

**Waking Maya**

a novel

by Warren Goldie

For Meghan

You have attracted certain events to your life based on your beliefs and intentions. This principle is called the Law of Resonance.

If you've searched for evidence of it, you've found it. If you deny it, it will remain forever invisible to you.

If you observe the greater world, you may suspect that large-scale events—the sweeping cultural changes of recent years, the rise of new technologies, the increase in social awareness—may not be random occurrences.

If so, you would be correct. They are manifestations—not of a single person or group but of all humankind.

Our race is searching. It has been since the beginning. It does this using one of the most exquisitely powerful instruments in the universe: the human mind.

How do we create events? What are the processes? Why must they remain a secret?

We will examine these matters now.

—*Ben*

*Ambrose*

# 1

THE HOLE was not deep enough. The small gash in the earth still would not accept the body. Her T-shirt was soaked through, on the unlikely smoldering autumn afternoon. She wiped a dirty hand across her face and braced herself upon the long-handled shovel as a staff that might carry her. The young woman grimaced, for she had done this poorly. She peered down, her eyes beginning to burn, to blur. She could see his shape in there: a rigored body pressing up against the burlap, a single white paw curving out through one end. And a whisker. She started to slide down the handle, her arms weakening. On her hands and knees, she let loose sobs so intense she could not find even a breath for the wrenching in her chest.

A breeze came through just then, drier and fresher than it should have been on the humid afternoon. She could feel the coolness on her skin, drew it into her lungs, like a gift. Her hands squeezed at the dirt in the shallow grave. She stood up suddenly, angrily. Finding the long-handled

shovel, she raised it over her head, poised it there for a moment like a harpooner about to strike—and brought it down as hard as she could into the waiting flesh of the earth. A feeling of lightness came over her, to her surprise, as if her frustration had flowed down her arms like an electrical current, out through her fingers into the splintered shaft to the tip where it was absorbed in the ground. She even had a strange feeling it was welcomed there. Yes ... *Mother*.

She bore down now, hoisting out the little dirt pyramids and flinging them high into the air. As the soil became denser, she stepped on the shovel edge with the hard soles of her Doc Martens backed by her full weight, until the tip slid in. Up and out the mounds came.

The rectangular slot, now nearly two feet deep, would be sufficient for Livingston's final resting place. Or nearly so. Maybe just another inch or two, to make sure. One last plunge of the shovel ...

*Clink.*

What was this?

She tapped around with the tip, probing.

*Clink.*

Huh. She dropped to her knees and looked, squinting cautiously into the shadowy hole. A glimmer of metal sparkled up through the dirt. She slowly reached down and removed the loose soil with her hands, watching the shiny spot grow into a flat surface. It was the top of a box.

She felt her chest tightening—an unknown fear. She looked up briefly, out to the nearby woods, watching the rustling of autumn leaves. Then back again to the box. She knew that it must come out of the ground. She reached in, angled her fingers under a corner and lifted it to the light. Etchings covered the lid, intricate web-like patterns cut into the silvery metal. An eyehole clasp hung on the front, secured by an old red pencil.

In the moments before opening the lid, she did what she often did at such times, hard as she tried not to: took flight. In the blink of an eye she was an archeologist digging in a remote corner of the world, having just unearthed the defining artifact of a civilization that had accomplished feats only possible in an ancient and magical

time. But she caught herself before she got too far in. Twenty-two is too old for such fantasies, she thought grimly.

Without wasting a moment more, she lifted the lid.

The treasure: a leather-bound notebook.

Buried in the ground.

In *her* backyard.

She lifted it out and opened it.

“Oh my God,” she whispered, staring at the inside page as a coldness advanced up her spine.

It was impossible.

Yet there it was, a piece of a puzzle she had tried to solve for as long as she could remember. The page contained a single handwritten sentence, seven words that reached forward from the distant past to seize her.

*To Maya, with love from your father.*

She exhaled—finally. “This isn’t happening,” she said. “This *can’t* be happening.”

His name was scrawled on the inside cover: Ben Ambrose.

She stared at it for a long time, hardly believing the evidence of her eyes. She slid her fingers across the blue-ruled pages, skimmed a few paragraphs and saw what it was: his writings on exactly the kinds of things she yearned most to know. His life of two decades ago, what he did, what he knew. What had happened. But the handwriting ended abruptly after ten pages. An ocean of empty white sheets followed, and she felt a momentary pang of loss for what they might have held.

Not only had she never met her father but she knew nothing of him. Her mother would not speak of the man. Maya’s secret searches of the house turned up nothing. *No*—there was one item she had found, a snapshot she pulled from the pages of an old map book. She was seven. She took it to Muriel, who amazingly started to explain about him and then stopped in mid-sentence before reprimanding Maya for finding books so worn and musty they would bring on allergies. Though the photograph was never seen again, the blurry image lived on in Maya’s

memory: Muriel and yes, *Ben*, sitting on a bench, the tall buildings of a city rising up behind them.

Aftershocks of emotion moved through Maya in waves as she hugged the volume tightly to herself, as one might a lost child just returned home. This time, when she glanced at the bundle a few feet away, she didn't become sad as before. A knowing smile came to her, for Livingston had bestowed upon her a parting gift. One into the earth, one out of it. Was life like that, she wondered, an even exchange through a revolving door? Or was progress possible—positive movement toward some end? Or the opposite, of course.

It was true: the old cat had had a good life. There was no need for sadness. She lowered him down, and said, simply, "Thank you."

As she busied herself with covering him over, she could not stop thinking about *how* it had happened, the strange way she had found the fateful spot.

It was only an hour ago when she had emerged from the back door and surveyed the lawn for a place to dig. Then she changed her mind. Why not *not* decide? Why not simply ask? She had been doing that of late. And so she made a query—to the Universe, the beyond, the land, maybe even God. The important thing was that it was *not her*.

Because *she* just kept getting things wrong.

She had walked the grounds slowly and deliberately, keeping to yesterday's still crisp lawnmower tracks, doing her best to become quiet and to listen within. She kept at it, determined. A half-hour passed. She started to calm down but nothing was happening. Then, when she had gotten almost to the woods, something happened that made the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end: there was a barely perceptible tug at the sleeve of her T-shirt, as if an invisible hand had pinched, pulled, and quickly let go. She froze in mid-step, caught in that timeless state of hyperawareness in which a single breath takes an eternity to complete and no detail is missed.

Then another tug. There was no doubt about it. She understood completely. Her eyes locked onto a patch of lawn by the old oak tree and she felt a certainty such as

she'd never experienced. A minute later she was digging...  
And then, the treasure.

\* \* \*

She took a seat on the ancient double-wide swingset. The rickety structure under the branches of the oak tree had somehow escaped Muriel's campaign to obliterate the Burke past—probably because Buddy used to come out here for his morning coffee and newspaper during his time with them.

She grabbed a support pole and pushed off. The rusted metal legs creaked distressingly as the structure moved slowly. Maya placed the journal in her lap and ran her hands lovingly along the brown leather cover. She opened it.

The first thing she noticed was the handwriting, a jumble of cursive and printing about as tortured looking as her own. Joy filled her. Proof! *I do have a father.* The act of poking a pen through a page due to sheer intensity was not unknown to her. She recalled when her third-grade teacher, Mrs. Wilkes, whose permanent scowl had always made Maya's insides tighten, told her she should take up engraving. It wasn't funny. Even years later, Maya's rambling letters to Uncle Buddy looked like chaos and felt like Braille.

Now, for the first time, she viewed her poor handwriting not as a liability but as an inevitability. An inheritance. She slid her fingertips across the page, savoring the little ridges and valleys.

She started to read.

*Maya, I miss you already. You must believe that I love you with all my heart. Whatever has happened or will happen, this much is true: I am your father. If you feel anger toward me, you are justified in it.*

*There is no way to properly explain why I left. It was necessary. My reasons, which are—or rather, were—compelling, cannot match the disappointment you must feel in not knowing me, and the great regret I feel in not knowing you. My hope is that this can change now. My reasons for doing what I have done will soon become clear to you.*

*It is early evening as I write to you in my study. My window*

*looks out onto the farm. Your mother cares for you in your room down the hall ...*

Maya gulped down some air, feeling suddenly on edge. She put the book down in her lap and gripped a support pole. She'd only gotten through a few paragraphs and was already overwhelmed. The anxiety was coming on, like cold snakes slithering around in her belly.

*Not now, please.* Doing her best to endure it, she stared at the trees in the woods beyond the split-rail fence. But she could hardly see them. *Focus, Maya. Use nature. It's always helped.*

She stared intensely at the trees, observing the details, watching them tremble in the breeze, listening to their rustling, breathing in the odor of their desiccation. She kept at it for several minutes until the anxiety was gone.

The journal was back in her hands.

*I love this place. I was an athlete in my youth, a runner, though now I limit myself to walking these fields for my exercise. It quite pleases me.*

*I am—was—a researcher at the university and elsewhere, and this is where it begins. Through my work I have discovered a phenomenon of a most fantastic nature, having to do with the way change comes about. By change I mean the small and large, from something as inconsequential as a decision one makes about a social event to that of a nation that chooses to make war on another. The internal mechanics are the same.*

*In the course of my work I have become aware of data that at first was troublesome to contemplate but later became certainties. I tell you this with great gravity after long consideration: A sweeping cultural change is in the offing that will alter both the physical and the cultural ways of the world. Our country, and others, is poised at the dawn of a period of transformation that has been unseen in many centuries. Monumental forces churn, even as I write to you.*

*I tell you this because discord always accompanies change. The old does not yield willingly to the new. There will be great unrest. You, dear daughter, must prepare for it. As the storm strikes, look beyond its violence to the nourishment of the rain, for that is its greater purpose—*

A car horn honked and Maya jumped, losing her grip on the journal. She grabbed for it, partially tearing a page, which felt like a wound to the heart. Josh revved the Mustang's engine, and then cut it. The car door slammed.

She quickly closed the journal and placed it in the box. She wanted to tell him she wasn't feeling well and would have to stay home. She didn't think she'd be able to leave the journal at home for a few hours, but she would have to do just that. Josh had been insistent on the phone, and she would not be able to put him off.

Back in her room, she slid the box far under her bed and kicked off the Doc Martens in favor of her Converse All Stars, which had always felt right peeking out from the bottom of her bellbottoms. Maybe she really was a hippie girl, as Josh had once joked. Tonight she did look the part.

She paused briefly at the mirror to admire her reflection. The contrast of perfect white teeth against skin which had tanned deeply over the summer. The liquid brown eyes with lashes that swept out in a gentle curve. The expressive face that could not hide emotion. The tall, athletic build and long auburn hair which spilled down her back in loose curls. She gave a little smile. She couldn't help it. *This will do.* Then she grabbed her jean jacket and glanced one more time beneath her bed. "Later," she whispered.

Though she could not know it yet, on this night her life would change forever.

## 2

JOSH ROSENBERG waited patiently, leaning against his rusted-out Mustang, absent-mindedly tapping his foot to one of the songs that played perpetually in his head. He stared at the ground, dressed in black as usual. Maya stepped out on the front porch, closed the door softly, and looked over at him. Her eyes narrowed briefly to bring him into better focus, her chest tightening unaccountably.

She ran down the sidewalk and hopped in the car, as he did. Josh smiled his broad, incandescent smile and flipped his hair back, which immediately fell back over his eyes. Maya chuckled to herself. Josh was the only person she knew who was cool *and* a caricature of cool at the same time.

For years they had passed each other in the halls of Plainfield High, Maya eagerly attending honors classes while Josh goofed off in the back rows of very different classes, in pursuit of a different future. They hadn't met until last May, when Josh's band was playing at a house party the week Maya graduated from Towson U. It was a heady time for her, and she found herself

uncharacteristically dancing to near exhaustion, lost in the throng and heat of the dimly lit room, at one point locking eyes with Josh. They made their way outside on a break and started up a conversation. At one point he stared up at the stars and she named several for him.

The months since had been good. Josh was easygoing and fun, living in the moment, his spontaneousness often pulling her out of predictable paths. But stealing a sideways glance at him now, sitting beside her on the worn cloth seats of the old clunker he loved so much, Maya wondered what exactly it was they had. Was it a *relationship*? She wasn't even sure she understood the concept, because every time she thought she was in one it would veer off into strange and unpredictable territory and sooner or later she would lose herself in it. Everything would feel different, including herself, as though another person lived inside of her. Someone nothing at all like her. Pain wound itself into love, and love was never stable or comfortable—and that couldn't possibly be what all those happy couples out there were experiencing. And lately, this, whatever it was with Josh, had been starting to veer...

\* \* \*

The Orion Cafe was packed with regulars, hopeful artists from the Institute across the street, kids who knew exactly who they were and what they wanted to do. Josh, who could have been the poster boy for this crowd, disappeared inside while Maya wandered over to a sidewalk table. He returned with two mocha lattes.

“Thank you, sir,” she said, reaching for the tall glass.

“The pleasure is mine,” Josh said pleasantly.

As Maya watched the passing traffic of Charles Street, she nervously adjusted her hemp bracelet, pushing and pulling it up and down her wrist. She tried to contain the geyser of frustration growing inside her. Why wasn't she at home reading her father's journal like any sane person would be doing? Was she out of her mind? What if Muriel burned the house down—or worse, found the journal and read it first?

The frustration felt like a geyser she had to keep

pushing down. Why wasn't she at home reading the journal like any sane person would be doing? Was she out of her mind? What if Muriel burned down the house—or worse, found the journal and read it first?

Maya said, "This is going to sound really weird."

"More than usual?"

"Definitely," she said, relishing the coming surprise. "I just met my dad."

Josh almost dropped his glass. "No way. I thought he was, you know, gone. Dead."

"*What?*" she said, bristling. "Where did you hear that?"

"Well, from you."

She thought about it. Yes, she may have said something like that at one time. Her feelings about her father had changed many times over the years, even though she knew nothing of him.

"I found something. A journal he wrote when he lived here."

Josh slowly turned his glass on the tabletop. "What's in it?"

"I didn't have a chance to read it. You showed up."

He just smiled at that.

"It's amazing I found it at all," she said, her eyes sparkling. "He wrote it to *me*, Josh, as in 'To my daughter.'"

Josh picked up his Marlboro cigarette box, stood it on one end, and considered it. Then he looked at her. "Maybe you shouldn't read it."

"Yeah," she laughed. "Maybe I'll just toss it out with the trash. Can't be anything important."

"No, I'm serious."

Was he? She didn't know. Josh was a contrarian, always going against the grain, trying to do or say what you'd least expect. Someone who would pet a cat's hair backward. And here he was again, trying to get a rise out of her.

Then he locked eyes with her, smiled — and changed. She had seen this transformation many times. The *other* Josh emerged, not the too-cool hipster but the one she liked: the warm, inclusive boy. The sarcasm was gone, melted seamlessly into a simple, sincere smile, and once again she saw what it was that drew her to him.

This Josh was connected to something deep, a passion

of real power. He was the guy whose guitar could transform a room full of strangers into a single pulsating being. He knew how to channel a primal energy. Maya had always been drawn to people like that. They had the gift. But the truth was, *she* wanted to hold that power in her hands, feel it pass through her. He could and she could not. And the fact that he took such a blasé attitude toward it made him hard to take sometimes.

“Livingston died,” she blurted out.

“Who?”

“My cat. Old age.”

“Right. I’m sorry,” Josh said blandly. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it.

“I feel sad he’s gone,” she said. “I miss him, but ...”

Josh sat quietly, smoking, waiting.

“But there’s something else. This, this ... I don’t even know how to describe it.” She thought she could see a slight weariness on his face. “It’s this ... *existential pressure*.”

“Hmm,” he said.

“It’s like a need to understand, to figure something out.” She reached for her glass and swirled the creamy liquid around, then set it down. “Do you ever feel that way? Something pressing at you that’s driving you crazy and you just don’t know what it is?”

He shook his head.

She continued on. “It feels like I have to figure out my purpose in life. Of all things.” She laughed ruefully. “I’m having a purpose attack.”

Josh closed his eyes, as if he didn’t want to have this conversation. “Maybe your purpose is to live and be happy.”

“Easy for you to say. You’re the next Kurt Cobain. What about the rest of us? What do I do? I get good grades. I run a fast mile. I have no friggin’ idea what my purpose is.”

“Do you want to?”

His directness gave her pause. This was not exactly a Josh Rosenberg conversation, yet here he was.

“I’m listening,” she said cautiously.

He downed the last of the latte and set the glass on the table. “You’re always thinking about the meaning of life,

Maya. Wondering where to find it. Well, I can tell you where it *isn't*: inside your head, the place you're always so gung-ho to look. I'll tell you what's in there: the past. What's done and gone. Journals in your backyard that take you backwards when you need to go forward—"

"Josh, it was written by *my father*. You can't seriously be telling me not to read it."

"I'm not saying that. Just listen."

She remained quiet, waiting for him to go on.

"You don't *discover* what to do with your life. It's not something you find. It's not located anywhere. Looking for it is a waste of time."

She watched him momentarily run his fingers over the dragon tattoo on his forearm. The certainty of the tattooed.

"You make it up as you go," he announced.

"What?"

"You make it up as you go."

"That's the big secret?"

He nodded, dead serious. "No signposts, no guides. Just what you decide, here and now," he said with total conviction. "What I don't get is why you can't see that."

She turned away, then quickly swiveled back. "Okay. But what about beyond that? Don't you ever wonder if there's a greater point to life than just living for the moment? Something beyond our awareness? Don't you think it would be sad if there *isn't*?"

He didn't answer. He just stared at her with an expression of pity, as if she were a child unable to understand his simple words. Then he shook his head, mentally checking out.

"There's more to life than Plainfield, I can tell you that," she said.

He looked away. "Here we go again."

"I get it, Josh. I don't know how to live life. I'm just some naive fool."

"I didn't say that."

She waited, but he just kept looking away.

"What?" she said, suddenly nervous.

She looked at him and understood. *Of course*. This was what he had wanted to talk about. She hadn't let him, grousing on about her purposeless life. *Oh, God*. A darkness

gathered around her.

There was a sound a few feet away. A car backing into a parking space bumped into a pickup truck behind it. The driver, a heavysset man wearing an Orioles baseball cap, cursed loudly, then angled out and sped down the street.

Maya held her breath. She *knew*. She knew the way she always knew.

“I’m not saying we should break up,” Josh said.

Maya drew a quick breath and held it. Her skin felt hot and prickly. Her back was moist with perspiration. She wanted to ask him what he meant but no words came. She felt herself wilt, deflate, transform from the spirited Maya into ... her mother’s girl. The mouse. The doormat.

“I need some time,” he said. “I’m not sure how I feel right now. You have to admit, things have been pretty strained lately.”

She gulped down some air and watched him, feeling like an animal frozen in the spell of the headlights, her eyes unnaturally wide.

He struggled with his words. “I need some time to, I don’t know, chill. You can understand that. I’m working on some songs. I need to focus.”

“Songs,” she repeated, numbly. She felt as though her soul had vacated her body, leaving behind an empty husk.

He looked miserably at her. “Maya, I’m sorry. It’s just what I need to do right now.”

*Why was he doing this? Tears pooled in her eyes. Get up. Go. Before it’s too late.*

“I’m really sorry,” he said.

“I’m going home,” she said. Forcing herself to be strong but trembling inside, she stood up and started to walk off.

“Maya, wait...”

“Leave me alone.” She wandered unsteadily down the sidewalk, her arms crossed tightly.

“Let me give you a ride,” he said, stepping toward her.

“No! Leave!” She stood there, staring through tears at those same stars she had named for him when they had met. Soon she heard the familiar jangle of a rusty car door shutting, then the sound of the engine fading into the night.

\* \* \*

She turned the light on in her room, closed the door behind her and slowly lowered herself onto the bed. She looked for her cat, and remembered... A short sob barked from her throat as she tightened her hands into fists and pressed them into her eyes. How hard it was to breathe, to simply *live*.

She was trembling. The room, the air, the world—everything began to blur. She could sense the first stirrings of the anxiety attack as a nausea in her gut. She bent down over the edge of the bed and gripped her chest tightly, thinking, *This must stop. I won't let it take me again.*

*Feel, don't think.*

There was a physical exercise that helped, and she performed it now, methodically tensing and relaxing the muscles of her hands, arms, shoulders, abdomen, legs, feet. She breathed slowly and deliberately, pressing out her belly, letting it fall back down ... *Yes, good.* The rule at these times was: physical, good; mental, bad.

It worked. A final shudder worked its way out and was gone. In a few minutes she was herself again. She lay there with her arms splayed out, a starfish on the bed.

And then she remembered.

How could she have forgotten?

She reached under the bed and found the journal. Just touching the cool leather cover made her feel better, quieter. Even though she had yet to read it she knew it had a power that would affect her profoundly. Lifting it into her hands she felt it as a talisman, a support to lean upon that might carry her through sadness, and anger, and confusion. As a father would.

She could not know it then but the slender volume she held in her hands was the doorway she had always longed for, which would bring answers not only to questions which had haunted her for her entire life, but to ones far larger that originated in a world she didn't even know existed.

### 3

MAYA LOOKED around the room and noticed, for the first time, that the pale yellow light that shone out from the bedside lamp illuminated a child's room. The desk, chest of drawers and bookshelves, now a decade old in cream white and powder blue, had been purchased by Muriel for a pre-teen. A row of stuffed animals stared blankly down from a long shelf that rode just below the ceiling, their faces frozen in empty smiles, their fur rimmed with dust. Now, they just looked dead to her.

Maya heard sounds in the living room and quickly switched off the lamp and lay still in the dark. Footsteps echoed in the hallway, then whispers and soft laughter. A man's deep voice played off of Muriel's flirtatious squeals. Whispers turned to giggles, there was a burst of laughter followed by a loud "Shhh!" and then all sounds disappeared as Muriel's bedroom door clicked shut.

A minute later Maya heard a tapping at her own.

"You there?" Muriel said.

Maya waited quietly, hoping her mother would pass.

"Honey?"

More tapping. ...

“Can I open the door?”

Maya squeezed her eyes shut, clenched her fists. “All right.”

A tall figure filled the vertical slot of light in the open doorway, her face hidden in shadow. The harsh scent of Tequila wafted in.

Muriel’s voice slurred, “You okay?”

“I’m fine, Mom.” Cringing. Her body remained stiff on the bed, a protection against the unknown.

“That’s *good*,” Muriel said with a strange exaggeration. “That’s real good.”

Maya held her breath. Her mother’s head tilted to one side as if pulled down by a heavy weight. Quickly she yanked it back up. “What was I saying?”

“I don’t know. You haven’t said it.”

“*Ab*, I know,” Muriel squealed, suddenly overjoyed. “It’s this: I try. I do. Honest. You can’t fault me for that—for trying?”

Maya’s pulse started to race. What was this? An apology? For what? She mentally clicked back through the hours and the days in search of an explanation. But she’d barely even seen her mother lately. She was working a lot and going out practically every night.

“It’s fine, Mom,” Maya said, doing her best. “I know you try. You try real hard.”

“You think so, *really*?” More liquored air floated in. “No kidding?”

“Totally,” Maya assured her.

Muriel sighed, seemingly relieved. “Good. Then everything’s all right,” she declared. She started to turn but then wheeled around. “Oh, by the way, Henry is over. You know Henry. I introduced you, right?”

“Yes,” Maya said obediently, even though she had never met the man.

Muriel stood staring at her for a long moment, as Maya started to slide under the blanket. *Here it comes.*

But it didn’t. Incredibly, her mother’s voice was gentle: “Whatever you may think, I love you. I—love—you. Just so you know. That’s all I wanted to say, okay? Now you can go to sleep or whatever it is you’re doing.” Then she shut the door and was gone.

Maya lay there, hardly believing that that was all. She jumped out of bed and went over to the window and slid it wide open. The pane snapped in place with a twang. She leaned out as far as she could. High up in the sky, the full moon drenched the woods in a soft slivery light, dark but not dark.

She inhaled deeply, filled her lungs to capacity. The peacefulness of one a.m. caressed her. She imagined herself as a bird, lifting off into the night sky. It was freedom the sky held. If she could be any animal, it would be an eagle. Oh, how she would power up high into the sky on her wings, up to where the air was thin and no humans roamed; then she'd drift down, gliding on unseen rivers of wind, peering down at the world and its sleep walkers, swooping earthward in ever widening spirals ...

She smiled at the thought of it. When she returned from the daydream, she pulled away from the window, catching her T-shirt on a nail in the pane that tore it clear up to her bellybutton. "Damn," she muttered, for she loved the old shirt which she had bought in an open market downtown and had worn until it became threadbare and disintegrating. A Yin Yang symbol was stenciled on the front.

She mused on the ancient mark—the black and white teardrops caught in a circular embrace, forever chasing each other's tail. Would they ever catch up? What then? What about the seeds inside? Would they grow larger and take over their hosts? The questions brought up a stream of new questions, which is exactly what she liked about it. The symbol led into mystery. And mystery was cool.

She liked the image so much that she had carefully drawn one on the back of her Converse All Stars, stretched to abstraction, designed to go undetected by all but the most perceptive of observers. If she ever met a guy who spotted her Yin Yang, *well* ... that would be it, wouldn't it?

She pressed her ear to the door. All quiet. She climbed into bed, settled back against the pillows and picked up the journal.

*... I founded a field which I call psycho-social meta-dynamics to study a theory I believe in strongly: that the beliefs of large masses of people affect, even*

*create, cultural and global events. My focus has been on religious and political movements. Why do some gain enough momentum to change the world while others fade into obscurity? What are the mechanics of change?*

*I didn't stay long at the university, though. Eventually I signed on with the government. There I—*

Here several lines had been struck out with a black marker.

*—cannot be more specific. Suffice it to say I recently left a project of great importance.*

*My purpose here is to give you a little something in the hours before I go, a primer of the old man's work, if you will. I know I cannot be there for you, Maya, but here is a bit of what I am, or was.*

*There is a bank in Calhoun called First Street Federal. There you will find a safe deposit box registered in your name. Take the key from the back of this book—*

Excitedly she flipped to the back cover. Indeed, a slit had been cut in the flap. She slid her finger in and pulled out a flat key.

*—go there and remove the contents of the box.*

She put the book down and sat quietly, integrating. Suddenly shivers were crawling all over her neck and arms. She sensed something—*someone*—there in the room with her. Carefully, as if not to disturb the very air, she stepped across the carpet and exited the room. Once in the hallway, she sprinted into the living room like a frightened gazelle, switching on every light until the room was as bright as an operating room. She clicked on the TV for some added comfort, then quickly muted it for fear of rousing Muriel.

She found the perfect anesthesia on channel sixty-eight: The Weather Channel. The voiceless television gradually helped to calm her; the benign colorful images slowing her

racing mind. The power—*her* power—was in play, too. She knew it because she felt the buzz all through her body.

Since Maya was a child she'd had an intuitive skill that at times crossed the line into precognition, although it was spotty and would disappear for months at a time, only to appear when least expected. A scene would appear in her mind, unpredictably, last for a few moments, then disappear. Sometimes she saw an image like a photograph; other times it moved like video, like life itself. And it was always accompanied by a strange electric feeling, a kind of chill that ran all through her body, from her toes to her fingers and all points in between.

Time would pass and she would forget about it. But then, sooner or later, she'd see it again as a real event in her life or in someone's that she knew, exactly as it had appeared.

This time, though, was different. There was no image, no movement, just a foreboding feeling. She didn't know what to make of that. She thought of the journal, of writing from the hand of an unknown father,

She returned to her room and started to tidy up, to take her mind off of what was happening. She gathered up the clothes on the floor and shelved them, neatly stacked the papers on her desk, and went through her closet and drawers, folding and straightening up. When she was done, she went to bed. But she didn't sleep much that night.

\* \* \*

Calhoun was twenty minutes down Rural Route 32, past some of the oldest homes in the area, two-hundred-year-old stone mansions built along the river like fortresses constructed to greet eternity. The countryside was lush and thickly wooded, and Maya enjoyed the drive down the winding road.

She turned on the radio and sang to an old Indigo Girls song that was playing—when the synchronicity occurred. Just as she passed by a Yield sign, the Indigo Girls sang, “and learn to yield.” Her jaw dropped. The car veered momentarily onto the shoulder, then she steered it back. The word *yield* and the road sign overlapped! She

immediately switched off the radio. *What just happened?* It was significant; of that she was sure. But what did it mean? *Yield to what?*

Maya believed unwaveringly in synchronicities, those chance occurrences that seem to carry within them deeper meaning—being in the right place at the right time, sensing an event before it happens, “accidentally” bumping into just the person you need to see. The idea of the synchronicity implied a larger plan at work. It was a clue. Synchronicities gave insight into aspects of that plan. The finding of the journal, to Maya, was a huge one.

She rubbed her eyes and tried to focus on the road ahead. She’d been awake most of the night, her mind chugging away, trying to figure out what was in store for her at the bank. Surprisingly, Josh had not been in her thoughts at all. She hardly cared about him. Rather than rejection she felt relief. Which was odd. It had to be this new thing in her life, she decided. So that was good, at least.

She swerved the little red Toyota Corolla into an angled parking spot beneath the tower clock on the east end of Main Street. She walked through the small downtown district, wondering why her father had chosen this place. Old iron lamp posts arched over the sidewalks like the branches of weeping willows. There was a soda shop, a grocer. It felt like home.

The morning was mild and windless, the sun hidden behind an overcast sky. The tower clock gonged as she pulled open the heavy door of the bank. Inside, she considered a possibility that had not even occurred to her but probably should have: Were the contents of the safe deposit box even legal? When she revealed the number, would the clerk push a secret button that would bring the police rushing in?

*No, that’s ridiculous. Just do it.*

She made her way to a desk where a man was filing papers. She stood there and waited but he didn’t look up. She sighed.

“I know you’re there, young lady,” he said curtly. “I’ll be just a moment.”

“Sorry,” she said nervously.

A few more minutes passed. Still, he continued to file. Her fear metastasized into anger.

Finally he peered up. He was in his mid-fifties and balding, with a few hairs swept up over a pinkish head. He forced a smile, and in a voice that mocked by its very nature, asked what he could do for her.

“I’d like to get into a safe deposit box, please.”

“Your name?”

“Maya Burke.”

He repeated her name. “Let’s have a look-see.” He shuffled through a file box full of cards and pulled one out. “ID?”

She handed him her driver’s license, which he placed on the desk beside the card. He registered a look of surprise.

“Huh. This is rather unusual.”

Maya’s hands went cold. She watched him closely to try and see him reach for the secret button. But he kept both hands in sight. “This box hasn’t been used in twenty years,” he said.

Maya didn’t know what to say. “Is that a problem?” she said feebly.

“Well, no. No problem at all. It’s been prepaid for thirty.”

*Thirty years?* Is that how long he expected her to take to find the journal?

“The co-owner, a Ben Ambrose, hasn’t been in for quite awhile. Hmm, I’ll say.”

He slid the card across the desk. “Sign here, Ms. Burke.”

The signature of Ben Ambrose, swerved gracelessly in the line above where she quickly scrawled her name, was unreadable, just like hers. The sight of it had a comforting effect on her.

“This way,” the clerk said, standing up.

He led her through a heavy steel doorway to a walk-in vault where safe deposit boxes lined the walls from floor to ceiling. He crouched down to the bottom row and slid a key into number twelve-thirty. He waited, staring at her.

“Oh, right,” she said, taking out her key. She slid it into the companion keyhole and they turned both at the same time. The man grabbed the handle and pulled out a small

metal box, which he handed to her.

“Viewing rooms are over there,” he said, pointing at two smoked-glass doors in a narrow hallway.

She bolted for the first room, shut the door and sat at the small wooden table, staring at the box, relishing the feeling of excitement. *Another message from the past.* A strange, unbidden image came into her mind, of herself standing at the outskirts of a glorious, magical city. All she had to do was take a step forward into it. She pulled up the lid.

The box was empty.

Unbelieving, she squeezed her eyes shut and quickly opened them as if to repair a temporary malfunction. She looked again.

Still empty. How could this be?

Her first step into the magical city had landed her into a pothole. And she was plummeting downward ...

No. Wait.

There *was* something—at the far end, under the two-inch section which formed the back of the latch. The gray color of the small envelope exactly matched the gray of the drawer. Quickly she snatched it up and tore it open.

Staring at the contents, she fell back against the chair as tremors of excitement shook her. She laughed aloud. In a lightning-quick reaction of emotional alchemy, despair had transformed into elation.

The envelope held five thousand dollars in neatly folded hundreds, fastened with a rubber band. She spread the bills out on the table. She’d never seen so much money in her life. But that wasn’t what filled her with excitement. The real gift was a scrap of paper on which her father had written, “Dr. Edgar Porter, 3706 N. Hillside, Chicago. A colleague. Maya, see Dr. Porter first.”

She read over these words several times. One of them filled her with hope. *First.* “See Dr. Porter *first.*”

She raised her fists in triumph. He was sending her on a mission.

END OF EXCERPT