

SHEAVESVILLE: With Every Secret Thing

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Chapter One

Scared Out of Their Wits

From a cloudless sky a shaft of deadly lightning careened out of nothingness, reaching down and severing a branch of a large oak tree and shattering the quiet of the summer afternoon. Flame, bearing cold shadow, and the oak bough crashed on rocks and trees beside an old stone wall that bordered grassy acreage behind the old Catholic church.

Inside, several children had been meeting, secretly, for fear of an unknown terror they all sensed was growing within their small community. The shattering noise had arrested their gathering and set them swiftly upon their feet. Coming out of the basement door in the rear of the church, exiting from the children's wing, the kids scattered in all directions. Two of them—a young boy and a slightly older boy—retreated together towards home, as another claw of crackling fire and blinding light missed them by only ten feet.

“I’m scared,” whimpered Little Drew, his small heart pounding in his chest like the little drummer boy running from Halloween to Christmas in 30 days. He looked too much *a whiter shade of pale* for a child who had been in the sun all week. “I’m really scared,” he repeated.

“Me, too,” chimed in Bo—his real name was Mephibosheth, but the other kids couldn't pronounce that so they adopted the nickname his grandmother had given him: *Bo*. She pronounced it *Beau* (as in *Beau Geste*). Bo was older than Little Drew and rather protective of him.

“Are you sure someone's after us?” Drew asked. “Some bad man or something like that is doing all this?”

“I’m sure,” said Mephibosheth, “so don't stop running till we get to the hedges.” Bo felt as though his legs were just about to give way under him. His energy seemed to be going, but he knew he and Little Drew couldn't stop until they reached cover, some modicum of safety. Mephibosheth's being blind didn't help the situation. Although he usually found his way around this area sightless, he welcomed Little Drew's efforts to lead him today and felt some comfort from the tug of Little

Drew's little hand, pulling him forward. Bo nearly tripped over a rabbit that seemed to pop out of nowhere. "Watch the bunny," Little Drew warned too late.

When the children in the Glendon neighborhood talked about "the hedges," they meant the box hedges and bushes and trees that lined the senior complex of condominiums and courtyards nestled on the southwest edge of town. Many tiny paths ran throughout the maze of shrubbery, which was old and towered over the children, so that once inside "the hedges," the children could not be seen from without. They knew how to scamper between flower beds and potted plants and rose bushes and pine trees without being spotted. They felt they could always hide in the nooks and crannies of the hedges until danger passed.

As they continued their race toward home, an oppressive mist seemed to spread like a dark blanket above the children, cutting them off from the 2:00 PM sun. Little Drew could feel a chill from the blackness, like icy fingers reaching out to ensnare him. It was as though the dark and cold were palpable spiritual nightmares crowding out all sense of hope and life. Then, out of nowhere a light flashed all around them, and the darkness fled, driven back by a power greater than any earthly army. The warmth of the sun touched their arms and shoulders again. Nevertheless, Mephibosheth kept urging Little Drew on.

Mephibosheth could not have imagined that a secret government agency was trying to find him. He did not yet fully understand the nature of his gifts or the fact that secret government "trackers" searched for *remote viewers* like Bo. This covert organization wanted to control the talents of remote viewers for their own purposes. So far Bo has been able to "shield" himself from prying tracker insights, but as his powers grew and he had need to use them, the seekers might get nearer to discovering him.

Perhaps it was for that very reason that Margot and Basil had been sent to the Glendon Hall to protect Mephibosheth and to teach him, and the other children, how to use a very powerful spiritual gift that would become increasingly more necessary with each passing day. But at this point in the story, Bo was only beginning to learn about the presence of Margot and Basil at the Glendon complex.

As the children nestled into a bed of soft ground cover under a low-limbed leafy tree, they breathed in the breeze-borne fragrances of berry and blossom, cut grass and weathered leaves, the chill of promised winter and the warmth of Indian summer. The dread seemed to pass them by, and they rested until the sun came close to setting in the western sky. Little Drew was exhausted. Bo sang very softly to the child: *Lay down . . . your sweet and weary head.* Little Drew sighed a whispered antiphonal: *Why do the white gulls call?* and fell asleep.

Mephibosheth's grandmother had taken the boys to see the elven *LOTR* movies—all three of them. Bo said God let him “see” the third one “clearly” because the story was “very important” for people today. Both children loved the winsome song, especially Little Drew. He liked to think of the white gulls and the gray ships and the dawn. Mephibosheth held the sleepy Little Drew in his arms until the sun had completely set. Not long after, they made their cautious way home, Bo still singing sweetly, but now his favorite worship song, “Word of God Speak.”

Named after his father, Drew had been dubbed *Little Drew* by his family because they referred to his father as *Big Drew*. Some of the children at times would call Little Drew merely Drew. It was a toss up.

Drew's mother had dinner ready for the boys when they reached the safety of Mrs. Bailey's house. Smells of home-style meatloaf, and mashed potatoes made with real cream butter and brown gravy, wafted out the back door to greet the children upon arrival. Bright golden sweet corn—not over-boiled—towered in a plate in the center of the table next to the hearty meatloaf drenched in tomato sauce. As soon as she saw the boys, Florence Bailey telephoned Bo's grandmother so she would not worry about her grandson's whereabouts. “The Lord told me he was alright, Florence,” the grandmother said, “but it's awfully nice of you to call. I appreciate it.” Mephibosheth's grandmother was proud of her African-American heritage and the deep spirituality of the Black Church.

People like Drew's family and Bo's grandmother seemed drawn to this small town, as though guided to live here by an unseen nudging, pulled gently by a spiritual magnet that “called” to only certain types of persons, and not to others. It was an unusual community that had slowly assembled over the years in Sheavesville, especially in the small Glendon area, not just within the courted complex but among many of the

surrounding old-fashioned houses surrounding this sweet corner of American-style family life.

The Bailey family originally were four. Then, without much warning, Mrs. Bailey and Little Drew had been left alone when his father died at a relatively early stage of his life. Although Florence Bailey missed her husband dreadfully, she had always found comfort in her sons. Little Drew, the baby, had been born quite a few years behind his older brother, Craig. Years later, Craig had gone to Iraq, with the Marines, and had been killed. Nearly a year had passed since Craig's death. Now, it was only Florence and Little Drew at home.

In the park, the town had erected a small monument—a statue of PFC Craig Bailey in uniform. Young Craig had always been so popular with the local folk. Even his high school buddies had remembered him as a young man with resolute integrity and a winning smile. The statue was surrounded by flowering trees and several park benches set in a circle facing the statue. Etched into a tasteful bronze plaque were the words *Semper Fi* and Craig's name and vital dates.

In these serene surroundings, those who lived in the neighborhood could sit and reflect. Little Drew enjoyed coming to this spot and talking to Craig. He never spoke to the statue but looked partly up to the sky and talked to his departed brother, whom he dearly loved. With their father gone, Craig had been both a daddy and big brother to Little Drew. Now the child missed him very much. Little Drew always ended his conversations with his brother with a salute and "Semper Fi." He never forgot when Craig had taught him to speak that tribute. It had been right here in the park, walking home after school, his tiny hand in his big brother's manly paw.

The park housing the statue was at the southwest end of the Glendon Hall neighborhood. Glendon Hall, with its apartment and condo complex, plus a few old scattered houses, was situated at the southwest corner of Glenn Haven, a town formerly known as Sheavesville. Under pressure from realtors, who thought the name Sheavesville would not attract house buyers, the City Council changed the town's name to Glenn Haven many years ago. The change, however, did not produce better real estate sales. Old timers did not hesitate, therefore, referring to Glenn

Haven as Sheavesville, for the original name stood for something special, even though that original intent had been lost in history forgotten.

“Were you children down at the park?” Mrs. Bailey asked.

“Partly,” Little Drew answered.

“We were also at the church,” Mephibosheth added, “earlier, before we came through the park and on home.” Not to worry Florence Bailey, Bo revealed nothing about the boys’ encounter with the powers of darkness. Bo’s grandmother knew about her grandson’s increasing encounters with the enemy of souls, and her prayers for him increased. Following his friend’s lead, Little Drew also said not a word about what had transpired earlier in the day. He looked up at Mephibosheth, who seemed to “see” Little Drew staring at him, sensing his inquiry. Bo answered in his mind: *not too much to tell*.

“Not too much to tell today,” said Little Drew. “Not too much.”



David Voltaire said to himself that he was not used to doing this sort of thing, but now he was sensing an emergency. He looked at the well-designed business card on the door, where a nameplate ought to be, and he mused on the poetic sound of her name: Lydia Lavender. She was a strange one, he thought, but then they were all strange at this complex where he lived, and perhaps he no less than the others. Still, Lydia knew a lot, he suspected, and he needed to secure her friendship beyond the brief *hellos* and *good mornings* he exchanged with her and so many others.

He rang the bell.

Lydia Lavender came to the door. “Why, Mr. Voltaire,” she said, in a pleasant tone, “do come in. It is *Mr. Voltaire*, isn’t it? What can I do for you? How nice of you to come by.”

“I know we really haven’t met,” he replied, rather nervously, but I wonder if I might have a minute of your time. I thought you might be able to throw some light on something, if you don’t mind my asking.”

“I don’t mind at all,” Lydia Lavender responded, “and I bet it has something to do with Ms. Margot across the way,” she added.

“You don’t?” David stammered, “and, well, uh, yes, it does; I mean, it might have something to do with Ms. Margot and, uh—“

“And Basil,” Lydia finished his thought.

With that brief introduction or odd crossing of a bridge, David found himself in Lydia Lavender’s condominium, seated in an antique chair, next to a small table that looked like a museum piece out of Dickensian England; he sipped her Earl Grey tea from a cup that must have been Minton china, at least, and struck up a conversation.

Almost as though she anticipated some of his questions, Lydia Lavender began to tell David Voltaire what little she knew of Margot Motherchurch and Basil Tuxaxle, who had recently moved into the complex a few weeks ago.

They had taken that corner condo that had remained vacant for such a long time—the agency that managed the complex never would say why it had been vacant so long, even when David had asked to see it, giving the excuse that he might be interested in securing it for himself. Now it was occupied, and by the two strangest people, if that’s what you would call them. It was as though some elusive broker had kept it on reserve until the arrival of the two new, enigmatic neighbors.

No one really knew who in Glendon Hall rented an apartment or who actually owned a condo. All the units looked basically alike, although odd differences occurred, as though the original builders had purposely enjoyed a little construction joke now and then. Some of the units actually held “secret” closets and small “hidden” rooms.

“You see, David,” Lydia used his first name finally and spoke almost in a whisper, “I, too, was curious about that vacant spot, and wondered why it suddenly became available to these two persons. Had they been the

ones securing it all these years—I’ve been here nearly nine years myself, you know—and what is the meaning of this sudden change? It’s all very curious, indeed.”

David agreed that he, too, was curious, but this concern was something that went beyond curiosity, because there were strange events associated with Ms. Margot and her stooped-over dwarf-like partner, and David Voltaire was finding himself obsessed with wanting to know all about these two and what their presence at Glendon Hall—as close to a senior citizen community as you can get with quite a few people under 50 living there—forebode for the complex. David was adrift in his thought. It was at this moment, however, that Lydia used a certain strange word again.

“What do you mean by *my-are*?” David asked.

“Oh, Maiar,” replied Lydia. “Well, that’s what Margot called herself, when I mentioned that her name was a bit unusual and, of course, interesting. Being originally from Europe myself,” Lydia continued, “I am fond of the history behind any name.”

“But what does it mean?” David questioned.

Lydia tried to console him: “*That* she never clearly explained, and later when I tried to find out more, she changed the subject, as though it either was not very important or she felt she should not have told me in the first place.”

“Talk about odd names . . . ,” David said.

“By the way,” Lydia remarked, “did I ever tell you that my real name is *Lavanduer*? Well, of course, I hadn’t. We just met. Anyway,” she continued without waiting for David to respond, “when our family came through Ellis Island decades ago, they asked my grandfather what his name was—our name—and he said *Lavanduer*, but they didn’t understand him and wrote down *Lavender*. When they showed him what they had written, my grandfather merely shook his head and said *Yes*. Thus, I have been Lavender ever since.”

Better than orange with green dots, David thought to himself.

The full extent of what David Voltaire learned from Lydia Lavender in that 90 minutes they visited over Earl Gray tea in her condo was confusing, to say the least, but definitely not boring. David tried later to organize it all in his mind but had that feeling that he was not grasping all the connections. Yet, connections, there were. He was sure of it. Somehow, all these phrases and turns of phrases that Margot had revealed to Lydia came together like a mosaic might, only David was not sure how. As the mystery deepened for him, it also seemed strangely clearer at the same time, if clarity is what you would call it. The strangeness seemed to be calling to him, like a voice out of a mist in time.

Again, there was that whole *Maiar* thing—David had learned from Lydia that there was a correct way to spell the strange word. Then there was that odd comment, whether of Lydia’s own musing or something Margot quoted from Basil (David was not sure which), “Some humans are more sensitive to *Maiar* than others.” What did that mean? Also, Lydia kept saying that these things were connected but “only by grace.” Everything, she had insisted, happened, in the case of Margot and Basil, “only by grace.” *Which implied what?* David wondered.

Finally, a creepy thought surfaced, and who knew where this vagary came from, that somehow these events were all tied in to “warnings.” Warnings coming to their little community, even maybe to the whole world, through children—like that blind child with the Bible name: Mephibosheth. Yes, David remembered, Mrs. Bailey . . . she said that her Little Drew had been told by Bo (*that’s what the other children called Mephibosheth*, David told himself) that the feelings they all were getting—unsettling premonitions, really—were special warnings that the children had to pass on to others. *But what were these warnings about?* David asked himself. *Why did they come only to the children?*

Mephibosheth and his grandmother lived at the end of the lane that ran within the complex; the lane ran parallel with, but separated from, the main road, and distanced by a box hedge and row of pine trees. A few old Victorian-style houses dotted the far ends of Glendon Hall. Bo’s grandmother had inherited one of these Victorians many years ago. David remembered hearing that fact. As though hearing an echo inside his head, David again pondered: *So what were these warnings about? Why did they come only to the children? How were they all connected?*

Connections. That was the word that intrigued David now. Lots of seemingly disparate connections. And sayings, sayings that reminded David of something his mother had read to him in childhood but he could not quite place it now, such as “like and equal are not the same thing.” Who had written that? Or who had said it? And why did it trouble him now? Margot had repeated it to Lydia—or had Lydia repeated it to Margot? David felt himself getting confused. He thought almost that he heard something speaking to him in his head, something trying to reach his mind with a message.

David Voltaire decided to call it a day. After he excused himself from Lydia Lavender’s and thanked her for her hospitality—she invited him back “anytime,” she had said—he took a long walk around the complex where they all lived, several apartments and condominiums arranged in squares around several small courtyards with paths and arches and patches of small garden space with perennials and annuals and bushes that blossomed off and on throughout the mild winter of California’s Central Coast; except that in their little town, a sense of four distinct seasons prevailed.

Here in this small complex of condominiums and court yards—set apart from the town, toward the West, and bordered by a main road and an inner lane—an even stranger sense of distinctiveness permeated everything, especially since Margot and Basil had arrived. *Was there any connection between their arrival and the so-called warnings the children claimed they were envisioning within themselves?* All these questions in his mind made David feel exhausted.

When he went to bed that night, David suddenly remembered—just as he was dosing off—something else odd at Lydia Lavender’s condo, a book he had noticed lying on the floor by the tiny tea table, a book that did not in any way seem congruent with Lydia Lavender. He remembered looking at the title, and being a bit shocked, but tucking the thought of the title away in his mind for another time. Now suddenly the thought surfaced.

Effective Stringy Description of Schwarzschild Black Holes. David did not remember the author. It was enough work to remember the title. He had repeated it to himself more than once and stored it away until he would

depart Lydia's presence. *Stringy?* he said to himself. Didn't that have something to do with quantum mechanics? The topic certainly did not appear to go with Lydia Lavender and her Londonery-like living room!

The world is changing too rapidly, David considered. It was turning into an infinitely curious universe for him. Perhaps too curious. As he finally drifted off to sleep, these thoughts challenged him, bewildered him, but eventually pulled him like kelp beds out to sea, down into the depths of much-needed rest, in spite of disturbing dreams where pieces of antique furniture floated past swirling spirals, and in and out of stringy spider webs that looked like windows opening onto the past and the future at the same time. His dreams were full of cobwebbed bolts of lightning crisscrossing back and forth with each swing of a penultimate pendulum. Then, **bam! Boom!** . . . He was rudely awakened by a thud at three o'clock in the morning.