

The Second Day of Twilight

The first thing I noticed upon awakening was how thirsty I was. My mouth was a desert and my breath was the hot wind. I made the mistake of moving my head and was rewarded by a flood of pain. I remembered playing volleyball on the beach, spiking the soft white orb across the net dozens of times, and yelling with triumph. Absentmindedly, I grabbed a beer from the cooler after each successful win. The beer slid down my throat so quickly and easily, like a waterfall, the overflow dripping down my arms and chest, seeming to quench my thirst. Stupid, Tommy. Really stupid.

I took a deep breath, and my head started throbbing. I could feel my brain cells frying, as if they were sizzling and popping on an open grill. I dared to turn my head up and to the right. A wave of nausea shot through me as I looked at the IV bag attached to the hanger above my bed. I slowly moved my head back and noticed the IV tube taped to the back of my right hand. I felt like I was going to throw up, but I remained still and the discomfort passed.

My skin was dry, sensitive beneath the sheets. One move of my leg convinced me the sheets were made of fine sandpaper. I moved my left hand toward my face and it collided with a plastic tube. My fingers followed the tube from my cheek to my right ear where the tube was looped then flowed down to my chest and off to someplace I couldn't see. I slowly inhaled through my nose. The air was sweet, pure, and refreshing, but breathing made my head throb.

I longed for water. The thought of beer nauseated me. I slowly turned to my side. The pain in my head shifted to one side, sharpened for a moment, then subsided. I spotted a pitcher and plastic cup on a tray next to my bed. I tried, but I didn't have the strength to sit up, so I slid back down and closed my eyes. As I began to doze off, all I could think was if I didn't die in this hospital, my dad was going to kill me.

When I woke again, my headache wasn't as bad, but I was extremely thirsty. My eyes roamed beyond my bed, which was surrounded by blue curtains. I was in a hospital, I knew, but I had no idea how many other beds were in the room. I heard someone cough, but it came from a distance. Then I heard quick footsteps softly tapping on the vinyl floor below. Maybe a doctor or a nurse.

The footsteps grew closer, then stopped. A blue curtain flew open, and a middle-aged man, hair graying at the temples, stepped in. He was wearing green surgical clothing with a pictured nametag on the chest pocket. I read his nametag as he leaned over me. Fairgame Hospital. Jared Black, R.N.

"So, Mister..." he consulted a chart, "Tracer."

I didn't respond.

"Well, you look much better than you did yesterday at this time."

I was waiting for him to say something sarcastic about my overdoing the beer, but he didn't. "What happened to me?" I croaked. I couldn't imagine being put into the hospital for being drunk. I'd more likely be put into jail for that.

The Second Day of Twilight

Nurse Black smiled patronizingly. I didn't appreciate that, but I was too tired to think of a nasty response.

I eyed the pitcher on the tray. "That water?"

"Yes." He picked up the pitcher and poured a small amount into the plastic cup, which had its own flexible straw attached. He held the cup as I sucked on the straw. "Not too fast," he said as he backed the cup away.

I frowned but didn't protest. "So, what happened to me?" I asked a second time.

"Heat stroke. And you were lucky. No major organ damage that's shown up in your tests—yet." Nurse Black let me take a few more sips, then put the cup back on the tray. "I'll be back to check on you later," he said, then disappeared.

I remembered now, becoming dizzy and disoriented, collapsing in the sand, feeling like I was cooking in a furnace. I must have passed out. And then the reality of where I was struck me. Fairgame, on the island planet of Skye. My dad was back on Earth. Good. He couldn't kill me until I got back. Let's see, the volleyball game was on the fourth day of afternoon. I couldn't have been in the hospital more than a day, judging by my hangover. I had come to Skye with my friend, Carter Scott and his parents. Carter was an only child and his parents had money—at least more money than mine did. As a high school graduation present, they offered Carter and a chosen friend, a vacation on Skye.

As if my thoughts summoned them to me, just then, Carter and his parents emerged through my blue curtains, and appeared by my bedside. Carter peered over me and made a face, his blond locks falling onto his forehead.

"Tommy, you don't look so good."

"You don't either," I said, wanting to say something worse, but his parents were right there. I knew Carter had been drinking beer during the volleyball game, but he was smarter than I had been. He frequently ran into the ocean and cooled himself. I bet he had a hangover though, because I saw him sucking up those beers too. The legal drinking age on Fairgame was eighteen, and we both met that requirement—myself just barely.

"The doctor says there's a good chance you'll be out in time for sunset," Carter said.

"I hope so," I answered. I wondered why no one told me that. I hadn't even seen a doctor since I'd awakened. "How long 'til sunset?"

Carter shrugged. "Not sure, exactly."

"Twenty-one hours until it starts," Carter's dad answered. He looked concerned, as if he were going to say, "I hope you learned your lesson," but he looked down at his watch instead.

"They said you still have a slight fever," Carter's mom put in. Then she reached over and touched my forehead with the back of her hand. It was soft and cool. "Yes, I think you do," she confirmed.

The Second Day of Twilight

“Well, I’ll just have to get over that, won’t I?” I said, trying to sound cheerful. Actually, I felt another wave of nausea coming on, plus, I had to pee. I hoped they would leave soon.

“We’ll be moving to the Playhaven Beach Hotel day after tomorrow,” Carter’s dad said. Yeah, no need for a darkhouse when the sun was down, I thought. “Call us when you’re released from the hospital. Carter brought you some clean clothes.”

Carter produced a cheesy smile, showing off his perfect teeth. I remembered when he had braces for nearly two years. We were in middle school then. My teeth are not perfect, but they don’t look terrible either, and I was happy not to have braces. My parents probably wouldn’t have afforded them for me anyway. They were always arguing over money.

When I said nothing further, the Scotts must’ve taken that as a cue to leave. Thank God. My bladder was about to burst.

I buzzed the nurse. “Where are the bathrooms around here?”

“There’s a commode in your room,” a woman’s voice burst through a speaker on the wall.

Geez, the whole hospital probably heard that. No time to be embarrassed though. I struggled out of bed and discovered a new place where my head decided to throb. I’m never drinking again, I told myself and really believed it. I didn’t have time to worry about someone entering my space as I struggled with the oxygen and IV tubes, which insisted on twisting themselves around my body as I struggled toward the commode. I won’t go into any more detail than that except to say that everything came out okay and I made it back into bed without breaking any bones.

Once I was relatively comfortable, my thoughts drifted toward one of the main reasons I’d come to Skye in the first place—to search for my mother. Seeing Carter’s mother and feeling her hand on my forehead triggered memories of my mom, who would sit beside my bed when I was sick and sing me to sleep. I was just a little guy then. Since my dad had kicked her out nearly four years ago, I had neither seen nor heard from her. At first I had taken Dad’s side on the issue and was really angry with Mom up until last year. But then I started missing her really a lot, especially when my dad would get down on me about my wanting to go to college. He wanted me to work in the family hardware store instead. Mom was always on my side when it came to going to college. But more than missing her, I wanted to hear her side of the story. I had no idea where she was, except she was on Skye somewhere.

“Knock, knock,” a woman’s voice came from behind the curtain.

“Come in,” I said. My voice sounded oddly weak and not like my own.

“Hello, Tommy, I’m Dr. Wadton.” She was young and intelligent looking, wore glasses and no makeup. Her light brown hair was pulled back from her face, and her blue eyes looked me up and down.

The Second Day of Twilight

“Hello,” I said. “When do I get out of here?”

She checked a chart, then looked me in the eye. “As soon as your temperature stabilizes, hopefully in twelve hours or so.”

Good, I thought. Then I won’t miss the sunset. I was tired of daylight. I wasn’t in the sun right now, but I knew it was out there, continuously blasting down on everything in sight. The hospital didn’t have dark window shades, and I could feel the sun’s presence, even behind my blue curtains. I longed for darkness.

Dr. Wadton removed my oxygen tubes. “Are you still experiencing nausea?”

“A little.”

She injected something into my IV line.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“An analgesic and something to help you sleep.” When she was finished, she lectured me on the seriousness of drinking alcoholic beverages while being in the hot sun. Then she told me how heat stroke had killed a lot of people, even when they weren’t drinking. When she was convinced she’d made me feel sufficiently guilty, she bid me farewell and said she hoped never to see me in her hospital again.

I lay back and wondered what I would do if I actually did ever find my mother. Would I question her about what she’d done to shame our family? Would I react with anger or empathy, or maybe some of both? I guess I’d worry about that when and if the time came. Right now, I was feeling sleepy and could barely keep my eyes open.

When I awoke, the room was still as bright as before. Good, the sunset hadn’t yet started. I wondered what time it was. I looked down at my hand and noticed the IV had been removed. My head and stomach felt much better. I had a much easier time getting to the commode than I did before. Then hunger struck me. I was famished.

“Mr. Tracer,” I heard a male voice call.

“Yes?”

The blue curtain flew open and Nurse Black stood there, holding a thermometer. “You look much better, Mr. Tracer. How are you feeling?”

Before I could respond, he shoved the thermometer into my mouth and told me to keep it closed. I waited while my stomach growled and Nurse Black read my chart.

After a couple of minutes, he yanked the thermometer from my mouth and studied it for a moment. “You’re in luck. Your temperature is normal. You may check out of the hospital.”

The Second Day of Twilight

Just like that? I thought? Didn't they want me to stay and stabilize or something? "Okay," I said slowly. "Where are my clothes?"

"Right here," the nurse said, pointing to a plastic bag on the floor. "Is there someone to pick you up?"

"Yes, I'll call Mr. Scott. Thank you."

Nurse Black left and I got dressed. I still felt a bit disoriented as I walked into the waiting room. I glanced around the room quickly. A young girl and a couple who looked like her parents were sitting in a corner of the room. The girl was coloring in a book but looked up as I entered.

I sat briefly, then got up and paced.

"What are you looking for, Mister?" the girl said.

I smiled. "A phone."

She pointed in the direction from which I came. I got up again, found the phone, and called Mr. Scott's mobile number. He answered after four rings and told me he and Mrs. Scott were dining right now, but that he would come by and pick me up after that. His tone was neutral, and I couldn't tell if he was upset at me for interrupting his dinner. I didn't let that bother me. How should I know what he was doing? But I was still burdened with guilt for having inconvenienced the Scotts' vacation by my irresponsible behavior. Oh well, nothing I could do about it now. I wasn't going to grovel with apologies.

My stomach growled again. I slipped down the hall and opened a door that was labeled, "Staff Lounge." Inside were two vending machines—one for snacks and the other for drinks. I dug in my pockets and found enough coins to cover one snack. Thanks, Carter, for transferring my change to these pants, I thought. The peanut butter cookies looked good. I dropped the coins into the machine and was rewarded with two giant cookies in one package. I ducked back out of the lounge and headed back to the waiting area. The little girl was alone now, still coloring. After I sat down, she looked up and spoke to me.

"Are you well now?"

"I suppose so," I said, not really feeling like having a conversation with a child.

"Glad to hear it," she said. "What were you in for?"

"They told me heat stroke."

"Hmmm. I was in because I got poisoned somehow, but they don't know what it was."

They must've pumped her stomach, I thought. Yuk. "You getting out today?"

"Um hmm." She put down her color crayon and studied me. She looked about eight or nine years old, and I wondered why her parents had left her alone.

The Second Day of Twilight

"Where are your parents?"

"Oh they're just having a discussion with the doctor."

"Well, I hope you are all well too," I said.

"I'm pretty sure I am." She closed her coloring book, stood up, and walked over to me. "My name is Alison." She held out her hand for me to shake.

I took her hand. It was tiny in my large hand and felt soft and fragile. "I'm Tommy. Nice to meet you, Alison." I still had a cookie. "Would you like a piece of my cookie?"

She eyed me for a moment. "No, thank you. You're hungry. You need it."

"You're right about that," I said and popped most the cookie into my mouth. "Guess they forgot to feed me before I left."

Alison sat down beside me just as a ray of sun blasted through the blinds of the small window that graced the modest waiting room. I shielded my eyes. Alison stood on the chair and closed the blinds with a twist of the hanging wand. "Getting closer to sunset," she commented.

"Yeah," I said.

Alison examined the small pink watch wrapped around her wrist. "By my calculations, sunset will start in seven point three Earth hours."

"Sounds about right," I commented. Actually, I never bothered figuring out how many Earth hours one afternoon on Skye lasted. About eighty or ninety, I figured, depending on the season of the year. But I didn't care about the exact amount of time. All I knew is the afternoon had lasted too long already.

Alison plopped back down in the chair next to me, bouncing a little as she settled. "So, Tommy, I bet you're just out of high school and have come here for a vacation before college."

I was startled by her insight. "You're pretty smart for a little kid," I said.

She didn't reply. Instead, she asked me what I wanted to study in college. I told her I wanted to study philosophy, but it looked as though I wouldn't get to go. My dad insisted on my working fulltime at Tracer Hardware, our family owned business that, for the most part, my two older sisters ran. I didn't have enough money to finance college on my own, so I was stuck.

"Don't give up hope, Tommy. If you want to go to college bad enough, there will be a way."

"I wish I had your confidence."

"You can if you want to."

"How old are you anyway?" I asked, slightly annoyed.

"I just turned nine."

"So this is a birthday present for you? Coming to Skye."

The Second Day of Twilight

“Um hmm.” She stood up and straightened her dress, then she sat back down again and studied me.

“What?” I said.

“You look sad, and it’s not just about college. Am I right?”

“What are you, psychic or something?”

She looked thoughtful. “Not really. I’m just in....”

“Inquisitive,” I said.

“No, in...tuitive. That’s what my mom says anyway.”

“That you are, Alison.”

“Come on, tell me what is making you sad, Tommy.”

My annoyance gave way to surrender. This little girl would be a good shrink someday, if she wanted to pursue that career. I sighed. “I came here to look for my mother. I haven’t seen her in four years. I have no idea if she’s in Playhaven or even on this island.”

Alison looked thoughtful. “Do you know if she’s on this planet?”

“I think she is. All I know is I recently overheard my dad telling someone on the phone that she was on Skye.”

“Then there’s a chance you can find her,” Alison said matter-of-factly.

I lowered my head into my hands. I had searched for her the first few days I was here up until the time I went into the hospital. I’d looked in phone directories, asked at restaurants and bars, and watched for her face among crowds of people. I looked up again, but not at Alison. “I don’t know. It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack. She could be anywhere and could have a different name.”

“Tommy, look at me.” I did. What was this adult doing in a child’s body? I wondered. “If you are meant to find her, you will. You will be walking along the beach or browsing in a store or sitting in a restaurant and you’ll look up and there she will be.”

“Alison?” The sound of a man’s voice approached. It was Alison’s father. “Are you bothering the man?”

“No,” I answered before Alison had a chance to say anything.

“We’re going to leave now,” her father said.

Just then, Alison’s mother stepped out of the doctor’s office. “You’ve got a clean bill of health, kiddo,” her mother said. “I’m delighted but surprised. The doctor said you had a bacterial infection, and those usually take weeks to get rid of.”

Alison hopped off the chair and looked up at her mother and then at her father. “Told you everything would be okay,” she said.

The Second Day of Twilight

Wish I had her confidence, I thought. Still, she might be right. If I'm meant to find my mom, I will.

I waved good-bye to Alison. She gave me a wink as she went out the door. The sun assaulted my eyes and I turned away until the door shut again.

A few minutes later, Mr. Scott showed up to take me back to the hotel.

I didn't get a chance to eat until we moved into our new hotel. The Scotts took me to dinner at a fancy restaurant. The downside was that I had to get dressed up in a suit and tie, but the food was worth it. Then it was back to the hotel to change clothes and get a spot on the dock for the sunset. The Scotts held a place for Carter and me while we went strolling down the avenue, looking into shops and watching people. I was careful to wear a hat and take plenty of drinking water with me. I was still tired from the heat stroke experience, but I found enough energy to take a dip in the warm ocean. Finally, it was back to the dock to sit and watch the sunset along with the Scotts and just about everyone else on the island.

All along the dock, bodies were lined like armies of ants. Folding chairs and sleeping bags spotted the docks with color, while feet dangled from those long runways across the water. It would take nearly an Earth day for the sun to completely set. Carter and I had a good view, but I found it difficult to navigate in and out of the area to fetch food and drink or just to do something different than sit there. Carter's parents were more sedate and seemed to enjoy their beach chairs and drinks.

After a few hours, I grew tired and went back to the hotel for a nap. At this point, I didn't mind if I missed the sunset. I still longed for the darkness of night, and that would take a while to come. I fell asleep almost immediately after lying down. When I awoke again, I felt refreshed. I peeked out the window. The sky was not as bright, but I couldn't tell where the sun was, as our room was located on the opposite side of the hotel.

I took a leisurely shower and put on some clean jeans and a t-shirt. I grabbed a jacket and left the hotel. When I turned the corner outside, I saw the sun had turned a brilliant red. Stratus clouds streaked the sky along the horizon, and the sky was painted with streaks of brilliant pinks and oranges. I gasped. No wonder everyone made such a big deal of the sunset. However, I was still preoccupied with finding my mother.

Strolling along the avenue, I took my time going back to the Carters' spot. I studied the face of every middle-aged woman I passed. I knew I shouldn't torture myself this way. The ancient Chinese philosophy stated, "Looked for, it cannot be found." I believed this to be true, but I just couldn't help myself. By the time I found the Carters, I was feeling extremely disappointed. My mood was out of place among the throngs of people festively celebrating the end of the planet's long day, and it must have shown.

The Second Day of Twilight

“What’s the matter, Tommy,” Carter said. “You look like you just lost your last friend in the world.”

I shook myself out of my despair. “I’m fine.” I tried to smile. Carter was drinking a beer. I wasn’t ready for one of those yet. “Hand me a Coke, would you Carter?” If I couldn’t get drunk, at least I could have a caffeine-sugar rush.

As well as I could in my limited amount of space, I lay down on my back and looked up at the sky. Sunset was all right, but the stars were even better. Skye had no moon, so once the sun was down, the stars were exceptionally bright. There were no familiar constellations because we were about forty-eight thousand light years from Earth. The distance was staggering.

I thought about my fear of the portal. Carter had gone through it before and told me there was nothing to it. Yeah, I thought, if everything went right. I had heard of portal accidents where people had been lost into thin air (or thin space) never to return. Carter had been right. Getting into the roller coaster sized cars was easy, and being sucked through the wormhole only took a few minutes. What happened wasn’t molecular dematerialization, but I felt tingly all over as if my body had somehow transformed into light. It was not an unpleasant sensation. Now that I’d tried it, I was looking forward to transporting back home.

The next day, which was the first day of twilight, Carter and I spent most of our time at video arcades. I was determined not to let my failure to find my mother get me down. I really zoned in on the games. Between video arcades, we would walk along the beach and hang out in bars. I was careful not to drink too much beer. I limited myself to four twelve-ouncers. After that, I switched to Coke.

That “night,” meaning our next sleep period, I had a hard time going to sleep. My thoughts kept rotating from getting back home to my girlfriend, Jessica, to figuring out a way to go to college, to finding my mother. Jessica and I had been going together for three years and were pretty comfortable with each other. But I still had some apprehension about her going off to college without me. The college was only twenty-seven miles away from our neighborhood, but still, she would meet new people without my being involved. But that wasn’t my main reason for wanting to go to college. I didn’t know what I wanted to be yet, but I knew I didn’t want to work in the family hardware store. As for finding my mother, I imagined what might happen if I really did, what she would say, what I would say, and how we would both feel.

Although the sky was more beautiful (to my eyes anyway) on the second day of twilight, I was getting tired of the video arcades and restaurants and was glad we would be going home soon. There is just so much fun a guy can handle before he’s ready to get back to doing something productive. I was going to take the college entrance exam, but I wasn’t going to tell my dad. I would work all summer at the hardware store and save my money. It might be enough for the first semester’s tuition, though I didn’t know where I would live. I would worry about that when the time came. I was also rebuilding a motorcycle that was given to me by this guy up the street. If I could get that running, I would have

The Second Day of Twilight

transportation anytime I wanted without having to ask Dad to borrow the car. I was optimistic now.

The time was between lunch and dinner—that would be afternoon back home, but here the clocks were so confusing. Anyway, Carter and I were browsing in a gift shop, and I was looking for something not too expensive but nice to take back to Jessica. Suddenly, I felt a hand on my shoulder and heard a woman's voice say, "Tommy, is that you?"

Annoyed at first, I turned quickly. She didn't look like the picture I had, but it was my mother. She was shorter than I remembered, but I quickly realized it was I who had grown taller. Instead of the long brown hair, she now had short red hair and wore rose tinted glasses. Her perfume was the same I had remembered: Amber Waves.

"Mom?" Now that I'd found her, or rather she'd found me, I didn't know what to say. A myriad of emotions shot through my body, and I could hear my heart beating.

"Tommy," she said with emotion and wrapped one arm around me. The other was holding a shopping bag. I hugged her back but was cautious. Once she let me go, she studied my face. "Tommy, I was going to contact you, but now you're here."

"Yes, I came with the Scotts. Graduation present." Mom looked at Carter who pretended not to be surprised.

"Hello, Carter. How have you been?"

"Fine, Mrs. Tr...."

"You can call me Ellen." She turned back to me. "Tommy, I'm remarried to a really nice man. A good man. His name is Frank." She glanced at Carter and then back at me. "I kept my maiden name, Murphy."

There was an uncomfortable silence among us, but Mom finally spoke.

"Tommy, how long are you staying on Skye?"

I cleared my throat. "Not very much longer. We're leaving on the first day of night."

"I'd love for you to come out to my house for dinner. You could meet Frank, and we could visit." She glanced at Carter. "If that's okay with the Scotts."

Carter shrugged. I didn't want to go to her house, and I didn't want to meet Frank. I wanted to talk to her alone. "Listen, I think we should just go to a restaurant or something for a few hours." I turned to Carter. "That okay with you?"

"Yeah, sure." I knew Carter would understand. I had talked to him about my mother before, not to any great extent, but Carter knew I wanted to find her.

The Second Day of Twilight

“Let me make a call,” Mom said. She stepped out of the gift shop and returned shortly. “All set. Where would you like to go?”

As we sat in the coffee shop, Mom explained why she hadn’t kept in touch with me. “Your father wouldn’t let me.”

“You could have e-mailed me or something.”

“I couldn’t let my location be known to you, or I would have violated a restraining order. I might have gone to jail.”

That was my opening to ask her what had been on my mind for a long time. “You did something illegal before.”

Mom hung her head for a moment, then she looked me directly in the eye. “I didn’t want to, but it was the only way I could see to save our business and our home at the time.”

I was steaming inside now. The anger I had buried had risen to the top. “But you sold yourself to men! I heard Dad call you a whore.” I felt my face flush as I realized people at other tables probably overheard me. “I’m sorry,” I whispered.

She took my hands, which were clinging to my coffee cup. “Tommy, I’m sorry, and I don’t expect you to understand.”

I straightened in my chair and pulled my hands out of hers. “I thought Gretchen and Sue were running the store. I thought they had everything under control.”

Mom picked up her cup and signaled she was getting a refill. I took a few deep breaths to settle myself. When she returned, she spent a moment adding cream and sugar to her coffee. Then she finally spoke. “Your father gambled away all our savings. We couldn’t get a second mortgage on the house, so I did what I thought I had to.”

I knew Dad liked to gamble. He went to a weekly poker game and sometimes went to the track, but I had no idea he had a gambling problem. “But he told me everything was okay with our family, financially, that is. I was stupid enough to believe him.”

“Honey, I don’t want you to be hard on your father. I believe that he thought he could pull us out of the debt we were in. He kept waiting for that big win.”

I could feel my eyes watering, but I wasn’t going to let myself cry. Not in a public place, anyway.

“It’s a sickness,” Mom said. “Just like any addiction is.”

I sighed. “I know.”

The Second Day of Twilight

“And I know it’s hard to understand these things at your age, but one day you will. Try and be patient with your parents. We are just human beings who make mistakes.” She raised her forehead and looked at me expectantly.

I tried to smile. “Yeah, you’re right, I guess,” I said. I looked at my watch. We had been at the coffee shop for over two hours. I wanted to tell her I’d be back to visit, but I didn’t know if I’d ever be able to afford it.

Mom took a sip of her coffee, then brought her purse up and placed it on the table. “I have something for you.”

“You do?” I felt like a little kid again, remembering when she would bring me a piece of candy home from the store or a special little toy.

“I assume you are still planning on going to college.”

“I’m going to try, but Dad....”

She pulled a fat letter out of her purse and placed it in front of me. “I’ve been saving up a college fund for you. It’s not much. It’ll get you through one academic year, but you will have to figure out your living expenses.” She must have known Dad would kick me out of the house if I chose college over the hardware store.

I picked up the envelope and turned it over in my hands. It was addressed to Mom and the return address was the Bank of Colorado. Snail mail, I thought. Expensive, but more secure than e-mail. I opened the envelope and took out a bank statement showing ten thousand forty-eight dollars and twenty-one cents. I swallowed hard. “Mom,” was all I could say.

Mom smiled, amused at my surprise. “You’re welcome. You aren’t restricted with your use of the money, but I know you want to go to college.”

My anger had dissipated. I looked at her in a new light. Then it occurred to me, in my self-absorption, that I had failed to ask her about her job. “So, what kind of job do you have to be able to save up this money? You’re not....?”

She laughed. “No, of course not.” I am a registered nurse. Went through school when I first moved here.”

“Oh. That’s good. I was in the hospital but I didn’t see you.”

She frowned, concerned.

“Heat stroke,” I said. “I’ll never drink beer and play volleyball in the sun again.” But I’m okay. I was lucky.” I smiled sheepishly, thinking that we all make mistakes.

“Well, I’m glad you’re okay. That heat stroke can be dangerous.”

She didn’t have to tell me that. I’d already had the lecture. “Yeah, I know.”

Mom looked at her watch. “Well, I told Frank I’d be home by five.”

I stood up before she did. We walked out of the coffee shop and walked to her car, which was parked in a garage about four blocks away. Neither of us said

The Second Day of Twilight

much except to comment on the beauty of the sky, its rich blues and indigos giving way to gradient shades of blue light on the horizon.

“When will I see you again?” I asked once we had reached her car. We both stood there awkwardly, not wanting to say good-bye.

“Frank and I are planning a trip to the states during the holidays.”

“Oh.”

“Most of his family lives in Connecticut.”

“I see.”

“We are also going to the Rockies between Christmas and the New Year.”

I hesitated. “Well maybe I’ll see you then.”

Mom dug into her purse and pulled out a small, white card. “You can count on it,” she said. She handed me the card, which was printed with her home address, mobile phone number, and e-mail address. It occurred to me that I had not offered her my information. I didn’t have a printed card, so I borrowed a pen from her and wrote down my e-mail address. I didn’t have a mobile phone—yet.

She looked at my e-mail address. “Same as you had before.”

She remembered. “Yep. Same one.”

“Well, you take care, Mom. I’m glad you are doing well.”

“Thank you, Tommy.” She kissed me on the cheek, then hugged me with both arms. “You keep in touch, okay?”

“Okay, will do.” I looked at her card again, then back at her. She was getting into the car. “Mom,” I said.

“Yes, Tommy?”

“Mom, I love you.”

“I love you too, Tommy.”

I walked back to the hotel, noticing the twilight had grown deeper. Soon it would be time to go home. That was okay though. I stopped at the same gift shop where I’d run into Mom, and I bought a pretty silver necklace for Jessica. I felt relieved of a great emotional burden, and my new financial situation lightened my mood as well.

The sky was pitch black when we boarded the roller coaster capsules and shot through the portal back to Earth. I barely noticed the transport’s pleasant sensation. I was thinking about what Alison had said—that if I was meant to find my mother, it would happen. I wasn’t sure if it was predestined or if I helped it happen by wanting it so much. Then I thought about my money and going to college, and yes, that when my dad found out, he was going to kill me.