



"Their ships weren't saucers or  
orbs of flashing light like we'd  
imagined. They looked terrestrial.  
Almost human."

"Keep"



[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The following is a transcript taken from a reel-to-reel recording found at the R.G. Munn auction house in Alamogordo, New Mexico. [REDACTED] obtained the tape ninety days ago and efforts to authenticate the details of its contents are underway at this time. [REDACTED] has confirmed the possibility of a signal, potentially originating from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] that could have been intercepted sometime in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The unspooled cassette was restored to a usable condition and cut together, but some parts of its transmission were lost due to extensive wear. Most of the recording, however, was well preserved. All latent sounds -- static, background noises, and dead spaces -- have been logged in the transcription to maintain the tape's integrity.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Catalogue ref: A 365/700831

I. 0730

[Man's voice: older, deep, grated/Background: a heart monitor]

I checked the time. Harold the Happy Hatter smiled up at me from my old Ingersole watch face and pointed his fat little fingers to half-past seven. That's when it happened. That's when They came. It's been almost forty years since then, but I remember it like it was yesterday. And I, uh...

[00:07 papers rustling]

Wait, am I doing this right? Is this thing on? Hello... Hello...

Okay, so it was early. I guess that's about as good a place as any to start this thing. I'm just going to try and keep this simple. Tell it like it is. Or was. You get the idea.

[00:03 clears throat]

I was on my way to work. Now, something you have to understand about that day is that we didn't know what was about to happen. To us, it was just another day -- a Wednesday. We didn't know They were coming until They were here. And it all happened so fast, a lot faster than you'd think. It was like a backhanded magic trick. They weren't there one second, and then *bam!* Just like that, They were floating over the city. Abracadabra! The trick's on you. Or us. You know what I mean. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that They didn't shoot through the sky in a fiery rain of meteorites or ride the lightning. They just appeared.

If you'd have asked me before They arrived what I believed the odds of an invasion were, I'd of told you they were about a trillion to one. Which is to say I thought it was total bullshit. Those lights in the sky were weather balloons or sewer gases. The videos being plastered all over the Internet were fakes. Close encounters were manufactured in Hollyweird, not played out in the streets of New York. Sure, there were nut jobs who'd made the news talking about crop circles, sightings, and abductions. But that was just the dregs of some mind-blown, addle-brained crackhead's imagination. They were liars and addicts. Their stories were about as believable as Mother Goose Gables'. Or so I th...hou...ugh...ght...

[00:19 tape skip]

...e...v...ery newspaper for the next twenty years would reference that day. Captions exhausted every possible headline: *Not Alone! Visitors! Arrival!* It got to the point where a guy couldn't even check on the Yankees without there being something about aliens in the article. Sure, it was all fun and games for the hippies, but I hated being wrong.

[00:13 coughing/monitor erratic]

I-I'm sorry. I'll try to keep the hacking down. I know it's distracting. I hate being old. My skin is paper and my body is on fire half the time. Sleep doesn't even help anymore. No rest for the weary. Food lost its luster the day the tube was put in. The docs cut a hole in my gut and shoved that plastic hose down into my stomach. It was sore for two weeks. You get used to those kinds of things, though. The taste lingers. I never thought you could get indigestion from liquid food, but you can. And when that crap backs up into your gullet it's damn near impossible to scrape the film off your tongue. The last time I tasted anything but polyurethane-laden spit-vomit was over six years ago: pot roast with scalloped potatoes and buttered bread. You'd think I would've been able to come up with something more imaginative for my last meal. But I liked pot roast. I liked scalloped potatoes. I'd kill to have one more rich, salty, sweet taste of fresh bread. Not that I could chew it. I can't even get up to take a piss anymore. The catheter hurt for three days. You get used to those kinds of things, though.

[00:12 coughing]

Where was I? Oh, right.

Their ships weren't saucers or orbs of flashing light like we'd imagined. They looked terrestrial. Almost human. Like *Made in China* should've been stamped on the ass-end of each rocket.

The Hattan UFO, which was almost as big as the entire city, hung in the air a half-mile above the tallest skyscrapers and sat motionless. The design of the ship was almost identical to the B-2 Spirit Stealth Bomber, which didn't do much to still the shock its appearance caused. The exterior of the craft was a slick, solid black material. Hundreds of enormous engines hummed along its underbelly as flames shot toward the ground. I

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assume that's what kept it hovering in place.

As for us, the schmucks scrambling down below, their arrival caused a lot of panic and confusion. Who wants a death-machine the size of Amityville floating above them? The whole city -- people stuck in traffic, kids out kicking rocks, and commuters in every mass transit vehicle you could imagine -- evacuated the streets. They hunkered down; they took shelter and hid; they tucked tail and headed for the hills. It was chaos in the streets and mayhem in the fiel...d...ds...s.

[00:24 skipping]

O...Oh, and the stories people used to tell.

[00:04 laughter]

Everyone had stories about that day. And the ones about where they were when the ships materialized were often the funniest. He was on the subway. She was hung-over. The guy in 66D was screwing his brother's girlfriend. Stories all.

Even I've got a story, which is why I'm doing this, I guess. It's not the best of the bunch, but it's the only one I've got. I'm not even sure if anyone will ever get to hear this.

[00:11 silence]

Piss on it. Here goes.

[00:02 clears throat]

My coffee was still hot and the toasted bagel in my hand had just melted the thick layer of cream cheese between its slices into a perfectly soft, velvet consistency. The Deli on 7th had the best bagels. And I'm not talking about that delicatessen next to the 7-Way Café. I think that one was called Deli-1. No, you had to go up the street a few more blocks toward the lakes to get the good stuff. I remember the skin of each bagel was crunchy and the meat was delicate. The char on each side was a golden-wheat color and the slice was perfect. But I'm getting distracted. Let me get back on track here.

It was cold and the wind blew bitter. Each breath I took made it

feel like my insides were icing over. Thankfully, it was only a ten-minute walk from the corner deli to my job. There I could sit in my office and enjoy my meal as the old radiator under the window rattled. Or so I thought. Having a giant aircraft suddenly appear in the sky ruined any chance I had of crunching into the bagel or sipping my steaming, black cup of joe. Both the drink and the doughy-O would instead wind up in a heap at my feet.

There are a few major responses to fear -- the three F's -- and, like animals, people generally do one of these three things when they're afraid: they stand up and *fight*; they run like Hell, taking *flight*; or they *freeze*. Apparently, I freeze. And I don't skimp on the amount of freezing I do. When I freeze, I stay frozen. While everybody else in the South Village screamed and took off, I clammed up and went stiff as a board. A stampede of people flew past me. Young couples held hands. Husbands shielded wives. Mothers dragged children. They shrieked. They cried. Some shouted accusatorially: —It's the Russians! The Koreans! The Iranians! PETA!

I wanted to join in the charge, to make a mad dash for shelter, but I couldn't move my body. My legs felt like overcooked linguini and my stomach was hovering somewhere around my ankles. I probably would've pissed myself, but, like I said, I never got to finish my breakfast so my bladder was empty.

I'm not exactly sure what happened next. From what I was told, I got flattened by a 1,000 lb. roach coach. I just remember standing stuck-still one moment and flying through the air the next. A loud, hollow *thud* boomed from where I stood, and I tried to throw my arms out to shield myself but I couldn't react fast enough. It felt like I was floating through Jell-O. My landing was about as graceful as my takeoff. Luckily a steel trashcan was there to cushion my fall. When the left side of my face smashed into its rim, my head wheeled around to the right in a swift, violent jerk and the world went dark. My teeth ground together as I ricocheted off the can. There wasn't much I remember after bouncing off the pavement. A warm stream of fluid trickled down my eye socket to my cheek, and I picked up the faint scent of blood.

II. 0936

I awoke in the ER at Mount Sinai.

A chubby, overly chipper man dashed to my bedside before I could

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get my eyes open wide enough to see more than his chunky cheeks.

“Hey there, buddy!” he yelled. My temples throbbed in a heavy thump, which resounded in my jaw as a painful *bang, bang, bang*.

I had to squint to try and get a glimpse of who was screaming at me. He was a goofy looking guy wearing red flannel jacket with matching gloves and a green hat. It was the kind of cap with earflaps that hung down around his face and had faux fur lining.

“The name’s Jonas! Jonas J. Miller. How ya doin’ there?”

“I, uh... Wait. What? Where am I?”

“You’re in the hospital, good buddy.”

“Why am I in a hospital?” My voice was meek and strained.

“I ran you over with my hotdog cart. It was a total accident. I was runnin’ from those, well, those *things*.”

“What *things*?” I asked, trying to copy his tone.

“The aliens, man. You saw the aliens, right?” I thought I’d misheard him. The thick southern accent dripping from his every word made him hard to understand. He couldn’t have said aliens. “Everybody thought it was some kind of foreign attack at first, but them’re aliens. They came down in those spacedships. They’re all over the place, too. There’re UFOs just like the one here in the city all over the world.”

I looked around the room and tried to get my bearings. It was a small, grey observation cell with an old television mounted in the corner. The sheets were stark and the gauze wrapped around my forehead was far too tight. A dime store wall clock flashed the time: 9:36 a.m. I’d been out for more than two hours. Jonas scooped up the remote and tried to turn on the TV. The screen flashed and hummed, but there was no picture. “Dang, *They* must’ve got to the TV stations, too.” I gazed at Jonas with a confused expression and he took a deep breath. “Okay now, look, everythin’s stopped workin’: radios, cell phones, land lines, not even my antennae works. It’s like *They’ve* gone and shut everythin’ down. Like *They* turned off the world.”

I scanned his face for any sign of deception or humor. He could’ve been drunk. Stoned maybe. Then it hit me like a kick in the nuts.

“I’ve got to get out of here,” I said, tossing the over-starched, cardboard linens off of me.

“Wait, uh, the nurses said you might have a concussion.”

I turned to look at Jonas. “A what?”

“A concussion, or concustered, or somethin’.”

“A concussion?”

“Yeah! That’s it!”

“Well concussion or not, I’m leaving.” I stood. My legs trembled, threatening to drop me. After two shaky steps, I felt a sudden, sharp sting in my arm. It was only then that I noticed the IV. Movies like to make a scene over people in hospitals ripping tubes from their veins. I wouldn’t advise it. Removing a needle from your own flesh should be done slowly and with finesse, which was not how I tore the hose out of my skin. It hurt. I bled. You get used to those kinds of things, though.

A cool breeze blew open my gown and chilled my naked rear a little more than I was comfortable with. “Where are my clothes?”

“Oh, yeah. They’re on that chair,” Jonas said, pointing to a small plastic seat positioned diagonally in the corner.

“Thanks, uh, could you wait outside while I get dressed?”

“Oh crap! Yeah man. Sorry, this must be kinda weird.”

“Yeah, kind of.” I threw my jeans and shirt on quickly and unwrapped my head. Using the tiny sink in the room, I washed my face and patted dry the stitches that followed my hairline. They were numb. “Great,” I said, surveying the gash. “That’ll leave a nice big scar. Chicks dig scars. Alice does...” My tongue suddenly felt like sandpaper in my mouth and an apple-sized lump grew in my throat. “Alice!”

Jonas nearly tackled me as I darted from the room. He’d obviously been waiting around. “Whoa!” he said. “Slow down there, man. You’ve got to take it easy.”

As frazzled as I was, seeing him was a relief. I needed a lift and fast.

“Look, uh, Jonas, right?”

“Yep, Jonas J. Miller, like the beer not the actor.”

“The actor? Yeah, well, Jonas-”

“Call me Jo.”

“Okay, Jo. I need to get out of here.”

The trip from the hospital to our apartment on 1st Street, which takes any sane person fifteen to twenty minutes to drive, was the scariest four minutes of my life. I’m surprised I didn’t wind up back in the hospital. Jo swerved his rusted Chevy POS 4x4 out of the parking lot and onto the street where he began dodging rows of abandon cars. For a city that claimed to never rest, New York looked like a ghost town. Not that I had much time to take in the sights before Jonas jumped the curb and stomped on the gas. Central Park, with its trees covered in a light dusting of snow, flew by in streaks of brown, green, and white. The park’s gold-leafed,

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copper statue of Lady Victory shot past the window like a bolt. After sliding onto East 59th Street at 30 miles an hour faster than he should've been driving, and almost drifting into the ten foot tall glass pyramid in front of the T-Einstein store, I began to pray the rosary. I hadn't seen the inside of a church in almost ten years, and I was a bit rusty when it came to praying, but I gave it my all. With my eyes shut and my buttock clenched to a waterproof seal, I repeated the words, "O Jesus, O Clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary." We flew through a red light. Hundreds of cars sat empty on Park Avenue, but Jo floored it.

"O Jesus, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!"

Jonas' barely functional horn rang out as we slid onto 2nd Avenue.

"O Jesus, O sweet Virgin Mary!"

A lone homeless man barely ducked behind a box truck before Jo scraped along the side of it.

"Jesus! Sweet Mary!"

The Chevy hopped another sidewalk, demolished a newsstand, and finally stopped. Jo's armrest had a permanent indentation of my hand stamped in it. He was lucky I hadn't ripped it clean off the door.

"We're here," he said, pleased with himself. "24 East 1st Street. That's what you said, right?" I was trying not to retch so an answer would have to wait. Silently thanking God was about all I was capable of. I'd never been so happy we'd moved to Hattan. The \$3000 rent was worth every penny. If we'd of stayed in Midwood, I'd have been dead for sure.

"Th-Thanks for the ride."

"Hey, no problem. I owed you for the bump on the noggin." I took a moment to settle my nerves and glanced over at Jo. He was an odd looking guy. His skin was bright pink and he was heavyset. The more I thought about it then, the more I realized he actually looked kind of like a hotdog. He definitely smelled like one, which was the least appetizing odor I could've wanted trapped with me inside the truck cabin. I couldn't tell you much more about him, though. I never saw the color of his hair. That ghastly hat of his covered his head. But he did have the deepest blue eyes I've ever seen. They glowed like LED lights stuck in his face.

"Who're you here to see again?" he asked.

"Alice, she's my fiancé."

"Fiancé, huh? I had one of them a few years back. But then she became a vegaterarean and I had to break it off. Can't trust a woman who won't swallow a foot long." He laughed at his little joke while nudging me with his elbow. "Am I right?"

I smiled back.

The Chevy's door was heavy and it flung open as I pulled on the handle and hopped out. Trembling, I tried to get my feet under me.

Jo, being the sensitive guy that he was, leaned over the bench seat and shouted, "Don't go slippin' into no cocoon now, you hear."

"A what?" I took a second. "You mean a coma?"

"Yeah! That's it." I closed the door, thanked him again, and he sped off. Harold's hands told me it was 9:42. It was time to find Ali.

The elevator ride was short and the music wasn't half bad. I'll never forget that tune. It always reminded me of the theme song to *Welcome Back Porter*. I fished around in my pockets and found my keys. I pulled them out as the doors opened, then stepped forward and slipped into blackness.

### III. 1100

Officially, it was called the Unconscious Communal Event, or UCE (pronounced yüs). It became more commonly known as the Sleep. You might have heard of the phenomenon of shared dreams where two people have a similar dream at the same time: a husband and wife both dream about a vacation or twin sisters dream about being princesses together. This was kind of like that, only bigger. A lot bigger -- 9.7 billion people had the same dream at the same time. And it wasn't *similar*, it wasn't *almost* alike. These dreams were identical. Can you imagine? It probably sounds nuts, but hand to God it happened. And you'd think with every person in the world snoozing, it would be dangerous, right? But it's not like there were airplanes flying around; the FAA grounded everything as soon as They arrived. Not that it would've mattered. Cars parked. Runners stopped running. Swimmers beached themselves. Every man, woman, and child stopped what they were doing, got to a safe location, laid their heads down, and slept. Not one accident was reported. Not one death.

[01:13 coughing/monitor erratic]

So-sorry, I-I just can't seem to stop c-coughing. The Sleep w... wa...as...

[04:13 static]

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...rm...ma...gg...ged...don...

[01:41 skipping]

...I...It was 11. In an hour, They would be gone forever.

I was the first one awake in our building. When my eyes popped open, I was laying in the doorway of the elevator. After rising to my elbows and struggling to shake the fog from my mind, I tried to gauge the situation. My head was spinning. I didn't know why I'd collapsed. It could've been from my skull-crushing dive into the sidewalk earlier in the day, but I wasn't sure.

Harold was mocking me. I was trying to focus. The last thing I remembered before keeling over was my desire to find Ali. So I staggered to my feet and moved down the hall. It felt good to see 58A's plaque, even if I was seeing it through a kaleidoscope of door numbers.

The locks clicked and popped as I turned the various keys. The hinges squealed when the door swung open. Ali was asleep on the couch. I admit, seeing her made me laugh for the first time all day. I sat down beside her and gave her arm a shake. She slowly came to.

"Hey," I said, cooing softly. Her eyes bulged and she shot upright. "Whoa baby, it's alright. It's just me."

"Christ, babe," she said.

"It's okay. You were just sleeping." It took her a few moments to adjust, but she seemed to cope with the haziness better than I had.

She knit her brow and looked at me closely. "What happened to your face?"

I explained everything to her: the hotdog stand, my visit to the hospital, and my near death experience in Jonas' truck. She laughed. A lot. I can't say it didn't damage my ego. I can't say it didn't hurt my feelings. You get used to those kinds of things, though.

I didn't quite know how to start talking about the invasion with Ali. What was I supposed to say? I've never been great with words.

Thankfully, I didn't have to say much.

"So what do you think we should do about the aliens?" Alice asked. She was bold and so matter-of-a-fact about the whole thing. I tried to come up with something inspirational to say. I failed. I think I said something like, "I-I, I mean, we-" Alice really responded to my conviction. She punched me in the arm. You get used to those kinds of things, though.

We talked about the Sleep and the dream we'd had. We compared

notes and argued. We debated and rationalized. The truth was we had no idea what we were going to do. Ali kept rubbing her midsection with the palms of her hands. It was something I wasn't used to yet. It was the movement of a mother and not one of my lover.

The Sleep was one of those things you'd have to experience to understand, but the message behind the images, the meaning behind the visions, boiled down to a few main points: our world was dying; we'd killed it; and the only way to survive was to abandon the planet. That's why They were here. If you believed Them, then this wasn't an invasion. It was an evacuation. And the UFOs weren't bombers; they were life rafts. You're probably wondering what was in it for Them. What They wanted out of all of this. It's a good question. One I've never gotten an answer to. A...an...nd...

[03:34 skipping]

C...Cen...ntral Park was packed with people as we walked up. It was standing room only for at least forty blocks. Those who'd chosen to trust the visitors and who wanted to depart our world in hopes of a better life elsewhere were walking towards the carousel in the middle of the park. It was one of the thousands of evacuation sites shown to us during the Sleep. Everyone else stood around the edge of the park gazing up at the electric blue skies. There was a column of light extending from the ship to the ground and when a person stepped into it they vanished. I remember thinking it looked like something straight out of a Sci-Fi show like *Battlestar Gate* or *Space Trex*. Beam me up, Robbie.

They'd said noon. That's when They said They would leave. At first, I wondered if They meant eastern standard time. But then somehow I knew it didn't matter where you were. We were all on the same time. No one would miss their launch.

Harold's second hand was ticking away furiously: less than a minute till liftoff. With moments left, the Hattan crowd suddenly erupted. It was like everyone in the six boroughs had the same idea at the same time, and the mob broke out into the loudest countdown I've ever heard. Five! Everyone yelled. Four! Three! Two! One! And They were gone, disappearing as fast as They'd come.

IV. Noon

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Four hours and thirty minutes exactly. That was my close encounter. You might think it was anticlimactic. The aliens weren't hostile. There was no fighting; there were no wars.

They had come to offer us a choice: choose to stay or choose to go. Nothing more. Nothing less. And, honestly, that was the best possible outcome for us. Once we'd lost our ability to communicate, we were helpless. If They'd wanted to take over the planet, They easily could have. We were sitting ducks.

[00:13 coughing]

You might ask me why we didn't leave, why Ali and I chose to stay. It's another good question. It might seem like we jumped the gun a bit. Like we didn't give it much thought before we made a decision. But let me ask you: Would you go?

What if They told you the only way They would take you to the new world was if you were willing to completely abandon your life? What if you had to give up everything? And I mean e-v-e-r-y-thing: running water, electricity, clothes, medicine. Would you go then? Could you? What if you were going to have a baby? Would you risk your child's life to start over on an unfamiliar world? More importantly, would you have the confidence in an alien species you'd never seen before to safely take you and your family across the universe in some kind of galactic Noah's Arc?

If you said no, then you're in the majority. When given the choice, most people stayed. Only about 90,000 left.

[00:57 coughing—violent]

It's those 90,000 people I'm doing this for, though; they're why I'm on this old radio broadcasting my story out into the universe. I had to bribe the orderly to sneak this antique in here. It's the only bit of fun I've had in a long time. I'd almost forgotten fun.

[00:13 cough]

Anyway, if what *They* said was true, then one day those who left would wind up just like us. It sounds far-fetched, I know. But if you're listening to this, then maybe They weren't far off the mark. If you think about it, I'm sure you've had déjà vu so real it scared you. Or you said

something and you could swear you were the first person to ever say it. Or you had an idea, then you saw it on a TV show or someone used your concept in a book. It's like that. The details. We can see ourselves, all of our past lives and lost worlds, in the details. And it's usually the smallest things we notice the most: people, places, things, pop culture.

Now, I don't know if I believe all of it. I don't know if on that small, blue dot where they took you that you'll keep the planets' names the same. Or the countries. Or the cities. I can't be certain you'll always call that rock you're on Earth, like we did. I don't know if you'll ever have a ball club as good as the Yankees. I don't know a lot of things.

I *do* know this transmission will probably bounce around for a long time. Who knows, it may never even get heard.

[00:32 coughing—violent]

I regret not going sometimes. When things get hard, I always think back to the day They came. That was the day I realized life isn't about what you take with you; it's about what you keep.

For me, it's my family: Ali and Connor. I keep them with me always. You might wonder about them, about my little family. You might want me to tell you a tale or two about our lives. But if I told you about Alice and our son -- if I talked about them the way I would have to in order to tell you our story -- then I would have to let them go, and I can't do that. So you'll just have to settle for this story. It's not the best of the bunch, but it's the only one I've got.

I'm getting tired now. I'm almost out of time and my chest hurts. You get used to those kinds of things, though. I just hope there's somebody out there who's paying attention.

[00:40 cough—violent/vomiting]

It's all ending, you know, just the way They said it would. The end *was* near...

[01:34 cough—violent]

D-don't be like us. Break the cycle. Be better. And if alien ships appear in your skies one day and they offer to rescue you, give Them the benefit of the doubt. I think if someone had sent us a signal like this one,

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we could've made different choices. We could've changed our fates. We could've tried. Hoped. Dreamed. Worked. Strove. And maybe, just maybe, w-we could've kept ourselves alive. We could've salvaged that small, red dot in your sky. We could have saved life on Mars...

[01:34 labored breathing, groaning]

[32:01 monitor steady -- flat line]

[End]