



Hart came around his daughter and bent over toward Trabue and Albert. It was then that the sleeping giant emerged with a roar to match a rutting bull elephant. With sudden energy akin to a volcano, Albert elevated the entire gathering and propelled all of them toward the yacht's salon door.

For Trabue, the sequence of actions appeared in slow motion. He saw looks of startled surprise on Hart and Jan. He saw glass shards from the salon door glimmer as they flew slowly through the air.

He saw Lawrence Hart's face contort as his back hit and broke the yacht's railing. It was Albert's great bulk that pinned the smaller man against the railing, just prior to its giving way. Trabue heard a sickening crunch. Even the sounds he heard were in slow motion.

The slow motion enabled Trabue to read the warning label on a life jacket hanging near the door. As he flew past, Trabue thought, *Is this for real? Is this how your mind acts just before the end?*

Everything had been altered by Albert's expenditure of energy. The big man's surging, renewed life-force had bent the space-time continuum. It was, *Hello, Mr. Einstein, good-bye boat!*

They all hit the water.

## Chapter 35

In the water Trabue had a new problem: sinking with bound arms. He felt air bubbles pass his face so he kicked his feet to follow them. Just then he felt Jan grab his waist.

*Yeah, the ex-swimmer*, he remembered. She was strong. She wasn't going to give up easily and let him go. She was taking him down.

Trabue was determined not to go gently. He startled her by wrapping his legs tightly around her and making like a sinker. Trabue became a lead weight trying to burden her.

*If you want to go down, we go together! I'll die, but so will you Jan!*

She was startled, but her response bewildered Trabue as she nestled close and tongued his ear. She released a small diabolical laugh with a few escaping bubbles and then she drove them deeper.

*She's the swimmer, she's stronger*, he realized. *She's going to win. She's just toying with me.* In his last moments of life he became more alert than ever.

His brain knew it, but it was his skin that experienced it—the chemical formula for water. Good old H<sub>2</sub>O. He could feel each molecule as his skin separated the river's pollution from each atom of oxygen and hydrogen. He also felt something else. He felt the hand of God. No, it wasn't a hand that touched him! It was a branch—no, several of them!

Together and all at once, a multi-fingered alien hand with a hundred fingers touched him. It touched her too! She giggled at the first touch—a tickle. Then she flinched. Not a tickle! It was a grasp, a grope.



Months before, somewhere upriver a tree had fallen. *Did anyone hear it fall?* was his thought. Sound or no sound then, the fallen tree was now silently introducing itself. More exactly, its limbs and branches—the tree’s fingers—reached out and grasped Jan’s long shimmering beautiful black hair.

She released Trabue to free her hair. Her motion increased the tree’s embrace. She was frightened.

Trabue’s breath could take him no further; he was spent. From above he sensed, then saw, a light.

*Is this the tunnel they talk about?* he wondered. *But, it moves. Oh, it’s a spot light. Maybe they’ll find me as a bobber.*

He looked at his arm and saw the syringe. It wiggled free, half empty, to find its buoyancy point, remaining suspended below the surface—just like the sunken tree.

As Trabue’s life faded, the light from above enabled him to have a final vision. The syringe hanging in the water was very still, in contrast to Jan’s frantic motions to free her hair from the tree’s fingers. She released a huge column of air bubbles, stopped moving, and drifted out of sight. The scene was haughtingly beautiful.