

## A WORLD UNDERWATER

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In the midst of all her challenges, Alida always had a way to survive. Sometimes, she was just hanging on. But she did what was needed. Now she was hitting a wall. The obstacles were much more formidable.

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Leah was heading to a party in her honor. She had just received a major promotion in her job. And she was ready for Ellis. She was sure that this would be the best night of her life. She was anxious to make it on time. There had been some road work on the route that she usually took. So she chose to take a detour of her own making. She had never gone this way before. She heard that it was faster. It looked right on the map. As soon as she got off the highway, she heard something with her car. It didn’t sound good. All of a sudden, it just stopped. She immediately picked up the phone and called a tow.

The driver got back to her. He would be there in fifteen minutes. She tried to get through to Ellis, but her phone wasn’t working. She figured that she would just wait.”

The tow driver had warned her, “Whatever you do, don’t leave your car. It isn’t safe.”

She wondered what he really. It wasn’t that great a neighborhood. She had heard things. She waited patiently in the car. She couldn’t very well play music. She might have to deal with a worse emergency. She held tight. She started to think about her life. She really wanted Ellis to propose. She thought that the moment was fading away as she was waiting there.”

She needed to reassure herself that there would be other nights. Maybe he had no idea to propose tonight anyway. She would have to wait for that special occasion.

She looked at her watch. It had been more than forty five minutes. She called the driver. She got his voice mail. She was freaking out a little. She couldn’t ring anyone else on her phone. It was hardly time to panic. About ten minutes later, the tow driver called her.

“I will be there any second. Just remember what I told you. Do not leave your car.”

She had listened carefully to his advice. And she had heeded what he said. She kept waiting. Any second started to turn into a half an hour. She heard something on her car. She became really afraid. Then she became convinced that it was some animal. Perhaps an owl or a dog. The car shook for a good minute. Then everything returned to normal. It wasn’t as if Leah could just drive out of there. She gripped her wheel even tighter.

She went through her contacts hoping that there was on person whom she could reach.

There was really no hope. She simply needed to make the best of things. She put on a happy face, and she continued to wait.

The driver called again.

“I had an emergency. I had to take care of that. I will be right there.”

“That is good. I will be safe. Just get here soon.”

Lean kept waiting. She felt her whole mind was a blank. She wasn't sure what she should think about. She loved her work. She worked in a business office as a financial consultant. She loved her friends and family. Only none of them could be with her at this moment. She wondered whatever was going on. She felt like a big nothing. This was not like her. She had a life. There was so much more than this.

She called the driver.

“I am almost there. I think that I can see you.”

He hung up, but she didn't see him. He didn't show up. There she was still waiting.

She started to become curious. Maybe this was not such a good idea. She was a sitting duck sitting all alone. Maybe she could find a bar or a gas station. They probably had a phone. She could get Ellis to come to get her.

She figured that it would be better to start walking. She was all dressed up. She was in heels. She started walking on the dark street. The street lights were not all working. This was worse than scary. Even away from the car, she could not get her friends to answer.

“Where are you?”

“Who is this?”

“I'm your tow truck. I'm by your car. What do you want me to do?”

“I was looking for somewhere that was open. I wasn't sure that you were coming.”

“I have other business. Emergencies. I can't wait all day. Tell me what you want me to do.”

“I want you to wait.”

She started to walk back to the car. She hoped the driver would be there. It took a little longer than she thought. Her feet were sore. When she got back, the driver wasn't there. Now she was really afraid. When she called him, he didn't answer. It just went to voice mail. She called a couple of more times, and he wouldn't answer.

Leah thought about calling another driver. That would be the way. She couldn't get anyone to come out. They were all on other jobs.

“That is a really dangerous part of town.”

“That is why I am afraid being broken down around here.”

Things were really going bad for her. She needed help. All of a sudden a car pulled up. She flagged him down.

“I am sure glad that you pulled up. I am broken down. I need you to help get me going. Maybe you could call my fiancé for me.”

She got a kick out of calling Ellis that.

“Lady, I am sorry. I don't know you. You can't really use my phone like that.”

“Could you get me some help?”

“Help how? All the garages around here are closed.”

“You couldn't get a tow truck.”

“My cousin works with a garage. He might be able to help. You have money.”

“I don’t have any with me. I have credit cards.”

“Do I look like I take credit?”

“We could go to an ATM.”

“Can you give me twenty dollars?”

“Twenty dollars for going half a mile.”

“It’s my time. We are all not rich like you are.”

“Okay. I can slip you a twenty.”

“I could use a drink. Do you want to get a drink?”

“I have to get going.”

“You’re coming for a drink with me.”

“I don’t really want to drink.”

“Let’s get a drink. You seem like a fun lady.”

Leah waited with her guide at a near empty bar. The phone didn’t work, and the bartender was a friend of her driver.

“I have to tell my friends what is going on. They are waiting for me.”

“They are going to wait whether you call or not.”

“What does that mean?”

“Don’t you know how to enjoy yourself?”

“I was going to a party in my honor. Why don’t you come with me?”

“Where you live. I am not going to drive no twenty miles. Drink your beer, and have fun. Her host got in the middle of the floor and started to dance for her. He was embarrassing.

She was losing patience.

“I would love to go. But I cannot. I am on a schedule.”

His schedule meant that he was dancing in front of her. He kept on like this.

“Do you want me to take you back to your car?”

“That is where you found me. You might as well take me back.”

She hated to admit defeat. But she couldn’t stay in this bar. He took her back to the car.

“Are you going to be okay?”

“Not really. But you have given me few options.”

“Sorry, I couldn’t be more helpful. I have somewhere that I need to get going.”

She really was uncertain about what to do.

She was back in the car. She wasn’t sure how long she would have to wait.

A couple of kids came by.

“What do you got, lady?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Do you think that we’re kidding. You got a phone. You got some jewelry. A watch. You have a car. But it ain’t going anywhere.”

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“We’re messing with you. But it’s not safe here. Not even for you.”

“What am I supposed to do? Let me use your phone.”

“My phone doesn’t get very good reception here. Come back to my grandmother’s.”

The two guys led her back to the grandmother’s house. It was all pretty crazy. She

wasn't dressed for much of anything.

"Grandma, this is our friend Leah."

She asked Leah if she wanted some chicken.

"I need to eat. I am getting hungry. Maybe I could use your phones."

"This who area is the same. We can take you down to the store later."

This was getting nowhere. Leah got a call from the two driver.

"I can be there in five if you can be back at you car."

"It's the second driver. He is going to go back to my car."

"It is going to take more than fiver minutes to get back there."

"We could try."

They again missed the driver. Leah started to really freak out. There were tears streaming down her face. What was happening to her perfect life. Why was that driver taunting her? She called him again.

"I don't want you bothering me again. You are the worst person whom I have ever met. You are a terror. I just hate you."

The driver was all freaked. He didn't answer a thing back. Leah was with the two kids.

"We have to get back to our grandmother. We can give you some more chicken."

"I should stay with my car."

"Your car will be okay. You won't be safe staying here."

"I will think of something."

"Come back with us."

She decided to let the boys go. She started to sleep. She felt something shake. She looked outside. Someone was trying to tow the car. She screamed out.

"What the hell?"the driver screamed back. It was not her driver. Someone was trying to steal the car. She stared them down. She had no idea what to do now. She jumped out of the car and started to come at both the men.

"Sorry, lady. We were sure that someone had abandoned this car. "

"The engine is still warm."

"You are in a lot of danger sleeping around here."

"Maybe you can help me."

They weren't there to help. They had been caught. Now they simply wanted to run away.

Leah had successfully defended her car. She didn't need anyone from work. She didn't need Ellis. She realized how lucky she was, but she felt very powerful.

After all that bravado, she felt totally alone. Her phone was dying. It seemed hopeless. She didn't want to sleep in the car. She should have gone back with the kids. She couldn't remember where they lived. They had took her through some short cuts. She couldn't remember all the turns.

She cursed the universe for making her like this. This night was turning out to be longer than she could have imagined. She wondered if they sent out a search party for her. Wouldn't they even know where to look.

She sat on the hood of the car. She was keeping guard. She was ready for whatever might come her way. She would fight her way freedom.

She sensed her utter weakness. She wanted Ellis here with her right now. But Ellis

would have discounted her ability to fight back. She felt all powerful at this moment. Nothing that Ellis could do would have the same eloquence. She didn't need Ellis. She was self-sufficient. She clenched her fists. She watched a woman make her way home.

"Mam, I need some help. Can you help me?"

The woman did not pause. She kept on her way.

Leah heard her phone ring. It seemed like a miracle. It was Ellis. She refused to answer it. About five minutes later, the phone went dead for good. She wondered what had happened. Rescue was there for her. She had thumbed her nose at it. Now she was completely without any resources. It was her against the night.

No one had taken the car. No one had hurt her. About fifteen minutes later, a couple of really dangerous toughs rode by. There music was blaring.

"Lady, you are really fine. You don't belong here. You belong in a palace."

Despite their flattery, there were there to get her out of her predicament. They got a real tow truck to the scene. He diagnosed the problem and got the car back to the shop.

"We should have it by the morning."

They dropped her at a nearby motel.

"This is not the luxury that you deserve, but it will do."

"I'm not the kind of person that you think that I am."

"You deserve a palace."

She didn't get a palace, but she was safe for the night. The next day, she had her car, and she was ready to go.

Ellis had been the last call. She ended up calling her mother in the morning. She explained how things were being taken care of.

"We all thought that you had been kidnaped. Your cousin all said that it was the space aliens."

They were both laughing.

"What about poor Ellis?"

"I will get to Ellis when I get back."

Ellis was his usual obsequious self.

"Honey, did you miss me?"

"Consider that I almost got left for dead on the street, missing you is the last thing on my mind."

"What are you telling me?"

"I am going to need some personal time."

Her car was running even better than before. And she figured out a new place for chicken.

"When I left the mechanic's, I recognized your door."

"How about some chicken? There's some cold chicken in the fridge. We can heat it up for you."

"I think that we could all use some pizza for the night."

Alida felt charmed by the story. She got up to get some food. She was eating much less.

"I can pick something up at the store if you like. Those pastries that you like."

"I am good for now. Maybe, I can give you a list when you go out Friday."

“That sounds perfect. I’ll remind you if you forget.”

I did what I could for her. The mountain was becoming steeper. We both looked up at the summit. She thought about the first Englishmen who had scaled Everest. This was her inspiration. I tossed her the rope, and we started to climb.

The next day, Alida was even weaker.

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In the midst of all her challenges, Alida always had a way to survive. Sometimes, she was just hanging on. But she did what was needed. Now she was hitting a wall. The obstacles were much more formidable.

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These stories were making it much easier for me. I was getting to understand Alida much better. Her life was so involved. There was so much going on beneath the surface. Even her struggle to survive was a major challenge. I wondered if I was staying too much in the background. Did I have to reach out more? Did I have to understand her history better? Where did I fit in all this?

I could see how our beliefs led us to these shrines to our memories. This was the source of our faith, how we carried on from day to day.

I was on the movie set. This was where it all came alive. Now, it was just a ghost town. There was a large abandoned building facing me. It was an abandoned college classroom. I opened the door and walked through the hallway.

“Where are you?”

“This is Alida’s story. I am following along. I am learning what was going on.”

This was a rare privilege. The clues were there for me. I let them lead me on.

I was now sitting in the classroom. I was waiting for the lesson to begin. I was close to something. This was more real than real.

“The FBI contacted me.”

“What about?”

“My research.”

“You’re a theoretical physicist, Ray. Whatever do they want.”

“Tom, they are looking for something.”

“The God particle.”

Both men smiled.

Tom was looking over Ray’s notes. He was on to something.

“We could call it the peace particle.”

“What am I supposed to do if I find a new weapon that gives us superiority?”

“We used to think that our enemies were the threat to freedom and learning. Now we are caught in this crazy arms race. Are we supposed to add to this madness?”

“We grew up with a belief that truth would find a way. In the free world, honest people would triumph over the forces of evil. I don’t believe in the Superman anymore. We are becoming the Mephistopheles of this story.”

“There is no innocence.”

Dr. Adam Turner was working with the Pentagon. He knew what Ray was doing. He wanted his research. He may have informed the FBI.

“If I sabotaged my own notes, would that be a crime against science.”

“If they get a hold of what I have, they will become the crime against humanity.”

“Do you know what you are saying? You are making yourself into an enemy against your own country.”

“Do I have any kind of choice?”

Tom thought about what he had seen. It was becoming evident to him what Ray had discovered. He started to work out the equations for himself. It was so brilliant but so obvious. He had another way of thinking about it. In the race to create the ultimate killing machine, we were destroying our very ability to create. This needed to be the end of mass destruction. This needed to be the flower growing in the rubble.

Tom went looking for Ray. His office had been ransacked, and he was missing. This was scary. Tom started to wonder if he was in any danger.

Tom explained it to Carol.

“I know all the equations. Ray and I were working on different things. But I know what he was doing. I have it all figured it out.”

The world was made that way. It wasn’t as if Ray had created his own world. He had just discovered a secret about our own world. That secret was available to all.

The campus police were investigating Ray’s disappearance. Tom thought that it was strange when the FBI showed up at his door.

“You were the ones who were hassling Ray. You are telling me that you had nothing to do with what happened.”

“Do you really think that we’d break into a university office and kidnap a physics professor? What kind of conspiracy theory are you caught up with?”

“I know your history.”

“Let me assure you that the FBI does not carry on break-ins.”

Tom was hardly sure that he could believe him. The agent asked a number of basic questions. He seemed to know very little about what was going on.

“Why did they send you anyway?”

“This is a matter of national security.”

“He was a theoretical physicist. He wasn’t even doing Defense Department research.”

“It’s a precaution.”

“Just like the FBI agent who was here last week.”

There had to be more to it.

Tom talked to one of his colleagues

“Does Adam Turner have his own secret police?”

“There could be something strange going on in the Pentagon.”

“But it was an FBI agent who stopped by last week.”

“They’re all connected.”

Tom felt that Ray was pointing the way to true peace. This was the only way to end all the destruction.

He asked Carol, “Are we just naive? We are used to thinking in terms of our theories and honest researchers. But we are dealing with dangerous men who will stop at nothing to get what they want.”

When the FBI agent who first questioned Ray stopped by, Tom wondered what was actually going on.

“Did you work with Ray?”

“We do completely different things. In fact, I am even more theoretical than he is.”

“He didn’t share his research with you.”

“He would talk in general terms. But we are physicists. If we don’t see the actual equations, we’ve seen nothing.”

Tom had seen more than the actual equations. He knew what made it all work together. Ray had given him the key, and he had taken it from there. Tom even wondered if he might have improved on the manner of calculation.

Carol said, “It’s Ray’s work.”

“You don’t know.”

The whole campus was shocked the next morning when Ray’s body was found. Tom just felt like pulling out his hair. This was his best friend. His brother. Himself.

“Carol, I don’t think that I am safe.”

“We don’t know the details about what had happened.”

“First, it was Ray’s office, and now this. They were after him.”

They were back at the office looking for more clues.

Tom started to hang out at Carol’s apartment.

“It won’t be long before they tie us all together.”

“You will be okay. They don’t know everything.”

“They know quite a bit.”

Tom still had no idea who they were. He imagined a conference room with the FBI, the Pentagon, and Adam Turner.

“I am going to find Adam Turner.”

“He has security clearance. He probably has an armed guard.”

“He’s a physics professor at Stanford. He keeps office hours. I’m not going to have to shoot my way in there.”

“You’re still going to leave a trail if you take a plane there.”

“I’m driving.”

“You probably have a trail. Take my car.”

He took her advice. She wanted to be a part of the adventure. But she could hardly see why she how she could help if they visited Adam Turner together.



The drive hardly seemed dramatic. Tom was chasing a phantom. He had few ideas where to look.

Tom surprised Adam Turner leaving a graduate seminar.

“Dr. Newton. I haven’t seen you in a while. Are you still working on cryogenics?”

With his question, Turner was mocking his work.

“I am trying to figure out how to preserve the brains of geniuses like you for all time.”

“I really do feel flattered. What are you doing in Palo Alto?”

“I came to see you.”

“Tom, you sort of lucked out. I have to be at an appointment.”

“You can call your appointment. I am here about the Doomsday Principle.”

“Are you insane? The Doomsday Principle.”

Tom pulled the pad Turner’s hand. He scribbled a series of equations on it. Then he gave it back.

“I just have to call my appointment.”

“No one is calling anyone. We’re going to find a place to talk.”

The two men walked into a seminar room.

“Tom, what do you want with me. We barely know each other.”

“You know Ray Blair. And I am pretty sure you know what happened to him.”

“The physicist who was killed by a mugger while he was out jogging.”

“Good cover story, Adam.”

“Tom, I am a research physicist. Why would I know anything about your friend?”

“I think that you put the word out on Ray. I think that you messed with him, and he was killed for whatever reason. Maybe, he refused to cooperate.”

“If what you say is true, why would you come to me about it. That would mean that you’re not safe.”

“Adam, are you threatening me? You’re a research physicist. Are you going to blow me up with a bomb?”

“I didn’t mean it that way. I was speaking hypothetically. What good am I going to be able to do?”

“I think that you ask yourself that question everyday. You are a pretty shitty human being.”

“Tom, you are such a moralist. We all work for somebody. And we can’t control how they use our research.”

“Adam, you’re doing everything that you can to control what they do with our research. You are the monster behind the mayhem.”

“Look at me. You are almost twice my size. What am I going to do to the world?”

“What did you do to Ray? Who did you report him too?”

“You are full of nonsense. I am not bothering anyone.”

“I should kill you with my bare hands.”

“Is that what it has come to?”

“I don’t know. You kill my friend, and you’re acting all innocent. Your hands are covered in blood.”

“You are over the edge, Tom. I need to ask you to leave now.”

“You don’t want to know what I know. You are even stupider than I thought. I guess that’s your style, Adam. You’re not that good a researcher. So you live off of the work of others.”

“Not good. I am the best. What do you know? We have Tom’s notes.”

“You don’t have what you’re looking for. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have killed him. But that was a little stupid on your part. His secrets went to the grave.”

“I’m a research fellow at Stanford. Where are you working? Southern Illinois.”

“The University of Illinois. But you know that, don’t you? You didn’t send your goons to Carbondale.”

Adam was acting a little nervous. He hardly had what he wanted. Tom realized that this was his time to get out of there. He had shaken the hornet’s nest. He had a lot more to do. He wished that he could have hopped on a plane. He still had Carol’s car and a long ride back. He wondered if there was anything else that he could do.

Out of Adam Turner’s office, he had picked up a tail. It seemed like a couple of government agents. It was one thing if he was hiding out in the vicinity. He was going to be a sitting duck if he drove across country.

“Carol, I have some bad new for you. You’re going to have to get your car.”

“Tom, what have you done now.”

“Do you have an extra set of keys.”

“I’ll meet you once I get in.”

Tom had a friend who lived in Berkeley. He agreed to put him up.

“I feel like the Weather Underground from the sixties.”

Tom corrected him, “I think that we are a little more rational this time.”

“You still have the FBI on your trail.”

“And we’re have the Peace Particle.”

“Tom, do you have an end game.”

“Rich, I have no game right now”

Carol got in the next day.

“All that I did was loan you the keys. I had no idea that I’d be in for this.”

“Use your vacation time.”

“I need to be back to teach. We have sociology conference coming up.”

“Here are the key.”

Tom told her where the car was.

“Rich is going to give you a ride.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I have a plan.”

“I’m not going to be in any danger.”

“You’re a sociologist.”

Rich interrupted, “What are they going to do if you publish Ray’s results.”

It was no longer just Ray’s results. Tom had supplemented the research. He spent the night working it all out. Then he had it printed the next day. The public would be sharing the Peace Principle.

“Carol, I guess that I am going to be traveling back with you after all. What are the going

to do? Gun us both down in Nebraska?”

“They have done a lot wilder things in the past.”

Carol and Tom made their way back to Illinois by singing songs and having a great time.

They remembered their friend, Ray.

“You can stop the truth.”

“Tom, you have no idea what they are really prepared to do.”

“They have no idea what I am prepared to do.”

“You are the new Superman.”

“I think that it is the end of Superman.”

He gave her a kiss as they crossed the Illinois border from Iowa.

“Maybe his is a new world.”

“The Peace Particle.”

I continued to wander in this ghost town. This was a whole new way of seeing the world.

“You can absolve old offenses.”

Alida was not feeling much better. She wished that she could use her dreams to lessen her pain. She was being drawn deeper within the land of nod. She closed her eyes and let the stories roll over her.

I made my own notes. Tom’s story fascinated me. What were these orders populated by the bad angels. How were they getting in our minds?

“Don’t surrender to the darkness!”

“I can see a glimmer of light!”

“Indeed!”