

# SECOND SIGHT

## NIGHTMARE UNLEASHED

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Hunter Savure lay in bed, and fresh tears flowed from his eyes. He laced his fingers behind his head and gazed up at the solar system painted on the bedroom ceiling. Hunter mentally recited the planets in order, starting with the sun, and when his eyes landed on Earth, Hunter stopped counting and wiped the fresh tears from his eyes. Hunter appreciated Astronomy, but the source of his earthly troubles prevented him from enjoying life: his dreams.

Hunter sat up in bed and elevated his knees to his chest, hugging them with his arms. Hunter's body was soaked in sweat, and his short brown hair clung to his forehead. His light brown skin glistened in the low light of the lamp attached to the bed's headboard. Hunter's slender frame looked fragile, but he was very capable at the age of fifteen. Swinging his legs over the edge of the bed, he stood and walked over to the window. He touched the controller, and the tinted window became clear. The sun rising above the trees illuminated the shadows outside his window and reminded Hunter that nightmares happened only at night. Yet his reassurances were not so reassuring when the same nightmare always returned to haunt his dreams.

Hunter opened the window, and the cool autumn air invaded his room. The shock of the air made him shudder. He donned his blue robe to regain body heat and closed his eyes while taking deep breaths of the cool morning air. He mentally recited the solar system to calm his nerves. Satisfied with the positive change of his psyche, he searched out the next element of solace in his life: the Savannah River.

"Good morning, citizens of New Savannah," a voice from a glass desk resounded in the room. "The time is seven thirty. The current temperature is fifty-five degrees. Today's high will be sixty-five degrees and mostly cloudy. Winds will be ten miles an hour north-northeast. Citizens are advised to dress warm but layered, depending on outdoor activity. Visitors from out of state, Georgia welcomes your patronage. Now, the news."

Hunter read the scrolling headlines on his desk and rolled his eyes. He pressed the mute button on his computer screen and returned his attention to the river.

“It’s year 2022 and the city still suffers from economic problems and horrendous crimes. With the breakthrough in modern medicine, perhaps a cure can be developed for reoccurring nightmares,” Hunter whispered.

“Kids, breakfast,” his mom’s voice came through the intercom from his desk. Technology had advanced in nearly all areas of computing and made communication devices nearly invisible.

“Speaking of breakfast,” Hunter said while walking over to his fish tank. The 150-gallon tank containing three fish rested upon a silver metal cabinet. The veiltail goldfish was his favorite. He named this particular fish Comet because the orange and white colors glittered in the light as the fish moved around the tank, mesmerizing its beholder. The fish interacted often and Comet nose-butted his fellow companions, Pluto, a bubble eye goldfish, and Swoops, a lionhead goldfish. He grabbed the food from the cabinet and deposited the treats into the massive tank. Hunter watched as the food sank slowly toward the bottom. On cue, the three fish zipped toward the smell and devoured each flake before the morsels reached the bottom.

Satisfied that the fish ate well, Hunter looked at the photo hanging on the wall above the fish tank. The picture of him and his brother always brought a smile to his face, and today was no exception. For that day was his V-day, the day he defeated his older brother in a hundred-meter swim race. Hunter recalled how excited his brother was for him. Kyle declared a rematch while playfully holding Hunter in a headlock. The brothers laughed and struggled against each other and time stood still, for they both were elated. Hunter missed his brother dearly, and he recited a prayer to St. Michael to protect Kyle, wherever he may be.

Hunter went into his adjourning latrine and relieved himself. He jumped in the shower and emerged ten minutes later. While brushing his teeth, Hunter remembered that awful nightmare. He stared at himself in the mirror with toothpaste foam around his mouth. The tears swelled up in his brown eyes again. Hunter's nights were far from peaceful, and a decent night's rest eluded him.

"What is wrong with you?" he asked himself.

"Hunter! Breakfast! Now!" a familiar voice boomed from his desk. *The latest in home security, and there is no protection from angry mothers*, Hunter thought. He finished his latrine routine by spraying unscented antiperspirant deodorant under his arms and covering his chest, groin, and feet with moisture absorbent lavender powder.

Hunter exited his latrine and walked over to his dresser. He removed a pair of blue boxer shorts and white cotton socks. Next, he visited the closet and grabbed a white T-shirt and a white silk button-up short-sleeve shirt. Finally, he retrieved a pair of tan slacks and denim shoes and dressed himself.

Hunter gave himself a once-over in the mirror and walked back to the dresser. He removed his silver cross necklace from its resting place, a hook over the dresser, and placed it around his neck. He then grabbed two metal bracelets, both magnetic, and put one on each wrist.

Hunter turned and faced the desk. The elated feeling from feeding his fish and reminiscing about the swimming victory drained away. He walked over to the desk and opened the middle drawer. The PDM devices that he dreaded awaited him.

"Your Poly-Docrane Membrane devices are sanitized and operational. Please insert the communication and interactive devices with care to avoid injury. Have a nice day," proclaimed the desk.

Hunter removed the first of the devices from the glass drawer, a single clear contact lens. The lens was attuned to his DNA and responded only to him. He inserted the lens in his right eye. Next, he removed a small, clear earpiece and inserted it into his right ear. Finally, he removed two extremely thin, yet very rugged, membrane finger devices. These encompassed his index and fourth fingertips like an invisible glove. The desk responded to Hunter's PDM and prompted him to touch the computer desk for synchronizing.

The synchronization process took seconds. Hunter now had access to his contacts, communication applications, e-mails, and many other functions through a projected interactive application that allowed him to choose the appropriate image with either of his membrane fingers.

He selected a photo through the projected image and initiated a call.

"Hunter! Good morning," an energetic female voice resounded in his right ear.

"Good morning to you, Hope," Hunter replied.

"See you in twenty minutes?" she asked.

"Of course," Hunter replied and then ended the call.

He grabbed his book bag from the floor and walked out of his room. He closed the door and fixated on the word affixed to his door. "Sanctuary." He exhaled deeply and proceeded downstairs.

Hunter generated static electricity by rubbing his shoes on the carpet stairs. He enjoyed greeting his little sister with a static kiss on the cheek.

He rounded the staircase and focused his attention on his sister, who was sitting at the kitchen counter eating a bowl of cereal. Hunter walked stealthily behind her, and before he touched her, she knew he was there.

“Good morning, Hunter,” Olivia said.

He grinned but remained undeterred and proceeded to tickle her and plant the electric kiss on her cheek. Olivia laughed uncontrollably, and her little laugh echoed throughout the huge home.

The family pets ran to her aid. Queen, the golden retriever, seemed to question Hunter's intent but did not interfere. She only barked as Olivia laughed. Leo, the tabby cat, was another matter. He assessed the situation and jumped up onto the barstool into Olivia's lap. He inserted himself between brother and sister. Upon conclusion, the family cat handled the situation by positioning himself protectively around Olivia's neck.

Satisfied, Hunter relented and seated himself next to his sister.

“Glad you can join us for breakfast, honey,” said Hunter's mother.

“Sorry, Mom. It takes time to look my best,” Hunter said.

“I wonder where you got that from?” retorted his mom.

“Let me see...oh yeah, you!” Hunter said with a grin.

“All right, finish your breakfast. I do not want the two of you to be late for school,”

Hunter's mom said.

Hunter looked at the crisp bacon and the eggs, grabbed two slices of toast, and combined everything into a sandwich.

“Ow!” Hunter screamed.

He looked at Leo, who had just extended his right claw and grabbed Hunter by the shoulder. Olivia laughed at his reaction.

“Nicely done, Leo!” Olivia proclaimed with a little revenge in her tone, yet with that style of voice that spoke of sisterly love.

Hunter removed Leo's claws and looked at Queen.

"Are you going to let Leo get away with that, girl?" Hunter said.

Queen looked at Leo and barked. Leo jumped to the floor, and the two pets started to play.

Queen grabbed at Leo's tail, and Leo retaliated by landing a few paw punches to the nose.

The family watched for a few seconds in amazement at how the two interacted. Hunter realized a while ago that Leo and Queen were extremely intelligent. Leo gravitated to Olivia, and Queen to Hunter, but both loved the entire family equally.

"Where is Dad?" asked Hunter.

"He had to leave early for work," said his mom.

"Again?" Hunter asked.

"Your father and I work hard to support the family so the two of you can have the best," responded his mom.

The interactive plasma television was muted, but the scrolling entries of upcoming reports caught Hunter's eye.

"Mom, turn that up," Hunter declared.

His mother turned up the volume just as the next segment began.

"Authorities are reminding all citizens not to trespass on Tybee Island. Officials are asking visitors who are curious about the island not to trespass for their own safety. Tybee Island is still deemed a disaster area and remains off limits to all citizens. Although officers do not patrol the island, nor enforce the no trespassing rule in concern for their own safety, trespassers are advised to take the approach of the authorities and avoid the island altogether. Your local news continues after these messages."

Hunter had heard many rumors surrounding Tybee Island. Hurricane George destroyed the island and over half of Savannah back in 2016, when many lives were lost. Rebuilding efforts always ended in tragedy on the island. When the fatality rate of contractors involved in freak accidents surpassed one hundred, all construction was ceased, pending further investigation, which also ceased when investigators started behaving abnormally.

So many stories from many sources, mostly from other teenagers, but a few were from derelicts who wandered the streets in a craze. Hunter tapped his two fingers with the PDM membranes together to activate the interactive PDM contact lens. He did a quick search for satellite images of Tybee Island. The images showed several incomplete buildings and unfinished roads. The images also showed the locations of buildings that were destroyed, with nothing but parts of the building frames standing. Several images showed a fog that appeared to develop into a large area over time.

Hunter deactivated the PDM and reflected on the news report and the images.

*Why is Tybee Island off limits still?* he thought to himself.

Queen started to bark angrily and stared at the door leading to the basement. Leo was in defense mode, too, staring at the door.

“What has gotten into you two?” proclaimed his mother.

Hunter’s hair stood on end. He turned his attention to the basement door and froze. His nightmare was now a reality. In the doorway was a tall black figure with eerie red eyes. The hate emanating from the specter made Hunter feel ill and agitated. The temperature dropped, then both pets ran out of the room. The figure moved toward Hunter’s mom.

“Kids, it’s time for you to go, or you will be late,” his mother said.

“But, Mom,” protested Hunter.

“But, Mom’ nothing. Go. Now!” she demanded.

Hunter spotted Olivia out of his peripheral vision. She jumped from her stool and proceeded toward the mudroom to gather her coat and books. He was mostly focused on the entity. The specter pointed to his mom and moved toward her. Suddenly, it paused and looked directly at Hunter.

A shiver went down Hunter’s back, and he became paralyzed with fear. The sight of the specter unnerved him, and just like in his nightmares, he was powerless to defend the one’s he loved and himself.

The specter grew in size and Hunter felt threatened. He regained his courage and backed slowly away. Hunter did not take his eyes off the specter, and he bumped into something behind him. Hunter turned to see that it was the shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary. He and his dad used it every day to pray. His hand grasped the ceramic cross, and with it, he confronted the specter. The specter stopped growing and moved back toward the basement door. Relieved, Hunter took a deep breath and sighed. He turned to gather his things. Three loud knocks were heard and felt from the basement.

“What was that?” he asked.

“Probably just some old pipes, honey,” said his mom.

Hunter did not believe that was the case, and he perspired at the thought of his living nightmare affecting his waking hours. He had just seen an entity, and more importantly, the entity had witnessed him seeing it. Hunter donned his knee-length white jacket and book bag and left their home with his sister in tow.

“Slow down,” cried Olivia. “You will pull my arm off if you don’t.”

“Sorry,” said Hunter apologetically.

Olivia could clearly see that her brother was upset. She wondered what had transpired from that electric kiss on the cheek to the sweaty-palmed, wide-eyed, hand-crushing sibling now escorting her to school. She remained silent as they walked along a sidewalk made of small pebbles. She loved the sound they made beneath her feet, and the cool air quieted her concerns about her brother even more.

The walk was a pleasant one this time of day. The few cars that either shuttled kids off to school or held parents heading to work respected the posted speed limit of thirty-five. Few families ever feared the prospect of a loved one becoming a statistic in a hit-and-run in this area. Large, ancient oak trees shadowed the highway and sidewalk, and the sun's rays struggled to penetrate the canopy of leaves.

The homes were the result of a successful working middle class. Most constructions consisted of brick, though some were reinforced wood homes. The yards were maintained well, and the trash receptacles were stored next to each home garage. Such was the way of New Savannah and its strict eyesore prevention laws.

“Ow,” cried Olivia.

“What’s wrong?” asked her brother.

“My hand. You are hurting my hand,” she said.

Hunter paused and looked at his sister. He held her injured hand to his lips and lightly kissed it. He looked at her bracelet, a PDM version for kids under fourteen.

“I’m sorry, Olivia. I’m just distracted,” he said.

He looked up the road, and a few houses down his friend Hope stood awaiting them.

“Come, I see Hope, and Hope has seen us,” Hunter said.

A few moments later, the brother and sister greeted their friend.

“Good morning, guys,” Hope said in her usual cheerful voice, her straight black hair blowing in the morning breeze.

“Hi, Hope,” Olivia said.

“Good morning, Hope,” Hunter said dismally.

Hope could detect the concern in his voice.

“Is everything all right?” she asked.

“I will tell you later,” Hunter said.

Hope grabbed Olivia’s other hand, and the three moved forward once again. Hunter listened as his sister and best friend talked.

“I like your hair,” Olivia said to Hope.

“Thank you, Olivia, and I love yours. I remember the days when I used to wear that checkered skirt and white silk blouse, and girl, you definitely make school uniforms look good,” Hope said.

“It must be great to wear what you want and not resemble every other girl,” Olivia said.

“It is, but with choice comes a wide range of problems accessorizing, especially for girls,” Hope remarked.

“Well, not unless you are Hunter,” Olivia said, and both girls laughed.

Hunter was in his own space. As he walked, he saw other dark entities hovering around other kids and adults. He watched as the entities took interest in him. The specters guarded their intended prey in a shroud to prevent unwanted interruption of their connection to the victim. Every so often, Hunter witnessed an entity lean in close to its victim and whisper something into that person’s ear. He was not certain, but he could sense a change in that person’s demeanor, and the change was not good.

"H<sub>2</sub>O, together again," a voice from behind the three said.

They each turned and were greeted by a redheaded boy smiling ear to ear.

"Shayne, don't sneak up on us like that," roared Hope.

"It's not my fault that, among the three of you, none is aware of who is behind you. I'm surprised you even heard me speak, with the talk of girly stuff and Hunter's shocked expression," Shayne said.

"Oh, hey, Shayne," Hunter managed to say.

Shayne turned to Hope with a questioning look, but she did not know what to say.

"What's wrong with you?" Shayne blurted out.

"I'll tell you later," Hunter responded.

The friends reached Olivia's school, and Hunter knelt and gave his sister a big hug. Each wished her well and watched as she walked up the sidewalk and entered the building. The schools were in walking distance of their home and only a bridge and two blocks from each other.

Hunter dreaded crossing the bridge. Today's crossing felt even more foreboding. He watched as others crossed without a concern or any care, but he saw the change. Gone were the days where he pointed at small boats crossing underneath with either obscene or weird names or logos on their sterns. Forgotten were those cheerful times where he and his friends would race across to see who was faster that day. Even the scent of fish was lost to him as he looked into those clear blue waters. Today, a new scene revealed itself, and Hunter felt as if his life would never be as it was.

He scrutinized other teenagers crossing the bridge, and today some had a new companion, one unseen to others but all too visible to him. Hunter noted how the specters often whispered

into the ear of some of his fellow students. Hunter witnessed how close they seemed to be to those individuals. He detected the loneliness and despair of those students who walked with the specters. He thought it odd that with some of the students and the specters appeared to be one.

“Good grief, man, you are sweating,” Shayne said. “Unbelievable, it’s fifty-something degrees, and you are actually sweating.”

Hope stepped in front of Hunter and looked at him more closely. She placed the back of her hand to his forehead to see if he had a fever. Satisfied that he was OK, she pulled away and wiped the sweat from the back of her hand on his jacket.

“Gross,” she said. “What is wrong with you?”

“My nightmare is unfolding before my very eyes. Can’t you guys see what is happening?” Hunter said, pointing to the other students infected by the specters.

Shayne and Hope looked to where he pointed and observed only students walking toward their school.

“Yep, there they are, the other students, walking to school just like we are doing,” Shayne said.

“Look!” exclaimed Hunter. “Don’t you see? They are infected with specters,” Hunter added.

“Sure they are, and we are wind walkers,” Shayne said jokingly.

“Come on. We’d better hurry, or we will be late,” Hope said.

Hunter, Hope, and Shayne proceeded toward their school. Hunter realized that he was getting colder the closer he got. His heart raced in the thralls of a full anxiety attack. He looked at his school and realized that it did not appear as bright as its surroundings on this cool but

sunny day. Hunter finally grasped that his school had a dark aura, and the closer he got to it, the sicker he felt.

His instincts screamed at him to run. The reality of running from a mandatory obligation meant that he would be located through his PDM device and apprehended by overaggressive truancy officers. Hunter struggled to calm his nerves and felt comforted that his friends were with him.

Hunter approached his two-story school, which was made of white marble and constructed in the shape of a hexagon. The first level was for freshmen and sophomores, and the second level was for juniors and seniors. In the middle of the structure was the gym.

“Ah!” screamed Hunter as he grabbed his head in both hands.

“Hunter, what is it?” inquired Hope.

“My head. It feels as if it will split,” revealed Hunter.

“Let’s get him to the school nurse,” Shayne said.

With his friends on either side of him, Hunter crossed the threshold of his school, and without any warning, he collapsed to the floor.

Images raced through his unconscious mind. He recalled many of the memories that now presented themselves as those of elation. The images slowed, and now he was seeing his nightmare. The specters hovered over many of the teenagers at his school. He saw these entities enter and leave students at will. Hunter felt the dread and anger from those affected rush over him. He felt his body spasm from the negative emotion. His mind raced and settled on his brother. He saw his brother look up, and he thought he noticed his brother mouth his name, “Hunter.” A flash erupted in his mind, and he was now seeing the infamous Tybee Island. He saw the thick fog creep through the desolate buildings as the wind blew in from the ocean. It was

real, and he moved slowly through the island, drawn to a specific area. He moved closer and encountered more specters.

They watched him as he passed each of them and drew closer to an eerie green glow. He stopped at a destroyed archway, and the green source was now before him. Hunter watched as the biggest specter emerged from the archway and hovered before him. He felt sickened, and dark thoughts started to form in his mind. He froze as the monstrosity reached for him. His body spasmed and he heard his brother scream his name and then add, "Don't let that prevaricator touch you." He opened his eyes and was greeted again by a bright, eye-piercing light.

Hunter tried to move, but to no avail. He was able to raise his head and found that his hands, feet, and torso were bound by leather straps. He surveyed the room, and to him it resembled a hospital. The smell of strong antiseptic cleaner confirmed his suspicion. He spotted a woman near a PDM desk, moving her hand through the air. He thought it odd that this woman was doing that.

"Who are you?" Hunter asked, startling the woman.

She turned to face her patient. "I am Nurse Foster," she said.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You are at the New Vannah High School nursing ward," she responded.

"Would you mind unstrapping me, please?" Hunter asked.

"Of course. Your spasm gave us quite a scare, so we had to restrain you in order to prevent further harm," Nurse Foster said.

"We?" he inquired.

"Yes, your friends and I," she said.

"Where are they?" he asked.

“In class—and quite concerned for your well-being,” she said.

Freed from his bonds, Hunter swung his legs around and attempted to stand. The room spun and he nearly passed out again.

“Slowly, or you’ll end up on the floor again,” Nurse Foster warned.

Hunter appreciated the support from the young woman. He had heard rumors from other teenage boys, who would often intentionally feign an illness just to be close to her. He now understood the lengths the others took. She had the classic perfect body that would fit perfectly on any beach. Her brown hair and green eyes showed how sexual she could be if not for that white nurse’s outfit. The glasses she wore did not hide any of her beauty.

In spite of all her qualities, what Hunter appreciated the most about her was the crucifix she wore around her neck.

Nurse Foster saw that Hunter’s eyes had come to rest on her cross and not on her chest.

“I’m Catholic,” she offered in a quiet voice.

She left him standing on his own accord and walked over to a bookcase on the other side of the room. Hunter noticed that the area appeared to be an office of sorts and was large enough only for a small desk and a bookshelf that hung above a fern. If the room had a door, Nurse Foster would have some privacy from the main patient area. He moved closer to check the small area. In between the books were a pair of ceramic praying hands and a small image of the Virgin Mary, which was also made of ceramic.

“My family is Catholic. Well, at least my dad, sister, and I are Catholics. My mom is agnostic,” he said nervously while running his hand through his hair.

“I personally find the structure of Catholicism invigorating. Having faith in the almighty God and the will to act out on faith gives me strength in my daily affairs,” replied Nurse Foster.

Hunter appreciated the wisdom of the nurse, and he now had much respect for her as a person and for the beliefs she cherished so strongly. Even though the lighting within the patient area was bright, Hunter was amazed at how a new light shined ever so brighter.

“I would very much like to know your thoughts about dreams and nightmares,” Hunter said.

“That is a request that has never been asked of me,” she said. “Are your dreams preventing you from resting peacefully?”

“Occasionally they do,” Hunter said.

“Well, dreams allow the mind to freely process events without interruption from the conscious mind. However, at times, through a very relaxed state, the mind will slip into the future and reveal an event that will occur later in life. Such knowledge is rare, and depending on the revelation, the individual may not handle the insight very well. Nightmares are heightened dreams, often dark in nature. To some, a nightmare is a reflection of one’s soul, and to others a warning. But don’t worry, even in a nightmare there is refuge. Look for your true self, and through faith you will be victorious,” she said.

“What are prevaricators?” Hunter asked.

Nurse Foster’s countenance became very serious, and she regarded her patient suspiciously. Hunter needed answers, but when he noticed the color drain from the nurse’s cheeks, he suddenly felt sick again.

“Prevaricators! How did you hear of this?” she demanded.

“That’s what my brother called it—prevaricators,” Hunter replied.

“Prevaricators are demons that will have you doing mean and perverted things. They whisper in the ears of susceptible people and possess the most vulnerable. They are never

satisfied and find corrupting or destroying the righteous their primary mandate,” Nurse Foster replied.

“What if your true self is dark, and you have nightmares?” Hunter asked.

“Then rest assured that such a person is behaving badly, and the innocent ones in that nightmare are suffering at the hands of the one dreaming,” she responded.

“Thank you,” Hunter said.

“My pleasure, Hunter.”

Hunter realized that his PDM devices had been removed. Not having them during school time seemed unnatural to him.

“Nurse Foster, where are my PDM devices?” he asked.

“I am running a diagnostic on them. As soon as the diagnostic is complete and they have been recalibrated, I will return them to you. You will have them before school’s out,” she said.

Nurse Foster saw the concerned look on his face.

“Do not worry. I informed all your teachers, parents, and the central database about your illness today. I need to rule out all possible causes of your blackout before we can determine what caused you to pass out. In the meantime, you are cleared to return to your class,” she said.

“What period is it currently?” he asked.

“Fourth,” she replied.

“Oh man, calculus. That class alone is enough to cause another blackout,” Hunter joked.

“You will be fine, with or without your PDM device.”

“Thanks, nurse,” he said.

“You are welcome,” she replied.

Hunter gathered up his jacket and backpack and walked out of the nurse's office. As soon as he passed the threshold, he felt heavy. The hall, although well lit, seemed dark to him. He was uneasy and very anxious. Hunter made his way toward the stairs leading to the second floor. The pictures on the wall highlighted previous New Vannah student accomplishments in activities like basketball, football, and chess.

"Mr. Savure," a voice called from an office he had just passed.

The tone used to call his name sent shivers up his spine. He paused and stepped back to face one of the school's four assistant principals. Hunter's heart race as he faced Mr. Smalls.

"How are you feeling, young man?" Mr. Smalls said with a smile.

"Fine," Hunter managed through tense vocal cords.

"Good, Mr. Savure. Ensuring the safety and health of our students parallels the quality education this fine establishment provides," Mr. Smalls said.

Hunter nodded his head in agreement with the assistant principal. The temperature dropped inside the office. Hunter witnessed a black mist appear to the left side of Mr. Smalls and proceed to take the shape of a prevaricator. Hunter struggled to keep calm as he witnessed the prevaricator lean in and whisper in Mr. Smalls's ear. Hunter saw a slight smirk appear on the man's face.

"How is your mother?" Mr. Smalls asked.

"She's fine," Hunter managed, feeling a little panic.

"Are you sure she's fine, Hunter?" Mr. Smalls said.

Hunter realized now how disconnected he truly was without his PDM device. If he had it, he could locate his mother at once and call her. He was now blind and felt unsure of his responses.

Hunter detected the subtle warning behind Mr. Smalls's creepy smile. He realized that his mother was vulnerable and that presently there was nothing he could do for her. Hunter calmed his nerves to stay focused on his current predicament.

"My mother's fine," he repeated.

"Of course she is," the assistant principal stated.

"Will there be anything else, sir?" Hunter said.

Hunter risked a quick glimpse at the prevaricator, which responded by moving a little closer to Hunter.

"That will be all, Hunter," Mr. Smalls said.

Hunter seized the opportunity and retreated from the room. He already felt ill, but being in close proximity to the prevaricator plummeted him into a new level of queasiness. He made his way to the elevator, pushed the up button, and waited.

*Ding!* The doors opened, and Hunter stepped inside and pushed the button for the second floor. Seconds later, Hunter stepped out of the elevator and made his way to his class. Static electricity built up inside him as he walked over the grayish carpet. The beige-colored paint encompassed all the walls, and some designer thought that a gray horizontal stripe on the beige wall would break up the monotony. That designer was wrong.

None of the classrooms on the upper level had any physical doors at the classroom entrances. As he walked, Hunter became aware of the extent of the prevaricator infestation. Inside every class he passed, he saw at least ten prevaricators standing near the students. When he reached his class, he saw that his was no exception.

Hope, upon seeing him, jumped from her seat and embraced him. Hunter could see the concern in her face as he embraced her in return.

“I am better,” he whispered to her.

“All right, you two, break it up,” resounded a husky voice.

“Yes, Mr. Peterson,” both said in unison.

“Glad to have you back, Hunter. If you need anything or you feel ill, please let me know at once,” offered Mr. Peterson.

“Thank you, sir,” Hunter said.

Hunter counted the students in his class with entities attached to them.

“Twelve,” he whispered to himself.

He considered those students, and except for three, all were model students as far as he believed. The other three were menaces to New Vannah High. He looked at Greg, the brown-haired, nicely tanned menace who had acquired the nickname “Shakedown.”

He and his cohorts, Robert and Paul, who were also in the same class with prevaricators attached to them, bullied students for their valuables, leaving smaller, more vulnerable kids traumatized.

The classroom lacked the friendly atmosphere of the past; the presence of the prevaricators removed all joy from the room. Hunter buttoned his jacket to preserve what little warmth he had left. Devoid of his PDM device, he settled in to listen to Mr. Peterson’s lessons without being able to follow along in the electronic textbook that was only accessible via a PDM device. Hunter looked around the room and considered it odd how everyone had a lost-in-space look—head straight, eyes forward, and with occasional elevated hand movements toward the invisible object in front of them.

“Weird,” Hunter whispered.

Deep down, he realized that he too would be behaving in unison with his classmates if he had his PDM.

Mr. Smalls entered the class and spoke softly to Mr. Peterson.

“Of course, sir,” Hunter thought he heard Mr. Peterson say.

Hunter shifted his gaze to Mr. Smalls’s prevaricator, which was staring at him. It raised an arm and pointed at him. Its red eyes glowed brighter, and the other prevaricators in the room turned their attention toward him. Mission completed, Mr. Smalls departed and merged with his prevaricator.

Mr. Smalls neared the entrance and turned to face the class.

“Keeping hydrated during the cooler months is just as crucial as staying hydrated during the summer months. Water is vital for our survival. Scientists often refer to water as H<sub>2</sub>O, and some agree that the O, or oxygen, component holds the two H, or hydrogen, components together. For without the O...well, I’ll leave the rest to your science professors,” Mr. Smalls said, staring at Hunter, and then departed.

Hunter thought the words inconsequential, the ramblings of a man under the control of a prevaricator and not to be trusted. Hunter felt a warning behind the message, though the meaning eluded him for now.

*Ding!* The bell sounded, ending one class and preparing the kids for a new one.

“What was that about?” Hope asked Hunter as they gathered their belongings.

“I don’t know. It was weird and came from nowhere,” Hunter replied.

“All right, after school then,” she said on her way to her next class, which was separate from his.

“Sure, meet you at the bridge,” Hunter replied.

“Cool, later,” Hope responded.

Hunter walked to his next class. The halls were more crowded now that the prevaricators walked next to his fellow students. The beige wall gave him comfort as he moved, scraping his right shoulder against it. He entered his next class and lingered at the door.

One, two, three, four, five, he counted. Nine now stood next to the students, and the class was not yet completely filled. His hair stood up on the back of his neck, and goose bumps ran over his skin.

“Well, if it’s not H<sub>2</sub>O. You seem incomplete with your missing compounds H and O. I wonder how Olivia is faring under these strange times,” said Shayne, who now stood behind Hunter.

Hunter recognized the voice, and yet he did not. He turned to face his friend and was greeted with that familiar darkness that haunted the other students. He glanced to Shayne’s left and saw that his friend now walked with a prevaricator.

Speechless, Hunter stared at them both. A sinister smile crossed Shayne’s lips, and a realization flooded Hunter like a rushing tide through a narrow crevice: Mr. Smalls’s words were now clear to him. Olivia was in danger. He dropped his backpack and ran out of the room, down the hall, and to the stairs. He took the steps four at a time as panic swelled deep within him.

“Olivia!” he screamed.

He exited the school at a full sprint, screaming his sister’s name as he ran.

Hunter received no relief from the cool air washing over him. He felt hot on this autumn day. He wondered briefly if those who passed him by in their vehicles had ever experienced a situation like his. They looked so happy. He reached the bridge, and Olivia’s school came within view. The clear water flowed in the noonday sun, whose rays reflected off the water. With the

bridge behind Hunter, the school now lay just ahead. He burst through the doors, and as soon as he passed the PDM scanner, the alarm sounded.

Hunter stopped at the entrance. He had no clue where to go from there. His PDM device would have showed him the way as a relative, but without it, he was lost, an intruder.

“Olivia!” he yelled over and over.

A pair of teachers moved toward him at a pace faster than what Hunter thought their age allowed. Each grabbed an arm.

“Olivia!” Hunter blasted in their ears.

“Calm yourself, young man,” the male said.

“My sister, where is my sister? Olivia!” Hunter yelled. “She’s in danger. I’ve got to find her.”

“All right, young man, calm down,” said his other captor.

“What’s your name, son?” the male asked.

“Hunter. Hunter Savure,” Hunter replied.

The duo escorted him to the cafeteria and motioned for him to be seated at one of the tables. Hunter’s size prevented him from being comfortable in the child-size seat. He was cool with that, though, because he was about to be reunited with his sister.

Hunter watched the female make a few hand movements, and he knew she was accessing records.

She stepped away from the two and started a remote conversation with another person.

“Yes, this is Principal Edwards from Antebell Elementary. To whom am I speaking?” she said. “Nurse Foster, I have Hunter Savure here, and he wants to see his sister. I understand he

had been under your care earlier today, and you now have his PDM device undergoing diagnostics,” she added.

“Will do, and thanks for your assistance,” Hunter heard her say. “All right, Hunter, I will let you see your sister. Afterward, truancy officers will escort you back to school,” she informed him.

“Thank you,” Hunter said.

Hunter waited a few minutes, but to him it took forever. He did not feel sick in this school, nor did he see any prevaricators. Although he had only seen two people, a certain relief came over him. Hunter hoped his mother was doing well. He understood that without his PDM device, getting inside his home would be virtually impossible. Breaking in would earn him a trip to detainment.

“Hunter!” Olivia screamed.

“Olivia,” Hunter said, rushing to embrace his sister.

“I’m glad you are all right. I was worried,” Hunter said.

“I am fine. What are you doing here?” Olivia asked.

“I was sick earlier and felt this overwhelming need to see you,” Hunter responded.

“Are you better?” she asked.

“I am now. And with you safe, I will be even better,” Hunter offered.

“All right, Hunter, as you can see, she is safe and must return to class. Please say your farewells so you can return to your school,” Principal Edwards said.

Hunter embraced his sister a final time and watched as she walked back to her class. He seated himself and waited for the truancy officers.

Hunter felt it before he saw it. Two truancy officers entered the cafeteria, and one had the most menacing prevaricator he had seen all day. Abruptly, the prevaricator merged with the truancy officer. Hunter stared at the affected man and considered his options.

“Hunter, I am Pete, and that’s my partner, Sam. We are here to take you back to school,” Pete said.

“Are you feeling better?” Sam asked.

“I am,” Hunter replied.

“Excellent, let’s go, then. I know you are without your PDM device, so we will get you back safely,” Pete said.

“Thank you,” Hunter replied.

The trio departed the school and headed for a black SUV. Hunter saw that the windows were tinted to a point where looking inside was impossible. Pete headed for the driver’s side and entered.

“You’re driving?” Sam said.

“I am,” Pete replied.

“Nice. I always wondered what being a passenger is like,” Sam replied.

Sam opened the rear passenger door for Hunter. Without his PDM device, Hunter was unable to open the door himself, and he now understood how reliant civilization had become on technology. Hunter climbed in, and the seat belt secured him automatically.

Pete activated the vehicle with his PDM device and departed the school premises. He drove north on Channel Street until he reached Port Avenue. He made a right turn and proceeded east at increasing speeds.

“Pete, you should have continued straight back there,” Sam protested.

Pete gave Sam a look that would have killed him if looks killed.

“What are you doing? We need to take Hunter back to his school,” Sam reminded Pete.

Pete said nothing and kept driving.

Hunter watched his nightmare unfold. He had dreamed only last night about being tied down in the backseat of a car. He watched as a shadowed figure looked at him while driving a black car. Hunter started to sweat. Hunter attempted to remove the seat belt, but as long as the vehicle was in motion, it would not relent. He tried to roll down his window, but that too failed. The safety features on all modern vehicles prevented any door from opening while the car was being driven. Hunter realized that he was trapped.

He watched Pete drive with increasing speed. Homes, trees, and light posts were a blur as they sped past them.

“Pete, slow down,” Sam protested.

And without warning, Hunter saw a flash of silver, and then Pete stabbed Sam in the heart. Hunter panicked. He heard gurgling sounds from Sam, then silence.

Hunter was now alone with Pete, heading toward a place only known by his captor.

“What do you want?” Hunter screamed. “Let me out!”

Hunter tried to reach Pete, but his restraints prevented him from doing so. He looked around in the back for anything to use to his advantage, but nothing of use could be found.

Hunter sat back, and tears swelled in his eyes. He thought about his sister, brother, and parents. He wondered how long Hope would wait at the bridge before heading home. He wondered how long his sister would wait before she too went home. Perhaps she would walk with Hope.

They drove for another thirty minutes, and Hunter realized where they are going.

“Why are you taking me to Tybee Island?” Hunter asked.

Pete looked at Hunter, and an evil grin came over his face. Hunter understood now that it wasn't Pete who smiled, but the prevaricator. They were both victims in an infamous plan.

“Almost there, and soon you too will be under our control,” Pete said. “You are strong for your age, and since you can see us, well, certain steps had to be taken,” he added.

It was now Hunter's time to remain quiet as he listened to the prevaricator speak through Pete.

“Your mother, ours. Shayne, ours. Soon, you too will be ours, as will the rest of your family,” Pete said with increasing menace. “You will be our most prized capture. Your brother eluded us, but you will not. You, like your brother, can see and sense our presence. Your brother can hear us. I guess you can say we drove him away.” Pete laughed. “If you could hear us, you too would have fled.”

Nausea swelled within Hunter. He now understood why his brother had left the way he did, and Hunter missed him all the more.

“We have arrived,” Pete said.

Hunter looked out his window and observed that the road leading to Tybee Island was incomplete. Attempts were made to repair buildings and other areas, but the accidents prevented any construction from being completed. Hunter realized now that the prevaricators were behind the accidents. The dense fog obscured his vision. He could not see anything around him, and the temperature plummeted.

Pete drove unaffected by the fog and without even using the car's headlights. Turning right, he proceeded for another two miles before stopping. Pete placed the vehicle in park, and the seat belt released Hunter.

“Get out,” Pete demanded.

Pete opened the door, and Hunter stepped out into a new horror. He looked around and saw only fog. He heard the ocean waves hit the shore, and he smelled the sea. He heard several seagulls in the distance, but other than that, there were no sounds.

He extended his arms before him and slowly moved a few paces. The moisture from the fog made his skin and hair wet. He moved a few more paces and encountered his first prevaricator. Hunter jumped back. Although the fog was thick, the black figures stood out in the gray fog. He saw another one standing opposite the first one. The fog thinned out around the two prevaricators. Hunter could now see other black forms materialize. He noticed that the two closest to him were pointing in the direction they wanted him to go.

He hesitated a moment, then slowly moved in between the two prevaricators and walked in the direction they pointed. The others pointed the same way, and Hunter walked. The sick feeling made him dizzy, but he continued on the path. Other prevaricators appeared to point the direction he must follow.

A dull green light appeared in the distance, and Hunter moved toward it. More and more prevaricators surrounded him now, all pointing toward the green light.

Hunter was living his nightmare and no one could help him. He held his head up and pushed forward. Deep down, he realized that he would have to help himself.

He stood before the green light. He realized that it was an entranceway to a destroyed stone building. The closer prevaricators pointed toward the light. Hunter's instincts screamed at him to resist.

A dark shape materialized inside the doorway. The presence of evil was so overwhelming that Hunter fell to the ground. He threw up what little contents he had in his stomach, and through watery eyes, he could see the full form of the monstrosity.

The entity stood ten feet tall, and its claws were sharp. Aside from its ruby red eyes, the creature was black, like a cloak flitting in the wind.

Unlike the other prevaricators, Hunter heard this one speak.

“You are mine!” it said, slowly reaching for Hunter with one of its long arms.

Hunter was paralyzed. He could not blink or reposition his head. He could only watch as the arm slowly reached closer and closer to his head.

“Hunter!” a voice pierced the fog.

Hunter could only see the hand.

“Hunter!” the voice rang out again, and yet the hand moved closer.

Hunter felt the tears flow down his cheek. If he could have closed his eyes, they would be shut so tight that not even a single tear could penetrate his eyelids.

“Hunter!” the voice said again.

Hunter saw a light move toward him at great speed in his peripheral vision. The hand was now on him. He felt extreme pain as it clawed at his flesh. The light was now at his side. He witnessed a silver flash before him and heard the prevaricator roar as it withdrew its hand from Hunter's head.

“Leave my brother alone!” Hunter thought he heard the voice say before he collapsed.

The end. Or is it?