

A JOURNEY INTO THE NIGHT

By Stephen Edelblute

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When I woke up, my head was leaning against the window of the plane. I had no idea where I was, where I was going, or how I had gotten here. As I looked out into the night, the wing tilted in preparation for landing toward the black emptiness of an ocean and back toward rolling lighted hills. City lights below blinked quickly as the plane passed through the last cloud. Wheels squealed on the runway and a surge of confused anticipation passed through me. I felt a sense of belonging.

Without wasting any time, I walked off the plane, through the terminal and out the entrance. There, standing in front of a black limousine, was a man in a dark blue chauffeur's uniform.

"This way, sir." He said, opening the back door.

I started to ask him who sent him and where we were going, but I did not. I just shrugged and climbed in. Driving into town, my face pressed against the window, I tried to absorb it all and figure out what was going on.

We reached a freeway exit, got off, and he let me out on a quaint street lined with small shops. A light, misty rain began to fall. The first thing I noticed was total silence. It seemed strange nobody else was on the street. I had a feeling of keen anticipation, like something significant was about to happen. I walked a couple of blocks looking at the closed stores. As I turned a corner, there was a beautiful girl sitting there in a dark doorway,

She looked up at me, as if she had been waiting. She was wearing a long tan cape, a loose white shirt and faded blue jeans. Her dark hair fell over her face covering most of it except for her eyes. Her eyes captivated me. They seemed to have a special glow. I felt shy about approaching her and tried not to stare, but I could not help it. She smiled, stood up from the step, then walked slowly toward me.

"Hi," she said, "I have been waiting for you."

"Me?" I asked shaking my head, "Do you know me?"

"You are finally here," she laughed softly.

She took my arm and led me down a small alley away from the streetlights. I began to relax. I had an odd feeling that I had been here before, the same street, the same girl, and the same sensation, but I knew that was not possible. We walked for a while without saying anything to each other, but I felt comfortable and at peace with her on my arm. At the end of an alley, we found an old store with fishnet hanging behind fogged windows, with a dim orange light coming through the glass. The girl walked with me to the door and stopped.

"I am leaving now," the girl whispered, "you need to go in alone."

She leaned in and kissed me softly, then left, walking back up the street. I watched her slowly fade into the mist before I turned back toward the door and entered.

As small as the shop appeared from the outside, inside it was massive with room after room filled with expensive artifacts. There were many shelves of beautiful sculptures, original art, baskets of jewelry and even displays of old gold coins. Dim orange light illuminated everything, casting sparkling highlights on an old teak floor. It was an incredibly beautiful place.

As I entered a room, a small old man stepped out from behind some display shelves. He fit the room perfectly. His hair was snow white, but his face that was surprisingly smooth for the rest of his stooped body. He smiled at me.

"Welcome," he said, "I have been waiting for you."

I just stood there, not knowing what to say. He smiled at my confusion.

"Relax," he said, "Look around. As you can see, we have quite a selection. If there is anything you would like, just ask. Pick something for yourself. Take your time."

I walked around for a little while, my mind racing.

"Why am I here?" I thought. "How do they know me?"

"Do you see anything you like?" the old man asked, "There are plenty of other rooms."

"I do not understand," I replied

"Choose anything you want," he said.

I shook my head in confusion.

"I feel..." I stuttered, "I have no idea what I am looking for."

"Just keep looking." He smiled as he left me.

I kept walking through the store. There was so much to see. I entered a room that was a bit brighter than the others. It was filled with old, but expensive looking furniture. On a walnut table near the wall was a dark brown leather book with a gold locked clasp. The rest of the room seemed to highlight it. There were so many other things to look at that I started to move on, but my eyes kept going back to that book.

I walked over and picked it up.

From nowhere, the old man appeared.

"Is that what you want?" he asked softly.

"Yes," I immediately replied without thinking.

"Then take it, it is yours," he smiled.

He was still smiling as I left and walked back onto the street. The misty rain made soft halos around the lights. It felt fresh and clean on my face. Somewhere, far away, I heard a lonely foghorn. Again, there seemed to be no sign of life on the street. I kept walking toward the streetlights searching for the girl and for a place to sit down to look at my book.

I finally found a dark coffee shop on a corner. The smell of coffee and fresh bread was strong. A lone older couple was sitting in a window booth holding hands across the table, totally engrossed with each other. The floor creaked as I walked over to a booth in the back. Sitting down, I softly rubbed my hand over the smooth leather on the cover. I realized then that I did not have the key to open the book.

At that moment, from nowhere, she sat down beside me. I looked up. She smiled at me. Her eyes sparkled. In the dim light of the booth, she was stunningly beautiful. It was not only her looks, but also her amazing aura of love, inner peace, and total contentment.

I knew then that she was what I had been searching for my entire life. I felt like I had known her forever. I will always remember that moment. Reaching up, I ran my fingers lightly over her cheek, her eyes locked with mine as her hair fell over my hand. She pulled a chain from around her neck and gave it to me. On the end was a small gold key. Slowly, I lifted the book from the table and looked up, as if to ask permission to continue. She nodded. With my heart pounding, I inserted the key and turned.

Inside the front cover was my name:

Jeffery Lyle

1946 – 1976

Suddenly a memory rushed back. I was back on the airplane, the engine under the wing was burning, people were screaming and crying, and with a sudden jerk the engine fell off the wing. The plane started a slow spin falling more and more quickly toward the ground.

My palms were sweating. I looked at her and asked,

“I did not make it off the plane, did I?”

“Does it matter?” She laughed.

She took my arm and put her head on my shoulder as we walked through a door at the rear of the shop. It opened into a hall lined with bookshelves on each side filled with books just like mine. At the end of the hall, she took the book from me and placed it on the top shelf.

She said, “I am so happy you are here with me.”

We walked through a last door into a most beautiful light.