

Barry Cowan woke up screaming in a hospital room with a nightmare where his memory should have been, and

a curious brass figurine in his pocket that made the nightmare seem all too likely to be true. Yet for all the emptiness there was a familiarity about the stranger who appeared, claiming to be his father — a HORRIFYING familiarity, tied somehow to the dreams of another world that invaded his sleep.

Where had he been? What had happened to shock his mind so deeply that it refused, to remember? Unknown to Barry, his deeper self had -been wise in forgetting; if his efforts to call back the lost year of his life should succeed, would he survive?

## PART I

### CHAPTER ONE

"No, Rellin!"

The scream crashed through the silence, and I woke up.

I sat up, blinking, and pain thundered through my head like the scream. My head- felt huge, as if it were something balanced precariously on my shoulders. I eased the clumsy thing back down to the pillow, and cautiously slitted my eyes open again.

People screaming all over the place! Might as well be in the nut house. Instead of— I blinked again and came all the way awake:

This wasn't my bedroom!

The walls were white, and the window was white, too, and not curtained. There were Venetian blinds, and thick sunlight made streaks through them and lay, in yellow barred glare, on the wall. The glare hurt my eyes, and I shut them again. Where was I? And why were people screaming all over the place, so loud that it might as well be right in the—

For God's sake, it *was* right in the room! I had screamed.

I put my hands up to my face. Where was I, and what was going on? I touched my face, and then I had the second shock:

My face was rough. I had a beard.

A *beard*? At my age? I'd shaved about twice in my life. That wasn't bad, for seventeen, but here I was with my chin rough and scratchy with a full-grown beard. *Where was I? What had happened?*

The door opened, and a nurse came into the room, and things suddenly clicked and fell into place.

Accident. I had had an accident, and I was in a hospital. Maybe a car had hit me on my way home from school—

The nurse was dressed in white, like most nurses. She was dark, and pretty, and smiling. "Is something wrong?" she asked.

Wrong? Was anything *right*?

"I heard you cry out again—that *was* you, wasn't it?"

"Oh. Oh, yes, that was me."

"Have you been dreaming again?" She sounded concerned.

Again? What was that supposed to mean? "I'm sorry. I'm feeling pretty dim just now. Have I been screaming before this?"

She nodded. "Yes. Don't you remember? Last night you woke up three times, shouting something about a railing. Can you remember now what it was? Did you fall through a railing, perhaps?"

"I don't know," I said slowly. "I assume I'm in a hospital. Is this Herrick?"

She nodded, smiling. "Yes, this is Hendrick. Hospital. So you know where you are? That's wonderful. Perhaps you'll remember, in a little while, what happened, and what all this is about railings."

I frowned, and wished I hadn't: it hurt. It didn't sound like me. I didn't have nightmares, and I hadn't screamed since I was thirteen and slammed my fingernail in the car door. Why could I remember that, and not anything closer? Railings? I racked my brain, trying to remember what it was that I'd screamed—or dreamed. I couldn't remember, but for some strange reason I was sure it had nothing to do with a railing.

"Dr. Bannon said he wanted to see you when you woke up," the nurse said. "I'll call him," she added as she went out.

Dr. Bannon? I'd never heard the name. I rubbed my hand against that strange wrongness of my face again, mostly because it kept me from thinking. Somewhere at the back of my mind I was beginning to get scared.

There was something wrong. Something I halfway knew about, and didn't dare think about yet. I knew that if I let myself think about it, that vague little bit of fear at the back of my mind would come roaring out like a tiger and I'd start screaming the place down again.

After a while, the door swung quietly open again, and a man stood in the door.

I'd never seen the man before, but I knew by his white coat that he was a doctor. He was youngish, with gray eyes and dark hair, and he frowned a little as he looked at me. Was I hurt as badly as all that?

"Miss Taylor tells me you've decided to wake up," he said pleasantly, but his eyes stayed fixed right on me. "How do you feel now?"

Experimentally, I moved. No casts, nothing seriously damaged or out of place, though there was something stiff and rusty on the calf of my leg that felt like a bandage, and my elbow felt queer. "My head aches a bit. Apart from that, I guess I'm okay. What happened, anyway? An accident?"

"We were hoping you could tell us that," he said slowly. "We don't know; a policeman found you lying in the street and brought you to the emergency room. We took X-rays to make sure your skull wasn't fractured; otherwise you're not badly hurt except for something like a burn on your leg and one temple. Frankly, I can't quite imagine what sort of accident—but no, you're not badly hurt. You should be all right in a day or two."

"That's good," I said, but unease was building up inside me again. I wasn't hurt badly, maybe, but there was *something* — "But now that you're awake and can talk sensibly, maybe you can tell us," Dr. Bannon said. "What happened?"

I tried thinking back, but it was like trying to remember what I'd screamed. There was a curious, fuzzy sense of fear, and a great crash that seemed to fill the sky. . . .

"There was a crash," I said slowly, "and— and something must have hit me—but I can't remember. I can't remember!"

"Easy, easy," the doctor said hastily. "Don't get excited. It will come back to you. With a head injury, sometimes there's a memory lapse. Suppose we get the rest straight first. There was no identification on you, you know, so we haven't even been able to notify your family. First of all—who are you?"

And then it crashed in on me, and I knew what it was that I hadn't wanted to feel. Why I'd kept my mind busy with so many unimportant questions. And why I'd held so many questions back.

Who are you?

A simple enough question. The first thing they always ask. There was nothing wrong with the question, just with the answer.

I didn't know who I was.

I didn't know my own name!

I guess my face must have done something I didn't know about. Because the next thing I knew the nurse was there with a little paper cup of something that smelled funny, and Dr. Bannon was saying, "Hey, hey, take it easy, kid!"

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much as twenty. From Seattle, Lloyd Sanderson, age eighteen, white, male, American, brown hair, dark eyes— that might be you; reported missing two months ago. We've wired the juvenile authorities in Seattle. Let me see—Berkeley, California, Barry Francis Cowan, age seventeen, missing from May '67, five-foot-eight—well, you could have grown an inch. We wired Mr. Cowan, and he said he would fly in tonight just on the chance, but he said he'd made four flights already, to New York, and a couple of other places, to identify someone claiming to be his son. So if you're Cowan or Sanderson—"

"I don't know, " I said, and felt like crying. "Juvenile authorities?"

"It's routine when someone turns up missing, " the doctor said quickly; "it doesn't mean you've committed a crime. "

"Did I have anything at all on me when I came in? I mean—no wallet, keys, money?"

"Just the clothes you had on, and a couple of pieces of junk in the pockets, " Dr. Bannon said.

"Can I see the clothes?"

"Get his clothes, " Bannon said to the nurse, and she went to a locker at one end of the room. She took out a brown coverall, and laid it across the bed. I eased my head up and took it in my hands.

It was rough and brown, woven of something like denim. Pants and shirt were all in one piece, and it zipped up the front. He said, "It looks as if something had been ripped off the arm. That's why we checked the Army and Air Force. "

I turned it over in my hands. The rough looking material felt curiously soft to the touch. Without quite knowing why, I turned it over to the breast pocket, and frowned. Something had been ripped from that, too. It was a large irregular patch of lightish fabric. The nurse said, "Oh, yes. It could be an eagle or something."

I shook my head. "I was wearing

