

Chapter 1 – Nick Evers

Time. I sat in my cubicle at work and watched intently as the second hand on the clock slowly ticked forward. If I could only turn back the hands of time, how much different my life might be.

My name is Nick Evers. I am fifty-two years old and like so many others of my generation, I felt lost in a world that had changed so much since 1967. It was the year that was referred to as the summer of love. I turned sixteen that year, and it began a time in my life that I would never forget. Life was full of wonder and excitement. Each day was another journey into the unknown, where another new experience waited in the shadows.

I had been married for seven years and divorced for the last ten. Now I lived in a one-bedroom apartment with my cat Lucy. I had found her two years ago on a Thanksgiving morning, wandering alone in a nearby park. She couldn't have been more than three months old. She was small and scrawny but had lots of life in her eyes. After that we were inseparable, and unlike my ex-wife, she never complained and always looked forward to my coming home.

I leaned back in my chair and let my eyes wander to the picture of me and my best friend Spencer Fontaine. It was taken in the early part of the summer of 1969, at a park not far from my parents' house. We were leaning on my Mustang convertible and Spencer had a half-smoked joint between his fingers and a smile on his face wider than the car grille. We had met in junior high school and within a year, we had become the best of friends. When the Age of Aquarius arrived in the summer of 1967, we both embraced it to the fullest. We smoked weed together for the first time and when the moment came to experience the mind-blowing effects of LSD, we had no qualms or

reservations about ingesting the pills that would alter our outlook on everything around us.

The music of the era was the backdrop for the hundreds of events and experiences that would come to pass. It was woven into the fabric of our lives. In the summer of 1969, the year we graduated from high school, a festival took place in Bethel, a small town in downstate New York. Woodstock was the festival that spoke for a generation. It was an event that was more about the audience than the performers. We opted not to attend because we had already seen most of the bands that would be performing at Woodstock, and the few we had not seen would sooner or later pass by. But that colossal event had little to do with the bands. It was the Age of Aquarius, all coming together for one last fun filled weekend. It was an experience that all who attended, still carry with them to this day. It was not just a concert of legend; it was the concert of legend. It was the one against which all others would be judged, and no card-carrying hippie would have wanted to miss it. We did.

That fall I had attended a local community college, but I soon lost interest and dropped out after the first semester. I had absolutely no idea of what I wanted to do with my life after high school. I only knew that I should continue my education, but I had no plan and that in itself made for a bad start. I signed up for the liberal arts program which turned into grade thirteen. It was English, history and language all over again. I felt like I was learning nothing new, or more importantly, nothing that would qualify me to do anything in the years to follow. Life was the course I wanted to take, so I dropped out, determined to experience life to its fullest. But at some point the fun stopped and I had not prepared myself for the day the party was over.

It wasn't until many years later that I realized what I should have done with my life. I had been invited by my younger sister to visit her at the elementary school where she taught. After spending the day in her classroom it became quite clear to me. Teaching young minds and helping guide them through an important part of their lives had to be one of the most rewarding careers there was. Not quite that early in the learning stage, but at the point where students would be making the kind of decisions that would affect their futures. The kind of decisions I never made. I would have liked to blame someone else, but the guilty party was there waiting for me every morning in the bathroom mirror. My parents had told me on many occasions that anything worth having, was worth working hard for. And what did they know that an eighteen-year-old did not? As it turned out, they were right about nearly everything.

That mantra also applied to the one girl in high school I so desperately wanted, but whose striking looks and allure kept me at arm's length, for fear she would say no if I asked her for a date. I had met Lilly during my sophomore year in high school. She was an earth mother in every way. She was kind, compassionate and had the extra luxury of being the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had a milky white complexion, long tresses of autumn brown hair and elfin features. If I could construct the perfect woman, it would be a duplicate of Lilly. Her very presence was intoxicating. Yet I never asked her out, even though we shared some of the same classes and once had skipped an afternoon of school together. We had purchased a bottle of wine and had laughed the afternoon away by a small stream that ran through the woods behind our school. I should have swallowed my fear and asked her for a date that day. It may be that she wanted me to but

I will never know, and not knowing as it turned out, was worse than hearing her possibly say no.

More and more I had begun to look back over my shoulder at what was. I was not interested in the road before me, only the one I had already traveled. This seemed to intensify after I turned forty. All my regrets seemed to roll around in my head like so many clothes in a dryer. Most of all, I missed being young and living in the late sixties. I missed the big circle of friends I once had, that over time, had shrunk to just a few. Spencer and I had talked many times about how fantastic it would be if we could travel back in time and relive the parts of our lives we missed the most. How we could change the negative experiences into positive ones, or better yet, avoid them altogether. But that was not likely to happen anytime soon.

With a loud sigh I turned as the sounds of heavy feet entered my cube. It was Marge, the sales team supervisor. She was an overly large person for whom nearly no one seemed to care. Being in sales was a tough job. Whatever you sold was never enough and when you did meet all your goals, then even more was expected of you. It seemed that Marge's main job was to antagonize and irritate everybody around her. Because of her girth she was often referred to as Marge the barge when she was not within earshot.

Upon entering my cubicle, she immediately pounced. "Your performance level has dropped considerably Evers," she said with a hint of smugness in her voice.

Too bad your weight hasn't, I thought to myself.

"You have thirty days to bring it back up to an acceptable level," she continued. "If you do not, then you will be put on a probationary level that could lead to your termination if not corrected."

I sat in silence and glared back at her.

“So, what are you going to do about it?” she demanded.

“Well Marge,” I said, rising to my feet, “being that it’s Friday and quitting time, I’ll have to get back to you on Monday. Have a nice weekend,” I said in my most condescending voice as I pushed by her on my way to the door.

“You better start getting serious quick,” she shouted after me.

She was one of those people who are so unhappy at home that they feel the need to come to work and spread their misery on their fellow employees. It makes them feel better about themselves. I really could not tolerate her or the job much longer.

After walking out of the building, I glanced up at the darkening sky. It was only 4:00 in the afternoon, but the dense dark clouds made it look like dusk. Lightning blazed in the distance. Mother Nature gave some of the best light shows on the planet. Huge bolts of lightning danced across the horizon. Moments later, an enormous earthshaking crack of thunder split the sky and with it came a fierce downpour. I turned my face upwards and welcomed the feeling of the heaven-sent rain that pelted my face, as if it could wash away all the mistakes and bad decisions I had made in my life and all the subsequent problems they had caused. I climbed into my car and started driving in the torrential rain, pondering what to do next. I had some time to kill before meeting Spencer for a drink. He said he had something to tell me and I hoped it was good news. I found myself heading towards the park and pulled over just inside the entrance. Spencer and I had practically lived here at one point in our lives. This was one of two places that I frequently visited when life seemed to overwhelm me. The other was a reservoir that stood high above the city, just a few short blocks away. Time stood still for me here. I

could close my eyes and be right back in one of those summers from the distant past that I thought would never end. The rain was just a drizzle now and there was no one around but me, or so I thought.

Chapter Two – The Park

I walked over the wet grass and went straight to the bench that I had sat on a thousand times. After wiping the rain off, I sat down and spread my arms over its long wooden back and took stock of my surroundings like I had never been here before.

The park was perhaps a mile around. On one side of it was a large man-made body of water where the occasional fisherman would give his luck a try. Right above that was a long wall made from large chunks of granite that looked like they could be part of a castle's fortress. Higher up was a road lined with colonial homes dating back to the early 1900's.

Near one end of the water was a large and very old red brick boathouse, which divided part of the small lake from the main body. In the middle of the structure was an opening through which boaters had passed in years gone by.

Several feet out from the water's edge stood an all-white gazebo on its own little island ringed with rocks. In times past there would be musical performances on it. Some of the performers were the very people we hung out with. They certainly were not scheduled shows, but we would occasionally sneak over with our instruments and play for whoever was in the park at the time. Even though we weren't supposed to be using the gazebo, the police never seemed to mind because we weren't causing any trouble. Sometimes they would pause in their patrol cars and listen. You could almost hear the sounds from the past floating across the water.

Tall oak trees surrounded a vast grassy area bordering the water. It was here where I had spent many an afternoon and star-filled night with Spencer and our other

friends. Now it was like a big empty house with all the children gone. Hardly anyone used the park anymore. Teenagers these days cannot have any fun unless technology provides it for them.

Surrounding the water was a gravel path that led to a stone bridge that looked like it belonged in a mystical land populated by elves and wizards. The bridge had such a high arch that it blocked the view of those who walked over it until they were nearly halfway across. The sound of your footsteps could always be heard echoing across the water. At the far end of the bridge stood an enormous willow tree that added to the picture postcard view.

My gaze stopped to focus on the spot where the picture of Spencer and I had been photographed in 1969. It was taken by our friend Alex Marsetti, who would be killed in Viet Nam only a year later. Alex and Spencer had known each other since grade school. They had even formed a rock group that was forced to disband when Alex was drafted into the service. Alex was a drummer and Spencer was a guitar player who worshipped Jimi Hendrix. Spencer spent hours each day learning to emulate his hero's guitar licks. Alex was shot during an ambush by enemy snipers while on night patrol. He had died instantly. Not only was the area they were patrolling normally quiet, but Alex was not even supposed to be on that patrol. Alex had been asked by one of his platoon buddies to fill in for him at the last minute. Apparently, their sergeant allowed his men to switch on and off, as long as the person coming on duty had a minimum of eight hours off duty. Alex was only nineteen years old.

His death was a rude awakening to the harsh realities of war. Like millions of others I had read about Viet Nam in the paper and had watched it on the news. It was on

the other side of the planet and Alex's death brought it home to upstate New York. Spencer had even gone to Washington D.C. to see the Vietnam Wall where Alex's name was inscribed, along with the all the other thousands who had died in the war with him. Spencer had traced his name with the special paper provided at the memorial site and had it framed. Once I asked him why he had it hanging on the wall and he told me it was so he would never forget.

I quickly stood up, angered by the memory of it all and spoke out loud. "Why did he have to die?" Shaking my head, I sat back down and buried my face in my hands. *I have to go back; I must go back.*

Time had become a predator and it was hunting me with ruthless precision. I could not go on like this much longer. Either I had to go back and fix it, or let it go. I also knew there was no way to go back, and that I would never be able to let it go. There was no answer for me.

Realizing the time to meet Spencer was near I pushed myself to my feet and had started towards my car when I first heard the footsteps. I knew exactly where they were coming from. I slowed my pace, curious to see who else was in the park on such a dismal day. Then I saw him. From where I stood I could not make out his features, but I could see that he was tall and lean. The way he walked gave an impression of authority. He stopped at the apex of the bridge and peered out across the water. Then he gradually turned his head until his eyes seemed to fall on me. His long open coat flew around him in the wind as the storm prepared to make another pass through the area. I don't know why, but I stopped in my tracks and returned his inquisitive look. I was somewhat perplexed by the stranger's presence, but I had no real reason why I should have felt that

way. However, that instinct we all have which turns itself on from time to time was making itself known. I had no idea who he was but I suspected that our paths would cross again.

I got in my car and as I drove away, I felt the urge to look in my rearview mirror and see if the mysterious stranger was still on the bridge. He was gone, and not just off the bridge, but out of my sight completely. I quickly braked, exited my car and scanned the entire park. There wasn't a soul anywhere. Puzzled by his disappearance, I got back in my car and sat there pondering the last few minutes. Who was he? Why did I feel that his presence here had something to do with me and where did he vanish to? I checked my watch and saw it was five-fifteen. I was late and needed to go. Spencer was waiting.

Chapter Three – Spencer Fontaine

I drove into the parking lot of Greg's Sports Bar where Spencer was waiting inside. It was here, many years ago, that Spencer and Alex had first played when they were just teenagers. It was called the Blackstone then and live bands performed here five nights a week. Now there was an oversized screen TV where the stage used to be. Countless local bands had launched their musical careers in this place.

Spencer and Alex had played their first gig in a band they had formed called The Image. They had become a local favorite in a few short months and their following had grown with each performance. At one point they were thinking of going out on the road and making it a full-time job. Unfortunately, their plans had been put on hold when Alex went to Viet Nam. His last words to Spencer were to keep practicing and writing. Alex said he'd be back before Spencer knew it. He never came home.

After Alex was killed, Spencer lost the musical drive that was so ingrained in him. He did not want to continue without Alex. They wrote all the songs together and pushed each other's musical limits. Talent oozed from them like sap from a tree. Separately they were still amazing, but together they were thunder and lightning. Spencer still played his guitar but refused to play with anyone else, despite the many requests.

I swung the door open. Off to my left was a long oak bar where patrons were lining up for happy hour. The same guy still owned the bar after all these years. He never forgot a face and he always said hello. Even though it was a sports bar now, he had one wall covered with pictures of bands that had played the Blackstone in years past. There was even a picture of The Image lost in the sea of faces. I guess he missed the past too.

I gave a nod to Greg and head over to the corner booth where Spencer always sat. Spencer was married to a lovely Irish girl named Molly. She had a smile that could melt your heart. It had certainly melted Spencer's. She was a year younger than Spencer and was at the end of her junior year when they first met. They dated for five years before tying the knot. It was a more of a reunion than a wedding. Spencer made sure he invited everybody we had hung out with in our late teens. As his best friend I was given the honor of being the best man. It was a fun-filled event. Spencer even got up and played a blues song with the wedding band. You could tell every note he pulled out of that guitar cried out for Alex. It was an unspoken, emotional tribute to our fallen friend that brought tears to the eyes of many who witnessed Spencer's heartfelt performance.

Spencer and Molly were in all aspects, the perfect couple. They were rare to fight and quick to forgive. Spencer sold cars for a living and was very good at it. With his charisma, he could sell sand in the desert. Although he had stockpiled a hefty nest egg selling vehicles, he wanted something you could not put in a bank account. He wanted something more personal.

Spencer had ridden horses on his uncle's farm when he was a teenager and it was there his bond with the massive creatures formed. When he turned twenty-one, he bought a race horse named Rustic and shortly afterward, entered the world of horse racing. Spencer had his successes and his failures and never made a lot of money, but it didn't matter. It was all about his love of the species and in particular Rustic, whom he often referred to as his first kid.

It was no surprise to me when he told me he was going to school to become a veterinarian. Molly was a registered nurse. With her career they could afford to have

Spencer attend school. Unfortunately, something happened that could put the best laid plans on the back burner. Molly became pregnant. And if one child wasn't enough, the news came down that she was going to have twins. It wasn't planned, but it was a reality that had to be dealt with. In Spencer's case it meant getting a steady income again.

Spencer sold his horses, and that included his beloved Rustic. I had only seen him heartbroken once before and that was when Alex died. Spencer's brother-in-law offered him a position back in the auto business, only this time it was as a wholesaler. He did a lot of traveling in and out of state, buying and selling vehicles and though the money was there again, the job left him with that empty feeling that only his horses could fill.

My thoughts soon returned to the present and my meeting with Spencer. He looked up from his corner booth and said, "Good timing. I just got here a few minutes ago myself."

On the table was a pitcher of beer and two frosted mugs that were begging to be filled. I slid into the booth while Spencer poured the refreshments.

I couldn't contain myself any longer and blurted out, "So what's the good news, Spence? I could use some after my day."

"You might want to drink this first," he said, sliding a beer over.

"Don't tell me our trip to the Rock-N-Roll Hall of Fame next month is cancelled?" I said.

Spencer and I had planned to take a weekend and immerse ourselves in the history of rock music. We had talked about it for a long time and had finally made arrangements to go.

"No, that's not it," he said as his eyes met mine.

I knew that expression; something was wrong. I heard the worry in his words. My voice dropped to a whisper, and I asked, "What is it?"

"Nick, do you remember a few weeks back when we were doing our morning run around the park and I lost my balance for no apparent reason?"

"I remember."

"Well, that wasn't the first time it's happened. It's been going on for a few months now. I went to the doctor last week. He ended up running all these tests and now I know why." He drew in a long breath, paused and looked me in the eye.

My voice rose enough that a few other patrons stopped their conversations to see what was going on. "Damn it Spence, what's wrong with you?"

In a tone empty of emotion, he said, "I have Parkinson's disease."

I sat frozen with the news. The only words I could speak were, "No, it must be a mistake."

"It's not a mistake," he said. "I have it and it's only going to get worse."

"What about medication?" I asked. "Isn't there something that can be done?"

"You can slow it down, but you can't stop it. Sooner or later I will be like a puppet in the control of some sadistic puppeteer."

"Spence, I don't know what to say." Trying to be upbeat I quickly added, "Look, at least it can be controlled for a while and there is no knowing for sure how much time you really have before it..." My voice began to fade as I stumbled for the words I could not find. Then, in an attempt to be cheerful I said, "You know, you're such a pain in my ass I may shoot you long before it ever makes a difference."

He smiled, trying his best to show his appreciation for my lame attempt to lighten a horrific burden. Something in him was taking away his coordination. When it would arrive, he did not know. He only knew that it was on its way. We sat in silence for a few moments before Spencer spoke up. “We’re still going to go running in the morning, right?” he asked.

Every week we ran together on Saturday or Sunday mornings, weather permitting. We met at nine o’clock in the park or at the nearby reservoir.

Sensing my next comment, he barked, “I’m not an invalid yet.”

“I know Spence, I know,” was all I could say.

After that the subject matter changed and we spoke no more of it. Following a few hours of small talk, we said goodbye with the promise of meeting up again in the morning.

On the drive home, my thoughts turned to all the distant yesterdays, when the worst problem we had was where to go to have a good time, when there were too many choices to pick from. When I turned down my street I saw a young couple walking with their arms around each other. I wanted to roll down my window and yell out at them:

Enjoy your youth and plan well, because contrary to what you may think, life only gets harder.

Later as I lay in my bed, my thoughts turned to Spencer and the devastating news he had shared with me earlier. My desire to go back and change the past only intensified with today’s news. I wanted my best friend to have his music and Alex back in his life. Dying, or living incapacitated because of some disease or accident, is bad enough. Doing so without ever having felt you accomplished something in your life only compounds and

intensifies feelings of failure. That's why it is so important that you do not waste a day or put anything off, because there may never be another chance. I didn't want someone to change my circumstances. I wanted to do it myself, only I required the impossible to make it happen. I needed to go back in time. I prayed to no one in particular to give me a second chance. Like all the prayers I had ever prayed, I heard nothing in return. Nobody was listening, or at the very least if someone was listening, no one really cared. I was getting drowsy and right now I just wanted to dream of a place where anything I wanted was possible. A place where there were no crippling diseases, dying children, or homeless animals wandering the streets with no hope of finding someone to love and care for them. Tragedy would not exist in my world. With those thoughts in my head and the sound of Lucy softly purring next to me, I drifted off into a deep sleep, utterly worn out by the news I had received earlier. Tomorrow was another day and little did I know... someone was listening.

Chapter Four – The Guardian

I was being chased, and I had no clue as to who it was or why. I was running as hard and as fast as I could. Behind me, the sounds of footsteps were getting closer. Further ahead I could see that I was about to run out of road as the edge of a precarious cliff drew near. I knew that whatever happened, I could not let myself be caught. My heart pounded in my chest and my breathing grew ragged. I feared what might catch me more than anything else. A few more steps and I would no longer have land underneath me. I made a decision to jump. Anything had to be better than facing the terror that pursued me. Using every ounce of strength I had left, I leapt off the cliff edge. I could only hope that my effort would carry me to the far side of the wide open chasm before me. With that hope, I went airborne and spread my arms, as if somehow that could help keep me from falling. Despite my best effort, I began to plunge into the abyss below. Intense fear gripped me like the jaws of a vise.

My alarm sounded and I sat up in bed, my heart pounding from the nightmare. Taking a deep breath I fell back on my pillow and lay there until my pulse gradually returned to normal. Then I replayed the dream in my head, trying to determine what it all meant. I came to the conclusion that what was chasing me was not a person, but something that chases us all. It was time. Time was after me and it was drawing nearer. It wasn't enough that I had to deal with it in my waking hours, now it had invaded my dreams.

I threw back the covers and went into the kitchen to get my morning coffee and toast started. It was just a few minutes past eight. I felt Lucy rubbing against my leg, letting me know she too wanted something to eat. After feeding her I went into the front

room and sat down near the large picture window that overlooked the street below. I lived in an apartment on the second floor of an older colonial home, only a few blocks from where I grew up. It was an area that I loved and I could walk to the park and the reservoir from here. Looking out the window, I could see by the patches of fog that it had rained earlier in the morning. I glanced over at the calendar on the wall, which had photos of all the great classic rock bands of the late sixties and early seventies. It was the fourteenth of June and no different than any other Saturday but I felt compelled to make a mental note of it. Why, I had no idea. It was probably just my obsession with time. I finished my coffee, put on my running gear and left my apartment.

The air was damp and felt refreshing on my face. I walked rapidly down the street and rounded the corner that led to the park. As I approached I could barely see Spencer's vehicle through the dense fog. I heard his voice call out when I drew near.

"Morning Nick," he said. He walked out from behind his car where he had been doing warm-up exercises.

"Hey Spence," I replied. "How do you feel today?"

With a loud sigh he responded. "Nick, I know you are worried about me. Whatever you do, please don't change who you are or how you act around me because of what I told you yesterday. Only you and Molly know what's going on and I'm not going to tell anybody else until I absolutely have to."

"Okay Spence, you win as always."

I learned a long time ago never to argue with him because once he made up his mind, it couldn't be changed.

“You ready?” he asked, and then added with a grin, “You go first, because in this fog we may trip and with you leading the way, you’ll break my fall.”

I gave him a parting sarcastic look and took off running.

After some initial chatter back and forth, all you could hear were the sounds of our breathing and our feet on the gravel path. Usually we ran around the park four times and stopped for a break after two. As we completed the second lap, we sat down on a nearby bench to catch our breath.

“Remind me not to drink so much the night before we go running,” Spencer panted.

“Do you know how many times you have said that?”

“Three,” he replied, smirking.

“How about three thousand!” I said.

He burst out laughing. “Well, at least I’m not throwing up.”

“Lucky me,” I replied.

We both laughed and then I got serious. I told him about my dream the night before and of my brief encounter with the stranger.

“What do you think it all means?” he asked.

“I’m not sure Spence, but something inside me keeps telling me his appearance had something to do with me.” I paused for a moment and then added, “And for whatever reason I cannot explain, I believe he is connected to the past.”

Puzzled, Spencer asked, “Did you recognize him? Did he look familiar?”

“No, it was nothing like that. It was more of an intuition than anything else—like when you know somebody is behind you, but you can’t hear them or see them. You just

sense that they are there. I don't know what it all means, but I have a feeling that something is going to happen and somehow he will be involved."

I knew that something was coming toward me and for better or worse, it would change my life. Once more, my thoughts were drawn into the past I once knew. It was so long ago now that it seemed like a dream. Like someone shouting from the top of a mountain, the past pulled at me, constantly calling my name. But there was no way for me to answer back. *If I could only go back in time*, I thought. *I could change so much.*

"What would you change?" a deep voice thundered behind me. I turned as if someone had taken me by the shoulders and spun me around. Towering over me and standing only a few feet away, was the stranger. I rose to my feet and faced him. He had long silver hair that fell to his shoulders. His face looked like it was chiseled from stone and he had steely blue eyes that bore two holes right through me. He was wearing the same long coat I had seen yesterday and tall boots that were laced up to his knees. He looked part English swordsman and part gunslinger from the Old West mixed together. He appeared aged but ageless, all at the same time. He was an enigma. I had never seen anybody quite like him.

"Who are you? Why are you here and how do you know my thoughts?" I asked as I studied him.

Spencer immediately interjected. "Is this who you just told me about?"

"Yes it is," I said.

The stranger's deep voice resonated all around me when he spoke. "I am the Guardian of Time," he said. "Is there not something you desire and does it not consume your every waking moment?"

“How do you know what I want? How could you possibly know?” I asked.

“You would not understand,” he answered. “Is it not enough that I am here and that I can make it come to pass?”

“What is he talking about?” Spencer blurted out.

I answered without taking my eyes off the stranger. “My need to return in time and change my life,” I whispered.

“You don’t really believe he can do that, do you?” Spencer asked me.

If premonition was any indication, then yes, I did believe in whatever powers the stranger possessed. Without waiting for an answer, Spencer turned to face him.

“Where are you from?” Spencer demanded.

“I exist where you cannot,” he replied.

“Oh for Christ’s sake!” an exasperated Spencer exclaimed. “This is a crock of shit if I ever heard one. This is unbelievable. Why are you even listening to this Nick?” He threw his arms up in the air and began to walk away when I stopped him.

“Spencer, please. Just wait a minute.” I begged. Spencer was right. It was unbelievable, but like a parent hoping that some outlandish cure would save their dying child’s life I had to try, no matter how ridiculous, unbelievable or far fetched it may have sounded. I turned back to the Guardian and said, “At this point in my life it doesn’t really matter to me where you are from, or how you got here. All I want to know is can you really do what you say and when can I go?”

“The answer to your first question is yes,” he said. “Time has no dominion over me. I move through time as easily as you do through the very air that you breathe. As for when, you can depart right now.”

Logic again told me that this was impossible, but I did not care. For whatever reason, I believed him. Instinct was all I had to go on and it was sending me a five-alarm alert.

“I guess this is where we click our heels together or something like that,” a sarcastic Spencer yelled out.

The Guardian turned and addressed him. “I am aware of your wishes and your unanswered questions as well Spencer Fontaine. I will tell you this. Yes, there is music when you leave this plateau for the next.”

I had no idea what the Guardian was referring to, but it had a profound affect on Spencer. His face went ashen white and he fell silent. The Guardian turned back to me and pointed toward the bridge which was shrouded in a fog, which inexplicably seemed to be getting thicker. “There is the gateway to the past. Cross it together and do not turn back once you have stepped onto it. On the other side is what you seek. You are forbidden to tell anyone of events that have yet to pass. The only paths you can directly alter are your own. Do not stray from what I am telling you. Above all, remember that the balance in life must be kept.”

“What do you mean the balance...?” I started to ask and he interrupted with his final words to us.

“If you wish to return, then you must do so at once,” he said in his commanding voice.

It was now-or-never time. I looked over at Spencer who was still close-mouthed, but I could see that the color had returned to his face and along with it, a new understanding or at the very least, a hope of what was to come. We started out for the

bridge. It was on the other side of the park but we would be there in minutes. At first neither of us spoke as we were both immersed in our thoughts about what was to unfold. I glanced back over my shoulder and saw that the Guardian had vanished, much like the day before.

Concentrating on the task at hand, I asked Spencer, “What did he mean when he said something to you about music and the next plateau?”

“I’ll tell you yesterday,” Spencer said, referring to the journey that lay before us. “Part of me feels like a kid on Christmas morning and part of me feels like a fool and I don’t know which half to believe,” he said. “You believe him though, don’t you?”

My voice trembled when I answered him. “Yes Spence, I do. I have to. I need to.”

“I guess we have nothing to lose then, do we?”

“No, we don’t.” I firmly replied.

As we approached the base of the old stone bridge I asked “What time is it?”

“Does it matter anymore?”

“Not really,” I said, not knowing why I even had the urge to ask.

He pulled out the antique pocket watch his grandfather had given him on his sixteenth birthday and with a big smile on his face, he said, “It’s nine-thirty and all is about to be quite well.”

Every nerve ending was on fire as I stood there and tried to peer into the fog. It was too thick and I could barely see more than a few feet ahead. I turned to Spencer to ask if he was ready when he cried out, “Can you feel it...can you feel it?”

For a moment I thought he was being sarcastic again, but then I became aware of an energy that seemed to reach in and pull at every part of me. It was not overpowering,

but more of a gentle tugging and it was something I could have easily broken away from. It was almost as if the energy was letting me know I could still turn back if I wished. But I never wanted anything more in my life and the past was waiting for me. It was confirmation of what was to come.

“Nick, it’s really going to happen, isn’t it?” Spencer asked excitedly.

I smiled at my best friend. We were about to take the first step onto the bridge. “Spence,” I replied, “we are being given a gift. I don’t know why, but we’ll have plenty of time to talk about it.” We both laughed nervously and I asked, “How about a quote before we go?”

When we were young and if he thought the occasion called for it, he would quote a line or two from a song. Spencer reflected for a second and then said in a whisper I could barely hear:

“Live hand in hand,
And together we’ll stand,
On the threshold of a dream.”

With that, we stepped onto the bridge and left the present behind.