

Ethereal - Chapter 2

It was May in Brisbane and typical autumn weather; a fine, clear day with blue sky and a cool breeze teasing the pine trees as it drifted across the lawns of the Gardens of Remembrance at Bridgeman Downs. Cameron stood alone at the grave sides of his wife and son, staring silently through tear filled eyes at the shiny new plaques in the manicured lawn. They indicated the final resting places of the two people who had been his life, and seemed so inadequate in the face of his great loss.

It was now nine weeks since the crash. His injuries had been too great for him to attend the funerals, keeping him in hospital until yesterday. He learned from his mother that a sizable crowd of family and friends had turned out to honour Sally and Zane, including a large contingent from Nudgee College. She said it had been a beautiful ceremony with the rugby players forming an honour guard at the graveside.

Sally and Cameron had been tireless volunteers for the many events, committees and projects at the college, while Zane had been a top scholar, student leader and sportsman. From the time they had enrolled him from primary school, they had been a much loved family in the school community.

When he left the hospital, he had dropped his mother at her house. He wanted to visit the graves alone. She understood that.

"I had a dvd made. You can look at it later if you want to. I left a copy at your house, on the coffee table."

His mother had thought of everything, it was just like her. But he wasn't ready to look at the dvd just yet.

He turned from the graves, and with the help of a walking stick, headed slowly back to his car. The lengthy stay in hospital had left him weak and he found that he tired easily. He would go home and rest. His mother had offered to have him stay with her, but he really wanted to be alone in his grief.

His doctors had assured him that his physical injuries were now well on the mend and that he could expect a full recovery. He would need physiotherapy on his legs for a further month or two but his body would become strong again if he worked hard.

Cameron was thankful that physically he would be whole again and he was determined to put in the necessary hard work, but it was his mental recovery that he was not sure of. He missed his wife and son so badly that he could actually feel the physical ache in his heart and soul, he knew that he had to get on with life; he knew they would expect this of him, but after his experience at the crash site as they left him at the roadside, he despaired of ever moving on. It was as if they had been stolen away from him in a blink; they were gone, and he didn't know how he would cope with that, and at times he still wished he had gone with them.

At home, he sat in the lounge, in the dark by himself, sipping from a glass of gin and tonic; he wasn't drinking to get drunk, he was just hoping to numb the pain that enveloped him.

He thought of those last wonderful minutes he had spent with Sally and Zane, of the feeling of love and togetherness that was in the car that fateful day. He thought of the excitement they felt, contemplating the weekend in front of them, and then he thought of the hopes and dreams that were shattered minutes later by the carelessness of an idiot.

He ran through those awful moments in his head every day. He had decided weeks ago not to shut them out, but to face them often, in the hope that by confronting the horror again and again, the pain would eventually be diminished.

He swallowed the last drop in the glass and swung his feet up onto the sofa, adjusting the cushions behind his head and, lying back, he let the world and all of his pain, wash over him and fade into the background. He thought of happier times with his family, as he slowly drifted off into a deep sleep.

He was floating, no ... flying. He knew he could fly but he was having trouble getting up into the air, he lunged upward several times, then finally he was up. He had to dodge the power lines, they were in his way, and there were trees; *get up higher*, he told himself, *above them that's it, that's better. Flying now, a bit jerky and a bit nervous, but it feels wonderful. Look around, where am I? Oh yeah! Above my house, getting higher; hard to keep airborne, lookout! Falling, falling.*

Cameron woke with a start and wondered for a moment where he was, and then he realised he was still on his sofa, as his dull aching sorrow flooded back over him. He got up and adjusted the cushions and then went upstairs to the bedroom.

As he climbed into bed and drew the covers up he thought about the peculiar dream he had just had; it had felt as though he was actually flying. It had been strangely liberating and had seemed as though it was a natural thing to do; only he wasn't very good at it.

It was a type of dream he hadn't experienced before, but a dream that Cameron was to have on several occasions during the next few days. He welcomed them, and each time as he drifted off to sleep he thought of them, hoping to experience the phenomenon again. On each occasion he remembered the previous dreams, and seemed to learn from them, becoming a little better at flying each time, as they seemed to go for longer. In one sequence, he found himself so high, that when he looked down to get his bearings, he could see the curvature of the earth. He remembered willing himself to stay where he was for a moment, to enjoy the feeling and the view. There was no fear, only curiosity and wonder.

Each time the dreams ended in the same way, with Cameron experiencing a falling sensation and waking in his bed, with full recall of the events in the dream. He felt that there was more going on here than just dreams and decided he would look into the possible reasons for his nocturnal sojourns.

On Friday, Cam had an appointment to see his doctor, Doctor Jennifer Bradley, for a check-up to see how his recovery was progressing. After she had checked him physically, they sat in her office to talk about how he was coping mentally. They were not only doctor and patient, they were old friends. Jennifer had been a good friend of Sally's since school and therefore could relate somewhat to his great loss and the pain he was going through.

She knew that physically he was healing well and now turned her attention to his mental care. Cameron was naturally still grieving, but thought it may be better if he went back to work.

Doctor Bradley wasn't opposed to this, but asked anyway.

"Are you confident that you feel up to it Cam? I'm sure they can do without you for a bit longer if you're not."

"Yes, I'm sure Jenny. It can't possibly be worse than moping around at home for ever. I'm feeling stronger each day, and I think the work focus will help."

He took a sip from the coffee that her assistant had bought in and Jenny took a sip of hers before asking.

"Have you been sleeping well? Through the night I mean."

Cameron was about to say yes, when he remembered the strange flying dreams and decided to mention them.

"I've been having these weird ...,"

He searched for a word to describe what he was experiencing.

"...dreams I suppose you'd call them. They started the night after I got out of the hospital, after I got off all of those drugs. It's as if I'm really flying but I feel a bit like the bloke out of that old TV show *Greatest American Hero*, I keep dodging power lines and trees and I always come back to earth with a thud and wake up."

He smiled for the first time since the accident, he felt comfortable talking to his friend.

Jennifer wasn't smiling; she sat up straight and with a furrowed brow asked.

"How often has this been happening?"

"About three or four times I suppose. Why?"

Cameron responded to her interest.

Jennifer didn't answer his question directly; instead she asked another question of her own.

"You mentioned the out of body experience just after the accident, has anything like that happened again?"

"No." He replied, "Do you think this is related?"

"Well, it could be. Perhaps we should get you to have a talk to Doctor Kuval. He is a Psychiatrist specializing in OBE and other unusual phenomena of the mind."

"I thought you *real* doctors didn't subscribe to that sort of thing?"

Cameron quipped. Jennifer smiled.

"Some don't, but I've seen and heard of a few occurrences that are a bit hard to ignore; your experience at the accident scene for example."

Remembering the accident sobered both their moods and Cameron became serious again.

"OK, I'll see him if you think it will help. Should I make the appointment or will you?"

Jennifer pulled out a pad and wrote a referral, then placing it in an envelope, she handed it to Cameron.

"You make it, just hand this to reception when you go in for the appointment, Doctor Kuval will read it before he sees you. I'll be interested to know how it turns out."

"Thanks Jen."

Cameron took the envelope and stood.

"I'll see myself out. I'll let you know how I get on. Thanks again, for everything."

He turned at the door and smiled at his friend before closing it behind him. He walked out of her offices and into the warm sunlight.

Out and about again, he thought, *this feels a bit better*. He took out his mobile phone and phoned the number on the letter Jennifer had given him, making an appointment for the following Monday.

He wondered if this could be some psychic thing, and allowed himself to muse, *maybe I could see them again, Sally and Zane*. He then thought how strange that would sound to some people if he mentioned it out loud, as it probably would have to him before the crash. But now he would keep the appointment and see what came of it, after his "Out of Body Experience" or OBE as Jenny had called it, his mind was wide open.

As he walked to his car, he contemplated the term "OBE" and thought that, once a phenomenon was known by its initials, it seemed to gain increased credibility, as though it was a common medical condition. He knew at least that he had experienced it, and he now knew that Jenny and this Doctor Kuval took it seriously. He became aware that he was now impatient to find out more, and was looking forward to his meeting with Kuval on Monday.

That night, when fatigue finally eclipsed his sorrow, he slept.

He became aware that he was floating, and realised he was up against the ceiling of his room. On looking down he saw himself lying in the bed, obviously sleeping. He looked around the room and then back at the ceiling, thinking of being outside and how he would get there and then suddenly there he was, floating above the house. He seemed to be holding his position more easily now and decided to become more adventurous.

On his last outing he remembered being high enough to see the curvature of the earth, and wondered how far he might be able to go. He looked at the moon and decided that is where he would like to be. Immediately he was floating above the surface of the moon, seeing it as he had seen the earth, from high above so that he could see its curvature. He looked back toward home and was mesmerized by the beauty of billions of stars shining against the black expanse of space, and in the centre of this the striking blue marble that was earth.

As he marvelled at what was before him he became aware of a presence, as if he was being watched. He focused his attention behind him and then in all directions, but saw nothing. He sensed something or someone at the periphery of his awareness and fear began to creep up on him. He suddenly felt a loss of balance and again after the sensation of falling, he once again awoke in bed, a light sweat breaking on his body; his thoughts were racing; he felt sure he had caught a flash of something in the darkness of space before falling. What could it have been? Perhaps it was just a shooting star; but what about the sensation of being watched, what could be out there? He shuddered involuntarily and tried to go back to sleep. However lying in the darkness, pondering his latest experience, sleep eluded him.