

Collider Passing

It wasn't a very nice thought, but sitting here, listening to the other kids talk about their previous night Claire couldn't help thinking it again. Lately it was a thought that had drifted in and out of her mind often.

She was actually... kind of angry with her parents. It's not like they were starving, it wasn't like she was one of those poor orphan children in one of those old black and white movies. She knew there were many other people in the world that had it much worse than she did. Her family had a small house, she had her own room, and she knew that elsewhere there were people, other teenagers, who probably didn't even have that.

But, when she was sitting in class, or at lunch break, and the other girls were bragging about where they went in their cars, or what they bought shopping, or the fun they had the night before, it had a grating effect on her.

And that effect brought forth these feelings of resentment. Claire sat there, twisting her bangs in her fingers, listening to the others, going on and on about some dance club they had got into downtown. And the thought kept creeping in, that she was mad, she was mad that she never got a car, mad that she didn't even get to learn how to drive. She was mad about always having to wait until the end of the season so her mother could get her clothes on sale, and she didn't like that the one thing she always had, that no one else did, was a feeling of being left out.

“Why do you always walk down the middle of the street?” Paula asked.

Claire continued walking up the suburban street contemplating her answer. She felt like every house they passed looked pretty much the same. Each had four windows in the front, a driveway, and some type of SUV in the driveway. Every house had a well-groomed lawn, and in the distance she could hear one of those lawns being watered by a sprinkler.

“I'm tired of the sidewalk. We've walked up and down this same sidewalk for three years now. Now that we're almost seniors I'm tired of it.”

Claire could tell Paula didn't exactly understand her answer.

“Don't you get tired of it? I have them memorized by now. There's a chunk missing, three houses up, in front of that guy's driveway, it looks like a triangle...”

Paula and Claire kept walking. As they got near to the house Paula walked over to look, and sure enough, the triangular crack was there.

“It could be worse, we could be freshman all over again.” Paula said.

“Yeah, you have me there. Can you imagine?”

The two girls giggled in horror of the idea. Every so often a car would drive up behind them and HONK not knowing why exactly the two girls were walking in the middle of the street.

Giggling once again, Paula grabbed onto Claire's book bag dragging her to the side of the street near some parked cars.

“Oh my god, I thought they were going to run us over...”

“Out here in the *burbs*? They had enough room to go around us, besides I'm sure

they weren't in that big a hurry."

Claire stabbed at her asparagus with her fork. She sat at the small table in the kitchen poking at her dinner while her mom had dinner in the front room with the television. As the sounds of some terrible sitcom drifted in from the other room Claire contemplated the coming weekend.

"Mom? Do you think you or dad could drop me and Paula off somewhere downtown on Friday?"

"Downtown? What in heavens kind of business would you have downtown?" her mother replied. Claire thought to herself, "Must have caught her during a commercial break..."

"I want to go to a dance club, everyone from school goes down there on Friday nights."

"I don't think so dear. It doesn't seem safe downtown. Besides, your father is so tired from driving when he gets home from work, the last thing he'll want to do is get right back in the car and drive back downtown."

"Paula and I could take a bus?"

"No."

Claire knew that one wouldn't work.

These were the best years of her life? If that was the case she just couldn't stand to think what comes after high school. Senior year would suck. College would suck. Working would suck. Everything just seemed so melancholy. Claire desperately needed some kind of escape. And then it came.

RING! It was the digital chirp of Claire's cell phone. Her father had it got it for her in some kind of family plan. Looking down at the screen she saw it was Paula. Not that she needed to look down, if her phone was ringing it was either Paula or Sabine. Her two best friends... Her only two friends.

"Hello?" she said falsely-cheerfully into the phone. An excited Paula was at the other end.

"Hey, what's going on?"

"Just homework. Working on history."

"Will your parents mind if Sabine and I stop by? We want to show you something crazy she found."

"I just need to finish up first. Are you two walking from her house or yours?"

"Mine."

"Yeah, I'll be finished, good. Come on over."

Claire hung up her phone and went back to her homework.

The evening sky was a bluish black. By the warmth in the air Claire could tell

that summer was coming. They were at the end of their school year. Soon she could have many more nights like this. Sitting on the porch, talking with the girls, relaxing.

“So what did you want to show me?” Claire asked them. She couldn’t help noticing they were both acting a little more secretive than usual.

Sabrina smiled. It was one of her trademark features. Along with her bleach blonde hair, she was known as the girl who always had a smile on her face. Claire often teased her, it was to hide that she was up to no good.

“I was going through a box of some of my parents junk in our basement and I found this.”

Sabrina dug through her bag revealing a cassette tape and a paperback book. The cover of the worn paperback read WALKING THE ASTRAL REALM.

“I think my mom bought it at a garage sale, it’s been sitting in the basement ever since.”

Claire took the book from her. She could feel a hint of dust on her fingers as she flipped through the pages. A musty smell--a used-book smell--was at the tip of her nose.

“What is it about?”

Paula cut in, “The best part is the tape!”

Sabrina shot Paula a look for interrupting her, “I thought I was going to tell her?”

“Sorry, keep going.”

“It’s a book and a tape that teach you how to *Astral Project*. If you listen to the tape while you fall asleep, you’re supposed to be able to leave your body...”

Claire crinkled her nose. There was a pause, and then it came out. Laughter.

“Yeah right. You two don’t actually believe this would work?”

Just then they were hit with bright white light. Claire’s father was turning into the driveway in his car.

Sabrina took the book from Claire’s hands and sheepishly stuck it back into her bag. With the CLUNK of the car door shutting Claire’s father was walking up the driveway toward them.

“Evening girls.” He said. His suit was slightly messed from a long day at work, and Paula was almost certain she smelled a hint of bourbon in the air as he passed.

“Hi Mr. Murfield.”

“Hi Claire’s dad!”

“Claire, don’t stay up too late, remember you still have school tomorrow.”

The girl’s silence ceased as he entered the house. With the CLICK of the door shutting behind him Sabrina quickly removed the cassette from her bag again.

“You have to give it a try.”

Claire took the tape from her.

“I guess they couldn’t put it on CD huh? Or get it on an Ipod.”

“It’s older than that!” Sabrina said defensively.

“They probably don’t even make them anymore because it’s such a scam!”

“It’s not.”

“How do you know?”

“Read the book, it’s all scientifically figured out, they’ve done a lot of research.”

“So, people research all kinds of stuff that isn’t real!”

Paula interrupted again, “It’s real! Tell her Sabrina, tell her what happened.”

Sabrina's signature smile faded to a much more serious look.

"I tried it out. The first night nothing happened. I just fell asleep. But then the next night, I listened to the tape again, and I was starting to fall asleep, and then the next thing I knew I was in my next door neighbors kitchen. No one was there except for me. The lights were off, or they were kind of greenish or dull or something, and I looked around, and I realized I was *really* in my neighbor's kitchen. I just got really scared. It was really freaky, so I just kneeled down on the floor and started crying. I remember the tiles were cold, and then I woke back up in my bed."

There was a silence as Claire took all this in. She had known Sabrina since they started high school and she knew Paula almost her whole life. Neither of the girls were really the type to make something like this up. Or try to play tricks on her...

"Maybe you just got carried away, maybe you were dreaming it?"

"No, this was different."

"Well it sounds scary, *you want me to do it?*" Claire asked with a hint of wry.

The girls laughed an uneasy little laugh. Then Paula spoke, "We copied it, so we can all try to do it at the same time. Maybe it won't be so scary if we do it at the same time?"

"We'll all just need to go to bed about the same time." Sabrina added.

Claire sat there on the porch, studying the plastic cassette in her hand. Why not? She thought. She sure can't go anywhere in the *physical world*--not with her mother forbidding anything that might be remotely fun. Maybe now she could at the very least see where all the other kids from school are getting to hang out? Maybe she could get there through other means...

Claire's head rested softly on her pillow. There was no light in the room except for the flicker every so often from a scented candle, which she removed from the bathroom. The book suggested lighting incense or something like this. She thought it strange that the book said only to use this when trying to *project*. That the smell would be something she would teach her mind to associate with the process of projecting. Right now the only thing the odor of the candle reminded her of is trying to cover up when her father would leave something unpleasant in the bathroom behind him.

Sitting next to her bed on the nightstand was an beat-up portable stereo with cassette deck. The only reason they kept it around was to take on camping trips. Usually it was left on a shelf out in the garage. Claire had to be discreet about taking it into the house and her into her bedroom so her parents wouldn't ask questions.

With some nervous delicacy she slid the tape into the player. She pressed play, laying back and looking at the ceiling. After a brief silence accompanied only by the creek of the old cassette player the author or announcer came on.

"Welcome to you. Welcome to the wonderful world of OBE or Out of Body Experience. This book and this audio program will be your guide into the wonderful and

fantastic world of Astral Projection, or as some call it, The Out of Body Experience. If you at any time become frightened, or scared, please discontinue use of this tape as you are not quite ready for walking in the Astral world. But, if you are ready, and confident, and prepared to walk farther into the Astral Realm then please continue to listen.”

So far this didn't sound too bad, Claire thought to herself. It sounded pretty basic, just like the book suggested, nothing to worry about. But will it really work?

“Soon, you will no longer hear my voice. I will still be talking to you, but it will be on a subliminal level. Mood enhancing music, made specifically to help you on your journey will soon start. Relax your mind, calm your breathing, and let go. Let your mind relax, but at the same time, let the music, and the words I will be saying guide your mind, and your consciousness along the path. You may not feel or experience the results at first, but be patient, and most importantly relax. Relaxation is the key to Astral Travel.”

There was a brief silence. Claire lay in her bed listening hard to the tape. She kept telling herself that relaxing was the key. She kept telling herself not to try so hard at listening. Suddenly she thought she heard something. A light sound was coming from somewhere. Not really music, but some kind of sound. Was it coming from the tape? As the sound grew ever so slightly, she could tell that yes, it was coming from the stereo.

Subtly, a strange almost hypnotic music began to play. She laid there in bed feeling more and more drowsy. The music would build, and then fade. Almost like waves coming in from the ocean. It music reminded her of something older than her, her mind started to wander, she wondered about who made the music, did they make it on a synthesizer? Was it recorded in the 70s? The book looked like it was printed in the 70s.

Below her was the oak tree, the one that was planted in her front yard. The tips of her toes and the bottom of her feet dangled just over the top of it, almost being tickled as they brushed across the top leaves. She was floating, a kind of hovering, maybe even flying. Her body was as light as it could ever be, and she felt very alive. Perfect. Elated.

The nighttime breeze blew with her, through her, she was now just a few feet above the tree in her front yard. Instinctively she pulled and fought to rise up. And she did! She rose higher into the nighttime sky. The tree was below her, her house next to it and the black of the late night was above her. She had never felt this good.

Claire looked over the rows of houses in front of her. From up here she could actually see into the distance all the way toward downtown. She could see the twinkle of all the streetlights between her and the skyline on the horizon. She could see the buildings so far off, raising into the night. That's where the other kids from school were probably hanging out right now. But she didn't care. This was better, this felt better, she was really here, she was flying in the air above the oak tree.

Her brown hair shifted with the breeze illuminated only by the moonlight above. Her nightgown fluttering with her every slight move, whether it was up, down, left, or right. She was really there. She was floating. It was real.

Glowing red numbers, 12:32. She awoke. Her bed was all around her. The

clock-radio on the nightstand glowed the numbers 12:32. The tape was no longer playing. She was once again in her bedroom. But it had happened, she was sure of it, just moments ago she was not in her bedroom. Everything seemed so foggy, she was on the edge of sleep and so tired. She was relaxed, but tired. Time to go to sleep.

The classroom always felt so hot this time of year. So suffocating. All that Claire and most likely the other kids in the classroom wanted was to be outside playing around, enjoying the weather.

As the teacher went on and on about some boat trip that Roosevelt and Churchill took together her mind wandered. In and out, she surely appreciated the relationship between the US and Britain during WWII, but right now all that she could think about was the night before.

The leaves and branches felt so real on the bottom of her feet. And the way the night breeze felt on her face--it had worked! She wouldn't have believed it this time yesterday but last night it worked.

"Miss Murfield! Miss Murfield? What is your opinion on the matter?"

Claire snapped out of her daydream.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry I drifted off for a second." She said. The class laughed.

"Well that was most apparent," quipped the teacher, "I don't know what it is with students this time of year..."

The teacher kept going on about the importance of the lecture and Claire paying attention to it, but she couldn't help notice something.

The words *Collidor Passing* were doodled in her notebook. She didn't remember writing that down. Did it have to do with the lecture? Claire wasn't even sure *Collidor* was a word.

"I fell asleep."

"I laid in bed for half an hour and nothing happened, except the music creeped me out so I turned it off."

The girls were gathered at their normal spot at the lunch tables.

"What about you Claire? Did it work?" asked Sabine.

Claire looked up from her pile of notebooks and her veggie-burrito, "You know, I'm not positive, but I think it kind of worked."

The other two girls looked both impressed and surprised.

"Really? What happened? Where did you go?"

"It wasn't really like I went anywhere, it just felt like I was flying, out in front of my house."

"Wow."

"Oh my God... That is so cool."

Claire suddenly found herself feeling a little more comfortable about talking about it. "Yeah, it was pretty cool."

"Yeah, well, we'll all have to try again tonight."

The smell of the candle was in the back of Claire's sinuses. The strange music from the cassette was playing softly through the room. The posters and shelves on her wall flickered and moved slightly with the flicker of the candle. Maybe she was too excited from the night before? Why wasn't it working? She was probably thinking too hard. And the comforter from her bed was too much, it was too much weight, she felt too warm. Aggravated, she pushed it down. Now she was only covered by her sheets.

This was better, she could feel the nighttime breeze blow in from the window, it reminded of her of the way she felt up in the air the night before.

This calmed her. The music continued, sometimes almost dropping out completely. The shadows of the shelves on her wall danced. With each flicker of the candlelight the details of it all changed ever so slightly.

She was moving fast. And this time she was high above the ground. Below her was a two-lane highway. She recognized it. It was the way to the college town nearby where most of the kids from her high school ended up going to college.

Her hair rippled as she soared through the air. If the night before she was floating, tonight she was flying. Her body felt so light within, like her adrenaline was flowing through every bit of her. She felt so incredible again.

Below she could see a car driving across the distance of the highway. It's headlights illuminating the path in front of it. A single speck of light in the otherwise dark open plains.

She wanted to see it, to be closer. Willing her body downward, she was in control now. She came up behind the car, it was moving at least 65 miles per hour. That meant she was moving at least 65 miles per hour. She knew if she wanted to move faster she could. She felt as if she could do whatever she wanted. This was living.

She reached the car, she saw some young teenagers inside. They were cramped together and the stereo was playing. They were talking with each other, holding cans of soda.

And then she was awake and alone in her bedroom, her body sweating slightly. Claire looked around her room. She knew she had made it back. She wanted to keep flying, but tonight was enough. She could always try again tomorrow.

Collidor Passing. Collidor Passing. What did it mean? And where did she hear it before? The words kept going through Claire's mind like the lyrics of a song she couldn't get out of her head. She even asked Paula during their free period if they had heard it before in a song or something.

"No, I've never heard that. It doesn't even make sense." Paula said.

"Yeah, who knows where I heard it." Claire said.

But Claire kept thinking about it, maybe it was a term the narrator was using in the subliminal part of the cassette tape? That made sense. It would explain why she kept

thinking of those words. But what did they mean, and why did it keep entering her thoughts?

Paula continued looking through tabloid magazines while Claire searched through the paperback looking for the term *Collidor Passing*. She searched the glossary, and the terms and definitions. She couldn't find anything remotely close to those words.

"Do you want to rent movies tonight?" Paula asked between gazing at pages in her *Celebweekly*.

"No, not really." Claire barely responded, her nose still in the book.

"Is that book really working for you? I've given up, all that tape does for me is put me to sleep."

"It kind of works, I'm just curious what the book has to say."

Claire looked up from the book for a moment. She didn't know why she had just lied to Paula. In fact the book and tape didn't *just kind of work*, they worked very well. And she wasn't slightly interested in what the book had to say, she was almost obsessed with unlocking more of its secrets. She wanted to fly again so badly but for longer, and in more control.

"Sabrine's dad said he would give us a ride downtown tomorrow night, if we want to go to the dance club."

"Really?" Claire asked. Not really caring that much about it.

"Yeah."

"Cool."

As she lit the candle on her nightstand Claire thought about a few moments before when her parents asked why she was going to bed so early.

"I'm just tired from studying for finals." She said. Why did she lie again? She didn't have to. She could have waited to go to sleep, but she wanted to try again so badly. She felt she was so close to mastering this newfound ability.

Paula and Sabrine were most likely at Paula's house this very moment. They were probably popping popcorn and getting ready to watch a scary or a cheesy movie. Claire felt kind of strange about blowing them off. But she was eager to fly again, to separate from her boring life, and to be out there somewhere free.

Claire sat down on her bed, removed her robe and then she saw it. *Collidor Passing*. Upon seeing it she felt as if her hear skipped a beat. For this time, it was written in lipstick, her lipstick, on her arm. And most shockingly of all, it looked as if she wrote it.

How could she have done that? Was it when she was washing her face in the bathroom? And why wouldn't she remember having done it?

Claire hurried back into the bathroom at the end of the hallway. She washed and scrubbed the words from her arm. Looking down she saw her make-up bag, and the tube of lipstick sitting on the basin. There was little doubt in her mind now that she had done it.

As she crept back toward her bedroom she could see the blue dancing light come from the television in her parents room into the hallway.

“Good night, dear.” her mother said.

“Good night mom.”

Claire went back into her room. She couldn't understand the words and why they kept coming up, why she kept bringing them up...

She sat in bed for what seemed like a very long time. No tape, no music, no attempts at projecting. She just sat there, frustrated and worried.

After a while she heard the television down the hall turn off, and she knew she was the only one awake in the house. She continued laying there, thinking about the car she had seen on the road the night before. She thought about the oak tree, and how magnificent downtown looked from where she was a few nights before.

She would try again. Maybe the answer she was looking for was somewhere in that astral state? She had to try again. She was on the verge of something, she could feel it, it was if her body was telling her that.

It took quite some time for Claire to settle down and for her body and mind to become relaxed enough to attempt projecting. She wasn't sure how much time had passed because she had covered her clock radio with a t-shirt, not wanting the illuminated numbers awaking her from the dream state again.

Claire pressed play on the cassette player. Soon her ears were filled with the familiar blur of the music and sounds. Her breathing was becoming more and more soft and regulated. She would be on her way soon. She was sure of it. She just had to focus on her breathing. Focus on being calm.

She felt her chest rise, then fall, rise, then fall. She could feel air pass through her nose and into her chest; she would let air pass out of her mouth. The smell of the candle, it seemed more and more strong. The shadows on the walls flickered.

The skyscrapers of downtown were passing slowly below her. There were many cars, lights and people on the streets between, but from up here, it seemed so silent and peaceful.

She was flying again. The air seemed much more chilly than the nights before, it bit at her face and eyes as she soared through the dark sky.

Where should she go? What should she do? She was far more in control now than she had felt before. Where she went was her choice. Claire willed herself downward, like the night before, only with more speed and skill.

She passed between buildings, she flew by streetlights, ahead of her was a cafe. She stopped there, just feet above the ground. There were a few sidewalk tables, all empty, except one.

Sitting at the table was a couple. They drank from a bottle of wine, and a candle flickered on their table. Claire wanted to see them better, she thought about flying closer--and then, was closer. No flight, no movement, it was as in a dream. She thought of where she wanted to be and she was there.

The couple talked, laughed, the man fed the woman a piece of bread from her plate. Claire was moved. She hovered there watching. And then she noticed something. The flicker of the candle. It reminded her of the candle in her room. Why couldn't she smell the scent from it anymore?

Something was wrong.

She wanted to go home. She wanted to see and smell the candle in her room. She couldn't. She wanted to be there in her room. She thought of being in the room, and was not. She was still here, invisible on some street downtown.

Panicked Claire willed herself into the air. She had to fight with every bit of herself to keep rising into the air. Every now and then she would drop to the ground, struggling for momentum. She landed in a park, near a highway, on a rooftop, near her school, and finally near her home.

Claire hovered through the air reaching the oak tree in her front yard. In front of her was her bedroom window. She passed through it. She was in her room, still floating, and in front of her, there it was...

Her body. It was so strange for her to be looking at herself. Claire hovered closer. She watched in front of her as her own chest moved up and down breathing. Calm, asleep.

Why couldn't she get back in? Why couldn't she get back into her body? Claire hovered closer. She studied her face, the point of her nose, and the paleness of her skin.

And then her eyes opened and were looking back at her. It was one of the most disturbing things Claire had ever witnessed. For she knew, she had not opened those eyes.

The eyes looked back at her for a second. And then her face moved. Her mouth twisted into a smile. It was unlike any smile Claire had ever seen on herself. She had never smiled like that. Why couldn't she just get back into her body?

And then Claire saw her lips move, and speak back at her.

"I am *Collidor*, I was passing near. I take this body for it is vacant."

Claire screamed back at her body and at that face, but nothing came out. She continued to sob and scream at the intruder but no sound came from her.

Her face looked back, the grin grew. The joy on the face was unreal. It wasn't hers.

"I am *Collidor*, I shall use this."

Collidor Passing... the words that had haunted her the past few days. Frightened, Claire was starting to understand. She understood why she had written those words in class, she knew why they kept going through her head, why she had written them in lipstick on her arm. Her body was trying to warn her. Her body was trying to tell her that while she was out, while she was out in the world flying, something else was trying to get in.

And it did.

The body in front of her rose. It seemed as if it was looking around the room for the first time. The body... Claire's body. It was still hers, she wanted it back, she wanted to go with the girls to the dance club the following night, she wanted to go through senior year, and go to college, and get a crappy job. All those things now seemed so far away.

What could she do? The body in front of her rose to its feet. Eerily Claire watched herself go to the door and walk down the hall. Where was it going? Where was she going? What was it doing with her body.

Claire willed herself downstairs, like earlier there was no flying, she just arrived where she thought, where her own body was already digging through the kitchen

drawers.

What was this *thing* doing? And then with sheer terror Claire knew what it was searching for across the room. Then with a small reflection of light she could see it in her own hand. A large kitchen knife.

Claire screamed and pleaded with the thing, with *Collidor*, whatever it was. But no words came from her mouth. She felt as if real tears streamed down her face. She screamed and screamed and nothing came out.

Claire's body walked back up the stairs and toward her parent's bedroom door. The knife still held in its hand. Claire tried in her mind to plead with the being. She begged for it to let her body go. She screamed for it to spare them. To think days ago she was angry with them for such trivial things, to think she would never see them again, never eat dinner with them, never say goodnight to them again.

And then she saw her very own hand on the doorknob opening the door. Claire floated there hopeless in her hallway as her body moved into the dark of her parents bedroom.

What could she do? What could she do...