

Crossing Dimensions

Revelations of a Mystical Traveller

by

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Chapter I

The last thing I remembered was Eddie staggering with me to the car through the pouring rain.

‘Shit mom,’ he complained. ‘Help me out here.’

That was just before he slid in the mud, landing on his backside, dropping me into the slosh beside him.

‘Sorry,’ I giggled.

‘You’re going to be sorry tomorrow,’ he blustered, looking at his suit. ‘I can’t go back into the party like this!’ I covered my mouth, trying hard not to laugh. My muddy hand left its mark across my face.

‘Look at you,’ Eddie complained, pulling me up. ‘I’ve never seen you like this!’

My daughter, Tyler, had been with Eddie since day care. Even when Eddie’s parents went to live in New Zealand, they became avid pen pals. Ten years is a long time in a child’s life,

and the separation from age eight to eighteen had only inspired adolescent dreams of the time they would be together. This had proved awkward, to say the least, when they did eventually meet face-to-face. The ease with which they corresponded froze when they met and was replaced by stilted conversation and shy glances. The pained ‘Oh, hi’ and ‘How are you’ were alleviated only by my nonstop chatter in an attempt to fill the void. Eddie had changed all right. The chubby little boy had turned into a six-foot, three-inch hulk with piercing, dark-grey eyes.

It didn’t take long though for the shy spell to end and the light-hearted banter to take over. In fact, before Eddie had unpacked, they had their first difference of opinion. These days, you couldn’t fit a word in edgeways when they started talking!

We hired the old scout hall for their engagement party. The walls, which were in dire need of a good clean and a lick of paint, were plastered with decorations; a large banner adorning one wall with the inscription “Tyler and Eddie – almost tied” was surrounded with smaller messages from friends, and judging by the expressions on the faces of those reading them, these were not for the family scrapbook. Eddie took control of the music, stating emphatically that he didn’t want this ‘karaoke or disco stuff’ and that good speakers and a decent collection of CDs would be much better. Kate (my youngest) and I appointed friends to help prepare food. This would be an evening to remember. Yeah, right! I hadn’t anticipated the most uncomfortable underwear ever. You know the kind? The ones guaranteed to make you look a size smaller, but when you bend over, they slide under your stomach, making a very impressive uplift. I also hadn’t anticipated missing the party!

I had worked my fingers to the bone! One drink, that’s all! I had a couple of sips before being pulled onto the makeshift dance floor by someone who could easily pass for Nicholas Cage. He had a weird look in his eyes though and an excessive amount of energy. I don’t like this new way of dancing where everybody seems to do their own thing. You don’t need a partner

anymore. In this instance though, it did offer me the opportunity to duck between several overzealous dancers and scoot across to my drink. That's all I had!

'I guess it's not every day your daughter gets engaged, hey,' said Eddie, coming to the rescue. 'Come on, let's get you home.' A strong arm went around my waist, and I was assisted, or rather bundled, into the car.

'God, Eddie,' I slurred, 'I feel sick.'

As fierce as the storm was last night, so was the sun this morning.

'Morning, Mum,' sang Kate, my youngest daughter, opening the curtains.

'Oh heck! No! Close them,' I moaned, covering my eyes with the duvet.

'Some party, huh Mum,' laughed Kate, leaping onto my bed.

'Some hangover,' I replied. 'What was in my glass last night?'

'I gathered you might be a little under the weather, so, I brought you these,' she said, pushing a couple of headache pills into my hand and a glass in the other. 'Come on, drink up.' I didn't miss the knowing smile that said, 'One glass, yeah right.'

'I swear,' I moaned, 'it was only one glass! I left it on the bar when someone asked me to dance.'

'You mean you did what you always told us not to do,' laughed Kate, raising one eyebrow. 'God, Mum. Nobody asks anybody to dance these days. That should have been your first clue.'

'It couldn't have been him.' I rubbed my temples, 'He stood in front of me all the time. I need to sleep,' I mumbled, finding it an effort to argue my innocence.

'I take the hint,' she turned toward the door, then looked back at me, and added, 'I'll wake you in an hour . . . I'm taking you to lunch.'

'Oh Kate, let's make it another time, hey?' I gently slid back, pulling a pillow over my head.

'No, come on, Mum. I've already made arrangements,' she stood up, hands on her hips.

'What's the rush?' I objected, my head hammering like an overactive building site. 'It's Sunday, day of rest!'

‘No arguments, Mother.’ She moved across to the window. I pushed myself up with a fair amount of effort, ‘For goodness sake!’ I wailed.

The room darkened once more, and I flopped gingerly back into the comfort of my bed. I didn’t have the stamina to argue the toss.

All too soon, Kate bounded back into my room. ‘Your bath is ready, Madam,’ she announced. ‘How do you feel now?’

‘A little better . . . I think,’ I replied. ‘What’s the time?’

‘Noon,’ she said, pulling my duvet off. ‘God, look at you!’ I was still dressed, though in fairness, Eddie did take my shoes off. ‘You need a good soak!’

I looked down in horror, ‘Oh, my God,’ I cried. ‘Why didn’t he just put me on the floor with an old blanket?’

She wagged her finger, ‘Come on, Mum, you’ll feel better when you’re clean.’ She laughed, ‘Christ, what a mess!’ We looked in horror at my expensive, crumpled, muddy suit. The bedding resembled a welcome mat on a rainy day. ‘Jesus!’ I gasped.

‘Well, Eddie wasn’t going to undress you,’ she laughed. ‘Ten points for taking your shoes off, though. Tell you what,’ Kate pushed her hair behind her ear. ‘You have a nice soak, and I’ll get these sheets in the machine; how’s that? My mate Sergio at the dry cleaners down on Church Street will work wonders with your suit.’

‘I can’t believe this,’ I complained, easing myself off the bed. ‘I only had one drink!’

‘Then it was spiked,’ Kate pulled the duvet out of the cover. ‘Or you picked up the wrong glass. Hey, what are you panting and puffing about?’ She looked over her shoulder. ‘I’m doing all the hard work here.’

‘Remind me never to wear one of these stupid body shapers again,’ I complained, inching the tight elastic over my thighs and buttocks. ‘This one was definitely not designed by a woman!’

Kate, my filthy bedding under her arm, bent to retrieve my discarded clothing. ‘Don’t expect this every day,’ she said, closing the door on her way out.

‘Makes a nice change,’ I called, reaching for the shampoo.

I had bathed and was sitting surveying my reflection in the mirror when Kate came back. ‘Look at these bags!’ I complained, ‘Age is someone’s sick sense of humour.’ I pulled the corners of my eyes, producing an oriental look. ‘Everything sags, the eyes grow weak, the mind grows weary, the body . . . well, look at this!’ I prodded my stomach.

‘Stop, Mother!’ Kate turned her head to one side. ‘A touch of makeup and a flattering outfit is what you need. You still turn heads, Mum. We all need a bit of help.’ She darted off to fetch her makeup. ‘Here,’ she held up a fairly large tube. ‘Try this under your eyes. It’ll work wonders on those morning-after bags.’ She applied a small amount on my finger, and I obediently dabbed it under my eyes. Kate handed me her eye makeup, saying, ‘A little colour on your eyes will do the trick.’

‘I’ve got my own makeup,’ I objected.

‘Mine’s better,’ she insisted, watching me work with some amusement.

‘What?’ I asked, looking at her in the mirror.

‘You’re not finished,’ she said, handing me a small pot. ‘Eye shadow. A little colour is bound to put the sparkle back, and here, try this mascara.’

‘Hmm,’ I grunted, fluttering my blackened eyelashes. I picked up the tube of cream that Kate had given me earlier. ‘I should get some of this,’ I said, squinting at the tiny writing. ‘Preparation H!’ I exclaimed, ‘You’ve given me Preparation bloody H for my eyes!’ Kate laughed heartily, ‘Mum, we all use it.’

‘It’s for piles!’ I complained in disgust.

‘It’ll shrink those bags too!’ Kate wiped her eyes. ‘God, Mum, you are funny.’

Kate sauntered over to my wardrobe. ‘Let’s see what you’ve got in here.’ She held up a turquoise trouser suit. ‘How about this? I love this colour.’

‘No good,’ I shook my head. ‘Kate, I am far too overweight to wear that now,’ I displayed my middle through my gown.

‘I am going to see you lose that,’ she frowned.

‘No good,’ I said, ‘I’ve been trying for years.’

‘Well then, it’s about time something transpired,’ she hung the suit back in the wardrobe, a thoughtful look on her face.

‘That’s life,’ I said, opening another cupboard. ‘I’m fifty-four. My hair is thinner, my middle is thicker. That’s the way it goes.’ I took a dress and threw it on the bed.

‘What rot, Mother.’ She turned around, a frown on her face, ‘Age is irrelevant. People in their seventies still run marathons. Stop putting yourself down.’

‘Are we meeting anybody?’ I asked in an attempt to change the subject.

‘Only Matt,’ she said dismissively.

‘Oh, God,’ I scowled. ‘Is he going to try and sell me an insurance policy again?’

‘No, but he is going to sell you a medical policy.’ Kate’s face flushed, and she added hurriedly, ‘It’s not expensive, Mother. I just worry that you have nothing.’

‘What’s wrong with the NHS?’ I looked at her.

‘It’s fine, Mum,’ she insisted. ‘But what if you had something serious?’ She cleared her throat.

‘I’m fine,’ I bent to retrieve my comfortable walking shoes. ‘When did I last need to see a doctor?’

‘That’s not the point,’ Kate shook her head. ‘You don’t take out a life insurance because you haven’t died yet.’

‘You’re bullying me,’ I sighed, picking up my hair dryer.

‘Yes, I am,’ she said firmly.

I was fed and watered, lectured and cajoled, my insurance forms sticking untidily out of my permanently overstuffed bag. Matt had insisted that a complete medical was a small price to pay for having the peace of mind that this medical insurance would offer. ‘If you needed a new heart, this would cover you,’ he ended enthusiastically.

I hate insurance salesmen! Thank goodness lunch was over! ‘Now, I insist we go Dutch,’ I said as sincerely as I could. ‘My gosh, how time flies.’ I stood up, taking my coat off the back of my chair. ‘You two stay and catch up.’ I intended to leave money with Kate and run. But no. This salesman wasn’t going to take the hint!

Matt and Kate stood up, completely ignoring me and picked up their coats.

‘Why don’t you stay?’ I repeated.

‘I have to go too,’ smiled Matt. ‘I really enjoyed our lunch.’ He scooped up the bill.

‘We can pay here at the table,’ I felt my face redden. ‘I didn’t mean for us all to leave now.’

‘We all seem to be in a bit of a hurry,’ he winked. ‘I’ll pay at the desk.’

I turned to Kate. ‘Don’t let Matt pay for me,’ I whispered.

‘Oh, Mum,’ she sighed, ‘you’re so obvious. Matt asked us to lunch, and he’d do anything for a sale!’

‘And spend the afternoon with you?’ I finished.

We were walking across the park adjacent to the restaurant when I saw a bride. ‘Oh look!’ I cried, moving forward to get a better look, when a step appeared out of nowhere. In an attempt to save myself from falling, I tried to catch up with gravity, overtook the bride, and landed in a freshly turned garden in front of her. ‘Excuse me,’ I stammered in embarrassment, standing up and brushing the dirt from my hands and knees. I felt their eyes boring holes into my back as, dignified as I could, I made my way back to Kate and Matt. ‘Shut up,’ I hissed.

‘Second time today,’ Kate brushed mud from my coat. ‘My mother,’ she continued, turning to Matt, ‘used to be embarrassed about having small breasts.’

‘Kate!’ I cried, ‘those are home jokes.’ She was not deterred.

‘She had these false boobs.’ She puffed her chest out.

‘Leave that story right there,’ I implored.

‘Hoping to impress the surrounding talent, she dived into a swimming pool, and they shot out of her bikini top on impact, bobbing on top of the water as she surfaced.’ Kate looked back at me and grinned.

‘Did anybody see?’ asked Matt, his eyes twinkling

‘Everybody saw,’ laughed Kate, spreading her arms wide. ‘Queen of embarrassing moments, my mum.’

‘That’s nothing,’ I added. ‘Matt, did you know when Kate eventually got this date with a guy she had been trying to impress all year ...’

‘Okay, quits.’ She walked away, covering her ears.

‘No way,’ I called. ‘Your turn.’ Matt was enjoying this immensely. ‘She had bought this beautiful, long, cream skirt,’ I continued, ‘very feminine.’

Kate turned and scowled at me from down the path.

‘She’d gone to the loo and was in such a hurry to get back to her date that she caught the back of her skirt in her knickers.’

Mat threw his head back with laughter.

‘Besides displaying a huge backside, a complete stranger had to inform her of that fact in the middle of the dance floor.’ I looked at Kate smugly. ‘People in glass houses,’ I trailed off.

We had arrived home, my mind preparing a dozen excuses not to have to invite Matt in, but that’s not what came out. ‘Would you like to come in for tea?’ is what came out.

‘I’d love to Mrs. Wads—’

‘Rebecka,’ I corrected. God, what was the matter with me?

‘Rebecka. Sorry, but I can’t,’ he patted my arm. ‘Rain check?’

‘Another time then.’ I wiped my arm. His hand was clammy. Then I noticed Kate’s horrified look and added, ‘It’s quite chilly; isn’t it?’ I said, rubbing both arms vigorously.

Kate, my strong-willed daughter was a sensitive girl, creative, charming, entertaining, and quite unaware of her own attractiveness. If one had to take her, feature for feature, she wasn’t beautiful, but wherever she went, she was noticed, regardless of the mouse-brown hair she always complained about.

Our house had become a hotel and meeting place for her friends, most of whom I had seen growing up, and I had become mum to the masses. The kitchen was always full of budding gourmet cooks. This part I really did not mind. I had given Kate full reign of my kitchen years ago.

I had been ordered to relax in my recliner with a book (not that I needed much encouragement), while Kate and her friends prepared lunch. The sounds of their ad-libbing and laughter added to the clamour of industrious preparation carrying through to the lounge.

I divorced my ex-husband when the girls were still babies, and life had been financially difficult for many years. We might

not have had material luxuries, but our home was always a happy place filled with love. One day Tyler asked me why we never went places like their friends, and I answered that we couldn't afford a car . . . like other families; but still, I felt guilty.

'I have an idea,' I said to the girls one day. 'We can go places, but not like others . . . We can have more fun.'

They jumped up and down with excitement, squealing, 'when, Mummy?'

'Right now,' I laughed, lying on my back in the middle of the lounge carpet. 'Come on. On your backs.' They excitedly followed suit. 'All right, now close your eyes, and pretend you're riding a bicycle in the air. Are you holding your handlebars?'

'Yes,' they chorused, their little legs circling furiously.

'All right girls, take a left turn now. Let's go to the beachfront. No, it doesn't matter which way is left. That's the fun of it all, you see.' We stopped at traffic lights, waved to a policeman, overtook a Mercedes and even enjoyed an imaginary ice cream. That was the start of many 'family outings.'

'What are you daydreaming about?' said Kate coming through to the lounge to call me. 'You've got one of those silly looks on your face.'

'How rude,' I admonished, giving her a stern look. 'Don't you ever reminisce? I was just thinking of our family outings.'

'Not the imaginary bicycles. Mom! That's so embarrassing! If you tell my mates, I will die!'

Doctors' rooms are all alike. Far too many people. I had completed a head count and divided the numbers into the amount of time left (two hours until 5:30 p.m.). That gave each one of us approximately fourteen minutes. The last patient took thirty-five. 'They're running late,' I told Kate, pointing to my watch.

'Relax, Mother, they have to see us this afternoon,' she picked up a magazine.

'Yes, but it takes me longer than fourteen minutes to get my clothes on and off. You tell me I've got to prance on and off a little step plus, most probably, a whole batch of aerobic stints, so they can check my heart,' I hissed. 'All this for some insurance policy?'

Kate wasn't taking any notice, flicking through her magazine. 'You won't have to strip, Mom.'

'They're making sure that I'm not likely to cost them any money,' I continued. 'It's the insurance companies who benefit from these policies. And of course the salesmen too. Let's not forget them.' I tapped my head. 'They're just going to prove that I'm very healthy and that they'll get more than their fair share in premiums.' Kate raised her eyes to the ceiling and back to the magazine she was reading. 'Look at that; more people have come in! How do they work their appointment books?' I whispered, 'See that last person who went in? He came in after us.'

'Relax, Mother,' she patted my hand. 'You're not getting out of this. You know very well that there are two doctors, and he was possibly booked with the other one.'

'I never go to the doctor.' I felt claustrophobic and had a horrendously strong urge to pick up my bag and run. 'I find these examinations embarrassing,' I looked at Kate hopefully.

'It'll be over soon, Mum.' Kate smiled reassuringly, 'You should start having regular checkups though.'

'No chance, Kate,' I objected. 'I gave you charge over my kitchen, not my person. You can be very domineering sometimes.'

'And you're being a terrible coward,' she smiled and handed me a tissue to wipe the glow from my face.

'I'm going to the loo,' I rose from my seat, thinking maybe I could just quietly slip out without anyone noticing. I could hop on the bus and be home with a nice cuppa before anyone would notice I had gone. I would leave Kate there for a little while then phone her. My wishful thinking came to an abrupt end.

'Ms. Wadsworth,' said the receptionist, 'you can go through now. Room six.'

I looked back at Kate, panic-stricken.

Tyler flung her front door open before I had a chance to knock. Sometimes when Kate's badgering about my weight and lack of exercise sent me looking for refuge, I always had the comfort of this daughter, who rarely worried about anything. Tyler's idea of healthy eating was the lettuce and gherkin on the top of her

burger. Wine and dried fruit were her other sources of ‘health,’ and chocolate counted as dairy. Whoever said ‘You are what you eat’ had obviously never met Tyler. She had thick, glossy, brown hair, huge green eyes, a flawless complexion, and perfect teeth, and irritatingly, she always remained slim, no matter what.

‘Where’s my favourite future son-in-law?’ I asked, clearing a space on the couch. ‘Were you in the middle of doing your ironing? This place looks like a laundry.’

‘Not really,’ she picked up an armful of clothing and dumped it on the coffee table. ‘I have to work out a strategy a couple of days before I tackle that dastardly deed. Ed went to get some milk for tea; he’ll be back any moment.’

As if on cue, Ed came running in, shutting the door and quietly locking it.

‘Shh,’ he commanded, as he flattened himself beside the front door, his breathing laboured. It sounded like an army thudding past.

‘What happened?’ Tyler asked, her eyes round with surprise.

Ed held up his hand, motioning us to remain quiet. We heard someone outside say, ‘Ee ain’t ’ere.’ Shadows passing the door again told us that Ed’s pursuers had given up the ghost. Instead of enlightening us, Ed slid down the wall and landed on the floor, shaking with laughter.

‘What was all that about?’ I asked, frowning.

‘One of them stole a little old lady’s handbag,’ laughed Ed, pausing to catch his breath. ‘At least I thought there was only one of them. Anyway, I caught the bugger, got the bag back, and made him empty his pockets. The top of my umbrella convinced him that I had a gun in his back,’ Ed broke into a fresh bout of laughter. Tyler and I looked at each other in amazement. ‘I collected £80.69 from his pockets and added it to the old lady’s collection.’

‘A modern-day Robin Hood,’ said Tyler. ‘You must be careful though, Ed. These thugs around here mean business . . . and they know where we live now!’

‘Nah, they spread out. They weren’t sure which building I came in.’ Ed pulled the hood of his anorak up. ‘Besides, I looked

like a hoodie. They couldn't see my face. I'll just have to wear another coat for a while.'

'You mean that wasn't all of them!' I was horrified, 'How many were there?'

'A gang of them, twenty odd.' Eddie stood up and sauntered over to the lounge window.

'I don't see what you were laughing about.' Tyler frowned.

'You should have been there. I told the guy that if he so much as moved, I would blow him away.' Ed held his umbrella menacingly, 'Anyway, the old girl was really chuffed at getting her bag back. She'd just collected her pension. I did my good deed for the day. Told her that the thief was so sorry that he put a little extra cash in her bag, but in future she should get her pension paid straight into her account. You should have seen her face light up when she saw the cash.'

'Had she already gone home?' I asked. 'Are you sure they didn't see you go into her building?'

'They didn't see,' Ed shrugged his jacket off. 'The others ran off in different directions. I suppose that was in case anybody chased after them. They didn't think anybody would follow the one who loped off around the corner with the bag under his coat. He couldn't wait to see what she had in her purse. I just guessed right and went after the one.'

'How did you know where to find her?' asked Tyler, joining him at the window.

'She had a letter in her bag.' Eddie sat next to Tyler. 'She was sitting in the foyer when I went in, and I said we should go up to her flat quickly. Poor old duck was in shock.'

'I bet she let you into her flat like an old friend,' I shook my head. 'My heart goes out to them. They come from a world where people were different and life was slower.'

'So trusting.' Ed nodded. 'That's why they are targets. They just haven't kept abreast with society.'

'I did give her a pep talk, and she insisted I have a cup of tea,' he continued. 'It's sad though; isn't it?'

I agreed, 'They need to be more aware.'

‘Anyway, it was only when I left her block,’ Ed hung his coat on a hook, ‘that I saw the culprit come running around the corner with all his mates. All I heard was *get him*, and I shot off as fast as my legs could carry me. Crikey, didn’t realize I could run that fast. That sure got the adrenaline going. Who says we don’t have any excitement around here?’

‘I think it’s time you two found a flat in a better area,’ I chided.

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