently, Paul made a fist.

"How do you feel about it Paul?" Diane asked, worried.

"I don't know, Diane, I don't know," he muttered.

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Paul paid the check, despite Diane's protests. She felt absolutely awful that she'd opened this 'Pandora's Box' in his mind, so unprofessional, so careless. He picked up on it as they walked through the parking lot.

"It's not your fault, you know," he told her.

"What, what are you talking about?" she asked.

"You know, I'm psychic, or telepathic? I know you're feeling guilty because I had such a revelation back there. It was way more than you expected. Okay, it was way more than I expected too! But it's not your fault. I asked for your help and you gave it!"

She stopped and looked at him, "Listen to me Paul. You're my friend and I will NEVER repeat what you told me to anyone. But YOU have got to tell someone else! What you describe sounds like-- well, I think you'd really benefit from talking to a counselor to work this through, especially before seeing your father again. Please, promise me that you'll see someone, for both our sakes. I can give you the names of a few professionals to choose from."

"So I am crazy after all. I knew I could convince you!" he joked.

"Not crazy. Hurt. And you deserve help. Promise me that you'll see someone, it's really important!" she said as they arrived at her car.

They drove in silence, both prisoners of their thoughts until she pulled into the parking lot of Paul's apartment house. Diane left the motor running.

"Good night, Paul," she said, giving him a hug, "please, are you going to be all right?"

"Diane, I'm fine! You really did help me. I don't know why you feel so guilty! It's all just washed away. Okay, I'm still thinking about things a little, but, there's no pain, no suffering. That's all in the past."

"I wish you would stop trying to be so brave."

She suddenly screamed as a small black furry animal jumped onto the hood of her car and yowled at the windshield!

"Relax," Paul sighed, getting out of the car. "It's just Tom, the cat. You remember my telling you about him?" He picked up the animal and it began purring in his arms, nuzzling and rubbing contentedly. "Now Tom, just what has gotten into you? Don't tell me, I don't want to know." He squatted down on Diane's side of the car so she could stroke the tiny beast.

"So this is the famous Tom you've talked about," she smiled, stroking the purring cat. "Is he yours?"

"No, he's a stray... well, not exactly. I guess you'd call him a communal cat. He hangs around the building, going into anybody's apartment that will have him. I guess tonight, it's my turn."

"He's really affectionate! How soft his fur is, and look at those glowing eyes. I'm surprised that no one has taken him in-- permanently, I mean."

"I think some people have tried, but he's very independent. He comes and goes as he pleases. Tomorrow, he'll be asking someone else for a handout, and he'll get it too."

"Smart cat."

"Yeah... we're buddies," Paul stroked the contented cat. "Well, goodnight, and thanks again."

They stood together in the driveway, Paul watching the car drive away, Tom looking at a nearby tree with sudden interest. Paul put the cat down and turned and opened the glass door of the apartment house lobby.

"Come on kitty," he called. The cat looked at him, then at the tree, tail twitching in indecision. He offered a small 'mew' and ran up the tree.

"Fine, have a good night," Paul remarked and went inside to bed and sleep.

It was past midnight when Paul suddenly awoke from a sound sleep covered in sweat. His mind was filled with-- something. It wasn't the dream this time, it was something else. He fought the cloudiness in the darkness trying to call back the mental message. What was it he had dreamt? Why was he sweating? He tried to remember, but all he felt was exhaustion.

He lay back down, allowing his mind to drift off. And in that tiny place between wake and sleep, he heard the words again:

"We come!"

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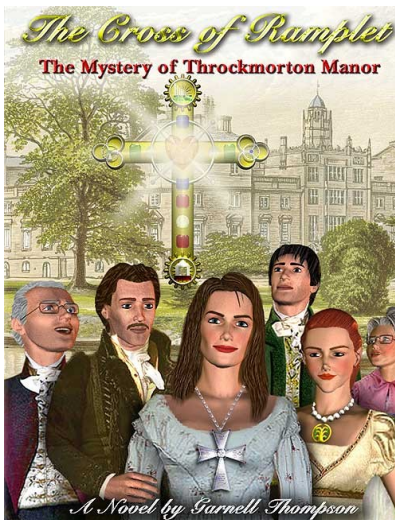
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