

SYNOPSIS

WATER *2035*

Are you the one to make it rain?

“Anyone who can solve the problems of water will be worthy of two Nobel Prizes—one for science and one for peace.”

~~ John F. Kennedy

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Logline:

By 2035 a 5-year global drought has turned the most precious commodity on earth into dust. Fresh, drinking water is scarce as scorpions. Grayson Fields, Ph.D., a young and gutsy scientist, risks her life to prove her grandfather is on the verge of discovering the solution for creating abundant *free* water. His method is known by its theoretical name as “oceanic cloud seeding.”

(Land-based cloud seeding no longer works—not enough lake and river water to create clouds. And desalination is too expensive.)

Grayson Fields, Ph.D., protagonist. She’s a 27-year-old professor of hydrology, Georgetown University. Lives with her wealthy grandfather. Neither care about money; they care about science and the solution to the world’s water problem. Grayson has moxie and a sense of humor. Behind her dorky glasses is a real beauty.

Julius Swartzkoph. Grayson’s grandfather. Professor at Georgetown U. An avuncular, kind-hearted man, he’s also rich as Croesus due to his chemical patent for land-based cloud seeding. His laboratory is a **Giant Simulator** built over the vacated Georgetown gym floor. It’s enclosed in glass—has its own micro eco-system, 2/3s of it representing the East coast and 1/3 the Atlantic Ocean.

Steve Muller, antagonist. CEO of Purity Worldwide, the largest water treatment and distribution company in the world. The only thing that could ruin his fortune is for Dr. Swartzkoph to succeed in creating oceanic rainstorms that’ll travel over land and release their fresh water. (Muller hates the idea of *free* rainwater.)

Subplot Characters:

Brooks Bullock—exchanged his British military career for mission work in India. His wife, **Anna, and two daughters** are with him in Samrang, India—the upper eastern tip, 30 kilometers from Bhutan.

Rinku Patel—18, lives in Samrang village. Since losing his parents to the waterborne disease, he has taken up with the Bullock family.

PART I – The Simulator

D.C., Grayson is in the converted Georgetown gymnasium standing outside her grandfather’s glass enclosed cloud seeding simulator. It’s as large as the gym floor. She’s pondering. Her watch phone rings. “Yes, Jeremy, I’m on my way. Today, pick me up at O and 37th.” There, she slips into the back seat of a white Rolls Royce. Jeremy interacts with her. “How was your day?” etc. She relaxes against the window as the scorched earth, dried vegetation, and dust-covered-city wiz by. Agitated people in the neighborhoods are bartering for water. An Exxon sign reads *Bio: \$6.99, Water: \$13.99*. She sees a homeless family camped in a park. She instructs Jeremy to pull over on the turnpike and back up. She takes water to them. The homeless woman asks, “Are you the one to make it rain?” Grayson slips back in the car.

She turns on all four monitors built into the roof. Talking head newscasters are explaining where the world stands in it’s fifth-year drought. Scenes from cities all over the globe showcase chaos, fights over water, and flyovers of the worlds shrinking lakes and rivers.

They pull up to a **3-story, castle-like mansion**. Inside, she eavesdrops as her grandfather, Julius Swartzkoph, PhD (of hydrology and professor emeritus at Georgetown U), and a senator talk about Purity joining forces with NOAA at its Himalaya cloud seeding facility. The senator wants Swartzkoph to join the team. “Julius, think about it, you’ll be able to experiment on the most sophisticated simulator ever built.” Swartzkoph asks: “Why would Steve Muller ever allow me to create oceanic cloud seeding?”

Muller's office in D.C. befits the richest person in the world. He sits behind an acrylic, fresh-water fish-tank-desk, fish glowing underneath him, and watches on his giant wall screen as his weekly update reports come in from his plants around the globe; like Scottsdale, Mexico City, Lagos, Buenos Aires—all bad news. Riots. Treatment plant problems persist. A separate bank of monitors broadcasts news from around the world. More chaos. Riots.

In Swartzkoph's private simulator on the Georgetown U campus, he and Grayson struggle to fine-tune the algorithm that will unlock the secret to coaxing ocean storms over land. And they *must do it before Congress passes a bill that will give private water treatment companies even more control over the pricing and distribution of 'body water.'* Clouds form inside the giant simulator, grow into rain clouds, but never quite reach land before dumping their fresh water back in the simulated Atlantic.

INDIA. Brooks Bullock is in the Samrang village giving his Sunday sermon to a handful of villagers. There's a commotion outside the tent. A man tells him, "The Bhutanese from Gong Thung are preparing to raid our village. They'll kill for our water." Brooks wants to go to the Bhutanese village and teach them how to drill for water to thwart their raid. But he doesn't know the way. Rinku wakes Brooks at midnight and tells him the way to Gong Thung. They strike out for the 2-day trek.

PHILADELPHIA. Muller and his puppet scientist, Dr. Tom Loren, inspect a problem with Purity's Philly waste treatment plant. Sewage is spewing everywhere. The team suits up in Bio-Haz outfits and enter the chamber to investigate. They're soon covered in sludge. The plant manager tells Muller that the demand for treated water has kept the plant running without maintenance for weeks. Muller fires him on the spot. Same problem is occurring in other plants. But Purity keeps shipping the water to poorer countries who're willing to pay the lower prices ...

not realizing the water is tainted.

INDIA. Brooks and Rinku in tree hammocks. (for protection from starving tigers.) According to Rinku's map, Gong Thung is just over the hill, out of sight for them. At sunrise, Brooks and Rinku witness a 3-jeep convoy with armed guards passing under their tree, then plowing over the hill. One jeep hauls a Purity 500-gallon tank. They climb down from the tree and watch as one of the guards opens a rusty spigot and sells water from the tank to local villagers. Two villagers rush through the crowd to get at the spigot but are shot by the water guards. The crowd screams and rushes backward, but quickly returns over dead bodies to the spigot. After 5 minutes, the machine-gunners fire their weapons in the air. The convoy leaves in a cloud of dust.

Brooks says a quick prayer for their safety before walking down into the village. He's about to bargain for his own village's existence. Instead, he and Rinku discover it's the wrong village. Brooks realizes he has left his wife and daughters behind with no way of protecting them. He panics. Rinku persuades Brooks to let him run back and retrieve Anna and the girls. After Rinku leaves, Brooks inspects the village. The farther he walks in, the more he sees dead women, children, men dying in agony, or already dead. *It's sepsis. They're dying of septic shock.* Eyelids rolled back, exposing full white eyes. To him, it looks like a voodoo spell. He pukes. "This is a type of sepsis I've never seen," he mutters to himself.

Rinku is sweating, running through the dry bush. He falls down a ravine. Dazed, he doesn't notice the emaciated tigers creeping towards him until it's almost too late. He climbs out of the ravine, clawing at the dry dirt and rotten roots as the tigers are at his heels, trying desperately to reach his legs. On top, he drops, exhausted.

D.C. Grayson and grandfather conduct an experiment on the simulator at Georgetown. She climbs into a boson's chair to install the high-tech sunlamp, so bright it almost replicates the

sun's intensity. The professor switches on the lamp power too soon and Grayson tumbles out of the chair and hangs on. Grad assistants help lower her. She has a serious sunburn. After she regains composure, the experiment begins. Nozzles inject silver iodide and propane to grow the cloud over the simulated Atlantic water. Lightning strikes the platform. Everybody falls back against the glass. In awe, they watch it grow bigger, bigger. More nozzles spray the positive and negative charged ions over the miniature land mass and ocean. The storm begins to move inland, but then, dumps its life-giving water back in the ocean before reaching land. (*A setback for the professor and Grayson.*). He tells her he has been offered a chance to work on NOAA's larger, newer, simulator in the Himalayas.

PART II - The Conflict

D.C. Grayson wants to join her grandfather at the NOAA/Purity facility in India. He disagrees. But Grayson is stubborn. She applies to work at Purity, using a fictitious name and an entire identity she has built on the web. Her interview and written tests with Purity's HR dept are off the charts and garner the attention of Muller. He wants to meet this brilliant new employee. Muller is taken with her, not knowing she's the famous professor's granddaughter.

INDIA. Samrang village. The villagers take a break (from fortifying their perimeter) for the wedding of the tribal chief's grandson. The wedding takes place around the mandap. The couple circle it. When the gong sounds, the first one to sit on the earth beside the fire is the 'head of the family.' It's tradition. Anna and her two daughters are delighted with the ceremony.

Rinku is into his second day of running, sweating, exhausted. It's night. He knows he's close to

Samrang. He sees painted warriors wearing voodoo-looking masks, hiding behind trees outside the village perimeter. He watches as they rush down into the village, shooting flaming arrows (Bhutan is known for its archery). Some of them fall into cobra pits, screaming. Some run through the trenches, lit by kerosene, and catch fire ... but continue running into the midst of the fight. Rinku cries as he sees the Bhutanese kill Anna and the girls. He crawls backward, still watching.

The Himalaya facility. Muller is on the phone with Senator Barbour discussing his plans to thwart the professor's efforts to create ocean storms that can be manipulated over land. At the Senator's office, there's a riot under way outside his window. People are demanding safe water. "Steve," the senator says, "I'm not concerned about what you do in India. Do you hear this mob? You need to get back here and fix your treatment plants, or I can't get this new bill passed."

Muller tells the senator to calm down and reminds him of the millions he's making from Purity.

INDIA. Trashigang. An exhausted, sobbing Rinku returns into Brooks's arms. Brooks doesn't need to ask about Anna and the girls. He can see it in Rinku's eyes. Brooks says, "We're going home. To London."

Six Senators privately discuss passage of the new bill that will allow Purity and other water purifiers/distributors the power to set prices so they can reinvest in plant improvements. That's their rationale because they're all on the take from Purity, and their competitors. Only Senator Barbour is concerned and argues against their plans.

LONDON. The All Saints Mission Church. Brooks and the Missions Director talk. Brooks is angry with God for allowing his family to be slaughtered. "And I haven't had a *convert* in five years. I don't belong in mission work." He's given a book to read—on grief. He throws it on the floor. "I don't need God anymore," he barks.

Night. Brooks and Rinku are awakened by a man at 3 in the morning. It's urgent. A village in India is being decimated by disease. The village has reached out for help. Brooks wants to know why he's part of this. "The village is Trashigang," the man tells him. "Weren't you and the boy there? We just need you to show us on a map exactly where it is. We're sending Jack to the village with medical supplies."

"Jack's just a boy," Brooks says. "He'll never survive." Brooks volunteers to go. The church books Brooks and Rinku on flight 864, London to Calcutta.

INDIA. Himalaya facility. "Double the amount of silver iodides and propane," Dr. Loren tells his assistant. "We're going to create the biggest storm ever over the Bay of Bengal (The flight path of airliners entering Calcutta.)"

D.C. Reagan Airport. Grayson boards flight 1049 to London for a changeover on flight 864 to Calcutta.

Senator's Office. Senator Barbour shoots himself in the mouth. Suicide.

INDIA. Inside airliner over the Bay of Bengal. Brooks, Rinku, and Grayson all sit near the rear. They don't know each other. Grayson is asleep. A bumpy ride has woken her and several others. The plane begins to shake violently. Hail is clobbering the windows. Cabin lights come on. Oxygen masks drop. People are pushed back, stiff in their seats, as the plane nose dives. The rear section of the fuselage rips off and splashes backward into a foamy ocean with 15-foot waves. Grayson, strapped in her seat, and unconscious, begins to sink. Brooks jumps in and swims down to her. He struggles to get her and the seat to the surface. He reaches topside, undoes her seat and tosses her over the side of the life raft. Brooks gives mouth-to-mouth, pushes her chest ... she finally spits out water.

Himalaya facility. Five floors under the mountain, Muller, and Dr. Tom Loren give Dr. Julius

Swartzkoph and other NOAA scientists a tour of the newly retrofitted oceanic cloud seeding simulator. It's the size of a football field. The dome is 200 feet in height. The land mass is represented by Southeastern India, including Calcutta, and covers 2/3s of the platform. The other 1/3 is salt water, representing the Bay of Bengal. "Once the simulator experiments work, we'll have the correct formula, make the batches, and send out real drones loaded with the chemicals," Loren says. We know it's not likely to ever happen, as Loren plans to sabotage the experiments.

The life raft. The sun is up. Seas are calm. The people in the raft aren't doing so well ... one fractured leg, a missing arm, cuts and bruises. Brooks inspects. Grayson says, "You saved me back there, in that crash, didn't you?" "No," Brooks says politely, "God saved you." "So now we have a prophet on board, huh?" "No, just a missionary and his adopted son." Brooks gives a lesson on survival.

Himalaya facility. Muller and Dr. Loren sitting in **security room**. Cameras observe everything. Muller says, "She should have arrived in Calcutta by now. Wonder what the problem is." Loren smirks and says, "Don't know." "Tom, I saw the weather from Bengal the other day. The storm. You didn't happen to have anything to do with that, did you?" "Steve, don't be so naive. I don't need her here. I'm running a background check on her right now. I think she's phony." "You're wasting your time," Steve says. "And to think, you may have killed her." He pushes a button on his console and orders planes to search for them.

The life raft. It's night. Rinku and Grayson are huddled in a corner looking at the stars. They discuss God and creation and other spiritual topics. Grayson is not interested. But they talk and get to know each other. A friendship is in the making. After they fall asleep, Brooks uses a knife to cut muscle from the dead man's arm. He places the meat under his tarp. (*Food for later.*) He carefully slips the body over the side. Time lapse. The sun is beating down. "It's been three

days,” Brooks says. “We only have a 3-day survival kit.”

Himalaya facility. Professor Schwarzkopf is in the simulator room, working on a computer algorithm. He lowers his head and whispers, “God, I’ve never asked you for anything, but I’m asking now. Please save my little Grayson from harm.” Muller and Loren still don’t know Grayson is his granddaughter.

In the security room, Muller is watching tape of the storm from 3 days ago. Satellite images in motion reveal a storm so strong, even he can’t believe it. Hewitt walks to a door labeled MAINTENANCE. It’s the security room. “What’d you do, Tom, load up on the chemicals? Look at this monster! Two-hundred and fifty-nine people were on that plane, for God’s sake, Tom. What are you, a monster?” They argue.

The life raft. Sunrise. Rinku spots a ship on the horizon. Brooks sends up flares.

The ship. They’re picked up by a freighter—a water hauler, dragging a *mile-long string of water bags*, kept afloat by helium filled pontoons. Grayson, Brooks, and Rinku end up in the ship’s galley. Brooks and Grayson talk and learn about each other. They argue over religion. His, and her ‘no-religion’ philosophy.

As soon as the captain comes in and invites them to dinner in his private quarters, a bomb rocks the ship. The captain screams, “Water pirates. Hide in the safe room.”

The pirates shoot the captain and crew. From the safe room, Brooks and Grayson use a radio to call the facility. Muller sends two fighter jets. They blow off the stern tongue used to pull the water bags. The ship speeds on but the water bags drift behind. Frustrated, the pirates leave in their gunship, but not before setting plastic explosives around the freighter. As the ship explodes, Brooks, Grayson, and Rinku make it overboard and swim to the bags. The fighter plane’s bullets have left holes in the bags. Waterspouts shoot up 50 feet. Grayson and Rinku jump up down like

on a trampoline, while Brooks sits and watches.

In the security room. “Got’em,” Muller says, watching on satellite feed. A copter arrives and lifts them from the water bags. They land at the **Calcutta airport** to drop off Brooks and Rinku, where they part ways with Grayson ... Brooks and Rinku in a truck, supplied by the church, travel through squalor and prostitute-laden villages on their way to Trashigang. Grayson, in the helo, is headed to the facility. For her, their approach to the Himalayas is a spectacular, breathtaking image. She lands at the **mountainside bunker**, greeted by Muller and her grandfather, standing docile behind Muller. Swartzkoph only shakes hands with Grayson. He doesn’t want Muller to know she’s his granddaughter.

Inside the facility. Grayson is shown her quarters and a tour of **The Simulator**, followed by dinner with all.

Trashigang. Brooks and Rinku pull up to a strange scene. Dead people all around the village. They slowly motor on. A man is leaning against a tent pole. It’s the tribal chief, Tahir. Brooks and Rinku find two more survivors. Brooks knows they’ll die if he doesn’t get them to the facility’s infirmary. They peel out in a cloud of dust.

The facility. Her grandfather tells Grayson that the algorithm he brought with him has been stolen. They realize there’s no way to create the right formula unless they have that algorithm. He says he left a copy near the Georgetown gym. He was about to give her the exact location, but Muller interrupts them.

That night, she opens fresh laundry, courtesy of the facility cleaning service. Within 15 minutes, she realizes she’s been poisoned. Her T-shirt and boxer shorts are stuck to her like glue. The poison is in her clothes! *The shower!* She manages to rip off the shirt and shorts, watching yellow chemical seep down the drain. She’s sick for 2 days. She and Swartzkoph never have a

chance to be alone.

All is lost.

Facility security gate. Brooks's truck comes to a stop. Guards won't let him in. He crashes the gate. Muller is contacted by the gate guard. Muller doesn't know anybody named Brooks Bullock. Grayson tells Muller how Brooks saved her life and chastises Muller for not allowing them in. He agrees.

Brooks carries Tahir in his arms towards the bunker entrance. Muller and others greet him.

Brooks, Tahir, and the other sick are sent to the infirmary for treatment. They begin to pray for rain. Constantly.

Grayson and Rinku get reacquainted. She shows him **The Simulator**, in all its glory. He's amazed.

The security room. Muller watches everything on the monitors. Loren walks in. Tells Muller that Grayson is the professor's granddaughter. Muller is dismayed.

Grayson wakes up feeling better. She sneaks into the pilot's quarters and inquires about a possible trip to D.C. She needs permission from Muller. Muller turns to Loren, "She wants to fly to D.C. Why?" Loren answers, "I've got the algorithm. She's probably going back to get a copy. I'll take care of it."

The F-24. Grayson flies to D.C. Jeremy drives her straight to the Georgetown gym. The entire building has been blown to pieces. She searches in the back office for the formula. A man walks in at the entrance, calling for her. Grayson's heart jumps. She knows he's there to kill her. She sneaks out and runs. She stops to rest on her grandfather's favorite bench. She thinks to reach down and see if an envelope is taped underneath. A wasp stings her. She turns the bench over.

Must be a mutated species in order to survive this drought. To her mind, it's science material, so

she stuffs the wasp nest in her purse. Then opens the envelope. Inside is the algorithm. She calls Jeremy. “Meet me at Prospect and 37th.” She slides in. The Rolls speeds away. A human man turns to face her. It’s not Jesse. He points a pistol at her and demands she turn over the algorithm. She’s stunned and hands the purse over. On the front floorboard she sees Jeremy, crumpled up in a position that sends chills down her spine. Wasps fly out of the purse. The assassin panics. Crashes. She survives and ends up in a Georgetown hospital with bruises and contusions. Police question her. Two days later, she boards a commercial flight back to India, the algorithm tucked away in her bra.

PART III – The Resolution

The Facility. Grayson slips the algorithm to her grandfather.

The Security Room. Rinku sees Muller exit the ‘MAINTENANCE’ (**security room**) door.

Rinku wanders in and starts questioning Loren. Loren tries to strangle him with a cord. Rinku manages to punch one number into his cell. Brooks arrives seconds later. He takes Loren down without a problem, wraps him up, and throws him into a **lower basement equipment room.**

NOAA officials take over and lock Muller up in the facility’s brig.

The Simulator. Grayson and her grandfather begin the experiments. Chemicals are mixed.

Ceiling-height nozzles spew vapor above the simulated Bay of Bengal. The clouds grow. And grow. Lightning strikes the platform. Once, twice, violently. All scientists recoil. Lower nozzles spray positive-charged magnetized ions over the land. Upper nozzles spew the negative-charged ions into the cloud. Swartzkoph and Grayson explain each step in the process to the other scientists.

The storm moves toward the simulated land mass. Everyone cheers. “Go, go!” The storm moves

over land and dumps its fresh water over land. *Jubilation!* The professor instructs the scientists to prepare thousands of gallons needed to create the real experiment over the Bay of Bengal.

Drones are loaded with chemicals. They fly out.

Facility Infirmary. Brooks visits with Tahir. They pray. Hours later, Grayson and the team watch the real storm on monitors. It moves toward Calcutta. The storm dumps fresh water over southeastern India. *Cheers!*

An NOAA official receives a cell call from D.C. *Apparently, it's raining in other parts of the world.* Grayson checks her weather monitor. It's raining in Paris, Africa, etc. while their man-made storm is moving up India to their location. Everyone is delusional with joy and confused with *how could this happen?*

They all rush outside. The dark clouds appear and it pours. They're getting soaked. Swartzkoph puts his arm around Grayson's shoulder. Brooks brings Tahir outside on a gurney. Rinku takes Grayson's hand in his. It's not romance. It's friendship. Grayson turns to Rinku, smiles, and says, "Rinku, I think I'd like to get to know this God of yours."

In the brig, Muller tries to bribe a NOAA guard to release him.

In the basement, water rises to cover Loren's saucer-sized eyes.

The End

(Chapter One Below)

पानी
WATER
2035

A Sci-fi Thriller

Michael Hicks Thompson

*“Anyone who can solve the problems of water
will be worthy of two Nobel Prizes—
one for science and one for peace.”*

John F. Kennedy

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With unique thanks to Google Earth for making it possible to find and explore the villages of Trashigang and Gong Thung, Bhutan; and Samrang, India.

Author's Note

First and foremost, *WATER 2035* is intended as entertainment. A *plausible* science fiction story, if you will.

I have been intentional about not overwhelming my reader with too much scientific information regarding our planet's impending water crisis.

For those wanting to know more about the facts, I've included dozens of important facts about our water at the conclusion of the novel.

पानी Paanee, means water in Hindi.

PART I

The Simulator

1

BATH NIGHT

“Will this thing ever work?” Grayson Fields mutters to herself. She shoves her arms into a winter coat, ready to leave.

She’s inside the converted Georgetown gymnasium standing outside a glass enclosed structure. It covers the entire gym floor. Inside the glass dome is a platform covered in miniature trees, houses, streets, all the details of the D.C. land area. The other two-thirds of the platform represents the Atlantic ocean. The only light in the gymnasium emanates from inside the glass structure. It reminds her of a star ship deep in space, housing its own ecosystem.

Her watch phone rings. “Yes, Jeremy, I’m on my way. Today, pick me up at O and 37th.” She flips off all the lights, thanks the security guard for staying late, and walks to 37th. A white Rolls Royce pulls up. She tosses her bag in the back seat and slips in.

“How was your day, Dr. Fields?”

“Fine, Jeremy. Thank you.”

“Tonight is bath night,” Jeremy said without emotion.

“I know. I’m really looking forward to it.”

The limitation on showers and baths had become part of daily life. Grayson was only one of millions who'd grown tired of the restrictions. But she understood its necessity. It's why she never went out without Channel in her purse.

Two baths per week. Those were the rules. The wealthy cheated, of course, and gladly paid the penalty rates.

But not her grandfather. He played by the rules. Rich or not.

Tonight, she thought, I'll fill it to the brim. She was willing to pay the fine if the *Water Resource Commission* checked the home's meter usage. And they would.

"Is grandfather home?"

"Yes."

Grayson tries to tease the answer out of Jeremy. "Is he meeting with anyone?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind telling me who that might be?"

"Not at all, Dr. Fields. It's Senator Barbour."

Grayson leaned back and let out a sigh. Jeremy drove on to Rock Creek Parkway, then Connecticut Avenue. Within a few miles, Grayson's eyes fastened onto a scene she'd seen a dozen times in D.C.—a family living in a vacant lot. She'd always felt compelled to stop. But never had.

"Jeremy, pull over. Please."

He pulled to the side of a busy Connecticut Avenue. A stream of vehicles sped by.

“Is something wrong, Dr. Fields?” His voice was so real Grayson sometimes forgot he was man-made Artificial Intelligence.

“Those people, back there in that park... let’s back up.”

“Are you sure, Dr. Fields? My senses warn this is not a safe thoroughfare.”

“No. I’m *not* sure. But do it anyway,” She turned to watch as they reversed fifty meters in the loose rock of the shoulder. Cars whizzed past.

“Here. Stop here,” Grayson said.

To her right was Melvin C. Hazen Park. She lowered her window. Three children played outside a makeshift tin and cardboard hut on a weedy patch of vacant land. A man and a woman sat outside the hut.

Unsure about intervening, but wanting to do something for them, Grayson grabbed two large bottles of water from the seat and opened the door. Jeremy turned to her. “Dr. Fields, would you mind explaining what you are about to do?”

“I’m going to do something I should’ve done a long time ago.”

Grayson opened the door and slid out. The draft from cars rushing by at seventy miles an hour brushed her back against the car. She regained her balance and walked into a dry ditch, then passed under dead tree limbs separating the brown forest from the vacant lot.

She stopped to study the man and the woman. They were less than thirty meters away. He, middle age; she, probably in her 30s. Very pregnant.

They sat on worn-out, shredded nylon chairs outside their illicit little hut. A small Hibachi fire flamed in front of them.

The illegality of squatters had never fazed Grayson. Just the opposite. She was sensitive to their plight. Especially the children.

Two girls, maybe six and eight, tossed a tennis ball back and forth. Once Grayson spotted two babies packed in the hut, she turned and ran back to the car. She reached inside and snatched more water. Jessie didn't have time to ask any questions.

As she returned to the family, she realized she was out of her comfort zone. *What am I doing here in the middle of Washington trying to help homeless people?*

Grayson knew expensive suits when she saw one. The man was wearing a tattered, dirty, tailored jacket, a white, open collar shirt, and expensive-looking glasses. Grayson thought he might be an unfortunate victim of the economy.

An odd question came from the woman.

“Are you the one to make it rain? Are you the one to make it rain?” the woman repeated.

“She's crazy you know,” the man said.

Grayson held out the six-pack of water. The girls stopped tossing the ball and observed.

“Here, I want you to have this water.”

The man stood, brushed off his suit coat, and reached for the water. “I was rich once. I had money once.” He had impeccable speech.

Grayson turned, trotted back to the car, reached in and pulled out all the cash she had in her purse. She glanced up to meet Jeremy's eyes.

“Dr. Fields, may I ask what you are doing?”

“I told you. I’m doing something I should have done a long time ago.”

She returned to the family. The girls continued to toss the ball as she approached.

Grayson handed the money to the man.

“Are you the one to make it rain?” the woman asked a third time.

Grayson didn’t respond. She trotted back to the car and slid in. She figured they’d be chased off the property, and she’d never see them again. Homeless relocations were a weekly occurrence.

Jeremy eased back into traffic.

Her adrenaline gone, Grayson reclined on the headrest.

She felt good about helping one family. But she was after more. Far more. Eight billion people more.

She thought back to the woman’s words, ‘Are you the one to make it rain?’ A tingle ran up her spine. Chill bumps sprang up. Something important is happening. She sensed it.

She exhaled that feeling, then pushed a button to release four monitors from the roof just behind Jeremy’s front seat. All monitors were broadcasting talking head newscasters explaining how our earth is surviving “during this devastating five-year drought.”

Scenes from cities around the globe would melt any heart, and Grayson was not immune. One channel focused on riots. Another on neighborhood fights over water deliveries from one of the purification and distribution companies. One station broadcast flyovers

showing shrinking lakes and rivers, and dying forests. It was too much to take. She turned them off.

She sunk into the luxury of the back seat and leaned her head against the window, and with nostalgia in her heart, reminisced about green leaves, lush bushes and flowers. Now, all she could see were dry leaves, dying trees, dust, and dirty cars. An Exxon sign read

Bio: \$6.99

Water: \$13.99

“Jeremy, how many scientists believe it was climate change that brought about the drought?”

“Sixty-three percent of the world’s foremost authorities believe it was caused by climate change. That number is one-million-two-hundred-fifty-two thousand and twenty-three. On the other hand, thirty-seven percent of the world’s foremost authorities believe it is a natural phenomenon that occurs over time. That number is—

“I get it, Jeremy,” she interrupted. “Thank you.”

“My pleasure, Dr. Fields.”

Jeremy drove them into Maryland and the Chevy Chase area.

Suddenly, he hit the brakes and screeched to a stop at the rear of a Purity water truck. Armed guards delivered large boxes of water to front doors of private homes. Every water carrier seemed to have some man or woman on their tail, desperate to buy the water.

The scene was not new to her.

“Shall I jump the curb, and move around them, Dr. Fields?”

Grayson poked her head out the window for a look. “Do it, Jeremy.”

At five-fifteen, the Rolls Royce pulled up to gates resembling the entrance to Buckingham Palace. They eased over the winding, crushed shell driveway, around a dry fountain, stopping at the front door of a three-story mansion. More like a castle. Parked in front of them was a black sedan with a U.S. SEAL and SENATE license plate.

Grayson headed up the front steps as Jeremy strode to the garage. She stopped, turned, and said, “Jeremy, I want to thank you for trusting me back there on the side of the turnpike.”

“You are welcome, Dr. Fields. It was my pleasure.”

Grayson dropped her head, twisting it, as she cast a coy smile in his direction.

“Do not do that Dr. Fields. You should not try to flirt with me.” He turned and walked into her grandfather’s six-car garage.

Grayson stepped into the foyer to be greeted by Arnold the butler. Like Jeremy, Arnold was another realistic-looking, manmade robot with Artificial Intelligence. Three years ago, Dr. Swartzkoph had purchased the twins for beta testing. It was Grayson who gave them their names during *programming*.

“Your grandfather is in the library, not to be disturbed, Miss Fields. So, best if you head up to your room, and give him some space. I’m sure he’ll join you for dinner at seven.”

“Thank you, Arnold.”

As she bounded up the first step and kept a fast pace to the top, she mumbled, “It’s time for Arnold to do whatever he does, so I can do what I need to do.”

Grayson unloaded her backpack and tiptoed downstairs.

Arnold was nowhere in sight. She wanted to know what her grandfather was discussing with a U.S. Senator.

2