



[Back to Amazon.com](#)

The Bypassed Mind

by ALAN DRAVEN

It was on a Friday morning in late September that Wolfgang Crawford arrived in Bitternest, Louisiana via a lengthy train trip from Lynchburg, Virginia. A young Psychology professor at Liberty University, Crawford had traveled a long way to attend a conference on hypnosis to be held at The Bitternest Grand Hotel reception hall. He had never been to Bitternest before, yet he seemed drawn there.

“Your luggage, sir?” the bellhop asked as Crawford stepped out of the cab.

“Just the one suitcase; I’ll take care of my briefcase, thank you,” Crawford replied, looking at the colossal hotel standing before him. “Is it always this foggy in September?”

“Only on good days,” the bellhop replied, smirking. “First time in Bitternest I presume?”

Crawford smiled. “I won’t try to hide it, yes, it’s my first time. I’m here for the conference this Saturday.”

“Ah, I see. The hotel is fully booked for that. Will you be a speaker?”

“No, just an observer; I’m what you might call a student of hypnosis.”

“Well, I wish you a good stay at the Grand Hotel and a great time in Bitternest. I’ll wait for you at the front desk and will take you to your room once you are given your key.”

Crawford walked through the revolving doors and stepped inside the hotel. The floor was made of peach-colored marble and the stucco walls were ornamented with gothic sculptures and Salvador Dali paintings, amongst others. There were a few patrons sitting on the leather sofas, smoking cigars or reading books. Chattering could be heard from the reception hall where a convention probably already took place.

This hotel was quite unusual, Crawford sensed. If anything, much of this city was atypical; it had a gothic feel to it, a dense fog worthy of London, and a peculiar atmosphere that made him feel a bit out of place.

"Good morning; Wolfgang Crawford, I have a reservation for room 1974."

"Good day, Mr. Crawford. I'll just need the credit card you used to reserve the room please," the young redhead behind the desk asked with a courteous smile.

"Three days, two nights, non-smoking, queen size bed, Continental breakfast served starting at 7:00 AM and free access to the lounge. Departure set for Sunday at noon. Here is your card key. The bellhop will take you to your room. The lounge will open at three and the bar closes at midnight. Enjoy your stay," she finished, still smiling.

"Thank you, duly noted," Crawford replied, returning her smile. He pivoted left to notice his appointed bellhop patiently waited for him by the elevator.

Once on the nineteenth floor, he walked out of the elevator and took a left down the long corridor to his room. He slid the card key in the slot and walked into a bright, spacious room.

"If you need anything, sir, ring me anytime by dialing '57' on your phone. My name is Franklin and I'm on duty all weekend from 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM."

"Will do, Franklin; thanks for the help with the luggage," Crawford said, handing him a five dollar bill for the tip.

"You're most welcome, sir."

Crawford was finally alone. He sank into the bed, exhausted, and stared at the ceiling for a small number of minutes.

Crawford took in his surroundings and immediately spotted a picture frame right across the room from him. It was a painting of a scene from a *soirée* dinner, comprised of different echelons of society: bureaucrats, professionals, artists, blue collar workers, servants, their elegant monarch hosts and last but not least, a woman in a blue dress with the saddest eyes he'd ever seen. Crawford felt transfixed by the lady's dazzling green eyes, as if he were immersed in them. He experienced dizziness as he looked away from her gaze. The painting didn't seem to have been signed or dated by the artist; no way of telling the era or if it was of actual living persons. Crawford decided he would go for a walk and catch some fresh air and explore the rest of the hotel before lunch.

It was twenty to noon and Crawford caught himself peeking inside the reception hall where people had just exited from the earlier convention: "Numerology as a spiritual guide". *Interesting*, he thought, *this new age of spiritualism*. Definitely a subject he would have to seek out for himself.

"Are you here for the Astrology seminar, sir?" a man asked, with a British accent, while adjusting his fedora and dusting his black velvet blazer.

"The Astrology seminar? Sorry, no, I'm here for tomorrow's hypnosis convention. And you?"

"Why, I'm here for all of it, my tall friend," the man exclaimed, a broad smile painted on his face. "How rude of me, I haven't even introduced myself! Aldous Finch; painter, poet and self-proclaimed dreamer."

“As in Aldous Huxley, author of *The Doors of Perception*?”

“Precisely!”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Finch. I’m Wolfgang, last name’s Crawford.”

“Please, just call me Aldous; we’re not on a master and servant basis, are we?” he said, laughing. “Now, are you properly acquainted with the Grand Hotel or is this your first symposium of the sort?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t been initiated yet. To be honest, this whole city is all new to me,” Crawford confessed.

“Marvelous! I shall be your guide then. But first, we must feast, my friend! Come, follow me; they make the most succulent scallops here.”

“Lead the way.”

The dining room was much larger than the first impression he got walking in; it must have been the size of a football field, at least. Stylish chandeliers enriched the ceiling and lit up the room like a thousand stars. Even though the hotel was surrounded by fog, the large windows on the right side of the room allowed light to fill up the spacious interior. The numerous paintings on the walls were very classy and tasteful, very reminiscent of the one in his room, and went hand in hand with the mahogany wood floor. There were two bars, one at each extremity. At the other end of the room, beyond the hundreds of tables and chairs, stood two massive swinging doors which made way for the kitchen, almost as if it were some mystical hidden haven.

“It would appear the dining hall is all ours my dear Wolfgang. Since you’re a first-time guest here, you get to pick the table.”

Crawford scanned the room; his eyes rested on a table by the window.

"Would you mind a seat by the window? The fog seems to be dissipating; we might get a glimpse of that colorful garden and those giant weeping willows," Crawford said pointing at the table.

"I'd be delighted; besides, I'm curious as to what strange and unusual tales those willows will reveal. I'm sure they've seen their share of stories over the decades from their pedestal," Finch said, sounding quasi-serious.

"I'm quite sure they have," Crawford said, not too sure what to make of Finch's comment.

They sat down and moments later, the waiter brought them menus and glasses of water.

"What is it you do for a living, Mr. Crawford?"

"I'm a Psychology professor at Liberty University in Virginia."

Finch nodded. He was staring at Crawford, seemingly reluctant to say what was on his mind.

"Forgive me if I seem straightforward, Mr. Crawford, but you must think me a bit cuckoo, don't you? I mean, regarding the willows sharing stories and about my being a 'self-proclaimed dreamer' and such. Tell me, you're not just here for the symposium, are you?"

The question caught Crawford unaware; decidedly, this man was most odd.

"I don't understand what you mean; if I'm not here for the seminar, why would I have traveled all the way from Lynchburg to Bitternest, a place I know next to nothing of."

"Hmm, you really don't know anything about this place, do you? Strange things happen in this city, Mr. Crawford, they've been happening for a very, very long time. For instance, when hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana a few weeks ago, Bitternest was left unscathed. It's as if even natural catastrophes were afraid of what this city can do. Think of it as a sanctuary for the bizarre

and unexplained, where some of the most lurid characters—and beings—lurk in the darkest shadows. This is a place where nobody comes from, yet it has been around since the dawn of time.”

These revelations from Mr. Finch had been rather unexpected and the more Crawford thought about it, the more he was certain that he was consorting with an eccentric artist with a few screws loose.

“All right, let’s assume that I go along with what you’re saying; that Bitternest is a ‘sanctuary for the bizarre and unexplained’; in what way does that concern me? I’m just here for the seminar!”

“Exactly! Doesn’t it seem strange to you, Mr. Crawford, that a Psychology professor from Virginia would cross four states to come to a seminar on Hypnosis? I mean, I’m sure you have more interesting affairs to tend to than to come to this cursed place!”

Crawford suddenly felt a sense of impending doom engulfing him.

“What are you saying; that there are forces at work that drew me here?”

“Precisely! Why is that so hard to believe?”

Crawford shrugged, hesitant to answer.

Finch just sat there and looked out the window for a moment.

“I’m a very perceptive man, Mr. Crawford, and my sixth sense went wild when our paths crossed.”

Crawford began feeling uncomfortable and to avoid Finch, his gaze drifted to the opposite wall toward the end of the room. His eyes instantly grew wider as they settled on a particular painting.

“The picture in my room,” Crawford said. “I felt dizzy just by looking at that woman’s

stare”

Finch turned around. “You mean the lady in blue in the painting behind the podium?”

Upon turning around, Crawford felt a shiver in the back of his neck. It *was* her: The lady in the painting from his room, except she was alone this time, but she still had those same sad eyes. All of a sudden, Finch didn’t sound so crazy anymore.

“That’s her! Who is she?”

“That’s Isobel Hoffman. She was a famous stage actress here in the late sixties,” Finch shook his head. “What a tragedy.”

“What do you mean? What happened to her?”

“She was killed by some nut job backstage before of one of her plays. The lunatic screamed all sorts of obscenities at her before murdering her. It’s almost folklore around here, such a young woman, such talent taken away like that by some madman. Life is so unjust sometimes.”

“My God, that’s terrible! What happened to the man who killed her?”

“Oh, they caught him; he was certifiably insane. Pleaded insanity but still got to do time for the crime. They found him dead in his cell one morning; suicide. The bastard got what was coming to him.”

Crawford was sweating, he felt feverish.

“I’m not feeling too well, Aldous. Would you mind if I took a rain check on that lunch?”

“Bloody hell! You’re pale as a ghost! Do you want me to take you to your room?”

“No, I’ll be okay. I’m really sorry about this. I’ll try and meet you at the lounge this evening, if not, I’ll see you at the seminar.”

Crawford got up and zigzagged toward the entrance of the dining hall. Finch rose from

his seat and ran to Crawford just in time before he collapsed face first on the floor.

* * *

Back in room 1974, Finch laid Crawford on the bed. He shut the lights and closed the curtains.

“If there’s anything, Wolfgang, I’m in room 1492.”

“I’ll be okay, really. I just need a few hours to rest,” Crawford whispered. “Thanks again for taking me to my room. I’ll see you later at the lounge, all right?”

“Call my room when you’re ready to go. Take it easy, lad.”

As he lay there in the dark, Crawford kept seeing the painting of Isobel in his mind. Her eyes entranced his soul. What was it about that painting and that woman that enthralled him so much to the point of making him dizzy and almost passing out?

He sat up in the bed and looked around the dimly lit room. He got up and turned on the night lamp. The painting of the aristocrats’ dinner facing him gave the impression of being illuminated, glowing almost. He walked over to it and sat at the desk right below it and began inspecting it more thoroughly. He caressed it with his fingers, then, looked even closer to focus on Isobel’s face.

Those sad eyes, he could get lost in them. He was becoming more aware of how very deep and passionate they were. He slowly sat down at the desk, never leaving her gaze. He sat there, eyes fixed on hers. He could swear she was alive at that point. His heart was beating slower now; he felt overcome by a sensation of well-being. His eyes became heavy, his arms numb and pretty soon, the noises from outside sounded hazy and far away. He finally shut his

eyes and drifted away again as he had the first time he'd looked at the picture, only this time, he sensed he was being transported elsewhere. Crawford let himself go, and like a feather, he was floating in the air. His thoughts became blank and everything faded to black. He was now in an absolute trance.

* * *

“Sir, would you mind getting up from your table if you're going to use it as a pillow. We have paying customers who would like a seat for the evening.”

“But this is my room,” Crawford said, puzzled.

“Your room, sir?” the waiter said. “You must be joking; this is the theater hall, there'll be a play here in six hours.”

“What? What do you mean a play? And why are you wearing that silly costume?”

Crawford looked around and realized he wasn't in his room anymore. There were tables and chairs all around him and a big stage stood at the other end of the room. It looked as though he really was in a theater.

“What the hell is this? I must be dreaming!” Crawford was flabbergasted.

“I can assure you; you are not, sir. Are you going to order something?” the waiter asked, obviously growing impatient.

“Can you please just tell me where I am; I'm confused—”

“You're at the Bitternest Grand Hotel Theater, of course.”

“It's not funny anymore. I know for a fact that there's no theater here,” Crawford said in disbelief, noticing everyone around him dressed in old fashioned clothes.

"No theater?" the waiter laughed. "This theater's been here since the 1930s. It's been around for nearly forty years, for God's sake!"

"No, it can't be; what day are we today?"

"All right, I've had enough of this charade; please leave at once, sir." The waiter pointed toward the exit.

"Okay, okay, I'll leave, but please, you must tell me, what day are we today?"

The waiter's patience was at its limits. Sighing, he said, "If that'll get me rid of you, then I'll tell you: Friday, September 23rd."

"WHAT YEAR?" Crawford shouted.

"What do you mean what year: it's 1969, obviously! Now, kindly leave."

* * *

Once outside the theater, Crawford noticed how familiar the room had felt. Those paintings, that chandelier; that was it, the dining room back at The Bitternest Grand Hotel. But now it all seemed different somehow, and what was all this nonsense about being in 1969?

"Good afternoon, sir, may I be of any help?" a porter asked.

"I ... I'd like to go to back to my room, please," Crawford stumbled.

"Why, of course, sir. What room do you have?"

"Uh, I ... room 1974."

"1974? I'm afraid you're mistaken, sir. There aren't any rooms on the nineteenth floor."

"But I have the key right here," Crawford went through his pockets; just as he feared—nothing.

“I must’ve left it in the room.” Crawford thought of something. “Tell me, what floor is this?”

“Well, the nineteenth floor, of course. That’s what I was trying to tell you, the only thing on this floor is the theater and the bar,” explained the porter.

“And where is the bar?”

“That way, right at the end of the hall,” motioned the porter.

Crawford didn’t even take the time to thank him; he rushed to the end of the hallway and swung the bar doors open.

“Welcome to the Moonlight Crescent. Would you like a table or will you be sitting at the bar,” a dark-haired waitress greeted him.

“The bar will be fine, thank you.”

Crawford walked toward the bar and sat on a stool next to an old man who wore a tweed jacket.

“A whiskey, please,” Crawford asked the bartender.

“Are you a guest here or part of the show?” the man in the tweed jacket asked.

“A guest, I think. And you?”

“I’m a newspaper critic; I work for the *Bitternest Herald*. The reason I ask is because you’re wearing a strange outfit; I thought you might have been part of the play or something.”

“Oh, well, no.” It started to dawn on Crawford that if for some peculiar reason he really was in 1969, he would look a tad peculiar in twenty-first century clothing.

The bartender brought Crawford a glass of whiskey.

“Thank you,” Crawford took a sip of whiskey, realizing that the old man was eying him from head to toe.

"I see. I presume you're a fan of Isobel?"

"Isobel? Isobel Hoffman? She's *here*?" Crawford said in disbelief.

"Of course she is; she's the star of the play! You're not here for the play are you?"

"Actually, no, I'm here for the convention"

"Oh, I didn't hear anything about a convention. When is it?"

"It was yesterday, it's over. Just a small convention, more like a secret meeting,"

Crawford made a quick comeback. "Tell me more about the play, what time is it at?"

"It's at eight o'clock. If you want, I could take you with me, I've got an extra ticket and my date didn't show up. My name's Mortimer Henry; you can call me Mort."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mort. I'm Wolfgang Crawford, Psychology professor."

"Psychology, huh? That's interesting." Henry glanced at his watch. "So, how about that offer, are you up to it?"

"Sure, I'd love to," Crawford said.

"Good, let's go."

"Now? But I thought you said the play was at eight?"

"Yeah, but I'm doing my interview with Isobel in ten minutes. Privileges of the press," Henry said, smiling.

* * *

Mort Henry knocked three times on Isobel Hoffman's door. She looked through the peephole and unchained the lock on the door. As the door swung open, standing before them was a tall, glamorous brunette in a satin blue dress with radiant green eyes and a smile that would make

a manic depressive beam. Crawford froze on the spot. So many thoughts rushed into his head but he couldn't speak. At that moment, he forgot every word in the English language and could not believe the sight of this woman—the very same one he'd admired in the painting back in his own time—who was now standing, in the flesh, two feet from his nose.

"Mort! How nice to see you; how long has it been?" she gave him a warm embrace as if they'd known each other for years.

"It's been too long, my dear. Let me introduce you to a buddy of mine; Isobel Hoffman, meet Wolfgang Crawford, a Psychology professor."

"A Psychology professor? What a fascinating subject! I'm very much into studies of behavior and the mind myself." She gave him a tender and sincere smile.

"You are? Really?" Crawford couldn't think of anything better to say. Not a compliment, not a witty question; must be that loss of language interfering with his thoughts. He sure didn't sound like a Psychology professor now.

"What a bad hostess I am; I'm keeping you out in the hallway. Come on in," she beckoned for them to follow her into the room. "Would you like anything to drink, gentlemen?"

"Don't mind if I do, my dear Isobel. Bourbon on the rocks, as usual." Henry said.

"And what about you, Mr. Crawford?"

"Please, Ms. Hoffman, call me Wolfgang," he insisted. "I'll have a whiskey, if you have any."

"You got it; but only if you call me Isobel in return."

Ms. Hoffman had this way about her to make someone feel right at home. Crawford got the inkling that there was some greater power at work here. What was it Finch had said about Bitternest? Something about a sanctuary for the unexplained? And what if it were true? What if

this were all an elaborate plan designed to lure him to this place? Some kind of parallel universe to his, or worse; a very intense dream from which he would never wake. It made no sense and he knew it, yet he could not deny how authentic this reality felt. His senses were telling him all of this was valid and concrete, although his assessment of the whole situation gravely contradicted that evaluation.

"So, Isobel, tell me, have you got any juicy news for me?" Henry asked.

"It depends what's considered juicy these days," she said with a smirk.

"Well, is there anything going on backstage worthy of mention such as a fling between two actors, a rivalry between celebrities or an unfounded rumor going about?"

"Nope. Nothing really exciting is going on; the only good thing in my life right now is my six-month old baby boy."

"You have a child?" Henry said, surprised.

"Yes, I do and you're the first to know aside from the troupe from the play. I've tried to keep it a secret for the time being."

"Why, congratulations, Isobel! I don't know what to say to that," Henry said.

"Here's a day to remember; Mort Henry, the snappy mouth, lost for words," she laughed, glancing over to Crawford who stood right behind Henry at that point.

"I extend you my best wishes, Isobel, and good health to your baby boy," Crawford said.

"Oh, don't be so shy, Wolfgang; the girl won't bite you. Is there anything you'd like to ask her before she kicks us out for rehearsals?"

"I was wondering if you've ever had your portrait done."

"Not that I know of. Is this a proposition? Do you paint, Wolfgang?"

"Unfortunately, no, I don't. It's just that I could've sworn I saw a painting of you in ... in

some hotel room the other day.”

“Was it a fine painting?”

“Yes, it was a dazzling painting.” Crawford’s glance locked in with hers and he was caught in a spell. The mesmerizing sensation overtook him once more. Time stopped for a few seconds and everything faded to black. Again.

* * *

Crawford awoke lying in a bed in a dimly lit room. He felt light-headed. He was dying to know where he was. This room was not the one from his timeline so he figured he must still be in 1969. The last thing he remembered was looking into Isobel’s eyes.

“Oh, good, you’ve finally returned to your senses. You’ve been out for a few hours.”

“Isobel!”

“Mort and I were worried when we saw you faint like that. One minute you were standing, the next you were in Mort’s arms; he caught you just in time.”

“Speaking of which, where is Mort and where am I?”

“You’re in my room, on the third floor. Mort and I brought you here. He’s gone back to the nineteenth floor; he’s interviewing the director of the play. I told him we’d meet him as soon as you’d be feeling better,” Ms. Hoffman said, putting a hand on Crawford’s forehead.

Crawford sat upright in bed, looking around the room for clues of something that would shed some light on all the questions he had about the glitch in time that had occurred. The last time he passed out, he woke up in 1969. So far, everything indicated he was still in the same year and not back in 2005.

"I apologize for putting you in a position like this; I've been feeling a bit off lately," he said.

"There's no need to feel bad; actually, I'm the one who should be apologizing."

"I don't understand."

"Perhaps I should be honest with you at this point; I owe you some explanations. Do you remember when I said I was into studies of the mind?"

"Yes, but what has that got do to with anything?" Crawford was confused.

"I'm sure you're familiar with hypnosis?" she asked.

"Yes, I am; as a matter of fact, I was on my way to a seminar on hypnosis this weekend."

"Then you're aware of the powers of hypnosis."

"Yes, I'm familiar with it, having studied hypnosis myself. However, it's still highly questioned by a lot of experts in the medical field."

"I know, and it's a shame; it can do great things, you know." She looked hesitant, as if there were something she wanted to say but didn't quite know how to. "Have you ever been hypnotized, Wolfgang?"

"No, but I know how the process works. The subject gradually goes into a state of consciousness in which attention is withdrawn from the outside world by a hypnotist or self-hypnosis and is concentrated on mental and sensory experiences."

"And under trance, the subject's behavior reflects what is being sought from the experience. Depending on the subject's emotional condition and the hypnotist's skill, the depth of trance can be significant and quite profound," she explained.

Crawford suddenly wondered where Ms. Hoffman's line of conversation was heading.

"This is very interesting, Isobel, but earlier, why did you say you owed me an

explanation?”

“This is what I’m getting at, Wolfgang. Did you feel somewhat hypnotized prior to passing out?”

“I guess I kind of did. I was drifting off as I gazed into your eyes. But I still don’t see—”

She cut him off, and rose from her seat.

“Oh, this is a lot more complicated than I envisioned when I first set out to do this.”

She was pacing in the room now.

“It’s okay, you can tell me. I’m not too sure I know what you’re talking about, but there are so many questions I have about so many things right now. Whatever you have to tell me, I’m open to it. This is going to sound crazy, but I feel like we know each other, as if there was a connection between us.”

“Believe me; it doesn’t sound crazy at all. All right; I’ll get to the point and I’ll answer any question you might have,” she finally said.

Crawford was all ears; he knew, somehow, that whatever the reason for this whole *incident*, the time had finally come for the elusive explanation behind it all.

“You didn’t really pass out, Wolfgang, I hypnotized you. I’m sorry, there was no other way to get to you, and I’m running out of time.”

“You hypnotized me? I don’t understand, why hypnotize *me* of all people?”

“Well, that’s where it gets a bit tricky.”

Crawford was lost in his thoughts. “On second thought, you couldn’t have; I’ve been feeling like this since before I even got to the bar tonight.”

“That’s exactly my point. Do you remember when you started feeling entranced, the very first time you noticed it?”

"Yes, I do, I was staring at a painting."

"And what was the painting of?"

"Well, it was a painting ... of you!"

"Then, you see, it worked; I did hypnotize you! And judging from where you are right now, I'd say I did a pretty good job of it," she added, smiling.

"Hold on a minute—from a painting? But when I asked, you said you'd never had your portrait done before."

"Well, not yet, but who's to say there won't be any paintings of me in the future."

"What? How could you possibly know—"

"Wolfgang, you're here because I wanted you here. I've been looking for you for decades, so to speak, and I've finally found you."

"You have? But, we don't even know each other!" Crawford was completely taken aback. This time though, he didn't feel as if he were about to faint—he was as clear as rain.

* * *

In light of this onslaught of information, Crawford found himself at her mercy; it was clear now that it was she who would have the answers to his questions.

"I've been practicing hypnosis for years now and have become quite good at it. Hypnotizing you was the only way I could get you to come and see me here."

"Coming to see you is one thing, Isobel, but coming *through time*? You *are* aware that this isn't my time, aren't you? I have a life back in the year 2005, thirty-six years from now. God, that sounds so outlandish; I can barely believe it myself!"

"I know, but it's a fact, you're here, are you not?" Ms. Hoffman confirmed. "Strange things happen all the time in Bitternest."

"Yeah, I bet, but we're talking about time travel; no, worse, time travel through hypnosis via a painting! Is it just me or that sounds preposterous?"

She gave him a tender look and caressed his face gently.

"Oh, Wolfgang, if you only knew how long I've waited to be able to speak to you again."

"Speak to me again? How do we know each other if you agree we're not from the same era?"

"It's complex but I'll try to explain as best as I can. Will you bear with me?"

"If you promise me there's a somewhat tangible answer to all this madness, yes, absolutely, I'm listening," Crawford said.

"All right, what do you remember about your childhood?"

"Not much, I was adopted when I was only a few months old after my biological mother gave me up. Pretty standard upbringing; growing up in Lynchburg, Virginia, I went to school, made some friends, studied hard and moved out of my folks' place when I turned seventeen. I wanted to become a teacher like my adoptive father. I loved studying people, you know, analyzing their behavior, the way they spoke, their minds."

Crawford focused his eyes on hers again.

"You might have been brought up in Lynchburg but you were born in Bitternest. That's why I had problems tracking you down: I was looking in the wrong place. I summoned you back here, this specific weekend, when the time was right, when everything was in place," she said.

"I could sense that there was something drawing me here, something very powerful. But how do we fit together?"

“I’ll get to that; you have to understand that I don’t have all the answers. I’m just as surprised as you that this worked. I’ve become very skilled, a lot better than I thought I’d ever be. I had a very good teacher who taught me how to break barriers, to project beyond death if needed.”

“Dear God, how could I have forgotten; back in 2005, Aldous told me you died!”

Ms. Hoffman lowered her eyes and stared at the floor for a moment before going on.

“Yes, I *will* die. Sooner than we might think; that’s why it is imperative that I speak to you now.”

“But when? Aldous never told me, he just said that a madman shot you on the stage one night. Isobel, is there anybody that would want to harm you?” He became restless.

“Not that I know of; I don’t even know when or how it happens, all I know is that something happens to me and I die before my time.”

“You have to be cautious from now on, take precautions, you know, have a bodyguard.”

“Listen to yourself; I can’t go through life in fear like that. I could get hit by a car while crossing the street; the point is no one knows when their final hour comes.”

A knock on the door shattered the silence.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“It’s Camilla, Ms. Hoffman.”

“Come in Camilla, the door’s unlocked.”

“Camilla’s my personal assistant.”

Camilla entered the room, looking shy and reserved. “I’m sorry to bother you, but I just wanted to let you know that little Wolfie’s fever broke.”

“Thank you, that’s a relief to hear, Camilla.”

“If you need me, I’ll be at the rehearsal.”

She left as quickly as she had come.

“Isobel, who’s Wolfie? That’s the nickname my friends and family call me.”

“That’s what I was getting at, that’s why I needed to talk to you before I died. You see, you’re my son, Wolfgang.”

The words echoed in Crawford’s ears for what seemed an eternity. The silence in the room became deafening.

* * *

Crawford had to sit down; it was altogether overwhelming. The conversation leading up to the revelation that Ms. Hoffman was his mother had already been hard to take in; this was the cherry on the sundae, to say the least.

“I must be dreaming; that’s what it is, isn’t it?”

“I assure you, you’re not. I die sometime after you turn six months old. I know this much because that’s the last memory I have of you. Then the incident on stage happens and everything goes blank. I can’t foresee the future, but I know I don’t have much longer to live. I wanted you to know who your real mother was and that I didn’t abandon you; not willingly, anyway.”

Crawford looked at her; she had tears in her eyes. He felt as if his head—and his heart—were about to explode, but most of all, he felt bliss; the joy of having a big piece of the puzzle of his life solved. He got up and held her in his arms as hard as he could.

“Oh, Wolfgang, you can’t imagine how long I’ve waited to be able to talk to you.”

“I’ve been wondering all my life who my real mother was and why she gave me up.

There's something I don't grasp though, how could you have been trying to reach me for years if you died?”

“It's strange, it's hard to explain, best way to describe it is that my soul didn't want to let go. My spirit has been trying to contact you since I died. I didn't become a ghost or anything of the sort, so I had to find another way to get in touch with you. I had to resort to what I knew so I tried to tap into your life energy but all my efforts were in vain; I couldn't find you for years. When I finally did, I realized you were thirty-six years old and didn't live in Bitternest anymore. I had to find a way to get you back to me. I projected myself so you would come here and find me through my paintings. I would then try the impossible and hypnotize you so I could tell you that you're my son and that I never stopped loving you.”

“How did you know what I would look like?”

“I didn't at the time, it must've been when you got here earlier today; I became imbued with all this knowledge, as if my departed soul joined with the one from this present time. Otherwise, I would never have known who you were and therefore not been able to tell you who I was in relation to you. It's a lot to stomach, I know, I thought I was going to pass out when it happened. I even wondered if I'd gone insane, but a few minutes later, you and Mort knocked on my door and I knew I hadn't gone mad.”

“I guess we both went through the same thing, didn't we? You have no idea how happy I am to finally be reunited with you!” Crawford, too, had tears in his eyes now.

They spent countless minutes holding each other and enjoying the precious moments they were having together, knowing they would soon come to an end.

“Wolfgang, what do we do now?”

“I haven't got a clue. We have to spend the rest of the weekend together.”

“Definitely, but we have to be very careful not to alter your time line otherwise you might not become who you are today.”

“What do you mean? You’re alive and I intend to keep you that way!”

“No, I mean your counterpart, the sixth-month old version of you, here in 1969. You mustn’t come in contact with him. There’s also the matter that at one point, you’ll leave to go back to your own time in 2005. We have to be careful where we spend our time; one of the rules of time travel is that you can’t travel through space: If you leave in Bitternest on a certain street, then you’ll re-emerge on that same street at the exact same time you left, only in a different time period.”

“That would explain why I woke up in the theater on the nineteenth floor; I guess the theater closed down eventually and they built rooms, like the one I was in.”

“That’s exactly it. We have to be very careful of your whereabouts; you mustn’t interfere with other people’s lives, you have to be in contact with people as little as possible.”

The clock struck eight. The play was about to begin.

“It’s eight o’clock already; Wolfie, I’m going to be late for the play. Hurry, let’s get going.”

“You missed the rehearsal; is everything going to be okay?”

“Don’t worry; I seldom attend them ever since I fired my manager. They’re expecting me, I can’t be late.”

They rushed out the door to the elevator to the nineteenth floor. They held each other’s hands as the elevator went up.

“Isobel! Where the hell have you been? Camilla told me she couldn’t find you in your room. The play’s about to begin; why do you always have to cut it so damn close!” the director

yelled.

“I’m sorry, Jack, I had some unfinished business to take care of. Have I ever let you down?” she smiled at him and hurried backstage.

“Wolfgang, find Mort, he’s got a table close to the stage. Here, keep my earrings for me, I can’t wear them for the play. I’ll meet you when it’s over, all right?” she kissed him on the forehead and rushed to put on a set of jewelry.

“Great! I’ll see you soon, Isobel. Break a leg!” Crawford clenched the earrings in his hand and tucked them in his shirt pocket. Scanning the room for Mort Henry, he found him waving to come and join him.

“Isobel, has Frank spoken to you yet?” Jack asked.

“Frank? He’s here tonight?” she felt uneasy at the mention of his name.

“Yeah, that no good ex-manager of yours came to see me, he was furious; he wanted to see you and wouldn’t take no for an answer,” Jack explained. “I think he’s still backstage somewhere.”

* * *

Crawford had the best seat in the house—front row. He was going to see his mother in the lead role of a play; he was overcome with anticipation. Henry was in the midst of telling him something about the play when Crawford saw a man dash toward the stairway leading backstage. Even though the lights in the theater were all dimmed, Crawford caught a quick glimpse of the man’s right hand as it came out of his coat pocket: he held a gun. At that moment it struck him; this was the night she died.

Crawford rose and abruptly knocked the table on the floor. “Isobel, watch out, he’s got a gun!” he screamed with all his might.

He headed for the stage, running. Everyone in the room became agitated and began getting up from their seats. Crawford could get a glimpse of the man in plain view now, waving his gun around and shouting at Ms. Hoffman. As he got to the stairs on the way backstage, a security guard panicked and tackled him; he fell to the side of the stage and knocked his head on the wall. Crawford looked up, dazed, only to witness in what felt like slow motion, a shot being fired in Ms. Hoffman’s direction. The last sound he heard was Isobel Hoffman screaming, then, the noise around him grew hazy, his vision got fuzzy, and seconds later, Crawford found himself, once again, in total darkness.

* * *

Crawford woke up with a headache. The sun came through the curtains and blinded his eyes as he felt for the ground, not sure of where he was. Crawford took a look around: He was lying on the floor, in a corner in the room. The room was familiar; he realized it was his own, back in 2005. He’d made it back somehow, before he could stop Isobel’s murderer. He slowly got up and looked at the time on his watch—10:25 AM. How long had he been out? Judging by the sun, he was into the next day, Saturday, the day of the hypnosis seminar. He wasn’t completely sure if the events so fresh in his memory had really happened. He looked at himself in the mirror; at least he looked better than he felt. He checked his head for a bump; nothing, not even a mildly sensitive area from the fall last night.

Crawford was beginning to think all this had just been a very compelling dream after all.

He walked over to the painting of Isobel Hoffman, whom he now believed to be his mother. He put his hand to her mouth and shook his head. Was he losing it? A knock on the door brought him back to reality.

“Who is it?”

“Wolfgang? It’s me, Aldous Finch. Are you feeling any better? I waited for you last night at the lounge but you never showed up.”

“Yeah, I’m alright. I just had a bad night, that’s all.”

Crawford unlocked the door and let Finch in.

“You don’t look too bad, my dear Wolfgang. Come on, the seminar’s starting in half an hour, let’s head down.”

“The seminar; I’d almost forgotten about it. Aldous, tell me; did I have a lot to drink yesterday at the dining hall?”

“Barely anything, you passed out before you had a chance to drink or eat, for that matter. Are you sure you’re alright, you look bewildered.”

“I’m okay, I need to take a shower first; I don’t feel fresh. How about I meet you in the lobby in fifteen minutes?”

“As long as you promise not to stand me up like you did last night,” Finch said, jokingly.

“You have my word,” Crawford smiled at his eccentric friend.

Once Finch was gone, Crawford went back to his previous line of thought, questioning his sanity over what had really happened last night. He decided a shower would do him some good—as well as getting out of this room. He put a hand in his shirt pocket and felt something cold. He brought it out; it was Ms. Hoffman’s earrings. He held them up in the light to get a closer look at them. He wasn’t insane after all, and the earrings were the proof that he had really

gone back in time to the year 1969.

He felt a sense of loss within him, although he was happy to know the identity of his real mother. He began suspecting that she knew she was going to die that night. She had wanted him to know who she was and that she loved him dearly before she passed away.

Crawford looked at the painting again. Strangely, she seemed less sad now. His eyes were probably playing tricks on him, in any case. Still, he felt better; his heart lighter than it had been in years. He would take a shower and head down to the seminar with Aldous Finch. He decided he'd seek out as much information as he could about Isobel Hoffman, his mother. Bitternest might have been an unusual and gloomy city, but this trip had been a most fruitful one. He would, without a doubt, return to this sanctuary in the mist one day.

© 2007 Alan Draven. All Rights Reserved.
The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal.

This Amazon Short has been permanently saved in your [Media Library](#).