

Part II
Chapter 6

(Thursday, July 5)

Though his post doc would be gone for most of the summer, Baker intended to continue his work on the problem of cold fusion. He had to admit that Aziz had not been quite as productive as he had hoped. However, he himself was making good progress. For the first time, he really thought that the solution might be within reach. He was convinced that the key to lowering the critical ignition temperature was in the structure of the magnetic bottle that held the fusion plasma.

Baker worked both in his office in Faraday Hall as well as in his study at home. The significant papers that contained both his speculations and his calculations were carried back and forth. He did not mind working on campus, and it had the advantage of access to most of his books on physics and the technical journals in Faraday Hall's library. However, he enjoyed working at home even more. His study had paneled wood walls and an overall masculine decor. One entire wall consisted of floor-to-ceiling book shelves. Some of the books were on physics, but most of his books at home were on other subjects of interest to this well-read professor.

Baker was particularly proud of his antique desk in the center of the room. On top of the desk toward the back, it had a convenient hutch that contained several compartments for storage of papers, small books, and other office materials.

As June turned into July, Baker was getting closer to solving the problem. Thursday of the first week in July had been particularly productive. He had suddenly gotten a flash of insight and worked late into the afternoon. He then continued to work at home. Quite late in the evening, he formulated what he considered to be the solution. Of course, he would go over his calculations again and perhaps show them to Professor Gibbons. Dr. Keith Gibbons also worked in the area of condensed-matter physics, though not specifically on cold fusion. However, he was more than capable of following Baker's equations.

But this was never to be.

By eleven o'clock that evening, Baker was ecstatic. He collected his papers that summarized his theory and stored them in his favorite place. Baker leaned back in his chair smiling. However, the combination of several weeks of strenuous work and this evening's excitement were too much for a heart that already had problems. He felt a sharp pain. His smile turned quickly to panic. The nitro pills--where were they? Where had he left them? Must get to them. He started to rise from his chair when the pain became excruciating. Doubling over, he fell to the floor. He tried to call out to his wife Mildred, but the pain would not let him. His vision began to blur. Then there was nothing but blackness.

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(Friday, July 13)

The death of Dr. Baker stunned the university community, and the entire physics department turned out for the funeral service. Dr. Hugh Cooper, the department chairman, spoke to Baker's widow, Mildred, after the service at the cemetery.

"Mildred, I'm so sorry. Your husband will be greatly missed by all of us. If there is anything I can do to help, please let me know."

"Well, there is something you can do, Hugh. I would hate for his life's work to die with him. I was wondering if you would want his files. Perhaps someone in the department could profit from something he's already done."

"That is an excellent idea. His papers will serve as a fine tribute to an outstanding physicist. And, of course, I'm sure you knew he had an NSF grant to work on the problem of cold fusion. That grant is still in force, at least for now. The research he's already done would be very helpful if we are to get the grant reassigned to another faculty member. The department would really hate to lose it."

"I did know about the grant, but I'm afraid I don't know how far he got on the project."

"His papers should help. Also, his post doc, Tahir Azuz, was part of the project. When he gets back from Saudi Arabia, he should be able to tell us something."

"Yes, Tahir's been over to our house many times. A very polite young man."

"Well, we'll go through his files, Mildred. Hopefully we can get NSF to approve a new P.I., I mean principal investigator, and Tahir can continue working on the project."

"Do you think you could find someone to come over to the house and box up his files? I'm just not up to that right now." A few tears began to flow again.

Cooper gently touched her arm. "I understand, Mildred. Of course we can do that for you. Tahir would probably be the best one to handle that, but since he's not here, I'll send a couple of grad students over the first of next week. In the meantime, don't worry about it. We'll take care of everything for you."

On the following Monday, the students boxed all of Baker's papers and files in his home office, both from his desk as well as the from his filing

cabinet.

Now alone in the large house, Mildred found her grief overwhelming. She decided to move out-of-state and take an apartment near her sister in Iowa. She needed and wanted very little from the house, so she hired a company to run an in-house estate sale to liquidate most of the furniture. The sale was set for Saturday. Following the sale, she would list the house for sale with a real estate company and then move to Iowa, leaving the agency to handle the sale.

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(Monday, July 16)

The weekend after their date at the county fair, Randy left to visit his parents for several weeks in Florida. That was now two weeks ago, and Terri was really beginning to miss him.

It was about eleven o'clock when Lorraine Anderson walked into the boutique. Her attire was as bazaar as ever. She wore a pink, tight-fitting top with short sleeves, a low-cut V-neck, and a cinched bust line. However, this time she wore matching pink leggings under her black miniskirt, no doubt believing she had dressed very conservatively.

Terri smiled warmly. "Hello, Lorraine."

"You remembered my name!"

"Yes, you're not an easy girl to forget."

Lorraine blushed. With a rather timid voice, she said, "I'm so sorry about that. I'm afraid I really embarrassed myself and everyone else...I mean you and Dr. Carrington. I just had the biggest crush on him!"

"Well, that's very understandable."

Lorraine stood there for a moment watching Terri until the light dawned on her. She burst into a happy smile. "Oh, I see! He's *your* boyfriend."

Terri could not decide how to respond at first. Then with a hint of shyness she said, "Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"Gee, Dr. Carrington must have been really upset with me."

"Oh, no, not at all," Terri replied reassuringly. "Anyway, I'm not sure he was my boyfriend then. He asked me out for the first time right after you left."

Lorraine again seemed to be bubbling over with excitement. "I'm so happy for you. He really is something, isn't he?"

"Just between you and me, he's the kind that makes you tingle all over just by walking in the room."

"Isn't that a fact!" Lorraine agreed. "They shouldn't allow men to be that gorgeous."

Both of them giggled.

"By the way, my name is Terri, Terri Lockhart. Can I help you find anything?"

"Well, not what I bought last time," she said with an embarrassed look. "No, what I need is a really nice present for my mother. A knickknack. She loves them."

Terri smiled. "This way, Lorraine. We'll make it the best surprise she ever got!"

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(Saturday, July 21)

"Say Mom, there's an estate sale today," Terri said, as she was looking over the newspaper. "Some professor from the university who died. You want to come with me? I don't go to the shelter today, so I thought I'd stop by and take a look."

It was Saturday morning, and Terri and her mother had just finished breakfast. "Sure, I'd like to get out of the house today, Mrs. Lockhart responded."

"Great! But you should start getting ready, though. We'd better get there early."

"I'm glad to see this sale has cheered you up. You've been moping around here for three weeks now just because your new boyfriend hasn't called you for awhile. I told you, men are often forgetful about things like that."

"Mother, I haven't been moping around, and I don't think the term *boyfriend* quite fits. Anyway, I'm sure he's just been very busy with his parents."

"I quite agree," she said in a noncommittal tone.

As a matter of fact, Terri had been disappointed. Of course, there could be a hundred reasons why he had not called. However, one worried her more than the others. She knew that he was probably still harboring doubts about getting serious, but she had hoped those doubts had been mostly dispelled by now. Maybe not. Maybe he was using this time with his parents for some

serious soul-searching. She must be patient--and have faith in what they had already shared together.

While waiting for her mother, Terri was sitting in the den in her favorite reading chair. Technically, this was her mother's house. Due to the death of her father, Terri had never moved out. The ranch-style house was large and elegantly furnished. There were three bedrooms. Her mother continued to use the master bedroom with its own bath, while Terri was still in the bedroom in which she grew up. Her mother used the third bedroom as her sewing and craft room. The house also had a formal living room and separate dining room. However, the den by far was Terri's favorite room. The knotty-pine paneling gave the room more of a masculine setting, but like her father, she loved that look. She also liked the large, brick fireplace and would often build a fire during the winter for the cozy warmth it radiated. However, the most important feature of the room was her library. She had amassed an impressive collection of books and talked her mother into adding built-in bookshelves from floor to ceiling on one entire wall of the den. She often sat in her reading chair and just looked at the books. She thoroughly enjoyed the ambiance of the room and loved being immersed in its scholarly atmosphere.

In her present state of mind, the room also served to encourage her during these last three weeks. The atmosphere of the room seemed in some way to keep her connected to Randy.

When Terri and her mother arrived at the house of Dr. Joseph Baker, a huge crowd of people was already there. The doors had opened at 9:30. The nearest parking place was two blocks away, and she and her mother had to elbow their way into the house. She was not looking for anything in particular, but she found it hard to resist open-house estate sales. She loved walking through elegant homes looking at furniture. Hopefully there were some pretty things left.

"Oh, Terri," her mother said, "look at that dining-room set! Isn't it exquisite? Almost makes me want to sell mine just to buy this one." The huge table was surrounded by four side chairs and two arm chairs. It also included a china hutch and server, both with drawers. The set had a massively woody look, possibly Early American in design.

"It certainly is beautiful. And look at that hutch and that china inside it! Wow, this family appreciated quality. It's cherry wood, isn't it?"

"I think so. Come on, let's move to another room before I lose control and do something foolish."

They walked into what appeared to have been the late professor's study. Terri liked the room immediately because it reminded her of her own beloved den. However, her eyes lit up when she saw the antique desk in the center of the room. She walked over to it and ran her fingers along the smooth, flawless, polished surface. She especially liked its most unique feature, a

hutch with a number of handy storage compartments. It was love at first sight. The price marked on it, however, made her wince.

"Mom, look at this desk. Oh, I love it! It would look so great in the den, and I could really use it for working at home."

"It's pretty expensive, Terri."

"Yeah, but how often do you see a desk like this? Let's see. I've got some money in my checking account. I could also take some out of my savings account."

"All right, dear. We can swing it. But you are not taking any money out of your savings account. I'll make up the difference. Consider it an advance on your birthday and Christmas presents."

Terri smiled like a child in a candy store. "Oh, Mom, thanks. You stay here and guard the desk. Tell anyone who looks at it that it's sold. I'll go get the lady who's running the sale."

Terri returned in a few minutes with the other lady in tow. They discussed payment arrangements, and as she began writing a check, a second lady walked into the room. She had a cultured dignity about her, but her face projected sadness. She walked up to Terri and introduced herself.

"I'm Mildred Baker." The older lady extended her hand.

Terri looked into her eyes and realized this was the professor's widow. "Terri Lockhart. This is my mother, Betty Lockhart."

"You will be buying my husband's desk?"

Tenderly placing her hand on the lady's arm, she answered in a subdued tone. "Yes, Ma'am. I'm so sorry about your husband."

"Thank you, dear. I wanted to meet the person who bought Joseph's desk. It was his pride and joy, his favorite piece of furniture. He spent many hours in his study working at that desk. I can see it's going to have a fine new home." Her voice faltered as she finished speaking.

"Oh, I just love the desk, Mrs. Baker. It will be my pride and joy too."

"Will it be for personal use?"

"Yes, I'll be putting it in my house."

"Do you work, dear?"

"Well, my mother owns the store, but I run Creative Fantasies, a

boutique in Old Town."

Mrs. Baker raised one eye brow, and a small smile appeared. "So you're the young lady who runs Creative Fantasies. Yes, I have visited your shop. I know my husband's desk will find a very good home with you." Mildred looked at Terri's mother and said, "So nice to have met you, Mrs. Lockhart." Then she took Terri's hand in both of hers and said, "You have a wonderful day," and turned to leave.

Terri watched Mildred walk away, her heart heavy with sympathy for her. Then looking over to the lady handling the estate sale, she handed her the check she had written earlier. Betty also began writing a check.

"I think I can find a few neighbors to help me pick up the desk. Can I come back in a couple of hours?" At this point, Mrs. Baker, who had just reached the door to leave the room, turned back toward Terri.

"That won't be necessary, dear. I will have the company handling this sale deliver the desk to your house this afternoon."

"Oh, Mrs. Baker, that's so kind of you! Thank you."

"You're very welcome, Terri. I'm sure you will enjoy my husband's desk as much as he did." With that Mrs. Baker turned and left the room.

Later that afternoon, as Mrs. Baker had promised, the desk was delivered to her house. Terri had already moved the furniture around to make room for it. After it was in place and the men had left, she sat down in her comfortable reading chair to admire the desk. It added another touch of class to her favorite room. No, she thought, it added more than just class. This desk had been owned by a university professor. Knowing that fact, for some reason, made her feel excited, somehow connected in a new way to the university. Perhaps the desk had been used by Dr. Baker to write seminal papers on some erudite subject. In a strange way, that seemed to connect her to great research and learning. A rather silly notion, really, but she did so love the university and its scholarly aura.

The following Monday, Mrs. Lockhart left for Arizona to visit her sister for several weeks, taking with her their only cell phone.

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(Monday, July 30)

A week later, Tahir Aziz returned from Saudi Arabia. He was quite anxious to find out whether Baker had made much headway on solving the problem of cold fusion. To his dismay, he found Baker's office locked. When he asked Wes Tanner in the next office if he had seen Baker today, Wes told him of Baker's unexpected death. Shocked, Aziz rushed to Dr. Cooper's office.

"Ah, Tahir, come in and have a seat. We've got a lot to talk about."

"When did it happen?"

"In early July. Massive heart attack; completely unexpected. Mildred was devastated."

"This is very distressing. Is there anything I can do for Mrs. Baker?"

"She's listed the house for sale and moved to Iowa. She's moved into an apartment close to her sister."

"If you'd give me her new number, I should give her a call and express my condolences. I've been at their home many times."

Cooper gave him the number. "We need to discuss Dr. Baker's NSF grant. Dr. Gibbons went through all the papers in his office here and the papers that Mildred sent over from the house. We found nothing from the cold fusion project more recent than five months ago. We were hoping you could tell us something of the current status and possibly where his missing papers might be."

"At the time I left for Saudi Arabia, he was not near a solution. He was going to pursue an idea he had for the configuration of the magnetic bottle. I'm not sure how far he got after I left. He never contacted me. And no, I have no idea where his latest papers might be."

Aziz knew very well where those papers could be. However, it was not in his best interest to tell Cooper this.

"Well, that is most unfortunate. It puts us in a very difficult position. We've been negotiating with the NFS about getting Dr. Gibbons assigned as the new P.I. But they made it quite clear that they would not approve a continuation of the grant unless they had up-to-date information on exactly how far Dr. Baker had gotten on the project. I'm afraid now that we'll lose the grant.

"And that creates an unfortunate situation with regard to you, Tahir," Dr. Cooper continued. Aziz's salary came from "soft money," grant money, not the university's payroll budget. Without the grant, he had no job. "We do not have any new faculty positions in the budget for the next two years. I'm afraid we can't keep you on. I'm so sorry, Tahir. Are there any possibilities for you back in Saudi Arabia?"

Tahir was thinking quickly. Serious issues were at stake here. He put on a thoughtful expression. "Yes, Sir, I believe there are some possibilities I can pursue. Thank you for your concern. I'll have my office cleared out by this afternoon."

Aziz was not worried about his job. He had a job, and it was not working

as a post doc with Joseph Baker. That had been an assignment. Yes, he had more than "possibilities" in Saudi Arabia.

He went immediately to his office, cleared out all of his personal possessions, and then turned in his keys. None of Baker's recent work had been found, and he had no time to lose. He had to contact Mildred Baker and find out what had happened to that desk.

After returning to his apartment, he called the number in Iowa that Cooper had given him. He had to quell the tension he felt and project the tone of a sorrowful associate expressing his condolences to the grieving widow. And somehow, he had to steer the conversation innocently to the whereabouts of the desk.

"Mrs. Baker, this is Tahir Aziz. I have just returned from Saudi Arabia and heard the terrible news. I am so deeply sorry for you."

"Tahir, how kind of you to call, and thank you so much for your sympathy. We always appreciated your friendship, and Joseph thought very highly of you."

"That always was a source of inspiration to me. My own grief at his loss is indeed profound. He was like a father to me. I have lost a dear mentor, and physics has lost a great mind. But of course all that pales compared to your own loss: a very devoted and loving husband. My heart aches for you."

"You're very sweet, Tahir."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, I'm pretty much settled in now in my new apartment. I'm near my sister and her husband, and they have been a real comfort to me."

"I only wish I had been here to help you with all the hard work of packing and moving. It must have been very difficult for you."

"Going through my husband's things was very difficult, but no one really could have helped me with that. As far as packing was concerned, I needed very little and took very little. I've rented a furnished apartment here, and I hired a company to conduct an estate sale from the house. It went very smoothly."

"Mrs. Baker, your home was always my home away from home, and it was always a comfort to me. Such warm memories I have of it. This city now has a definite void in it. I recall Dr. Baker's study most of all. We spent so many productive and enjoyable hours there working on the physics for which we both had a driving passion. I can picture us now, sitting around that beautiful antique desk he had and throwing out ideas to each other."

"Yes, he loved that desk, Tahir. I had such mixed emotions about it. I

hated to part with it, but I think it would have been even more painful for me to keep it. However, I am very pleased with its new owner. She was such a sweet girl, and she fell in love with the desk just as Joseph did."

"You knew the person who bought it?"

"I met her at the time she bought the desk. I must confess that I was watching to see who would buy it. Her name was Teri Lockhart. She runs the Creative Fantasies boutique, and I was very impressed with her."

It was only with great effort that Aziz suppressed his astonishment so that his voice expressed only his usual calm, smooth tone. "Terri Lockhart...yes, I met her at the end-of-term dinner. A very nice young lady with a keen interest in antiques, I believe. I'm sure Dr. Baker's desk has found a very good home. Now Mrs. Baker, please let me know if there is anything I can do for you."

"I'm fine, really. Thank you again for calling, Tahir."

After hanging up, Aziz sat there for several minutes thinking. He could not believe his good fortune. He not only knew where Terri Lockhart worked, but he knew where she lived and had even dated her once. This would make his task much easier. The first thing to do, however, was to vacate his apartment and go underground. He would also need to get some help. He must contact the Minister.