

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# The Kennedy Conspiracy

Michael White

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## About the Book

### **1963**

The 22nd of November was a day that changed the world.

President John F Kennedy was assassinated on home soil, triggering numerous investigations and conspiracy theories about who was behind the shooting. But could the truth still be out there?

### **2012**

Mark Bretton, a British journalist living in New York, is asked to write a piece on Professor Abigail Marchant, recently denounced by the American Psychology Association for experiments in reincarnation. Sceptical about his assignment, Mark has no idea that digging into Abigail's work will lead him to the shocking truth about who killed JFK.

That secret has been buried for nearly fifty years and there are those who would kill to keep it from ever coming to light  
...

Fast-paced and action-packed, *The Kennedy Conspiracy* brilliantly weaves the present day with the past to deliver a pacy and unforgettable thriller.

## About the Author

A former Thompson Twin, Michael White is now a globally best-selling author of thirty-six books. He has the unique distinction of being the only person in the world who has appeared in three different Top Ten charts: As a novelist, as a non-fiction writer and as a pop star.

He has sold over two million books in forty languages, including *Equinox*, *The Medici Secret*, *The Borgia Ring* and *The Art of Murder*. He has also written the E-Force series under the pseudonym "Sam Fisher".

Michael has recently co-authored a novel with the world's best-selling author James Patterson. Entitled *Private Oz*, it is due for publication globally in 2013.

For more information please visit: [michaelwhite.com.au](http://michaelwhite.com.au) or <https://www.facebook.com/michaelwhitewrites>

ALSO BY MICHAEL WHITE

Fiction

*Equinox*  
*The Medici Secret*  
*The Borgia Ring*  
*The Art of Murder*  
*State of Emergency* (as "Sam Fisher")  
*Aftershock* (as "Sam Fisher")  
*Nano* (as "Sam Fisher")

Non-fiction

*Stephen Hawking—A Life in Science* (with John Gribbin)  
*Einstein—A Life in Science* (with John Gribbin)  
*Darwin—A Life in Science* (with John Gribbin)  
*Asimov: The Unauthorised Life*  
*Breakthrough: The Race to Find the Breast Cancer Gene*  
(with Kevin Davies)  
*The Science of the X-Files*  
*Life Out There*  
*Super Science*  
*Weird Science*  
*Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer*  
*Leonardo: The First Scientist*  
*Machiavelli: A Man Misunderstood*  
*The Pope and the Heretic*  
*Thompson Twin: An 80s Memoir*  
*A Chronicle of the 21st Century* (with Gentry Lee)  
*Rivals*  
*The Fruits of War*  
*Galileo: Antichrist*  
*Tolkien: A Biography*  
*C.S Lewis: The Boy who Created Narnia*

*A Teaspoon and an Open Mind: The Science of  
Doctor Who  
Coffee with Isaac Newton*

Young Adults non-fiction

*Alien Life Forms  
Mind and Matter  
Mozart  
Galileo  
John Lennon  
Isaac Newton*



# The Kennedy Conspiracy

Michael White



arrow books

Always for you . . . Lisa, India, George,  
Noah and Finn.

*“He saw all these forms and faces in a thousand relationships become newly born. Each one was mortal, a passionate, painful example of all that is transitory. Yet none of them died, they only changed, were always reborn, continually had a new face: only time stood between one face and another.”*

*Herman Hesse, Siddhartha*

# **PART 1**

You never know who you are going to meet.

## Prologue

IT COMES IN alternating snatches of super-reality and vagueness, just as most recurring dreams do. Sharp edges jump out, light splits as if through a prism. And, beneath that, an uncomfortable, unsettling feeling, a disjointedness, a nagging anxiety, as though you know things aren't quite right but you can't put a finger on the root of the problem.

There is a line of cars, big chunky old-fashioned automobiles with huge Cold War tail fins and brash headlights. There are two cars in front of us. They look alike, one dark blue, the other black. I'm in the offside rear seat of a Chevrolet with the roof down. I can feel the leather with my fingertips. A slight breeze rustles my hair. On the wind, I smell pizza. The car has a large red sweeping dashboard and one of those huge 1960s steering wheels, white plastic with an inner chrome rim that doubles as a horn. I'm aware of someone sitting beside me, a man. I look down at myself and see that I'm wearing a somber black suit, narrow lapels, middle button done up, white shirt, green tie. I notice my hands, long slender fingers, in my lap. At my feet is a worn brown leather briefcase.

I turn to the person beside me but he has vanished. In his place on the seat lies a newborn baby. She starts to cry and rolls around on the leather as the car accelerates, then slows. We're only just crawling along now. I can see the speedometer reading under ten miles per hour. The driver is wearing a dark suit, spectacles. His hair is graying, greased back.

There is a line of people by the side of the road. They are clutching flags and waving. As we pass, a well-upholstered woman in a tight flowery dress peers into the car, realises

that I'm no one famous and pulls back, disappointed. The celebs are in the lead cars. I'm not sure how I know that, but I do.

I look round across the vehicle's sprawling trunk and count five more cars in a curve that sweeps from a yard behind me, left, between two brown brick buildings. Twisting back, I notice the outriders, half a dozen police bikes, big Harleys, cops wearing aviator sunglasses. Then I notice the bright sunlight, the clear blue sky.

The cars keep going, around a corner, a left, then a right. I glimpse street signs but can't make them out. There is a stretch of lawn to our left. Someone is standing there playing a double bass, but the music cannot be heard as the man sways gently, his eyes closed, his fingers caressing the neck of the instrument.

I whirl back to the seat and the baby has gone. There is a pile of newspapers in her place. Then a second bundle of newspapers lands on the back seat, quickly followed by a third. It starts to rain paper, single pages, and whole supplements, reams and reams of paper cascading from the perfect blue sky. I can see more, high up in the air, thousands of growing dots, millions of specks all falling toward us, and I know we'll be crushed under their weight.

I start to panic, pushing away the great pile of paper that has accumulated on the back seat of the car. I try to pull sheets of newsprint away from the face of the driver so that he can see where he's going. Then I slip back again and push myself over the trunk, attempting to retrieve something, but it's just more paper.

I hear a gunshot far off ahead of the car. It's followed by at least two more bangs. And then it's over. I awake.

## Chapter 1

MARK BRETTON OPENED his eyes to a view of the white ceiling of his apartment. His head was splitting and he groaned as he shifted across the bed toward the alarm clock and saw that it was 7.01 a.m.; groaned again as he remembered it was Monday morning. Then the memories of his latest dream came back to him. The same weird dreams . . . again.

The phone rang. "Mark."

"Yeah." It was Saul at the paper.

"Just checking you remembered the 7.45 with the boss."

Mark swore silently and scrunched up his face. "Course I did," he lied. "Your shout with the coffees," he added as nonchalantly as he could. He put down the phone and jumped out of bed.

The apartment was on East 10th Street, a tiny one-bed affair four floors above a second-hand record store that had only just started selling CDs as the world had moved on to iTunes. The two rooms and a kitchenette were scruffy and bohemian: "lived-in", as Mark preferred to call the place. This morning it was more than lived-in. Clothes lay strewn across the back of the overstuffed, seriously distressed chesterfield, beer cans covered the coffee table. Mark's vintage Gibson 335 ES guitar in its hard case lay against the wall close to the bolted and locked front door. The guitar was his most precious possession and even after getting in at two a.m., and much the worse for wear after a gig at Mackey's Blues Club, he had cleaned the sweat from the instrument's neck and laid the case carefully against the wall. Cat, the cat, lay in the narrow doorway to the kitchenette, rolling onto her back as Mark stumbled in to put on the kettle. He could only drink tea first thing, a hangover

from the days when he thought of himself as entirely British. In the twelve years since he had moved to New York he had lost most of his old habits and picked up many new ones, some good, some decidedly bad, but drinking tea as one of the first acts of the day would, he knew, remain with him until the day he died.

As the water heated up, Mark leaned forward with his arms outstretched, gripping the rim of the kitchen counter, and stared at the wall above the slowly evolving steam. A corkboard hung there. It was covered with reminders, unpaid bills, notes, lists and two photographs pinned with colored tacks from Walmart. On the left was the smiling face of Jill, his ex-wife. They had been apart for more than four years now. He had only seen her twice during that time. The first encounter had been two years after their separation when Jill had come over to tell him that she had met someone she had fallen in love with and that she wanted a divorce. The second time was when he had stood across the street from the registry office on the day when she had remarried. He watched her leave the building in Union City. She had not noticed him. It provided an odd form of closure.

The picture on the right showed an ageless, almost hermaphroditic character. He was bald, his face gaunt. His large brown eyes spoke of youth, but his skin was creased around the eyes and at the corners of his lips. He was wearing a bright red woolly sweater, the sleeves hanging over his long bony fingers. Recently, Mark had been looking at this picture more and more; this picture of Patrick, his oldest friend, the one constant in his life now that Jill had gone. If Mark had believed in the concept, he would have called Patrick his soul brother. He was the one person in the world he could feel free with, could say anything to. They had been closer than most brothers and he missed him, but an ocean stretched between them and he hadn't been in the same room as his friend for far too long. And now Patrick was ill again.



The sunlight, some ninety minutes after dawn had filtered through the buildings, banded the street with strips of dazzling orange and deep shade. But it was already hot and sticky, another steamy August day in Manhattan. Mark dashed across the street and dove into the subway. The ride uptown passed in a semi-conscious reverie. He had gone through a phase of reading novels on the subway, but that had been during a brief period when he'd been trying to clean up his act. He would get to bed at a reasonable time, rise refreshed, drink orange juice as well as his tea and sometimes even go for a run, ending up at his local, Life Café. But that kick had lasted no more than two weeks, ruined when his band had been offered three nights a week at Mackey's. The band, The Gondoliers, meant a lot to him. They were three friends, him, James Trent (bass) and Hugh North (drums), who shared a love of the blues. He would never be as good a player as he would wish to be, and sometimes he felt like an imposter, but playing in the band acted as a nice foil to his day job, the one he had somehow managed to hold down for almost a decade—Features Writer for the *New York Courier*.

Saul Maddox handed Mark a coffee outside the door to the editor's office, triple-shot latte, which he knew would be the first of many that day. "You look like shit," Maddox remarked as he rapped on the door.

"Oh, stop the flattery," Mark quipped and led the way in.

Two other Features Writers were there already, Juney Shriever and Alex Coltrain. They started to get up as Mark and Saul Maddox came in.

"Right. Gotta make this quick," the editor, Sam Helmer, a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound ponytailed Texan, said. He was a man loved and hated in about equal measure in the industry and had been at the helm of the *Courier* for over eight years. In spite of the air conditioning he was sweating profusely, his white shirt stained under the arms and in two

lines down his front. "Juney," he said. "You deal with the lead on the Assistant DA in Queens. Sounds juicy. Saul, take the Kremlin story. Needs more meat than your outline suggests, though." Then he turned to Mark. "Got this in last night, Mark. Some psychologist, set up her own research programme here in Manhattan." He glanced at a sheet of paper before handing it over to Mark via Alex. "Professor Abigail Marchant, researching into reincarnation."

Mark looked up from a notebook he had open on his knee, his pencil poised in mid-air. "Oh, for fuck's sake!"

Helmer raised an eyebrow. "You no like?"

"No, Sam, I don't. You had me on some kook only last month, the guy who claimed he could talk to the dead. You know how I feel about that sort of shit." He glanced over to Alex Coltrain. "It's more Alex's bag, isn't it?"

Coltrain shook his head. "Er . . . no, Mark. You're giving me the train crash inquiry, aren't you Sam?" He glanced at the editor.

Helmer nodded. "Mark, listen. She sounds pretty competent."

Mark Bretton eyed his boss skeptically. "Yeah, right. A shrink studying reincarnation. Don't tell me . . . her secretary's a fairy."

"He might well be," Helmer retorted. "Adds color to the story if he is—find out!"

"Sam!"

"Okay, people," the editor said, ignoring Mark's protestations. "I want copy from you, you and you by four," he said nodding in turn to Alex, Saul and Juney. Turning to Mark, he added. "You have until six o'clock. It'll be for the weekend supplement. Right, go." He stood up, his gut wobbling as he pulled on his jacket.

Mark hung back as the other three journalists trooped out. "Sam," he said, "why'd you do that?"

"Do what, Mark?" He saw the anger in Mark's eyes.

"You know I hate all this woo-woo crap."

“Precisely.”

Mark stared at his boss, frowning. “So you want an aggressive piece?”

“I want an *intelligent* piece, Mark. And I believe that skepticism is the best direction to come from if you want intelligent. At least when it comes to this kinda stuff.”

Mark gave him a cynical look.

“Listen, I think this Professor Marchant is an interesting woman. I don’t think she’s a crackpot. And our readers are hungry for unusual new ideas. This is certainly, well . . . different. Plus it’s about people. I want a balanced piece. Hear the woman out. Do some serious digging, okay?”

“You think you can get round me like that?” Mark retorted.

“Don’t need to, Mark. I’m the editor. If I want you to interview a psychic researcher, I expect you to do it.” Then Sam smiled. “Nothing woo-woo about that, buddy.”

## Chapter 2

PROFESSOR MARCHANT'S OFFICE was on West 47th Street close to the corner of 3rd Avenue, a fair distance from the paper's office on 55th. Mark felt like a walk, but after three blocks away from the air conditioning he was beginning to regret it. The whole of Manhattan seemed to shimmer in the summer heat. Some of the visual effect was caused by oil smears on the tarmac and the steam rising from manholes, but there was a very real humidity in the air. He had experienced this almost every summer of the twelve he had spent in the city, but he could never get used to it. It felt as though he had an extra layer between his skin and his clothes, a slippery film that itched.

Out on Sixth Avenue the traffic stood bumper to bumper, a sea of yellow cabs, horns blaring pointlessly. Messengers on bikes dodged between the crawling cars. They must be melting, Mark thought as a Lycra-clad beanpole on a super-lightweight racer shot through a gap between two stationary cabs and almost hit him as he stepped off the curb. "Hey! Moron!" the cyclist hollered and Mark gave him the finger.

The air grated the back of his throat. It was always the same, fumes kept at street level by the fetid Manhattan air. And the catalytic converters made it worse, adding a top note of ammonia. He kept to the shade as best he could, loosened his tie and undid the top button of his shirt. Slinging his damp jacket first over one shoulder, then the other, he finally rested it in the crook of his arm.

His cellphone rang, a blues-guitar riff he had recorded himself and downloaded onto the machine. But it took four rings before Mark heard it above the noise of the traffic. By the time he pushed the "accept" button the caller had rung

off. The screen told him that the number was blocked. He cursed and edged into the doorway of the first shop he could, just to get out of the noise and the heat.

He waited for the phone to ring again. It had been a blocked number, so it could have been about his credit card, or some insurance jerk trying to sell him half-assed protection. But it could also have been Patrick; international calls always came up as “blocked”. Mark leaned against the wall of the store just inside the doorway and brought the plastic of the phone to his forehead. It felt unnaturally warm.

“Can I help you, sir?”

Mark opened his eyes and saw the Indian shop assistant. Behind him stood an array of glass cabinets filled with electronic goods, watches and models of the Statue of Liberty.

Mark apologized and turned back to the sidewalk, feeling suddenly depressed. He hadn't thought about Patrick since leaving the apartment, and the realization shocked him. Was he already burying his friend? Moving on? How ridiculous. He pushed the thought aside and tried to focus on what he was doing. By the time he reached his destination he had prepared his attitude and his questions for the kooky professor. He was a pro, he told himself. He would do the interview, write the damn piece, duty done.

Professor Marchant's rooms were on the twenty-fourth floor of a nondescript building on the south side of the street. Mark checked his watch as he entered the relative cool of the lobby. It was ten-thirty and he felt he could really do with a drink. He paused for a minute to find the bathroom, failed and asked the doorman who pointed to a narrow corridor just beyond the elevators. At the sink he threw cold water over his face, toweled it off, straightened his tie and pulled on his jacket. The sleeves stuck to his arms, scrunching the fabric, making it bunch at the elbows. He removed it again and cradled it in his right arm. Peering

into the mirror, he surveyed his face. It was long and narrow. He had good cheekbones that would usually have made him look a little younger than his thirty-five years. But the benefits from the cheekbones were canceled out by the bags under his eyes, the pallor of his skin and the lines in the skin at his temples. He had striking green eyes and a good haircut. He was sometimes able to convince himself he was aging in an interesting way, that he was clearly a man of substance. But he couldn't manage it this morning. He just felt jaded and actually not very interesting at all.

A slightly overweight young woman with brown hair tied back in an old-fashioned bun met Mark as the elevator opened onto a brightly lit reception area on the twenty-fourth floor. She smiled as he stepped towards her. "Mr. Bretton? I'm Julia Dreen, Professor Marchant's PA. Follow me, please."

Julia led the way along a wide corridor. Mark read the signs on the doors: Matilda Inc., The Brass Screw Company, Lamington's Optical Equipment. The last door on the right carried a brass plaque that read: A. H. Marchant. M.D., Ph.D. The professor's PA took them through an outer office dominated by a wide oak desk. A large window opened onto the sides of two other buildings looming skywards: their concrete lay in shimmering shadow one side, striped massicot on the other.

Julia stopped at a door to the left of her desk and knocked gently. A moment later, a tall athletic woman appeared in the doorway, her hand extended. She was smiling warmly. The PA took Mark's jacket, holding it gingerly by a single finger at the collar.

"Mr. Bretton, welcome," Professor Marchant said. She had a refined voice that fitted precisely what he had learned about her from the preliminary research he had done after this morning's meeting. Professor Marchant was an Ivy Leaguer, old Bostonian money. One of the articles about her had been from the Association of Psychologists website

describing the work that had first gained her recognition—a study of post-traumatic stress disorder in troops returning from Afghanistan. Another had been a piece in *Paranormal Investigations*—what passed for a serious publication in the field of occult subjects. The third had been a mention in *Reader's Digest* which had highlighted Professor Marchant's recent clashes with the scientific establishment over her radical new studies into what the magazine referred to as "parapsychology". And, indeed, she had clashed, very badly—so badly that she had been suspended from the APA, the American Psychological Association, and publicly denounced in the *Journal of American Psychology*.

"Please, come in," she said. "May I offer you coffee? I'm afraid I only have half an hour. Something unexpected has come up and I have to be somewhere by midday."

"Coffee would be great—thanks." Mark looked around the room as Professor Marchant popped out to instruct her PA. The room was large, with cream walls and a high ceiling; the block was old, a deco tower. A large modern desk stood one side of the room, a four-seater sofa the other. A forty-two-inch flat-screen TV dominated the adjacent wall. When Abigail Marchant returned she nodded toward the sofa.

"You're disappointed by how ordinary it is, Mr. Bretton."

"I guess I am."

"Were you expecting some box of tricks with flashing lights and a slightly demented lab assistant?"

Mark grinned. "Reckon I must have been."

"Sorry to be so prosaic. So, I imagine you've done some background research. You probably hold quite definite opinions on my work."

The coffee arrived and Julia Dreen placed the cups on a table in front of the sofa, closing the office door behind her. Abigail Marchant lifted her coffee and took a sip.

"Yes, I have," Mark replied. "You're obviously at odds with the scientific establishment over what you're doing."

Professor Marchant raised an eyebrow. “It is always difficult to divert the course of a driverless juggernaut as it speeds along the freeway, Mr. Bretton.”

He studied her face. It was angular: a fine, shapely nose, large brown eyes. He knew she was thirty-four, but she looked a few years younger. Her skin was pale with barely a visible blemish and she wore very little make-up, just a smear of lipstick. Wavy blond hair fell to her shoulders. She was a striking woman, Mark decided. “And that’s how you view orthodox science, is it?” he replied. “A driverless juggernaut?”

“I never used to. I was a good girl, did all the right things, believed all the respected and respectable ideas. But when a new concept hits you between the eyes and it doesn’t fit the accepted pattern it would be a dereliction of duty simply to turn away from it.”

Mark looked puzzled. “I’m sorry, professor, I’m not really sure what you mean.”

“You have a scientific training, don’t you?”

Mark looked surprised.

“When I knew you were coming to interview me I Googled you—the *Courier’s* website. The only journalist there with a science degree.” Marchant took a sip of coffee.

Mark raised his hands. “I own up—physics, Oriel, Oxford. But it was a long, long time ago.”

“Well, then, you shouldn’t find the reaction of the science community toward my work that strange.”

“Well, no, I don’t. Science and the occult—strange bedfellows.”

She looked away across the room for a moment, staring at the far wall above her desk. There were two rows of framed certificates and diplomas there. “They are today,” she said. “But it wasn’t always the case. Isaac Newton was an occultist. Einstein often considered things in a bipartisan light.”



“Yes, but correct me if I’m wrong . . . they certainly didn’t publicize the fact, did they? We’ve all seen modern careers crumble at the very mention of the paranormal. It’s a path followed by only the very bravest scientist.”

“Or the terminally stupid?” Marchant asked.

“You said it.”

There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment. “Okay, look, maybe we ought to go back a few steps,” Mark said. “I’ve read that until eighteen months ago you were something of a poster girl for your profession. Your work on PTSD was lauded. Then, somewhere along the line, you stirred up a hornets’ nest by advocating research into reincarnation. You were booted out of the APA.”

She lifted a hand. “I was suspended, Mr. Bretton. There’s a difference.”

Mark conceded the point with a nod. “Was the tragedy surrounding Senator Roger Gates’s granddaughter Peggy the final straw?”

Abigail Marchant didn’t answer immediately. She just looked down at her lap and the cup. “You’ve obviously read the report. I was exonerated. And, more importantly to me, I remain close to Senator Gates, whom I consider a great friend.”

“But the APA made the case that your research into reincarnation was, to quote, ‘a contributing factor in Peggy Gates’s mental decay,’” Mark replied.

“They did say that. It’s their prerogative. But they happen to be wrong.”

“Okay, but how come you’re still conducting research?” He waved a hand to indicate the well-appointed room.

“Let’s just say I have some contacts who believe in what I’m doing and have the resources to support my work. But look . . .” She stood up. “You’re here to talk about my latest work, isn’t that right?”

Mark nodded.

“Okay, then. Well, first let’s just correct a few things, shall we? First, I call the phenomenon I’m studying ‘rebirth’, not reincarnation. Second, you seem to have the idea that I came suddenly to this work. But I did not. I was not converted from being a skeptic in some whacko road-to-Damascus moment. I’d been studying what might be called parapsychology for a long time. I’m not taken with much of it. I see nothing in most of the ideas of the occultists. I don’t believe in alien abduction, spooks and ghosts or telepathy, or precognition, or any of that stuff, but I do believe that rebirth is a genuine phenomenon. There, I’ve written your headline.”

Mark gave her a rueful smile. “I’m afraid I’m a horrible skeptic, Professor Marchant. You’ll have to do a lot better than that.”

“Wouldn’t have expected anything else.” Abigail Marchant bent down, plucked a remote from the coffee table and pointed it at the plasma TV. “I’ve got something to show you.”

## Chapter 3

THE SCREEN LIT up to show a young boy sitting in a small room. He looked scared, his eyes wide. He was seated in a hard plastic chair and was facing the camera. A voice-over, female and British-accented, said: "This six-year-old Greek boy is Andreas Mossikious, and he claims that he has lived before. From the age of two he has been telling his mother about his 'other parents' who lived in a big city. What he calls the City of Angels in a country called America."

From out-of-shot an interviewer asked the boy a question in Greek and the voice-over translated. "What do you remember, Andreas?"

"We lived in a big house. My name was Sam. I had two sisters, Suzy and Fiona. Both of them were older than me."

"What happened to you?"

"I died when I fell into a river and drowned. I was nine when I died."

The image changed to footage of Andreas in his tiny house in Greece, playing with a skinny kitten. The voice-over continued: "At first, Andreas's mother Delia thought it was all nonsense, just the fantasies of a toddler. But the odd thing was that Andreas was consistent. He simply built on his tale, embroidering it, filling in the details as he went along. By the age of four, he was describing the inside of his house in Los Angeles, recalling the color of his 'other' mother's hair, the shape and shade of her eyes, the way she had looked down upon his dead wet body as they had dragged him from the river. Andreas's mother was understandably disturbed by this. She told her brother Petros."

A big man with heavy eyelids and ebony eyes and wearing a leather jerkin over a rough white shirt appeared. His mustache twitched almost comically as he spoke. A male translator took up the voice-over. "I was skeptical, of course," he said. "I talked to Andreas for a long time. I tried to catch him out, just to prove he was making it up. But I couldn't. I know it sounds crazy, but I believe my nephew is telling the truth."

The female voice returned over stills of a growing Andreas. "Another two years passed and Andreas continued to talk about his 'other' family. He told his mother and uncle about his 'other' father, John. John had been killed by a car, knocked down outside the house in LA. He hadn't looked right then left, Andreas had explained. Then, just after his sixth birthday, the boy began to suffer anxiety attacks. He would weep, stay up half the night in tears, shaking, saying he missed his 'other' family and he had to see them, that they would be very worried about him."

Abigail Marchant glanced at Mark. He ran his hand over his forehead and was frowning. He caught the professor's eye. She could tell he was finding it a struggle just to keep watching the clip.

The scene changed again to show a film crew arriving at Andreas's home in Greece and being introduced to the boy. Then came footage of Andreas, his mother Delia and uncle Petros boarding a plane, flying to America and looking bewildered as they were driven along Santa Monica Boulevard, rain pelting against the sweeping wipers.

The car pulled up at a run-down house in Jefferson Park. Andreas seemed to be at home there immediately. "It's different to how I remember it," he said in Greek to the camera. The male voice-over translated: "The old phone box on the corner is gone and the cars looked different when I lived here. There used to be a store over there." Andreas pointed to a parking lot.

The dilapidated house resembled what Andreas had described as the home of his “other” family. It was small and ramshackle but at least twice the size of the boy’s tiny home in Greece. It had been left to decay: the windows and front door were now boarded up, graffiti had been splashed across the walls.

The camera held the boy’s expression. He looked stricken for a few seconds and his eyes began to water. The same interviewer, still off-camera, suggested that they should go inside. It was almost as though the bubble had burst and some strange confused realization had hit the kid. Suddenly, the contradiction of it all, the impossibility of what was happening had been made clear, even to a six-year-old.

“This was my room,” he said slowly to the camera. Then, walking along a corridor, he pointed to another tiny room. “This was where Suzy and Fiona slept.” He paced over to the window and pointed out to the street. “That’s where my papa died,” he added, thoughtfully. “Right there. He was hit by a blue car. There was red all around his head.”

The scene changed abruptly to show the producer interviewing a local couple, a very old black man and his wife who had lived across the street for fifty-four years.

“We remember the family,” the old man said. “The Trebaums. Germans or Swiss, I think. Mother, father, two girls and a boy. A sweet kid, the boy, Sammy. It sure was tragic, what happened to ‘em. It musta been ‘65 when the father died.”

“Was ‘66,” the old man’s wife interrupted.

“You sure?”

“Damn sure.”

“Okay, ‘66,” the old man said. “John Trebaum, hit by a car right there.” He pointed a gnarled finger toward the living-room window. “Right outside his house. Then, not two years later, the boy, young Sam, he goes and drowns in the waterway, over there.” He pointed toward the back of the house.

“They moved away after that, poor souls,” the old woman added. “The ma took the girls, Suzy and Fiona, I think they were called. No idea where they went to. I just pray they found some peace.”

Professor Marchant flicked off the DVD and gave Mark a questioning look.

“I’m here to interview you,” he said. “Tell me what you think.”

“I find it impossible to explain, other than that rebirth is a reality.”

“Hardly scientific, Professor Marchant. It struck me as being pure hokum.”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong. I’ve applied Occam’s razor—that’s why I came to my conclusion.”

“You honestly think it is the simplest answer?” Mark scanned her face. “The kid could be making it up.”

“Bit of a coincidence that he was right about the details.”

Mark breathed in, brought his fingers to his lips and shook his head slightly. “He must have known about the family, saw it on the Internet. Maybe the mother made it up and fed him the story.”

“Naturally, I considered those possibilities and others,” the psychologist replied. “There’s one major problem. The Mossikious family in the film live in the tiny village of Kossis on the relatively remote Aegean island of Naxos. No phones, let alone Internet. More importantly, until the journalists arrived and took them to LA, Andreas, his mother and his uncle had never left the village.”

Mark looked stunned for a second. “Okay, so someone went to the village years ago and told the story to the kid.”

“Possible, I suppose, but unlikely. Both Delia and Petros have sworn on the Bible—and they are extremely religious people—that, as far as they know, no one from outside spoke to the boy.”

“They could be lying.”