



# THE GULF POINT FIVE

Kristin Garth

number  
4 book

## GEOFFREY CHASE

A hard-won reward, the object of decades of denial, study and some would say criminal deeds, stood blinking sad grey eyes at me in the frame of my open office door. There were complication and more labor at hand – and, yet, there she was an unmistakable sign, a girl with grey eyes, like her mother, needing my help.

I had to stop myself from calling her Aster – Aster Price. Her name is Avalon.

“Avalon Hayes”

I nodded toward the chair in front of my desk, getting off regular weekly phone with Cheryl Janelle, Trinity Janelle’s mother – a ritual we’d repeat until Trinity was safely Gamma Phi Beta at Duke just like mommy. No way a sure shot. These calls irritated me to no end – but as I hung up the phone I let that all go. Cheryl Janelle would not distract me from my destiny pouting before me – waiting for Geoffrey Chase to save her life.

Indeed, I would.

“I’m Geoffrey Chase, Avalon, your counselor. Tell me something I don’t know about you,” a script I’d said for years now. When executed with the appropriate wide eyes and a smile, it relaxed the subject.

Avalon smiled back but her response was uttered at a brisk, urgent pace.

“I have to get transferred to dual enrollment. I cannot be in this building anymore.”

I knew why. Everyone knew why.

“That’s doable. We’d need to act quickly, of course, to get you enrolled at the university for Monday. I’ll have to have papers signed by your parents tomorrow, I’m afraid.”

“That’s fine,” she breathed a sigh of relief, and then reconsidered. “I mean, it better be.”

Then the tears started. I grabbed a Kleenex and walked around my desk to put it in her dainty hand. She had that slight graceful build of her mother, long legs crossed demurely in a pleated miniskirt which distracted me a moment. But as she reached out her hand, I only saw one something in primary colors and plastic that caught my breath, the Swatch, the damn notebook Swatch of Aster Price.

How could it be anything but a sign?

Feeling encouraged, I spoke.

“What is the problem? Surely your parents aren’t objecting to such a sensible plan as beginning one’s higher learning early?”

Avalon wiped her eyes.

“My father. My mom dropped out; she gets it. I won’t last the year here.”

Was the Hayes household in the high school dropout production business? For certainly, its matriarch was exactly that and now it seemed their oldest daughter was in jeopardy of falling prey to the same fate. Fortunately, Avalon had something her mother had lacked, a guidance counselor in her corner.

I walked over to my desk and procured a writing pad and pen and handed them to Avalon.

“Write this down. Eighty-eight percent of dual-enrollment students have a college degree in five years that’s opposed to forty-nine percent of kids who complete a standard high school program. There’s a twenty-nine percent increase in the chance of dropping out in instances of intense bullying. Do you feel bullied, Avalon?”

She scoffed, “You think?”

I moved close now. We were getting somewhere, not a tenth as far as Aster and I had gotten by the time of the damned Gulf Point Five and the scrutiny it put upon a desperate act of love, twisting it to something perverse.

Osho would say, “Mind’s whole expertise is to create complications. If you want to live a simple, a beautiful, a silent, a joyful, a blissful life, let the mind be ignored and let the heart be restored to its status as master.” Let’s be honest though, Osho had complications – poisonings and assassination attempts that led to his deportation and muddled his name.

A good student learns as much from his teachers’ weaknesses as strengths. Certainly, I had learned from Osho’s mistakes in the past as well as my own. I would mind the complications before they undermined me.

“Your mother is a drop out?”

It was hard pretending to not know Aster Price, any detail of her biography, details I’d lived through.

Avalon nodded.

“Parental education is one of the highest predictors of high school drop outs. Your mother never made it to college. You can get there next week.”

Avalon smiled, like any teenage girl she longed to feel superior to her mother.

It was all very easy, and yet, humility, Geoffrey. Even Osho succumbed to complications.

“Two things, write this number down – no name, just the number at the bottom of the paper.”

She complied as I dictated.

“Now, tear it off and keep it at hand, outside of prying eyes.”

“What is this?”

“It’s my home number. If anything goes wrong tonight, it won’t do any good to tell me tomorrow. It’d be too late to fix it. If it doesn’t work, you’ll call and go over everything. I’ll give you more facts. But it’s best – fathers are naturally jealous and protective. All these facts, this argument, if it’s “Mr. Chase says this, Mr. Chase says that,” he’ll resist for the most Freudian of reasons. Let it be your idea. You did your research. Don’t say my name at all. In fact, if you have to say a name, it’s Ms. Carruth.”

I thought perhaps this part would be a hard sell, in this modern age of “don’t keep stranger’s secrets,” but she just nodded. Neil Hayes must be a real puritanical asshole.

“You’re so right. It’s like you know him.”

I mean, sure I’d done my share of googling and surveillance at his office and church and your house over the years, but know? As in spoken to? No.

“Now, that we’ve figured that out, let’s plan your college schedule.”

Avalon bounced in her seat, her platinum hair moving in the air obscuring her eyes just the way her mother’s red hair once had, when we were Avalon’s age, at this very school. I laughed out loud.

“Tomorrow will be even better.” And I believed it would.

## **Excerpt from THISA’S PREDICTIONS TO PROJECT BRIMSTONE**

### **221<sup>st</sup> Military Intelligence Brigade**

Following are predictions of the alien spirit Thisa, an entity of the board communicating with the 221<sup>st</sup> Military Intelligence Brigade, Project Brimstone, stationed in the European Center for Cryptology, Greisham, Germany, Session 342. Spc. Davis, Sgt. Switzer, Spc. Wiedland and PFC Cannon each ingested the prescribed dosage of Substance X, mandated in the Board Protocols Manual page 16, paragraph 3. As designated documenter, the participants completed the NLP/hypnosis script, pages 42-46. Spc. Davis commenced Session 342 on the board as LEADER. Switzer, Wiedland and Cannon were on the floor in the appointed configuration as ENERGIZERS. At 9:31:18, the planchette moved, and the following was transcribed.

Session 342

Prediction: In 1999, two shooters will kill 13 in Colorado.

Prediction: In 2007, a nuclear disaster will kill 500 in Pennsylvania.

Prediction: In 1994, an earthquake will kill 57 in California.

Prediction: In 2011, a tornado will kill 158 in Missouri.

Prediction: In 1998, an airplane will crash in Tennessee killing 78.

Prediction: In 1995, 168 people will die in a fiery explosion in Oklahoma.

Prediction: In 2001, a subway accident will kill 39 in New York City.

Prediction: Jesus Christ travels to Pensacola Beach, Florida in a silver spaceship and will be destroyed by an agent of Satan unless this agent is stopped by members of the 221<sup>st</sup> Military Intelligence Brigade, Project Brimstone.

### ***SARGAENT SWITZER, 1992***

*Acting as defacto leader in the new mission, Spc. Wilkes handed each operative in Operation Gulf Point assignments. Wilkes tasked himself and Cannon with S-4, logistics and supply, procuring essentials for travel from Greishem to the United States: falsified forms of ID and cash. Didn't know how and sure as shit wouldn't ask, totally off-books, midnight requisition if Bannon was involved.*

*Bannon came from a different background, CIA. He had an intense power I'd recognized and feared since the day we met at USASA Field Station Auchsburg two years prior to our FOB at Greishem. The other four came from Air Force PSYOPS.*

*Bannon's gifts as a psychic receiver were indisputable — his prowess at mind control exceeded the rest combined. Dabbled in the darker arts of the government, even the downright criminal, a meat eater all the way. With him as our lead, we would reach our objective -- Gulf Point, Florida.*

*Under Bannon, I shut my mouth and did as I was told. Talking seemed a bad idea, the remnants of Substance X still in my system. As much as we were required to imbibe, it never cleared our veins -- dregs accumulated, making each session worse than the last. Forget the torture of a restraint chair, being "impaired" now meant being cut from this new mission (and being "cut" would be an entirely apropos word with a schizoid spy like Bannon). Residual drug symptomologies I was experiencing was information best kept to myself.*

*Wilkes made it clear, "Substance X is now prohibited in Operation Gulf Point, as well as any other mind altering substances, even alcohol, for the remainder of this mission."*

*Bannon stared me down, cold, like it was my fault these chemicals swirled in my body -- not a government directive. After two years of living in a top-secret, state-sanctioned perpetually altered state, I looked forward to sobriety, just wasn't quite there yet.*

*Wiedland, Davis and I were tasked with S-2, intelligence detail, logging long hours in any IRC chatroom we could find on psychics, aliens and the supernatural. We needed to identify the female psychic residing in Gulf Point, Florida, proximate to Pensacola Beach, who would embed with us, our guide.*

*The task was overwhelming but not unfamiliar since we routinely visited these rooms as part of our SIGINT protocols in Brimstone. Refilled mugs of coffee, took our place at three terminals together, chose handles of OPGP 1, OPGP2 and OPGP3 and typed /join and whatever name came next.*

*While I pulled 12-hour shifts, the welcome rush of caffeine pushed residual molecules of Substance X out of my system. We added each failed chatroom name to the collective list maintained. Made the best use of all resources, no shammers on our watch.*

*We brainstormed a hundred cover stories for use in these chats. Everything we came up with sounded as ridiculous as the truth. When you're as tired and a bit altered as we were, it's hard to differentiate between degrees of crazy. So, finally, when PFC. Bannon crafted the script we'd use, it was easily agreed on to be perfect.*

*"Join, tell them you're a member of a group of men communicating with an alien; it has tasked you with protecting the world from the antichrist. You seek psychics, believers in the city of Gulf Point who will help."*

*Absent our military identification, it still contained the gravitas of the true story. So far I'd tried #alienlife, #alienexperience #aliens #watchtheskies #wtsaliens #cosmication #alienaware. Each room taunted me with leads until I'd realize I was just engaging with some impressionable lunatic in need of a friend. IRC is full of secret squirrels, nutcases. We heard lots of stories of psychics and aliens. Nobody had even heard of Gulf Point. Nothing said was even worth recording.*

*It was 21:43, tired and hopped up on caffeine, my mental state was almost as skewed as if I'd taken another dose of Substance X. Bannon and Wilkes hadn't returned to the FOB.*

*Before I could even evaluate the merits of saying it, I heard myself, "At 22:00, I'm calling it. If I don't get some rack time, I'll crash on this keyboard."*

*No one argued, all tired as hell, shaky as shit. I typed in one last channel name, #alienwatch and the script flowed quickly from my fingers. Seventeen more minutes of nothing then to my bunk for what I'd hope to be more than two hours of rest. Instead, I got an invitation by a user by the name of FindNelson to join me in a private channel.*

*Called out to Wiedland and Davis I had a possible hit. They quickly abandoned their own screens to read along behind me and offer suggestions:*

FindNelson: *Think we may be able to help each other.  
I live in Gulf Point. Was taken into an alien  
ship two weeks ago. They still have Nelson,  
my dog.*

OPGP2: *Please continue.*

FindNelson: *Most people think I've lost my marbles, but know what happened.  
Looking for somebody who can tell me what's happening and what it  
means.*

OPGP2: *We believe you are a part of a series of events  
that is leading us to protect the world from the antichrist.*

FindNelson: *The antichrist has Nelson?*

OPGP2: *Not necessarily the case. We have information  
forces, good and evil, may be on ships  
proximate to your city. We can help but before  
we can make our way, we must identify our guide.*

FindNelson: *I'll help however I am able.*

OPGP2: *We're seeking a female with psychic abilities  
who resides in Gulf Point. This woman will  
give us shelter.*

Find Nelson: *My wife talked to two psychics this week about Nelson. We're talking  
to anybody who offers help. Both live here, both female.*

OPGP2: *That's wonderful. Would you be able to make contact again and ask  
them to join this chat so we might determine which, if either, is our  
guide?*

FindNelson: *My wife has their information.*

OPGP2: *Do it now. Report back with all details.*

*At this point in the exchange, a few moments elapsed while FindNelson completed his mission.*

FindNelson: *Okay. Pam called the first, Nina Crowe.  
he'll be here within the hour. The other didn't answer. Pam talked to  
her about Nelson while I was being interviewed for the paper, Lucy  
Parish. Pam says she wouldn't bother with  
her -- didn't seem to know much and spent  
a lot of time taking visual inventory of our belongings.*

*Nina Crowe, though, Pam liked, seemed like the real deal. Pam wrote a lot of what she said, most of it about Nelson, but there's some stuff here -- maybe it means something to you.*

OPGP2: *Please tell us.*

FindNelson: *Pam wrote, "A spirit is telling her this information." I guess Pam worried it was Nelson speaking, that he'd passed. But it's not Nelson because Pam has written here: "The spirit is NOT Nelson." Then, "The spirit is from another place." And then one word in caps underneath, with an exclamation point: "ALIEN!" And then one word, I guess a name -- not one I've heard of -- "Thisa."*

*"Oh, fuck," I said as a noise came out of Davis, a cross between whistle and groan.*

OPGP2: *You said this psychic's name was Crowe?*

FindNelson: *Nina Crowe. She'll be here in an hour.*

*Looking at my watch, I felt exhaustion I knew would not be quenched with sleep. That name, spoken by a stranger just met across the sea, renewed my commitment. Maybe I'd grown a little lost after hours fixating on green characters and black screen, but I was found.*

*The three of us, myself, Davis and Wiedland, turned toward a commotion I hoped was Bannon and Wilkes returning to the FOB. Could also be the sounds of MP boots coming to throw us into tiny cells. The tightness in my chest released when I saw Bannon's goofy face come around the corner, an orange manilla envelope under his arm. They had been successful in their mission, too.*

*"The Lord provides," Bannon laughed dumping the contents of the envelope on the conference table -- a stack of cash, maybe \$20,000, and several had-to-be fake-but-high-quality passports. Bannon looked proud. It was sinking in, for most of us, the enormity of what we were doing. Not to Bannon though. He was one hundred percent in his element off the grid, living off the land. Clear he couldn't wait to see what Gulf Point required him of next.*

*I spoke without further delay, "I think we've found our guide" and watched Bannon's big green eyes, wild with thoughts of demons, murder and a trip to the beach.*

**ASTER PRICE, 1992**



*Fifteen minutes before my alarm, I bolted from bed, a jolt of adrenaline mixed with lust and euphoria. Feet hitting the floor, this soon turned to anger. Each vicious piece of my mother's attack last night flashed like slides across my waking mind. I'd been late getting home, pine needles in my hair. I'd lied, and she'd slapped me, the only time she'd hit me in my life.*

*I tip-toed across my room, listened at my door for signs of life. I needed a shower and the telephone — neither of which was behind my locked bedroom door. Absolutely could not face my mother right now. Even if she was apologetic and ready to put this behind us, I was not. The last thing I could risk was another fight interfering with my article and my future.*

*Then I remembered it was Saturday and jumped with glee: estate sale! Not only was she gone, I knew how long. My mom worked part-time for Roberts', a local estate sale service. The sales were sporadic. Often didn't know she had one until I woke up leisurely to a quiet house and the cozy realization I had a few hours to myself. The estate sales had the same predictable schedule, 9-2.*

*Pulling the headphone jack out of its input on my stereo, I spun the volume knob and blasted Down In It, stripping off my baby blue cotton nighty. Danced naked, down the hallway to the shower. Each drop of hot water snaking its way down my body to places Geoffrey Chase touched not so long before brought me a step closer to the blissful state I awoke to this morning — before I remembered my mother. God, to live free like this every day of your life.*

*Pulling my pink robe from the hook, arms pushing into plush sleeves, I pranced back to my room to fetch my planner, with Brooke Newton's number. Couldn't wait a second longer to make contact. Dialing the first number, I noticed the dry erase board next to the straight-out-of-the-70's olive green phone. Bubble lettering only added to the bitchiness of the message: "I've got your keys. Consider yourself grounded. Be back by 3 to talk."*

*Slamming the phone receiver, the mount shook as if it might drop off the wall. 9:42, according to the clock in the kitchen, no way was she ruining this day for me.*

*Call Brooke and ask her to come to my house? Sure, she would, but Mom would come home at some point — with zero regard for my career. If she made a scene or threw Brooke out, everybody at The Guardian would hear and know I was just some kid — not a professional who could handle a career in journalism.*

*Geoffrey Chase was the one person I could count on to help. I paged through my planner until I found the folded-up map he'd drawn yesterday, the digits of his phone number across the bottom. Phoning him this morning broke all the rules, though doing it on the first date had, too. I wasn't going to worry about playing mind games with a boy. I had a job, and I needed a ride. If he was willing and free, it was the least he could do.*

*Plus, Geoffrey Chase was the subject of this article. Brooke wanted audiotapes, videotapes, anything physical I could bring. I'd bring her something more — the source himself.*

*I grew more nervous with each dialed digit. His mother answered, her "hello" scratchy but not unfriendly. When I asked for Geoffrey, with the fingers of my free hand crossed, I was sure I heard a smile in her "I'll get him."*

*Everything was going to be okay.*

*"Good morning, Aster." He took obvious pleasure in my unabashed desire for connection. I had a job, and I needed him. But I had an epiphany that gave me confidence, too. His mom hadn't asked for a name, and I hadn't offered. Yet, he heard a girl was on the phone for him and said mine. I was the only girl in his life! My delighted in that discovery in this moment of such important business said a lot.*

*"Thank God, you're there. You're not going to believe what I've been through with my mother."*

*"Are you all right? Do you need me to come over? Do you want me to talk to her?"*

*Can you imagine that conversation? It was a remarkable offer. Geoffrey Chase was positively as chivalrous as Agent Cooper.*

*"I'm okay. I'm just stranded. I was late last night, had pine needles in my hair. She knows I've been with you -- being totally ridiculous about it. She's working, and in her attempt to ground me, she's taken my keys. Can you believe it? I'm supposed to be at Brooke Newton's to work on this article. I guess I just hoped you could" --*

*"Give me directions to your house. Twenty minutes soon enough?"*

*"Yes. I cannot thank you enough." Then I gave him directions.*

*"I'll get dressed and call Brooke."*

*"Call Brooke. Don't get dressed. I'm leaving now."*

*Skin hot and tingly under my robe, the thought of him on top of me again, all the touched, raw places, hands all over me in my own room, in my own bed, on my Hello Kitty sheets overwhelmed me. Legs feeling weak, I leaned against the kitchen cabinets, breathing so deep I sounded like a girl in a phone sex ad though I didn't say a word.*

*"Did you hear me?"*

*The "yes" I managed was half word, half breath. Agent Cooper had gone away. He was all lascivious whisper only heard before in headphones from my forbidden Trent.*

*"Call Brooke, tell her we'll be there in an hour. Unlock your front door and get into bed."*

*Then he hung up. Hadn't waited for a response or objection. Not that I had either to offer. Fingers trembling, I hung up, thinking of his dark eyes and strong hands. Pulling myself for a moment from sexual anticipation to the cold world of journalism, I picked up the planner off the tiled counter and found Brooke's number again.*

*How I made it through that call, I don't know, but I made it quick. I was so ready to lie down in my sheets, hear the familiar creak of our front door, a sound that had never been as titillating as it would be today lying on my back, waiting for it.*

## BROOKE NEWTON, 1992

*During Bugs Bunny and our Saturday ritual brunch, homemade chocolate chip waffles, I heard the phone. Easily within a stretched arm's reach from my barstool perch, I heard Oliver scream "I'll get it."*

*"It's that UFO girl for you."*

*Taking the phone, I ran my fingers across the top of his sandy blonde bowl cut before he raced back to his position far too close to the TV.*

*"Hi Brooke. Got everything we needed for our story. You're going to be thrilled. But I'm actually planning to bring Geoffrey, our source, if that's okay."*

*"Wow. Okay." Bringing the source this morning who happened to be a teenage boy she interviewed last night -- romantically, it sounded as if things had gone very well for Aster Price. Journalistically, suddenly I had doubts. Oh, to be a teenage girl again, myopic and lost, blinded to everything else by all that light and heat. It was an exciting feeling to experience even as a memory.*

*"Were you planning on coming over now?" A quick examination of my living room affirmed it remained in its habitual state of disaster: dishes, cups, legos, the Trivial Pursuit board cards all over the coffee table from last night*

*"Well, actually, let's say, in an hour, is that too late?"*

*"Perfect, Aster. I'll see you guys then."*

*"Oliver, help me get this room cleaned before these kids get here."*

*"Kids?"*

*He was thinking playmate, poor thing.*

*"Yeah, Aster's in high school, bringing another high schooler, too."*

*"Oh."*

*Spending Saturday with kids, even if it was in the context of journalism, I really felt my skills as a mom might win the day. Facing the perpetual question any mother asks herself daily: what exactly are these kids attempting to pull?*

A-

*The two arrived, about a half hour later than planned. They offered no explanation, and I didn't ask. The flush in Aster's cheeks told me all I needed to know. I offered them both a seat on the couch and asked Geoffrey to tell me about the UFO. Looking me straight in the eye, he executed a perfect retelling. When he finished, I was quiet, mulling a few questions in my head.*

*Aster pulled a videotape from her bag and handed it to Geoffrey who made his way to our VCR.*

*"You'll want to see this."*

*Geoffrey put in the tape. It was just as described: a spaceship in the woods of Gulf Point. Examined with skeptical eyes, the story was still plausible. The voice inside my head persisted. I had no concrete reason to disbelieve Geoffrey Chase. Still mom radar pinged off each sideways steamy glance he shot in Aster's direction. Though he spoke to me, she was his focus. Aster's attention was elsewhere, studying me, my reaction to everything.*

*Decided the best strategy was divide and conquer. Sat up a chessboard in the family room for Geoffrey and Oliver. Oliver's demeanor changed from annoyance to joy. He had a playmate after all.*

*I took Aster into my office to write. We did so, exclusively, for a good hour and a half, fine-tuning a rough draft of our article. Reading it out loud, it sounded closer to bad science fiction than a newspaper article. I couldn't say it was crazier than my last story about an alien abduction of a Maltese. I only report the news. I don't make it up. Did Aster Price though? I couldn't yet say.*

*Finally, I decided I couldn't hold back. Who knew how much time we had left before the boys interrupted, and I'd lose this opportunity to hear the truth? It was time to interview Aster Price.*

*"How long have you and Geoffrey been involved?"*

*We were side by side in chairs before the keyboard. Aster leaned over the keyboard concentrating on a paragraph. She straightened up, turned her head in my direction, embarrassed. I felt like such a mom in the worst ways.*

*"Just since last night. It happened working on the article. The whole thing was a surprise. He was always there, and I never noticed before yesterday, like a movie."*

*"Yes. Well, it certainly seems pretty intense now."*

*Did my best to not let my annoyance come across as judgy, remembering how much I hated adult judgment at that age. Shut down when I encountered it. I couldn't afford for her to shut down. I needed her to assure me this wasn't some teenage conspiracy to get her in the paper and get him laid.*

*"Yes, it does," she smiled.*

*"This is going to be a first page story; you're going to get what you've wanted. I just — it would be irresponsible if I didn't point out the shaky ground here journalistically, a reporter and source so mixed up together."*

*"We should have waited until after the story. It's not professional at all. I didn't plan this, but my feelings did not compromise the article."*

*"Look, I'm sorry. I just — I have a boss. If it turns out a couple of kids had some scheme to get themselves in the paper, and I didn't question it, maybe Louis Kristol fires me — maybe not, but I can't risk that."*

*"I'd never do that to you, Brooke. I swear. Please don't give up on this article. It's my one shot to start my career. I'm telling the truth. And you can ask Geoffrey yourself."*

*Wouldn't bother there. No doubt Geoffrey Chase had the perfect answer at the ready to be delivered in that cool, wannabe-adult tone. He was a younger version of a type of man I knew of well, a type I'd divorced.*

*"I believe you, Aster. I want to do the article."*

*"Thank you, Brooke." She was so sincere and vulnerable. I did not doubt she was telling the truth. As for the other one, it wouldn't be the first time I'd published a story from a dubious source with an obvious agenda. Like I always say, everybody wants to be in the paper. On a personal note, though, I did feel the need to share a word of caution, female to female.*

*"I can't prove Geoffrey Chase is lying about this story. We're going to publish it. If he's made this story up because he wants attention -- wants your attention, then he's a liar, not a bad liar either. He's had practice. Keep your eyes open. He's obviously smitten with you, but that doesn't make him a good person."*

*Aster smoothed her hair, mussed in our hug, and turned to me with a defiant gleam in her eye and began to speak.*

*"Geoffrey is not a liar. He wouldn't lie to me. I don't believe that."*

*Her lips trembled. I could tell she was angry though trying to not let that show.*

*"You know what? I'm sure you're right. I'm just paranoid. It's the plague of the old and the divorced."*

*She laughed a little, falsely comforted, though I continued to worry long after they left.*

## **GEOFFREY CHASE, 1992**

*Back in my car leaving Brooke's, Aster seemed uncomfortable. Brooke Newton hadn't cared for me. She'd smiled, been overly polite but I read the mistrust in those squinty eyes mocking my story and judging harshly when my fingers absentmindedly wandered across the top of Aster's bluejeaned thigh. It wouldn't really matter, her appraisal, except for Aster. Brooke Newton could get Aster in the paper, and that made Aster happy. Happy Aster, Happy Geoffrey.*

*Aster's happiness required me permitting a ten-year-old to lecture me endlessly on antipositional moves, and I'd happily done it. You took the game, Oliver. I took the queen. Except now in my car, Aster looked as downtrodden as a beleaguered peasant.*

*Gripping the side of her seat, Aster looked afraid. Grey eyes full of worries, she made several careful little peeks at her Swatch, bands that looked like a composition book. Pulling the car to a stop in front of a yard filled with racing children, I checked in.*

*"That's a cool watch. I've never seen one like it."*

*"My mom ordered it because I'm a writer. She says it's from the both of them, her and Dad, silly I know. The face looks like notebook paper, too."*

*She held out her hand. I looked as I took her fingers in mine.*

*"It's sentimental. Another reason to admire you; I'm sentimental, too." I kissed her palm then stroked the watch face, a new peephole to my favorite soul.*

*A quick glimpse of my Casio confirmed it was later than I'd thought. I put the car in drive.*

*"It's 3:38. We were there a long time. Weren't we? Are you afraid to go home?"*

*Aster didn't say anything; a tear trickled down her face.*

*I didn't know what to say besides "it's okay," ridiculous and trite, but it moved her to speak.*

*"I'm sorry. It's so stupid. I've never fought like this with mom before. I don't even know who she is. She's home and furious I'm gone. I know I sound like such a scaredy cat little girl."*

*Brooke Newton lived in Gulf Point proper in the modest section behind the football stadium. I pulled over again, in the stadium parking lot. Aster needed my full attention, and I wanted nothing more than to give it.*

*I leaned over and wrapped my arms around her and held her as tight. She started to sob. All I wanted was to comfort her.*

*"You're not dumb. Don't ever say that. You're one of the smartest people I've ever known. It's one of the things that's always attracted me to you."*

*She pulled back, brave now, a coy smile on her face; it made my heart tingle along the edges like a numb limb awakening. It almost hurt.*

*"So you've always been attracted to me?"*

*She looked naughty, wielding this epiphany like a weapon. It made me a little embarrassed, uncomfortable. Felt an impulse to make her small and controllable again in a way that scared me a little and excited me more. Taking her by the shoulders, I pinned her against the seat. She giggled, her lids half-closed over those wet, needy grey eyes. She was ready for me to kiss her. Instead I examined the angular slope of her nose and cheeks and contemplating all the joy that entered my life in the last twenty-four hours.*

*"Let's drive to the beach."*

*Her eyes opened. She was weighing consequences, risk versus reward.*

*"I mean, you're already late anyway. What time did you say your Mom got back?"*

*"3:00."*

*"The beach is five minutes away. I promise to have you home by 5:30. We'll sit in the sand and talk. Maybe head to Sun Ray Taco before I take you home?"*

*Smiling, though she still hadn't fully acquiesced, I could tell she would. Never underestimate the appeal of chips and salsa to a teenage girl. Not overly experienced in their ways, even I knew that.*

*"I guess I'm screwed either way. Might as well have some fun."*

*"That's the spirit."*

*I kissed her hard, let my hands wander down her belly and inside her jeans. She did not protest. Then I leaned away, put the key in the ignition while she adjusted her clothes. Then I turned and brushed one pale, pink princess cheeks with a finger.*

*"Promise me. It's just the two of us for the next hour and a half. When we cross that bridge to the beach, we're in our own world -- no papers, mothers, curfews or UFO's. They do not exist. There's only us. Will you do that for me?"*

*Her smile radiated trust. It echoed in her dulcet whispered yes. I pulled out of the stadium titillated with thoughts of my fair maiden in the sand. When we approached the bridge, I let my fingers wander up her leg to where they found my new most favorite point through fortuitously thin denim. With a smile, she leaned back into the most graceful repose I could imagine in my passenger seat. The angled view of her long body made me instantly hard.*

*I watched her let go. Everything was suddenly as it all should be. We crossed the bridge.*

## **LIEUTENANT DAN PETERS, GPPD, 1992**

*Some guys in law enforcement get into it for action, violence. They crave it. Knew a few in Loxley, where I started. My fiancé slept with a couple – why I came to Gulf Point to start over.*

*I'll happily write tickets and keep streets safe for kiddos. Like living in a place without a murder on its books for fifteen years. Sure, only a couple weeks ago, we had our first actual kidnapping, but thank God that was over, resolved as well as it could be. Besides a certain senior citizen with claims of alien abduction and a missing dog, Gulf Point was on its way back to its breezy, innocent normal way of life.*

*The old man, I found sad. Maybe he needed medical help or a family who checked in more. Who's to say? His stories would not affect my vision of this haven for one badly damaged soul. My allegiance and love for Gulf Point was, to pick a pretty appropriate word as of late, inalienable. I took pride in my small role in keeping it safe.*

*Approximately 10:30 Sunday morning, I'd been on my appointed patrol of Highway 98 eastbound a couple of hours, a slow, September day; school in session. The tourists we counted on to ignore speed limits and generate precious income (as I say, our roads are very well maintained) were home somewhere north or west, cold and drab. Radioing in on some calls, I looked forward to an uneventful day before a bottle of wine, a nicely grilled steak and a movie in the VCR. Remembering to stop at Blockbuster on the way home was my heaviest concern when I saw it -- it being the the van that would change my entire day.*

*It was a white van, a Ford Econoline, older model, rough for wear, moving at an unusually slow speed. Noticed it in my peripheral vision, while I sat at the light at Shoreline and 98, I watched him turn right. A black Acura made its way around the slow moving van a little carelessly and distracted me from my target for a second. But the van's slow speed pulled me back, jabbed at my Spidey sense like a shot of epinephrine. Knew it was a problem right away.*

*Took immediate inventory of the vehicle and the driver: Caucasian, male, early 30's, light brown hair, short. Even from this distance, he was clearly frazzled, off -- impaired? No swerving but, while I watched for it, I noticed the inoperable right taillight.*

*Turning on my lights, I maneuvered into the lane behind the white van. It took a moment for the Volvo station wagon, catty-corner and a little too close behind the van in the other lane, to notice my lights and yield. As soon as it did, I changed lanes, was behind the van waiting for it to exit the roadway. We were at the congested beach exit when I'd flipped on my lights; not all that concerning he hadn't exited. But when we passed the first of the three entrances to the Gulf Point Shopping Plaza, I felt that familiar, nervous tingle, off script with a suspect, about to enter possibly dangerous territory. Turning on my siren, I hoped for the best. Come on, idiot. Don't do this to me today.*

*Immediately, I saw his signal, and his speed reduced. Turned into the second plaza entrance, he stopped his car, partially blocking the exit. The building tightness in my neck, over the last few moments, dissipated with his sudden cooperation. I opened my door and approached his car.*

*The driver rolled down his old window with some difficulty. Closer up, something about him, the short hair, the posture, build made me think military. Gulf Point was nestled between two military bases, Eglin Air Force Base and Pensacola NAS. Armed servicemen and women shopped at my grocery store. I wrote them tickets on their way home from the base or the beach. Seen it all on a spectrum of the polished and serious to the criminal and deranged.*

*This driver was nothing if not criminal and deranged. Sweaty and manic, he looked terrified. I was in for weird shit here. That's before he opened his mouth.*

*"Driver's license and proof of insurance."*



*The driver's hands clutched the wheel as if unfamiliar with the protocol of a traffic stop. Stared straight ahead, no response, looked nervous as a drug trafficker; perhaps he was. The tightness in my neck, I thought had gone, returned.*

*"Sir, I'm going to need to see ID now."*

*One eye on the driver, I made a quick survey of van's interiors, no obvious weapons, contraband. Dirty but free of debris, there was one lone Hardee's cup in the front seat console. He turned slowly.*

*"I cannot provide you with that, sir. I apologize."*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, why you gotta screw with me on a beautiful fall day like this? I pulled my radio to my mouth:*

*"Peters here, officer requests 10-96 (send back up), 10-41 (meet at) Gulf Point Shopping Plaza parking lot, requesting vehicle search. I'm here with a 10-66 (suspicious person) and an 11-54 (suspicious vehicle). Suspect is 10-30, (unable to identify.) 10-46 (holding suspect, rush reply) then I'm 10-51 (en-route) to the station with 10-15 (prisoner). 10-39 (message delivered.)*

*The only response was a crackle. The suspect's face dropped into shaking hands. He rocked back and forth, genuinely creeping me out now. When the dispatcher responded, I breathed a little:*

*"10-23 (standby). Units are 10-51, ETA, two minutes or less."*

*"Copy."*

*"Step out of the vehicle, sir."*

*He stopped rocking, lifted his head to meet my gaze but made no movement.*

*"I'm not asking again. Step out of the vehicle."*

*Our eyes locked, and he looked completely defeated. Besides being an annoyance sure to ruin the rest of my day, I knew he had no intention to do harm. This epiphany did not change my behavior, kept eyes trained like a goddamn hawk. Watched his arm move toward the handle then open the door, he executed a careful choreography exiting, maintaining eye contact the entire time.*

*Quickly, I turned and cuffed him, recited his rights. Asked if he had a wallet or any contraband on his person.*

*"There's a wallet," he jerked to gesture forgetting his restraints, "in the left pocket."*

*I retrieved a plain black bi-fold. Its thinness an indication there wasn't much inside. Opening it, this was true: six very empty credit card pockets, three crisp hundred dollar bills in the cash pocket. Retrieved an evidence bag from my kit, put the wallet inside until it could be processed, along with this fruitcake, at the station.*

*"Look, backup's going over this car with a fine-tooth comb while I'm taking you down to be poked, fingerprinted and sit in a cell for hours while we wait to find out who you are. Or you can cooperate and tell me what's going on; make this a whole lot easier on everybody."*

*I opened the back door of my car and pushed him authoritatively but carefully inside.*

*"Last chance, buddy," I shut his door and hurried to my side of the car where I faced him eye to eye, man to man. Before I could say anything more, he spoke.*

*"Do not run my fingerprints. You can't. I beg you. You don't understand what you're doing. I'm part of a clandestine government operation. We've traveled across the ocean on a top secret mission to save the world and Jesus Christ himself. We are instructed by a powerful alien spirit Thisa. I know what you're thinking, but I'm not crazy. When you enter me in your system, the moment you do it, I'm as good as dead. You are killing me and sealing the fate of this planet if you fail to let me out of this vehicle right now. Let me drive away. You're — man, you're my only hope now. Just let me drive away."*

*I sat, mouth half open, looking at this character for I don't know how long when the sound of knuckles rapping on my driver's side window grabbed my attention. It was Denton and Federovich, on the other side of my open car door, staring at me through the window. I stepped out of the car to speak privately.*

*"You're not going to believe this shit."*

*Federovich laughed, "Your face, I knew we stumbled on something good."*

*"He won't identify, has ID on him, wallet with cash only," I gestured to the baggy in my passenger seat. "He's just told me he's part of a secret government unit acting under the orders of an alien spirit. So, you know, there's that."*

*Denton peeked at my passenger and whispered, "whackadoodle" under his breath. Federovich laughed.*

*"I'm taking our little friend for fingerprints, DNA, drug test and maybe a psych eval. I need you two to process this van for narcotics or clues to who this guy is, his supposed unit and what the fuck has brought him here to Gulf Point."*

*"Sure. You got the nut. We got the van. We'll radio in if we find anything." Denton chimed in.*

*"Thanks."*

*Back in the car, glancing at my unidentified suspect, I realized I had a five-minute drive to the station, precious little time left to find out more. I worked quick.*

*"Here's the thing. I had to get away from those two, okay? They would not be helpful to our cause. I'll be honest with ya', when you started talking, I did not believe you. You seemed unhinged. But we've had some incidents lately, to be frank, I cannot explain, people disappearing, children, old people, dogs taken by," I sighed theatrically working myself up for the big delivery, "I'll just go ahead and say it -- aliens. It's been a lot. Then you appear — you seem honest -- have what they call the courage of your convictions. I'm man enough to admit there's more going on in this world, hell, even in this city than I can explain. I do believe you. I want to help."*

*He bolted forward in his seat, obviously in some sort of manic condition, seethed more than spoke, "Then take these cuffs off me and let me out of this car."*

*I bit the inside of my mouth keeping my composure in check. "Now, now, now, can't do that. Somebody would see -- somebody sees everything in this town. They'd make a report of a suspicious character and shady activity by the police. Those two simpletons back there would come and re-arrest you and take me, too. You're not going to find another open-minded cop here like me. Then where would Jesus and the rest of America be? Have to be smart. Got one shot here to do this right."*

*My words calmed him. Leaned back in his seat, he was contemplating my argument. Come on, No-name, engage.*

*"How can you help? What is your plan?"*

*Bingo. Good, No-name. I wanted to say, "Take me to your leader. Would be a good laugh but terrible police work. Pretending to take this guy seriously was working. Couldn't stop now.*

*"Okay. Thank you. I do have a plan." And I did, forming as I spoke, duplicitous and dangerous, outside station protocol. I was about to let him lead me to four other lunatics who thought they were on a mission to save the world -- probably armed, definitely mentally ill, a disaster for an officer without backup or a partner. Yet I knew it was the only play guaranteed to bring about the necessary result: removing a nest of undesirable, end-of-the-world zealots from my city pronto. I continued with the plan.*

*"I need you to take me to your unit. Coordinate efforts. Being in law enforcement, I could help in a variety of ways, but, first, we need to meet. Understand?"*

*Shaking his head, he sighed heavily before speaking, was he trusting me or just surrendering? Did it matter?*

*"You passed the street, a couple of streets back, Bear Drive."*

*"Okay. Okay. Bear Drive." My hands shook, searching for a place to turn the car around. Didn't want to give this guy a second to reconsider. Within a moment I made the turn on Bear.*

*"What's the number?"*

*"301, it's not very far, a yellow two-story house -- there it is, that one."*

*Reducing my speed to a crawl, I parked at the edge of the property, hopefully out of sight of the wood-framed bay windows poking from its innocent façade. Nothing good came from this crew getting a peek of a police car pulling up to their quaint suburban hidey hole -- a domicile as manicured and well-maintained as a little girl's dollhouse.*

*It was hard to believe the same hands that mowed this St. Augustine and painted that antique white trim and swept that wraparound porch allowed five deranged individuals to occupy its walls. Could it be? I was suddenly scared I might have happened upon, without backup, a hostage situation.*

*"Okay. So here's how this needs to go down. First, whose house is this? What am I walking into here?"*

*He was silent, thinking. Had to shut that down.*

*"How did you guys come to this house? I need to know if this is someone who might turn us in. Can't take chances. This is how I can help, see? I live here; I know people."*

*"There's no problem. Her name is Nina Crowe. We met her on the internet relay chat through a man taken by aliens with his dog. She helped him. Powerful psychic, extremely dedicated to our mission. She's sheltered us, cooked us meals. I'm telling you, she's completely on board."*

*"Nina Crowe." I was too stunned to speak. We weren't friends -- even friendly, but I knew Nina Crowe. She was a squat middle-aged lady with grey long braids, an aging ex-hippie type who put on puppet shows for children. I worked the school's fall and spring festivals each year. Nina Crowe and her puppets were a popular attraction.*

*So Nina Crowe was a puppeteer and, potentially, if I could believe this psycho in my backseat, a psychic. The yellow dollhouse grew curiouser and curiouser.*

*The next step in this mission I'd mulled since making the turn on Bear --- I was going to have to radio in for backup. Could use all the codes I wanted, it was going to be abundantly clear, when I called for backup, I'd been a double agent. Knew from my history of dealing with lunatics, I was going to be stuck in a car with a poked bear on my hands, caged and enraged.*

*Get out of the car to make the call? As soon as he saw the radio, he'd know I was betraying him, and his lungs were certain to carry all the pent up fury of the insane from my open car door to maybe inside the yellow house. Couldn't risk that.*

*Worst of all, it was possible No-Name invented this story about Nina Crowe's complicity. She could be a victim inside her own home. If so, I was wasting life-saving moments sitting in my car like a civilian. I had brace myself for the consequences. I turned on the radio.*

*"Peters, here, I'm 10-15 (prisoner in custody) outside a residence with multiple 10-66's (suspicious persons)"*

---

*"Oh, fuck. This isn't happening." No-Name wails became shrieks, ear-splitting. Not only did I have an instant headache, I was sure dispatcher wasn't going to get half of what I said. Not able to exit the car for fear of attracting attention from the occupants of the deceptively sedate looking yellow house, I had no choice but to speak louder and continue.*

*"Possible 236 (false imprisonment) in progress at 301 Bear Drive. Code 8 (request cover/ backup) for apprehension of four suspects inside house. Do you copy?"*

*The outcry in the backseat became punctuated by pounding on the cage between us by No-Name's head. Thankfully, the station was close. Backup should be quick. How long could I take it in here with No-Name before I'd pound my own head against something?*

*Brenda responded quickly, reading back the address. No-Name's auditory release had made things difficult for conversation, but Brenda had the details right. She said two units were on the way from the station, less than two minutes. Prayed it would be less than one. My eyes repeated a circuit from my watch to the windows and door of the yellow house and then to the empty road I waited to see light up blue and red.*

*The backseat grew quiet. Took a quick glance to make sure that No-Name hadn't done himself too much harm. His forehead was a little banged up, but he looked calm and resigned from the profile I now saw. His eyes trained on those yellow house windows like he was willing those crazies out here to rescue him with his thoughts, his one unlikely hope left.*

*Above his head, I suddenly saw the welcome red and blues, on for just a second before clicking off. Vaughn and Curtis met me between our vehicles just as I watched another car pull up behind. Denton and Federovich hurried over to join us.*

*I told them about the alien spirit, Jesus, the end of the world, a puppeteer who might be a psycho or might be a hostage, all the other important details No-Name provided as succinctly as I could.*

*Vaughn's voice was quiet but full of determined anger, "We're not going to play around with these jokers a second more. We're going in. Denton and Federovich, I want you though the fence around back watching for fleeing suspects and awaiting our signal. The rest, to the front. I'm knocking on that door, giving them a count of 20, and then I'll kick the fucker in myself."*

*Denton and Federovich jogged as close to the property line of the Crowe property as they could before zig-zagging over to the entry of the fence. Vaughn, Curtis and I walked as casually and nonthreatening as we could to the porch, guns at the ready, already unlocked in our belt. Even as we walked up the steps onto the porch, the house betrayed no new information, sound or visual. Vaughn knocked while I made my way up the steps behind him.*

*He stepped back and cleared his throat, his voice a boom, "Gulf Point Police Department. We're here on a report of a possible hostage situation inside. Come outside, hands raised above your head, or we are coming in."*

*Lights on inside, some shadowy movement was clear through the textured glass panes of the front door. Somebody was there, but no response. Not a peep of sound except Vaughn's counting. Pulled my gun out and signaled to Curtis to step aside with me, to give Vaughn room to make the breach. He backed up a few steps from the door, angled his leg on the door jamb near the lock executing a trial kick.*

*As soon as I heard 20, Vaughn moved into his stance and executed the first kick. The kick shook the door, reverberating on the floorboards of the porch beneath our feet. It wouldn't be long now. The second kick sent some splinters of wood into the air and left the door barely intact on the frame. The third kick was accompanied by a sound from Vaughn, closer to roar than scream. The door flew from its frame onto the floor of the hallway in pieces.*

*The three of us walked over them as we made our way yelling, "police," "hands in the air," and then "clear." Down the hall, through an empty living room into a dining room where we found what we'd come for.*

*At the table, arms outstretched, fingers intertwined, sat four males, presumably the members of No-Name's unit. Eyes closed, they were chanting particularly nutty sounding shit. Didn't pause or acknowledge our entrance. At the head of the table, holding hands with two men was Nina Crowe, chanting louder than the rest. Goddamn if she didn't looked directly at us, the only one of the bunch with open eyes, an expression of defiance. She seemed absolutely in control. No-Name had been right after all. Vaughn turned to me with a look of absolute confusion.*

*Vaughn signaled Denton and Federovich. I looked straight into Nina Crowe's pale green witchy puppeteer eyes and told her, and the others, to stop the chanting.*

*"Hands behind your back, the rest of you stand up slowly"*

*Nina Crowe cooperated quickly, the others slower, like they were coming out of a trance. Maybe they were. Denton and Federovich, cuffed them and started heading out to the cars. I took Nina Crowe with me and deposited her in the backseat with No-Name.*

*"Hope you're pleased with yourself, Officer -- betraying your species as well as the Lord Jesus Christ."*

*I looked at No-Name who still wouldn't look at me. Whether I'd betrayed my entire race or not, I can't say. Definitely betrayed No-Name, so I deserved his aloof treatment. The adrenaline was starting to let up enough for the humor of the situation to finally hit me -- judged harshly by a puppeteer/psychic I walked in on casting spells with the insane. I couldn't help but chuckle.*

*"Oh, don't you worry, Ms. Crowe. I've been told."*

#### **BROOKE NEWTOWN, 1992**

*Dan's subtle knock was 9:30 on the dot. He'd learned the knock versus bell routine the first time he came over -- our bell ridiculously loud, sure to wake Oliver. Not only did he always remember to knock, his knock was carefully quiet and reliably, precisely on time.*

*Black polo shirt and khakis, his ruggedly handsome physique was only marred by tired eyes, betraying the drama of his day. Stepping inside, he handed me wine and sat on the couch. Glasses and a wine opener were ready on the coffee table.*

*"I'll let you do the honors." I said, handing him back the bottle. Dan poured two generous glasses and handed me one.*

*"You've got me totally in suspense."*

*"All right. You'll know everything soon -- one hundred percent off the record, background only."*

*"Gotcha."*

*He took another sip of wine and gave me a quick once-over.*

*"You wouldn't be hiding any secret recording devices on your person there?"*

*Put down my wine and put on my best playful pout. "Of course not, Dan. Do you want to frisk me?"*

*"Careful now."*

*Flirting was fun, but the promise of a good story titillated me more.*

*"Come on. Stop teasing. What happened today?"*

*Once he started, his words ran together. I had to interrupt periodically to ask him to repeat details I was sure I misheard but had, in fact, heard correctly. A traffic stop turned into a detention of an unnamed individual who led him to a house of men part of a secret government project instructed by aliens to save the planet and Jesus Christ from the devil himself. It was Nina Crowe's house. Nina Crowe was their leader? Nina Crowe, Oliver's favorite local puppeteer who moonlighted, unbeknownst to me, as a psychic.*

*Okay. Wow. I was so rapt with his story it surprised me when I swallowed the last sip of my wine. Dan noticed and paused to refill my glass.*

*"I can't imagine where this is going, Dan."*

*"Don't even try. You have no idea. So we get the five guys and Nina Crowe back to the station. Four have no ID. One is carrying a passport we find out real fast is a fake."*

*"Jesus."*

*"Yeah. Fingerprint them, run them through AFIS, lock everybody up 'cause they're not talking, not asking for lawyers, spooky quiet. Now, when you run prints in AFIS, it's not like you get some match in seconds like tv."*

*"I've heard about it."*

*"It's a real pain in the ass. Hours you wait for a list you narrow down yourself. So I'm waiting, when Federovich runs in, out of breath, from holding, where he and Denton are on watch, and says: 'You gotta get back here. Your buddy, the one you called No-Name, had to take him out of his cell. He asked for you, and the other dude in there with him, the aggressive looking one, just fucking pounced on him, man, like bam. Denton held him against the bars just so I could get No-Name out.'*

*"I ran back to the holding area, no more time for Federovich's stories. The situation there was calm, the feisty one in solitary, in the fetal position on the cot of his cell. Denton rolled his eyes from his seat near the cells, so I asked him, 'What did you do with No-Name?' And he said, 'Federovich cuffed him and took him to interrogation, number 2. Says he's not talking to anyone but you.'*

*Dan paused for wine.*

*"Well, that's a turn of events, him trusting you again," I almost was afraid to talk now and delay hearing what came next.*

*"You're telling me. I get in there, and No-Name says to me, 'This room, people are watching us? This is being recorded. Where's the camera?'"*

*"No idea who was outside the glass watching, so I couldn't say for sure -- though no doubt somebody was. I said, 'Both are a possibility. Then he says, 'I don't know why I trust you after that stunt before, but I have an undeniable feeling you're the only one here trustworthy. Get me a notepad and a pen."*

*"I ran out past Federovich and Denton, staring through the glass like it was their new favorite tv show, to my desk. When I returned, No-Name, in his chair, seemed alert and lucid. If I didn't know better, he looked pretty trustworthy himself. He got to work writing while I watched."*

*"What did it say?"*

*"Patience, Brooke. I'm getting there. He was just getting down to his composition when I hear a knock on the interrogation door. Step out to see the Chief. Apparently AFIS was quicker usual; these guys were all tagged in the system special, all five."*

*"What in the world for?"*

*"This is where the real scary shit starts. Chief Johnson's like, 'This crew just came up as an AWOL military unit based out of Germany.' Right away I'm going, 'What? What do you mean AWOL unit? An entire unit went AWOL?' He says, 'You heard me right the first time. The whole unit went AWOL, together, a week ago in Germany, disappeared off the face of the earth. Now they're here, in Gulf Point.'"*

*"What the" -- too stunned to finish my thought.*

*"Exactly how I felt. Chief Johnson says after he made the call to the military, before he could tell us what he learned, his phone rings; it's some director at the fucking Pentagon."*

*"Holy smoke."*

*"Chief says this guy told him military police were sending officers from the Navy base to take custody of the lot, even Nina Crowe, for questioning. He says this director dude got real worked up -- we were not to speak to these individuals, no questions or conversations.*

*"Then this director asks him, straight out, whether anybody here had engaged with these suspects. Chief Johnson said he told him 'not at all,' that 'to my knowledge none of them were talking to anyone or each other.' But Chief said this answer didn't seem to relax this director fellow one bit. He said, 'Talk to your people; find out what conversations took place and contact me at this number with names of any officers who engaged. They'll need to be debriefed.' So he asked me if I had talked to any of 'em" --*

*"What did you say?"*

*"I said, 'Just enough for No-Name to tell me where to find the others; that's it.' Chief thought about it and said, 'Maybe we ought to keep that to ourselves.'"*

*"But what about the notepad?"*



*“Exactly. All I was thinking of the whole time, getting back in that room and to that notepad before anyone else got to it first.”*

*“And did you — were you able to get it?”*

*“Chief Johnson said he needed to round up everybody -- make sure the officers understood these new instructions. As soon as he left, I ran in and pulled the pad away from No-Name in the middle of his sentence. He wasn't too happy about it and started screaming, but there wasn't time to reason with the insane. I tucked it in my pocket.*

*“Then I leaned in close to No-Name and whispered, ‘The military’s on their way. They’ll be here any minute. Don’t what you guys are up to, but the Pentagon has told us not to talk to you. Whatever you do, do not tell them about this letter.’”*

*“He nodded, his expression grim and spoke, ‘Read it with an open heart; make your decision about what to do with it. Destroy it if you feel you must. If you hear nothing else about us, assume the worst.’ And then his head just fell forward and the words just stopped.*

*“I walked out of interrogation, heard bodies coming down the hallway I assumed to be MP’s. I was right.”*

*I moved closer to Dan on the couch. The intrigue of the story pushed our palpable physical chemistry past containment. I put my hand on his leg.*

*“Dan, tell me you have the letter.”*

*“Yes.” He touched his pocket. “You can read it, but you never saw it.”*

*“I never saw it.”*

*He pulled the notebook from his back pocket and handed it over carefully. I received it as if it were some aged historical document containing the secrets of a civilization on its lined pages. Who knows? Maybe, in fact, it did.*

*When I finished reading, I turned and said the first thing that crossed my mind, drenched in wine and conspiracy, “What world is this?”*

*Even with all the alcohol and adrenaline coursing through my veins, the words sounded weird and dramatic. He didn't scoff though, just leaned over and kissed me and held me close.*

**The interrupted explanatory missive of Spc. Roger Davis:**

I WILL ADMIT IT HAPPENED RATHER QUICKLY TO THE CIVILIAN EYE, AND IT WAS ALL DONE IN THE MANNER APPOINTED BY MILITARY PROTOCOL OF OUR UNIT AS OUTLINED IN THE SPEC FOR THE 221ST MILITARY INTELLIGENCE BRIGADE. FIVE WERE ASSIGNED TO THIS JOINT CIA/NSA LISTENING POST IN GRIESHEIM, GERMANY IN A FACILITY KNOWN AS THE DAGGER COMPLEX, 25 MILES FROM WIESBADEN. I AM SFC. KOGGE DAVIS.

WE WERE KEPT HERE, SEQUESTERED IN THIS ISOLATED PLACE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE DUE TO THE CONTROVERSIAL AND BEYOND TOP SECRET NATURE OF OUR WORK. WE ARE TALKING SCI HERE, SENSITIVE COMPARTMENTED INFORMATION. THAT'S MILITARY CLASSIFICATION ABOVE TOP SECRET. YOU'D NEED A CODEWORD ASSIGNED TO YOU BY THE CIA TO SEE ANYTHING ABOUT OUR PROJECT, EVEN ITS EXISTENCE. SO FOR THE SKEPTICS AND THE NONBELIEVERS WHO DOUBT OUR VERSION OF AN ADMITTEDLY FANCIFUL SOUNDING STORY, WE LOOK TO YOU WITH NOTHING BUT THE REVERENCE OF ANY MILITARY OFFICIAL CHARGED WITH WATCHING OVER A CIVILIAN POPULATION PROTECTED FROM THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING ANY BETTER.

REMAIN BLANKETED IN YOUR NAIVETY WHILE WE SOLDIER ON ALONE IN THE COLD CLOTHED ONLY IN OUR PATRIOTISM AND OUR SECRETS. I CANNOT BLAME THOSE WHO PREFER THE WARMTH AND COMFORT OF THEIR IGNORANCE. STILL IT DOES NOT CHANGE THE TRUTH AND THE UNFORTUNATE NEED FOR ITS BEING TOLD AT THIS JUNCTURE.

ON APRIL 18TH, 1987, FOUR UNITED STATES AIR FORCE OFFICERS AND A CIA OPERATIVE WERE SENT TO GRIESHEIM TO A NEW UNIT THAT WAS KNOWN ONLY TO A HANDFUL OF OPERATIVES AND THE MEN INVOLVED AS PROJECT BRIMSTONE. THIS WAS A CLANDESTINE UNIT WITH A SPECIFIC DIRECTIVE TO INVESTIGATE AND EXPERIMENT WITH ILICIT DRUGS, PARANORMAL ACTIVITY AND ALIEN COMMUNICATION IN AN EFFORT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO HONE THESE TOOLS AND MAKE THEM USEFUL TO OUR GOVERNMENT AS WEAPONS TO BE USED AGAINST OUR ENEMIES.

PROJECT BRIMSTONE DID NOT EXIST TO PROVE THE VIABILITY OR EXISTENCE OF THESE VARIOUS PHENOMENON. TO THE MEMBERS OF OUR UNIT (AND OBVIOUSLY TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR WHOM WE WORKED), THEIR EXISTENCE WAS A GIVEN. WE WERE ONLY HERE TO LEARN TO HARNESS SUCH PHENOMENON FOR STRATEGIC MILITARY PURPOSES.

YOU'RE FINDING THIS ALL HARD TO DIGEST AND TO BELIEVE. I FELT THE SAME AT ONE TIME. WE ALL DID. I HAD ALL THE SAME QUESTIONS AND MOCKING RETORTS PLAYING OUT IN MY MIND THAT YOU HAVE NOW. YET, I WAS RECRUITED ALONG WITH FOUR OTHERS FROM AIR FORCE PSYOPS. THAT WAS WHAT WE HAD IN COMMON. WE WERE ALL A PART OF A TOP SECRET MIND CONTROL PROGRAM THERE. THE DARK AND TAINTED ETHICS OF OUR EVOLVING WORK IN PSYOPS HAD TO BE ON THE VERY OUTER EDGES OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PERIPHERY. WE, TOO, WERE NAIVE. PROJECT BRIMSTONE WAS THE STUFF OF ENDLESS NIGHTMARES. IT WAS OFF THE MAP.

THEY CHOSE US FOR THIS WORK BECAUSE WE WERE DISPOSABLE, UNMARRIED, WITHOUT FAMILIES FOR DIFFERING REASONS, EASILY TAKEN AWAY AND ALTERED WITHOUT —

# The Gulf Point GUARDIAN

Wednesday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1992     Editor In Chief Louis Dane Kristol

## GULF POINT FIVE ARRESTED

By Brooke Newton

Five unidentified men were arrested in Gulf Point Sunday afternoon at 301 Bear Drive, the home of local puppeteer and psychic Nina Crowe. Four of the men had no forms of identification on their person at the time of their arrest, and one had a passport which turned out to be fraudulent. Lt.

Dan Peters of the Gulf Point Police Department arrested the first suspect after a routine traffic stop when he noticed the suspect's vehicle had

a faulty taillight.



Nina Crowe, Gulf Point resident

The suspect's demeanor and unwillingness to identify himself or produce identification led Lt. Peters to detain the individual. Lt. Peters