

# The Cassandra Connection

by E.S. Strout

January 3, 2008. *Psychologists at Harvard University have developed a new method to study extrasensory perception (ESP) that can resolve the century old debate over its existence. This study, they say, provides the strongest evidence yet against the existence of ESP.* Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences

1.

It took only a single astrocyte in the left frontal lobe of 14 year-old Claire Rowland's brain. For some unknown reason, that cell failed to achieve normal mitosis. Thus it initiated an aberrant lineage of malignant cells. The tumor cells continued to proliferate unopposed until they produced a mass of sufficient size to compress and distort adjacent structures.

Claire sustained a grand mal epileptic seizure during a spring soccer match at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

2.

NIH Hatfield Clinical Center, Bethesda, Maryland. Monday, May 10, 2010. 0730 hours.

"Cranial mass, Dr. Savoy," the green clad O.R. tech said. He clinked a kidney-shaped metal basin down on the Formica counter top of the green-walled frozen section lab next to the surgical suites. It contained a one centimeter soft pinkish-gray mass.

"Dr. Sullivan is awful antsy about this one," Pathologist Peter Savoy said. "Is the patient awake?"

"Yes. Dr. Sullivan asks questions during the procedure."

Savoy nodded. "Of course. Wait."

Dr. Savoy sat back from the microscope after eyeballing the quick stained slide, exhaled a soft sigh. He wrote on the preliminary pathology report slip *-astrocytoma, Grade II*, and handed it to the tech.

3.

Recovery room. 1420 hours.

“How’s she doing, Barry?” Pete Savoy asked.

“Her verbal responses showed no immediate cognitive defects. I took as little surrounding tissue as was feasible.”

“What are her chances with a one centimeter Grade II lesion?” Savoy asked.

“Excellent. She’s young and strong. With radiation and chemo she should do very well. There could be some aftereffects from the surgery, Pete. The anterior cerebral hemispheres are involved with cognitive functions, perception, discernment and understanding. In a word, intelligence. It could be a month or more before we can tell if there have been any major changes.”

“I understand she’s a bright kid,” Savoy said.

Sullivan showed Pete both hands with crossed fingers. “She’s could graduate a year early.”

#### 4.

One week later:

Marian Rowland accompanied her daughter on a short, slow jaunt around the Neurosurgery Unit. “Wow. Your walking is steadier, Claire. That’s improvement from yesterday,” her mother noted.

Petite, brown-eyed Claire gave Mom a wink. “Yeah, pulling this IV stand wears me out, though. Where’s Dad?”

“He was going to come but Homeland Security called. They need him to evaluate some oddball terrorist threat.”

Claire smiled. “Out chasing bad guys again.”

She slid into bed as a nurse handed her a pill in a tiny paper cup, and a glass of water. “Bottoms up, Claire.”

She turned the blue capsule in her fingertips, eyed it thoughtfully. “This is a new one,” Claire said. “Phenytek. A long acting seizure medication like Dilantin.” She swallowed the capsule, drained the glass and handed it back.

The nurse gave her an odd look. “How did you know what it was, Claire?”

She shrugged. “Hmm. Dr. Sullivan must have told me.”

“I might have said a seizure med, but not a brand name,” Dr.Sullivan said later when asked.

5.

Dr. Sullivan’s office, Monday, May 24. 1030 hours:

Sullivan, a tall man with reddish hair and piercing gray-green eyes, had just completed Claire’s physical exam. He added notes to a page on her chart with a ballpoint pen, then nodded. “Excellent progress, Claire,” he said.

“No loss of motor function and reflexes are normal. The surgery scar has healed nicely. Any problems you’ve noticed?”

She gave him a contrived pout, brushed a hand across her scalp. “Yeah, Dr. Sullivan. I’m not too fond of this brush cut.”

He chuckled. “You’re lucky you’re on Temovar. With some of the other chemo agents you would be wearing a wig.”

“Hmpf. At least I’d get to choose a color better than my usual mousy brown.”

The nurse handed Dr. Sullivan pages of lab results. He flipped through them, scanning each in order. “Your blood work looks fine, Claire. No bone marrow depression.”

Claire blinked, stared at an art poster on the wall for several seconds, eyes closed. She said in a low monotone voice, “You’re wishing my platelet count was a bit higher.” Then she brightened. “What the heck are megakaryocytes?”

“Platelet precursors in the bone marrow . . .” Sullivan did a startled double take. “How did you know? You can’t access patient records on your IBook.”

“I don’t know,” she said, a mystified expression creasing her forehead. “Maybe I overheard the lab technicians.”

“Mm-hmm. Guess I’d better have a word with those people. Anyhow you’re good to go, Claire. What’s next for you?”

She made a face. “Clinical Neurology. They’ll try to figure out if I’ve lost fourth grade or piano lessons.”

Sullivan smiled. “You will like Dr. Lafave. You’ll surprise him.” She did.

“I couldn’t remember area codes,” she told Dr. Sullivan later. “But I’m relearning them.”

## 6.

Dr. Sullivan's office. Tuesday, June 1. 1530 hours:

He screened his voice mail, hit the speed dial.

"Mrs. Rowland. Sorry I couldn't get back to you sooner."

Marian held the phone in one hand as she stirred cake mix with the other.

"Dr. Sullivan, I know you said to call if anything unusual arose in Claire's condition. It may be nothing, but . . ."

Sullivan's voice was confident but a twinge of unease crept into his thoughts. "Nothing is unimportant, Mrs. Rowland, especially in cases like Claire's. Is she with you right now?"

"No, she's up in her bedroom on her iPhone with some classmates, catching up on a pile of homework."

"Please tell me what concerns you."

"We were having dinner last night. Claire stopped with a forkful of pasta half way to her mouth. Her eyes were shut tight with the lids quivering. When I asked her what was wrong, she didn't answer. I was ready to dial 911 when she dropped the fork and looked straight at her brother Robert and grinned."

"She told Bobby he was going to get a B-plus on his math test today." Of course Robert thought it was a joke."

"She just smiled and said 'You'll see.'"

"My husband Mike laughed, shook his head and ate another meatball."

"The weird thing is this, Dr. Sullivan. Bobby came home an hour ago with a neat B-plus marked on the exam paper."

There was silence on the line for long seconds. "Could you bring Claire in tomorrow morning, Mrs. Rowland? I'll have a PET scan run. She may have had a small seizure."

## 7.

Nuclear Imaging Center Wednesday, June 2. 1030 hours.

Radiologist and nuclear medicine specialist Kevin Barrow, M.D. arranged a series of

PET scan images of Claire's brain on a digital screen. "Claire is one smart kid, Barry," he told Dr. Sullivan.

"She knew as much about the procedure as some of the technicians."

Sullivan chuckled. "I'm sure she googled for anything she could find last night."

Barrow pointed out the tumor on the old scans, then pulled up the new ones.

"Here's the area of her craniotomy. Left frontal lobe. A bit of scarring, no evidence of recurrent tumor."

Sullivan nodded. "My main concern is petit mal seizure, Kevin. She had suggestive clinical symptoms, but her physical exam was normal."

Dr. Barrow clicked a remote. A new image appeared on the screen. "This is today's. Normal scan. Nothing out of the ordinary.

"What would you see if there was?"

"A post seizure PET scan would show areas of decreased cellular glucose uptake for cells in the seizure area. None here."

"Weird," Sullivan muttered. "Okay. Thanks, Kevin."

## 8.

"I didn't have a seizure, Mom," Claire insisted as they waited in Dr. Sullivan's office.

"You dropped your fork and your eyes were shut tight for a long time, Claire," Marian replied.

"Oh come on, Mom. I didn't bite my tongue or wet my pants."

Marian tucked a dark tress behind an ear, adjusted her glasses. "And your guess of Robert's exam grade?"

Claire assumed a perplexed facial expression and rested her chin in one hand. "I remember dropping the fork and thinking, how clumsy."

*But then I just knew.*

"Claire, you knew how hard Bobby was studying for that exam. Maybe you were just trying to give him a bit of a subconscious push."

She smiled. "I guess it worked."

*But I knew.*

When Dr. Sullivan returned he sat down and turned his desktop computer so Claire and Marian could see the screen. Two clicks brought up the PET scan.

“Mrs. Rowland and Claire, this is from the test this morning. This is the area of the brain where the tumor was. No evidence of post seizure activity. It would show some bright spots if there was. There’s a bit of scar formation, but that’s normal.”

Marian took her daughter’s hand. “That’s good news Claire. Thank you, Dr. Sullivan.”

Claire asked, “Will I still have to take Phenytek?”

Sullivan smiled. “I think we can cut the dosage a little, Claire. See you in four weeks.”

*If it wasn’t a seizure, what the heck was it?*

## 9.

At home, seventeen year-old Robert was looking at Washington Redskins websites on his laptop. There was a soft tap on the door.

“It’s open.”

Claire stuck her nose in. “Can I ask you a favor, Bobby?”

“Sure, Sis. C’mon in.”

She laid a deck of playing cards on his desk. “This is for an ESP test. On me.”

He laughed. “The B-plus thing. I know we didn’t believe you, but I’ll admit that grade was a surprise.”

His sister laid a page of lined notebook paper and a pencil next to the cards.

“Take out twenty-five cards at random, hold them up in front of your face with the backs toward me, one at a time. Give me ten seconds, if I guess correct, mark a plus on the page. If I miss, put a minus sign, okay? Don’t say anything until we’re done with all twenty-five.”

Robert did a fast shuffle, grinned at his sister. “If you get them all, you and me are going to Vegas.”

Claire snickered. “With yours and my allowances combined we couldn’t afford a one-way bus ticket.”

“We’ll cut Dad in on it.”

He showed the first card.

Claire closed her eyes, deep in concentration. “Nine of Spades.”

Robert made a mark.

A half hour later he laid down the last card, made a mark and slid it across.

“One out of twenty-five, Claire.” He put a hand on her arm. His brown eyes were downcast, reflecting empathy. “I’m sorry, Sis.”

She smiled. “Don’t be, Bobby. It must be something else.”

*But what?*

## 10.

Rowland home. Thursday, July 8th 0930 hours.

“Come on, Claire,” Marian called as she idly tossed her Camry’s keys in one hand. “We don’t want to be late for Dr. Sullivan.”

Claire scrambled down the stairs, peering at her watch. “Plenty of time, Mom. I thought of a new route to his office,” she said.

Sigh of exasperation. “So what’s wrong with mine?”

“This is a shortcut. Take a right on Connecticut Avenue, then a left on Jones Bridge Road. Takes us right to the Rockville Pike.”

“Give me one good reason . . .”

“Please, Mom.”

“Are you okay, Claire? Your face looks warm and damp. Do you have a fever?”

She wiped her face with a sleeve. “I’m okay, Mom. If it doesn’t work, we won’t use it again.”

“Did Bobby find this for you?”

“No. I know the neighborhood. Please?”

She tossed the car keys again, caught them backhanded. “Oh, all right. It’s your fault if

we're late."

They were five minutes early.

11.

Dr. Sullivan's office, 1020 hours.

The nurse finished with Claire's vital signs. "Everything looks okay, Claire."

"No fever?" Marian asked.

"All her vitals are normal. Dr. Sullivan will be right in."

Claire smiled. "Good shortcut, huh, Mom."

Dr. Sullivan walked in carrying Claire's chart, took a seat at his desk. He opened the folder and picked up a pen.

"Glad to see you didn't get caught up in traffic."

Marian smiled. "Light to moderate, No problems. Why?"

"There was a big pileup at Wisconsin Avenue and East West Highway."

"Just now?"

"About five minutes ago. Breaking news on WMAL radio."

"How bad?"

"Big rig lost its brakes and plowed into several cars turning onto the Rockville Pike. Some deaths, we heard. A real mess."

"We took a shortcut," Marian said, "Claire's idea."

"You were lucky," Dr. Sullivan said.

Claire fidgeted in her chair, gnawed a fingernail, uttered a soft sigh.

"Something, Claire?" Dr. Sullivan asked.

Brief head shake. "No."

*That's where we would have been. I saw our car crushed. Police and paramedics. Stretchers.*

*What's happening to me?*

The nurse came in and Dr. Sullivan did the physical exam. "Looking great, Claire."

She blinked her eyes several times, nodded.

Sullivan checked some lab results, winked. "I'm very pleased, Claire. Your platelet count is back to normal."

"I know."

He hesitated a moment, then smiled and nodded. "Anything else, Claire?"

"No."

*I think Dr. Sullivan believes.*

## 12.

It took forty-five minutes to get home with southbound Wisconsin Avenue down to one lane due to the accident.

"What was that thing about the platelet count between you and Dr. Sullivan?" Marian asked.

Claire blocked the carnage of the accident from her vision with one hand.

"Inside joke, Mom," she said with a little smile.

"Now tell me the truth, Claire. How did you know for us to take the shortcut? Was the accident on your iPhone?"

She held up the device so her mother could see the blank screen. "I haven't used it at all today."

"At home, then. Radio, TV?"

Claire shook her head, "I just knew."

Marian just kept driving. "I'm sure you overheard it somewhere."

Claire shrugged. "I guess."

*It's like that story of Cassandra in Greek mythology.*

*Why me?*

13.

Office of Dr. David Lafave, NIH Hatfield Clinical Center Neurology. 1600 hours the same day:

Lafave, an olive-skinned man with a perpetually dour facial expression, raised an eyebrow. "This is a surprise, Barry."

Dr. Sullivan pulled a chair over, smiled. "Come on, Dave. You consult on all my craniotomy cases."

"Sure, but a personal visit? This Rowland case does have some unusual features, as you described over the phone. I've asked Jane to join us."

"Thanks, Dave. I'll appreciate her input."

There was a soft tap at the door.

Psychiatrist Jane Svoboda, a tall, angular 45 year-old woman with frizzy ash blond hair stuck her head in. "HI, Dave, and your guest must be the eminent neurosurgeon Barry Sullivan."

Sullivan stood, extended a hand. "Pleasure to see you again, Jane. I've appreciated your input on my craniotomy cases."

"Thanks, Barry." Sullivan retrieved a chair for her, placed it beside his.

Dr. Lafave peeled off some reports from a file on his desk, handed them over to Svoboda.

She flipped metal rimmed reading half-glasses down from her forehead, read for a minute and nodded. "So the surgery did involve cognitive centers, I see. Is there any spatial loss of orientation?"

"She knows where she is. And she told me the correct date and year if that's your concern, Jane," Dr. Lafave said.

"Good". Jane said. "All I can see is some slight memory loss. She couldn't recall phone area codes."

Sullivan nodded. "She's relearning them."

Svoboda raised a questioning eyebrow. "So why am I here?"

"Barry, tell Jane about your concern."

“Claire’s had four episodes of possible precognition.”

Jane raised a questioning eyebrow. “A major Harvard University report came out recently,” she said. “Couple of researchers did a well-designed and complex study of brain wave and neuroimaging patterns on supposed ESP-capable individuals. Identical twins, blood relatives and the like. Their conclusion? There is no such thing as ESP.”

Sullivan nodded. “Three of the episodes could very well have been coincidence, but the fourth . . .”

“Please go on,” Dr. Svoboda prompted.

“Claire knew about that accident today at East West Highway and Wisconsin Avenue before it happened.”

There was a stark moment of silence.

“Yes,” Dr. Sullivan continued, “she was early for her appointment this morning. Her mother humored her by taking a shortcut Claire suggested. It bypassed the accident site.”

Jane said, “She obviously got it from radio, TV or her iPhone.”

“She was in my office twenty minutes before the crash was reported. I checked the time with the Washington Post’s news desk. Ten seventeen, exactly.”

Several moments of utter silence passed. “Let’s see if we can get Claire in here with us. Without the mother or any other outside influences,” Dr. Lafave suggested.

14.

Dr. Sullivan’s office, Friday, July 9. 1030 hours:

“What kind of weird tests do they want now?” Claire asked.

“Beats me,” Marian said. “All I know is Dr. Sullivan will be there with you.”

“No more needles, I hope.”

Her brother chuckled. “If there is one, maybe you’ll get a Simpsons Band-Aid and a lollipop.” Marian hushed him with a glare.

When Dr. Sullivan walked in he was carrying Claire’s chart. “Good morning Mrs. Rowland, Robert. We won’t be too long. The cafeteria knows you’re coming. Brunch is on me.”

Robert pumped a fist. "All right." Sullivan gave him a fist tap.

"Please come with me, Claire."

"I'll text you when I'm done, Mom." she said.

15.

They entered a small conference room in the Neurology section. There were four chairs around a small table. Dr. Lafave raised a hand in greeting. "Remember me, Claire?"

She nodded, gave Dr. Svoboda a questioning look. "And you are?"

"Jane Svoboda, Claire. I'm a colleague of these fine gentlemen."

Sullivan said, "They just want you answer a few questions, Claire."

She gave them each a brief intuitive glance. "Ready when you are."

*Sullivan believes, Lafave is doubtful and the shrink doesn't.*

Dr. Svoboda began. "We understand you could identify medications and laboratory results without prior knowledge. How could you do that?"

Claire shrugged. "Must have overheard it from the nurses or lab technicians."

Dr. Sullivan gave an uncomfortable shrug. "That's what I thought at first."

"Tell us about your prediction of Robert's test score," Dr. Svoboda continued.

"I can't," Claire said. "I remember dropping a forkful of pasta, then I told Bobby he'd get a good grade."

"A B-plus, to be exact," Dr. Sullivan added.

"My Mom thought I'd had a seizure. But it wasn't, right, Dr. Sullivan?"

He nodded. "We had a PET scan run. Dr. Lafave reviewed it with me and Dr. Barrow from imaging. Completely negative."

Dr. Svoboda tapped her pencil on a page. "So far, everything is explainable by coincidence," she said. "Overhearing names of medications, lab results. Claire's subconscious urge to help her brother."

“Run the latest episode by us again, please, Barry,” Dr. Lafave said.

“Claire convinced her mother to take a different route to my office. She was quite adamant, showing signs of agitation, fever and perspiration. All resolved by the time I examined her,” Dr. Sullivan said. “The deadly accident the Rowlands avoided occurred after they had arrived.”

“Is that right, Claire?” Dr. Svoboda asked.

“My Mom said I’d seen it on my iPhone. I showed her it wasn’t even turned on.”

“Claire and her mother were in my office minutes before the first radio reports,” Dr. Sullivan related.

“Coincidence, Jane?” Dr. Lafave asked.

She nodded. “Some time overlap but still within the realm of chance. I’ll admit,” she continued, “It’s all good fodder for the tabloids. There’s that Harvard study that I mentioned. They concluded they had strong evidence against the existence of ESP.”

Claire slouched in her seat, raised a hand.

“Yes, Claire?”

“Google found that article for me last night. They also concluded that they couldn’t prove a negative.”

Svoboda looked at each of the others.

“There may have been some unusual hallucinatory effects secondary to her tumor and craniotomy procedure, but still . . .”

“Suppose the foresight capability was already there and was activated by tumor growth and surgery?” Dr. Sullivan asked.

Dr. Lafave scribbled a note on a memo pad. “Or the following assault of high energy x-rays and chemo waking up dormant areas in the gray matter. Jane?”

Dr. Svoboda smiled. “There is a theory that any so-called unused cerebral cortex was long ago atrophied and reabsorbed.”

Lafave scowled. “That’s B.S. and you know it, Jane.”

“I apologize, Claire . . .”

“It’s okay, Dr. Lafave,” Claire said. “Even I recognize bullshit when I hear it. I know how Cassandra felt when nobody believed her.”

Dr. Sullivan stood abruptly, hushed Claire with a finger to his lips.

“We’re done here. Appreciate the input, Dave, Jane.”

16.

“Dr. Sullivan,” Claire began as they walked back to her surgeon’s office.  
“I apologize for my vulgarity but the shrink is off base.”

He smiled. ‘Apology accepted.’

Marian and Robert hadn’t returned, so they each took a seat in the office. Sullivan opened a small fridge behind his desk and handed Claire a bottle of Smart Water.

She unscrewed the plastic top and took three long swallows, wiped her mouth on a sleeve. “I don’t think Dr. Svoboda will want to see me again.”

He smiled. “She’ll get over it.”

“I’m curious, Claire. You mentioned Cassandra. Isn’t she from Greek mythology?”

Claire sat forward, gave a vigorous nod. “She was given the gift of foresight, but then a curse was added. All her predictions would be accurate, but no one would believe her.”

Sullivan nodded. “I understand.”

“Do you believe me, Dr. Sullivan? About the precognition thing?”

He folded his hands, gazed at the ceiling for several seconds.

“Yes.”

“The first three incidents could have been coincidental, as Dr. Svoboda theorized. She was wrong about the accident prediction.”

“I saw it, Dr. Sullivan, as sure as I’m sitting here. Our car was crushed and my Mom and I were severely injured or dead.”

“I spoke to those people at Harvard. They were impressed but not convinced,” Dr. Sullivan said.

“They asked if you would be available for some testing.”

Claire smiled. “My apologies again, but not a chance. Bobby and I did a card test. I got

only one of twenty-five. It's something else."

"What you and Dr. Lafave said about latent precognition capability being aroused by the tumor, surgery and treatment. Could that be true, Dr. Sullivan?"

"I wish I knew, Claire."

17.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Sunday, August 8th. 1130 hours:

"Pancake breakfast after Mass," Mike Rowland exulted. "How about it, Marian?"

Exasperated sigh from his wife. "You've already had eggs and toast, Michael."

Undaunted, he continued. "C'mon guys. Bobby? Claire?"

Big grin and a thumbs-up from Robert.

"How about you, Claire?" Mike asked. "You only had orange juice."

She smiled and gave her brother a fist tap. "Maybe two. With bacon."

"Marian?"

A sigh. "You guys go stuff yourselves. I'll have coffee."

Halfway through pancakes Michael's cell phone beeped. He listened. "Where? When? One of our guys? Oh, hell. I'm on my way."

"Sorry, guys. Problem in California. I'll get the car."

"It's his red Homeland Security phone," Robert whispered to Claire. "Must be something big."

"Let's look it up on the internet when we get home, okay?" she asked, her voice low and cryptic.

"Why can't you . . .?"

She grabbed his arm and squeezed. "Please?"

18.

At the Rowland home, 1305 hours:

“Are you okay, Claire?” Her brother asked. “You’re looking kinda pale.”

She flopped in a chair next to Robert’s desk, brushed beads of perspiration from her brow with a sleeve. “I’ll be okay, Bobby. Look for something happening in San Pedro. It’s in California, near Los Angeles.”

Robert scratched his head. “How can you know what’s happening on the West Coast?”

“I really knew your grade on that test,” she said in a low, urgent voice.

“Oh wow, Claire. So that shrink is wrong.”

“Yes. Dr. Sullivan believes me. I think Dr. Lafave does too.”

Robert pounded keys. “Drudge Report has some Congressional B.S. ESPN has the Nationals score . . . Rats. They’re losing again.”

Claire sighed, gnawed a fingernail. “Darnit. Try Los Angeles. TV stations, radio too.”

Her brother typed more keys. “Nothing, Claire. What am I looking for?”

She sat back, exhaled a disconsolate breath. “Oh Bobby, something’s wrong.”

There was a sudden sharp beep from the computer. “Oh wow. Look here, Sis. I had it search for West Coast breaking news. This is from KFI 640, an L.A. station.”

*Homeland Security is reporting one of their agents was killed during a shootout in San Pedro. The assailants escaped in a pickup truck with stolen cargo from the Port of Los Angeles. One suspect captured,* blinked from the screen.

“Dad is going there, Bobby.”

“Why him, Claire. They have agents in California.”

“He’s a specialist in smuggling and immigration. He’s on a military jet now.”

“Dad . . .”

Claire slipped to the floor, arms and legs in convulsive tremors.

Her brother ripped off a sleeve from his *BCC Battlin’ Barons* T-shirt and stuffed it between his sister’s teeth to keep her from biting her tongue. “Mom,” he yelled down the stairs, “Call 911. Claire’s having a seizure.”

19.

NIH Hatfield Clinical Center Neurology ICU. 0525 hours the following morning:

“She’s comatose, but all our tests with EEG and neural probes show no evidence of seizure or post seizure changes,” Dr. Lafave said.

Marian squeezed a moist handkerchief in both hands. “What, then?” she demanded as she mopped the hanky over tearfully swollen eyelids.

“I can’t tell yet,” he said. “I can assure you all her vital signs are normal.”

“Looks like Claire’s just asleep. All that trembling she had before is gone,” Marian said.

“Her brain scans looked odd before, Dave,” Dr. Sullivan said.

Lafave nodded. “That’s the weird part, Barry. The left and right frontal lobe cortices were lighting up like strobe flashes. It’s like all her synapses were firing at once. Now it looks normal.”

“What was she doing at the time of this episode?” Dr. Lafave asked.

“Bobby, you were with her,” Marian said.

“We found a report of federal agents involved in a shootout in California on the computer. She was concerned that our Dad was in trouble.”

“Robert,” Dr. Sullivan said, motioning him aside, “was it her ESP thing?”

Bobby’s eyes widened in surprise. “You believe her, Dr. Sullivan?”

“Yes. And you do, too.”

“What’s she trying to tell us, Bobby?”

He stared at his hands. “I wish I knew, Dr. Sullivan.”

The strains of The Beatles’ *Across the Universe* suddenly intruded on the silence.

Marian grabbed for her purse. “My cell phone.” She listened for several seconds, inhaled a sharp gasp. “We’re at the Hatfield Center, Mike. Claire’s had another seizure.”

“It’s my husband. He’s just landed at Andrews Air Force Base. He’s on his way here.”

20.

One hour and twenty minutes later:

A fierce embrace between Marian and Michael ensued.

Then a soft, tremulous voice infiltrated the quiet. "Dad?"

"Claire's awake." Robert said, relief pervading his voice.

Mike hugged his daughter. "Claire. Are you okay?"

A relieved sigh. "Much better now, Dad. You're safe and you got the bad guys." She reached up and detached the EEG and neuroimaging leads, swung her legs over the side of ICU bed and pulled out the IV line. Then she jumped to the floor and hugged her brother.

"Dad got my message, Bobby."

21.

"It was the weirdest thing, Marian," Mike Rowland told his wife at home later as they watched an exhausted Claire sleeping peacefully.

"The guy they captured spilled his guts. A bunch of gang members from El Salvador were holed up in San Pedro with enough guns, ammo and RPGs to start WWIII. I was with a team of L.A. Homeland Security folks when we came under heavy fire. My position was exposed. Then a voice screamed 'get down, Mike, now!'"

"I dove into a ditch by the driveway. Automatic fire shredded the tree I'd been behind into toothpicks. And I'll swear till the day I die the voice I heard was Claire's."

22.

Epilogue:

Claire Rowland was awarded a Master of Science degree in Information Technology from Marymount University, Arlington, Virginia in 2021.

She's had no recurrence of precognition events.

Her two children, Cassandra and Michael, have developed no capability for extrasensory

perception.

Claire still sees Dr's Sullivan and Lafave for annual follow-ups.

The End