

## Chapter One

*Friday June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

It would feel strange working during the weekend, but the following day, we'd have tests to run before opening the rift on Sunday. It disturbs my nature, just as it would when I stray from my normal hours. Nonetheless, I had to force myself, and I had even come in at 6:30 AM on this particular day, a substantial half hour earlier than normal. Kaela had been great - given all she'd been going through. The saying goes, 'Leave your personal problems at the door', but for her, the worst of those problems had begun within those walls. Despite what I had put her father through in the past, and with Rael's accident, she was weathering it all fairly well. She was only human, though, and I could see in her eyes how much she missed being with him. Dario still blamed himself for the accident, but it was the cheap clip on Rael's safety harness that had caused his fall. It was an IC&P lowest bid contract, no doubt. But they were now paying with daily therapy for his leg and sessions to help him regain his memory of the last couple of years of his life. In the few months since it had happened, he'd been staying back with his family. It was hard for Kaela to visit him when he looked at her as if he didn't know her, and I could see the frustration in Rael's face as he'd try so hard to remember. I'd seen Kaela outside, standing, just staring across the wetlands at the house where he was.

I would never tell Kaela, but sometimes I felt relieved to see it affect her. Healthy is a heart that still feels pain. Once we're numb to it all, it's over. Whether or not Rael regained his memory, she would be there for him once he was ready to work again. He had fallen in love with her once. He would fall in love with her again.

I'd been silent about the good things happening with Danielle, Max and me. I felt guilty being so happy, but I'd cringe thinking that it almost hadn't happened. I couldn't imagine what my world would be like without Danielle and Max. The previous sixteen years of my life had been better than I could have ever hoped for. And, in two days, I would get to thank the man who had changed my life. At least, I hoped my doppelganger was following a parallel timeline, and that he'd be there when the rift was opened. Danielle was my love and my life, and I had so much to tell Kyle, so much to thank him for.

In reflective moments, I'd think of how incredibly strange it was; almost like a dream. It was the little voice on my shoulder, squared. This next meeting would have an automated data transfer, but I still felt a little selfish that in conversation; I wanted to speak less about science and more about life. We're all two people inside, whether we are willing to admit it or not. One part of us refuses to do something then ten minutes later, we're doing it. I had faced that other side.

I met my doppelganger using Stasis in June of 2006, when I had been attempting to develop a new source of renewable energy using a regenerative field. What I succeeded in doing was opening a rift between two realities. On the few days leading up to it, all of the data indicated that the field had formed, but without the projected outer skin. The electron cloud still cleared, and the electrons registered as being at two locations in space-time, but I couldn't make the outer shell. On the day before I was successful, I had been able to keep the field resonating for twelve minutes, but there was still no outer shell. By that evening, I had reached my physical limit and had no choice but to go home and rest.

### ***Wednesday June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006***

*I woke. It was still dark out. The clock read 4:13 AM. I realized I'd been working on the problem in my sleep, and had stumbled upon what could be the answer. Although I was anxious to know if it would work, I still took the time to shower and shave before leaving.*

*With the roads so empty at this early hour, it didn't take me long to get there. When I approached the gates at SciLab, I was fumbling to find my ID. I rarely entered this early, so I had never met the overnight guard. I pulled up slowly.*

*"I'm Kyle Trace. Just give me a moment to locate my ID."*

*"I know who you are, Dr. Trace. I see your photo in the company newsletter all the time. Go right in."*

*The building ahead was obscured by the dark clouds shrouding the moon. The light*

*turned on when I parked in my space out front. I felt anxious as I touched my ID to the sensor on the door. I thought about all the scientists who worked their whole lives without ever making a difference.*

*There was dead silence in the lab - until I powered up the equipment. The screens displayed running diagnostics, and when all systems passed, the panel flashed rows of green. Once I reviewed the startup logs, I entered the new settings, but this time, there seemed to be symmetry in the numbers. I clicked the link to start the sequence.*

*I heard two low sounds winding up in pitch as the guidance and acceleration fields attempted to synchronize. Once the optimum levels were reached the first time, the center burst into light, but this time with solid delineation. A dark grey hole formed in the center and then flashed off. As the system attempted to synchronize again, I jumped into the chair, punching away at additional adjustments. The brief readings from the shell pattern showed it to be void of harmonic overtones. I introduced low wave harmonics and they filled the lines between the spikes.*

*When it reached optimum levels the second time, it burst into the large dark hole encased in the photoelectric shell. This time it settled into a sustained regenerative loop and power consumption dropped to zero.*

*It was absolutely beautiful. As I approached to take a closer look, the dark hole gave way to what for a moment seemed to be a reflection of the lab and me. But I shuddered when I realized that it wasn't a reflection at all; my counterpart wore different clothes. When I moved, he remained still.*

*"Amazing," the voice from inside said. "Who are you?"*

*"Dr. Kyle Trace. Who are you," I asked?*

*"Ditto," he said, and stared into my lab as if he were looking into a storefront*

window. *“This didn’t happen last time.”*

*“Last time? This was the first time for me,” I said.*

*From the Kyle within: “I achieved resonance six months ago, but it contained nothing but vacuum.”*

*“You’re already doing trial runs?”*

*“I was exploring the quantum properties of the field surface. This is unexpected...”*

*“I’ll open the rift again so our colleagues can see. I’ll reproduce it.”*

*“Not for some time. Check your metal integrity monitor. If yours is like mine, the shaft will be disintegrating. It took me months to rebuild the unit. Based on the rate of deterioration, we have 17 minutes left before the hole destabilizes.”*

*“And if I shut it down?”*

*“It won’t respond. This ride is one ticket per build.”*

*“But, for those 17 minutes, we can compile data and talk!” I said. “I have so many questions. We can examine what we record later. Do you live on Croton Hill like I do?”*

*“New Windsor, on Little Britain Road. You have to be super rich to live on Croton Hill. You have that kind of money?”*

*“SciLab stock offering,” I told him. “I made a killing from my shares.”*

*“I never opted in,” he told me. “I used the money I had saved to buy our home, when Max was born...”*

*“You’re married? You have a son?”*

*“Max is the best thing that ever happened to Danielle and me,” he beamed.*

*I was stunned, “Danielle? Danielle Shaw?”*

*“Yes,” he said. “We met in London when I went to the conference on alternative energy. I traveled back and forth for over a year to be with her.”*

*Then I told him, “The same events have happened to me, but we split up when she got an offer to work in Zurich. The travel was proving to be too much.”*

*“I didn’t let her leave,” he said. “I loved her too much. I convinced her to come to the States with me. It wasn’t long before we had Max. He just started walking and, already, he’s dismantling everything in our home.”*

*“He sounds like a great kid. I loved her, but I hesitated. I let her go.”*

*“Well, go find her! You missed out on a great thing.” He backed up to the table and sat down.*

*I did the same and stared at him for a moment, seeing for the first time how others saw me.*

*“So, what is it like to be rich?” he asked.*

*“It’s OK,” I told him. “I don’t have money problems to worry about. The house is great, but it feels empty. I don’t really know any of the neighbors on the hill, since the houses are so spread out. After I left London, I concentrated solely on my work. I gave it everything, and yet, you’re six months ahead with Stasis. How did you do it?”*

*“Danielle and Max keep me balanced. I’ve learned to separate my home life from work most of all and it makes me more productive while I’m here. She gets annoyed when I get up early to get here. I wired up the final circuit last night and was more than eager to perform the new set of tests.”*

*“Do you like living in New Windsor?” I asked.*

*“It’s not like your neighborhood, but it’s comfortable. We’re building memories.”*

*“You’re making me regret my choices.”*