

Am I Crazy

“Honey, who was on the phone?”

“Louise, she invited us to dinner. I accepted.”

Jack and Louise were good people. The kind of folks you want as neighbors. They were always there for their friends and never asked anything in return. However, I didn't like eating dinner at their house. Louise was a great cook and it showed—she carried an extra eighty pounds on her five-foot, two-inch frame.

I liked her cooking. The problem for me, she insisted everyone have seconds. She appeared dejected whenever I declined. So, as to not hurt her feelings, I always ate more than I wanted and definitely more than I should have. By taking small first portions, I was able to take even less when I selected second portions and not feel uncomfortable at the end of the meal, although I always made a big deal about being stuffed. Even after eating small portions I'd still diet for two or three days after every meal we ate at her house.

Unlike me, Sandy, my lovely wife, never refused second and third helpings, especially desserts. She didn't appear to be aware that her dress size had quadrupled since we married—to be kind, I'll say she pushed the scales several pounds past *pleasingly plump*. Everyone knew I didn't eat sweets; by using high blood sugar as an excuse, I was able to refuse the desserts Louise so proudly served—such as tortes on puff paste, Crème brûlée, and soufflés with crème fraîche. I would sip café noir while discussing things of little or no importance and watch the others consume five or six thousand calories they didn't need. I couldn't figure out how Jack kept so trim. He stood an even six feet and weighed 170 pounds—two inches taller than me, but only ten pounds heavier.

Sandy and Louise, carrying bowls with generous servings of apple and cherry torte covered with Chantilly Crème, and Riesling glasses containing what remained of the bottle of trockenbeerenauslese they'd savored with dessert while at the table, retired to the media room to discuss children and grandkids while watching *Secret Garden* or some other old movie with a love-story ending.

Jack and I cloistered in the library with snifters of Remy Martin X.O. Excellence and Arturo Fuente Opus X cigars to discuss his latest hypothesis on space aliens making regular visits to earth. The more we argued his theories, the further into fantasy his suppositions became. Lately, he'd been stuck on the postulation that extraterrestrials walked amongst us without leaving a clue they had visited. Jack appeared rational when he presented premises supporting his presupposition, but I was beginning to question his state of mind.

We'd been at it a couple of hours when I asked.

"Jack, if we are visited by beings from another world, why don't we see or hear them?"

"These celestial travelers register on our sensors, i.e. eyes, ears, and so on, but they have the ability to block the collected data from being processed—our brains don't receive the information, so we don't know they exist."

"Okay, for the sake of furthering the discussion, I'll concede your point, they have the ability to block what we see and hear from our minds, but if they steal from us, as you unabashedly proclaim, why don't we miss what they take?"

"For the same reason we don't see or hear them. They erase all traces of their activities from our brain. As far as we know, we were never in possession of the things they took. If all records of the things taken from us have been removed from our minds, then, as far as we are concerned, these items never existed.

"So, one might be in the room with us drinking your brandy and smoking your cigars?"

"Exactly. However, I wish to make clear, I don't discuss my theory with anyone other than you."

Jack had never gone this far during our discussions of his suppositions before; perhaps he had been concerned I would laugh at him.

He refreshed our snifters with a dram of \$300 Remy Martin, returned to his plush Paloma leather chair, leaned back, propped his feet on the ottoman, took a long breath through his seventy-five dollar Arturo Fuente Opus X Robusto Colorado, and exhaled the smoke slowly. He was obviously hesitant to make his next statement or perhaps ask another question. A few more seconds passed before he took in another deep breath,

let it out slowly, and then asked, “Dan, have you noticed the general population is becoming more and more corpulent?”

“Yeah, every day and I don’t have to leave home to be reminded, but what does that have to do with space aliens?”

“You’re familiar with feedlots, right?”

“Sure, cattle are fattened in feedlots before they’re shipped to slaughter houses.”

“Precisely. So, what if extraterrestrials use earth as a feedlot?”

“Jack, I think your brandy must be of a higher proof than I realized.”

He took another deep breath, let it out and then began making his case.

“I’m serious, hear me out and consider what I have to say before you start laughing, okay?”

“Hey, I’m susceptible to wild theories—go for it.”

“Alright then, I have given this considerable thought, and I believe extraterrestrials fatten earthlings and return on a regular schedule and harvest everyone who reached whatever weight specifications they have set for us.”

“Okay, let’s say I buy into your theory, where do these space aliens live? How do they get to earth?”

“I don’t know. But look at it this way. What do we really know about space travel? A century ago, did anyone seriously believe someone from earth would walk on the moon?”

“I’m sure some did. I suspect when Galileo looked to the heavens he dreamed of the day we humans would fly to the moon. I can’t speak for kids a hundred years ago, but I was influenced by something I read way back when, ‘*Anything the mind can conceive and reasonably believe can be achieved.*’ So yes, I figured *Flash Gordon* would make it someday.”

“Dan, you’re making my case for me. If we humans can make ‘. . . *one giant leap for mankind.*’ by walking on the moon, then on what basis can we suppose other civilizations on other worlds in other solar systems or perhaps even other galaxies aren’t capable of space travel? Why should we believe these civilizations haven’t developed space travel far beyond anything we can conceive?”

“I understand where you’re coming from, but how do they force people to overindulge and become obese without first having programmed them?”

“That could be part of how they do it, but I think it’s much simpler, however programming our minds could be used in conjunction with my theory.”

“What might that be?”

“What if they have genetically modified our food to keep us craving high-caloric diets? Would that not produce the same result as having cattle continuously eating while standing around in a feedlot all day?”

“I suppose it would. So what are you saying?”

“Let’s take it to another level?”

“Okay, you’re the man, take me there.”

“What if space aliens own fast-food chains, as well as all-you-can-eat buffets and keep the prices low to encourage earthlings to overeat? Wouldn’t that serve as a feedlot?”

“Oh, come on Jack. According to your theory, they prevent our brain from allowing us to realize they exist. So how could they own a restaurant without exposing their hand?”

“If they have the ability to block their existence, couldn’t they allow us to see and interact with them if they chose to?”

“I guess so. But that would mean they look just like us.”

“Not necessarily. If they can prevent us from seeing or hearing them when they want and on the other hand interact with us whenever they so choose, couldn’t they present themselves as human or for that matter, in any form they want us to see?”

“You have a point. I’ll give it some thought. I’m sure I’ll have more questions for you when we continue discussing your feedlot theory at our next get-together.”

“Does that mean you find my theory credible?”

“Jack, having lived for three-quarters of a century, I’ve come to believe nearly anything is possible. I can’t say I find it plausible, but your argument is persuasive. Have you encountered anything tangible that has led you to believe this feedlot speculation of yours to be true?”

“No, only images flashing on the backside of my eyelids. When it first happened I was reminded of the old axiom, ‘*Your life flashes before your eyes when you are dying.*’ However, I wasn’t dying and the images I saw had nothing to do with my life.”

“What images?”

“Promise you won’t laugh?”

“I won’t laugh—I promise.”

“Okay, I’m going to hold you to your promise.”

He hesitated a moment or two and then continued.

“I first noticed the images when I closed my eyes, while on my way home sitting in my car waiting on a traffic light. I’d spent most of the afternoon at my desk working on a Microsoft Office Power Point document I would submit to the board outlining and amplifying changes I had proposed at the last meeting. My eyes were tired, so, I leaned back, intending to rest them for a few seconds—I figured someone would lean on their horn when the light turned green. Just before I closed my eyes a rotund couple stepped off the curb and began waddling across the intersection. When I closed my eyes I was still looking at the scene that had been in front of me before I closed them, with the fat people about a quarter of the way across the intersection.

While contemplating this weirdness, the two obese people disappeared from the picture on the back of my eyelids. Startled I opened my eyes. Nothing had changed in the intersection other than the two portly people had vanished. I closed my eyes again. Everything went dark, just as you would expect.”

“Jack, I think you need to layoff off the brandy.”

“I knew you would laugh.”

“I’m not laughing, but I do think you’ve been working too hard.”

”Could be: for the last six months I’ve put a lot of time into revamping my company, trying to keep it in the black without having to let any of my employees go. These are stressful times, but the pictures I glimpse when closing my eyes started long before all these new federal regulations put my company in jeopardy. Sometimes I think I’m going crazy, but I’m not. I’ve never done dope—I’m not hallucinating. I drink only with my friends, never alone—you’re my only friend. But lately, I’ve been questioning my sanity. Dan, do you think I’m crazy?”

I figured I’d better change the subject and lift Jack out of his funk. So I took us back to our childhood.

“Not any crazier than when you talked me into sneaking up to Betty Sue’s bedroom window to watch her undress and go to bed.”

Jack smiled; we both smiled. “Yeah, those were exciting times, but she wasn’t much to look at back then, huh?”

“No, not at ten years old, but a few years later I equated looking at her with a glimpse into heaven.”

“For sure, but by then we weren’t standing outside looking in. She’d open the window so we could crawl inside. I sometimes wish I’d married her; don’t know why I didn’t.”

“I’ve often had the same thoughts; I still think of her and often dream about her. I remember the best day best day of my life as though it was yesterday. The day the three of us were old enough to move into an apartment. We became the original *Three’s Company* long before a TV program with that same name became popular.”

“Dan, have you ever wondered what happened to her?”

“Oh yeah, even considered trying to find her, but figured she had a life and didn’t need me to mess it up for her.”

“Yeah me too, even tried to locate her once.”

I had him thinking about the carefree days of our youth, so hopefully he’d go to bed and dream about our fun times with Betty Sue and not have nightmares about his feedlot theory.

I breathed in the vapors trying to escape the snifter as I let the last of the brandy slide onto my palette—it lay there like velvet until I let it trickle past my gullet. I stuck the half-smoked Robosto Colorado in my mouth, and stood.

“Jack, as always, I’ve enjoyed spending the evening with you—drinking your brandy, smoking your cigars, discussing your wild theories, and reliving our past, but I have an early appointment tomorrow and need to be rested when I meet with my client.”

“I enjoy our get-togethers as well. I too have an early morning; I need to prepare for tomorrow’s board meeting. I’ll walk you to the door.”

As we passed the media room, I noticed his television was on.

“Jack, I don’t remember your TV being on when I arrived, are you hiding a woman in there?”

“I wish.” He laughed and then continued.

“I was watching the pundits trying to guess what the market will do if the feds raise overnight interest rates. Guess I forgot to turn it off.”

“Yeah, I have the same problem. It seems I’m becoming more forgetful with every passing day. Be-that-as-it-may, I don’t find it unusual that a couple of old bachelors like you and me would forget things every-now-and-then.”