

THE KNOWLEDGE OF  
GOOD & EVIL



## PROLOGUE

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*(Based on official police records,  
eyewitness testimony, journal records,  
and facts in evidence)*

**COTTAGE #2, RED CROSS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTER, BANGKOK,  
THAILAND, DECEMBER 10, 1968, AFTERNOON**

World-famous theologian Father Thomas Merton, 53, stepped from the shower toweling his rugged face and gray crescent of hair that rimmed his head, blue eyes aglow with the fervor of his Great Secret. He hummed a Christmas carol the choir had sung for him at Mass this morning—“Angels We Have Heard on High.”

If only they knew how fitting their selection was!

One week ago while visiting a sacred cave in Ceylon, Father had stumbled into something he suspected no soul now living had ever seen. Surely something no living soul was meant to see. He’d entered Heaven through a back door, looked into the very Mind of God, and escaped with a revelation so powerful it would change all humanity. Bring wars to a standstill. End forever the age-old hatreds between races, creeds, and cultures.

Even more earthshaking, unlike revelations of scripture, his vision did *not* stand on Faith alone. Anyone daring to follow Father’s path could steal into Heaven and see for himself. For the first time in history, to the utter negation of all nonbelievers—*proof of God and the Afterlife!*

The Secret burned in Father’s soul and he couldn’t wait to present it to the world. But a revelation of this magnitude demanded a proper forum, and to that end he was biding his time until tonight. As guest of honor at an international religious conference, he was to give closing remarks. And what a finale he would make it! Hundreds of spiritual leaders and media

in attendance from all over the globe, none with a clue to the bombshell he was about to drop.

The forum was hours off, however, and Father needed rest. Hooking his towel on the door he retired to the bedroom, padding naked across the terrazzo to where his pallet sat by an electric fan.

Moments later he lay dead.

But his Great Secret did not die with him. Father Merton left behind a journal . . .

## ONE

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### *The Near Future*

#### **CBS AFFILIATE, CHANNEL 6 TV, LOS ANGELES, MORNING**

Grinning, Charles Dunn bustled into the little screening room, clicking on lights with a remote, feeling like he'd just won the Super Lotto. He checked his Rolex. Angela would be here soon, always punctual as a church bell.

He lumbered down to the center row, shuffled to a seat, and plopped, smoothing his suit. *Next week, the diet*, he vowed. Impossible now with winter production racing to a close. He'd been gulping coffee and donuts for hours to keep his energy. Insane business, this, creating local TV programs to compete with national broadcast and cable—and at a fraction the budget. Living Nielsen-to-Nielsen not knowing if the shows you'd birthed and nurtured lovingly as a parent would endure.

But it was moments like the one pending that made all the heartburn worth it. Charles had spoken to the home network in New York this morning, and he had *incredible* news for Angela. She'd no clue what awaited, joining him here simply to preview new footage for their series.

"And to think," he sighed, running a hand through his thinning hair, "I nearly let her slip through my fingers . . ."

It was scarcely a year ago that Angela had come to his attention, a talk show host for an obscure LA radio station at the time. Just another tongue clamoring to be heard on the crowded, late-night airwaves. Charles always kept an ear cocked for radio shows with TV potential, and he'd heard buzz about a new program catching on with area college students—often a bell-wether of the next hot thing.

But tuning in, he'd quickly tuned out. *Probing the Paranormal*. A weekly news-type format investigating things supernatural. Ghosts, clairvoyants,

mediums, and such. Old hat. Cable TV had been working that shtick for years with lukewarm success.

Nor was he that impressed with Angela, first blush. Fresh out of grad school, his sources told him, PhD in psychology, no previous broadcast experience. Hardly a springboard to TV. Not that she wasn't talented. A silky, arresting voice. And clever the way she applied science and reason to topics seldom handled intelligently. But *too much* science and reason. More PBS than CBS.

"Damn, did I whiff that one!"

Two months later he was kicking himself in his big, professional ass. Driving to work one morning, glancing out his window at a billboard, he did such a double take he nearly pulled a muscle in his neck. Towering before him, the image of a stunning young woman with dark hair, arms folded, leaning against the call letters of her radio station. Bold words proclaimed:

**LA's #1 Late-Nite Talk Show!**  
**PROBING the PARANORMAL**  
**with Dr. Angela Weber**

He'd almost skidded off the road. Grabbing his cell, he'd arranged a hasty meeting, only to confirm how wrong his first impression had been. Angela was *amazing*. Poised, personable, quick-witted. And uncommonly attractive. Large, hazel-green eyes that changed like a kaleidoscope with her mood—light when she laughed, dark when serious. Charles knew screen presence when he saw it.

Of course by then other producers were circling, too, and he had to pay top dollar and make tough concessions to get her. Granting her creative control of the show, allowing her to pick her own cohost—

He was interrupted by the sound of the door. Turning, he saw a lithe figure in a dark dress suit glissading down the steps toward him, walnut hair shimmering and bouncing on shoulders square as a carpenter's level. Oval face. Ivory skin. Intelligent brow.

But her smile was just a brief flash today, eyes dark.

No matter. Once she heard, he'd have her beaming . . .



Angela felt swallowed up in Charles's bearish arms, his trim, red beard scratching her cheek. As a rule, she didn't like the "Hollywood hug," but

Charles she didn't mind. He'd been wonderful to her and Ian as they'd plunged into this mind-boggling business. Seasoned and wise.

His deep voice rumbled in her ear, "Ready for Ian's solo debut?"

She hesitated, pulling back. "When he called last night, he mentioned they'd had problems. Didn't go into it, he says the video will speak for itself."

Charles motioned her to a seat.

It wasn't Ian's video that worried her. Over the course of their season he'd sharpened his investigative skills, able now to cut through the knottiest paranormal puzzle on his own. It was the way he'd jumped on this East Coast case despite her objections, despite having ample material here at home—just none that suited his tastes. It hurt that she couldn't talk him out of it, that her refusal to join him didn't matter. He'd even stayed on to do the editing, sending ahead the finished MPEG.

Charles clicked a remote to dim the lights, and the screen below came to life. Angela found herself wishing Ian's video would fail. And felt miserable for it.

A five-second countdown, then a tall, athletically slim man appeared on-screen in the light of flood lamps, standing in front of a Cape Cod-style home, patches of dirty snow dotting the yard. Handsome in a navy-blue cashmere topcoat, puffs of breath escaping into the night. Angela's heart kicked the way it always did when they'd been separated for a time.

The camera zoomed in to reveal vivid blue eyes. *So serious*. Little clue to the warmth she knew lay beneath. Dark hair neatly combed, a few unruly locks fluttering like pennants in the breeze. She wanted to reach out and smooth them. A font on the screen read:

*PTP Investigator, Ian Baringer*

He gave that little smile of his and gestured toward the house, a hint of boyishness in his bearing. That strange, innocent quality Angela had noticed first time she'd laid eyes on him five years ago. As if he'd been plucked out of some quaint, bygone era, still adjusting to the twenty-first century. Which, in many ways, was true.

"*The Devil's Due*," he announced his episode, refined northeastern accent filling the theater. Her heart quickened.

The scene cut to daytime footage, same house, a middle-age man shoveling the walkway. Ian continued, "*This is Mr. Andrew Kavoski. Accountant, husband of Bernice Kavoski, father of two children away in college.*"

The view widened to take in a heavysset woman with heavily coiffed brown hair, bringing Andrew a hot drink.

*“Andrew starts each week a normal, healthy, typical resident of suburban Hackensack, New Jersey . . . But on the seventh day of each week, the Lord’s Day, Andrew transforms like Jekyll and Hyde into this manic creature—”*

Abruptly the video cut to a scene of the same man, almost unrecognizable, strapped to a bed, writhing, growling. Angela drew her legs under her seat.

*“Victim of a severe, if passing, psychosis, Andrew has endured seizures like this every Sunday for months. Medical experts were at a loss to help, unable even to diagnose his condition.”*

The video switched to shots of a church.

*“It seems the onset of his ailment coincided with the end of an affair he was having. His liaisons had taken place in this church basement each Sunday while he was supposed to be at Mass.”*

Angela glanced at Charles to see a smile on his lips.

*“Andrew was finally caught in the act by his wife”—the view cut to a scene of Bernice being consoled by her pastor—“and a week later, Andrew’s strange affliction began. That Sunday morning, about the time he usually left for Mass, he suffered a seizure. Bernice called her brother, a neurologist living nearby, who rushed to their aid.”*

The image of a burly, fiftyish man in a white coat came up on-screen, along with shots of Andrew undergoing a physical and brain scans.

*“Andrew was hospitalized in his brother-in-law’s care, but after tests, there seemed no explanation for his attack. He recovered quickly, however, without complications, and was discharged. Only to suffer another seizure the following Sunday—and again every Sunday thereafter.*

*“When more tests and treatments yielded no answers, Andrew—and most of his church parish—came to believe he was the victim of demonic possession. His pastor put him in touch with a priest experienced in such matters.”*

Angela saw the photo of a smiling, avuncular, gray-haired man in dark shirt with reverse collar.

*“Father Peter Riggs and I have been friends for years, and with the Kavoskis’ permission, he invited me to document the event. But sadly, the exorcism did not go well.”*

Jerky video ricocheted around the screen—Andrew, crazed and loose from an armstrap, attacking Father Pete with a bloodied shard of glass. Angela shrank in her seat, shocked. Never had their shows displayed such



violence. She was even more appalled to see Ian take on the psychotic Kavoski, wrestling him back into his bindings.

*"Whoa!" Charles gushed. "Viewers will eat this up!"*

The melee ended and Ian's face materialized on-screen.

*"Fortunately, Father's injuries weren't serious. He's expected to make a full recovery. And despite the setback, this story has a happy ending. Inspecting the room after the attack, I discovered something. Though I'd carefully supervised the breakfast Andrew was served in bed that day, I'd overlooked a salt shaker he'd used to season his eggs."*

Impressed, Angela saw video of a medical research facility with technicians examining liquids in vials.

*"Lab analysis revealed a foreign substance in the salt—phencyclidine—an animal medication. Also known by the street name 'angel dust,' phencyclidine causes hallucinations and psychosis in humans . . ."*

The camera cornered a shamefaced Mrs. Kavoski.

*"Bernice is a veterinarian's assistant, and confronted with the evidence, she confessed to spiking the salt. Her brother was in on it, falsifying Andrew's medical tests. Bernice's motive was to punish her husband while saving face, wanting her neighbors to think his infidelity the work of the Devil, not their failing marriage. Her plan was to teach Andrew a lesson, then 'cure' him with an exorcism. In the end, the only demons she exposed were her own . . ."*

Ian appeared once more in front of the house.

*"I'm pleased to report, Andrew is now symptom-free, and he and his wife are in counseling. He's declined to press charges against his brother-in-law . . ."*

The video ended, the lights came up, and Angela sat back. She could hear that little voice again, nagging about the way Ian's choice of topics was slanting the show.

But Charles's focus was ratings. "Great stuff! Except, no more splitting the team. I like the sparks you two throw off." He grinned. "We're gonna need those male demos you pull—now that we're expanding to new markets!"

Angela blinked. "Syndication? *So soon?*"

His broad face glowed. "Syndication, hell. The network's taken notice, and they *like* what they see. They're flyin' in end of the month to talk *national rollout.*"

Stunned, all she could do was gape at him.

"Not a done deal, of course. But when the brass come to you, it's a damn good sign."

His cell phone went off and he fished it from a pocket. Angela recognized his secretary's face on its screen.

*"Your ten o'clock is here."*

"I'm on my way." He hung up, looking at Angela. "Ian gets in tonight?"

"Yes." She was still reeling.

"Well, don't stay out late celebrating. I've got you two meeting with those picketers tomorrow, first thing . . ."

A small, if vocal, group of demonstrators had been protesting their show the last several weeks.

"Can't have that crap while the network's here. Work your charms on those kooks, get rid of 'em."

That little voice in her head rose another decibel.

## TWO

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### LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, SAME DAY, NIGHT

Angela stood at the security gate amid a small crowd. Ian wasn't expecting her, but she missed him so, this the longest they'd been apart since reconciling last fall. Her mother and sisters had given her so much grief for taking him back. But as usual, she'd ignored them.

People began to stir as passengers filtered toward the gate, and Angela could see Ian approaching in that long, easy stride, making her heart jump. He looked *so* good. Clean-cut in his button-down shirt and pleated slacks, eyes bright and alert despite the long flight.

Two young women flanked him. Pretty, in sandals, jeans, T-shirts, and ball caps. College kids, they looked. Ian was toting what appeared to be their carry-ons.

Angela came forward, catching his eye, and he broke into a surprised grin. Bidding his companions and their bags good-bye, he rushed to sweep her up. It felt wonderful, wringing the fatigue right out of her. She inhaled his scent—like the fresh-charged atmosphere before a storm.

"What are you doing here?" he cried, setting her down, kissing her.

The two young women passed, eyeing Angela, and she whispered in his ear, "Fans?"

He paid them a parting smile and wave. "No, actually. They never even heard of the show." He wrapped an arm around her, ushering her to baggage claim. "Philosophy majors at UCLA. Made for an interesting flight."

"I'll bet." She said it without sarcasm. Though she'd felt a twinge of jealousy, she knew that if the coeds had been flirting, and if they'd exercised any degree of subtlety, Ian would have missed their signals. Just as he'd missed hers when first they'd met.

He collected his suitcase and they rolled out of the terminal arm-in-arm to their car, Ian taking the wheel, heading for Santa Monica.

"I've got some interesting news," Angela told him. "Charles heard from the network yesterday. They may want *PTP*. They're coming out to talk."

His face lit up. "No! Incredible! When?"

"End of the month."

"Who would have thought!" He gave her a squeeze. "Now if only the ratings hold. How's the fan mail?"

"Strong. Though the poison pens are still scribbling." She decided not to go into it now. "By the way, you got some more marriage proposals."

"Have I caught up to you?"

"Close. I may get my skirts shortened."

He laughed, and she felt his warm hand on her knee, sending a thrill up her spine. Then his voice grew soft.

"So . . . what did you think of it?"

"Of what?"

"The Hackensack case, of course."

She knew; she was stalling.

He added, "I was damned lucky, I nearly lost Pete."

"Not to mention your *own* life."

"Everything was falling apart," he admitted. "But then I tried to think like you, and the answer finally came." He moved his hand to hers. "I missed you."

"Then why didn't you come home to do the editing?"

He paused. "I thought the raw footage would upset you. I wanted to clean things up first. And anyway, I had business in New York, some papers to sign for the trust."

The inheritance his late parents had left him.

"Well," she said, "you'll be happy to know, Charles loves it. And I'm sure CBS will, too."

"Good, because I've got us another one. On the flight in, I was fishing online and came across a 'miracle' at a public high school in Kansas. There's this retaining wall where a Christlike image appears. The school paints it out, but it comes right back. Believers think it's a sign from God supporting Intelligent Design. Drawing huge crowds."

Angela flinched. "And what do *you* think it is?"

"Something a little less heavenly . . . I checked the area, there's a plastics plant nearby. If my hunch is right, it's I.D., all right—Industrial Discharge . . ."

She sat back, watching him as he prattled on. He certainly looked the epitome of the normal, healthy, all-American male. Anyone seeing him now would be hard-pressed to believe he was once an obsessive-compulsive neurotic. Angela had worked so hard to help him break free of its grip. But to her trained eye, the old claws were encircling again. And she wasn't sure how to stop them.