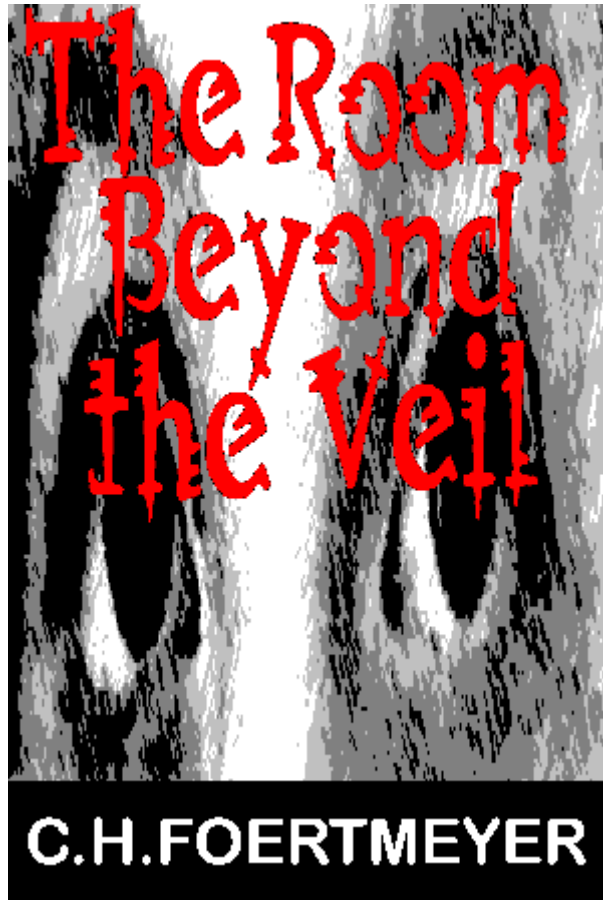


The Room Beyond the Veil



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The Room Beyond the Veil

C.H. Foertmeyer

The Room Beyond the Veil

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To my friend, Bob Hill, whose personal dream led to this work of fiction. Unlike Thomas Jewett, Bob is still looking for his room beyond the veil.

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Once again I am indebted to my brother, Tom Foertmeyer, and my good friends, Tim and Casey Jeffries for their editing work on this novella. Their help in preparing my works for publication is of the utmost importance to me and sincerely appreciated.

Again I must thank my brother, Tom, for his cover designs. I believe the cover of *The Room Beyond the Veil* to be his best effort yet.

Finally, I am extremely grateful for a casual conversation with my good friend, Bob Hill, which led to the idea for this work. Bob actually has dreams of such a room as that which Tom Jewett dreams of. Be careful, Bob, that it remains only a dream.

Foreword

Look at your wall clock, the second hand ticking endlessly around the face. Sixty clicks to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour, twenty-four hours to the day. Time is the one element of our universe that is constant and unvarying. It is determined by the rotation of the Earth around its axis and the Earth's revolution around the sun. Unchanging and steadily moving forward.

But, how do you know if what you perceive to be a minute or an hour is perceived by others in the same way? Is an hour the same length of time to everyone? Ridiculous question? What about how fast five minutes passes when you are engaged in a task whose deadline is approaching? What about how slow it passes when it is the last five minutes of the work day and you are ready to go home?

Time is only as constant as our perception of it. How long is an eight hour work day? Is it longer or shorter than eight hours of sleep? Most would say from their perception of the passing of time that the eight hours of sleep is by far the shorter of the two. Without a clock would you even know how long you had slept?

So, time, although constant as defined by the laws of science, is actually quite dynamic when measured against a specific situation.

Does this explain what happened to Thomas and Sally Jewett? No...I think not. What happened to the Jewetts is beyond the limit of our comprehension. But, perhaps it does provide us with a starting point from which to begin our quest for understanding.

C.H. Foertmeyer

Chapter One

The "New" Home

"Well? What do you think?" Tom asked Sally, as he pulled into the driveway of their new home. It was nine a.m. on Tuesday, September 12 1995, the beginning of their new life in Traber, Colorado.

Twenty-one year old Thomas Jewett was embarking on his career in writing, having landed a job as a cub journalist for the Traber Herald. It was a good opportunity, not great, but he was anxious to begin writing for a living and Colorado was as good a place as any-maybe better than most. Traber, located in the front range of the Rocky Mountains was an ideal setting for his true passion of fiction writing, a love that had been placed on the back burner by the need for an income.

Tom and Sally had been married straight out of high school and Sally had worked at the local Wal-Mart in Carthage, Nebraska, supporting, or trying to support Tom and his college career at Carthage Community College. It had been a rough two years, but the opportunity for Tom to join the Traber Herald had raised their spirits considerably. His father's graduation present, the down payment on their new home, had raised them even higher.

"It's okay," Sally, answered, studying the large Victorian home Tom had purchased sight unseen. "It looked a little better in the photographs, but 'fixer-upper' did describe it well."

"Yeah, but look at it. It's so cool. It was built in 1887," Tom said, suggesting that the antiquity of it made it somehow better than a newer home might be.

"Yes-I know. You've mentioned that at least a dozen times already. But what I see is one hell of a lot of work!" Sally complained.

"Come on, Sally. It's not that bad. It'll be fun fixing her up, and besides, you're going to need something to keep you busy while I'm at the Herald," Tom said, trying to bolster Sally's low level of enthusiasm for their new home. "And besides, Traber is like home, sort of."

"Why? Because your great grandfather was born and raised here?" Sally asked, dryly. "You've told me that I don't know how many times, too."

"Well-Yeah. That's kinda neat, isn't it? I mean, just think-my great grandfather might have come to visit someone who lived in this very house once upon a time."

"Yeah, right," Sally said, sarcastically. "And maybe he even lived in this house."

"No. According to his family Bible his home burned to the ground in 1882. That's when he moved east to Carthage with his wife, Emma," Tom explained.

"Huh-I wonder where it was then?" Sally said.

"Number seventy-two Oliver Road, according to his family Bible, but I checked with the post office for that address and it doesn't exist any longer."

"Still. We could find Oliver Road, look at the addresses, and figure out where it used to be, couldn't we?" Sally asked.

"We could if Oliver Road still existed. But, from what I was able to determine it doesn't exist any longer either. That was over a hundred years ago that the house burned down, Sally. Things can change a lot in that amount of time."

"Are you sure about the address? Maybe the address in the Bible was from a newer home of your great grandfather's," Sally speculated.

"Nope. My great grandmother wrote the passage inside the front cover. It says something like, '*Our beautiful home at 72 Oliver Road in Traber, Colorado burned to the ground on April 7, 1882, due to a lightning bolt. All of our possessions were lost, save this Bible, which Oliver rescued from the parlor as we fled our burning home.*' The passage was signed, Emma Carson Jewett."

"So Oliver Road was named after your great grandfather?" Sally asked, her interest in the history of seventy-two Oliver Road growing.

"Or he named it after himself. But whatever the circumstances were, the fire erased the house and a hundred and thirteen years have erased the street. It doesn't exist any longer," Tom insisted.

"Maybe the post office is wrong. Maybe the town is so small that they don't have complete information on it," Sally persisted.

"That's nuts, Sal. They deliver the mail, remember? It doesn't matter how small the town is, they know all the streets. But, I also checked on my MapQuest CD-ROM and it wasn't listed there either. Oliver Road is gone from Traber."

"Well, maybe after we get settled we'll go see if we can find out in the county records or something," Sally replied. "Ready to go in?" she asked.

"I suppose I am. When did you arrange for the movers to bring our stuff?"

"Today, if they stay on schedule. I figured we would go in, take a look at the place, and then go check into our cabin. Then we can come back and supervise the unloading of our stuff, sleep at the cabin for the night and begin organizing everything tomorrow. Sound like a plan?" Sally asked, smiling at Tom.

"Sounds like a plan-But, what cabin?" Tom asked.

"I made reservations at a place called Pine Haven for tonight. We get our own little cabin all to ourselves," Sally replied, smiling her come-hither smile.

"Gee, we need to talk more often. When did you do that?"

"About a week ago when I got the moving arrangements all worked out."

"Huh-Okay-So let's go in and check out the house."

Tom pulled the car further up the circular driveway to the front portico of the old home, parking beneath its varnished bead board ceiling. He and Sally climbed the seven steps to the front porch, which wrapped around the entire front of the house to about a third of the way back each side, the white painted railings finally curving gracefully into the sides of the house.

Tom stood on his new front porch in awe of the grace of the porch and the beauty of the front entryway. The front door was massive oak, stained and varnished to a deep, dark walnut color. The leaded glass windows, etched meticulously with beautiful maple leaf designs, glistened in the light of the day.

"Wow," Tom said, breathlessly murmuring the flood of emotions into one word.

"It is impressive," Sally said, in response.

"I'll say-Come on, let's go in!" Tom said, hardly able to contain himself any longer.

He worked the combination the realtor had given him before leaving home and retrieved the house key from the lock-box. He turned the large brass key over and over in his hand, marveling at its heft and style.

"This looks to be the original key to the house," he commented to Sally.

"Could be I guess. Come on use it. Open the door," Sally urged.

Tom placed the key in the lock and turned it, smiling when he heard the distinct and heavy "click" of the lock opening. He slowly pushed open the heavy door to his new home and then turned and whisked Sally off of her feet and into his arms.

"Let's do this right," he said, smiling and kissing her on the cheek.

"You're nuts Tom Jewett," Sally laughed, throwing her arms around his shoulders. "Truly nuts."

Tom carried Sally across the threshold and into the foyer, placing her gently back on her feet. He inhaled the aroma of the house deeply into his lungs.

"Ah! Just smell that, Sally. That's antiquity you smell. You won't smell that in the newer homes they're building these days. That's the smell of history."

"That's the smell of mildew, Tommy boy. The roof probably leaks," Sally, teased him. "It's either that or leaky pipes, but it sure isn't history that I smell."

"Then look at it, forget the smell. Look at that tooled leather wainscot going up the stairway. It's fabulous!" Tom exclaimed, trying to build Sally's enthusiasm again.

"Yes, Tom, it is. A few hundred hours of hard work and we'll have a really nice home here in Traber. Simply fabulous," Sally giped. "Shall we go upstairs first and have a look at the bedrooms or perhaps start in the kitchen and see how 'historical' it might be? Maybe it will have a real wood-burning stove. Maybe, on the other hand, we should start in the basement and make sure the coal bin is full. After all, it is September, and up here winter comes early. We'll have to stoke that furnace."

"Come on, Sally. Where's your sense of adventure? It's not that bad. The place has real possibilities."

"Yes, but on your income it won't be possible to hire anyone to do any work in here and that means that this place's 'possibilities' won't be realized for several years."

"So-What's the hurry? We've got plenty of time to get it all in order, but starting in the basement is a good idea. I should have a look at the furnace and make sure it is in working order."

"And what do you know about furnaces, Tom Jewett?"

"Enough to tell if the pilot light is lit and if you'll turn the thermostat up when I yell I can tell if it ignites and if the blower comes on. What more is there?"

"Okay, you go down there and yell when you're ready. I'll find the thermostat and then do some exploring up

here," Sally replied, with a smirk on her face that said, 'Okay Mr. Handyman, do your thing'.

Tom could see what appeared to be the kitchen down the hallway past the staircase. He headed in that direction figuring the basement stairs should be off the kitchen, or at least that is how he had it pictured in his mind. He looked around the kitchen finding it to be quite modern and up to date. *Wood burning stove*, he thought to himself. *Ha!* His eyes fell upon a door in the corner of the room and he walked over to it, turned the knob and pulled the door open. *Right where I thought it would be*, he thought.

He pushed the top button of the two button light switch and the basement below came into view. From where he stood at the top of the stairs he couldn't see much, but the floor appeared to be hard-packed dirt and the base of one wall he could see seemed to be constructed of stone. The light below, although not bright, was adequate and Tom stepped down the first step, then the second, and after leaving the thirteenth step he was standing on the hard dirt floor.

The basement was one large room apparently the size of the house above. All four foundation walls were built of stone, the corner beneath the coal chute blackened by years of coal storage in a still existing, but empty, wooden bin. The basement was empty except for the furnace, centrally located in the room and a water heater in a corner adjacent to the coal bin. Other than six massive oak uprights holding the house above, the basement was otherwise bare.

Tom focused his attention on the furnace, which was relatively new and noticed immediately the hum of the blower. He opened the access panel and saw that the burner was fully lit and apparently functioning well. In awe of the old home as he had first entered it hadn't even dawned on him that it was comfortable compared to the chill of the outside September air. "That's cool," he muttered, as he closed the access panel. He took one more look around at the four stone walls and the empty coal bin and then headed back up the stairs to join Sally.

"Hey, Sally!" Tom yelled, as he hit the top of the basement stairs. "Where are you?"

"I'm upstairs in the master bedroom!" she called back. "You didn't yell!"

Tom hurried up the front stairs.

"Which way now?" he called again.

"Last door on the right toward the back of the house!" Sally answered.

"Wow! Big room," Tom said, as he entered the bedroom. "I didn't yell because the furnace was already running when I got down there."

"I could have told you that when we first entered the house—if you'd have asked," Sally answered, smiling and winking at Tom.

"Cute."

"Well, I knew nothing was going to keep you out of that basement anyway. Will there be room for your workshop down there?"

"Plenty, but there's no water down there or stationary tubs like I expected. I don't know how or where we'll hook up your washer and dryer."

"I do. I already found it. Whoever lived here before made the mudroom off the kitchen into a laundry room. The water hookups and the two-twenty are there, as well as the washtubs. I'll need some shelving in there, but other than it, it's perfect."

"Hey, that's great. No stairs to climb with heavy loads of wash, well at least not to the basement, anyway."

"Not at all. They put a laundry chute in from the master bath down to the laundry room," Sally replied.

"So, what's the layout up here?"

"Well, there are four large rooms, this being the largest. Look at that cool curved wall the stairwell forms in this room. Isn't that just the neatest thing? Then, there is a narrow spiral staircase that leads up into the turret room. *That* would be great for your writing studio, Tom. It's octagonal with windows on four of the eight sides. It's simply an awesome little room. There's enough room for your desk and a couple of book cases."

Tom peered into the master bath and asked, "Where's the second bathroom? The literature said there were two upstairs baths."

"It's off the hall, toward the front of the house. You haven't been up that way yet. That's where the staircase to the turret is, too, all the way up front on the left side of the hall."

"That's what I want to check out. Wanna come along?" Tom asked.

"No, you go ahead while I go down and explore the first floor. I came straight up here after seeing the kitchen and laundry. I haven't even found the living room yet."

"Okay. I'll join you down there when I'm done up here," Tom said, as he left the bedroom and headed for the front of the house. When he reached the front of the hall

he saw the wooden steps leading to the turret curving up and out of sight. *Absolutely cool*, he thought and started up the stairs.

The staircase came into the turret room right through the floor along one wall, a wooden railing protecting one from toppling down the stairwell from the side. The room was octagonal with four large windows on the outside four walls. Random width pegged floors ran diagonally across the room making for an unusual effect and birch wainscoting adorned the lower three feet of all eight walls.

Tom was impressed and became anxious to get his studio set up and begin writing in this inspiring room. "This is the perfect room," he said aloud. "Simply perfect!"

He rushed back down to the first floor and met up with Sally in the living room.

"Well, what do you think of our new digs?" he asked, anticipating her response would be favorable.

"Well, Tom. I think you did well. I like it. I like it just fine," she answered, giving Tom a big hug. "I think we're going to be very happy here."

"Me too, Sally. I think this will be a great place to raise a family."

"We're going to have to go meet the neighbors as soon as we get settled in," Sally said.

"What neighbors? The closest house is a good quarter of a mile away on either side and there are no houses at all on the other side of the lane. We're pretty much alone here, or didn't you notice?"

Yes, I noticed, but still, we should get to know at least the closest neighbors on either side of us. It's only-ah-neighborly."

"Yeah, you're right and we will, but not now. For now let's head to Pine Haven and check in. I'd like to get a little shut-eye before the movers come. Driving all night may have gotten us here early, but it sure took its toll on me. I'm bushed."

They had no problem finding Pine Haven and by eleven thirty they were checked in and Tom was sound asleep in the cabin loft. Sally sat down at the dinette table and began writing out a list of what she would need from the grocery to stock her new kitchen. She would wake Tom at one o'clock so they could be back to the house in time to meet the movers at two. As she wrote out her list she realized that her initial anxiety over the new house and the move away from her hometown had been replaced with the excitement of their new beginning. She smiled and thought to herself, *This is going to be nice, really nice.*

Chapter Two

Wednesday - The first Day...and Night - September 13 1995

Moving day went pretty much as expected. There were the usual broken items, itemized and catalogued for reimbursement by America Moves Moving and Storage. They *had* arrived on time and by suppertime, Tuesday, everything was unloaded and placed where it was supposed to go. Now the unpacking of the boxes would be the order of the day.

After everything had been unloaded Tom and Sally had gone back to the cabin and changed clothes before going out to supper at the local Denny's restaurant. Sleep, and plenty of it had followed their meal.

The young couple hadn't accumulated much in the way of furniture since marrying. They had previously shared a small apartment in Carthage and now their old Victorian would have a few empty rooms for some time to come. They were able to furnish the living room, sparsely, the kitchen and the master bedroom. The movers did manage to get Tom's desk and two bookcases up to the turret room, but with a lot of difficulty. That was about it for furnishings. Blinds and a washer and dryer would have to come later. They were just glad that the previous owners had left behind the range and refrigerator as part of the deal.

The realtor had taken care of getting the gas and electric service restored before their arrival and Tom assumed that it must have been the realtor who had also turned on the furnace and water heater. That left establishing phone service, which Sally took care of Wednesday morning and the phones were working later that day.

"Hey, Sally. I think I'm going to take a break from unpacking boxes and check in at work," Tom said, wiping his brow. "I want to let Mr. Conrad know we have arrived in town and that I'll be there for work on Monday as agreed."

"You're leaving me now?" Sally asked.

"No, not leaving. I'm going to call in," Tom explained.

"Oh-Are the phones working then?"

"Yeah, I picked up the receiver a few minutes ago and got a dial tone."

Glancing down at her watch, Sally said, "That was fast. I called them less than four hours ago."

"Well, all they have to do is throw a switch, I think. How long can that take? What's our new phone number?"

"721-5000."

"How did you get that? That's a cool number—easy to remember for sure."

"721 is a new exchange here. I actually had my choice of just about any number I wanted," she explained.

"Good. I like your choice," Tom said, smiling at Sally.

"Thanks. I wanted something you'd remember," she laughed.

"Funny. Hey, what's that around your neck?" Tom asked, noticing the large brass key hanging on a string around Sally's neck.

Sally reached up, taking the key in her fingers.

"This? Oh, yeah. I found it in the kitchen drawer when I was putting away our silverware. One minute it wasn't there and then the next minute it was, lying in the knife slot. It had a piece of tape stuck to it like it had been taped to the bottom of the drawer above. I guess it just let go and fell in the drawer when I wasn't looking. Maybe I knocked it loose."

"So why's it around your neck?" Tom asked.

"I put it on a string and decided to wear it around my neck and try it in every door until I find where it works," Sally replied.

"Did you find where it works?"

"No, not yet."

"Let me take a look at that," Tom said, taking the key in his fingers. "It looks like an old padlock key, not a door key. I wonder why it was taped to the bottom of the drawer? Did you see anything around here with a padlock on it?" Tom asked Sally.

"Well, yes, now that you mention it. The outside cellar doors are padlocked. I noticed that when I took a walk around the house to the back yard. That was before I found the key though."

"What outside cellar doors?" Tom asked, surprised at Sally's information.

"You know, those double doors that lie almost flat along the side of old houses. You open them and there is a stairway to the basement from outside. You've seen them before."

"Yes, but not here."

"Did you go around back and look?" Sally asked. "They are there, Tom."

"No, but I was in the basement and there aren't any stairs down there to the outside. Just four solid stone walls and a coal chute in one corner. There's not even a window down there, let alone a stairwell."

"I found the iron lid to the coal chute in the front bushes, but the cellar doors are around the back. Maybe you overlooked them when you were down in the basement," Sally suggested.

"No way. Come on, let's go out back and have a look at those doors," Tom said, turning and heading for the kitchen.

Sally followed Tom through the kitchen and laundry to the back door. Once outside, she pointed to the cellar doors.

"There they are, just like I said."

"Yeah, I see. Give me that key, Sal. Let's see if it fits that padlock."

Tom took the key and inserted it into the heavy brass lock, but it would not turn.

"Damn! I guess it must belong to something else," Tom stated. "Come on Sally, were going to the basement and see where these doors lead."

Tom paced off the distance from the cellar doors to the corner of the house and then headed for the back door. Sally followed along behind, beginning to get interested in this apparent mystery, although she was pretty sure Tom had simply not noticed the stairwell leading up to the doors when he was in the basement the one time he had been down there.

They made their way into the house and down the stairs from the kitchen to the cellar, Tom going straight to the back corner of the basement. He paced off nine paces from the corner and stopped.

"The stairs up to those doors should be right here," he pointed out to Sally, running his hand along the solid wall. "So-Where are they?"

"I don't know. Maybe someone rocked them up for some reason," Sally guessed.

"Why would you do that? It makes no sense, and besides, this is all one continuous wall. There's absolutely no sign of a fill-in job here. It would show, no matter how good a job they did."

"Well, I don't know, Tommy. Maybe you should get a saw and cut the lock off and see what's behind the doors. Maybe they're just decorative or something like that."

"Who ever heard of decorative cellar doors? Not me. I'm going into town and get a hack saw at the hardware and

find out where those doors lead. Wanna come along?" Tom asked.

"No. You go ahead and I'll keep unpacking. Don't be gone too long, Mister, because you're not using this as an excuse to get out of unpacking boxes. You hear me?"

"Yeah, I hear. I won't be gone long. I'll swing by the Herald though while I'm out and talk to Mr. Conrad, but I won't stay long. I'll be back in about an hour, okay?"

"Okay. One hour," Sally said, frowning playfully at Tom. "Oh, and stop somewhere and pick up a couple of microwave dinners. Okay?"

"Sure, Stouffer's?"

"If you can find them, yeah. Get a couple of those dinners in a bowl they have now."

They went back up to the kitchen and Tom took off for town while Sally went back to unpacking. As much as she wanted to concentrate on her chore of unpacking and sorting out their possessions, she couldn't get her mind off the cellar doors. *It just doesn't make any sense*, she thought, repeatedly. She tried to picture what might be on the other side of the doors, but now that she had been in the basement, all she could imagine was a stairwell leading to a stone wall. *That's nuts*, she concluded. *Who'd do something like that?*

Tom didn't even bother to come back in the house when he returned from town. He went straight around to the back of the house and began sawing on the padlock. Sally heard the sound of the saw on the lock and after she realized what it was, she headed out the back door.

"You're back. Why didn't you come get me?" Sally asked, perturbed at Tom's starting without her. "Those doors have been driving me nuts ever since you left."

"Sorry, Sal. As soon as I get the lock cut off I'll let you have the honor of opening the doors. How's that?" Tom offered.

"No thanks. You can open them. I just want to see what's down there when you do. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it and all I can come up with is a stone wall at the base of a set of stone steps."

"Well, we'll see soon enough," Tom replied, as he sawed on the lock. "I'm near halfway through now."

Sally sat down on the grass and watched as Tom cut away at the lock. She was extremely excited and she couldn't explain to herself why, but her excitement was like that of when she was a child on Christmas morning, tearing away at the wrappings of her presents. *Crazy*, she thought. *It's just a cellar door.*

Tom finally cut through the lock and turned to look at Sally, a huge grin on his face.

"Well, ready to see where this goes?" he asked.

"I guess so," Sally answered, with a bit of apprehension she didn't quite understand.

She stood up and positioned herself where she would be able to see down the stairwell as Tom pulled open the right door—and then the left.

"Damn!" Tom yelled. "It's just what I thought it would be. A stairwell to nowhere."

He walked down the seven stone steps that ended at the foundation wall, the same wall in appearance as the wall in the cellar. He looked left and right, but it was seamless, the stairwell walls butting right up against the foundation wall. It all appeared to have been built at the same time and of the same mortar and stone.

"Well, now we know," he called back up to Sally.

"Now we know it goes nowhere, but we still don't know why it's here in the first place," she replied.

"Yeah-Right. Have you been in the attic yet?" Tom asked Sally.

"No, why?"

"Maybe there are some blueprints of the house up there. Maybe they'd make some mention of this."

"You can check if you want to, but as far as I'm concerned it's just what it appears to be—an afterthought."

"An afterthought?"

"Yep. I think they forgot all about an outside entrance to the cellar and constructed it after the house was built or as it was being built. They just never got around to knocking out the wall to make it functional," Sally explained.

"Yeah, right, Sal. They never got around to knocking out the wall in a hundred and eight years."

"Well?"

"Well, I'll check the attic and see if there are any blueprints up there."

"Go for it then. I'm going back to my boxes. *Someone* has to get us unpacked."

"I'll be along to help you just as soon as I finish in the attic," Tom promised.

"See that you do, Mister, and where are the frozen dinners?"

"Oh, yeah. They're still in the car."

"Well get them and put them in the freezer before you go to the attic."

Tom smiled at her and headed back around to the front of the house to get the dinners. He then went to the attic and was back in no time, pitching in to help Sally with the unpacking.

"No blueprints?" she asked.

"No nothing. That attic is empty."

"Well, they probably wouldn't have mentioned that anyway—I think I'll go throw those meals into the microwave. You're ready to eat aren't you?"

Tom replied, "Absolutely!"

The Stouffer's "Chili in a Bowl", as Tom called it, was quite tasty and really hit the spot after a long day of rummaging through boxes and putting stuff away. He had done his best to dodge the effort, but Sally had been on top of things and held him to the task at hand.

"That was pretty good," Tom said. "Now what?"

"Now what? Now I go upstairs and put the master bath in order. What are you going to do?"

"I dunno."

"Well, how about hooking up the television in the bedroom and see if we can get a decent signal up here or if we are going to have to get cable or a dish," Sally suggested.

"We can't afford cable-or a dish, yet," Tom replied.

"Well then you had better hope we can get a good signal. I missed all my favorite shows last night and I don't want to miss any more of them tonight."

"Well I didn't see an outside antenna anywhere, so the rabbit ears will have to do. I hope they're enough."

"If not, Tom, we are ordering cable. We'll just turn the thermostat down two degrees for the winter and pay for it that way," Sally demanded.

"We're on even-billing. That won't help any. Not right away anyway. If you want cable you're going to have to get a part-time job down at the Wal-Mart in Loveland," Tom informed her.

"Well, Mister, that is exactly what I was planning on doing. In fact, I already called the manager there and told her who I was and that I had been a Wal-Mart employee in Carthage and she set me up with an interview tomorrow."

"When did you do all this?" Tom asked.

"While you were at the hardware store and visiting with your new boss. By the way, how did that go?"

"It went fine. Loveland is quite a drive, Sal. I was just kidding about that," Tom said, showing concern over the mountainous drive Sally would have to make each day if she took a job there.

"I know. That's why I told the manager that I wanted only three days work each week. She understood and said she felt we could work that out just fine."

"I don't know, Sal..."

"Tom, it's already decided. We need the extra income and I need something to do besides clean house and cook. So, please, just go along with this, okay?"

"Okay, but if the roads are bad this winter, you're staying home on the bad days."

"Agreed," Sally replied.

With that settled, they headed upstairs, Sally to work in the master bath and Tom to the task of getting a decent TV signal. When Sally had finished in the bath she came out to see how Tom was doing with the television.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well what? I got three channels, the networks, fairly well but that's about it. They're a little fuzzy but not too bad. Here take a look," Tom said, stepping away from the screen.

"Yeah, not bad. Not good, but not bad. We're still getting the cable."

"Fine. We'll get the cable after you get a paycheck, okay?"

"Okay. Let's hit the hay, Mister. I'm pooped," Sally said, pulling back the covers on their double bed.

Tom had no argument for that and climbed under the covers, snuggling up against Sally. He held her close for a moment, and then said, "Sweet dreams. See you in the morning. What time do you have to be in Loveland?"

"Eleven a.m.," Sally answered.

"Well then you'll have to leave by nine thirty or so. Better get some sleep."

"Right. Good night, Tommy."

They were tired and sleep swept over them in a matter of minutes. They had completed their first day in their new home and it had gone well. It seemed as though their ship had finally come in and they were happy and content with their lives as they were now.

Sally drifted off into sweet dreams of gardening around the house and painting and wallpapering, beginning with the foyer and then moving into the living room with her decorating projects.

Tom drifted off to quite a different experience.

Chapter Three

Thursday - The First Morning - September 14 1995

Tom opened his eyes to sunlight filtering through the bed sheet Sally had fashioned into a curtain over the east window of their bedroom. He rolled over in bed to discover Sally already up and standing in the bathroom brushing her hair in front of the mirror.

"Hey, Sal. Good morning," Tom called to her.

"Morning, Tom. You sure had a restless night," she mentioned.

"I did? Huh-must have been those weird dreams I had. Or rather the weird dream I had over and over again all night long," he corrected himself.

"What was it about?" Sally asked.

"I dreamed I woke up here in this bed and then walked down the hall and down the front stairs to the foyer. Then I turned and headed for the kitchen... The next thing I know I am in an old room, completely furnished with antiques and lighted with kerosene lamps and a gas chandelier. I look around the room and notice a woman sitting on a settee knitting or crocheting or something, dressed in a long dress with her hair pulled up in a bun. I walk toward her and then she notices me and looks up and smiles at me..."

"Then what?" Sally asked, quite interested in Tom's dream.

"Then I wake up and I'm back here in my bed."

"Any idea who the lady is?" Sally asked.

"Nope. I've never seen her before in my life, but she seems to know me when she notices me. Weird."

"You said you had the dream several times?" Sally asked.

"Yes. I'd go back to sleep and the whole dream repeated itself, exactly as it was the previous time," Tom explained.

"Have you ever seen this old room you went to before? Maybe you visited it when you were a boy or something like that," Sally suggested.

"No, Sal. I've never been in a room like that. I'd remember that. It was like being in some old western movie and walking into the parlor at some rich rancher's house, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, I get the picture. Well, it was just a dream. Probably doesn't mean a thing. Most dreams don't. It's just your imagination working overtime," she smiled.

Tom glanced at the clock and said, "Hey, you better be shoving off soon. I don't want you rushing on those mountain roads. You're a flatlander and not used to them yet," he said, kidding her, yet not.

"I know, Tom. I'll be careful. What are you going to do while I'm gone?"

"What would you like me to do, kiddo?"

"You could finish unpacking the boxes and putting things away," she suggested.

"That's what I was afraid you were going to say," Tom replied.

"Well? Will you?"

"Yes, I'll do that. Then I'm going to set up my writing studio. Did you see my typewriter in any of those boxes yet?"

"Nope. Not yet. You'll come across it though. I saw the movers put it in one box or another back in Carthage. I'm sure it's here somewhere."

"Okay. You better get going. Is there anything in the kitchen to eat?" Tom asked.

"Just some Pop-Tarts. I did make a pot of coffee already though. Enjoy," Sally said, smiling at Tom as she left the room.

Tom hopped out of bed and followed her downstairs to the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Now you be careful, Sal. I hope you get the job. Maybe we can get a discount on a washer and dryer with you working there."

"I'll check and get some prices, if I get the job."

"Okay. Where's the Pop-Tarts?"

"In the cabinet above the coffee maker. See ya later, Tom. I'll call you from Loveland when I get there safely."

"How'd you know I was going to ask?" Tom smiled.

"Because you're you, Thomas Jewett. Just because you're you."

Sally went through the laundry to the back door and on out to the garage behind the house. Tom got his Pop-Tarts and sat down at the kitchen table and sipped his coffee and nibbled on his pastries. They would have been better hot, but Sally hadn't found their toaster yet among their still unpacked possessions. Cold would have to do.

When he had finished his breakfast, Tom went into the living room and began looking through the boxes for his typewriter. He found it in the second box he checked and

headed straight for the turret room. By the time he got there, after climbing both sets of stairs carrying the heavy old Remington-Rand, he was exhausted and totally out of breath. *I wonder how long it will take me to get used to this altitude*, he wondered. He placed the typewriter on the desk and sat down in his chair.

From where he sat in his desk chair he could look out the center two windows to a fabulous view of Traber Peak to the west, illuminated by the morning sun. *Wow! This is great!* he thought to himself as he studied the shadows on the mountain. *What a great place to write!*

Then, as if led to it by some invisible force, he thought about his dreams from the night before. He pictured himself getting out of bed and walking down the stairs to the foyer, turning toward the kitchen and then... then he was in the strange old room. *But how did I get there?*

Tom stood up and went down the spiral stairs to the second floor hallway. He looked around and then headed down to the foyer and turned toward the kitchen. As he approached the kitchen he realized that this was as far as he had gotten in the dream before entering the strange old room. *Now, where did I go from here?* he wondered. He looked around and noticed the basement door. *Down there maybe?* He pulled open the door to the cellar and went down the stairs.

Standing on the hard earthen floor, Tom surveyed the room around him. There was nothing different about the room than the last time he had been down here. There were still four solid stone walls, the coal chute and bin, the furnace, and the water heater. *What'd you expect, dimwit?* he scolded himself. *I must not have come down here after all.*

Tom climbed the staircase back to the kitchen and entered the hallway again. As he walked down the hall he began tapping on the walls with his knuckles, listening for a hollow spot. *Maybe there's a secret door*, he thought, not really believing that there would be. But, he thought it was worth a look because this was where his dream led him right before entering the old room. He studied the wall above the wainscot carefully and tapped gently on every square foot of it. Finally, after nearly making it back to the front of the hall his tapping produced a deep hollow return. He studied the vertical molding running between the chair rail and the cornice and noticed a small seam in it, just above his head. "Ah ha," he muttered, and rapped on the wall again. *Definitely hollow*, he thought, and pushed in on the wall, which seemed as though it would give way

under enough pressure. He braced himself and pushed harder, moving the panel in about a half an inch before it would move no further. He released his pressure on the wall and it came back to its original position, flush with the rest of the wall. "Huh," he said, "That's funny." He braced and pressed in again and the wall moved in again, but this time he released it quickly and the section of wall above the wainscot popped out and open, swinging out on hinges a two foot wide section.

Tom took a step back and slowly opened the panel, peering into the darkness of the cavity in the wall. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness of the space a wall safe came into view. "Mosler," he muttered. "It's a wall safe."

Although Tom thought this was a cool find, he was disappointed that it had nothing to do with solving the question of the whereabouts of his dream room. Furthermore, he realized, after trying to pull the safe open, that it was locked. "This'll do me a lot of good," he mumbled. "Where am I going to find the combination?"

Tom closed the wall panel, pressing it all the way in and releasing it slowly. It caught and once again it appeared to be just a part of the long wall. He turned to head back up to the turret when, on a hunch, he turned back to the wall and rapped on the section of wainscot just below the safe. "It's hollow, too," he uttered, and pressed in on the lower panel, which moved in just as the upper panel had. He released it quickly and the wainscot popped open.

"Wow!"

He pulled the lower panel fully open and stared into the darkness. This time his eyes did not adjust to the appearance of anything at all. The hollow remained pitch black and apparently empty. He reached into the opening and felt along the right side of the opening, his fingers coming across a two button light switch. He pushed the top button and the opening illuminated with incandescent light.

"Cool!" Tom exclaimed, loudly, staring down a narrow stairwell about three feet high. He could see down to the floor of what appeared to be a room with a smooth stone floor. "Awesome!" he shouted, excited over finding a hidden room right in his very own house. It was like a childhood dream come true. He had always wanted a *secret room* of his very own. Now, it appeared as though he had one. "Wait 'til Sally sees... no, why tell Sally? This is *my* secret room," Tom said. *But, she'd think it was cool, too,* he thought. *Maybe I should tell her.*

Tom decided that he'd decide that later, after he had explored the hidden room. He stooped down and started down the narrow stairway, hunched over to accommodate the low ceiling. As he descended the stairs he began to realize that something was wrong with this whole picture. Then it hit him squarely. The electric lights. The room in his dream had been illuminated with kerosene lamps and a gas chandelier. There were no electric lights in the room in his dream. As he stepped onto the stone floor he realized immediately that he was right. This was not the room in his dream at all.

The room appeared to be about twelve feet square, the far wall opposite the stairs was completely covered in racks containing very dusty bottles of wine. The wall to the right was also wall to wall racking, but this racking contained rifles and muskets and old pistols of various types and styles. The left wall and the wall containing the stairwell were stone and looked very much like the foundation walls in the basement. *I'll bet I was wrong about the basement being the size of the house above it. This room seems to be in front of the basement and I'll bet that left wall is the other side of the basement wall,* he thought to himself, trying to figure out the layout and location of this subterranean room.

Then, the question of the location of the room became totally insignificant as Tom realized what he was looking at. "God! This stuff has to be worth a small fortune!" he yelped, hardly able to contain himself. "But, why would the owner leave this behind?" he questioned aloud. *Because this was the owner's secret room,* he thought, remembering what the realtor had said. The owner of the house had passed away suddenly and his wife had put the house on the market. *She didn't know about this room,* Tom realized, smiling broadly.

Tom didn't know a thing about wine, but he did know a little about weapons and he knew that old flintlocks and cap and ball muskets were worth a lot of money. In addition to the older muskets there were brand new Sharps and Winchesters and even an old Marlin lever-action. There were two old double-barrel 10 gauge shotguns with external hammers, the caps still in place beneath them. "Damn! I'm rich!" Tom yelled, "and I don't even have a clue how much those bottles of wine might be worth!"

He knew now that this was something he would have to share with Sally. It was the answer to all their prayers. He wanted to share it with Sally. There was no way now that

Sally would have to drive to Loveland several times a week to work at the Wal-Mart store.

Tom's elation was suddenly tempered by two thoughts, which crept into his mind almost simultaneously and with all the subtlety of a racing locomotive. *What about the former owner's wife? and This isn't the room I saw in my dream...*

He thought about the room in his dream, illuminated with kerosene lamps and decorated with antique furniture and trappings. This certainly was *not* that room. Or...maybe it was. *Dreams*, he thought, *are just vague references to actual things in existence. Maybe this is the room depicted in my dream, the dream just suggesting the antiquity of it in a very different picture of the room itself. Does that make sense?* he thought, questioning his own reasoning. He decided that it did make sense. After all, how could he picture this room accurately in a dream when he had never seen it before? The dream, for whatever reason it came to him, merely suggested a very old, hidden room. This was the room, he was sure.

Now, as to the former owner's wife. *Didn't she deserve the proceeds from all of these valuable items?* Tom decided that she did deserve a share, but certainly not all. After all, she would have received nothing at all had he not found the room through *his* dream. He thought about that for a moment and came to the conclusion that half seemed fair. Her half due to the fact that her husband had owned all these valuable antiques and his half because his dream had led to their discovery. *That's plenty fair*, he thought, with finality. *But, would she agree to that if he told her about this? Maybe I had better think more about this later.*

Tom stooped and went back up the narrow staircase to the hall. Exiting the passage he reached back and turned out the lights in the secret room and closed the panel. He took several steps toward the front stairway and looked back down the hallway to the hidden doors. They were truly indiscernible, even knowing they were there. He smiled and started back up to the turret room.

Tom spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon in the turret, organizing, airing out, and cleaning his new writing studio. He hooked up his computer and ran a phone line from the jack on the baseboard behind his desk to his modem. The boxes, still unpacked in the living room, could wait. He had far too much on his mind to worry over them. He couldn't stop thinking about what lay beneath the front parlor, hidden away for who knows how many years, and now its contents, worth thousands of dollars, all belonged to

him. The excitement of his find, coupled with the excitement of working in his own writing studio, had totally erased any awareness of the passing of time. He heard a car pull into the front drive and went to the window to look out.

Sally, he thought, seeing his car pull up in front of the house. He looked at his watch and noticed the day had slipped away and that it was nearly five in the afternoon. *She's gonna kill me for not unpacking.* Then, he thought about the room beneath the parlor and realized that he had nothing to worry about at all. *Not after she sees what I found!*

Tom hurried down the turret stairs to the upper hall and then down to the foyer, arriving just in time to catch Sally coming through the front door.

"Hi, Sal," Tom greeted her. "How did the interview go?"

"Good. I got the job!" Sally said, with enthusiasm. "I start next Monday, so go order the cable!" she laughed.

"Sure, but first, I have some good news for you, too," Tom said, smiling the smile of a child who can't wait to tell a secret he knows he should keep to himself.

"Good news?—What sort of good news?" she asked suspiciously, noting Tom's devilish grin.

"I can't tell you. You've got to see it for yourself. Come on, follow me!"

Tom led Sally from the foyer to the hallway and stopped in front of the hidden panels.

"So, what do you see?" Tom asked, motioning toward the wall.

Sally gave him a blank stare that said, *Are you nuts?*

"What am I supposed to see, Tommy?"

"That's the point. You're not supposed to see anything—now watch," Tom said, with great anticipation in his voice. He pushed on the upper panel and then released his pressure quickly. The panel popped open revealing the wall safe.

"Lookie there!" Tom gleamed.

Sally stared at the opening and the safe within and then looked Tom squarely in the eye.

"What's in it?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't have the combination," Tom replied.

"So, what's the big surprise? The good news?" Sally asked. "If you don't know what's in it, what good news are you expecting to find in there?"

Tom stared at Sally with a totally blank stare.

"I hadn't thought about that," he replied. "There may well be more good news in there, too."

"More good news?"

"Yeah. This is only part of what I found while you were in Loveland. The best is yet to come," he replied, as he pushed on the lower panel and then released it. He swung the door open and reached in for the light switch, turning on the lighting in the subterranean room.

"Come on, Sal. Follow me!"

Tom led the way down the cramped staircase, Sally following close behind, and reaching the bottom Tom stepped aside so that Sally could enter.

"Well?" Tom asked.

"Wow..."

"Do you have any idea how much this stuff is worth?" Tom asked.

Sally was speechless. Tom walked over to the gun rack and lifted a flintlock musket from its resting place. He held it out to Sally, saying, "This is your washer and dryer, your big screen TV, and at least a year's subscription to cable!"

Sally smiled and replied, "But, do we own it?" she asked, bringing up Tom's previous concerns.

"I don't know, legally. I mean it was abandoned, right?"

"Or left behind unknowingly by the widow of Colonel Depew..."

"Depew? How do you know his name?" Tom asked, surprised.

"The realtor mentioned it to me, that's all," Sally answered. "She mentioned once that the house had been owned by a retired Civil War colonel named Depew. I thought you knew that. She said he built the house in 1887 after retiring from the army and moving here from Missouri."

"Wait a minute then!" Tom said, excitedly. "When did Colonel Depew die?"

"I don't know, but it had to be around 1920 or so, just figuring from the fact that he was a colonel in the Civil War. Say, thirty then, lived to be maybe eighty-five, tops, died then around 1920 or so."

"And his wife?"

"Probably shortly thereafter. Why?" Sally asked.

"Because that means someone else lived here after that and they never discovered this room. Maybe several families over the years. So, the last rightful owner is dead. That means we do own this stuff, Sally. We do!"

"If it was the colonel who put this stuff here," Sally reminded Tom.

"It was, and I'll tell you how I know. Look at the wall where the steps come down. It is the exact same stone and workmanship as the foundation wall there," Tom said, pointing to the left wall. "That means this room was built at the same time as the house was built...by Colonel Depew. He built it and he stocked it with all these guns and wines. Either his wife did not know about it or she died before selling the house and had told no one about it. The secret of this room died with either the colonel or his wife."

"Well-That does make sense when you look at it like that. Maybe we do legally own all this stuff. Wouldn't that be something?" Sally stated, her look of concern breaking into a wide smile.

"Sure we do," Tom smiled back.

"What do we do next?" Sally asked.

"We go back upstairs and you'll cook some supper while I get on the Internet and start looking for some antique gun dealers. We're going to turn some of these guns into cash. The rest we will save for a rainy day. I don't know what we'll do about the wine. I'll have to make a list of what's down here and then see what it's worth somehow. I'll do that tomorrow."

"Make a list of the guns, too. I'd sure like to know what all this is worth, all together. I brought some groceries home with me. Come on and help me get them out of the car and then you can go check out the Internet for gun dealers. I'll fix us a great supper to celebrate!" Sally offered, with great enthusiasm.

"Great, come on then."

Tom led the way out of the secret room and turned out the light on their treasure. He pushed the panel closed and made sure it was latched in place. He then accompanied Sally to the car and helped bring the groceries into the house.

"Can you take it from here?" he asked Sally, as he placed the last of the bags on the kitchen table.

"Sure. Go find some dealers and get some prices. I'll put this away and get started cooking. Go on, scoot!" Sally kidded.

Tom took off for the turret. He was just as anxious to get a first price as was Sally. He had made a mental note of the first musket he would check out, a pristine Model 1795 flintlock from the Springfield Armory. The lock plate was stamped "U.S. eagle proof Springfield 1810". Tom wasn't

sure how many of these muskets were made in 1810, but it seemed a good bet that it was probably worth a small fortune all by itself.

He raced up the turret steps and flicked on his PC, logging onto the Internet as fast as he could manage. He navigated to AltaVista and began his search by typing in 1795 flintlock. He selected the top result of his search and located a model 1810 for sale on the site. He nearly fell over backwards when he saw the price.

Four thousand dollars... "Four thousand dollars!" he yelled. "Sally! Four thousand dollars!" he yelled again.

He flew down the spiral stairway and down the hall to the front stairs. He stopped and hollered down to the kitchen, "Sally! Four thousand dollars! Can you believe it? Four thousand dollars!"

He bolted down the front stairs and into the kitchen.

"Did you hear me, Sal?" he asked, totally out of breath.

"No, not over the mixer."

"Four thousand dollars for the 1810 flintlock I showed you down there! Four thousand dollars! And that's just the first of sixty or seventy pieces down in that room."

"Wow..." was Sally's only reply.

Tom pitched in helping Sally with the preparation of their meal and they enjoyed a delicious meal of pot roast, creamed corn, and potatoes. After cleaning up and doing the dishes the evening was reserved for enjoying each other's company and discussing what they would do with their new-found wealth.

They retired to the bedroom early and had a second celebration of a more intimate nature before retiring for the night.

Tom had no more than dozed off when the dreams began again; the same dream, repeated over and over throughout the night. He awoke in a cold sweat at three a.m. realizing that he had not found the room of his previous dreams. In this new round of dreams he had walked right past the hidden panels in the lower hallway and had proceeded into the kitchen before finding himself, once again, in the old antique laden room, lit up with kerosene lamps and a gas chandelier. The lady sitting in the room smiled at him again as she noticed his entry into her presence.