Chapter One

“It’s not the fall that kills you; it’s the sudden change in direction.” Hutz the Putz

One year earlier

Abe the Bartender opened early, anticipating some kind of New Year’s Eve crowd. The Divide Disco and Café had become quite a hit in Duluth, in spite of all the worldly goings-on. In spite of the dark comet, a one hundred mile wide near Earth object on a collision course with planet Earth in a couple of weeks.

“Hey Pam. You’re early! I told you Scott and I would open.”

“Couldn’t sleep. I keep having the weirdest dreams.”

“What kind of weird?” Abe asked. He hadn’t expected the owner. Two days ago, Pam was planning on taking a little vacation with her husband. She needed a break. The year had been stressful.

“ Weird, like nightmares, about floods and devastation, and . . . all these bodies. Very disturbing, so I decided to forget Hilton Head and stay home.”

Pam glanced out the front doors of the club; and a crowd was already gathering on Duluth, Georgia’s Towne Green, kids playing in the fountain with temperatures in the eighties. The New Year’s Eve celebration was a huge event for Duluth, as thousands gathered to watch the famous glass Disco Ball rise, instead of fall, at midnight.

“What kind of crowd do you think?”

“Who knows? There were hardly any people on Grand Cayman last week. I’m glad I went, I love that place; but it was kinda eerie with no
tourists. Melissa told me that Jeff may close his dive shop and just maintain the one in Jamaica.”

“How did it go with Jeff and Melissa?”

“Oooh La La,” Abe said, holding his heart.

“Really? Do you think they’ll get back together? Jeff would be in heaven.” Pam was happy as punch.

“Jeff doesn’t believe in heaven.” Abe said matter-of-factly. “But I will say this. The day before I left, they were snuggled up like a bug in a rug. Don’t think they could get much closer without being sexual.” He winked and grinned.

Pam grabbed the remote from the bamboo bar counter, turned to the new eighty inch big screen, and clicked the on button. Her heart was pitter-pattering, maybe in disbelief, maybe in joy for Jeff. He really never got over the divorce, she knew that, no matter how many women Duluth’s most eligible bachelor went out with. His heart was still with Melissa, and everyone knew . . . except the ladies he went out with. He never talked about his ex when on a date. That he learned the hard way, and Pam chuckled quietly at that story.

“How long are Jeff and Melissa staying on Cayman? Are Gray and Andi still there?”

The TV was on, but there was no sound.

“They’ll probably stay until the comet hits, at least that’s the plan. Jeff told me they would rather bite-the-dust on Grand Cayman than in Atlanta, Georgia.”

“Do you think it will hit, Abe?” Pam’s smile faded, and she realized that the coming doom may be the reason for the nightmares.

“That’s what all the great minds say. People are partying all over the world, Hong Kong, Bangkok, London, Paris.”

“And Duluth.” They laughed, as Scott Johnson, the head bartender and other things, emerged from the office.

“That kind of blows the whole Mayan thing don’t you think? Their calendar doesn’t end until December 21.” Scott had researched the Maya 2012 so-called predictions.

The TV remained silent, and a News Alert icon was the only thing showing across the screen. Scott walked around the club, turning on the other fifteen televisions, each tuned to a different news channel. That was the theme of The Divide, not a sports bar but a news bar. His mind wandered, thinking about his new sweetie, Kara Mulherin. Who would’ve ever thought that he would fall in love with a missionary?
“All the channels have Breaking News alerts.” Scott called from across the restaurant.
“Try Al Jazeera.”
“Same thing,” Scott replied, walking back to the bar and handing Pam the control.
Pam, Abe the Bartender, Scott and the first customer to come through the door this day, stared at the sixteen flat screens. Suddenly, the sound came on sequentially, different TVs losing their Breaking News icons at different times. The beautiful Condi Zimmerman appeared on the screen, a foxy lady who had once been with Fox News before going independent. Condi always smiled, a cheerful and positive, my glass-is-half-full type of lady. Today she looked grim.
“Folks, this is not good news.”
Condi thought that almost laughable. There had been nothing but bad news for the past two years it seemed.
“Montserrat, once the jewel of the Caribbean, had been a British island, high-dollar resorts, romantic beaches, until . . .”
The commentator was breathless.
“Soufrière Hills has erupted again!
“The island of Montserrat in the Caribbean has exploded, according to Reuters. The Soufriere Hills volcano has been erupting on-and-off for several years you may recall, completely burying the capital in deep ash. The island population has relocated to the far side of Montserrat over the years.
“About one hour ago, the volcano exploded and fell into the sea. Eye witnesses report that there were only a few minor tremors before the mountain ‘leaped into the sky’ and crashed into the ocean. A large tourist ship trying to bring tourism back to the island disappeared as the mountain landed directly on top of the ship. Tsunami warnings have been issued for all of the Caribbean, Bahamas, Cancun and the Mexican Riviera and the east coast of the United States. As we get more information, we will surely pass it on.
“Now to Ronn Aronson, our European correspondent. Ronn, it looks like Europe is realigning once again, since Greece’s default and bankruptcy. What do you hear?”
“That’s right Condi. Greece was already in dire straits last year, when the government suddenly decriminalized pedophilia and exhibitionism. These acts were reclassified as ‘disabilities’ which meant the state picked up tremendous additional health care costs . . .”
Abe the Bartender, Pam and Scott, mouths agape, said nothing initially and tried to absorb the news they just heard. A tsunami in the Caribbean?

Grand Cayman was in the Caribbean, and so were their close friends. In a flash, they started dialing or texting. The first customer of the day walked out the front door and disappeared into the still-growing crowd on the Green and glanced at the western sky. It was still too bright to see the Earth-bound comet; but he was sure he’d seen it the night before, a brief glimpse of bright light in the dark, North sky.

Melissa Ross fell over the top of Cayman Grand Hotel, washed over the side actually, toward the dark asphalt parking lot forty feet below. The fall seemed surreal. She wasn’t sure how long the descent would take and was awed at all the thoughts that crossed her mind in the few seconds before she would lose consciousness.

*Where had that wave come from?* That was one thought. It had been so sudden . . . and *where was Jeff . . .* The wave had been almost silent, an eerie beauty along the distant horizon. She was sure, had the electricity on Grand Cayman Island not been out, Jeff the news-junkie would have known; and she recalled the news reports from yesterday, something about the Soufrière Hills Volcano erupting. Could that have caused *this*?

Falling, she again thought of Jeffrey and feared their reunion would be short-lived. They were holding hands when they ran to the edge of the roof and looked out to sea. What had earlier appeared as a gray ribbon stretched across the horizon, the dark wave had grown immensely and was approaching the shore so fast. She had never seen a tsunami, except in news reports, and was briefly amused at the beauty. *So beautifully terrifying.* She had not expected that the giant wave would actually wash over the roof of one of Cayman’s taller hotels; but she knew that forty feet wasn’t all that high off the soon-to-be-flooded ground below.

Falling face down, Melissa tried to rotate her body in the air; but the BC hindered her coordination. She was glad to have the Buoyancy Compensator strapped on, one of the last things she and Jeff had done before running to the edge to watch doom approach. Should the fall not kill her, at least she would stay afloat. Maybe that would keep her alive until the comet hit, and she wished she hadn’t recalled *that.*
Miraculously, her acrobatics worked; and the sunlight hit her squarely in the eyes as she completed her rotation. She noted the coconuts as she passed through the thick fronds of the palm tree. At least when they found her body, her face wouldn’t be all smashed up; and she laughed at her vanity just before crashing onto the hood of the black Mercedes limousine parked below. Her last thoughts before darkness set in was how hot the hood of the car was, and where was Jeffrey?

Jeff watched Melissa wash over the edge of the hotel roof. He felt the wave would breach the rooftop and squeezed Melissa’s hand tightly. He knew the power of the water would destroy the grip, and she was gone in an instant.

They had remained at the edge of the roof, almost hypnotized by the specter of the rapidly approaching wave, at least until the bright blue cabanas, jet skis and paddle boats started slamming against the stucco siding of Cayman Grand. There was nowhere to go, but they went anyway. Holding Melissa tightly, they hid together behind one of the large, green rooftop air conditioners and waited. It seemed the seconds were creeping by. Jeff leaned over and kissed Melissa softly on her lips. The ambient noise was so great by now, he mouthed, “I love you Melissa. Always have.” And then she was gone, ripped from his grip by the salty tsunami and washed over the side, into the parking lot below.

Jeff didn’t have time to mourn his great loss as he lost his grip on the roof exhaust fan and raced the green air conditioning system to the edge. He hoped the air conditioner would win this race, because he knew that landing on the HVAC system would probably be better than the HVAC system landing on him.

A blur of blue something flew toward him, caught in the wave like so much other debris; and he recognized the bright blue cushions that had recently adorned the white oak chaise lounges on Seven Mile Beach below, just a few seconds earlier. His instinct and quick reaction allowed the catch; and he held the cushion tightly, heading perilously toward the north edge of the roof. Now floating a good six feet above the roof’s surface, something slammed into him. Dazed, his mouth full of Caribbean saltiness, he tried to protect himself with the cushion when he suddenly recognized the object that collided with him. Earlier it had been the little old man from France who always walked up and down the beach, greeting everyone he
met with a *bonjour* and a smile. Now the Frenchman was wet and dead, twisted in two like a pretzel, deep wounds turning his face into streams of crimson. They raced for the edge, the torrent heading north toward Rum Point and the open sea.

The air conditioner, the dead man and Jeff washed over the edge at the same time; and the water below now completely covered the parking lot. Jeff barely missed the black Mercedes limousine with the hot hood, now floating across what had been bright pink and red bougainvillea bushes edging along the sidewalk. He pulled himself tightly into a ball, not very easy with the inflated BC strapped tightly to his torso, and landed with the blue cushion stretched out in front of him. The cushion hit at just the right angle; and Jeff surfed over the parking lot, floating higher with each second as the flood grew. Nearly a half mile inland, he slammed into the top of a coconut palm about twenty feet above the cars and the two-person Pedi-cabs below. He lost all consciousness in an instant. He had no last thoughts as he passed from an otherwise beautiful Cayman Island’s sunset into blackness, darkness, comfort. It was like he suddenly fell asleep.

“Reports are still coming in, but heavy damage has been reported from the Bahamas to Barbados and now the Cayman Islands and Jamaica. Cuba is in the big wave’s sights, and the eastern coasts of Florida will be hit within an hour. Beaches along the entire Gulf and Atlantic coasts are being evacuated. We have no news from the Cancun area or the Mexican Riviera because of continuing power outages.

“This could be devastating for Mexico’s tourist industry, already gearing up for the End-of-the-World parties this coming December 21, 2012.”

Sitting in Duluth’s newest sensation, *The Divide Disco and Café*, Abe the Bartender listened to the six o’clock news. Condi Zimmerman, the news babe, projected in high-definition from the flat screen above the bar. Tonight Condi’s beauty was far from Abe’s mind. His thoughts were with Jeff and Melissa, and their friends, Gray and Andi. He had flown back from Grand Cayman just a day earlier to handle the New Year’s Eve crowd at the new club. He had to admit, as he sat on the plane, it did occur to him: *What’s the use?*

For the life of him, he couldn’t figure out why so many people were coming to celebrate the New Year; and it was happening at clubs everywhere, not just the United States. Big *End of the World* parties were being thrown
along the French Riviera; and Hong Kong’s famous Privé Club was totally booked at $15,000 per person, champagne and room included. London and Las Vegas gamblers were betting on where the comet would hit and at what precise second. It seemed that no one really believed, or else it was mass denial. Abe was still undecided. Would the comet hit before the world ended? and he smiled at the irony.

Abe was a self-taught Jewish and Christian Bible scholar, of sorts. He couldn’t match up to the real experts and had never attended professional theology schooling, but he had come a long way since his days of disbelief. An Israeli, he had studied the Jewish prophecies thoroughly but didn’t remember anything about God destroying the world with a comet. There was that prophecy in Revelation 8 about a burning mountain falling from the sky and hitting the great ocean, or something like that; but if his memory was correct, that was one of the latter things that happened in God’s plan of destruction and renewal. Hail and fire would be thrown at the Earth first, then the burning mountain falling into the sea . . . could that be Soufrière Hills? . . . then the star blazing like a torch that fell to Earth. Is that the dark comet?

Condi continued.

“This just in, a retired admiral, Justin P. McLemore, and the United States Public Affairs Liaison, Sheryl Lasseter, were the victims of an armed robbery attempt today when at least three ‘Pants on the Ground’ gang members followed them from the Fox Theater in Atlanta to a Ponce de Leon Street parking garage.

“Unfortunately for the street thugs, the admiral turned out to be a retired Navy SEAL-team member; and Ms. Lasseter had just won the military’s top civilian honor in pistol sharp-shooting, the coveted Crosshairs Trophy. As the admiral chased one perpetrator up Ponce de Leon, Ms. Lasseter fired through the bottom of her purse, blowing the gun out of the perp’s right hand. The taller gang member lunged at Ms. Lasseter with a knife, and she shot him in the chest, squarely in the sternum. Before the other gang member could react, Ms. Lasseter pointed her gun at his . . . well, can I say ‘private parts’ on TV, and told him not to do anything silly. He did not.

“The police arrested the three young men and are looking for others. The ‘Pants on the Ground’ gang has been connected to several armed robberies, including some possible homicides. Admiral McLemore was released from Emory with a foot injury after kicking one fugitive in the head.”

“Hey Abe. What’s up? Have you heard anything yet?”
“Oh, hey Pam; you startled me. The owner’s not supposed to be here early. No, I haven’t heard anything from anybody. I did just hear on Channel 5 that Admiral McLemore and Sheryl were robbed or something down by the Fox. I was daydreaming and only caught part of the story.”

“You’re kidding!"

“No. I’m sure there will be an update in just a few minutes. Sounds like they’re OK. I bet those guys wish they had chosen another target.”

“Do you think we’ll have a crowd tonight? I mean, with all the terrible things that are happening. I heard Jamaica has at least 30,000 deaths and counting. Not sure how much of that’s true. You know how first reports are.”

Pam considered if she should’ve told Abe about the number of deaths, but she knew that he had probably heard as much news as she had. They both knew the estimates would be higher. The ejection of the Soufrière Hills Volcano into the Caribbean Sea and the subsequent earthquake was sure to cause more death and destruction before this day was over.

Pam glanced out the open french doors adorning the entrance of The Divide. The day had been unusually warm for December 31. A crowd was beginning to gather on the Duluth Towne Green, children running up and down the yellow brick path that designated the geography of the Eastern Continental Divide that ran straight through the center of downtown. Pam had never thought promoting the Continental Divide as a tourist attraction would work for the city, but it had. The crowd was early; and the sun was setting, darkness racing westward at a thousand miles-per-hour.

“With the President admitted to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, it is suspected that he has also contracted the Spanish Flu. With the deaths of much of the White House staff and much of the Senate and Congress, the Spanish Flu continues to take its deadly toll, though the CDC claims this particular strain is not as contagious as the original Spanish Flu of 1918. The entire Senate, House and Justice Department have been temporarily quarantined until the spread of the virus is investigated. The CDC has a bio-lab crew on sight at the White House as we speak. The President’s family is in China on vacation and has been advised to stay there until the source of the carrier can be found, which according to CDC is not likely. Homeland Security is suggesting that it could be the result of terrorism, and now, this: A man identified as a member of TACS has been found in a local D.C. hospital where he passed away yesterday. The hospital is now under quarantine.

“The Army of the Christian Soldier, whose sole intent is the overthrow of the U.S. government and the installation of a Christian theocracy, has been
connected to various computer hacking incidents. Some of you will remember the traffic light incidents last year that caused so many deaths and injuries. It appears that this particular ACS member visited the White House with a tour group last month.

“The dark comet continues heading toward Earth, and most of the world’s nuclear ICBM missiles have been launched on an interception course . . .”

Pam gave Abe a conciliatory hug and kiss on the cheek.

“I’m sure we will hear something soon. It looks like the crowd’s starting early tonight. I wonder how many’ll make it to midnight to see the Duluth Disco Ball go up? Last year they gave it a standing ovation. How many disco balls have ever gotten a standing ovation?”

Pam greeted some of the employees on the way back to her office, but she couldn’t contain her amusement at all the revelry. Florida was getting ready to get creamed by a tsunami, a comet was hitting Earth in less than three weeks, street gangs were roaming the streets, rapes were up big time; and all these people seemed in total denial.

“Ghana has reported its 34th case of mosquito-borne HIV. This is devastating news, as if there weren’t enough. Spraying of the dreaded pesticide DDT has begun in large areas of the African coastal regions.

“Famine and drought continue in the western and central United States as well as large areas of Europe.

“On a different note, people of Semite origin do not seem to be as susceptible to the Spanish Flu virus as others; and the CDC is doing research on this puzzling bit of information.”

Abe left Condi Zimmerman’s reporting at the bar and started mingling with the crowd, welcoming the revelers to what could be the last New Year’s Eve party. He thought again about Revelation 8 and the mountain that would fall into the sea. That prediction says a third of sea life will be destroyed and a third of the world’s ships. He would watch the news.

Abe circled the bar, taking note of the mumblings about the Mayan calendar and December 21, 2012, and whether we would even make it until that date. Abe figured he would know on December 22, as his thoughts drifted back to Jeff and his friends at Grand Cayman Island and whether they were still alive.
Chapter Two

“Who you calling fat boy, hero?” Sheryl laughed as she retold the story of the attempted mugging to her friend Judi.

Judi Ellis heard the news report while driving home from Emory and called her friend Sheryl right away, mostly out of concern but also curiosity.

“Yeah, Justin chased that poor guy up the street; and when he turned around, Justin kicked him right in the head. I’ve never seen anything like it Judi. For an old man he moves quite well. Of course now he can’t walk!”

“Yes. Some news reports have designated you two as the Over the Hill Gang.’

They both laughed, but Judi couldn’t help but notice . . . Justin? Sheryl had never called The Admiral that before. She smiled, her mind working like an inquisitive mind will, and thought maybe there might be just a little hanky-panky going on. Women knew these things.

“Justin?” she queried.

Sheryl felt her face flush and was glad there was a land-line between them, not really understanding her sudden blush. She found herself feeling like a school girl, something she hadn’t felt for years. She ignored the query.

“Judi, have you heard anything from Jeff? We didn’t even know about the disaster in the Islands until we were leaving the hospital. We, she and Justin. She liked the sound of that.

“Nope. Haven’t heard anything yet. There has been no news from any of the Cayman Islands and just a few tidbits from the others. Apparently Jamaica has had a really bad day, at least the eastern part. I heard something about a large cruise ship that was totally capsized and washed back out
to sea near St. Thomas. It’s awful. All the news is awful.” Judi was not her usual, jovial self. Who could be? Her doorbell rang and she carried her cell phone to the front door. She was expecting a package from Dr. Rosenberg.

“Hold on Sheryl. Let me see who this is. Joe is sending me a synopsis of tomorrow’s speech.”

Sheryl and Judi had often worked together with Dr. Joseph Rosenberg, a professor of apocalyptic religions at Emory. An interesting man to say the least.

Sheryl heard the doorbell ring once more followed by a knock and Judi saying, “I’m coming. I’m coming. Cool your cookies,” followed by a scream and the sound of breaking glass, then silence as the phone went dead.

The light was bright, extraordinarily, even brighter than the dentist’s light that always manages to blind you even with your eyes closed. Jeff could actually see his blood vessels winding their way through the pinkness of his closed eyelids and tried to open his eyes but couldn’t. Then it was gone. Slowly he tried again, annoyed at whatever was sticking into his back. He vaguely remembered . . . something . . . water maybe? His head was killing him. It was eerily quiet, except for the sounds of the splashing water beneath him; and he was surrounded by darkness, clinging to him like a fog.

“Where the hell am I?” he asked out loud. There was no one to hear his question, not even the sound of nocturnal insects screaming for a mate clouded the night. Total silence, except for the water. Then he fell from the palm tree to the waters below, even before he could force his eyes open. Jeff slid into a world of unconsciousness and dreams, drifting closer to Rum Point and Stingray City.

Jeff’s injuries were internal, so there was no blood to attract shark, barracuda or other predators of the sea. He alternated between unconsciousness to semi-consciousness, back and forth throughout the night. At times he was sure he saw a flash of light because his eyelids would turn pink, just for an instant. He finally forced his eyes open after one such experience only to see a sky full of stars, a Milky Way as clear as it used to be on the farmlands surrounding Charleston when he was a kid.

He continued his horizontal voyage toward the north side of the island, often bumping into something that floated into him, maybe a log, a table,
a body. Gradually he began to recall the day’s late afternoon events, the wave, Melissa washing out of his grip and over the side of the building. *Melissa*. . . He tried to shout her name, but only silence exited his salt-ridden throat. For the first time in many years, Jeffrey Ross cried and silently wondered why God was such a tease.

Gray and Andi Dorey had been close friends with Jeff and Melissa when they were married, when they were divorced, when Melissa remarried and after Melissa’s new husband, a missionary, was killed in a plane crash off Puerto Rico. Before heading out to sea on their ultra-quiet, electric jet skis earlier in the day, they were convinced that whatever Jeff and Melissa once had, a special fondness, was back. They were happy for them. They were happy for themselves. There were many memories between the foursome, most good. It suddenly seemed darker, and Gray motioned Andi to head back in.

“What was that? Did you feel that, Gray?”

“I did.” Gray answered his wife’s question as she asked it; but he knew what had just happened wasn’t normal, the sudden rise in the ocean’s surface. They were stopped less than a mile out to sea, their electric jet skis nearly silent except for the occasional slap from a passing wave assaulting the yellow and green fiberglass housing.

“What do you think that was?”

“I’m not sure, but it was odd.”

Gray looked back toward Seven Mile Beach, George Town just to the right. George Town, the capital of Grand Cayman, had been bustling earlier with activity, shopping and high finance. The crowds on the beach were small for the Christmas season, primarily because of the Spanish Flu; and many Europeans were not traveling because of the smallpox outbreak. The crowds, though small, were running inland. Then Gray lost sight of the beach, of George Town, the entire island had disappeared; and he rubbed his eyes in disbelief.

“Andi, I think it was a tidal wave,” and in the few seconds since Andi asked the *what was that* question, the massive wave began to grow as it rushed to shore. Everything disappeared behind the height of the now towering wall of water; and then it crashed inland, skirting between the rows of buildings, pine trees ripped from the beach.
“Do you think Jeff and Melissa were still diving?” Andi was notably distressed, and the end of div-ing was almost an octave higher than the rest of the question.

“I hope not,” was all Gray could say as the quiet, still air was insulted by the sounds of the thunderous wave crashing inland, carrying mounds of beach chairs, umbrellas, jet skis, pine trees and sea life with it. The Cayman Grand held its stature against the onslaught, as did most of the structures; the island had strict building codes and little poverty.

“What are we going to do?” Andi and Gray were stunned, almost dizzy, from the sudden turn of events. The sight was totally surreal.

“Let’s go. We have to find Jeff and Melissa. Andi, we’re not going to like what we see; so try to prepare yourself. There will be bodies, carcasses, ants, snakes, no telling what, floating in the water. Then there’s the debris. Let’s get closer, but be prepared. Most of the time there are two or three waves, often more.”

As they made their way slowly and deliberately toward what had been Seven Mile Beach, the mist grew in the eyes of both Gray and Andi. They were almost sure their friends were dead, whether they were resting on the beach or had been doing a shore dive. Darkness had crept through the afternoon quickly, the sun setting in the west. It was going to be a long night.

By eight o’clock, Gray and Andi gave up their search, reluctantly. Andi was sick, and the darkness set in, the only lighting coming from the stars above. Andi threw up again.

“You OK sweets?” Gray knew she wasn’t OK, who could be? The wave had not been followed by other waves, unless they were too small to detect. Seven Mile Beach was Seven Mile Beach again, George Town was only slightly flooded, but the night was silent, except for the occasional groan, or a cry from out of the distance.

“I’m not OK, Gray. Are you?” She wasn’t angry, just worried.

The devastation looked worse than the Indonesian tsunami of 2004, at least it appeared so when viewing live and in person. Hundreds, maybe thousands of bodies, floating in the sea along the shore line with many just resting on the streets, in a final sleep.

“Gray, I’ve never seen so many dead animals. This place is going to be a field day for the birds. It’s already beginning to smell. Where are we going to stay tonight?” Andi was calm.

“I would say we go back to Seven Mile Beach, see if there are any top floor rooms available that aren’t heavily damaged. Or we could go to the Ritz.”
“Going to the Ritz,” and Andi sang the jingle with a nervous laugh. “I say Cayman Grand; because I know, if Melissa and Jeff were on the beach, they would’ve known right away what was happening. As soon as the ocean drained out to sea, they would’ve headed to higher ground.”

They turned their jet skis back toward Cayman Grand, moving slowly in case they hit unseen debris, or worse. Andi again felt nauseous. The indicators told the story of the jet skis’ batteries; less than two hours of charge left. Gray kept his eye out for floating jet skis, battery powered or otherwise. That could very well be their only mode of transportation until they found Jeff and Melissa. If they found them. Then there were questions: How were they going to get back to the United States? Was the Cayman airport damaged? How much damage would the tsunami cause to Florida and the other coasts? And what about that comet or what-ever?

“No Gray, it’s not ending. We’ve talked about this. Things are just bad right now.” Andi was the ultimate optimist.

Making their way onto the very dark Seven Mile Beach, they pulled the jet skis onto shore and took the starter keys with them. Entering the hotel was not easy, the outdoor lobby now filled with dead fish, squid, people and beach chairs. There was a small dog waiting at the rear entrance, and they couldn’t believe their eyes. Neither could the dog, as he came bounding into their arms, licking Andi all over her face. Every cloud has a . . . Andi thought, and the small dog brought immense joy to their hearts. How could that dog have survived, the only life they had seen in more than three hours?

Had Andi and Gray looked across the back parking lot still covered in four-and-a-half feet of salty sea and up into the trees, they might have spotted Jeff hanging in the very top of a palm, supported by the dark blue strap of his buoyancy compensator.

Jeff floated with the help of the inflated BC and chaise lounge cushion that had remained entangled around his leg, northward toward Stingray City off the North Shore. He also floated in and out of consciousness, mostly out. Occasionally he would awaken, sure that someone was shining a flashlight in his eyes but would see nothing except a jet-black sky with a crystal chandelier that only God could make, enhancing God’s ceiling with a jewelers delight. Only he didn’t believe in God, in spite of all Abe’s counseling, bless his heart, the last year. These disasters were purely
coincidence. Besides, he had actually prayed to God a few days earlier, to bring his best friend and his only true love, back into his life. He had actually gotten on his knees for Pete’s sake. His first prayer in many years, though he knew it was nonsense. And it hadn’t happened. It almost had, at least it seemed. Now she was gone, drowned probably, in a forty foot wave that came out of nowhere. Melissa . . . he drifted back into dreamland, still floating northward toward Rum Point and Stingray City. He was sure something was nibbling on his toes. One minute ‘til midnight.

“JEFFREY ROSS!!!”

“Did you hear that?” Andi jumped out of the damp, queen-size bed of the third-floor room, a room with at least a semi-dry bed. She almost collided with Gray as they rushed out the sliding glass doors, now warped in a half-open position, and onto the Roman tiled balcony. The night was dark, but the Milky Way was no longer visible due to the intensity of the light in the distant sky. It was an unusual light, almost blue-white. Gray knew it was no star or supernova, at least from what he had learned last summer at the Duluth Library’s Conference on Astronomy.

“What do you think that is Gray?” Andi had about had it with natural wonders, and her anxiety showed. “Could it be a search helicopter?” She knew that couldn’t be. As quiet as it was, she would surely hear the motor in the distance.

“Nope, can’t hear the motor,” Gray answered. Andi couldn’t help but note how smart her hubby was. “What was the noise we heard? It nearly shook me out of bed. I swear the radio on the night stand was vibrating.” Gray seemed shaken. The noise had been very loud, much louder than thunder.

“It sounded like a loud band instrument of some kind, maybe a trombone, or trumpet, except . . .” Gray recalled his marching band days and his old high school buddy, Darrell Edwards. They would grab a trombone, a baritone, a trumpet, a tuba, any brass instrument they could find and see who could blow it the loudest and the longest without taking another breath. Used to drive his parents crazy, as well as Mr. Southwick the band director . . . He briefly wondered about his old friend Darrell but figured he was probably a famous trumpet player somewhere, maybe in Austria or Sweden, or maybe a famous symphony like the one in Charleston, where Jeff grew up. He snapped out of the day dream.

“I thought it sounded like a voice. I know it sounds crazy, but I am absolutely sure it was a voice. It was like a shout.”
“Sounded like a horn to me.” Andi insisted. “Never heard anything like it.”

There was silence between them as they continued to watch the light. It really couldn’t be a star, because it wasn’t actually *shining* in their eyes. As intense as it was, it was more like a spotlight at the opera; focused, a beam almost like a fat blue-white laser of some kind, and very high in the sky.
“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Mark 13:32 NIV

“Are you thinking the world is going to end in December? Everybody’s talking about it, December 21, 2012; the Mayans, the Hopi Indians and Nostradamus. Every time I turn on TV there’s something about the end of the world.”

Pam was having serious doubts that the world would even make it to January 21, 2012, much less December 21. Everyone seemed in total denial, and Pam could see a quiet hysteria clouding the world.

“No one here seems worried about it tonight,” Abe answered, observing the rapidly growing deluge of people. He considered the 1500 or so missiles journeying through space toward the dark comet. Would it work? Could the nuclear missiles actually affect the comet’s trajectory? He would know soon. They all would.

“And don’t forget the whackos who predicted May 21 would be the return of Jesus, then October 21 would be the end of the world. Bet they were surprised October 22 when they were still here.” Abe chuckled but knew these sorts of things, these false predictions, turned unbelievers further from God. “Maybe they just didn’t make the cut.”

“Yeah, they put up billboards. How embarrassing.”

Pam scanned the bar and dining areas, man-made fog flowing across the neon dance floor, already filled with pretty girls in gorgeous disco dresses, dancing the night away. Donna Summers sang MacArthur Park; and no one really seemed worried about December 21, just 11 months away. No one seemed the least-bit concerned that a 100 mile-wide comet was supposed to make a direct hit on Earth in about two weeks and end
civilization, again. Sixty-five million years earlier, an asteroid killed off all the dinosaurs. It could certainly happen again. Pam smiled, as though she had a hint at what was coming. The asteroid that ended the dinosaurs was only 6 miles wide.

“No, I don’t think so,” Abe said. “I think 2012 could be a significant year in the whole scheme of things. There is that planetary and star alignment that only occurs every 26,000 years. That’s supposed to happen December 21 and may have a gravitational effect of some kind. However, if the Bible is correct, and I think it is, we’re at least seven to ten years away from the end. This comet hitting Earth is not supposed to happen until a lot of other stuff happens, if then. And the other stuff hasn’t happened.”

“No, but it’s happening right in front of our eyes. Look at the hail storms, the outbreak of Morgellon’s Disease and all the fires. Greece’s olive orchards are torched, again; unprecedented forest fires in the west and midwest. More people than ever are starving because of famine.” Pam was getting depressed and poured herself an early glass of champagne.

“Hollywood’s version of 2012 was a fantastic movie; but in the biblical version of the end, Earth isn’t here one day and gone the next. According to the people who study this stuff a lot more than I do, before the world ends there is to be a seven year period called the tribulation; a time of great distress, and the distress will get worse each year. You know, hail storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanos . . .”

“Comets and tsunamis,” Pam interrupted. “Abe, I’m not a religious scholar by any means; but there is a specific mention of a star, flaming like a torch, that falls to earth in the last days. It was described in John’s writings two thousand years ago. That could easily be a comet. Comets look like stars falling. That’s why they call meteorites ‘falling stars.’”

Abe remembered the verse well. He’d been hooked on end times prophesies for a long time and the trumpets that would hail their oncoming disasters. He recited it in his head: Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.

“And you are correct again Ms. Pam, Revelation 8:10. But if that were to happen now, it would not be in the prophesied time frame. I’ve been studying prophesies for years, and they all seem to come true. In exactly the sequence predicted. The apostles asked Jesus when the end would be, 2000 years ago. You know what he said, don’t you?”

“He said he didn’t know, that no one knew except God.”
“Well, there ya go. *No one* would include the Hopis, the Maya and Nostradamus. ‘No one’ is pretty specific, so I don’t doubt it. Like I said, they all come true. It wouldn’t surprise me if we blow that comet right out of the sky. I’m a lot more worried about Jeff and Melissa,” he paused, “and their friends.”

“Abe, do you ever think you might be wrong?”

“About what?”

“About your religious beliefs? I know you are a *Messianic* Jew, but I’m not real sure what that is. When you were little, what made you think your beliefs were wrong?”

“I didn’t think my beliefs were wrong then. One day I decided to read the *New Testament*. Then I researched the *Old Testament* references and decided my family was wrong, that they had missed the Messiah. Of course, they think I’m wrong and were really distraught when I changed my mind. You do know that all the first believers in Christ were Jewish, not gentile?” Abe paused.

“I never really thought about it. Do you ever think your religion is wrong, that possibly Jesus really *wasn’t* the predicted Messiah?” Jeff asked.

“No. Not really. I just find myself wanting to learn more.”

“Well, therein lies the problem. Everyone with a belief system thinks they’re right and everyone else is wrong. It’s the nature of the beast.”

Abe checked his trusty Timex, 11:45. Just fifteen minutes ‘til midnight. The evening had flown by.

“Let’s move outside and mingle, get ready for the New Year’s Disco Ball.” Abe faked jubilation.

“You go ahead, Abe. I need to find Scott and tell him to give everyone free champagne at midnight. I’ll meet you over by the amphitheater.”

Pam turned from Abe, scanning the crowd for Scott Johnson, the assistant manager. At six-foot five, he should be easy to spot; and he was. She made her way through the unexpectedly large crowd toward the manager’s office. On the way she thought about what Abe had said and wondered how much grief the little Jewish man ended up taking for converting to a Christian. She decided she would ask when the time was right. People were funny about *religion*, but Pam felt in her heart that Abe probably had a heck of a story.

Walking out of the club through the open, hand-carved, persimmon doors, Abe couldn’t believe how warm the night was. The A/C had been running all night in *The Divide*, and the air inside was still a little stuffy.
He subconsciously looked up into the northern sky. The dark comet, as everyone called it after the Hutz statement, was clearly visible now, even over all the city lights. Glancing over his shoulder, he thought he heard his name, Abe blindly ran straight into the arms of Admiral McLemore and almost knocked Sheryl onto the all-brick patio.

“My goodness, I didn’t know you cared so much Abe. You should’ve told me.” They laughed out loud, and the din of the crowd grew stronger. The waitresses were working the outdoor patios and gardens, the free champagne flowing.


“Yeah, it’s huge.” Abe confirmed.

“That’s not what I meant,” Admiral McLemore responded. “They’re all looking up.”

Abe noted that no one was looking toward the soon-to-ascend Disco Ball but up into the north sky, many pointing toward the comet. Abe considered the comet’s brightness. It had been invisible to the naked eye just a couple of days earlier. It wasn’t a pretty comet like the ones Abe had seen in pictures and movies. It was a dull white, more gray than white, with no tail.

“Hear anything from Jeff or Melissa?” Sheryl interrupted the sky gazing.

“Not yet. We borrowed a ham radio from Woody’s Nursery. Scott’s been monitoring it, but the only broadcasts he’s getting from the Islands have been from Jamaica and Haiti. Seems like there have been few deaths at either place, which is hard to believe, especially in Haiti. I guess the two hours of warning gave everyone time to head to higher ground. The bad news is, one report said Grand Cayman Island had suffered a major power outage caused by solar flares. That’s not good. They may have had no warning at all.”

“Well, the Cayman Navy made it out of port; so someone knew something.” The Admiral always had inside knowledge on anything military.

“Abe, do you know Judi Ellis?” Sheryl asked.

“I do. Dirty martini girl. Why?”

“She was attacked today at her own home by four men and is at St. Joseph’s. Can you believe that? They stole both her laptops. One was Jeff’s.”

“Actually, I do believe it. There are youth gangs everywhere. They’re certainly not worried about any comets hitting Earth. Is she alright?” Abe
didn’t know Judi well but had always admired her poise, and her legs. She did wear some short dresses sometimes, but why not? If you have the wheels, show them.

“I don’t know the story. I was on the phone with her when it happened. I called the Roswell police, and they rushed to her home; probably saved her life. Thankfully, they were there in about two minutes. Never found the four guys, and Judi was only shaken. One of the four told her it was a warning to Dr. Rosenberg.”

“Dr. Rosenberg?” Abe asked.

“Joe’s a religious scholar who Judi works with at Emory. She schedules conferences for him.”

Abe thought he had heard, or seen the name before. “By the way, how’s that foot doing Admiral?” Abe winked at Sheryl. “Heard you saved an angel in distress.”

“My foot’s fine. I haven’t kicked anyone in the head in years. And don’t give me any grief, or I’ll hit you with my crutch.”

They ambled toward the Disco Ball, The Admiral hobbling along with Sheryl offering support; and Abe thought he might detect a romance being born. It was 11:59.

Jeff continued his voyage northward, the warm Caribbean Sea slapping against his body; and occasionally, something else. And there was something else, something wrapped in plastic, maybe a baggie, lying on his chest. He opened his eyes as soon as he heard his name, and the light was blinding. Just like the light he had seen the year before in Villa Rica. Out of reflex his eyelids slammed shut, reacting to the intensity. Jeff was reminded of the previous sighting of this blip of light and how it reminded him of the old Kodak Brownie cameras with the flash cube. If someone took your picture, you couldn’t see for five minutes. He could still see the blood vessels through his closed eyelids.

“Let’s go!” Gray grabbed Andi’s hand and led her down the three flights of stairs. “Let’s get the skis and get over there.”

“Are you sure?” Andi worried about running into things in the darkness, like dead bodies. She also worried that the batteries in the jet skis might not last.

“We have to. I think Jeff’s out there. The battery gauge says two hours. I’ll use my headlight, and you follow me.”
“Why do you think Jeff is out there?” Andi heard the same noise that Gray had heard. **JEFFREY ROSS.**

Gray hesitated, then answered. “Did you think the noise we heard sounded more like a voice or a trumpet, maybe *some* kind of horn?”

“It sounded like a loud French horn, maybe. But whatever it was, it didn’t play music. It said *Jeffrey Ross*. At least that’s what I heard.”

“Yeah, me too. That’s why we have to go.”

Gray and Andi pulled the heavy jet skis into the water. The batteries that powered the craft were made of lithium, not as heavy as lead but still heavy. The silent motors started as soon as the keys were turned. Gray turned on his headlight, and they headed toward the light. There was no noise, only silence and the water that slid by the skis.

“You know what that light looks like?” Andi asked as she looked at the distant light.

Gray and Andi had been married thirty two years and were always on the same wave-length; and Gray replied, “The Star of Bethlehem, at least from the drawings I’ve seen over the years,” and he admired the intensity and the narrow focus of the beam. It was truly awesome, a pin-point spotlight.

Jeff was beginning to find the light annoying. There had been no other sounds, other than his name; and now he wasn’t even sure he heard his name. He may have been dreaming. Then the light spoke again, softly this time.

“*Your prayer was answered.*”

The light went out just as Gray and Andi saw Jeff, spotlighted in the bright beam like a moth in a light.


Chapter Four

“Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” Daniel 10:14 NIV

The Nerpa 155 nuclear attack submarine wasn’t in the news, at least unclassified news, but was in the mind of the navies across the world. It had suddenly disappeared a few weeks earlier in the Pacific, an apparent victim of an internal explosion while traversing the depths of the Marianas Trench. Except, Russian subs couldn’t go nearly as deep as the Trench. The bottom was seven miles deep. Only one manned vessel had ever been to the bottom, the U.S. Navy *Trieste Bathyscaphe* in January, 1960.

The Marianas Trench was the deepest area in all the oceans, so finding the submarine would not be easy. Debris, clothing, a few bodies and oil had been discovered soon after the sub’s disappearance. The U.S. Navy didn’t buy the story for a minute, as was the case with the Israeli and British navies.

The Nerpa 155, though built in Russia, had been sold to the Indian Navy. It was Russia’s most advanced nuclear attack sub. Loaded with stealth technology, most stolen from Uncle Sam, the submarine had a propulsion system that was second to none. Especially worrisome was the sub’s stealth, it was so quiet, virtually undetectable; and the transformer-like nuclear missile pods.

The submarine crew was mainly from the Chechen Republic, a part of the old Soviet Union. Chechnya had long been a thorn in Russia’s side, and Chechen Islamists had caused many deaths among the Russians. The Chechen Republic was 94% Islamic with a large, radical base. That was even more troubling.
As it approached midnight on December 31, the Nerpa-class submarine had a rendezvous planned with the Panama Canal. After that encounter, she would soon be gliding smoothly and silently through the Atlantic toward the Mediterranean, the Suez in her sights.

Diego Garcia was located in the Indian Ocean and was the home base of large U.S. bomber fleets, including the B-52 Stratofortress and the B-1B Stealth Bomber. Both had created great havoc in Iraq and Afghanistan, with Iran in their future.

Earlier the submarine had deployed a missile pod in the Atlantic off the coast of Florida, similar to the pod off Diego Garcia, consisting of two independently-guided nuclear warheads contained in the single missile, 2.5 megatons each. Two and a half million tons of TNT would cause tremendous damage, but the radiation would make the island uninhabitable for years to come.

The missile systems had been pre-programmed for midnight and would destroy much, if not all, of the Naval Submarine Base at Kings Bay, Georgia, insha’Allah.

The K-155 submarine, at a depth of 200 feet, edged closer to the Atlantic coast of Panama just before midnight. Her crew was anxious.

The night was moonless and clear, a perfect night for alligator hunting on Gatun Lake just a few miles away. Commander Julio Kadyrov had no interest in hunting anything other than that which would hurt the Americans and the Jews, like the Panama Canal.

Kadyrov was compassionate and had purposely chosen the Pedro Miguel Locks, because those were located in the least populated area of Panama. He had nothing against the Panamanians, but they were a sacrifice that had to be made in this Holy War. Jihad was the way; the only way. The Commander ordered the sub to begin surfacing. They would stop at sixty feet.

To the west, two Panamanian men, crowded in a small boat, listened for the sounds of gators swimming through the swamps.

“Hand me another beer, Gonzalo.”

Gonzalo and Jorge worked together at the Gatun Lock, a part of the Panama Canal closest to the Caribbean Sea. Gatun Lake, one of the world’s largest man-made lakes, was completed in 1913 specifically for the construction of the Panama Canal. The lake was one of the few recreational areas and a favorite fishing and alligatoring spot for the locals. There was a small dance hall on the south shore, along the main highway, that was the hottest spot around for socializing. It was the only spot around.
Gonzalo reached into the cooler and handed another Balboa to Jorge.
“Don’t get too drunk Jorgio. It’s almost midnight. The wives will be home from the New Year’s Eve celebrations long before we get home.”

“Me get too drunk? You’re the one who’s drunk my friend. I can always tell when you start calling me ‘Jorgio.’” They both laughed.

As Jorge turned up Panama’s most famous beer for another big swig, he saw in the moonless sky the brightest light he had ever seen. “A shooting star Gonzalo. Look!”

They were mesmerized as the shooting-star progressed across the dark sky, outlined by a myriad of stars.

“That’s not a shooting-star Jorgio. It’s too low. Must be an airplane or somethin’ man. I can hear it. You need another beer my friend.”

Gonzalo explored the cooler once again and opened another beer. The cruise missile continued westward, less than a quarter mile above the surface of Gatun Lake. The fishermen’s wives did not see the missile but may have heard something during the celebrations, a roar like a jet engine flying low over their small, Catholic Church.

The warm, December night welcomed the celebrants as they slowly made their way across the Duluth Towne Green toward the LED-lit Disco Ball. The Admiral was not so good on crutches, even with Sheryl’s support; and he managed the steps, barely. Just 45 seconds from midnight, the large Disco Ball began its ascent. The higher it went, the more the crowd cheered, and drank. Abe could only wonder at all the jubilee this year, much more than last. *Were people in denial about the comet?*

At the stroke of midnight from the Big Ben-like clock that graced the top of Duluth’s City Hall, the mayor toasted the City; and the couples kissed, as couples have done for so many years on New Year’s Eve. This year was somewhat different, as three gay couples sat on the hill behind the playground and kissed passionately at midnight. The conductor, Darrell Edwards from *The Symphony*, struck up the band; and Auld Lang Zyne reigned loudly across the square, as couples of all varieties, and couples with kids, slow danced into the New Year. As many held each other tightly, moving mystically to the music, most knew the coming three weeks would be trying, waiting for Dark Comet to hit . . . somewhere.

The Admiral and Sheryl danced the best they could, at least with crutches in the picture. Just a few bars into the music, Sheryl felt light-
headed. She was really beginning to like this man; and she gave him a little extra squeeze, sort of an *I really like you* kind of squeeze. That’s when she saw the sky light up over the trees to the north of town.

The light was so bright, everyone stopped dancing; and Director Edwards brought the band to a halt. The night sky to the north continued to brighten as though it was the East and the sun was rising. The light was soon followed by a sound, a distant roar that only seemed to get louder, a sound almost of thunder but not quite. The Admiral was sure he felt the ground shake, just a bit, like a mild earthquake.

Just twenty miles north of Duluth, while the Disco Ball was rising above City Hall in the Towne Green, the two guards atop the Buford Dam had noticed a soft light deep in the water below the dam.

“What the hell’s *that*?” the senior guard questioned.

“Maybe it’s the submarine, you know; the tour sub at Lake Lanier Islands. They have special permission from the Corps tonight for a night dive.”

“They don’t have special permission to be *there*!” the senior exclaimed. He grabbed his radio; but before the call button could be pressed, both guards vanished in a flash of heat that was hotter than the surface of the sun. They would have certainly been blinded by the light had they not been vaporized first.

Buford Dam, as thick and well-constructed as any dam in the country, began to crack at the base, underwater. The top half of the dam had disappeared with the two guards.

A few midnight fishermen graced some of the rocks in the Chattahoochee River downstream, some in Suwanee and some in Duluth. It was a New Year’s Eve ritual for many. They were all startled when the warning sirens went off shortly after midnight, an automatic warning system to let those downstream know when the dam was releasing water. But the dam wasn’t supposed to be releasing water at midnight. Everyone who knew anything about the river knew that.

The two fishermen on one large rock at Jones Bridge Park looked at each other. “Musta been a mistake,” one said; and they threw their lines back in the water.

The roar on the Chattahoochee grew louder as the large mass of Lake Lanier was finally free from the constraints that had held it back for so many years.

Atlanta and many communities downstream would never be the same after this night.

The Chattahoochee roared.