

AN INTERSECTING WORLDS STORY

BE MY QUEEN



ERIC VON SCHRADER

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ABSOM Books

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depicted here are real, and no inference should be made to
actual events.

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This book is dedicated to my dearest
Becky Brittain von Schrader
You're the best!

Join the mailing list for news and updates about the
Intersecting Worlds books.

Go to Eric's website: <http://ericvonschrader.com>.

You will also find photos of places in the books,
inspirations, and other fun stuff.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	8
THE BOOKSTORE	9
DAISY	11
ABIGAIL	17
BUCKY	37
JIMMY	44
MOM	47
FLICKER	57
PUZZLE AND PARADOX	61
CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK	64
BARBECUE	68
A NOTE	74
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	75

PREFACE

Be My Queen expands the story James Whittemore Hines, a major character in *A Universe Less Traveled (Book 1 of Intersecting Worlds)*. He was a brilliant young stockbroker who bet every penny of his clients' money on an infallible hunch that the market would rebound on October 29, 1929, after the disastrous crash of October 28, "Black Monday." His hunch was wrong. He and his clients lost everything that day, which became known as "Black Tuesday." In a daze of despair, he went up to the roof of his office building and jumped.

Instead of plummeting to the sidewalk, Jim woke up in a parallel universe version of his city, where no one knew anything about the stock market crash or who he was. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, he went out and made a new life for himself. In a few short years, he used charisma and cunning to lead his new city to wealth and greatness. But, even with all his astonishing success, something was missing. Jim was alone.

This story also refers to some events from *A Universe Disrupted (Book 2 of Intersecting Worlds)*.

I hope you enjoy it.

Eric

THE BOOKSTORE

THE TURNOUT WASN'T BAD. Twenty people crowded into the small San Francisco bookstore to hear Carol Boustany read from her alternate history novel, *Dispatches From An Imaginary World*. This was the fifth one of these events she had done and the first on the west coast. She and Billy decided to make a trip out of it; they planned to see a Giants game and spend a few days in the wine country before returning home to St. Louis. While she was reading, he was checking out a nearby record store—he had attended all of her previous events. They would meet for dinner afterwards.

Carol began with the opening sentences of the book: “This is the story of a world that doesn’t exist, but maybe once did. A world where the barrier between reality and imagination is thin and permeable. Where you can wake up on one side of that barrier and fall asleep on the other.” She read excerpts from different parts of the book, stories of a fictional city in a fanciful twentieth century. There were heroes and villains, disasters and celebrations, beauty and deceit. The small audience applauded when she finished. One woman stood up and said, “When I close my eyes, I can see the places in your book, like they’re real. I would give anything to go there.”

Carol chuckled. “Thank you very much. So would I!”

She sat at a small table to sign books for anyone who wanted one. A handsome older man with bright blue eyes waited his turn. When he handed his book to Carol, she asked “Who should I make it out to?”

“Jim Collins.” He paused while she wrote. “I’ve waited years for something like your book to come along.”

“That’s quite a compliment. Thank you.”

“I especially liked your character, George Adrian Matthews.”

“He’s one of my favorites too.”

“I think he’s based on my father.”

“My book a novel. Completely fictional.”

“Is it? My father’s name was James Whittemore Hines.”

Carol’s pen stopped in mid-signature. “What did you say?”

“James Whittemore Hines.”

Carol was momentarily flustered. “The book comes from my weird imagination. It’s all made up. Really.”

“Can we talk? I would greatly appreciate it.”

“Uhm, not now.” She gestured to the line of people behind him.

“Here’s my number,” he said. “Call me.”

DAISY

ABIGAIL FLOWERS, KNOWN TO ONE AND ALL AS DAISY, was putting the final touches on the birthday cake for her fiancé. She squeezed a piping bag to write *Happy Birthday, Jim* in looping green letters across the white frosted top of the cake. In honor of his success in the financial world, she surrounded the words with green dollar signs. Then she added hearts in red frosting as signs of her love for him.

Tomorrow, Wednesday, October 30th, 1929, was going to be Jim's thirty-second birthday. Daisy planned to surprise him with a party at her apartment. All his friends and clients were coming. She told Jim that it would be an intimate evening, just the two of them, and she was confident that he hadn't gotten wind of her real plan. She knew he would be thrilled by the surprise. Jim loved being the center of attention.

Her secret hope was that he would use the occasion to follow through on the hints he had been dropping for a while—to announce their engagement and make everything official. She could see the champagne glasses raised high by the circle of their smiling guests, as she and Jim stood arm-in-arm in the center. She had ordered a case of the best French bubbly, the kind Jim liked, from the bootlegger.

The phone rang. It was Daisy's best friend, Eleanor, calling to report on the party decorations she had purchased. She also mentioned the news that another crazy day was happening on Wall Street. "Jim will probably be ready for a stiff highball after this." Daisy was preoccupied with the party preparations, so she didn't turn the radio on.

Later in the day, she called Jim's office a few times to see what he wanted to do for dinner. But the line was always busy. Evening came and there was still no word from him. The phones at both his office and his apartment rang and rang with no answer. Daisy figured he had flopped into bed after a grueling day and was out like a light.

She called him at home around nine the next morning. She didn't want to wake him too early if he had had a rough day yesterday. Again, no answer. She tried his office, but no answer there either. Eleanor called. "How did Jim hold up yesterday? The papers are calling it 'Black Tuesday.'" Daisy said she hadn't heard from him. "He's probably still conked out."

One of Jim's clients phoned to say he wasn't coming to the party. "I'm ruined, thanks to that bastard. You can wish him happy birthday for me and tell him to go to hell!" he said as he slammed down the phone.

Daisy walked to Jim's apartment, just a few blocks from hers. His car, a dark green Packard roadster, was parked in its usual spot. She rang the bell and knocked on the door. No answer. She used her key to go inside. He wasn't there. As usual, clothes were strewn around the floor. Jim didn't care much about keeping his place clean. A half-empty coffee cup was on the kitchen table next to yesterday's morning paper, open to the financial page. It was covered with Jim's scribbled notes.

She took a streetcar to the Railway Exchange building in downtown St. Louis where Jim had his office. Groups of men milled around on the sidewalk. They were all in shock from yesterday's crash, muttering to themselves and each other. They stepped aside to let Daisy in the door, but otherwise paid no attention to her. She rode the elevator to the sixteenth floor. On the way up, the operator said he hadn't seen Mr.

Hines today. The door to Jim's office was open. His overcoat and hat hung on the rack. Ribbons of tickertape littered the floor. Daisy noticed the framed print of an English fox hunt on the wall. She had given it to him last Christmas. He loved that picture from the moment he unwrapped it. He pointed to the gentlemen on horseback wearing red coats. "I'm going to have what they have—wealth and leisure!" Daisy was pleased that her gift was a success. She knew that Jim was determined to become wealthy, but she doubted he would ever be a man of leisure. He had far too much restless energy to slow down.

The phone rang. Daisy picked up the receiver. "Where the hell have you been, Hines? I want my money!" It was Vern Cantwell, one of Jim's best friends and an important client.

"This is Daisy, Dr. Cantwell. Jim's not here."

"Find him, goddammit! What's going on with my account? I need answers."

Daisy checked the other offices on Jim's floor, but no one had seen or heard from him since yesterday morning. She went to the cafeteria around the corner where he liked to have lunch. The man behind the counter said Jim hadn't been in for his usual ham sandwich, either yesterday or today. He saw that Daisy was upset, led her to a booth, and gave her a cup of hot tea. She leafed through a newspaper that was lying on the table. It was full of stories about the stock market crash, including a mention of a distraught New York financier who jumped to his death from a Manhattan skyscraper.

At home that afternoon, Daisy was overwhelmed by fear and worry. She lay on the sofa and stared at the ceiling. When she heard footsteps in the hall, she sat up with a fleeting moment of hope that it was Jim. But the footsteps

continued past her door. She heard murmured greetings as the neighbor across the hall let the visitor in. At six, Eleanor arrived to help Daisy with the party. But she was the only person who showed up all evening. Daisy sobbed on the sofa. At nine, Eleanor took down the decorations and tossed the untouched birthday cake into the garbage can.

For the next week, Daisy searched for Jim every day. She contacted everyone who knew him. She went to all his usual haunts and even put flyers up around the neighborhood. She shuddered as she remembered the newspaper article about the New York financier. Could Jim have done something like that? Throw himself in front of a train or jump off a bridge? She couldn't imagine it. Not Jim, not her Jim.

She filed a missing person report with the police, but they advised her to be patient. "Most people turn up if you give them some time, Miss Flowers." Eventually, after she kept coming to police headquarters day after day, they made inquiries. They interviewed Jim's clients and his friends at the Racquet Club. Several clients believed that he had run away with their money, "He's probably sitting on a beach somewhere, laughing his ass off." But the bank said that, as far as they could tell, all the money Jim withdrew was lost in disastrous trades as the market collapsed on Black Monday and Black Tuesday.

Daisy often walked the neighborhood to be alone with her pain and loss. Once, as she passed the elegant shops on Maryland Avenue, she sensed Jim's presence, like he was right behind her and was about to greet her with a hug. For an instant, she felt a tiny glimmer of hope. She turned around, but he wasn't there.

By Christmas, Jim's landlord wanted his things out of the apartment so they could rent it to someone else. Daisy and Eleanor took on the sad task of packing up his possessions.

There weren't a lot. Despite all the money that Jim made, the apartment was sparsely furnished. A closet full of expensive suits, a nice Victrola, and a humidor of cigars. Daisy wept when she saw the framed photo of herself and Jim at a garden party. He was wearing a straw boater and a crisp white suit and smiling his trademark grin.

She found his address book in a dresser drawer. It had the address of his parents, Fred and Martha Hines of Jackson, Mississippi. Jim had never spoken much about them. One night, after several drinks, he angrily dismissed them as "small minded, small town people." Jim had left home at sixteen, worked in various jobs in Illinois and Indiana, then joined the army when the war began. An officer he met in France got him a job at a Chicago brokerage house after the war ended. That's where he learned the investment business. He got tired of working for someone else and moved home to Jackson to start his own firm. That was a big mistake. Despite being a Mississippi native, people didn't trust him—his time in Chicago made him too much of a city slicker for them. After a year of beating his head against the wall, he came to St. Louis in '26 to try his luck there. Daisy met him six months later.

She wrote a letter to Jim's parents to introduce herself and tell them about his disappearance. She got a reply from Martha a week later. They had not heard from him in almost a year. He sent them nice presents every Christmas, but had only come to visit one time since he moved away. She was distressed to learn her only child had disappeared. She promised to tell Daisy if she heard from him and assured her that she was praying for Jim every day.

The winter felt colder than usual to Daisy as she grappled with the prospect of life without Jim. On a blustery February afternoon, she wandered along the cobbled stones of the levee

below the Eads Bridge, bundled up in the long fur coat that Jim had given her. She had this crazy notion that he would step off a riverboat and wrap his arms around her—or that his body might wash up amid the chunks of ice that clogged the frigid Mississippi.

But neither happened. Jim was gone.

ABIGAIL

“MOMMY! HELP ME. I messed up my picture.” Celeste hollered from the second floor. Mrs. Dwight Collins put down her pen at the small desk where she was writing checks to pay the monthly bills. It was already August second and Abigail felt uncomfortable that she hadn’t mailed the checks on the first. Dwight expected things to be done on time. “Dwight Junior will help you,” she called back. She turned to her ten-year old son who was sprawled on the living room floor, reading a comic book. “Go upstairs and draw with your sister.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes. I need to finish these bills.”

The boy let out a theatrical sigh and stomped up the stairs.

Just as she turned her attention to the next envelope in her stack, the telephone rang. *Will I ever get a moment’s peace?*

She went into the front hall of her Lincoln Park townhouse, where the telephone sat on a small, polished wood table. “Hello.”

“Daisy?”

“This is Abigail Collins.”

“Did you used to be Daisy Flowers?”

“That was a long time ago. Who am I speaking to?”

“Jim.”

“Who?”

“Jim Hines. Daisy, don’t you remember me?”

Her mind went blank. The thunk, thunk, thunk of the ticking grandfather clock in the hall was the only sound.

It sliced the formless mass of the future into thin curls of distinct moments, one second after the other. Those moments gathered around her, like the slices of pastrami that the butcher made as he pushed the spinning blade of the circular saw back and forth across the slab of meat.

“Jim?” She was bewildered.

“Yup, that’s me. Your old pal, Jim. I’m sorry I haven’t been in touch. I hear you’re doing really well. That’s wonderful. I have so much to tell you about what I’ve been up to. ‘Up to no good’ like we used to say in the old days.”

She wanted to hang up, to give this slice of time back to the butcher and have him glue it back onto the slab. But returns were not allowed.

“I’m here in Chicago, Daisy. It wasn’t easy to find you. I was hoping we could meet for lunch.”

It had been years, but Jim acted like not a day had passed. He assumed that Daisy would agree to whatever he said. As always, his instinct was right.

She was too flustered to think straight. “Uhm, okay,” she stammered.

“Perfect! How about the Walnut Room at Marshall Field’s? Noon.”

Jim waved when Abigail entered the room. He stood to embrace her as she walked to the table. She extended her hand for a polite handshake. Except for a touch of gray at the temples, he looked just the same, with his big grin and twinkling blue eyes.

“I’m so glad I tracked you down, Daisy. You’re as beautiful as always.”

“I go by Abigail now.”

“Well, you’ll always be Daisy to me. How the hell are you?”

She gave him the basics: married to Dwight Collins, a lawyer and a great guy, two children, beautiful home, busy with friends and charity work. Jim listened attentively and nodded his approval. “You’ve done well for yourself, Daisy. I knew you would.”

The waitress arrived to take their orders. Abigail welcomed the brief respite from the torrent of feelings that seeing Jim had unleashed. After the waitress left, she asked Jim if he were married. He shook his head no.

“You spoiled me. I’ve never met a woman who could hold a candle to you.”

The pain of her long ago loss morphed into anger.

“Where in god’s name have you been? Not a peep for sixteen years, then you call me and want to have lunch like we’re best friends?”

“I’m sorry, Daisy. I couldn’t help it.”

“Stop calling me Daisy! We were practically engaged and then you disappeared. Poof! Half the people said you stole their money and rest said you must have killed yourself. I don’t know which was worse!”

“I had no way to get in touch.”

“Don’t take me for a fool, Jim. You couldn’t send a postcard?”

“No I couldn’t. This is hard to explain, but let me try. First of all, I didn’t take one cent from anybody. The crash wiped us all out. However, I did, in a manner of speaking, fall off the roof of my building back in ’29. It was a bad day. Then I woke up in this place where nobody knew me. And they didn’t know anything about the crash, or Lindbergh, or the Great War—nothing.”

Abigail flashed a skeptical look.

“I’m serious, Daisy. I lie a lot. It comes with the job. But I would never lie to you. You know that.”

“Where were you? In the land of Oz?”

“Huh?”

“You know, The Wizard of Oz, The movie.”

He shook his head. He had never heard of it. “This place was St. Louis, where we lived, but, at the same time, it wasn’t. It was strange as all get out.”

“Jim, that makes no sense. How could there be a place where no one knows anything?”

“Beats the hell out of me. Over the years, I met a handful of people who had the same experience I did. They were more confused than I was. And I was pretty damned confused.”

“What did you do?”

“I played the hand that was dealt to me. Made some money. Got to work on some projects.”

“What kind of projects?”

“I’m sort of in charge of building stuff over there. It’s great fun.”

“You’ve got a lot of nerve talking about fun! Do you know what I went through? How many nights I cried myself to sleep over you?”

“I thought about you too, Daisy, every day and every night for all these years. But I couldn’t figure out how to come back or send a message. Then, not too long ago, a friend came up with a way. Now I’m here.”

He put his hand on top of hers. She pulled back.

“You think you can show up out of nowhere after all this time with some cockamamie story and everything will be like it used to be? I have a family! A life!”

“Of course. I have no right to expect anything from you.”

The waitress came with their lunch orders. Neither of them said a word for a few minutes. Jim studied Daisy as they ate. She was so beautiful and he trusted her completely, unlike the women he had met in the intervening years. With

them, he could never tell if they were interested in him or in “James Whittemore Hines,” the big shot who ran the city. The few times he had let his guard down, he found out it was the latter. So, more than anything, Jim wanted to get Daisy back.

“Can you come with me for a couple days? When you see this place for yourself, you’ll know I’m not lying or crazy. I swear I’ll bring you home in one piece.”

He looked at her with warm, imploring eyes. He knew that this was the time to keep his mouth shut. If he said another word, she would turn him down. Abigail, who felt the stirrings of Daisy inside her, mulled over what she should do. Curiosity about Jim and his story rumbled around her mind. Was she ready to walk out of Marshall Field’s and never see him again? Because that’s what would happen if she didn’t take him up on his offer. But would going with Jim somehow be cheating on Dwight? Maybe not, if she were careful not to let it go too far. She tried to balance the pros and cons like an adult, but it was hopeless. The ocean of feelings about Jim rose up in a wave and smashed the shore of caution and good sense.

“Okay. Two days, but that’s it.”

Jim’s smile glowed brighter.

“Fantastic! Let’s go Saturday morning, day after tomorrow. You’ll be back by Sunday evening.”

“I’m supposed to go to Wisconsin with Dwight and the children for the weekend.”

“Tell them there’s been an emergency. You have to help out an old friend in St. Louis. And that would be true.”

“Jim, I can’t do this so quickly.”

“If you don’t do it now, you never will.”

Jim was right again. Abigail took a deep breath and agreed to go on Saturday. That evening, even after hours of

rehearsal inside her head, it was excruciating to lie to Dwight. Her story was that her friend Eleanor was suddenly very sick and had no one to take care of her. Though he didn't like surprises, Dwight was trusting and said it would be fine. He would take the kids to the cabin. She should help her friend.

In the taxi to Municipal Airport to meet Jim early on Saturday morning, Daisy came close to telling the driver to turn around and take her home. She knew this whole thing was wrong—completely wrong in every way—but the thrill of seeing Jim again and her curiosity about his strange story won the day. He wanted to fly to St. Louis instead of taking the train. She protested that flying was too expensive. Jim waved off her concern. He was happy to cover the costs. “Flying’s faster. Let’s not waste our time together sitting on a train.” Actually, Daisy was nervous. She had never been in an airplane before, but she didn’t want to tell that to Jim. The flight, less than two hours instead of the train’s five, was bumpy. Daisy clenched her armrest most of the way. During one especially bad bout of turbulence, she squeezed Jim’s arm. He patted her hand to reassure her.

When they walked down the stairs, Daisy saw that the tarmac was bustling with military planes. Men in uniform were everywhere. “I thought you said someone would be here to meet us,” she said. “There will be,” Jim said. “Follow me.” They walked into the small terminal building for civilian flights, then out a door on the other side. Cars were parked in front, but Jim led her in the other direction, around to the rear of a storage shed. He pulled a silver cigarette case out of his jacket pocket, opened it, and picked out two small white pills. “These will take us to the other place.” Daisy’s eyes opened wide. This was scarier than the airplane. “Don’t worry. You’ll feel bad for a few seconds, then it will be over.

Hold onto your suitcase and grab my hand.”

Jim made a little toast with the pills and they both swallowed. Daisy’s knees went wobbly and her head began to spin. The next thing she knew, Jim was helping her back to her feet. “I hope that wasn’t too hard,” he said. They walked around the shed. A long black car was waiting. The uniformed chauffeur got out “Welcome back, Mr. Hines.” He put the suitcases in the trunk and they drove off. Daisy looked out the window at the airport. Instead of military planes, a line of silver biplane airliners was parked along the runway.

They drove into the city. Daisy noticed that women on the sidewalks were wearing elaborate, conical hats—a style that she had never seen before. Also, new buildings were everywhere, but then she hadn’t been in St. Louis for many years. After months of heartbreak over Jim’s disappearance in ‘29, she accepted a girlfriend’s invitation to share an apartment in Chicago. Within a year, she met Dwight and never looked back.

“Do you remember that party we went to on Portland Place back in ’28?” Jim asked. How could she forget? Two hundred people and a live jazz orchestra in a massive mansion owned by one of Jim’s clients. “I live in that house now. Helluva turn of events.”

A few minutes later they turned into Portland Place, the city’s most exclusive street. A policeman on the corner waved them through the gates. Another policeman stood guard in front of the house, a three-story, red brick Georgian with a flat roof. A butler hurried out the front door as Jim and Daisy got out of the car. “It’s wonderful to have you home, Mr. Hines. I trust your journey was satisfactory.”

“Yes, it was, Wilson. This is my friend, Miss Flowers. She’ll be staying in the main guest bedroom.”

“How many guest bedrooms are there?” Daisy asked.

“Four or five,” Jim said. “This house makes no sense for one person. But I was encouraged to buy it. For entertaining and because this street is well-protected. Concerns about my security.”

“Why?”

“Beats me. I’m pretty popular. But people always worry about some damned thing or another.”

Inside, the front hall was the size of the entire main floor of Daisy’s house in Chicago. A tall vase with a lush arrangement of flowers stood on marble-topped table in the center. A broad stairway led to the second floor. Two more servants appeared. One, a young man in a suit, gave Jim a folder with papers. “Are any of these urgent?” Jim asked. “Just the ones on top.”

A woman in a starched maid’s uniform asked what Mr. Hines and his guest would like for lunch. “How about chicken salad?” Jim asked Daisy. “Melba makes the best you’ve ever tasted.” She nodded and he held up two fingers for Melba. “We’ll be in the dining room in a half hour.” The butler carried the suitcases up the stairs as Jim and Daisy followed. Jim showed Daisy her room and pointed out that his was at the opposite end of the hall. “Relax and freshen up, then meet me downstairs.” He held up the packet of papers. “I have to read some of these and make a few phone calls. No rest for the wicked.”

Daisy’s room had windows on three sides, wallpaper with floral designs, and a mirrored dressing table. The main feature was a four-poster bed with a wood-framed upper panel. She lay on the bed and looked up at a magenta satin canopy gathered into a rosette at the center. Jim had done pretty well for himself.

In the wood-paneled dining room, Jim sat at the head of the long table, talking on the phone.

“Don’t let them bluff you, Peter. We have all the cards. This product will transform their company and they know it. If they don’t want to pay our price for the patent, we’ll find someone else who will. Tell them that I personally ran the numbers and can vouch for the product’s potential.”

Jim saw Daisy and waved for her to sit down at the table as he finished his phone call.

“I can’t take any more business calls until next week. I know you can close this deal. See you tonight.”

The butler took the phone away and Melba brought in two plates of chicken salad.

“Daisy, I forgot something,” Jim said. “We have to go to a party tonight. It’ll be fun.”

“Where?”

“At the Meriwether Hotel downtown. There’s a big formal do for the grand opening. Raising money for some charity or other. I don’t remember which one.”

“I don’t have a dress for something like that.”

“We’ll pick up an outfit for you this afternoon. You’ll be the belle of the ball.”

Daisy thought to protest that she didn’t want Jim buying her anything. But she knew it wouldn’t do any good. There was no stopping Jim when he knew what he wanted.

Jim’s car pulled up to the dressmaker’s shop at the corner of Euclid and Maryland. When the chauffeur opened the door for Daisy and Jim to get out, people on the sidewalk spotted him and crowded around. Jim smiled, waved, and shook hands. A young man asked him for an autograph. A mother held up her toddler to see him. The chauffeur moved people out of the way so Jim and Daisy could enter the shop.

Inside, Daisy asked “What was that all about?”

“I told you that people like me.”

“Are you a politician?”

“Not really, but I started this deal that has made a lot of money for a lot of people. They’re pretty happy about it.”

Jim told the dressmaker that his friend needed a gown for a ball this evening, “Something that will knock their socks off.” The dressmaker and her assistants surrounded Daisy in a flurry of attention. After a few minutes, she was wearing a floor-length, pale-blue silk gown with frothy, sparkling accents on the shoulders and neckline. It was sublime.

Jim beamed as she came out of the dressing room. “You look like a million bucks!” Daisy smiled. This was the first elegant new dress she had worn in more than three years, since war rationing had put women’s fashion on hold. The dressmaker said she would finish the alterations and deliver the dress to Jim’s house by five o’clock.

Jim showed Daisy the city all afternoon.

Through the window of his car, Daisy saw cranes and construction sites everywhere they went. “Is all of this your doing, Jim?” she asked. “I guess I got the ball rolling, but it’s way beyond me now. Back in the old days before the crash, all I wanted was to make money. Now I put together financing to build the city. It’s more fun than a barrel of monkeys.” Daisy was impressed, though she thought that Jim was probably being modest about the scope of his contribution.

“For years, I dreamed about showing you this place,” he held her hand. “And now you’re here. I’ve never been so happy.”

The chauffeur held the door open as Jim and Daisy got out of the car at the intersection of Lindell and Grand, where huge trenches were being excavated down the middle of both streets. Jim was more excited than ever as he talked about the plans for two subway lines to tie the city together, east-west along Lindell and Olive and north-south on Grand. “We’re going to have a massive underground palace

of a station where the lines cross. Vaulted ceilings, mosaics, crystal chandeliers, the works! Nothing like it anywhere in the country.”

They drove around town for a while longer and turned into Tower Grove Park. As they slowly passed under the majestic cathedral of trees, Jim said “This is where I come to think.” He signaled for the chauffeur to pull over so he and Daisy could walk. It was cool in the shade with a touch of breeze. Birds flocked in to eat mulberries that littered the ground beneath large bushes. Children played while mothers sat on a bench in conversation. Jim was silent for the first time all day. He took Daisy’s hand as they walked. She didn’t pull away. She breathed in the fragrant air. There was no reason for Daisy to be here and every reason for her not to be. But strolling with Jim felt so easy, so right. She let reason slip away and drift to the ground.

They came to an outdoor café next to ornamental ponds filled with lily pads. Small fish and tadpoles flickered in the dark water. Dragonflies hovered and darted above. They sat at a table underneath an umbrella and ordered tea with an assortment of cookies and ice cream.

“Remember our friend Bradley and his ‘ice cream socials?’” Daisy asked.

“I haven’t thought about him in years,” Jim said. “All he would allow us to drink was ice cream in champagne glasses, doused with bourbon.”

“He had a different stunt for every party.”

“Like his poetry party. You had to open a book of poetry and read aloud to earn your drink.”

“He said ‘Say it like you mean it. It’s not the damned telephone book.’”

“Then I read the telephone book like it was poetry. Mr. Alexander Caldecott of 3935 West Pine Boulevard called

Miss Penelope Winterbottom at Forest 3140.” Jim held up an imaginary telephone. “Hello, Penelope, would you like a drink?”

Daisy played along. “I would love one, Alexander. That is so thoughtful of you.”

Daisy and Jim toasted each other with spoons of ice cream. They began to laugh. Jim tried to continue his act, but he was laughing too hard. Soon he and Daisy were both in tears. He regained his composure for a moment, but she couldn’t stop laughing.

“Daisy, settle down. People are staring at us.”

“But there’s no bourbon in this ice cream.”

“Would you like me to ask the waiter for some—or for a telephone book?” That got her laughing even harder. Jim played the part of a mock radio announcer.

“Miss Daisy Flowers of 4497 Pershing Avenue is making a spectacle of herself once again.”

“Mr. James Whittemore Hines of 37 Portland Place is, as usual, exacerbating the plight of Miss Flowers.”

“Exacerbating. That’s a five-dollar word, Miss Flowers. Your vocabulary is superb.”

“Why thank you, Mr. Hines.”

They giggled so hard that Daisy had to be careful not to spit her ice cream. She hadn’t laughed like that in sixteen years. Neither had Jim.

Waiters and other diners glanced at them discreetly. An intrepid squirrel edged closer on the flagstones, hoping to snare a stray cookie crumb.

Jim, wearing a tuxedo with tails, waited for Daisy at the bottom of the staircase. When she appeared on the landing in her blue ball gown, he made a theatrical bow. “You look stunning! Tongues will be wagging all over town tonight.”

She was a little embarrassed. Did a forty-year old mother deserve such attention?

Searchlights swept the sky as Jim's limousine approached the Meriwether Hotel, a tall wedding cake of cantilevered slabs, which rose above a white spiral base that covered an entire block. "Welcome to another of Wright's monuments to himself," Jim said to Daisy as they emerged from the car to popping flashbulbs from news photographers. They walked along a red carpet as well wishers cheered from behind velvet ropes. Inside, guests in formal attire marveled at the spacious lobby, which glittered with light. A forest of thin columns rose up from the floor and spread out into broad, circular blooms at the ceiling. Daisy was surprised that many Negroes were among the hundreds of revelers, mingling and chatting with everyone else. That was something she had never seen before, even in Chicago. Jim plucked two champagne glasses from a waiter and handed one to Daisy. As a line of guests approached to greet him, he introduced her over and over as "Miss Flowers, my dearest friend." A clutch of women looked Daisy up and down with barely concealed envy while they exchanged pleasantries with Jim. After they departed, Jim whispered into Daisy's ear, "They'll be in a tizzy for days, wondering who the hell is Hines' mystery woman." His eyes sparkled as he grinned.

A voice over a loudspeaker announced that it was time for dinner in the upper ballroom. Guests stood waiting at banks of elevators. A short man with billowy white hair tapped Jim on the shoulder, "You and your guest must join me on my private elevator." Jim introduced him to Daisy. "This is F.L. Wright, who dreamed up this place." The man made a courtly bow and kissed Daisy's hand. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Miss Flowers. Please call me Frank." The private elevator whisked them to the top floor of

the hotel ahead of the other guests. They emerged into vast ballroom under a glass roof. Wright pointed to the portions of the roof that had retracted to reveal the stars above. "Here we transcend the noise of the city, Miss Flowers. I lift mankind closer to nature and the living universe." He explained how the indirect lighting system prevented glare so your pupils remained dilated and you could see both the lit interior and the dark sky through the open roof panels. It was an uncanny experience.

Daisy was seated between Jim and Wright at the center of the head table. Wright talked incessantly about his projects and his business, the Hydraulic Brick Corporation. "C'mon, Frank, give Daisy a break," Jim said. "She's my guest, after all." Wright turned his attention to the woman who was sitting on his other side.

"Sorry about him. He never shuts up" Jim said under his breath. "I hope you're enjoying yourself."

"Yes, It's wonderful."

"I have to give a little speech after dinner."

Daisy was alarmed. "Oh my god! You should have been practicing, instead of driving me around all afternoon."

Jim chuckled. "No worries. I could do this in my sleep."

After dinner, the master of ceremonies introduced Jim. There was a standing ovation as he made his way to the podium. Daisy noticed that the crowd consisted mostly of successful, silver-haired men, and women in brightly colored gowns, who looked like tropical birds. They all gazed in adoration as Jim waved to them. *This place really is Oz*, Daisy thought, *and my Jim is the wizard!*

Jim began by praising the new hotel and its creator, F.L. Wright. "The mind boggles at the magnificence we see tonight. This hotel will be the brightest jewel in the crown of our city. But I know that Mr. Wright has even greater things

up his sleeve.” He nodded to Wright. “We eagerly await—the nations of the world await—your next marvels.” Wright waved to the crowd.

Jim continued. “St. Louis is fast earning the reputation as the ‘City of Inventors.’ From Amperic bricks to zip clothing fasteners to new food processes, we are showing the world what a city that works for everyone can do. Still there are naysayers. But not for long. They ain’t seen nothing yet!” Another standing ovation. “Tonight, I am pleased to announce that, within one year, we will unveil a new invention that will astound the world and propel us to even greater heights of prosperity. I guarantee it!”

The room erupted in cheers. The wizard had spoken. People at the head table shook Jim’s hand and clapped him on the back as he returned to his seat. Daisy leaned over and asked him to tell her about the new invention. Jim said, “Can you keep a secret?” She nodded yes. He whispered in her ear, “I haven’t the faintest idea.”

She opened her eyes wide in surprise. “But you promised it within a year.”

“Something will turn up. I believe in the old saying ‘It’s better to be lucky than smart.’ But do you know what’s even better? To be both lucky and smart. And I am.”

He looked her in the eyes with the smile of the brash twenty-nine year old he was the day they met. He hadn’t changed one bit. Daisy’s heart melted. There was no one in the world like Jim.

An orchestra began to play. Waiters cleared away a hundred tables. Jim took Daisy by the hand and led her to the center of the room. “I need you, Daisy. Be my queen. All this will be yours. What do you say?”

It was the offer of a lifetime. She smiled at him and nodded yes. He swept her up in his arms and whirled her

around the dance floor. He declared for all to hear, “Ain’t life grand!”

They danced until the orchestra’s last number. It was past midnight when they returned to Jim’s home. Other guests remarked to each other that they had never seen James Whittemore Hines enjoying himself in public. He had a reputation for ducking out of events as quickly as he could manage without offending anyone.

At the top of the stairs, Jim and Daisy embraced. He ached for nothing more than to smother her with kisses, but he knew the value of patience. He didn’t want her to feel even a feather’s weight of pressure. That would doom his campaign for her free affection.

Daisy—now she was mostly Daisy and just a little bit Abigail—was torn. She was having the most wonderful night of her life, but a faint voice told her it was a mirage. Not the time or place to be swept off her feet. She held Jim in the embrace for a long time, then let go and walked to her room without looking back. She slipped out of the blue silk gown, hung it carefully in the closet, and put on the simple cotton nightgown she had brought from home. She fell back on the bed and stared at the satin canopy. All the moments of the day danced in front of her eyes. She was buffeted by feelings she couldn’t sort out. They brought tears and smiles to her at the same time.

After a while—she had no idea how long—she got out of the bed and opened the door. She checked to make sure that none of the servants were around, then walked on silent bare feet down the long hallway to Jim’s room at the far end. She opened the door and closed it behind her. Moonlight filtered through the sheer curtains, casting a faint diagonal shaft of light across the white sheets. Jim lay on his back. He turned to Daisy when he heard the door click shut. She hurried to

the bed and put her forefinger over his lips to hush him. She slipped into the bed and pulled the sheet over their heads. They lay forehead to forehead, each feeling the slight breath from the other's nostrils. In the dim light that penetrated the sheet, she saw his smooth, innocent face. Daisy was the first to touch. She lightly stroked his cheek with her finger. Soon they began to make long, slow, sweet, sweet love.

Sunday morning, Daisy awoke at dawn. Jim was sleeping peacefully. He looked just like her old Jim. The signs of age and the solidity of success faded away in his slumber. He was once again the young man with endless enthusiasm and seventy-six ideas a minute—the most completely alive person she had ever known. Daisy got out of bed and walked to the window. She parted the curtain to look out at the street below. Flower beds in every color filled a grassy median with large shade trees. A statue of Mercury faced the rising sun from atop a red granite pedestal. Two gardeners were quietly clipping and pruning.

When they spent weekends at the Lake Geneva cabin, Dwight liked to get up early and let her sleep. She knew that, at this moment, he was taking Dwight Junior and Celeste out fishing in the rowboat as wisps of morning mist lingered over the water. Dwight Junior was a proud, self-sufficient angler, but Celeste refused to touch icky worms. Her father had to bait her hook. The red and white bobbers darted down into the dark water with the first nibbles. After a half-hour, they would have a mess of perch on a stringer floating behind the rowboat. At the cabin, Abigail would be sipping coffee when they returned. Dwight Junior proudly cleaned the fish for her to see. Abigail would heat the skillet and prepare a bowl of cornmeal with salt and pepper. Celeste helped her coat the perch fillets and drop them into the hot oil. They would eat

breakfast on the screened porch with Celeste bubbling on about the fish that she caught all by herself.

But Abigail wasn't there today. She was a world away. Someplace she couldn't even begin to describe. The spell of Jim's smiling face, the dancing, and the magnificent ballroom dissolved. Daisy vanished. Abigail had never felt so far from Dwight Junior and her little Celeste. She looked back to the sleeping Jim. *What in hell am I doing here? Dwight and the children need me.* Suddenly, this moment when she had been ready to throw everything away terrified her. *I want to go home!* She curled up in a ball on the chair opposite Jim's bed.

Jim stirred. He flopped his arm to where Daisy had been all night. She wasn't there. He opened his eyes and saw her in the chair. The fear on her face told him that he was losing her.

"I can't do this, Jim."

"Oh Daisy. My sweet Daisy."

"You're wonderful. But it's been too long."

"Daisy, nothing could possibly be better than the love we have. You know it and I know it."

She sobbed. "Yes Jim, I know. But I can't leave my children."

"We'll bring them here. They'll have the time of their lives."

"How could I do that to Dwight?"

Jim resisted the temptation to say something mean about Dwight, who sounded like a plodding dullard to him.

"Dwight will get over it. I know how men are."

"But you don't have children. You don't know what that means."

Jim had no answer for this. He could always see the chessboard with all the moves and countermoves stretching into the future. Now, he had no move left. Checkmate for

his happiness. His powers of persuasion were legendary. He could convince almost anyone to do almost anything. But he didn't want to use those powers on Daisy. That would ruin everything. She would end up hating him. There was no point in making it hard for her.

"I'll take you home right away."

She nodded as she cried.

At the airport, she swallowed the pill grimly. Soon they were boarding the DC-3 that would fly them to Chicago. Abigail wanted to take the plane, despite her fears. The journey would be over sooner. They hardly spoke during the flight.

As Jim hailed her a cab at the Chicago airport, he told her that in case she wanted to talk, he would be at the Drake Hotel that night. If he didn't hear from her, he would leave in the morning and never contact her again.

They embraced. After a long moment, Jim was the one who pulled back. "Time for you to go." She wasn't ready to let go and clung to him. "I love you, Jim. You're the best."

"No I'm not. In my book, you're the best, Daisy. And I will always love you, come what may."

In the cab, she turned to see him through the back window. He was standing alone with his suitcase by his side. He caught her eye, flashed his big smile, and waved as her cab drove away. A deep, smothering sadness came over her as she watched Jim recede into the distance. Her youth was disappearing along with him.

Abigail did pretty well with Dwight and the children that evening. Celeste leapt into her arms at the front door. Dwight Junior talked a mile a minute about fishing, swimming, and building the best sand castle ever with his buddies. Dwight asked how her friend was doing. "Better," she said, "It was

important for me to be there. Thank you.” Dwight kissed her on the forehead. It felt a little distant. *Is he suspicious?* She was afraid to talk to him—she might say something that would make things worse. She told him she was exhausted and needed to lie down. Upstairs under the covers, she relived and savored every moment of her day—only yesterday—with Jim. She knew she would never be able to breathe a word of it to a single soul. When Dwight came to bed later, she pretended to be asleep. In the middle of the night, she was startled awake by a frightening thought. *What if I was dreaming this whole thing and it never happened?*

The next morning, Abigail’s sadness began its slow transformation into a numbness that lasted for weeks. It only lifted when the first chill winds of fall blew in off Lake Michigan and the trees in front of her house showed fringes of red and orange leaves. An appetite for life stirred inside her.

BUCKY

JIM ORDERED ROOM SERVICE at the Drake Hotel. He wanted to stay close by the phone if Daisy called. From the look in her eyes that morning, he knew she wouldn't, but he had nothing to lose. He wasn't quite ready to admit that his dream of many years was over. He didn't touch his dinner, didn't even lift the cover of the plate on the silver tray. He did, however, open the bottle of scotch that he had ordered with his meal. Normally, Jim didn't go in for drinking. He prized his mental clarity. Long ago, in the muddy, stinking trenches of France, he figured out that, when sober, he could beat drinkers at poker any day of the week. Success required three abilities: recalculating the odds on the fly as each card was revealed, controlling one's facial expressions, and, most importantly, reading the other players to predict what they were going to do. Alcohol interfered with all of these and made drunks easy prey for Jim, who returned from the war with far more money in his pocket than when he left. But this night, he welcomed the wobbly haze of drink. There was nothing to play for. He had already lost. Despite all his longing for Daisy, the phone never rang.

Jim awoke at dawn. He was top of the bed, still wearing his clothes. His head throbbed, his mouth was dry, the bottle of scotch was half gone, and his heart was broken. He wanted to get out of Chicago as fast as he could. He decided to go to St. Louis by rail. Flying would bring back too many memories of Daisy. He made it to the station in time for

the nine o'clock train. As usual, the platform was filled with soldiers and sailors. *These people and their stupid wars!* He bought a paper and found a seat. He read about the bloody, grinding advances towards the invasion of Japan. The faces of the soldiers in the station revealed their fear—a fear he had felt himself in France in 1918. In a few short weeks, they could be the ones dying on a Japanese beach. Jim also read about the recent defeat of Germany and the discoveries of its barbarous campaign of murder. Oh, how he hated this world! *Is there was no end to their brutality?* Daisy was the only person he cared about here and now she was forever lost to him.

Jim stared out the window as the train lumbered through downtown Chicago, carrying him away from Daisy. He vowed he would never set foot in this world again—except for business. This place was no more than a piggy bank to be raided. He had established a lucrative trade stealing inventions from over here and patenting them in his new world. He had already made good money, but he had barely scratched the surface. Today, his only regret was that the people here would never realize how thoroughly Jim Hines was fleecing them.

A voice asked, “Is this seat taken?” Jim looked up to see a short man with thick glasses and a dark suit standing in the aisle. Jim waved for him to sit down, then went back to his newspaper. The man opened his briefcase, which was crammed with a jumble of documents and notebooks, and started to sketch and scribble.

After a few minutes, Jim put down his paper and watched the man, who was immersed in his work. The sketches seemed to show a structure suspended by cables from a mast. “I don’t mean to intrude, but that looks fascinating,” Jim said.

The man turned to him, blinking. His eyes were enlarged behind the strong lenses. “Pardon me?”

“What are you drawing?”

“A dwelling machine. A modern, mass-produced house. I’m on my way to Kansas to meet with the people who will be manufacturing it.”

“Are you an architect?”

“No. Architects don’t like me. I’m going to put them out of business.”

Jim smiled to himself. He wondered how his friend F.L. Wright would take that statement.

The man continued, speaking fast in a clipped New England accent. Jim could barely keep up with his torrent of words. “The way in which we live is very, very ignorant. We must reorganize the environment of man so man can prosper. That’s my main undertaking. You’re either going to make money or you’re going to make sense. I want to bring the design innovations of the sea and the sky to the land.”

The man rummaged in his briefcase. “Cars today are based on the horse and buggy. They’re heavy, inefficient, and spew smoke. Completely wrong for the modern age.” He pulled out a drawing of a car, which looked like a zeppelin or a cigar. “Based on aircraft principles. Light, maneuverable, and inexpensive. But no one is interested. The car companies can’t see beyond their noses.”

“I’m interested.” This could be just what Jim was looking for—big ideas that could make serious money in his St. Louis. “How long will you be in Kansas?”

“A week.”

“Perfect. I represent some businessmen and money men in St. Louis who would love to hear your ideas.”

“Everything’s patented.”

“Of course.” Jim reassured him. He didn’t give a damn about patents. No one here would ever know what he was doing in the other world.

They made a plan to meet in St. Louis a week later. The man said he could come directly to Jim’s office. “It would be better to meet at the train station,” Jim replied. “My place is hard to find.” Jim introduced himself and realized he didn’t know the man’s name.

“Buckminster Fuller. Call me Bucky for short.” They shook hands.

When the train pulled into St. Louis Union Station, Jim saw a commotion on the platform. People were laughing and dancing. Soldiers hugged each other. He said goodbye to Bucky and disembarked. “What’s going on?” he asked a jubilant soldier. “We’ve whupped the Nips!” Jim saw a vendor waving newspapers. He bought one, the afternoon *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for August 6, 1945. “U.S. Atomic Bomb Blasts Japan.” *Good God! Is there no end to the ways these people kill each other?*

After he met Fuller the next week, Jim led him to a remote corner of Union Station. It wasn’t easy to convince him to take one of the pills. Jim had to use all his guile and charm. “It’s just a precaution, completely harmless. My colleagues are very fearful of infection.” Fuller didn’t realize what was going on, but allowed Jim to put a pill in his lips. The next thing he knew, he was in a limousine on the way to a conference room filled with people who were very keen on listening to his presentation. Once Fuller got going, he talked nonstop. He described his concepts for automobiles. “By using comprehensive, anticipatory design science, we can create higher-functioning vehicles with far less material input. Design the car around tension, not compression.”

Jim stood in the corner and smiled. This could be the breakthrough he had hoped for. The engineers from the Dorris, Moon, and Gardner car companies poured over Fuller's drawings and peppered him with questions about suspensions, steering and frame design. "The most important advance will be to harness hydrogen, the most abundant element in the universe, for propulsion. We can get rid the outdated, obsolete internal combustion engine." Fuller said as he unrolled a new blueprint. "All vehicles can run on a fuel cell, a small electric generator powered by hydrogen. Silent engines with no exhaust, except water vapor. With a steady source of electricity to separate hydrogen from water by electrolysis, using a device like this, we can produce endless fuel at almost no cost. Put the oil companies out of business."

F.L. Wright walked over to Jim and whispered in his ear. "My Amperic bricks can do what he needs." Jim smiled. "Get a team on that electrolysis machine right away," he said. Wright nodded.

At the end of the meeting, Jim asked Bucky to leave his designs and plans so the attorneys could do their due diligence for investment purposes. He protested, but Jim reassured him, "We understand that everything is protected by your patents. Nothing to worry about." He produced a signed agreement that acknowledged Fuller's complete ownership of these inventions. Fuller was mollified and left his documents.

Jim took Bucky back to Union Station, gave him a briefcase with gold coins as an advance on royalties, and, once again, had to convince him to take the pill. Back in the regular world, they shook hands and Jim promised, "I'll be in touch soon with detailed licensing agreements for you to review." Jim watched Bucky disappear into the crowd on the

train platform. *Like I told you, Daisy*, he thought to himself, *I'm lucky and smart!*

Fuller never figured out where he had been or what had happened to him. He told people about the St. Louis businessmen who were planning to invest in his inventions, but he was never able to find them again or get his plans back. Eventually, he sold the gold coins and invested the proceeds in his mass-produced housing company, which failed after a year.

On May 6, 1946, Jim strode to the podium in the Meriwether Hotel ballroom. “Last year, I promised you an astounding invention. Today, I’m here to deliver on that promise. Not just one invention, but two. Together, they will revolutionize transportation and put our city of St. Louis at the center of a new automobile industry.”

The curtain behind him parted to reveal a smooth, cylindrical vehicle. “Behold the *WhisperCar*, powered by *HydroDrive!* It’s light, maneuverable, and almost completely silent. The only exhaust is harmless water vapor. No noxious fumes! And you can produce your own fuel with the Amperic bricks that power your house.” A young woman on the stage pulled back a second curtain to reveal a white box attached to a tank. “Hydraulic’s new *Home Filling Station* uses your surplus electricity to convert water into hydrogen for your *WhisperCar*. Fill up conveniently in your own garage. No more trips to the gas station!”

Jim raised his arms in triumph and flashed his biggest smile as flashbulbs popped and people crowded forward to get a better look at the new inventions.

At the same moment a world away, a newborn’s cry echoed in the delivery room of a Chicago hospital. Abigail slumped

back into the bed as a nurse wiped the sweat from her brow. “Congratulations, Mrs. Collins,” the doctor said, “You have a healthy baby boy.” The nurse wrapped the baby in a blanket and placed him in Abigail’s arms. With her face still flushed and her damp hair matted around her face, Abigail was radiant as she gazed into her baby’s eyes.

A little while later, Dwight was allowed into the delivery room to see his new son. The nurse said to him, “You must be very proud of your wife, Mr. Collins. Not many forty-one-year-old women can give birth to a healthy child.” Dwight leaned over to kiss Abigail on the forehead as the baby slept in her arms. He said, “I think we should name him ...” Abigail held up her finger to silence him.

“Dwight Junior is named after you and Celeste after your mother. I’m choosing the name for this one.” Dwight had not expected this. “What do you want to call him?”

“James.”

Abigail nuzzled the baby closer. “Jimmy, my sweet Jimmy. You’re mommy’s special angel.”

JIMMY

“I NEED CHICKEN BREASTS, bread crumbs, and parmesan cheese, along with everything else I’ve ordered. Can you deliver by 5:30?” The voice on the other end of the phone murmured something. Abigail smiled. “Thank you. If I’m not home, set the box on the front porch. And make sure the chicken is packed in ice.” She hung up the phone in the large kitchen of her new Lake Forest home. She and Dwight had moved there just a few months earlier, after he had been made managing partner of the law firm. She was still getting used to the layout of this kitchen and spent more time than she liked opening cabinets and drawers as she hunted for the bundt cake pan.

Jimmy was flying in this afternoon after his sophomore year at Yale, and angel food cake was his absolute favorite. She had to get it in the oven soon, so it would be baked before she went to Midway to pick him up. Abigail looked forward to a special evening, with Jimmy coming home for the entire summer. Dwight Junior, now an associate at the law firm, would also be there with his wife, Evelyn. Abigail thought they made a perfect couple, who might bring her a grandchild before too long. As usual, Celeste would miss this family dinner. She was somewhere in France or Italy on a “backpacking” tour of Europe with her friends, who were worthless beatniks as far as Abigail was concerned. Not the kind of people who were a good influence on Celeste, who needed to settle down. She was twenty-six, after all. Celeste had no desire to listen to advice from her mother. Abigail

wished that Dwight would stop indulging their daughter's whims, but she had daddy wrapped around her little finger. Abigail was tired of arguing with both of them, so now she just bit her lip and kept quiet.

She had taken the sugar, flour, and almond extract out of the cabinet and was separating the egg whites into a mixing bowl when the doorbell rang. *That grocery store is fast!* She opened the front door, but there was no box of groceries. Instead, a mailman with a clipboard said, "I have a special delivery for Mrs. Dwight Collins. Please sign here." He handed her a large manila envelope with no return address. She wasn't expecting anything, so it was probably some kind of solicitation. Several of those had come since they bought this house. In the kitchen, she tossed the envelope on top of others in a basket and went back to her cake.

Dwight had arranged a summer job for Jimmy, an internship with a Northwestern economics professor. Jimmy was thrilled by the prospect of a summer filled with numbers, statistics, and equations—the most wonderful thing he could imagine. Dwight pulled a few strings to get him this position—his law firm represented several of the university's top donors. But Jimmy had earned it also. A glowing letter of recommendation from his mathematics professor at Yale had sealed the deal.

Abigail whisked the egg whites by hand, then added the water and almond extract. She finished the batter in an electric mixer, stirring in sugar until it was whipped into mountain peaks, then adding flour. She poured it into the bundt pan and slid it into the oven. She turned the dial on the spring-loaded kitchen timer to thirty-five minutes and glanced at the clock. The cake would be ready before she needed to leave for the airport.

Abigail washed her hands, then remembered the envelope. She slit it open with a kitchen knife and pulled out a newspaper. It was the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from a week earlier. Jim's photo was on the front page. The hair was silver and the neck a bit heavier, but it was her Jim, with his mischievous eyes and million-watt smile.

Abigail staggered and found a chair. Her eyes raced back and forth as she read. She put the paper down and stared at the wall in shock. A jumble of a thousand memories swirled through her mind. After a while, she began to cry. She cried for Jim. She cried for Daisy.

Ding!

The kitchen timer sounded. Jimmy's angel food cake was done.

MOM

“GET YOUR BUTT TO CHICAGO, JIMMY. Now!”

“This isn’t a good time.”

“There’s never a good time to have a mother with dementia.”

“She’s not that bad.”

“How would you know? You’re not here day after day.”

“The earliest I can come is next Wednesday. I’m speaking at a conference on Tuesday.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful. I’m sooo happy for you. But here, in the land of reality, everything is going to hell. Dwight and I are beating our heads against a wall. You know mom likes you best. You’re the only one she will listen to.”

“Okay, Celeste, I’ll be there on Wednesday.”

After he hung up, Jim Collins took a deep breath to calm himself. The angry calls from his sister never failed to stress him out. He stared at the draft of the speech on his laptop, *Game Theory, Innovation, and Financial Markets*. It was the best work he had ever done.

Dwight drove on the way to the assisted living facility. Their mother, Abigail, sat in front, Celeste and Jim in back. Abigail cheerfully pointed out a house where friends of hers, long dead, used to live. The three children, who barely remembered these ancient friends, made perfunctory comments. Dwight and Celeste had high hopes that this facility would work out. Several people who Abigail knew lived there. “They don’t have many vacancies in the memory care unit,” Dwight told

Jim when he picked him up at his hotel. “One is open now and I put down a deposit to reserve it for mom. “But they won’t hold it for long.”

Abigail was extremely polite to the woman who led them on the tour. She admired the view of the grounds a dining room window. Dwight, Celeste, and Jim were encouraged.

Back in the car, Abigail exploded at her three children. “What in the world is the matter with you? You think I would want to live in a place like that? Maybe I didn’t raise you right. Take me home!”

She waved them off as she opened the front door. “Leave me alone! I can take care of myself.”

They stood in the driveway as she slammed the door. “We’re going to lose the slot at that place unless she changes her mind soon,” Dwight said.

“I can’t keep worrying about her all the time,” Celeste said. “I’ve got my own life to live. That’s something you would know about, Mr. Big Shot Stanford Professor.”

“Lay off,” Jim said. It was always complaints and bickering when he was with his brother and sister. He hated it. “I’ll talk to her tomorrow. By myself. I’ll try to smooth this out.”

Jim went to the house the next morning. His mother’s face lit up when she opened the door. “Jimmy, my Jimmy, what a surprise!” She took his hand and led him to the kitchen. She apologized for not having his favorite angel food cake. “If I had known you were coming, I would have made it for you, like always.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“You’re my special angel, little Jimmy.”

“You’re my angel too, mom.”

She held his hand, started to say something, then stopped. She looked lost. Difficulty finding words was one of the

warning signs of dementia, the lady from the assisted living facility had told Dwight, Celeste, and Jim over the phone. After a moment, she began to talk again.

“You know, I had a beau before I met Dwight. Long before any of you were born. We were quite a couple. He was handsome and smart, like you.”

“What happened?”

“He disappeared.”

“You mean you broke up?”

“No. One day he was just gone. Without a word, without a trace.”

Over the years, she had dropped occasional hints about her glamorous life in the 1920s. Jim never thought to ask questions and she offered no details. He suspected she might be embarrassed for her children to think she had once been young and foolish.

“I missed him so much.” She began to cry, like it was happening all over again. Sudden mood shifts were another sign of incipient dementia, according to the lady from the facility.

“Some people thought he stole a lot of money and ran away. But I knew he wouldn’t do that. Something terrible had happened to him.”

“Did you ever find out what it was?”

“No.” She looked out the window. “Not for a long time. By then it was too late.”

“What was it?”

“Never you mind, Jimmy. Just boring stories from long ago. Everyone in them is dead, except for me.” She patted his hand. “I’ve got you. That’s all I need.”

“You look tired, mom. I’ll let you rest.”

“Will you come back soon?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Just you. It’s easier to talk to you than them.”

“Sure, mom. Just me.”

She was cheerful again, with a sparkle in her eyes. “Who knows, Jimmy? I may have a surprise for you.”

“Please don’t bake me anything. You don’t need to go to all that trouble.”

He left her at the front door. At least they had gotten past the hard feelings from yesterday’s debacle. Maybe she had forgotten it already. Her mood swings and non sequiturs bothered him, but he did enjoy the one-on-one time with her. She was eighty-five, so there wouldn’t be many more opportunities like this.

Jim reported to Dwight and Celeste that evening. “Convince her to move soon,” Dwight said. “She can’t stay in that big house by herself. If we lose the slot at that facility, who knows when another will open up.”

“I’m going back tomorrow. It’s better if I’m alone with her. Let me see what I can do.”

“Fine by me,” Celeste said. “I’m headed to Key West for a week anyway. Knock yourself out, little brother.”

When Jim returned to the house the next morning, his mother was agitated. Drawers and closets were open in the front hall. Clothes were strewn about.

“I can’t find it. I need help, Jimmy.” She was on the verge of crying.

“Sure, mom. What are you looking for?”

“An envelope. A big one. It’s important. Very important. Please help me. I know it’s here.”

This agitation and confusion were the clearest signs of dementia that Jimmy had seen for himself.

“We’ll find it, mom.”

“I don’t have cake for you. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about that. Let’s look for your envelope. What’s in it?”

She turned and glared at him. “You’ll know when we find it—and not a minute before!”

“Where do you remember seeing it last?”

“In the kitchen, of course! Then I put it away. I don’t want Dwight to find it. It’s just for you.”

“My brother?”

“No, my husband!” Dwight Senior had been dead for seven years.

“It’s here somewhere, mom. There’s no need to rush.”

“Yes, there is! I have to give it to you.”

“No worries. We have all day, mom.”

Jim approached this challenge systematically, like everything he did. They began in the front hall, looking through the closet and the drawers of the small desk. Then they went to the basement, where junk was piled everywhere. Boxes, old furniture, and racks of clothes. Fortunately, Dwight Senior had been a stickler for basement waterproofing after he bought the house in the 1960s, so it wasn’t as damp as most basements and there were no signs of mold or water damage in the boxes they opened. Abigail calmed down and they had a pleasant time. She marveled at the contents of each box they opened. One contained the chemistry set he had as a boy. The glass vials were cracked. The contents of a few were crystallized. “We should throw this out, mom,” he said as he added it to the large trash bag of items to be pitched.

They finished in the basement without finding the envelope. Abigail made sandwiches, which they ate in the sun-filled breakfast nook off the kitchen.

“How are Jenny and the girls?” she asked.

“They’re all fine. Lots of soccer games and scout meetings. Jenny is enjoying her real estate work.”

Abigail nodded, hummed sweetly, and held his hand. Jim felt that this was a perfect moment—being alone with his mother—that brought back feelings from his childhood. As the youngest, he craved attention, which was hard to get. The house was filled with the loud voices and incessant demands of Dwight and Celeste, who were—it seemed to Jim—more important than he was. Dwight Senior was focused on Dwight Junior’s sports and Celeste’s piano lessons, accomplishments which little Jimmy could never match. He grew up as “little Jimmy.” He hated that name.

After lunch, they went to the second floor. Four bedrooms and a linen closet. Abigail said not to bother with Dwight Junior’s and Celeste’s rooms. “Those are the last places I would have put it.” Jim was relieved. He had no desire to see Dwight’s sports trophies or Celeste’s posters of Elvis and Ricky Nelson. They looked in his old room. He felt comforted to be there. It had been his refuge from the family commotion, the place where he read comic books, did math puzzles, and dreamed of space adventures. Abigail got distracted and told him stories about his childhood that he had heard a million times before. She treated them like long-lost secrets. He noted another sign of dementia when she told him the same story three times over the span of fifteen minutes.

Next, they tackled his parents’ bedroom, which was filled with the mingled memories of their lives together. The walls were covered with family photos: Dwight and Abigail’s wedding, graduations, fishing from the dock of the cabin, and formal portraits of long-dead relatives who Jim didn’t remember.

Jim opened the door to Dwight’s closet. His suits hung there neatly, shoes were lined up on the floor, and fedoras

sat on the shelf above. She hadn't thrown one thing away. "We don't need to look here," she said as she closed the closet door. Her closet was another matter. Jim pulled hat boxes and jewelry cases down from upper shelves. The closet smelled like the mother he remembered deep in his bones. She parted dresses on the rack to make sure that nothing was hidden behind them. She pulled out one dress that Jimmy didn't recall seeing before—a pale blue, silk formal gown with sparkling ruffles on the shoulders and neckline. She held it up in front of herself, smiling and batting her eyelashes. "Can you believe that your old mother was once the belle of the ball?"

Nothing turned up in this last bedroom, so Abigail said to try the linen closet off the upstairs hall. "I'm positive that's where it is! I think ..."

The walk-in closet was a dingy white, with faded, forty-year-old paint. Cabinets above and large drawers below. Musty blankets, towels, quilts, and pillows. Neatly folded sheets and pillowcases in the drawers. Abigail watched as Jim lifted blankets and quilts out of the cabinets and stacked them on the floor. "Feel between them, dear. It could be slipped in there." She was giddy with anticipation. Jim was tired from hours of fruitless searching.

He opened a drawer that held baby blankets and crib sheets. "Do you remember these, Jimmy? They were yours." He ran his hand between the blankets. Something was there. He pulled out a large manila envelope. It was addressed to Mrs. Dwight Collins and postmarked 1966. She yanked it out of his hand and clutched it to her chest. She twirled around in a little pirouette of joy. She made him put all the blankets, quilts, sheets, and towels back where they had come from. She didn't want to leave a mess—or a sign that they had been in there.

Down in the living room, the afternoon sun was getting low. A dusting of snow lay on the shrubs in the yard. Abigail still held the envelope close to her chest. "I'm going to tell you something very important, but it's only for you, Jimmy. Dwight and Celeste must never know. It would break their hearts."

"Okay, mom. I won't tell."

"It's about your father."

"What did he do?" Jimmy wasn't sure he wanted to hear this revelation.

"Not Dwight, honey. Your real father."

She took a deep breath. "Once, I did something I shouldn't have. But it turned out to be a blessing. I got you."

She unclasped the brass clip on the envelope. "My fiancé, the one who disappeared, called me many years later. He asked me to go with him to where he lived, just for one night. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't resist. He was smart and funny and handsome, just like you. You would have loved him. I've thought about that night ever since."

"What happened?"

"He wanted me to stay with him, but I was married. I couldn't leave Dwight and the children. We agreed that he would never contact me again. And he didn't. It was so hard, Jimmy. I cried for weeks."

She started to open the envelope, then stopped. "I don't know if I can do this, Jimmy. It's too sad." He patted her hand tenderly. She slid out a newspaper and unfolded it on the coffee table. "You look just like him, honey."

A two-inch tall headline screamed across the front page, with a photo below:

JAMES WHITTEMORE HINES IS DEAD

CSP FOUNDER SUFFERED FATAL HEART ATTACK AT 68

All the stories on the front page were about him:

THE TITAN WHO LIFTED ST. LOUIS UP FROM THE RUBBLE

“He was one of a kind,” said Peter Tomlinson, who succeeded Hines as director of the Citizens Shareholder Plan, “there are no words to express our grief.”

TRIBUTES POUR IN FROM ACROSS THE WORLD

President Mayfield declared a National Day of Mourning. “Jim Hines was a visionary leader who showed us what a great American city can be.”

A PRIVATE MAN WHO BROUGHT PROSPERITY TO MILLIONS

Hines never married and had no known relatives. “This city is my family,” he often said. “Its people will always be closest to my heart.”

THRONGS OF MOURNERS IN JOPLIN SQUARE

Thousands of grief-stricken St. Louisans gathered at a spontaneous memorial across from City Hall.

Jim tried make sense of what he saw. “My father was famous?”

“Yes. Very famous. But you’ll never find anyone who has heard of him.”

“How did you get this?”

“The mailman brought it one day, while you were in college. I wanted to tell you, but I was afraid it would cause trouble and upset everybody. Don’t hate me, Jimmy.”

He embraced her. She trembled. “I could never hate you, mom.”

“It’s yours to keep now. Don’t ever show it to Dwight or Celeste. They wouldn’t understand.”

“This is amazing. Thank you.”

He leaned back and looked at her. For a moment, she seemed thirty years younger. At peace. Then she slumped onto the sofa, like a limp rag doll. She was drained. After a few minutes, she spoke softly. Jim could barely hear her.

“I’ll go to that place where Dwight and Celeste want me.”

“You don’t have to, mom.”

“I know. I don’t want to be a bother to any of you. I’ll be fine.”

Abigail moved to the memory care facility. The children sold the house. Within three months, she was dead.

FLICKER

THE INVOLUNTARY LOOK ON THE AUTHOR'S FACE lasted less than a second, but it sent Jim Collins a huge message. From playing high-stakes poker, he had learned that one tiny flicker in an opponent's expression could give away the game. He had honed this skill the hard way, during his raging poker addiction.

The name James Whittemore Hines obviously meant something to Carol Boustany, but what? He pondered as he drove in the dark down the 101 freeway to Palo Alto after the bookstore event. It wasn't much to go on, but it was the only lead he had in twenty years.

Maybe there was a second copy of that newspaper and she had seen it. Or maybe she knew who was behind the hoax—she wasn't old enough to have done it herself in 1966. Or maybe there were other possibilities he hadn't thought of.

The newspaper and his mother's dementia-tinged story before she died in 1992 had opened up a vortex that sucked him down into a dark place. Was this smiling phantom from the newspaper really his father? Since childhood, he had felt that he didn't quite fit into the family. His father, brother, and sister played a Collins game that he didn't know how to join. He was always on the sideline, waiting to be called in. He craved the attention his mother paid to him, even though it sometimes felt like a consolation prize. Then she, the only person in the family who really loved him, dropped a bombshell which left him lost and alone.

Jim's first impulse was to figure it all out. He was a smart guy and good at puzzles. When he showed the newspaper to

his wife, Jenny, she was mystified, just like he was. But to her it was no more than an interesting tidbit of family history. She got tired of listening to him talk about it. He shared the paper with a colleague, a history professor, who agreed to research it. A few weeks later, he told Jim that “not one single word of this newspaper is historically accurate. I suspect it’s some kind of hoax or trick that was played on your mother. Very odd.”

Jim also hunted for evidence about James Whittemore Hines wherever he could. The 1990s were the early days of online genealogy databases and Jim spent long nights on his computer. He even made a visit to the Mormon Family History Library in Salt Lake City. After months of work, he came up with only three slender pieces of information: an 1897 birth certificate from Jackson, Mississippi, Army discharge papers from 1918, and a brief St. Louis newspaper article from November 1929.

LOCAL STOCKBROKER MISSING

Police ask the public for information on the whereabouts of James W. Hines, who was last seen on October 29.

This item excited him because of the St. Louis connection, but it led nowhere—there were no follow-up articles. Jim contacted a few Hines family descendants in Mississippi, but they knew less than he did. One of them, a family history buff, was aware of the birth certificate and discharge papers, but had no other information. She thanked Jim for the 1929 newspaper story, which she would add to her scrapbook.

These dead ends gnawed at him. He couldn’t let this riddle go. That’s when he turned to poker, a puzzle he could solve, as a distraction. Winning at poker was all about predicting the other players’ behavior—using the same

principles he developed in his game theory research on the stock market, along with keen observation of his opponents. At first, Jim played games around Stanford, where he won regularly. He soon gravitated to the casinos in Reno, where the stakes were higher. First a weekend a month, then every weekend, then three days a week. He started making a lot of money. Despite his winnings, Jenny became resentful of his obsession. After several confrontations, she got fed up and left, taking the girls with her. Now Jim had fewer reasons to stay home and he played even more. Then, he almost lost his job as an economics professor at Stanford. His tenured status saved his position, but just barely. Even tenured professors were expected to show up for classes they were teaching, at least now and then. He blew off his university responsibilities month after month to spend more time at the tables in Reno.

His friends became so alarmed that they begged him to go to Gamblers Anonymous. For a while, he fought going, then it saved his life. He had thought addicts were people who lost too much money. GA taught him that the irresistible thrill was the real addiction—winning only made it harder to kick the habit.

When Jim quit gambling, he also buried his obsession with his mother's tall tale about his supposed father. He gave up hope of finding an answer and gradually grew a protective shell around the emotional wound in his heart. He became a responsible economist once again. Jenny and the girls were gone for good—he had blown the marriage—but he was able to build amicable relationships with them. The poker income was replaced by a lucrative consulting practice. Silicon Valley executives and investors valued his expertise and insights. Jim's life was smooth sailing for years, until a month ago, when his history professor friend

emailed him a link to Carol's book. "I think you might find this interesting."

When Jim got home to his Palo Alto condo that night, he poured a glass of wine and sat on the patio to consider the next moves. He had tossed juicy bait into the water when he gave the author his phone number. Would she bite?

He had his answer at nine the next morning, when the phone rang. Carol invited him to meet her and her husband for lunch in San Francisco.

PUZZLE AND PARADOX

“YOU’VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!” Billy said when Carol repeated what Collins told her at the bookstore.

“He said ‘James Whittemore Hines’ as clear as day. And he wants to talk more.”

Billy took a moment to absorb this startling news. “What the hell. Call him. But let’s be careful. We don’t have to give anything away.” Even though the threat from the Knights had disappeared when the bubble was popped a year earlier, Billy’s reflex to keep quiet about HD remained.

Jim scanned the interior of the restaurant looking for Carol. She stood up and waved so he would see her table on the far side of the room. She watched him walk slowly toward her. He carried a small backpack and was slightly hunched over, as if the weight of the world had worn him down. Carol thought he looked kind of sad. She introduced Billy and they all shook hands. Billy said, “You have the same name as an old ball player, a Hall of Famer.”

“I got teased about that constantly as a kid. No relation. I was lousy at baseball.”

They made more small talk until they ordered lunch. Then Jim said, “Let me tell you why we’re here today.” He observed Billy and Carol closely as he spoke. “Many years ago, my mother told me a very strange story, a few months before she died. She had worsening dementia at the time, so it was hard to sort out the truth from the hallucinations. She said that a man named James Whittemore Hines was

my real father. He had been her boyfriend before she was married and that he had tried to get her back. It didn't work out, but according to her, the end result was me."

"What does that have to do with my book?" Carol asked. It was obvious to Jim that hearing the name James Whittemore Hines put them both on edge.

"As I said last night, your character, George Adrian Matthews, sounds a lot like what she told me about Hines."

"Are you accusing my wife of plagiarism?" Billy said sharply. His bluff was transparent to Jim. *This guy would lose his shirt playing poker.*

"I'm not accusing anybody of anything. I'm just looking for answers."

"What about my book reminds you of your mother's story?" Carol asked.

"That my father was famous, but nobody knew about him, like he lived in a different world."

"That's not much of a connection," Billy said.

"There's also this." Jim opened his backpack, set an iPad on the table, and turned it towards Carol and Billy. There was an image of a newspaper front page with a photo of a handsome, silver-haired man and the headline "James Whittemore Hines is Dead." Carol had seen this photo before. She looked at Collins more closely. There was a definite resemblance.

Carol asked if she could have the iPad. Jim slid it across the table. As she zoomed and pinched to explore the different articles on the front page, she and Billy exchanged glances. Jim watched their eyes dart back and forth. He knew he was finally getting somewhere.

Carol slid the iPad back to Jim. She and Billy looked at him, but didn't say anything. Their silence spoke volumes to Jim—*they know more*. He would have to be patient.

“I’m not asking you to betray any secrets. This mystery has been eating me up for twenty years. It cost me my marriage. I just want some closure. Can you help me?”

Carol softened. “Your newspaper is real. And we know who Hines was.”

“What does real mean?” Jim asked.

“Your paper describes events that actually happened,” Billy said. “But was Hines your father? We have no idea.”

“Let me explain,” Carol said. “We had an experience so unbelievable, so bizarre, that there was no way to talk about it. So I turned it into a novel.”

“What more do you know about Hines?”

“Nothing important. Everything is in my book.”

“What about my mother, Abigail Collins?”

“Sorry, I never came across that name.”

Jim let out a long sigh. He looked even sadder than when he walked in. “I didn’t give her any credit. I was so bought into the idea of her dementia. In her own way, she was trying to tell me the truth.”

Carol put her hand on his to comfort him.

Lunch arrived. They ate in silence as they each processed what they had seen and heard. After a while, Jim said, “I deal with complex problems for a living, but maybe I’ll never figure this puzzle out.”

“We’ve had to get used to a lot of puzzles and paradoxes,” Billy said.

CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK

AFTER THE LUNCH WITH BILLY AND CAROL, Jim's mind was spinning a spiderweb of possibilities, which led him to three conclusions: First, they had given him confirmation about the newspaper (which was a huge relief). Second, they didn't trust him yet and were holding back something even bigger. Third, this was a non-zero-sum game. They were not his opponents.

He thought his best strategy was to give them some time, but after a week, he couldn't wait any longer. He emailed Carol, *I want to come to St. Louis. Can you and your husband show me around?*

Billy and Carol were not surprised to hear from him. "Poor guy," Carol said. "This stuff is driving him nuts."

"We should just tell him about HD and get it over with. What do we have to lose?"

"But not about Poverty Point."

"Of course. Not about Poverty Point."

At Carol's suggestion, Jim stayed at the Chase Park Plaza Hotel. "It was here in the 1920s, when Hines lived nearby," she told him when they sat down for dinner in one of the hotel's restaurants.

"Tomorrow, we'll take you to other places he would have seen," Billy said.

“Here’s my big question. In San Francisco, you said my newspaper was real, but when I had a history professor examine it, he said nothing in it was historically accurate. Who’s right? It has to be one or the other.”

“What if both statements are true?” Billy said. “Physics is a funny thing. Paradoxes and puzzles, like I said last week.”

“Let’s save this conversation for tomorrow,” Carol said.

Over dinner, they learned more about each other. Carol described her years as a middle school teacher before she became a writer. Jim explained his career as a Stanford economics professor and how that led him to consult for Silicon Valley tech companies. “I’ve always been a math guy. I enjoy solving number problems. Guiding a start-up to success is, at the most fundamental level, a numbers challenge.”

“I was on the other side of that,” Billy said. “I had a thriving family business that was destroyed by big tech and internet shopping. There was no way we could compete.”

“Our daughter works for a start-up here in St. Louis,” Carol said. “A green energy company called Morning Star Brick.”

“The one founded by the Native American guy?”

“Yes. Diyami Red Hawk. Meredith is the VP of Marketing.” Billy said.

“Also, she and Diyami are a couple,” Carol added.

Jim nodded with approval. “The buzz on that company is very positive. Smart people are saying it may be next big thing.”

The following morning, Billy, Carol, and Jim stood on the corner outside the hotel. Billy asked Jim to look around at the buildings and the cars passing by. “This isn’t the only corner at this location. There’s another one. Right here, right now.

But we can't see it or touch it. We call the world we're in now SD, for Standard Definition. The other one is HD, for High Definition."

"That's ridiculous!" Jim said.

"Your newspaper came from HD," Carol said.

"We know it's not ridiculous, because we've been there," Billy said. "But now we're cut off. Everyone is."

"How can you expect me to believe all that?"

"Believing or not believing is completely up to you. But think about it—do you have a better explanation?"

"Let's take a drive," Carol said. "You can see the city that James Whittemore Hines knew."

Jim soaked up every sight through the window of the car. His father had walked these streets. They went to the office building where Hines worked as a young stockbroker and the mansion where he lived after he became rich and powerful.

The tour ended at Billy and Carol's apartment in the Pelican building on South Grand. When they got out of the car, Billy said: "One other thing. My father's favorite restaurant was in this building. I can't say this for a fact, but I think Hines knew him. They may have come here."

"Billy, you're dreaming!" Carol said.

"I'm just saying it's possible."

Carol brewed a pot of tea to go with a plate of fresh cookies. She went into the bedroom and returned with a book, which she handed to Jim. *Prometheus: The Genius of James Whittemore Hines*. The photo on the cover was the same one as in Jim's newspaper.

"I've never shown this to anyone, but you deserve to see it."

Jim's face lit up. "Can I read it now?"

He sat on the sofa. Billy positioned a floor lamp above him. Jim read nonstop for the next ten hours. Shadows marched

across the floor as the late-autumn afternoon sun sank into the west. Streetlights turned on. Cars and buses rumbled outside. An ambulance with blaring siren and flashing lights raced by on Grand Avenue. Jim didn't move an inch. He finished the book a little past midnight. He turned to the pages of photographs in the middle of the book. "It says these are from the 1930s and 40s, but they're in color."

"In HD, they had color photography and color printing before we did," Billy said.

"In all the pictures, he looks so serious," Jim said as he pointed out photos of Hines giving speeches, sitting on a parade float, and cutting ribbons at construction sites. "Except for this one."

It showed people in formal wear dancing in a ballroom. Hines was in the center, laughing with his head thrown back. The caption said *Hines at a charity ball. Date unknown.* Jim asked for a magnifying glass. Carol found one for him. He held it over the photo to look closer. The woman he was dancing with had her back to the camera, so her face was hidden. She was wearing a pale blue gown with ruffles on the shoulder. "I think that may be my mother."

BARBECUE

AT JIM'S HOTEL THE NEXT DAY, Carol asked him if he would like to meet Diyami Red Hawk. "Sure!" They drove across the Mississippi to Cahokia, where Morning Star Brick's headquarters had recently been completed, less than a mile from the ancient pyramid. When they arrived, Billy said that it was the first new building to be clad with Morning Star's electricity-generating bricks. Construction was completed in record time so it could demonstrate the technology. The lobby was dominated by a large display which showed the building's electricity generation and consumption in real time. Meredith, wearing tasteful, business-casual clothes, came out and greeted her parents with hugs. "This is Jim Collins, who we spoke with you about," Carol said.

Meredith shook his hand, "You have a very impressive background, Mr. Collins. Diyami is eager to meet you." They walked through a large, open-floorplan office space, where Meredith greeted many people by name. This building was a far cry from the dilapidated trailer next to Monk's Mound, which had been the company's headquarters just a year before.

In a conference room, Diyami finished a phone call, then stood up to shake Jim's hand. "Thank you for coming to see us."

"People in California who I respect are very bullish on your company." Jim was a little surprised by Diyami's facial tattoo and long black hair.

"That's very kind. We need all the support we can get when we're doing something truly innovative."

Diyami and Jim got into a deep conversation about the challenges facing his company. Diyami asked him what he saw as the greatest risk to Morning Star Brick. “Companies fail when they think they’re playing one game, but are actually playing another.” As they continued, terms like “burn rate,” “net present value of money,” and “minimum viable product” were tossed around. Billy, who had once run a successful business, quickly realized that he didn’t understand most of what they were talking about. He felt very over-the-hill.

After forty-five minutes, Diyami had to leave for another meeting. He asked for Jim’s business card and said he hoped that they could continue talking. Next time, he would include his attorney. Jim said he looked forward to it. Diyami asked if this was Jim’s first visit to the St. Louis area.

“Yes, but my father lived here—a long time ago.”

As Diyami walked to the door, he whispered into Billy’s ear. Billy nodded.

Billy and Carol drove Jim to the airport. Before he left them, he said “Thank you. For the first time, I feel like I know my father. I can sense him inside me.” He hugged them both.

Jim floated on air through the next few weeks. Without the weight of the puzzle about his father pushing him down, he didn’t quite know what to do with himself. It would take some getting used to.

Then he got an email from Carol: *Do you like barbecue? Meet us in Memphis and we’ll take you to an amazing place. You don’t want to miss this chance. We’ll be at the Peabody Hotel day after tomorrow.*

When Jim walked into the hotel, home of the famous lobby duck parade, Carol held up a brown paper bag. “I have our authentic Memphis barbecue right here. We’re going to take a drive that will last several hours. With this, we won’t be hungry.” Billy told Jim that he had to leave his phone, watch, and all other electronic devices at the hotel. “You won’t need them where we’re going.” Up in Billy and Carol’s room, Jim put his phone and watch in the safe. Their devices were already there. Billy told Jim to choose the combination, so he could be confident that his items would be there when they returned.

Outside the hotel, a long, black van was waiting. It was comfortable inside, with tables and reclining chairs. The driver waved a wand over Billy, Carol, and Jim to confirm that they had no electronics. As they drove away, the driver closed a partition between his compartment and the passenger area. There were no windows, so they couldn’t see outside. “What in the hell is going on?” Jim asked.

“Security precautions,” Carol said. “Have some barbecue.”

They were headed to the Poverty Point World Heritage Site, in Louisiana, where Diyami and Meredith had discovered a second bubble in the barrier between the two worlds of SD and HD. After the first bubble, over Cahokia and St. Louis, was “popped”—or destroyed—this was the only place where it was possible to cross from one world to the other. Its location was a deep secret, known only to Diyami and a handful of others in SD and to the Cahokian elders in HD. Diyami created an elaborate security protocol to prevent the bubble from being discovered. One element of that was the prohibition on electronic devices, which could be tracked.

After a few hours, the van stopped. They stepped out into a windowless building. “Where are we?” Jim asked.

“It’s not important,” Carol said.

“Remember what we told you about being cut off from HD?” Billy said. “That wasn’t one hundred percent true.”

A young Native American woman appeared and showed them a lounge area with couches, magazines, and snacks. “Please relax. The second leg of your journey will begin in a few hours. You can take showers if you want to freshen up.”

The young woman reappeared a while later. She led them to an area in the warehouse that was marked off with stripes on the floor. She opened a small case which held three pills. “These will cause vertigo and, possibly, nausea. It will last less than a minute. Someone will be available if you need help afterwards.”

“Are you sure about this?” Jim asked Carol and Billy. He looked apprehensive. “You’ll be fine,” Carol said as she patted his arm.

“Cheers,” Billy said. He held up his pill and swallowed it. Jim reluctantly did the same. The room swirled and he collapsed to the floor. A wave of nausea hit him hard. Then it was over. A hand helped him to his feet. It was a young man he hadn’t noticed before. Billy and Carol were getting up as well. “You did it, Jim!” Carol said. They appeared to be in the same windowless warehouse. The young man pointed them to another van parked nearby. It was shaped like a wingless airplane and supported by wheels hidden in its body. A door was open. Inside were more reclining chairs. Like with the other van, there were no windows.

“It’s late and we won’t get to our destination until morning,” Billy said. “I plan to get some sleep.”

Jim awoke to the smell of fresh coffee. He tilted his chair out of the reclined position and rubbed his eyes. Carol offered him a cup. “We’ve arrived.” Jim took a sip. Billy was drinking

coffee and examining a tray of pastries on the table. "These are so much better than the sweets at home." Jim tried one. It was delicious.

"Are you ready?" Carol asked.

Jim nodded yes, as he wiped crumbs from his mouth.

Carol pushed a button and spoke into a grille on the wall, "Please remove the shading." The walls and roof of the van turned transparent. A forest of multicolored buildings, connected by crisscrossing skybridges, shimmered in the morning sun. Shiny ovoid cars and trucks were everywhere. A long blue streetcar whooshed silently by. Pedestrians filled the sidewalks.

"Welcome to the city your father built," Carol said.

Jim turned his head back and forth from one side of the van to the other. He pressed his face to the window, like an eager child, to see as much as he could. "Oh my god!"

The van stopped after a few miles. "Time to stretch our legs," Billy said. They got out onto a sidewalk in front of a Byzantine-Romanesque style church with a green dome. He led them across the boulevard toward a spacious plaza, with low, colonnades on both sides, an ornate fountain in the center, and a large building at the far end.

They walked past cafes where diners sipped coffee and read newspapers at umbrella-topped tables. Pigeons fluttered to get out of their way. The building at the rear of the plaza looked like a mountain range of rainbow-colored arches. Jim saw the sign above the entrance, *Hines Memorial Opera House*. A bronze statue, about twenty feet tall, stood on a pedestal in front of the building. It was a figure of a man looking east into the distance. The inscription on the pedestal read:

JAMES WHITTEMORE HINES
1897-1966

“When a man owns a piece of the future, every sunrise
is a magnificent opportunity.”

Jim looked up at the statue. Billy was about to say something, but Carol tugged at his arm to keep him quiet.

Jim stood still and ramrod straight as he studied the figure atop the pedestal. Tears streamed down his face.

A NOTE

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Eric von Schrader has made documentary films, produced television shows, and written countless business and educational programs.

He was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, where he spent years exploring the city and imagining what might have been.

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