Part Two

They Are Not Alone

How did this “hook-up” Sierra mountain weekend get so out of hand? All Mark wanted was to be alone with Rachel, like he had before with the other girls. Instead she startled him off the dome rock into a tree-top where the only person who stood between him and a five hundred foot plunge was this old, rickety guy. Even if the guy could help him the encroaching storm may still kill them.

The old man worked his way down the granite fissure, steadying himself on the slippery sand. The wind kicked up. “Well, young man, you seem to have got yourself into a bind.” Mark prayed they both didn’t blow over the edge.

Mark’s hands shook. He couldn’t just lie in the tree, yet it didn’t seem right to let this old guy try to rescue him. Any wrong move in the tree canopy could plunge both of them hundreds of feet below into the valley. The scent of cedar needles may just become his burial myrrh.

“Wait, sir, I...”

“Don’t worry,” said the bearded gentleman. He stopped at the edge, almost touching one of the tree branches. His foot slipped sending small stones bouncing off the ridge and into the valley below them.

“Sir, we’ll both plummet to our deaths! Can you just drive and find a ranger?”

“Nonsense,” barked the old man. “…and, I don’t own a car, anyway.”

The man sat down supporting his feet on rocks and extended the staff to Mark. He lowered his voice. “Now, come on, son. Reach for the staff very slowly.”

Mark grabbed the staff with his right hand, and shifted his feet to face the man. The tree rocked a little.

He stopped.

“Now, son, try again and slide up the branch toward the rock. Place your feet on the dome. When I say, ‘now,’ I will pull, and you walk up the ravine working your grip hand over hand on the stick.”

Mark shook his head, and bit his lip. “This day is about to get worse.”

“Come on Mark, you can do it!” Yelled Rachel.

“Ok, son, ready?”

Mark sighed. “Do I have a choice?” Mark’s eyes locked with the old man’s. His eyes seemed to be casting confidence.

“Now!” He pulled Mark off the branch and into the cleft.

Mark’s foot slipped on some sand. He began to slide back over the edge. Mark reached out, grabbed the man’s shirt. It ripped, but not before Mark fell forward, panting.

He was safe.

The two scampered to the top of the dome.

Mark and Rachel embraced, “Mark, please forgive me.”

Rachel turned to the old man, her eyes swollen red with tears. “Thank you for saving us.”

“Thank you, sir. I thought I would die up here,” said Mark. They shook hands. “Can I buy you a shirt?”

The old man smiled. “No, it was old. At my age, it’s nice to be able to help someone.”

“Is there anything I can do for you, maybe buy you dinner?” Mark looked to Rachel for approval.

“No, please,” he replied. “I just like to be alone up here.” He turned and started down the backside of the dome.

Rachel stared. Mark knew that look. He saw it last week when Rachel thought she saw a UFO in the evening skies over the Pacific Ocean. She had pleaded with Mark to call the police about the bright object trailing vapor

which turned rainbow colors before dissolving.

“Mark, did you notice something unusual about that man’s body?

“No,” said Mark. He rubbed his scraped shoulder.

She stepped closer. “Well…that man doesn’t have a navel or nipples. I saw this through the rip when he climbed out of the cleft.”

Mark stopped and stared into her penetrating blue eyes. “Seriously? You play ‘cat and mouse,’ causing me to almost plummet to my death, and all you have to say is *this man has no navel*?”

He shook his head, and turned, but Rachel grabbed his arm. “Well, I am sorry my little game led to this, but this is weird.”

“Wait a minute!” Mark yelled in a hushed tone. “You have been reading too many of those sci-fi novels. I told you they were warping your brain. Now, let’s stop this and get back to the car.”

Rachel turned and sprinted up to the man, catching up with him. “Sir, I don’t know how to ask you this, but my curiosity is getting the best of me.”

“Rachel,” yelled Mark. He could feel his veins popping out of his neck. He couldn’t believe she was going to embarrass this old man after he’d just risked his life for Mark.

The old man stopped and sighed.

“After Mark ripped your shirt, I noticed that you didn’t have a navel or nipples.”

Mark cringed. “Rachel, you are prying.”

“Oh, that’s ok, Mark,” said the man, the corner of his mouth tugging a smile. “The locals call area peak around here “Nellie’s Nipple,” he snickered. “Maybe I’m not the only person that lost one around here.”

“Well, if you don’t mind,” said Rachel.

He looked down, and then at Rachel. “I could tell you, but you wouldn’t believe me.”

“If I am not intruding, sir, I’m curious.” Rachel turned to Mark, and grinned.

“Well, first of all,” the stranger started, “Call me Angelo.”

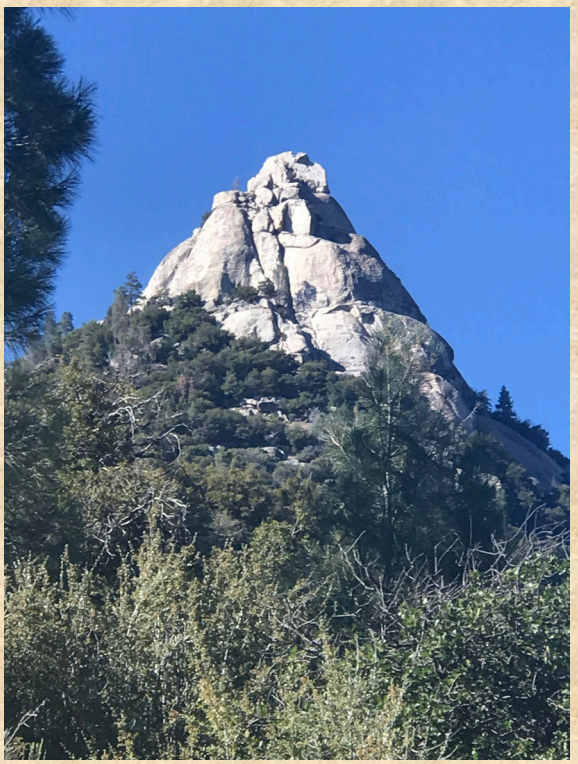
He leaned on his staff, and bowed slightly, and glanced at the trees. “Did you know that this forest is teeming with life you cannot see?”

Chills ran down Mark’s spine. Rachel relished in science fiction, fantasy, and horror stories. Aliens, zombie apocalypses, vampires, you name it. “You know, I think we should go.” He grabbed Rachel’s arm, but she stiffened her legs, planting herself.

Angelo laughed and waved his hand. “Everything you are seeing has mass.”

“Of course they have mass,” Mark said. He fought the urge to laugh at the old man.

“But,” Angelo raised his index finger, “What about something in a different dimension--a different realm where there is ‘mass-less’ energy?”



“Mass-less energy?” Rachel beamed. “That is physically impossible.”

Mark clutched Rachel’s arm again and ushered her down the dome’s backside toward the car.

“What I mean by mass-less energy is the spiritual world.” Angelo called.

Rachel anchored Mark and stopped. Angelo said the magic word, “spirit.” This would turn her on more than “aliens.” She had visited a number of psychics the last two years and even studied Tarot Cards for a while. At this rate, they’d never get off this rock.

Angelo continued, still looking up at the trees. “All life is really just an imprint of what exists in the spiritual realm.” He placed his hand over a large boulder to his left. “Like the imprint left by this fossil. The fossil imprint represents something much greater and full of life, another reality.”

Mark shook Rachel’s hand from his arm. “Heavenly things…spirit world! I’m sorry, but I don’t deal with mediums.” He relaxed his shoulders and tried to calm his voice. “Sir, we will leave you to your imaginary neighbors.”

Angelo stole a step towards Mark. “Actually, Mark, I don’t live here.”

Mark’s feet rooted to the earth. That was for sure. The old man journeyed in his own world.

“You see Mark, I’m an angel.”

“Come on, Rachel, we should go.” Mark yanked her hand and walked down the hill toward the road.

He felt her look over her shoulder. “Mark, I want to stay a little longer!”

Angelo yelled, “So Mark, are you taking Rachel to Ponderosa where you took that brunette a couple of months ago?”

Rachel stopped, stared at him. “What brunette?”

Mark looked up and caught her gaze. What was this guy’s game? He yelled over his shoulder in a half laugh. “Yeah, what brunette, *Angelo*?”

Angelo lowered his voice to a whisper, “Oh you know. That soft, brown-eyed, brunette with a mole on her neck. And may I add a dove tramp stamp.”

A lump filled Mark’s throat.

Rachel’s face had flamed red, her teary eyes wide with realization. “My room-mate, Stephanie Anderson? How could you?” She shook herself out of Mark’s grip

Mark looked at Angelo and caught his gaze. “What are you, some ‘peeping Tom’?” How do you know that, if you were not watching us? I should report you to the Ranger!”

Angelo’s face hardened.

Rachel turned and faced Angelo. “Look, I can deal with this myself. Why are you prying into our business?”

Angelo inched forward. “Rachel, Rachel. I don’t pry. It is as obvious as your bulimia. In fact, you just purged the lunch you ate a little while ago.”

Angelo shrugged his shoulders. “Mark, next time get her flowers. She won’t eat those.”

Mark’s gut twisted as he turned to Rachel. He didn’t want to know that, and now they were now both in tears.

“As you can see, your deepest, darkest secrets are open scandal in the spirit world.” Angelo looked toward the sky.

“Tell us,” Rachel blurted out. She stumbled toward the old man, as if being pulled by an invisible force.

“Tell you what, Rachel?” Angelo lifted one eyebrow.

“Tell us everything. Tell us about the spirit world. I need to learn what is really good and evil. I need the knowledge to know God.”

“Rachel,” Mark consoled, “what are you asking this guy?”

“Shut up, Mark.” She trembled. “I’ve called out to God for years, but it seemed he never listened. Then I have tried psychics and tarot cards. Nothing has seemed to work.”

“Look Rachel,” said Angelo, his voice more soothing now. He walked to the tree and glanced at Mark. “If I tell you all of those things, it would be like giving a newborn baby a small fruit. It would harm you.”

Rachel clenched her fists. “I want this fruit of knowledge. I think I am the one that can make that determination, not you. Give it to me and let the consequences of this knowledge be my responsibility.”

Angelo sighed. “Ok, but to know the answers, to know the true meaning, you have to start at the beginning--at the Angelic Wars.”