

## THE LIBRARY

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The first time he had heard of the Library's existence had been two months ago at a bar in Brooklyn. It was right after running down another dead-end lead in a search for a story, any story, which would put his by-line back in the category of a household name. There were many rumors about scandal and underhanded practices in the wind concerning the recent Presidential Campaign, but it was all penny-ante stuff, nothing earth shattering or bizarre enough to be worth his time. It had been a long dry spell since winning the award for the article that exposed the bribery and kickbacks the mayor of New York was involved in, and Adam Richardson missed the limelight. His fifteen minutes of fame had only whetted his appetite, and he wanted more. He knew something out there was going to put him back on top again, and eventually he would find it. He just had to keep looking.

He had been drowning his sorrows in the White Dog Pub after coming up empty on the campaign thing, when he felt someone watching him. Scanning the bar, he saw two people at a nearby table talking and trying to pretend they were not keeping an eye on him. He assumed they were tourists. Something about them he could not quite put his finger on, but they did not look as if they belonged in New York. It was a couple. Man and wife maybe, or engaged. Their conversation was animated and the looks they kept sneaking his way indicated they knew him from somewhere. He'd already had a few, but he was positive he had never seen them before. Maybe they had him fingered as a celebrity, but he couldn't think of any celebrity he resembled enough to warrant this much excitement.

Intrigued despite his despondency and feeling buoyed by the drinks, Adam went to the bar for yet another, trying to think of a way to get closer to them so he could eavesdrop on their conversation without being too obvious. His usual method of barging in and firing questions would probably scare them off. Besides, he'd had enough to drink that he was off his game. Better to take this slowly, learn all he could on the sly first. Coming back from the bar, he was grateful the place was so busy. Someone had taken his table and it did not look as staged as he looked around for a replacement, managing to find another table a little closer to the couple when he sat down again.

They continued to talk and glance at him surreptitiously. Despite the noisy room, he was able to catch some of their conversation.

"It *is* him, I'm sure of it!" The woman hissed. "He's even drinking rum and Coke. I saw the bartender make his drink."

"It might be, Chemika. But if you don't hold your voice down and quit staring, he'll notice us."

"We maxed out our credit chip for this vacation, Tristan. Maybe we should let him notice us!"

“You read this Library’s rules. We are not supposed to initiate contact.”

They went on about their great vacation through some place called the library; how wonderful it was to see the main character. It was an odd conversation and Adam would like to have heard more, but the bar noise seemed to be growing louder and he had trouble hearing them now. Or maybe it was because he shouldn’t have bought that last drink. The room began to move in and out of focus and his stomach did a couple of flips. He leaned slightly their way to get as close as possible, hoping to catch more of their words. But he’d gone over his limit and he was too drunk to maintain his equilibrium. Adam overbalanced himself and almost fell off his chair.

The couple quit talking when they realized he was on to them. While Adam was trying to gain control over a body that no longer wanted to cooperate with its brain, the couple abruptly left and Adam found himself too drunk to follow. What he had overheard, though, had given him a glimpse into a story. He had picked up a lead from the little information his inebriated brain had managed to store in memory: *The library*.

The next time he had heard about it was a week later. He had almost given up on finding anything. Every reference to library led to plain old libraries—nothing new or exciting about that. Nothing even remotely connected to travel and libraries except for the usual tourist crap about exotic places. He was beginning to think his mind had been playing tricks on him and that in his drunken state he’d made more out of the couple’s conversation than there was—but there was still that nagging thought that they had acted as if they knew him from somewhere. He definitely remembered that part. There was something going on, he just had not stumbled onto it yet.

Then he ran into two more people talking about the same thing as the couple. He was behind a pair of young girls on a bus when those two words leaped out of the jumble of sounds and buzzing voices around him—*the library*. Having learned his lesson the first time, he tuned in to their conversation without making it obvious. Pinpointing the voices as coming from the seat directly in front of him, he pretended to read his paper while rolling his eyes up enough to see them at the edge of his vision. He could see the girls using pocket mirrors to watch him in the seat behind them while they were talking. This time he picked up more information. A lot more. They were talking about different dimensions and all kinds of weird stuff. They were students, maybe grad students, and they were going from dimension to dimension gathering information for a paper they were writing. Right. That was not possible. Nevertheless, if there really was some place called the Library saying it was possible, he had a story.

Plus the fact that they seemed to have an interest in him, just like the couple in the bar. The young women were trying to act cool about it, but they were definitely watching him. After his one big break, he had been a nonentity for years. Sales for his book *Captive Planet* were dismal—he gave away more than had been sold. Suddenly people he did not know were watching him and acting as if he was a celebrity. Why the sudden interest in him? Adam had no clue what that was about, but he wanted to find out.

When the girls got off the bus, he followed them to a coffee shop. Looking through the window he could see them sitting next to each other at a table. The blonde one with the cute, upturned nose was on the left. They were pretending not to notice him when he walked in the door. Deciding to go with his usual strategy, he paid no heed to their efforts at ignoring him and walked right up to their table.

“Is this seat taken?”

“Not yet,” the blonde giggled and shoved the chair across the table from her with her foot. “But I have the feeling it’s about...”

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