

Thomasina Swift
and the Flying
Generators *of Death!*

*Adventure Three in the
Awesome New Series!*

BY

Leo L. Leo II

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**This book is a parody of the third
of the original Thomasina Swift
stories:**

Thomasina Swift and Her Flying Generators

Also in this series:

Thomasina Swift” Forever (and a bit) More

Thomasina Swift and the PAHRC Jet

Thomasina Swift and Her Space Lunch Program

*Thomasina Swift and Her Space Retrieval Service
(Exedra Headache #1)*

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Anything you may have heard about the author being “out of his ever-loving mind,” or “what was he thinking when he wrote this,” are simply the product of jealous small-minded individuals.

THE THOMASINA SWIFT STUFF

Thomasina Swift and Her Flying Generators *of Death!*

By Leo L. Leo II

Okay. Time for another recap. Thomasina Swift came to the U.S. just in time to pull the Swift Construction Company out of being dissolved and having their assets sold off. All courtesy of the, then, emotionally paralyzed Damon Swift.

She invented a nifty bracelet phone and computer tablet with the help of some drawings and notes left by the late Tom Swift, along with Tom's sister, Sandy. And, a couple of really good hugs brought Damon out of his torpor and back to work. Hurray!

She met, fell in love with and helped ex-Air Force man, and now pylon racer pilot, Bud Kenworth and invented a radically new jet engine using a plasma arc partially fired by human urine. Yuck!

She has brains, blonde hair and a dynamite body. Bud ought to thank his lucky stars!

Dedication

This book is dedicated to people who share my love of a particular genre of books:

To the wonderful guys—and the occasional lady—who make up the Yahoo Tom Swift Group. Be you reader, writer or occasional message sender, the affection we seem to share for Tom is what led me to write these stories about Tommy Swift. Definitely not Tom, but a very nice and soft replicant of our Boy Wonder.

Anyway, Tommy has deep blue eyes and a perfectly proportioned nose and mouth. Her full and sensual lips are naturally pink so she rarely needs to use lipstick to enhance them.

From what I've already written in the first two stories, you can probably see in your own mind's eye that she is somewhat buxom with a tight but not too narrow waist and hips that are perfectly proportioned to the rest of her.

Really nice! Oh, yeah.

You go on without me. I'll just stay here and picture her.

Go away, now.

Leo L. Leo II

A SWIFT ENTERPRISES SAGA

Thomasina Swift
and the
Flying Generators
Of Death!



By Leo L. Leo II

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Prologue Part Three: Thomasina Swift And Her Flying Generators *of Death*

Tommy looked over to the entrance of Bud's hangar just in time to see a lanky, older teen boy standing there. It wasn't anyone she had ever seen before—and she knew all of the 276 employees at the Swift Construction Company.

"Can we help you?" she called out.

He stood there doing a 'Who? Me?' pointing at himself then turning around to see if anyone was standing behind him that Tommy might be speaking to.

"Yes. You. What do you want? I think I've seen you before. Who are you?"

He looked surprised and stepped back outside. Getting to her feet she saw the stranger disappear around the door. She had jogged over to the doorway and looked all around; the boy was nowhere to be seen. Tommy walked all around the hangar. Nothing. The mystery kid had disappeared.

"What the heck was that all about?" Bud asked when she returned. He tossed her another rag.

"I really wish I knew," she said. "It's like I was seeing my own ghost! At least, if I had been born a boy and didn't have these." She looked down at her own chest.

They both laughed at the absurdity of it all and went back to work.

“Going on a trip?” Tom Jr.—also known as TJ—asked his youngest probability. Three of the five Tom Swifts had bellied up to the bar at the All Tom’s restaurant and were drinking coffee and hot chocolate. Not separate, mind you. A mixture that made for a poor man’s mocha. It was late in the day, and the wait staff was starting to come in. The staff consisted of Nancy D, the waitress, and Judy G, the girl from Kansas in the blue gingham dress who sang like a woman at least ten years older, and a person they all knew was doing some sort of drugs by the vacant look in her eyes.

Looking at Little Tom’s fur parka, gloves and itchy wool balaclava sitting on the bar, TJ answered his own question. “Going back to the Himalayans to visit that tamed Yeti girl, I see,” mentioning one of Tom V’s earlier adventures. “You ought to stick to your own species!”

“Ha-ha. It is winter in my Shopton. Didn’t I ever tell you guys that my Earth is about five months out of synch with this one?” he chuckled in high spirits while eyeing them to see if they believed him.

Both Toms stared at their younger self. They could see all the signs of a really bad liar coming of age.

“What are you doing now?” TSL asked.

“Working with dad. After we finished up the

Chameleon Cloak adventure we stated getting really close. Being treated like an adult is great! He listens to my input and tells me dirty jokes and even had *the talk* with me. I didn't understand a lot of it, but it made me feel funny inside. You guys get that?"

His companions chuckled, recalling their own *the talk* sessions.

"Yeah, good times," said TSL. "As you get older it all falls into place, just don't rush it. And, as my father told me, don't dip your wick in a dirty pond."

TSL looked at TJ. who added, "But they have some marvelous medications if you do."

Just then a blue folder landed on the bar in front of them, spinning a few times around and spilling out the contents. T-4 spend many minutes picking up all of the sheets of paper and organizing them. Because the had no page numbers this took awhile.

"T-4. Don't you think you ought to carry a binder clip or something. I mean, since you are the one who finds those things, you should clip the pages together so we can get on with the reading and not sit here watching you fumble through it all?" scorned TJ. None of the other Toms had ever found a blue folder.

Tom IV took a gulp of something in a glass sitting on the bar looked at them. "Are you

kidding me? I just got shot at out there in the parking lot..

“What! Are you sure?” asked LT paling at the thought. “Oh, and why not mention that fifteen minutes ago when you came in and not wait until you got the pages back in order?”

“Oh yeah, I’m in shock. That’s it.. A bullet whizzing by your head is gonna do that.” He tried to make himself as pale as LT.

T-4 looked around. “Where’s T-3?” he asked.

TJ reached out his hand to stop him taking another swig from the mystery glass. “That’s Nancy’s cleaning solution for sterilizing the bar.”

“Yeah, guess you’re right! I knew it tasted like that. Not bad, though, except that I can’t feel my fingers any more.” TJ pointed to the bathrooms. T-4 took the hint and headed off to vomit the offending liquid back up.

“Thanks, Tom, that’s much better,” he said when he returned to the bar.

TJ nodded and reached into his pocket and pulled out his quantum radio fob and touched a button.

“TJ to T-3, come in please.”

“Hi, Tom Jr. What’s cooking? The stars are bright tonight and I can’t see if it’s cloudy or blue and I only have eyes... sorry. Did want to

join me? It's a popular song." He sounded relaxed but lonely.

"Sorry Tom III, but no can do. We don't want to pay royalties for using too many of the lyrics. Listen. We've had an incident down here. Better be on high alert," he warned.

"What happened? A Negative Zone show up there." His voice was all business now.

"Nah. Nothing that important. Someone just took a shot at Tom IV as he walked to the restaurant from the parking lot. Or, so he says if you know what I mean."

"I'll keep my eyes and ears open. I have Aristotle stationed on the far side of the sun in my shuttlecraft. As soon as he figures out he needs to come out of a position where the sun is exactly between us so we can communicate I'll let him know to watch as well. I'll keep in touch, out."

"Well," said TJ, "that's settled. We have an enemy and he's willing to shoot at T-4. Guys, after this is over we'd better close down all the Negative Zone devices and stop seeing each other. I know we promised to always be there for each other, but if someone wants to kill T-4, I for one don't want to be too close or too easy to find. Know what I mean?" He looked from one Tom to the other.

"You're right, TJ," said TSL, "we'll have to

make the right kind of decision that protect our own asses. Our enemy knows all of us and can pick us off one by one if we remain in a tight group. The very least we can do is to make it more difficult to hunt each of us down.”

“Let me make copies of this folder and we can get out of here,” T-4 said, “before you all gang up on me and tie me to a stake in the middle of a small clearing in the jungle to attract our potential killer.”

When the other Toms headed off to the bathroom. T-4 whispered to LT, “Did you get me a Chameleon Cloak liked I told you.”

LT hesitated and then nodded his head. “I feel funny about this. And, not in the same way I felt when dad gave me *the talk*.” He was looking worried.

“I know, kid, but this is life and death. Possibly mine. One of us is an impostor, a charlatan, a fake, a fraud and any other synonym I might be able to dredge up. Tell no one about this! Once I find out which Tom is the impostor, charlatan, fake, fraud or any other synonym I might be able to dredge, up we can then square it with the others.”

LT nodded his head in agreement and, with shaky hands, finished photocopying last folder.

Chapter One: Inventions Don't Just Appear Out of Thin Air

The public address system howled three times in quick secessions and announced, "*MEDICAL RESPONSE TEAM, CODE BLUE, ASSEMBLY BUILDING THREE, SECTION T-THREE,*" then repeated it twice more.

Sandra and Thomasina Swift, cousins—who preferred to be known as Sandy and Tommy, respectively because the other way around wouldn't make any sense—gave each other a quick look. They ran from Tommy's lab and shed and jumped into Sandy's white sports car. In less than a minute they pulled up to 'AB-3.' Section T-3 was located just inside the loading dock at the back. The freight doors were wide open letting in what little cool breezes there were on that hot August day.

The Med Team was heading through the doors so the girls ran to catch up. When they reached the edge of the small crowd of workers, Mr. Avery, the shop foreman, was still shoving the looky-loos and rubberneckers out of the way. The two medics shouted for everyone to 'make way!' then used their gurney to force their way through any workers who didn't move. At least three of them fell to the ground screaming in pain. Two men were giving a prone,

unconscious workman CPR. One, Harry Schafer, was pumping the victim's heart five times and the other one, James McCoy, was breathing into the lifeless man's mouth after each set of pumps.

"Keep going," ordered one of the EMTs as he cut open the stricken man's shirt with a strange pair of scissors and checked him for vital signs. "He's dead, Jim! Get the shock sticks out!" The second medic already had the portable defibrillator open with the paddles smeared with sticky gel and charged, ready to go. It only took him a second to get into position and place the paddles on the man's chest.

"Clear!" he shouted and pressed the shock button. The prone man's muscled involuntarily flinched making the body almost jump off the ground, but ultimately he only gave a slight shudder and lay still. Still.

"Nada," the other medic said after checking for a heartbeat. He cranked up the amps and hit the charge button. It hummed for a second and a green light glowed. "Do it!"

"Clear!" and once more the man jumped... but this time the body gasped.

"Is that good or bad," Mr. Avery asked.

"Probably good, sir," the EMT with the paddles replied setting them aside. A second later the stethoscope touched the formerly dead

man's chest. "Yo-ho-ho! Got a heartbeat and... uh-huh. Love it! He's breathing on his own. Let's get him on the gurney and out to the hospital, fast!" In another minute they pushed the heavy metal device past the two men who hadn't made it back onto their feet, and disappeared out the door.

"Okay, people," called out Mr. Avery as the EMTs were loading the stricken man into the ambulance. "Take an hour break, grab a cup of coffee and rub some life back into those shins while you gossip about all this, and be ready to get back to work by ten! Harry, Jim. Not so fast. First, glad to see that at least two people paid attention during that CPR class we had backing March. Did you see what happened to Hinkle?"

"Yes sir," answered the one called Jim. "Hinkle... was... there... taking down... the power cowl... off the end... of the assembly line—"

"Stop with the Shatner cadence. Speak US, not Canadian!" ordered Mr. Avery.

"Right. Anyway, Hinkle was placing them on the pallets when it happened. He bent over to pick that one up," he pointed to the nearest cowl, "and got a big jolt of electricity. He keeled right over. It was funny at first but then we all could see that he was in trouble."

The blades inside the cowl were slowly

spinning in the breeze from outside..

“Stay clear of that!” warned Mr. Avery. “It’s still charging. It may overload at any moment and send an arc of electricity into any of you standing too close. Like you, Smithers, all standing there leaned over the cowl gawking at it like an idiot.”

Tommy, one of the natural reactors not a freezer like lots of people who put others in jeopardy by not moving when they should, grabbed a length of chain, swung it out so that it wrapped around a steel support beam and the other end over part of the power cowl that was not covered. It arched perfectly and fell directly on the exposed wire coils. There were several large blue sparks accompanied by loud pops and the smell of ozone filled the air.

“Well, Tommy, that was a good trick. But it sure destroyed that power cowl.” Uncle Hank laughed as all the tension he had been feeling came pouring out. The two women called him ‘uncle’ even though they were not related. “Sandy, run and close the loading dock doors, we have to stop that breeze from coming in or else other cowls will begin to spin—they are after all so perfectly balanced that it takes only a stern glare to make the blades move. And, when they move, they build up an electrical charge”

Sandy finished the task before he had

finished his explanation. Tommy was trying to yank the chain off the now wrecked power cowl. With a final tug it peeled off, taking a chunk of carbon fiber with it. The device was a combination air compressor and electrical generator for the front of Tommy's new PHARC Jet engine. This cowl had been built for a private jet aircraft and was half the size of the commercial ones. Tommy could only think what might have happened to the man, Hinkle, if it had been a full-sized unit.

It was suppose to function by having three sets of forty thin turbine blades spin at high speed. They sucked in and compressed the air before it was forced backward and into the combustion chamber. The ends of the compressor blades were... Oh. Just read story #2 to find out how the danged thing works!

"This never happened before, Uncle Hank. Why?" Tommy asked.

"It's your new TML hub." Tom's Magnetic Levitating hub was an idea that Tommy found in the late Tom Jr's diary. "This is the first batch with them in it. They're really neat and much better than the old ones, but as we have just seen, there is a drawback."

Tommy touched one blade and it started to spin. "Until it gets connected to the rest of the turbine assembly this is so light and balanced it

takes nothing to start it spinning. We'll have to add easily recognized and removable stop. Foam rubber or Styrofoam I suppose."

"Can't you just *not* connect the wires together?" Sandy asked, not understanding about the circuitry.

"There's too many, Sandy," said Uncle Hank. "We have to keep the blades from spinning or they'll continue to be a safety hazard."

Shaking her head Sandy said, "A thin piece of a non-conductive substance light enough to not be a bother yet both strong enough and resilient enough to be added to these blades without causing damage, huh? Who would have thought of that before this accident happened?"

"It will have to have a long 'pull me before use' flag on it, too," Tommy said ignoring the implied accusation. "Think what a job it would be to clean that out if someone left on in and started the engine."

They spent a half hour checking the assembly line in case the electrical feedback caused damage. By the time they were done, the workers were starting to come back.

Uncle Hank was now busy giving out work orders so Tommy and Sandy left. Tommy grabbed the turbine and called out to Uncle Hank, "I'm taking this," and he waved his

consent.

Tommy couldn't fit the cowl into Sandy's car, so she had to walk back to her shed.

An hour later, Tommy decided to pay her uncle, Damon Swift, a visit in his office. She needed some advice.

After the elevator doors finally opened on the top floor of the new Administration building, she stepped out and directly across the hallway, then into the front office of her uncle. The ever present secretary seemed to be missing, which was strange because the woman was quickly getting a reputation for being at her desk whenever anyone came in. Whenever!

Tommy shrugged and walked across the room to the door to her uncle's office. Without knocking, because she had discovered years earlier that you miss out on seeing a lot of interesting things if you let the person on the other side of the door know that you intend on entering, she opened the door and entered.

And, her jaw dropped!

"Uncle Damon!" she exclaimed.

An attractive thirty-something woman with a full head of red hair suddenly was a flurry of arms and hair as she sought to get off of the inventor's lap and over to the edge of the desk.

“Miss Trent!” Tommy also exclaimed.

“Uh, Why... uh... Tommy, dear,” Damon Swift uttered while trying to surreptitiously rebutton the top three buttons of his shirt and straighten his very loosened tie, “what a delight to see you. Suddenly. Uh, Miss Trent and I were just getting ready... um, I mean she was about to take... errr, she noticed that my shirt was misbuttoned so she was helping me, and I had a cramp in my leg so I couldn’t get up, so she had to get into my lap to reach the buttons... uhhhh, and she was just about to button the first one when you burst... came in. Yes. That’s definitely what was happening.”

Tommy stood there with her hands on her hips, head tilted to one side, and a wicked grin on her face.

“There’s nothing wrong with what you were doing, Uncle Damon. I’ve had a good look through the company standards book on employee behavior—because of my budding relationship, pardon the pun, with Bud Kenworth—and there’s nothing in there about not having it off with a fellow employee. Besides, it’s been almost three years since... uh, the accident, where your sixteen year old son, Tom, and your wife, Anne, met a terrible fate when an eighteen-wheeler—“

“Tommy. Now isn’t the time to—“ he started

to interrupt her before she interrupted him.

“Stop right there, Uncle Damon, I’m not close to being finished with my exposition here. Anyway,” she said giving him an ‘I dare you to interrupt me again’ glare, “...where was I? Oh, right. The big truck with the drunken lout driving it crossed the line in a curve and killed them, leaving you to wallow in self-pity and anguish for two full years, while the company failed around you, only to be pulled from your depression by my arrival and the teaming of your daughter, Sandra—who prefers to be called Sandy except in business situations—when we made the first of several crackerjack inventions, the now world famous wrist bracelet touch tablet computer.”

She looked at them both. Miss Trent was trying to get some order back into her hairstyle and Damon was sitting there staring at Tommy’s chest.

“Okay, I’ll bottom line this for you two. It’s okay to have a little dalliance in the office. Miss Trent here is a fire-haired hottie and Uncle Damon is a very handsome man who has been a little starved for female companionship for too long. I say good for you both.”

Clearing his throat, Mr. Swift said, “Miss Trent and I have already... um... been close on several occasions. I suppose we need to be more

circumspect here in the office however.”

Tommy scowled a little. “You don’t have to call her ‘Miss Trent’ in front of me.” Turning to the secretary she asked, “So, what’s your name?”

“Oh! I could never allow such familiarity to have my employer calling me by my first name. It is and always shall be Miss Trent!” With that, she rose from the side of the desk and walked out of the room.

Tommy looked at her uncle and he looked back at her, this time in the eyes.

“So, why did you come in here, Tommy?”

“You know, I’ve completely forgotten. Bye!” and she skipped out of the room giving Miss Trent another wicked smile as she went past.

The turbine sat on the workbench, black and smelling of burnt ozone. Tommy was now in mad scientist mode. She knew that electricity had killed the cowl and electricity would make it once again rise and take its place among society!

Mwa-ha-ha-haaaa! “Oh, jeez. Did I make that maniacal sound out loud?” she asked herself.

She was in her glory working at something new and intriguing and that took her full concentration. Time seemed to disappear. Where

others might see a piece of wrecked junk, Tommy saw a fully-fledged wind power generator. They were not new to Tommy, but the way she was planning on using this cowl were.

She gave a brief thought to traditional wind powered generators and dismissed them without ever getting to the point where she might list how they operated and what could go wrong and what robbed power from them.

As in her PHARC Jet turbine, magnets of her new generator were located at the end of carbon fiber blades with wire coils epoxied into pockets all around the cowl. As air flowed through it would turn the blades and generate electricity. Lots and lots of good old American electricity!

She redesigned the blade shape into broader, wider and fewer than the original cowl. This dropped the three rows of forty thin blades to just one row of twelve, and the depth of the cowl went down to just ten inches. The total weight would eventually come in at only five pounds compared to a regular back yard wind generator of similar size that, with its heavy gearing, came close to fifty pounds.

She needed to reshape the wire coils to be longer and narrower. But. How many an how far apart? She did a little research and found a formula that told her a nine point five foot

circumference needed thirty-eight wire coils.

As suppertime passed, her stomach started to rumble; she had missed lunch and had not even taken out a delicious and nutritious adult meal enhancement beverage from the little refrigerator she kept at the back of the shed. She shut stacked her papers left. The new body would wait until tomorrow.

By seven a.m. the next day she was back in the shed and on the phone talking to Uncle Hank, “You *do* love me, don’t ya, Uncle Hank?” she said trying to tease him.

“Oh, Tommy, if you only knew how I yearn— that is, I mean what do you need?”

“A wind tunnel,” Tommy replied choosing to ignore what sounded kind of icky to her.

“What for? The last time I saw you, you were walking away with that burned out power cowl.”

“I did a little design work, designed some new blades and a new hub to hold the blades, cut down the cowl, repositioned and rebuilt the coils and came up with a perfectly balanced and very light weight electrical generator that needs to be tested in wind. If you have to ask.”

“Girl, you don’t need a wind tunnel, you just need a fan. Call Janitorial and get one of their box fans.” He laughed and hung up.

“Thanks for the advice, Uncle Hank” she told

the dead receiver. Janitorial promised to get one to her later that day.

She next turned to making a jig to shape the blades, layering eight of the ten sheets of carbon fiber in the jig—after coating it with paste wax so the finished produce would release cleanly—and fitted the rare earth magnets to the tips before she finished covering the blades with the final two layers. Tommy then surrounding the finished sandwich with double-sided tape, adhering a plastic film over it except for the area where she next pump out the air using a pump and then allowing a special epoxy to flood back in. Then she used the vacuum pump to squeeze the layers of carbon sheets and epoxy. Once oven-cured they formed one continuous piece.

Luckily Tommy was very fast and managed to make all twelve blades by the middle of the afternoon. This was followed by making the new hub into which each blade would fit. At six she began to sand and balance all the blades so they would not cause vibrations

She had to repair the outer casing where she had chopped off the excess and that meant working with a different type of epoxy as she would not be able to use the big curing oven over in Assembly. It ran 24-hours a day making the cowls for the real Swift products. By midnight she was asleep at her workbench. At

two in the morning she staggered to the rear of the shed, dropped onto a cot she kept and slept till nine when Sandy woke her and took her to get coffee and breakfast.

Normally her boyfriend, Bud Kenworth, kept her from working late hours but he was making a delivering to in Newfoundland, Canada of a new electronic setup to replace their antiquated airport tower equipment. He was the Swift's only cargo pilot and also ran an air flight school out of the Swift's complex.

By noon she was done. The whole thing came in at a final weight of five and three quarter pounds. The new blades spun almost by themselves and actually did when she blew on them.

An anemometer and test instruments were set up to help regulate the air speed from the box fan and the cowl was clamped to a Black & Decker Workmate® portable bench. Two sandbags stabilized the thing.

Crossing her fingers she turned on the fan and set it for its slowest possible speed, five miles per hour.

A minute later she grinned realizing that she was getting 19 watts; a typical three-bedroom house with two adults and one child needed just over 1,000 watts. At ten miles per hour she got 152 watts! And, at twenty miles per hour, it was

outputting 1,216 watts. She was elated. Cheap power was now available to anyone that lived in an area with an average twenty miles per hour winds, and from a three-foot generator; she did a detailed series of calculations, resorting to Reverse Polish Notation formulae, and came up with figures for larger generators and higher wind speeds.

By the time she finished, she was dizzy with excitement, and the realization that she had again skipped eating a couple meals. She sat back and admired her chart.

	5 MPH	10 MPH	20 MPH	40 MPH
3 ft.	19 W	152 W	1,216 W	9,728 W
6 ft.	38 W	304 W	2,432 W	19,456 W
9 ft.	76 W	608 W	4,865 W	38.912 W
12 ft.	152 W	1,216 W	9,728 W	77,824 W

Her elated state sank somewhat when she researched several Internet sites and discovered that the average wind speed in most places was seven to eight miles per hour at ground level. And, it wasn't there every hour of the day. Mostly near dawn and dusk when the heating or cooling of the air or the Earth made for the conditions that gave you wind.

Even her turbine couldn't make power

without wind.

“A tower!” she realized as little blue spots began forming in front of her nutrition-starved eyes. But, more research told her that a tower to get the turbine high enough to have access to a more constant wind source would be over two hundred feet tall.

“What to do?” She thought as the world around her began to spin. “You can’t have towers all over the place! What to do?”

With that, Tommy Swift passed out from not eating.

Let that be a lesson to you!

Chapter Two: Kite Flying

The next day was miserably hot, even for the first week of August. Damon Swift had remarked to Mr. Avery how nice it would have been if Tom Swift had been a live so that he might invent some sort of flying device to both clean up excess carbon from the atmosphere while also repairing the hole in the ozone layer over the South Pole. “Yep. That just might help global warming,” Mr. Avery had admitted.

The sun was even hotter on the tarmac of the Construction Company and Sandy, dressed in shorts and a very thin halter top, was running up and down the runway pulling an uncooperative kite behind her. Eleven men lined the catwalk around the control tower watching her thought powerful binoculars and letting out heavy sighs with each step and each little jiggle.

The air was dead and, within five minutes, so was Sandy. She trudged back to her white sports car and tossed the kite onto the passenger seat. Leaning against the sun-baked car was a mistake; she yelped and jumped away. Too much skin and too hot a car!

Tommy lowered her binoculars and laughed at her cousin. Patches O’Brian, the control tower operator, told the other men there, “Show’s over,

boys. Get back to work!”

One minute later they were standing alone on the catwalk of the runway tower waiting for a plane to come in.

The radio squawked. Tommy grabbed the mic and called out “That better be you, Bud. Mama’s been waiting too long for it to be anyone else!” Fortunately for Tommy not only was she talking on the Swift’s private frequency so that nobody from someplace like the FAA would overhear her, it *was* Bud Kenworth radioing in his ETA. He was coming back from Canada. She talked to him for a few minutes and then handed the mic back to Patches.

She flew down the outer tower stairs, climbed down the fire ladder on the side of the three-story Administration building and jumped on her motorcycle. She jumped right back off as her thighs—bare because of the short shorts she was wearing—registered the nuclear-hot leather of the seat. She yanked out her chamois riding shirt from the saddlebag, settled cautiously on the saddle and started the bike, roaring off seconds later. As she pulled up to Sandy’s car she playfully picked up the kite, let out some string and accelerated. The kite flew up in the air.

Sandy hopped into her car—she had been smart enough to put a towel on the seat when

she got out—and raced after the thief.

Tommy was laughing and having a good time flying the kite until it all went wrong and the kite frame snapped, sending it to the ground.

“Oops,” Tommy said to herself. “Double oops,” she said as she stopped her bike in time to watch Sandy’s car run over the wreckage.

By the time she walked over there Sandy had picked up her mangled kite. “Looked what you’ve done! You killed it! You’re the sort of person who’d spray water on the Wicked Witch of The West just to see her melt.”

Tommy looked at Sandy and shook her head in disbelief. She reached out for the kite, took it and wadded it up.

“Now,” Tommy said, “act like the beautiful and somewhat scantily clad sexy little woman you are and stop being a kid!”

Sandy looked at her and then down at her own body. “Thanks for that, but I’ve gotta tell you that you’ve got no soul. That kite was going to win the Lake Copland kite festival.”

Tommy laughed at her, “Sandy, an old fashioned stick, string and newspaper kite with the torn strips from one of your old blouses for the tail isn’t going to do it. How do you think it could win?”

“It would have won on personality and

moxie...”

“What in the name of Arthur C. Clarke does a bitter alternative to cola have to do with— oh. You didn’t mean the old soft drink, did you?”

Sandy shook her head.

She would have said more but the roar of Bud’s airplane engine caught both their attentions.

Tommy jumped on her motorcycle and headed toward the hanger where Bud kept the Swift’s cargo plane. She was half way there when it hit her! “Flying the generators,” she laughed out loud, and turned the motorcycle so sharply she had to put her foot down to keep from having the bike slide out from under her. As she raced off to her own shed she muttered, “instead of putting them up on towers, we can fly them. Three thousand to five thousand feet—that’s where the winds are constant. What a dunce I am to not see that before!”

Tommy forgot about Bud within seconds of turning on her computer—the world around her disappeared.

“Ahem! Forget someone?” Bud stood at the door with a grin. He had landed two hours earlier.

“Hi, Bud. Oh, bloody hell, Bud!” she

exclaimed, with a look of shame crossing her face. “Forgive me? I... I... heck, I’ve got no excuses.”

“That’s for sure! I’ve been back for two hours. I saw Sandy and you in the parking lot as I landed and talked to her and she told me you went off to go meet me. Somehow in the short distance from the parking lot to the cargo hanger you got kidnapped by mysterious and invisible beings and ended up here. It’s no wonder you’re still single.” Tommy looked contrite. “Now as punishment you have to take me out to dinner and pay for it. Lots of sloppy kisses will be necessary, too! It’s all you can eat previously frozen seafood night at Tortilla Jose’s! And I’m hungry!”

That weekend Tommy finalized her plans on how to get her new generators up in the air. Flexible wings, like those common on hang gliders, were out. Neither type were sturdy enough, nor could they take off without some type of outside power.

The next group of airfoils she investigated were kites. The problem? Most were basically a flat surface with no place to attach a turbine. Box kites were another thing. She envisioned attaching two box kites together and flying tandem with a pair of generators suspended

between them. She made a rough sketch of it. It might just work so it deserved further work.

Her next idea was a Wright Flyer biplane. It could be outfitted with two spars coming out from the same area of the props. At the end of the spars would be the turbines and attached between the two turbines she would place a symmetrical wing—identical curvature on both sides—to kept the generators always facing the wind. She had great hopes for this as the Wright brothers experimented with wing designs by flying them on tethers, like kites.

Her third choice was a flying wing. Everyone had made one at some time. The Nazis had, Northrop did their YB-49 in the 50s, and the Lockheed Skunkworks had secretly created one at Groom Dry Lake Bed (also known as Area 51) in 1971 and had flown seven variations over a thirty-two month period where all but two had experienced crashes and their burnt out hulks had been buried in shallow pits around the facility—the largest one on a direct bearing line of 270° (magnetic) from the left edge of hangar 7, sixteen hundred and three feet away.

But, that's not important here.

As Tommy sketched her wing, she studied the chord length between the leading edge and the trailing edge of the wing. She would need to make it adjustable to test various stability

settings. She added wing tiplettes to the ends of the wings and configured a central pod to house the batteries, the electrical equipment and the emergency parachute she intended to add to the real thing in case of an accident. On the wing bottom she attached the two turbines about a third of the way out from the center.

On both the biplane and the flying wing she placed the turbines to the back so as not to interfere with the airflow over the leading edge of wings. Tommy was going to use the turbines as both the motive force to get the units up into the air and then reversing the connections to turn them into generators.

With her ideas on paper, Tommy now set about making actual flying models. She couldn't make tiny generators for the models but intended to use electric motors in their place. Her ultra-light nano-tube batteries would power the motors, plus the micro servos and RC receiver pack.

She finished the tandem box kite in an afternoon. After attaching the generator stand ins, she found that the kite was nose heave. She pulled them off and moved them back and lower. That seemed to do the trick.

To save time and effort Tommy bought a RC Wright Flyer kit and modified it to her needs. That took all of Tuesday.

She first tried placing the generators where the propellers of the original plane had been. It made the model want to flip upside down. So, she made a small armature and attached the two motors a third of the way from the bottom wing.

Tommy glued the symmetrical wing to a spacing rod and epoxied that in place. The model was still top heavy, but she hoped that a little wind over the wings would fix that.

On Wednesday morning Bud had another flying delivery to take care of. He would not be back till late Friday morning. Although she loved the big lug and would miss him she was glad he'd be out of her hair for a few days.

The flying wing had to be hand cut out of a solid piece of high impact foam. Tommy used a positioning jig and a hot wire knife to melt through the foam. Fine sanding with micro-planes and hobbyist files, plus a coating of foam sealant, finished the job.

By late Thursday afternoon she had all three models done. None were as strong as she hoped but that was something for the actual builds. All she needed was 20-30 minutes of flight time.

Now that she was finished, Tommy was a little bored. She called her cousin. "Got the urge to splurge?" she asked.

Fifteen minutes later Sandy and Tommy went out the gate and drove to the mall to

celebrate (spend money on dresses and shoes), have dinner (reward themselves for being clever Swift girls) and then went back to the mall to buy new summer swimwear.

“Can you tuck those things in a little better?” Sandy asked when Tommy stepped out of the changing room in a daring red bikini.

Tommy looked down and shrugged. “It’s the largest cup size they have. Anyway, only Bud will be seeing this.”

“You sneeze and everybody around you will be seeing a lot more than just that red top!” Sandy exclaimed. “Can I offer you some snuff, Tommy?” She waggled her eyebrows.

“One of these days, Sandra Swift, you will go too far with the girl to girl flirting,” Tommy warned.

“Or, one of these nights,” Sandy said under her breath as she turned away.

Bud flew in Friday morning at 11:10. Just before 11:00 Tommy hid out near his hanger. He taxied up and hit the remote to open the double doors.

Tommy was standing just inside the door to be in full sunlight. As the doors parted the hanger was dark except for a stream of light illuminating her.

“Hey, Tiger!” Tommy called out as Bud shut

the engine off and was stepping off the step on the landing gear. "Someone missed you."

She slowly took off her coverlet and dangled it from one hand. Then she raised her other hand above her head and pirouetted slowly in the sunlight. She had on the small red bikini. Her white skin glistened in the light and her blond hair swirled around her face.

Bud was rooted to the spot. He barely was able to get out, "Wowsers, Tommy. I now have zero doubt about whether you are all woman. Man oh man are you all woman. And then some!"

She stopped spinning and said, "Get ready to take me swimming, and do it before I call Haz," she teased.

"If you call him," Bud replied as he stepped forward and reached out for her, "you won't get this," and he kissed her passionately.

"Oh deary, deary, deary me! I believe, sir, that you have caused me to become ever so slightly excited." Tommy whispered in his ear when he stopped. "I guess you win our big prize. It's me by the say. Interested?"

"Every day of the week and twice on Sunday," he huskily whispered back. "But, Tommy, you won't your girly bits get frostbitten in December."

“You silly man, I’ll have a snowsuit on over this.”

As he continued to hold her, he asked, “So what brings you here to my little... uh, great big red hangar? Besides me? Do you really want to go for a swim? Let’s not go to the pool downtown. You could drive an entire school year into early puberty in that little number.”

Touching his cheek with the back of her hand, she smiled a “Yes. I want to swim. Let’s go to the lake. As the song goes, I know a place...”

Ten minutes later he had the plane put away and was ready to go.

As they got into his truck, Tommy fluttered her eyelashes at Bud and said, “Say, Mr. big strong man. Can you take a girl back to her shed for a minute? I’ve got to bring something with us. Three things, actually.”

Intrigued, Bud answered, “As long as it’s not Haz!”

Chapter Three: “Opps, I shot down a plane!”

“No, Bud, take a left here onto that dirt road, then a right, another right and a left at the third stump. Sandy showed me a secluded spot to... ummmm, *swim*. I’m sure you’ll like it.”

He did as she told him and soon stopped the truck near a small bluff overlooking the lake. He looked around the large clearing that was in the middle of the woods and saw no one else. He smiled at Tommy who returned it along with a wink.

As they got out beach gear, Bud looked at the three long duffle bags in the truck bed. He pointed to them. “Why’d we bring those?”

“First we swim then eat. Then we kiss and later we play with what I brought.” Tommy led him down a path to a small, sandy beach.

Each end of the beach ended in rocks and small trees that were struggling to survive. The water ran right up to the edge of the rocks. They chose a spot near the for their afternoon picnic.

Kicking off their outer clothes, they ran to the edge of the water and tried to re-enact that famous beach scene in *From Here to Eternity*, but as threw re no waves, it wasn’t very successful. Resignedly, they romped hand-in-

hand into the water and kept on running. After fifty feet Bud stopped, the water only to his waist. “Can’t do much diving around here,” he told her.

“Isn’t this great! I just love it! I can’t swim, you know.” She playfully splashed him. He picked her up and hurled her a few feet out into the water. She came up spurting and thrashing at the water with a look of panic on her face. Bud instantly realized that he had screwed up and rescued her. He couldn’t stop apologizing as he rushed her back to the beach and wrapped her up in the towels.

“Bud, stop! I’m all right. It’s not your fault, men just don’t listen to us when we tell you we can’t swim. Besides, I’m the one who never learned how to swim. I was too young when my father deserted me and grandma was an aquaphobe and was convinced that I’d catch the croup or polio or would get pregnant if I went swimming where boys might have been.” She kissed him and suggested that he should teach her to swim after lunch—and after the kissing part. He readily agreed.

By late afternoon the breeze was starting to come up. Tommy had been trying to swim for almost two hours. The hardest part was teaching her that she could hold her head underwater

without drowning. Bud had greatly enjoyed having his arms under her hips and chest while she was learning. At first, she had a mini panic attack and stood up, but now that she was over that she was concentrating on her arms and legs. So was Bud, but for entirely different reasons.

Her normally alabaster skin had slowly turned pink and then red from the sun. They brought lots of food but forgot the suntan lotion.

With the beach gear stored in the back of the truck and with their clothes on, making Bud just a little sad, Tommy opened all three duffel bags and began to assemble her model generators. Bud helped her by attaching the cord she brought for each one, and by testing the servos. The breeze continued to build and was soon just what Tommy hoped for.

She took the first string to the left-hand bluff and Bud held the tandem box kite fifty feet away. On her nod, he pushed it into the air. Tommy pulled in the little slack in the string and up it went. Looking a bit wobbly, it flew up for twenty feet and hovered, did a loop-the-loop and spiraled into the sand just short of the water.

Tommy looked at it, scratched her chin, shrugged her shoulders and reeled in the string. Bud walked over and picked up the kite. “Well, that didn’t look very convincing,” she told him.

To fly the biplane model, Tommy looped the

tether line looped through a D-clip attached to her belt and let it run back to Bud who held the end under his foot. She needed both hands free to operate the radio control transmitter.

Bud was downwind holding the plane with the nose pointing up. Tommy stepped back a couple paces and the line went tight between them. She nodded and he waved back. They were ready.

She moved the speed control slider bar up. The two props started to spin, and Bud could feel that the plane was pushing hard enough to fly, so he let it go. Up it soared and he quickly picked up the string and reeled in the slack while walking back to Tommy.

Tommy played around with the flaps to keep the biplane continuing straight up. When it was about three hundred feet up, she stopped the motors. It was time to turn it into a kite. She kept the angle of attack high on the wings so the wind would catch the surfaces and pull the biplane back, keeping it aloft. When she felt that the plane was stable, she began to play with the wing angle to learn how it might best fly.

Using the flaps and rudder she had complete control of the plane. They both could even see the now idle props spinning in the breeze. Bud hammered a spike into the ground and they tied the biplane off to see if it could stay aloft on its

own. Three minutes later, Tommy turned to the flying wing model.

It was the one she most wanted to succeed.

Following the same launch sequence as with the biplane, the wing was up in the air in no time. As pilots always reported in real world flights of such wings, it was unstable and wanted to stall. Only Tommy's quick reflexes kept it up. "Well, in a full-size wing we'll have computers to do the second-by-second adjustments. For now, I'm happy to see this up, and even happier to feel that it is tugging even more than the biplane. Gotta love that lift!"

Bud was tired of simply watching Tommy, so he picked up the biplane's RC unit and started to play with it. He released the tether and flew it free style. "This is actually fun," he told her.

A light roar could be heard in the distance. A minute later a speck appeared in the sky across the lake and made a wide circle around them. Over the next ten minutes it made three more circles, getting closer each time. Tommy had noticed it once when it flew past her flying wing off in the distance. She took a real interest when it seemed to be flying right at them in a high-speed dive.

As it sped towards them a number of memories flashed into Tommy's mind. She called out to Bud, "I've seen that plane before..."

It's a pylon plane... That's Sergey Levenkov's plane... Run, Bud. He's got guns on his wings!" she shouted. Without thinking flipped the release button to the tether line on the RC unit. The servo clamp let go and she rammed the motor power slider to top speed. The props spun into life and shot the plane into the sky. She did a high-speed one-eighty turn with a half-barrel roll thrown in. The wing was flying straight at Sergey's plane.

The plane was small and Sergey wasn't paying attention. So, as he lined up, smiled, and moved his thumb over the firing button, he was unaware of what Tommy was doing. He was still smiling as he pulled the trigger on the twin 50-caliber machine guns.

Bud was fully in his sights and was not moving out of the way very quickly.

Bud, finally registered Tommy's outcry and noticed the strafing plane coming toward them. He did a back flip off the side of the bluff. The bullets struck a jagged line in the ground right where he had been standing.

Sergey looked ahead in time to see the last fifty feet of approach that Tommy's flying wing made before it smashed into the plane. He only had time to evoke one profanity, "Dyermo!" before both the prop and canopy disintegrated.

The plane did a number of wild rolls before

crashing into the lake.

Tommy watched in both horror and satisfaction as it hit the water. It skimmed over the surface for a second and then nosed right in, flipping over twice and breaking apart before disappearing in seconds. She dropped the remote and turned to see if Bud was okay. He wasn't there. Her mind replayed what her peripheral vision had seen, and that was of Bud going over the bluff. She ran to the cliff's edge more scared at what she might see than she had been during the attack. She forced herself to look over the rocks and there he sat in about six inches of water. He was talking to someone on his wrist phone.

He looked up at her and waved. Tommy waved back and fell onto her knees and had a really good cry for them both.

By the time Bud climbed back up to her she had composed herself and was calmly kneeling on the ground with her hands on her lap. Hearing his footsteps she looked up at him and meekly said, "Bud, I shot down a plane!"

By the time Bud and Tommy had been given permission to leave the area and go home, it was night. There had been four tedious hours of questions, telling of the story, telling it again to see if they might be hiding something and then

finally being allowed to phone Sandy.

First up had been the local police, then the state troopers went back over everything, and finally the FBI grilled them. Haz showed up with that group.

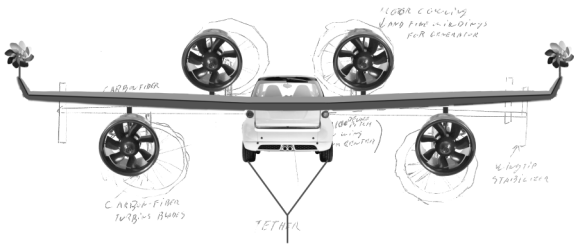
He was apologetic for being so late, but believed it was vital that agent Wallis—he had handled the Russian racketeering investigation at the Flagger carnival and air show that past spring—be on the case. Agent Wallis needed to be pulled off another case to take this one back and that had required several hours.

The Sheriff's lake patrol sent divers down to the crash site. No body was found. The canopy of the plane was shattered and the restraints were undone so he could have gotten out, but Tommy and Bud had not seen anyone swimming away. They had watched the crashed area constantly.

In fact they had not moved from the top of the bluff except when Bud had shifted Tommy onto his lap so he could hold her tight. They had refused to get up until they were allowed to go.

The entire next day Tommy didn't move from one of the computers in the Assembly building's second floor offices. She was using the dedicated CAD computer located there. She began by locking the door, prompting Sandy to

pound and pound on it at lunchtime to force her British cousin to “eat something before you pass out and smash your head open on the edge of the table, silly!” Her first step was to scanned in a drawing she made in the middle of the night.



It had come to her in a vision fueled by both lack of sleep and lack of food. At first, Tommy thought it might be a nightmare, but she realized soon after that through crossed her slightly confused mind that what she had seen was an almost fully formed flying wing complete with four of her generators.

Using the sophisticated CAD unit, Tommy overlaid her sketch with a computer simulation of the new flying generator wing. It was a loose combination of the biplane and the wing with a central pod that looked odd to her, but she shook that feeling off and added it anyway. *Where have I seen that before*, she asked herself as she hopped into the little Smart car that her uncle Damon had provided so she could get around the

complex even in bad autumn, winter and spring weather. On a hot day like this one, she relished the A/C.

Tommy lengthened the wing's width a little more than the one on the first wing model she made. Because it might need to fly in lower winds, she added forward slats and flaps to the back of the wing to increase lift. By adding a ten-degree upward bend to the wing, it became stable. At least, that's what the computer calculations told her. But, then again, that program had been something she found for free on the Internet. Hopefully, she was getting more than what she paid for.

She shifted the turbines back toward the middle of the wing—as viewed from front to back and not side to side—and placed them on top of strong, aerodynamic pylons, two above and two below the wing. The two turbines on top were positioned a quarter the way out from the dead center of the wing, and the bottom two motors were a quarter length farther out from those.

She beefed up the two end rudders at the ends of the wing where they would not only provide stability, but also steering. For a flourish, she added colorful pinwheels to the tops of the wing tips. She considered streamers as well, but realized they might be

counterproductive to flight worthiness.

Located in the center of the top side of the wing were avionics electronics and radio control units, and that emergency parachute she had considered earlier.

Hanging below the wing was a larger pod holding the generators' controllers and the nano-battery packs. The undercarriage had an arched bottom with extendable wheels that would be used whenever the wing landed. They would keep the lower generators from being torn off the wing. They could also allow a single, burly man to push the thing along the ground.

The tether attachment was a 'Y' shape harness connected to two towing hooks that were located just inside of the forward wheels. The tether had to have the ability to separate from the wing on command without doing any damage and also to have its balance point shifter fore and aft as necessary. She devised a pair of bars with drive sprockets at each end and a chain going around them with the connection point welded to one of the links. The entire thing could move the attachments points about four feet and featured two quick-release points that could be either radio operated or released by the onboard computer.

It was a heck of a lot to consider in one day of design, but Tommy really didn't want to spent

too much time on it. She had experienced “feature creep” several times where a design gets so over thought that it changes constantly and never ends up getting built..

Toward the end of the day Uncle Hank came over to talk to Tommy about her new project.

"Is Mr. Hinkle going to be okay?" Tommy asked first thing.

Hank Avery chuckled. "You'll want to drop that 'mister' bit when you talk to him, Tommy, but yeah, Hinkle is doing just fine, Missy. I visited him last night. He got scorched on the hands from all that electricity, but his doctors removed some skin from his fat rump and gave him grafts. They've taken so he's on the mend. He'll be taking a month off to heal, but he swore to me that he kick the butt of anyone who takes his job. If you or Sandy have done something foolish like hiring a replacement you may want to leave town for awhile."

"No, Uncle Hank. Fair is fair. Mr. Hinkle was hurt while working for us, so if he wants his job back, and his hands are at least ninety-three percent functional and he hasn't sustained any brain damage, or started beating his wife, it's his!" Tommy was forceful about it.

"Yeah... right. Sandy tells me you've become a kite murderer." He waggled his eyebrows at her. "Plus, I hear that you took out a real plane

over the lake.”

“Uncle Hank, the kite thing is all her fault. If she wasn’t trying to fly that ridiculous kite of hers... ah, heck, I don’t know. I might not have the forthcoming major project for you to handle. As for that plane, it was that Ruskie Sergey Levenkov and he was starting a strafing run at Bud and me. What he got, he deserved. Made me drop a really nice RC controller and ruin it with sand and water. The FBI never found a body so they figured he managed to survive, somehow, and could have left the country. I guess I didn’t hit him hard enough. Next time I go flying like that, I’ll pack my models with a few ounces of Semtex or some other high explosive!”

“I hear you, Missy, and I’ve got a little stash of the stuff. Just say the word.” He tapped the side of his nose in the well-known signal of conspiratorial knowledge shared between associates. “But, Tommy, how do kites and generators go together? I thought you were trying to make a better wind turbine for home use? Not satisfied with that?”

“Uncle Hank, it takes a lot to satisfy me,” she told him in a way that made him blush.

“I am working on a generator, but one big problem with wind turbines is wind... or lack of it when and where you need it. You can’t count

on it at ground level, and you need to go as high as thirteen hundred to eighteen hundred feet to get a steady wind. It would cost a hundred times more than the generator to put up a tower for it, plus the FAA would throw a wobbler about it being a navigation hazard.” And off she went explaining her new approach. At last she came to her one remaining problem.

“The tether becomes a quandary. It’s a strength to length conundrum because the higher you go the longer the cable and the heavier it gets. At some point you need to build a larger, thus heavier, flying platform for your generator and then the whole length/strength/weight thing starts all over again. The tether also has to be strong enough to keep from breaking in very high winds. Then, you need to use the tether as your electrical cable to get the power down to the ground.”

“So it’s impossible,” he told her. “What is your solution? You must have one, or you won’t be going to all this trouble to design the wing.”

“As per usual, you’re right. Once I finish my design plans for the flying wing and also for the generators set up, I’m going back across the pond and do a little research at my crystal factory with my friend Betty.”

Hank Avery looked at Tommy. “That wise? I heard a little birdie telling stories about a small

contretemps having to do with an old woman and a disappearing granddaughter.” He raised one eyebrow at Tommy.

“No idea what you’re talking about. Sorry. Can’t help you there. Noting to see or hear about. Back to the matter at hand, eh? If I am able to modify the crystal sheets we use for the screens of our phone bracelets to form a continuous crystalline cable, I may have an answer.”

“*An* answer!” Uncle Hank burst out. “It sounds more like you have *the* answer wrapped up with whipped cream and a cherry on top.” Uncle Hank knew Tommy too well by now not to realize that “the impossible” was not in her vocabulary. Except for her favorite song from *The Man of La Mancha*, that is.

“Uncle Hank, I can sure use your help right now. I can’t be in two places at once. Not yet, that is. Possible by the time story eight of nine comes along, just not yet. I’d love to be here forming and curing carbon fiber, plus building and overseeing the wing construction and such, but there’s no way my new cable is going to become a reality if I’m not over there.”

“Well, Missy, I wish I could help you, but your Uncle Damon has told me to keep clear of your harebrained schemes and wild projects, so I can’t possibly do it.” He had such a sad look on

his face that she wanted to take him into her arms. He stood there waiting for her to do just that. When she failed to move toward him, he tried making his lower lip quiver. It might have worked but she could quickly see that it was from restrained mirth.

Tommy's jaw dropped open in astonishment as Hank Avery looked at her face and burst out laughing. "Got you this time, Missy, didn't I?"

She hit him lightly in the arm. "You sure did, you miserable, old... rascal!" she acknowledged. "What is it you say here in America? 'I owe you one?' Or is it, 'I'll get you for that if it's the last thing I do?' Actually I owe you plenty for everything you've done to help me save this company. I have faith in you to turn my design into reality and besides... if you really need a Swift next to you, you can always grab Sandy." She smiled mischievously at the older man. "Just do it where others can't see you and don't let Haz hear about it!"

They shared a good laugh. "Okay," showing him the plans, "I want to use carbon fiber throughout to keep it light. Titanium is too expensive. The motor/generators are located on top and below the wing. For now just copy the test turbine in my shed. We need four of them but we need two of them counter rotating to stop the one sided pull from the torque of the blades."

Tommy stopped and looked at him.

He nodded and she continued.

“With all the lightweight stuff going into it—and exclusive of the four tyres of the lower pod—the wing should weigh less than a hundred pounds. I’ll have the rest of the specification done by tomorrow. Can we go over the details then?”

“Sure, Tommy, but why do you say tyres instead of tires? I noticed it with how you say centre as well.”

“It’s an English thing. Not the language, the people. We also add an extra ‘u’ in words like colour, and for some reason we add an extra syllable in aluminium. That’s aluminum over here. We’re just funny that way. Funny as in looney, not as in ha-ha!”

“Thanks for the explanation. Just give me a call and we’ll get together before you take off. If I need help I’ll get that young man that’s been hanging around you lately and put him to work. I might as well see what kind of education our tax dollars gets these days from the Air Force. I’d already know if he were a Navy man. Can’t have everything, I guess.”

Chapter Four: Swift Enterprises International

“Tommy, I hope I didn’t interrupt an importing meeting with Hank?” Damon Swift said as she and Sandy came to his office two days later.

“No sir, you didn’t. We were just wrapping it up. He has a lot on his plate while I’m in England, but you Americans do use rather large plates. He’ll manage. And anyways, I’m a call away. And, a seven hour flight plus time to clear Customs and then all the bit about getting up here from New York or, God forbid, New Jersey.”

“Yes, of course. I needed both you and Sandy here today before you leave tomorrow. It may have an impact on your trip.” An “Oh” appeared on Tommy’s lips. Mr. Swift tried to ignore it but it made his shiver.

“I’m so glad that both of you could come to see me.” Mr. Swift held out chairs for the young women.

“Why so formal, Daddy?” asked Sandy as he sat down behind his desk. He pretended to look over a few papers before answering her.

“I’m going to be dumping the Swift Construction Company.”

“No, Daddy! We’ve been all through this

before!” Sandy shouted, as she stood up. “Have you gone totally potty?”

“No! No! Sorry girls, and sit down, Sandy. I said that in the form of an incorrect phrasing. Let me start again.” Sandy sat back down and eyed him cautiously.

“I want to start a brand new, fresh company. To update our name and image, as they say nowadays. To rise like a Phoenix from the ashes of what I practically destroyed with my antics the past two years...”

“Uncle Damon, no...” Tommy started to say but realized he was speaking the truth, so she sat back and waited for what he had to say.

“Let’s all be adults here, and realists. Sandy, you are nineteen years old now and technically an adult even though I find it hard to not think of you as that little girl I used to give baths to.” He shuddered, then continued, “Can we agree that I didn’t help the situation and leave it at that?” The girls nodded in agreement.

“Good! Now, Tommy I need your help. You and your holdings in England are the pivotal part in all this. In just six months you have put us back on our feet with your inventions and innovative ideas, let us pay off all past debts and the money we owed to Haz Samson, plus build up a tidy little account for future R&D and other expenses. You’ve proven that our name still

means something, but the harsh reality of business is that once a name is blackened it's always somewhat tarnished in the eyes of some people."

Tommy wasn't sure where this was going, so she kept silent.

"We need a new name for a new company, and one with international holdings. That is a formidable combination in this industrialized world of ours. I propose that instead of just manufacturing here or in England, I would like us to go worldwide and make our products for the people and by the people who use them. We'll use their experts and labor force at their low wage rates. We won't just take their money and run, we'll help them build factories and give them the jobs and a bit of self-reliance. All our products are high-tech so we'll teach people to build them, where we have to, so they will not need to bring in outsiders. And, the best thing is that we can charge them for the training and let them figure out how to write it off as an expense in their various countries!"

"This all sounds great, but we don't have the kind of money it takes to do all that. Unless, that is, you intend to make the different countries pay for their own factories." Sandy was starting to worry about what a burden all this might be on both the financial as well as her father's mental

conditions. This was sounding farfetched.

“Sandy, Tommy, don’t fret.” Mr. Swift reassured them, “I’m not crazy. Never call me crazy! Besides, I’ve consulted an expert in world trade, but I digress. Let’s go back to Tommy and her company and the name change.”

He took a deep breath and said, “Tommy, can I buy out your holdings in England?”

“Uncle Damon, that company is a part of me and I am a part of Swift Construction Company. Where I go, my company goes, so say the word and it is yours. I wouldn’t want it any other way. Give me the papers and I’ll make it all nice and legal.”

“Thanks, Tommy, but this isn’t going to be a straight gift from you. Just to let you know, you and Sandy are both going to be joint owners in this venture. Equal shares for each of us.”

Sandy and Tommy looked at each other, mouths agape.

“Now that that’s resolved, on to the name change. It’s subject to change like I said and we all get to vote on it.” Mr. Swift reached under his desk and pulled out a poster board and held it up for them to see.

“It’s a little crude. I did it myself.”

Seeing what he had created, Tommy remarked, “Art generally reflects the artist.”

The picture was a long blue banner rippling at both ends and the new company's name in red outlined in white across the forward arch of the banner:



“Well, it’s striking enough, don’t you think, Tommy?” Sandy asked with a weak smile. Tommy just nodded.

“Girls, if you don’t like it, just say so.” He was all smiles and proud of his artwork.

“No, Daddy, it’s good. For your first attempt at using PhotoShop. We’ll get a real artist to clean it up and then we’ll see. Okay? Other than that, I say it’s a go. Tommy?” and she handed it back like a hot potato.

“Uncle Damon, you’re the best. I agree with Sandy that a graphic artist can take that, smooth the edges all around the banner, give it more of a 3-D look, and then we use it.” As long as it made her uncle happy, she was all for it.

“Thanks, girls. I appreciate the kindness of your comments.” He buzzed his secretary. “Miss Trent? Is my next appointment here?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” she purred. “After they all leave do you want me in there to give you—“

“Nix, nix,” he interrupted. “Not now! You’re on speakerphone.”

“Oops! Sorry.”

“Just send him in.” He flipped off the intercom. As the door opened he announced, “Ladies, without further ado and straight from a recent trip to Russia, meet my global marketing expert and upcoming vice president of our European division, Mr. Hazard Samson.”

“Haz!” Both girls squealed, jumping up from their chairs.

“Hi, ladies! Surprise!” He gave them hugs and pulled up an extra chair.

“Daddy, you’ve got to explain...” Sandy’s mind was a whirlwind of emotions. While she could see the immediate benefits of having Haz part of the company, all the time he would spend in Europe was going to be a bummer. She might even have to find a backup man to fill the time.

“I’ll let Haz do the talking from here on in.” Mr. Swift nodded to Haz to take over.

Haz looked at both women and cleared his throat. “I know you’ll find this hard to believe I’d turned your father down a couple times starting back in May. He finally wore me down. Made me see that this not only is the best thing for you, but it fits right into my plans to ruin A. Flagger once and for all times. Just as long as I

don't have any problems launching my satellites, all is well. Of course, if something like sabotage at A. Flagger's facilities as they are building the satellites happens, then all bets might be off. At least until Tommy here can figure a way to glide up into space to fix them." He laughed heartily at the very idea. Sandy and Damon swift joined him, but Tommy got a sudden gleam in her eye.

As the laughter died down, Haz continued, "Damon persisted and wore me down. But he's right. If we deal directly with the European, Asian and American markets and include them all in the manufacturing, we can't lose. Each region has its own needs and ways it likes to see a product. You can't expect to sell something and not make cultural change. The only thing I have put my foot down over is dealing with France and French-speaking Quebec, Canada. Those cheese eating surrender monkeys and their North American robot minions can twist on their own thumbs before I will French-ize products, manuals or labels."

"I like the attitude, Haz," said Tommy, "but aren't you running the risk of doing too many things at once? I mean personally. I'd list all the things you do here but most of them aren't important to the story! Now you want to help run a multi-national conglomerate?"

"Even if Uncle Damon runs the Americas,

other than Quebec, of course, you'll still have a heck of a lot to oversee. European Europe alone is a headache. Believe me; I've dealt with it all for several years."

"True, Tommy," and he smiled at her. "But I have a cunning plan."

"Of course you do," Tommy smiled back.

"I'm finished with the stock market. I've sold the brokerage firm to my managers. As for my other stuff, I'll just tell my father to take it back. He's gotten a bit fat and laze these past five years, so it's time for him to get back in the saddle."

"So," Tommy asked slowly, suspicion in her voice, "you've just tossed all that aside for us? Even before Sandy and I have agreed?"

"Yep. Listen, Tommy, I am tossing nothing aside. The stock market was just a quick way to make money I don't need any more. I can't possibly spend everything I've got salted away in bank accounts in most major financial centers around the globe. Heck, I make a million dollars a week in interest. What I really want is the challenge of a lifetime, and this is it!"

"Sounds like you've thought this out," Sandy said, a gleam of pride in the man she was more than fond of. She looked around to see if anyone noticed that she was practically panting.

“I have. As I said, your father came to me with this scheme three months ago. So, I’ve set things in motion at my end that frees me to work for your father. Yes, believe it or not I said work! I will have no holdings, stocks or shares. I’ll be making a base pay of six hundred thousand dollars a year with a golden parachute of one million if I am forced out within the first two years. After that, you can kick me to the curb with no extra out of pocket expenses. with a percentage based on profits. The companies we’ll start up or buy will be based on products that will sell in that region. We won’t make PHARC Jet engines for the trans-Pacific or trans-Atlantic markets, but Europe and mainland Asia are wide open. We can make our phone bracelet and nano-batteries worldwide. We just have to pick and choose the best product for the best locations.”

“How long will it take to get this off the ground?” Sandy asked still in a daze.

“I’ve got all that legal junk ready to go. The crystal and battery plant in England really helps. It already has all the export and import licenses we need for the Euro trade market. So, I give it four to six. Fingers, toes and eyes crossed!”

“Daddy? Are you sure?” Sandy could not believe he had put this all together without her knowing it. *Sneaky old fart*, she thought.

“It will be a lot of work, but I want to do this. Between Haz and me and Tommy’s company we can get it done. Right, Haz?”

“You bet! So ladies do you want to hop on and ride this pony?” Haz was looking at Sandy when he said that.

Sandy slowly turned red as his innuendo sank in. Tommy was grinning at her cousin’s discomfort and Mr. Swift was now sweating.

“I need a glass of water,” Sandy said turning to Tommy. “Come.” Tommy nodded and got up.

They crossed the room to a small sitting area with a table holding carafes of coffee and a pitcher of ice water. Reaching for the water Sandy whispered, “What do you think?”

“As I said before, you Swifts sure run your lives at full speed.” Tommy grinned so that only Sandy could see her. “It’s more fun that riding my motorcycle over a rough road!”

“At full speed is right. With Haz part of the company I think I’d better strap in and put on my high heeled sneakers. As Mae West once said, we’re in for a bumpy ride. “

“Is that all?” Tommy asked with a gleam in her eyes.

“I don’t know! And I don’t want to know, yet!”

Chapter Five: It's Murder, Madam!

“**H**az, I tell you, this just doesn't feel right! Bud should be the one sitting there with his hand on my knee, not you.” Tommy was putting her overnight bag in the compartment above their seats.

“Sorry. Force of habit.” As he removed his hand Haz replied, “I wish you were Sandy, too. No offense, but this is strictly a business trip for me, and with the exception of you all the Russian women I'm likely to encounter look better pulling tractors. And, all the Chinese and Southeast Asian women look up at my six foot six body and scream out in terror. At least I'm not going to Japan this time. Last time there I couldn't go anywhere without hearing ‘Arghh. Gojorra!’”

Tommy smiled at him and nodded. It made sense.

“After I talk to your people at the crystal plant and make it clear that I will tolerate no union activity there, I'm off to France, Germany, Russia and then Asia, including a visit to the Xichang rocket launch site in China. The Russians launch the first two of four satellites from Plesetsk Cosmodrome to cover the

Northern Russian territory on August 29th and the second two on September 3rd. The Chinese will launch the next four over the Sino-Russian border area before the end of the third week of October, also in two separate launches.”

“Any problems trying to get cooperation from either of them?”

“Not from the Mother governments, but a lot of political huffing and puffing is going on over this from the small border countries between Russia and China. And, of course, from North Korea who are screaming bloody hell that I’m planning to drop nukes on them. Kim Ping Pong of whoever their current inbred leader is has let it be known that he will wipe me out ‘for the glory of the North Korean freedom loving peoples,’ if I don’t call all this off. Ignorant little putz.”

“I have every confidence in you being able to ride out the storm, Haz. So does Sandy. And, speaking of riding, I caught that innuendo back at uncle Damon’s office about ‘riding the pony.’ Pretty bold talk in front of a nineteen year old girl’s father.”

“Damon is just about over the moon that she is showing interest in a man. I guess there was something of an issue about what direction she might lean.”

Tommy laughed. “She doesn’t so much lean

as she wobbles. You get her on that pony and she'll straighten up.

“Good. Enough of politics. While I'm in China I'll send feelers out about setting up nano-battery factories in a few locations and one for the PHARC Jet engines. Their air pollution rate is so high that I think they would be the first ones to want to start making electric cars and trucks. Even make them mandatory. Have you seen the smog in Beijing? On a clear day you can see about two city blocks. Ugh.”

The small talk lasted for a while but Haz finally ran out of steam and took a nap over the now dark Atlantic Ocean. At six a.m. GMT the plane arrived at Heathrow International Airport and, after three hours just to clear Customs and another one to get down to the Tube station, a train ride took them to their destination.

“Of course Professor Albert, I'll gladly stop by this weekend and I'll clear my schedule for next week, too. To work with you again will be the highlight of my trip back here. Your quantum physics classes were always so fascinating... Oh. Sorry that I always seemed to be nodding off. Really, I was absorbing everything you taught. Wonderful to hear that you have *new* theories you want to publish and to demonstrate? You're really *that* far along into

it?... Yes, I understand that you don't want to talk about it... Wizard! Ten o'clock at the north end train station. I won't be late. You just be certain to be there to meet me, Professor, no excuses. Goodbye."

Tommy hung up and sat back in her chair looking at Betty Rawlins, manager of Tommy's factory and whose office she was in. Tommy had already been there a week and had done all the preliminary work on the new crystal tether.

Haz had come and gone, leaving everyone with a feeling that they had been injected with speed. They all found him to be dynamic and enthralling, but his energy level and no-nonsense approach stunned them.

Betty was the University friend and fellow researcher that Tommy turned to when she'd needed to help the Swifts out of bankruptcy. Betty had supplied the money and had located the factory space for Tommy to make her crystal phone plates and nano-batteries. Once the money came in, Tommy paid Betty off and bought out the factory.

A researcher in crystal formation, Betty had been invaluable in helping Tommy at that time. Now she was managing of the plant for her.

"Professor Albert... that's a name from the past," murmured Betty over her tea. "The last I heard he was semi retired and still living in that

darling little cottage of his outside the university. The Dean keeps him around as he still brings in research grants. But lately, he's been behaving very erratic and secretive. He once claimed that he's being spied on and his papers taken. The authorities looked into it but found no evidence. The papers always turn up, but not where he claims he left them. I'm afraid he might be a little potty," Betty sighed.

Tommy didn't know how to respond.

"Poor man... so brilliant in his time. But, time moves on. If you have to, humour him and call Pamela Elise in the Science Department. You do still understand words with that extra 'u' in them, don't you?"

"I haven't been that Americanized, Betty. And, of course, I'll be careful with him. He did sound a little needy, maybe lonely. I'll let you know."

Sipping her tea, Betty looked at Tommy. "The absolute truth, please. Have you found a man to keep up with you? And, shall we say, your appetites?"

Tommy smiled and nodded. She told Betty all about Bud.

"Tommy, I couldn't be happier. You always have a certain effect on men, but I worry when I see them walking away rather than toward you. You have a way of stunning men. Two ways,

actually.” They shared a laugh. Poor Betty hadn’t been one of Mother Nature’s major construction jobs but she was more interested in her research than in male companionship. “At least I have this wonderful job. The pay that Haz offered is outrageous and I get to keep my research. What can I say? I hope he can afford it. I hope *you* can afford it!”

“Betty, at what this plant is bringing in, we could afford five of you!”

“Tommy, you’re paying for it! It’s yours by right. That you’re willing to pay me for it is unheard of. So what if it’s only a percentage... twenty-five percent is unthinkable.”

“You’re rich. You ought to attract a man one of these days.”

Betty shook her head. “The kind I get hanging around are more interested in my brain than my body.”

They shared a sigh.

“Professor Albert, please report to the information desk.” This was the third time in ten minutes that Tommy had the Professor paged. He wasn’t answering his phone either. She made the decision to not wait at the train station anymore. She left a note at the information desk and called a cab. Tommy first went to the

campus business office to see if they knew where he was, but the woman at the desk said they had not seen him for a week or two but offered to page the eccentric professor in the campus buildings.

He failed to call in response to the page. They offered to call her if they heard from him.

Tommy got back into her cab and directed the driver to take a slow drive past the Professor's cottage. As they approached the cottage she practically screamed at the driver to stop.

Police cars and an ambulance with their flashing blue lights horrified Tommy. They always had. The flashing lights and all that noise made her want to run away screaming. She threw money at the driver and ran... to the house.

A rather tall constable swung his arm across the door at Tommy's chest height. She refused to give him the satisfaction so she stopped short. "Sorry miss, you can't go in," he told her somewhat resignedly.

"I must see the Professor. Is he all right?" Tommy was trying duck down and squeeze past the officer.

He moved to intercept her. "I can't let you in, miss, but if you behave and stay here I'll get one of the inspectors to speak with you." He moved

into the doorway and quickly closed the door behind him. She heard the distinct sound of the deadbolt being thrown.

“Yes, sir, I’ll wait right here, shall I?” Tommy yelled through the letterbox. The constable returned a few minutes later with another man.

“Miss, I’m DCI Ames.” He was in his mid thirties and looked somewhat rushed.

“Detective Chief Inspector. I’m... uh, I’m *Tommy* Swift,” she told him hoping that the name would not ring any alarms. “He was supposed to meet me at the train station this morning. He didn’t show up,” she told him, sadly.

He looked her over for a moment, seemed to be pondering something, then took her arm and let Tommy to the side of the house, out of view of the front of the little cottage. The rose garden behind the cottage was in full bloom.

The inspector took out his note pad and a pen. After scribbling something at the top of a page he asked her to spell her name and provide other vital information he needed, and most of all, why she was there. She answered in as much detail as she could then asked the inspector, “Is he going to be okay?”

“Not as such, miss, but I guess you have the right to some answers, being as you gave me an

explanation as to why he had his coat on. If he was leaving to pick you up at the train station that gives us an approximate time of death.”

“Death! No! I thought he was just injured,” Tommy’s legs almost collapsed. The inspector reached out to steady her. He led her to a bench and they sat down.

“At times like these I wish we could carry a flask,” he told her. “You look as if you could use a snifter or two.”

“I’m all right! It’s just a shock to hear that the gentlest man in the world, and someone you spoke with just a few days earlier, is gone. I can’t think of who would want to hurt him.”

“We think,” continued inspector Ames, “his death was accidental. No windows or doors were jimmied, so the suspect probably came in via the front door as the professor was leaving.”

“But, if someone came in...” Tommy started to say.

“We don’t know what happened next except that there was a struggle and somehow the professor hit his head on the hallway table and was killed. We know assume because there is blood on the edge of the table and he is laying underneath it.” He looked at her. “Whatever the culprit wanted, he didn’t find. Any ideas what that might be?”

“Not really,” she told him.

“Any suppositions?”

“Not really.”

“Wild guess?”

“Uh-uh. Neither do I have a theory, a hypothesis, assumption, deduction, presumption, conclusion or belief. I just got here, remember?”

With a resigned sigh, the inspector closed his pad and put it into his pocket.

“How do you know he didn’t find what he wanted?” Tommy was still reeling.

“I never said it was a ‘he,’ miss.”

“In the English language where the gender of the individual being discussed is unknown, the assumption is that it is masculine, and so my use of the word ‘he.’”

“Fair enough, *Tommy* Swift. All the rooms were ransacked. If *he* had found it he would have stopped and left.”

“Can I see the professor?”

“I’m afraid not, Tommy. The coroner has first dibs on him, then the family gets his body. I don’t think you’ll be seeing him until the funeral. I must go now, Miss Swift. Just remember, if you think of anything, call me.” He handed her his card, “and don’t get into any trouble while you are back in England. Okay?”

Tommy was so dazed by the past hour that she just wandered around the university, eventually finding herself in front of the lecture hall that the professor used. She went in. The classroom, one of many similar in the building, was gloomy with the shades pulled down.

She walked around the class touching familiar things and slowly making her way to the desk on the side of the lecture platform. The drawers were empty of all papers—she even pulled them out to see if anything had been taped to the bottoms—and the chalkboard was clean. The room had been unused for some time.

As she passed the chalkboard she recalled the professor's favorite hiding place where he kept everything from class notes to a secret case of single malt whisky. She walked to the back of the board and unfolded the side leafs that extended the chalkboard size... and there it was.

Most of the bottles had been removed but the case was still there. **Old Schlobbinibhao** from the western island of Jimm. Sighing at the memories of being plied with the strong but smooth liquor by the old professor—with little results in his favor—she looked around. Bingo!

The back of the board was covered with formulas and notes and scribbles and annotations and observations. Lots and lots of words and numbers. You could tell they had

been added to at over time and some erased and modified. It was total chaos. It could take days to unravel the mess.

Tommy took her phone off her wrist and set it to high-resolution video with the motion stabilization on. She rotated the back of the board to the windows and slowly videoed the entire board. She then turned on the infrared mode and repeated the process, just in case. She only wished that she had an alternate light source to check to see if the professor might have made secret notes using his own urine.

As an extra precaution, she e-mailed the video files to her work computer at the Swift Construction Company. Satisfied, she started to close up the sides.

“No,” she thought to herself, “the professor probably died for this, I just can’t leave it for the killer.” Taking the eraser from the front of the board, Tommy meticulously cleaned off every speck. Then, she took paper towels from a side table and got them wet in the small sink behind the boards and wiped everything down. She closed it up and turned it back to the way it was.

She stopped at the door and took one last look around. Tommy now knew that this chapter of her life was gone forever.

She opened the door and stepped out into the hallway. She registered the hands that grabbed

her and that violently slammed her into the wall. She partially blacked out and the breath knocked out of her.

She was pulled back into the room and forced against the wall next to the door. An arm was holding her there by her throat; the other hand was holding the wrist that held her bracelet phone.

Tommy's eyes focused on a face as she gasped for air.

"Sergey Levenkov, the rat didn't die after all," Tommy managed to gasp out. "And I see you get a nice new scar across your face. And, from the looks of that patch, a lost eye as well. It becomes you. I wonder how you got that."

He pushed his arm harder against her neck. The deep red scar pulsed with the beating of his heart. It ran across his forehead, through his left eye and down the side of his face. The patch that covered his eye was black in color.

"Your quick tongue won't save you this time, girl," hissed Sergey into her ear in his heavy Russian accent. "So you know the professor. What a coincidence, and it's so fitting that you are the one to give me those formulas after what you did to me. I liked that little plane and my eye as well. You took those from me and forced me to leave the country with all those cops after me."

He shook his head and sighed. “But it doesn’t matter. My work was almost done. I have my people in key positions in the A. Flagger organization.” Sergey laughed out loud. “That stupid Flagger is so gullible. I’m surprised he can tie his own shoelaces.”

He pulled Tommy’s bracelet from her wrist and placed it in his pocket. “I was going to let you walk out of here, but you saw and cleaned that board. I can’t possibly leave you as a witness. I enjoyed our little chat, but all good things must come to an end. Wish I had the time to see if those are real,” and he glanced down at her chest.

Tommy knew she had to do something now or not at all. While he was contemplating taking a little feel, she jerked her knee up into Sergey’s groin. He pulled back like a shot. She grabbed his ears and pulled him forward and administered another shot. He wrenched out of her grip, turned, vomited and stumbled over grabbing his lower extremities.

Tommy wasted no time,. She gripped the door handle, yanked it open, stepped out and slammed it shut. As she ran down the hall she tripped the fire alarm. Out in the street she started to yell for help and the police.

Chapter Six: Revelation

After a miserable train trip, Tommy was back in Betty's office. Even the hot cup of tea couldn't soothe Tommy's nerves.

A second interview with Inspector Ames in the same day didn't go well. As he told her, there were too many coincidences to please him. Tommy was now on his radar. If it wasn't for her bruised neck and wrist she would have been sitting in the bulls-eye. After three hours of questioning, with no tea offered, she was let go.

Tommy hadn't told him that she had found what the killer wanted. Or that she had it. And, sadly, so did Sergey. She could only hope that the formulas and notes were useless or that Sergey and his people couldn't figure them out.

"So that's it, Betty. I called Sandy Swift and she checked to see that I have a copy. I do she will keep it safe. I just wish that I had some way to remotely wipe my bracelet's memory chip." Tommy yawned and looked sleepily at her friend. She bid her goodnight, or rather good morning, as the sun was about to rise.

The next few days were busy for both of them. The work that Tommy had done the week when Haz was there, and when Betty had spent so much time with him, was bearing fruit.

Tommy mastered making tiny string pieces out of the new crystals. The next step was to make enough to be useful in tests.

The two women worked well together and, before long, had three trays of crystals forming under controlled heat and a special liquid growth medium. The trays had been etched with a fine laser beam of just a few microns wide and deep, the bottom of which was the collection and formation area.

Tommy explained to Sandy, “It’s too convoluted to go into all the details, but imagine that I am making really tiny femurs. At one end is a crystal ball and at the other a crystal socket. When I zap a socket with negative to positive electricity, it puffs open a little, and when I apply positive to negative power to the ball on another segment, that shrinks just enough that we can force them, magnetically, together. Remove the power and the socket shrinks, the ball expands, and they are linked together. Once they are dried, they will never react to electricity again. Otherwise, and here’s the funny part, if we used this to send power up and down from one of the flying generator platforms, the entire tether would probably disintegrate! Can you imagine?”

She went on to describe how each segment had to be made and attached. Only robotic

equipment could do this precise job over and over.

The two types of filaments were being made: conductive and non-conductive. Each was taken up onto different spools. To get a completed cable a length of conductive crystal was placed in a twisting machine and the non-conductive strands were twisted around the first bundle and sealed together to make a finished micro-cable.

She could picture Sandy yawning so Tommy said goodbye. She rejoined Betty in the lab. The two women tested the micro-cable in every conceivable way. The results were astounding! The ultimate strength was measured in MegaPascals (MPa). Nylon topped out at 75 MPa, high tensile steel alloy at 1,860 MPa, and multi-walled carbon nanotubes at 62,000 MPa. But Tommy's micro-cable was tested it handled well over 120,000 MPa. The end result was that it was almost uncut-able. Diamond tipped blades could cut the smaller Crystal Carbon Nanotubes (CCN) cable but it took a special saw and epoxy compound together using the CCN cable itself to cut anything over several cables thick.

All of this work took the major part of the week; they only stopped for Professor Albert's funeral. On the train ride back, Betty asked Tommy a question she had been holding back. "What did you name the CCN cable, or is that its

name?”

“I was considering that, but I think because Sandy was the root of all this, I’m going to call it SanCrys Cable.” Tommy spelled it out to her.

Betty chuckled and replied, “I’ve never had the pleasure of meeting the woman, but I don’t think *that* name will fly. Not even with Sandra. Best plan on calling it CCN.”

It would take up to four months to get the actual production line going. Mr. Dodd, an industrial engineer and the new plant manager, was well qualified to handle it.

Tommy, Mr. Dodd and a small staff of engineers created the layouts and blueprints of several pieces of new equipment. Much of it had to be robotically controlled so three new computer stations also had to be installed. The curing ovens were being custom made by an outside firm and wouldn’t be ready for two months. In three weeks, the paper engineering was done and Tommy was ready to go home.

Mr. Avery had called a few times with technical issues on the generator wing, and each was resolved over the phone. The air waves got hot every night when—even after a hard day’s work—Tommy snuggled into Betty’s guest bed and call Bud at two in the morning, GMT, to spend a few moments with him.

While Tommy was busy with the plans, Betty kept busy in reformulating the growth mixtures to match the super size trays that would be used. With the help of a lab assistant, she built a roll of CCN cable to take back to use on the generator wing. It required three weeks even with refinements to the process. It was slow work and they could only create a few meters per hour.

Mr. Dodd would oversee the actual construction of the production line and, if problems arose, he would consult Tommy to see if she needed to come back to England. She really hoped to avoid that as she was feeling little trickles of sweat running down her spine each time she thought of DCI Ames' request that she stay out of trouble.

A lot had happened back home. Mr. Avery finished the wing generator test model and was waiting for Tommy's return with the CCN cable. Haz returned from his travels and he and Mr. Swift were mapping out their strategies for the new factories. And most of all, Haz's first four satellites had been launched from Russia without a snag. Satellites five and six would be launched in a few more days from China.

Betty and Tommy were sharing a last cup of tea before Tommy left for the train, and then her flight back home. As they finished, Betty finally

bit the bullet and asked Tommy if she knew what Haz's family business was.

"Sure," Tommy answered with a frown, "his father is a big name in shipping. Haz told us that himself. Why do you ask?"

"Yes, he's in shipping, as in 'Atlas Freight & Transport'. He's one of the top three shipping moguls in the world. Trucks, planes, trains, container ships, delivery services and anything else that moves goods around the world, he controls them. With a thumb of iron and a disposition to match. Are you certain the acorn has fallen far enough from the tree? Do you see my concern, Tommy?"

"Betty, do you really think Haz'll overcharge us by using his father's businesses and pocket the profits?"

"You did say he is working for base salary plus a share of profits. Might he take those up front? I hate to bring this up and I was hoping not to. But Tommy, you're my best friend and I can't let you leave without telling you."

Tommy got up from her chair and went over to her friend and gave her a little slap across the face. "Don't be a bitch or a buzzkill, Betty. Sandy is trying to decide if she has the hots for him and I don't want to queer that for her. Besides, if she or I find out his intentions are less than honourable, we'll do that little ballet

move on him. You know. *The Nutcracker!*

“Sweet! I’m sorry, Tommy. It’s only because I care.”

Tommy took her face in her hands and leaned down, kissing Betty on the nose. “Sorry for the slap, love, but you have to trust my judgment. Betty, you’re my friend, and soul sister for life, so nothing you tell me from your heart could ever hurt me, but I’ve got this handled. I’m glad you told me and I’ll mention it to the Swifts when I get back to the States. Other than A. Flagger I have never seen Haz set out to hurt anyone deliberately. Actually he’s gone out of his way to help others on more than one occasion. Maybe that is a reason he’s in the States doing business and not with his father.”

“I hope you’re right, Tommy. He may be a knight in shining armor but then he may not. Please, be careful.”

“With you to watch my back, how can I not be?”

“Attention, attention please! Will all First Class passengers for flight 1952 to Kennedy International Airport please report to gate A-9 for boarding,” the announcement came. Tommy, gave a sigh of relief, grabbed her overnight bag and headed for the departure gate. As she was handing the security agent her pass she heard her

name called out. Looking around she spotted Inspector Ames jogging over to her.

Out of breath he wheezed, "I thought I missed you. Can I talk to you for a couple of minutes?" Tommy looked at the attendant.

Ames flashed an apologetic smile at the airport employee. "Five minutes, miss," the woman said and she handed Tommy her boarding pass. The inspector took her arm and led her to a secluded spot.

"Miss Swift, I had to talk to you before you left. I shouldn't, but you've been a great help to us, and especially to Interpol. Sergey Levenkov is a tough nut to keep track of. Interpol lost him a year ago. They thought he was in the Arab countries selling black market weapons. Boy, were they wrong!"

Tommy was starting to get worried.

"Interpol has called in the CIA and your FBI about this. You said Levenkov has his people inside A. Flagger's Communication Company, and that's very bad. Your defense department has quite a few contracts with A. Flagger for high-tech equipment and communication systems. They now feel compromised. Your government has already moved in on A. Flagger headquarters and subsidiary companies. At this moment he's completely shut down. A dozen or so Eastern European employees disappeared but

they have arrested several others.”

“Bad for A. Flagger but what does this have to do with me?” She was getting upset.

“Bottom line time, miss Swift. Levenkov is going to go after revenge for all this. You have interfered with his plans three times already. Twice in the States and once here. He’ll want you out of his life! Permanently. He’ll kill you himself—he has to. His position in his Russian Mob is at stake otherwise.”

“Miss,” called out the attendant, “You have to board now, and we must close the loading ramp door.”

“Why are you telling me this? Won’t the U.S. Government protect me?” Tommy was torn between running for the plane or finding out more information.

Inspector Ames reached into his pocket and handed Tommy a business card.

“When you get home I strongly suggest that you immediately contact this man... he’ll know what to do. I’ve made sure of that. Now get on the plane. It will be safer for you in America than it is here right now. At least we know that Levenkov is not there!” He once more took Tommy’s arm and walked her to the gate. He showed his credentials to the attendant and told her that, on orders from Scotland Yard, she was to get an Air Marshal for the plane. It would not

be allowed to close up and leave otherwise.

The security agent gulped, then took Tommy's pass, stamped it and ran to get the requested Marshal. The inspector grinned. He lived for moments like this where he could exercise some level of power over petty minded rental cops. He took Tommy slowly down the ramp. He paused half way down. A minute later a rather inconspicuous man followed them down with the flight attendant bringing up the rear.

At the plane door the inspector stopped. "Tommy, get aboard. I hope everything turns out well for you. Call that man and watch yourself. Go, get on board." Tommy stared at the inspector for a moment, turned and ran into the plane. A couple minutes later the man she now assumed to be the Air Marshal came aboard and the attendant sealed the door. The man pointedly did not look at Tommy, yet he noted where she was sitting, and nonchalantly went down the aisle to his seat.

She was now afraid for the people she loved. It was hours later that Tommy remembered the card in her pocket. She took it out and looked at the rather elegant written business card.

Printed on semi-translucent vellum, it simply had a company name, their motto, and contact information. She needed to talk to Sandy and Uncle Damon about this and then decide what

she should do.



As Tommy took her luggage off the airport carousel at Kennedy, a tall, athletic looking man approached her. His first words were, “Miss Swift, don’t be afraid. I am here to protect you. My cousin, DCI James H. Ames, called me to escort you back home to Shopton and possibly have me look over your personal and company security.” He handed her his business card—a match to the one in her pocket—and the card of

his cousin back in England. “We’re related through our fathers.”

“What’s the H stand for?” she asked turning the Inspector’s card over to see if there was anything on the back.

“Haymes,” the man replied with only a slight hint of mirth at the terrible name his cousin’s parents had saddled him with.

“Who would do such a thing to their child?”

“My aunt, his mother, the former Mary Cherrie Terry!”

“Ahhh. Must be from some place like the American South,” she said. “They’re pretty big on goofy names.”

“Yes. Actually I believe the family roots are in East London, but it’s the same idea, just a different, almost incomprehensible accent. Sort of like Alabama! Anyway... If you don’t trust who I am, I’m to tell you ‘the rose garden was in full bloom at Professor Albert’s cottage and the constable would not let you into the house.’ I also understand that the constable made several comments about your bosom to DCI Ames.”

He smiled at Tommy. It put her at some ease.

“Does that quash your fears? My cousin is a very cautious man and takes great pride in doing his job right. If he says you need protection then you need my help. He also said that if you still

had reservations I was to mention the mysterious death of an old woman and disappearance of her granddaughter moths back. I'm not sure what that means, but there it is."

Tommy finally let out the breath she had been holding. There was something about this man that made her feel safe. She let him carry her luggage as he took her to a waiting car.

An airport security officer was standing next to it speaking on his walkie talkie. Noticing Tommy's escort he said, "You can't park here, I've got a tow truck en route so you can't drive away, neither, Mac."

Mr. Ames stepped up to the officer, flashed something in his wallet and stepped back to Tommy.

"Cancel that tow," the man said nervously into his radio. "Have a good day, sir and madam."

Several hours later Tommy got out at the Swift's home. It was late morning by now and she was exhausted. She hadn't gotten much sleep in the car coming back from New York. When she had asked about the exchange at the airport, he simply told her he had some experience with high-level security and left it at that.

Mr. Ames took her to her door and asked permission to look around. This disturbed her a

little, enough that she messed up the security code for the door. Mr. Ames smiled and told her, “It’s nice to see that the house has some type of protection.”

A half hour later he was ready to leave. As he left he nonchalantly told her, “From now on I or an associate will be watching over you and all the other Swifts. My cousin will immediately call and tell me when it was safe to stop. Oh, and don’t worry about paying for the services... I more than owe James one.”

“What if I don’t want constant protection?” she asked, not harshly, but inquisitively.

“Unless I want you or others to see me, you won’t know I’m there. And, what you don’t see, you can’t try to ditch. And, if you try to ditch me, I will still follow you around. Think of me as a pleasant stalker. Good night, Miss Swift.”

Chapter Seven: “Up, Up And Away!”

That night found the Swifts and many of their friends at a favorite Italian restaurant. Bud wouldn't leave Tommy's side all night, and Haz could not help himself about razzing Bud about it. Not that Haz was ever more than an arm's length from Sandy.

Eventually, the two women escaped into the ladies room for a five minute respite.

As things turned out it was a welcome home party for Tommy and a farewell one for Haz. He would be leaving at nine to catch the midnight 'red eye' from JFK to China's Sichuan Province. Bud had offered to fly him—hoping to take Tommy along and maybe get a little mid air kissing in, but Haz demurred. There was a shuttle flight from Shopton Regional and Sandy would take him there. He was off to watch the launch of his first two satellites from Xichang Launch Center and to firm up SEI's position in the Chinese market.

At around midnight—and everyone was getting ready to leave—Tommy noticed a familiar face sitting by himself in the corner of the restaurant. He touched his forehead and nodded at her. She went over to him and said,

“Mr. Ames, you should have come over and joined the party. I’m sure my family would like to meet my newly appointed stalker.”

“That’s alright, Miss Swift,” he answered back with a smile. “I met them all this afternoon while you were sleeping. Good movie, by the way.” Mr. Swift, seeing Tommy talking to Mr. Ames, came over.

“Well, Hardin, did you tell Tommy the good news?”

Tommy played ping pong with her head looking from one to the other. “News?”

“Why yes, my dear. Mr. Ames has graciously excepted my offer to became our new Chief of Security. He pointed out our total lack of safeguards at the complex. He almost laughed himself sick when old man Jenkins just waved him through when he stopped at the gate this afternoon. By the time Hardin got to my office he had a list a mile long on what needs to be upgraded. He does like our monitoring display system in the lobby of the Administration building. Too bad we record no videos of what’s on the screens.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over that, Mr. Swift,” interrupted Mr. Ames, “That will be my job. Considering all you told be that’s been happening around you the last few years, and not having an incident to bring it your attention,

your lack of security hasn't hurt you. I have a feeling that all that's going to change. As any company sees success they get everything from industrial spies to kooks with guns. But, now's not the time to talk shop, your guests are ready to leave. I'll be around from now on. I promise not to be hard to find." He showed Tommy his brand new bracelet phone/tablet. "As a matter of fact, you just might get tired of seeing me!" He bid them good night and left the restaurant.

Tommy saw him sitting in his car as everyone left, and she thought she saw him following her home. When she looked out of the front window, he and his car were nowhere to be seen.

The next day Tommy was too jetlagged to work, so she tried to catch up on her paperwork. She deliberately stayed away from Mr. Avery and the wing project. She wanted to be in tip top shape when she looked it over. She was at the combined computer station and desk in her shed when Hank Avery came by to pick up the CCN cable.

He stared at it a moment, then down at the heavy-duty dolly he had brought. As he picked the fifteen pound spook up with one finger he assured her he would have it attached to the wing's coupling system and to the truck winch by tomorrow morning.

As he left she heard him say almost to himself. "If she thinks this thread will hold that wing, boy oh boy! There's no way this can do it!" and he kept on talking to himself as he walked away dragging the dolly behind.

Tommy knew for herself that if she were handed that spool of cable and told it held slightly over three thousand feet of high tensile strength tether line, she might think that person was crazy too! An hour later he was back, looking sheepish. "Missy, how the heck do you cut that stuff? I wrecked almost everything we've got trying. A torch doesn't do it, either!"

"Sorry, Uncle Hank, I forgot to give you this," and she reached into a box next to her desk and took out tool that looked like a combination cross-cut pliers and miniature chain saw. A ratcheting mechanism moved the two blades back and forth as the grip tightened.

"You've got to be kidding! That won't work!" he told her. "you're having me on, right?"

Tommy just handed it to him and said, "Try it, you old doubting Thomas!" and she went back to organizing Professor Albert's formulas and notes.

And hour later Sandy showed up and asked how she was doing. Tommy just shook her head, making her hair fly to and fro. She grabbed a

bunch that had stuck to her lips, pulling it aside, and said, “I can’t make sense out of Professors Albert’s notes. There are formulas about gravity, absence of gravity at the sub atomic levels, bits about four and sixteen dimensional universes as well as Cooper pairs and Bucky balls. Oh, my!” She shook her head again.

“Yet, he called on me to help, as if he knew that I could make it happen. What did he think I knew that would lead to an answered to this mess?” she was exasperated.

“Tommy, you’re trying too hard—sleep on it—let your mind wander. Have a two hour make out session with Bud. Go buy some clothes. Have another make out session with Bud. I’m sure you’ll find the answer.”

“I hope so, Sandy, I hope so.”

The next morning before the sun rose into the sky, Tommy, Bud and Uncle Hank were going over the finished generator wing. Tommy was elated with the results.

Uncle Hank and Bud had taken the time to make a scale model of the craft before they built the real thing. They took it over to Astros Aerodynamics, a leader in privately owned jet aircraft and now the Swift’s best buyer for the PHARC jet engines. They tested it in AA’s wind tunnel and, except for a slight off-balance at the

tether line attachment points—fixed by Tommy’s adjustable arrangement in the real wing—it was air worthy. The lift coefficient of the wing at the slow wind speeds in which the craft would hover into was right in line with Tommy’s figures.

She even smiled when she saw stenciled on the wing rudders:

Sandy’s E-Power

By six thirty they were in the middle of the runway. Bud and Hank separated the wing’s transport/launch trailer from the heavy-duty truck and Tommy drove fifty feet away and parked it so the back end faced the wing.

A winch—completely oversized for the CCN cable—was at the end of the truck, and a launch control station was located behind it facing the winch. Tommy hopped and released the clutch on the winch flywheel. She pulled the end of the CCN cable that was fastened to two large swivel balls at the end of a ‘Y’ connection line to the wing and connected them to the clamp tie points on the undercarriage. The two men had released the wing from its tie down straps on the trailer.

Stepping back from the wing, Tommy looked around, “I wonder where Sandy is? I told her lift off was at seven sharp. The FAA is only giving

us a three hour window to test the wing.”

Bud shrugged, “Maybe she’s in the tower with Patches. I’m sure she doesn’t want to miss this.”

Tommy clicked open her wrist phone and speed dialed the tower.

“Patches here, Tommy.”

“Is Sandy there?”

“She was. She just left and told me that she’ll be back in time to watch the test flight.”

“Do you know where she went, Patches?”

“Nope, but she didn’t leave the building. I’ve had seen her if she did.”

“Thanks, Patches. And it should be ‘I’d have,’ as in ‘I would have.’ Not ‘I’ve had.’ Lift off is still set for seven so get final clearance from the FAA at five of and let us know.”

“Will do.” He clicked off. She didn’t hear him mutter, “Missy smart arse pants!”

Tommy looked at her watch. “Come on, guys. Get up on the truck and fire up the control systems.”

From her position on the truck, Tommy admired the look of the wing. It was all black and gray except for the engine cowlings that were bright yellow. It was, she had discovered, due to the type of epoxy used. It was as strong,

but had the built-in colorant.

Production ones would be made completely from black carbon fiber. And the right epoxy. The blades were white with red tips. The overall length of the wing ended up at thirty-two feet; and the engine cowlings were six-feet wide.

The radio control electronics and computer guidance systems were in the blister on the wing top while the generators control units and nano-batteries were in the undercarriage, just like her design. Everything was all just as Tommy had designed it. Nothing had to be changed.

Her phone rang, “Time, and wave at Sandy,” was all Patches said.

Tommy hit the start clock, and looked over to the air traffic control tower. Sandy was standing there with a high-definition camcorder pointed at them. She waved back at Tommy and continued to recording the take-off of Tommy’s generator wing.

At one minute before launch Tommy stepped away from the control board. She had a sudden realization and wanted to put it out there

“Uncle Hank, this baby is yours; you built it, now you get to fly it!” With a look that spoke of both pride, surprise and gratefulness—even though that was three things—he stepped over and took her place at the controls with a big grin on his face.

“Nice one, Tommy,” Bud told her giving her a kiss on the cheek.

At the five-second mark Hank Avery hit the electric motors start up switch.

“Three, two, one and lift off!” he touched the hold-down release button. The four motor/generators roared to life, and the craft shot into the air. The cable sang as it unreeled from the winch.

“Holy shi— erm, I mean gosh!” Hank said. “That dangd string of yours is holding it!”

He provided a play-by-play description of the action over the next five minutes. “Five hundred feet and climbing... one thousand... fifteen hundred,” he sang out. “Closing in on three thousand feet... Mark! Transition commencing... Horizontal flight has been established, winch motor off and the cable locked down. Tension on tether is building, but holding really nice. Wing hover mode established,” he sighed in relief—the wing was flying!

“Now, to see if it will generate electricity! Flipping the motor polarity, releasing brakes.” He watched the power output meters from each generator. “Power is going up,” he looked at the wind gauge, “and the wind speed over the wing at eighteen miles per hour... pretty steady, too. The power’s leveling off... steady at two

kilowatts per generator! You did it, Tommy!”

“We did it Uncle Hank. Bud.” She was so pleased that she hugged everyone. She even let it slide that both Bud and Uncle Hank gave her bottom a little squeeze

Tommy’s phone buzzed again. “Well,” asked Patches, “how’d she do?”

“Oh, Patches, It’s just great! Tell Sandy that the wing is providing enough power to run eight houses, and we’re just using the smallest generators. Wait till everyone sees what my super wing will do!” she replied with glee.

Bud and Hank’s heads snapped around to look at her.

“Super?” was all they could gasp out.

Chapter Eight: Hide And Seek

A couple of hours later all arrangements with the FAA were complete. This surprised Mr. Swift as the FAA had always been one of *those* agencies that seemed to take weeks discussing insignificant things such as, “I’m not certain that barf bags in the main cabin might not have been the reason the plane went down with all that ice on its wings, one of its two engines having flamed out and the entire rudder having been snapped off.” He would watch programs such as *Big Jet Crashes* and have the root cause of the accident figured out before the first ad break.

Tommy sat back in her chair. She was very satisfied with the willingness of the FAA to give her flight time for her generator wing. And the U.S. Energy Commission was giving her wide berth, almost as if they wanted no part in the affair. From what she knew of the U.S. Government bureaucracy she was surprised. And, nobody from the DAR or the VFW had even written a stern letter. Amazing. If all went well she could fly it for twenty-four hours. After an inspection and flight demonstration with FAA officials, they could send it up for a two-month trial run at the Shopton women’s shelter, food bank and kitchen out by Lake Copland. It had been Mrs. Swift’s favorite charity and

Sandy knew they could certainly use the free electricity.

This was an unheard of speed for the government to start to approve a new power generating system. Tommy was flying as high as she hoped her generator wing would go.

Then it all hit her. She froze, eyes wide with astonishment. *She could now see everything in Professor Albert's formulas and notes as plain as the pert nose on her pretty face.* "Yes!" she screamed, "Yreka! I mean, eureka!" and she danced and twirled.

As she turn and spun she hit something. It went, "Oomph!" and crashed to the floor, knocking her stool over. "Fiddlesticks!" was heard next followed by footsteps running out the door accompanied by a final, "Owie, owie, owie!" of pain.

Tommy hit the security alarm, part of the new upgrades being implemented by Hardin Ames and his security team.

She called Sandy and Bud and told them to get to the shed, fast! A moment later Ames and his three men showed up. "Mr. Ames, you won't believe this but I just had an invisible intruder here. I accidentally knocked him down, right about there." She pointed at the floor. There were a lot of marks and scratches to be seen but in the middle was a distinctive butt print.

“If we can match that, we’ve got our intruder,” one of the men said. Ames shook his head and told him, “Don’t be a dolt. That could be Tommy’s shapely behind print. We don’t know if she is in the habit of sitting in the middle of the floor!”

“Ahh. Right. Anyway, he turned over that stool as he fell. I heard him say ‘Fiddlesticks!’ where he went down. Next I heard his footsteps running out the door yelling something about ‘Owie.’ ”

Tommy walked to the doorframe, “Look!” she exclaimed, “there’s blood and skin he must have painfully snagged on that protruding nail. He must have grabbed the door frame as he left.”

“Don’t touch it, Tommy,” warned Ames. “We’ll get that to a forensic lab for a DNA breakdown and a possible match up.” He motioned one of his men over and he opened his forensic collection kit and went to work.

Bud and Sandy had been standing outside listening to everything. “Oh, oh!” Sandy mumbled covering her mouth with her hand.

“What is it, Sandy?” Tommy asked. “And if it’s about those Area whatever ghosts of yours, count me disinterested! Is this important?”

“It is Tommy. I’ve seen him, too.”

They gathered in the conference room on the second floor of the Administration building. All six of them. The three Swift's, Hank Avery, Bud Kenworth and Hardin Ames.

Five of them were staring at an enlarge and blurry photo Sandy brought with her. Ames was standing up and questioning Sandy about it.

“You said you took this *months* ago?”

“Yes, sir. ” She felt like a kid being question by a teacher. “About a month after Tommy arrived from England.”

“And you didn't tell anyone? It didn't seem suspicious enough for you to even mention it? As in, ‘I've just taken a really weird picture and it seems to show a portal into another dimension,’ sort of thing?”

“No, sir.”

“Why not?” his voice was stern. She could well imaging him in a nun's habit ready to whack her knuckles with a pointer.

“Would you?” she questioned back. “It looks fake! And, what a story I would tell. ‘Look everyone. I've just seen a ghostly image of a young man standing in a multi-universe dimensional portal and taken a picture of him.’ As if. But it's real!”

“Retell the story.” Ames requested.

She retold her story. “As I said, late one night I was trying to get the company’s books in order and needed some old records from boxes in the storage room. I went down to get them and could see the storage room light shining under the door, but when I tried the door it was locked. I put the key in the lock just as the lights went out. I figured if I took my bracelet phone and turned it to photo flash mode I could blind the thief. Then, if I hit him about midsection, knocked him down and danced on his liver with my high heels I could take him out.” Sandy laughed at that memory, “When I popped the strove and looked, there was no one in there! I figured it was one of the automatic switches that were being installed so I didn’t think anything more of it. At least until it was a week or two later and I actually looked at the photo”

They all stared at the picture that showed a window set into the back wall with some sort of outside spot light appearing in the left hand top corner as a white blob.

Inside the frame was a rectangular block of black floating within the frame, but recessed a couple of inches all the way around. It wasn’t perfectly centered in the shot but now was not the time to take Sandy to task for poor photography. In that blackness a young man was walking away as if into an inter-dimensional tunnel. That part was easy to see for everyone.

Whoever *he* was, *he* was looking back with a smile on his face. His blond hair was short, like an old crew cut. You could tell he was tall and lean, but Sandy had been in a hurry, as usual, and even the motion-stabilization of the build-in camera of her watch/tablet hadn't been enough to make it a very good picture at all.

That part was also easy to see for everyone.

His face was too grainy to determine most of his features. But Sandy knew who it was. Uncle Hank knew who it was, and even Bud could take a wild guess at who it was. Tommy, who had never been show any old family pictures had no idea. Only Mr. Swift refused to believe it.

It was Tom Jr. in that photo!

Tommy cleared her throat, "Oh-oh. I've seen him too. At Bud's hanger one day while I was helping on the plane. Do you remember, Bud?"

"Huh? Oh wow! Yes, Tommy, I remember it quite well. I never saw him but you did. You said that seeing him was like looking at your own ghost. Although. Since he's a guy and Tommy is very obviously a girl..."

"Shut up, everybody!" Ames ordered. "That is why I've asked for this meeting. If Sandy saw him and Tommy saw him, and if that unseen visitor was the same person, we're in trouble!"

"I don't believe in ghosts. I know that no one

on this reality of Earth has that type a cloaking ability... and ghosts don't bleed!" Uncle Hank exclaimed.

Only Tommy grasped the importance of part of his exact words.

"Uncle Hank, you hit it right on the head. This is beyond *our* present abilities. But it's not beyond *someone's*!"

"Hey, guys," interjected Ames, "before we all go off half cocked, there's one bit of information that I am holding back for dramatic effect." This got everyone's attention.

"Scotland Yard found a connection between Sergey Levenkov and Professor Albert. Tommy, do you remember his last mentor student before he retired?"

"Well... it was after I left the university... and we hadn't kept up as much as I should have... and I was kind of in this relationship—don't stare at me like that, Bud. I never claimed to be an unpicked piece of fruit—but I think he could have been a foreign exchange student... Russian... Oh, crap!"

"Yes," retorted Ames. "Does the name *Peter* Levenkov ring a bell?"

"Is that Sergey's son?"

"Close, but no, it's his brother Kirill's son. A genius from what they find out about him. But a

loner and a ‘I can’t seem to finish what I start’ kid who jumped from school to school like a toad on a griddle. He never made friends, so it’s really hard to learn what kind of person he is.”

Ames looked at each of them before continuing.

“Commie!” the exclaimed in unison.

“Be that as it may, from the information available it seems that he went from one school to another, insinuating himself on the most prominent scientist at that school, impressing them with his brilliance. He would stay for a semester or two, some study or notes or devices would mysteriously disappear, and he would transfer out.”

His gaze settled on Tommy. “So, does he sound like the type of person that could be behind this?”

Tommy thought about it for a moment before answering, “No. He may be a thief and possibly a murderer, but I stand with what Uncle Hank about Sandy’s ghost boy not being feasible at this time, on this Earth. On top of which, all the Levenkovs have black hair and our Mr. Photogenic reality jumper is a blond. And, he evidently is the spitting image—with allowances for Sandy’s jiggling camera—of Tom Swift.”

She looked at Sandy who was smiling back. The implied insult had gone whooshing over her

head.

“Now, if Peter Levenkov found out about Professor Albert theories and/or helped the Professor with them or stole them from him... that could mean trouble. Like all groundbreaking discoveries, there is a possibility that some terrible weapon might be constructed from Dr. Albert’s notes.”

“But, Hardin,” injected Mr. Swift, “if he had stolen the theories from the Professor, why would Sergey go back? Is he that stupid?”

“Possibly, but my thought is centered around what he told Tommy—that he needed the hidden equations. That means that Peter is a bungler and a fool and didn’t get them. Sergey got fed up with his idiot nephew and went to get it from the Professor. They must have scuffled and Albert was accidentally killed. Then, Sergey cruelly left him there and tried his old lecture room. If Tommy hadn’t gone there Levenkov might still not have those notes.”

Tommy slyly rubbed the side of her pert nose with a middle finger.

“The only question now,” he stared at Tommy, “is what did the Professor discover?”

Tommy looked at all of them trying to find the best way to explain what she still had a hard time wrapping her mind around. “Do you want the quick and dirty or the heavy on the science

version?”

“My head hurts already,” implored Bud, “so, the quick and dirty, please.”

“You asked for it, Bud. How about a way to transmit any energy without using wires and doing it instantly.”

“Any energy? What about gravity, Tommy?” Mr. Swift asked. “We don’t even know what gravity is, never mind controlling it.”

“Look, Professor Albert postulated a sixteen dimension universe instead of four. We know the basic four, length, width, height, and time. Gravity is assumed to be the fifth. We also think of time as the sixth. But, there is no physical form present for them. He believed they could be dragged out of the universe and made to dance to his own music. In other words, he believe he found a way to make all of the dimensions tangible, and a way to transmit them from place to place.”

Bud and Sandy looked from Tommy to Mr. Swift. Then to Haz, to Hank Avery and to Hardin Ames. He looked back at Tommy. “This is going to sound like crazy talk, but I think I understand it. He either discovered or postulated a way to make all energies have mass. Then, he believed that any of these energetic masses can be transmitted through space—and I assume other matter—with no loss of time.

Instantaneous movement from point A to point B. Is that it?"

Everyone was staring at Bud. Four of them had their jaws dropped down about as far as they could go—on their own and not to the extent it might be possible for an angry gorilla or chimpanzee to yank one down—so that you could see their uvulas.

Very slowly, Tommy nodded. "Tonight, you get a reward for being a clever boy! For the rest of you, we live in three dimensions. The professor says there are more, but I am not going to sully the water by detailing the list to you. As far as any one of them that already is or can be turned into energy, Bud's conclusions are spot on."

"So, the transporter on that old sci-fi show is possible?" Hardin asked, not because he wanted one but because he thought it might be used to breach security. "I only ask, not because I want one but because it might be used to breach our security. Got to be ready for the future!"

"If that's the easy, Tommy," quipped Bud, "I hate to hear the high brow one. So, does that give us the man in the window that's in the picture that Sandy took?"

"Not certain that is possible using his theories, but some day... maybe. For now I need more time to study these things. I hope I can get

to the heart of them before Sergey or his goons do. But, I can't hurry this."

She folded her arms under her breasts making it difficult for the men in the room to hear what she was saying.

"I'd hate to try to name the 'who' before I know the 'how.' I can tell you that I absolutely need to understand this, but that it may be both beyond my time and ability. I'll be lucky to just transmit energy from one place to another. Let's get that ball rolling first. Then we can add more balls and learn to juggle them together."

"Huh?" four male voices chorused.

EPILOGUE

Oh, and that “*Of Death*” thing?

Well, along with the obvious murder of Professor Albert, when Tommy finally lowered her test generator wing, an aged vole had just popped its head out of a hole and was squished by the right, front tyre (or tire for you Yanks) of the undercarriage.

It wasn't a pretty sight.

It took a good scrubbing to get all the goo out of the treads.

Ick!