

Ethereal - Chapter 5

Cameron felt hands on him. He was being gently shaken. The entity in front of him faded as he felt the falling sensation. He suddenly woke, back in his bed, as a figure loomed over him, shaking him by the shoulder.

"Cameron, Cameron! Oh thank god you are alright. I've been knocking on your door for an age and I got worried, so I used my key to get in. Are you alright, are you sick?"

Cameron came out of his fog and rubbing his hands over his face, discovered that the figure in front of him now was not a strange spectre, it was his mother.

"Hello Mother."

He said groggily.

"Why are you waking me at this hour? I was sound asleep."

"Well, I'm happy to see you too darling. It's only about eight o'clock you know, and as I haven't heard from you in over a week, I thought I would see if you were OK."

"I'm sorry Mum. I've been busy with doctors and things. If you go down and make some coffee, I'll get decent and be right down. I'll tell you all about it."

His mother smiled and touched his face, then retreated to the kitchen while Cameron showered himself awake.

He stood, hands above his head on the shower wall, his head bowed under the shower rose, water cascading over his head and shoulders, streaming down his body to the shower floor.

He recalled, with a sense of amazement, the experience he had just been yanked away from, and the frightening apparition he had encountered some twenty light years from home. His thoughts then turned to the spectacular, Earth-like planet he had been above only minutes before. Thoughts spun in his head.

Had it been a dream, or had he actually been there? It seemed so real, he had to have been there, he knew that he must return there as soon as he could. What would he tell his mother of these recent adventures?

He turned off the shower and stepping onto the mat, he grabbed a towel and dried himself off, deciding that his mother was not ready for the concept of astral projection just yet, he would skirt around the whole issue.

Cameron came into the kitchen and kissed his mother on the cheek.

"Sorry about being grumpy Mum, I was a bit groggy. It's been a big week, with doctor visits and physio. I'm just a bit worn out."

"That's understandable love. Here's your coffee. How is it coming along? Are the doctors happy with your progress? You look a lot better."

"Yep, progress is good. I feel a lot better. I'm going back to work next week."

They sat and chatted for the best part of an hour, until his mother satisfied herself that her son was well on the mend and healthy enough to go back to work. She gave him a hug and said her goodbyes after extracting a promise that he would come to her place for dinner later that week.

After she left, Cameron sat for a while on the couch considering his recent journey.

He was convinced that he had really been there; he had actually travelled to Gliese 581g. He had traversed 200 billion kilometres of space, in the time it took to think he would like to go there. His thoughts then turned to the encounter with his silent observer.

Who was it? Was it the same entity as the first one he had sensed? Could it have been Kuval? If they were the same, it couldn't have been Kuval; he had the first sensation prior to their first session. Should he venture out to confront it again on his own? Perhaps he should

consult Kuval again before he goes. Yes, that would be the wise thing to do. He would call him tomorrow.

When he contacted Kuval first thing in the morning, the doctor agreed to see him just before lunch and greeted him in the waiting room as usual when he arrived.

"Good morning Cameron, come in please."

He ushered him into his office with a wave of his arm like a concierge, then indicated the chair.

"Please take a seat. Now what did you wish to discuss?"

Cameron was excited to tell Kuval about his progress.

"I've done it Doctor. Remember that I was telling you of my passion for the stars and planets? Well, last night I travelled to a planet which orbits a star some 20 light years from Earth. It's a star system which I have been studying with my students. So I thought I would take a closer look. I was able to travel there in just a blink, it was incredible."

"That is incredible, when you think that only a few weeks ago you were dodging trees and electricity lines."

Kuval smiled as he relaxed into his chair.

"How much of the planet did you see? Did you find what you expected to find?"

Cameron's obvious excitement at being able to share his experience with someone to whom it would not seem ridiculous, was evident as he sat on the edge of his chair and related the full story.

"I was only able to see it from space, as my mother woke me from sleep before I could get a closer look and I was pulled back to my body. However, I did observe blue and green expanses across the planet; it did seem Earth-like with obvious water areas and plant life. I'll be returning as soon as I can, however I had an unsettling experience just before I was awakened; I encountered my stalker again.

As I was looking down at the planet I had that sensation of being watched, and when I turned this time it was there, it didn't disappear or move, it just floated there like a spectre. It had a vaguely human form but without features, doing nothing, just watching. Then, as I said, I was rudely awakened and yanked back home."

Doctor Kuval thought for a second, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, his hands clasped in front of his face, before speaking.

"Yes, his features would have been undistinguishable because you don't know who this is; you have no memories of what this being looks like. If it is the same entity that has been following you, it seems likely that it is ready to make contact. Was there any attempt at communication at all?"

Cameron shook his head and sat back in his chair.

"No Doctor, but it was only a split second later that I was yanked back to my body. There really wasn't any time for communication. It was a little unsettling though. Do you think it presents any danger?"

Kuval gave a slight sideways nod of his head.

"No, you can't be hurt. The moment that you feel unsafe or in danger you will come back to your body. There is no danger. I would suggest, if you encounter this entity again, that you attempt communication."

Cameron was relieved to hear this, and then another thought occurred to him.

"Do you think that this spirit is from earth? Or could it be from another world. The planet maybe?"

"It is hard to say, although you did encounter, or felt that you sensed, the presence closer to home, so it is likely to be from here. As I say, try to communicate and you will no doubt find out."

Cameron rose from his chair and Kuval followed suit, again they shook hands.

"I will, thank you Doctor. I plan to go back this evening. Barring my mother's interruptions. Thanks once again. I'll let you know how I get on."

That evening at home he knew that he was way too excited to fall asleep readily, or to focus enough to astral project easily, so before dinner he decided to go for a run through Marchant Park, to expend some energy and wear himself out. Recent physiotherapy had been working well and his daily walks had progressed to a jog over the past week, to a stage where he was really enjoying a run now.

The evening air was brisk and the light fading as he donned his earphones, selecting his favourite playlist before setting out on his run. Marchant Park was not very well lighted, though it held no fears for Cameron. He had been running through the park along the cycle paths and linking to other parks across suburbs for many years now, and he knew the precinct well. His run tonight would only take him about 45 minutes which would see him home before dark anyway.

He made his way along the path through the centre of Marchant to Newman road, crossing Newman to continue along Downfall Creek to Sandgate Road before turning to return along the same path. As he reached the more tree-lined section of the creek, he suddenly heard a rush of footsteps from behind, loud enough to be heard over the dulcet tones of Van Morrison's *Into the Mystic* piping through his earphones. Before he could turn to see who it was, he felt a sharp pain in the back of his head and then there was silence and darkness.

The next thing he knew there was a gentle prodding on his shoulder. He opened his eyes to see the entity floating beside him and looking down saw that he was once again floating outside his body. He looked back to the entity and mumbled.

"Dr. Kuval, is that you?"

The spectre remained featureless.

"Who are you, what do you want?"

A voice sounded inside Cameron's head, as clear as if he was talking to a person, he would reflect later that the voice was speaking English and with an Australian accent.

"I mean you no harm. You must follow me now."

It tugged at Cameron's arm and he followed obediently. He felt no threat, sensing benevolence instead.

They flew along the path until they came across two men in running attire jogging along the path. One had Cameron's phone and earplugs in his hand while the other carried his wallet. They continued to follow them until the men entered a house in Delaware Street, off the side of Marchant Park. The two wraiths followed the men inside and watched them stash Cameron's belongings into a cavity under the stove, after taking \$120 from the wallet. They then retrieved beer from the fridge and, saluting each other they laughed and dropped into chairs in front of the TV and turned on the news.

The spectre turned to Cameron.

"You must go back now and alert your police."

Then it was gone, leaving Cameron stunned and confused. There was nothing for it but to do as his benefactor had instructed. He rushed back to his body and was soon sitting up on the ground rubbing the back of his head, a stranger standing over him.

"Are you alright mate? What happened?"

He looked up at the stranger.

"Yes, thanks mate, I'm OK. I was jumped by a couple of louts; they got away with my phone and wallet."

The stranger nodded his head.

"Thought so? You're about the third one along here in as many weeks. The cops can't find whose doing it."

Cameron stood up, his hand still on the back of his head.

"Have you got a phone I could use please, I'll call the police, I know where they are."

"Already done mate."

The Good Samaritan brandished his phone as he said this.

"The paramedics are on their way as well."

He two services turned up simultaneously, the Police interviewing him while a paramedic checked him over.

"You say that you know where you're attackers live Mr. Gates. How could you know that?"

Cameron knew that he couldn't tell them how he really knew, so he had to come up with a plausible reason.

"Well, I didn't lose consciousness right away; I was able to identify one of the men before I blacked out."

When he and the entity had entered the house and observed the two men, he remembered seeing a tattoo of a shark on the calf of one of them, he seized on that.

"He had a distinctive tattoo of a shark on his left calf. I had seen it before. I walk and run through the park regularly, as do the men. I've noticed the tattoo before and have seen them coming and going from the house in Delaware Street. I can come with you and point it out."

The police agreed and when the paramedics had finished with Cameron, took him with them to the house, hatching a plan before pulling up outside.

"Now we don't have a warrant, so we won't be able to enter the house without probable cause. So what is your phone number? If we ring it and can hear it from the front door. That will be enough to gain us entry."

Cameron supplied his number and they dialled it as one of the attackers answered the door. The ring could be clearly heard coming from within the house. The two officers showed their badges.

"Police, please step aside. We have reason to believe you have stolen property on your premises."

The policemen pushed past the man at the door, the ringing phone guiding them to its whereabouts. They retrieved it from under the stove along with Cameron's wallet and several more items of property, no doubt the proceeds from previous attacks.

As they escorted the men from the house in handcuffs, another police car pulled up outside the house and while they took the criminals to the station, the second car dropped Cameron at his house, with a promise to return his goods to him as soon as they were booked in as evidence.

Cameron didn't have any problems falling asleep that night, however no sooner had he dropped into a deep sleep, he was again aware of a gentle prodding at his shoulder. The entity was back.