

UNUSUAL LIGHT

a novella by

J. ELIZAGA

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CHAPTER 1: AN UNUSUAL CALL

May 29th



AT HALF PAST MIDNIGHT, A PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER RECEIVED A FAMILIAR BUT unsettling call. Amid the static and crackle, a voice uttered, “Send help.”

The strange calls started nine months ago, and they always occurred on or near the full moon. The voice supplied only their first name and location. The caller’s name changed every month, but the location stayed the same—Shoreline Hospital morgue. The police officer who responded to the first dispatch spoke with Matt Faulson, the morgue’s overnight security guard. He denied dialing for assistance. The officer walked around the perimeter of the building and witnessed nothing out of the ordinary.

But after three monthly calls involving the same person on duty, the department assigned Officer David Jackson to patrol around the time of the full moon, when they estimated a call would occur. They suspected the twenty-seven-year-old Matt to be the prankster.

Police interviews failed to pin him. Instead, the detectives saw video footage of stationary objects moving randomly in various rooms in the morgue late at night. The young man admitted to seeing strange activity during his shifts. Adding to the mystery, the city’s emergency dispatch system saved the calls, but the hospital had no record of any of their phones being used.

David arrived at the parking lot with another patrol car at 12:25 a.m. He saw a lone figure sitting on a bench near the morgue’s main entrance.

“Matt.” He approached the security guard with friendly caution. As the guard greeted him, the officer couldn’t help but notice the dark shadows under the young man’s eyes and the ruffled hair. “Man, you look terrible.”

Matt sighed. “There’s not a lot of sleep with the graveyard shift, as you know. I don’t like walking the floors between midnight and one a.m., but I took too long answering an email, and I forgot the time. I rushed through the hallways, and let me tell you, I had more than one sighting,” Matt said. “I guess you received a call?”

David nodded. “You have to get me in there one of these nights. I want to see for myself.”

“I’ll call next time. But I didn’t make the call tonight,” Matt replied. He stood up and prepared to go back in the morgue, but froze. “Oh.”

“What is it?” David asked. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the second officer took a defensive stance.

“A gray entity floated out of the wall to my left,” Matt said softly as he kept his head very still.

David looked as soon as Matt spoke. “I don’t see anything.” He glanced at the other officer.

“I don’t see anything either.”

“Really?” Matt asked as his shoulders dropped. He gingerly turned his head and looked. “Am I the only one who sees ghosts?”

“I’m beginning to believe that,” David replied.

CHAPTER 2: AN UNUSUAL JOB

June 1st



ANA JULIET (AJ) BARELY FINISHED ROLLING THE BANDAGE AROUND HER ANKLE before she stood up and walked carefully out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. She took a lunch pack out of the refrigerator and placed it in her backpack, making sure it was upright.

“I hope you’ll be sitting down most of the time,” her mom, Celeste, remarked with the briefest of glances at her before removing a wilted flower from a bouquet, then pouring fresh water in its vase.

“It’s a minor sprain,” AJ assured her. Such a small injury wasn’t going to prevent her from reporting to the first day of her summer internship. Her cell phone beeped. She zipped up her backpack as three figures walked by the kitchen window.

“Hey, Mrs. D.” Her friend Arvind greeted her mother, while her neighbors, siblings Nate and Nalyn, followed with hand waves.

“I’m going. Wish me luck,” she told her mother.

“Good luck. Don’t break the other ankle.” Her mother stepped away from the flowers and deposited a kiss on her cheek. “Are you wearing that personal air purifier necklace your Aunt Kay brought from Manila? She said it will help clean the air around your face. It’s good to use since you’ll be working in a hospital.”

AJ nodded as she raised the electronic pendant before putting it inside her shirt. "I'll be fine. There's, um, only IT personnel on that side of the hospital."

She followed her mother with her gaze as she returned the vase back to the dining buffet. Satisfied that her parent didn't think her response was odd, she opened the patio door and said, "Well, data doesn't stop at five p.m. Here's to my first swing shift at the hospital IT department. They'll pick me up after my shift's over." She stepped out with her friends in tow.

"We'll bring Little Annie back home tonight," teased Arvind, who, at five foot nine, towered above her five-foot frame. "We'll take her to work and back on Fridays."

Three years ago, when she was sixteen, a police unit had stopped and spoken with AJ while she walked home from school by herself. Two more police cars arrived, and the officers asked several more questions. She discovered that they'd mistaken her for a missing twelve-year-old child.

Though her mother later said, "You'll thank me and your dad when you're forty and look about twenty-one," it wasn't funny when it happened.

As the four settled in Arvind's car, Nalyn said, "Uh-oh, you haven't told your mom what you'll really do at the hospital."

AJ raised crossed fingers. "I heard my dad once say forgiveness is easier to ask for than permission. I'll tell them next week, after I know what kind of work I'll be involved in."

She was the only daughter of a Filipino-American couple, John and Celeste Diwa. The family lived modestly in Sunnyvale, a city an hour's drive south of San Francisco. John was an architectural draftsman and Celeste an accountant.

AJ grew up a mischievous but advanced student who, in high school, joined a robotics competition, yet also received detention for skipping class to drive down to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk with her friends.

She wanted to study engineering because she and her father both loved science and science fiction. She became enamored with her father's architectural diagrams and tried to build small versions using Legos or popsicle sticks. When she was younger, they would watch mysterious expeditions on TV. She also met an engineer who became a mentor.

She got accepted at the University of California in Santa Cruz. Though she moved out of their home and into her own studio apartment, the proximity allowed her to visit her parents every weekend and benefit from free laundry and a bountiful raid of their refrigerator.

AJ kept good grades during the first year. But as a sophomore, she made a bet with a classmate in advanced calculus on who could have a lower grade before the final exams and score high enough in the finals to pull the grades up and pass. But her final exam scores weren't high enough, and she couldn't pull the grade up. She failed advanced calculus.

She didn't realize the amount of scolding she would receive from that bet. She needed to re-enroll and pass the summer session to stay on track with the regular course load. And their planned vacation had to be rescheduled, much to her parents' disappointment.

As she had last summer, she planned to stay at her parents' house to meet up with friends who were home for the break too. She'd also applied for a job so she'd have money for going out. But her failed grade complicated her plans. She wanted to stay at home, but didn't want to be on her mother's radar.

She was elated to be accepted for a summer internship at the hospital, and she got accepted to the summer class in advanced calculus as well. Things were looking up. She would stay in Santa Cruz on Mondays and Tuesdays and work at the hospital for the other three days of the week. Though she'd stay at her parents' house because it was close to the hospital, she'd be away at work long enough to avoid getting reminded by them of her mistake and canceled vacation. The three-to-eleven shift was perfect, and she'd arrive home late at night.

"You applied as an IT security operations intern at the hospital, but your application went to hospital security operations," Arvind recounted. "That's the most bizarre mix-up I've ever heard of."

Arvind was her childhood friend. There was something calm but daring about him. She could tell him her ideas, and he wouldn't dismiss them. As they grew up, they discovered they both liked to build things. AJ liked to build remote-controlled machines, and Arvind liked to build and sell bicycles. Like her, he didn't accept "no, that's not going to work" for an answer so easily. He became her boyfriend during their senior year of high school. She felt safe with him. But when he was accepted at a university in Massachusetts, they mutually decided to end that phase of the

relationship and return to being best friends. Back home for the summer, he used his family's garage as a bicycle repair shop to earn some money.

"Isn't it? But I guess after I'd completed the basic security course online, they thought my experience as a volunteer tour guide at the Silicon Valley Museum last year was enough," AJ explained.

"I think it's more bizarre that you accepted the job," Nate said.

"They pay twenty-four dollars an hour, and I'll work Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays for eight weeks. Who wouldn't take that?" AJ said.

Arvind nodded. "Not bad. Maybe I should apply too."

"As a security guard at the hospital morgue from three to eleven?" There was a twinkle in Nalyn's eyes. "When you get the creeps, who will you call?"

"Call? Just do a live stream," Nate said.

"It's summer. It doesn't get dark until nine. Besides, science has answers for these things before I consider the supernatural." AJ bent her arms into a cobra stance and fluttered her fingers.

"Ooh..."

"Have you actually encountered something paranormal?" Nate asked.

No, I haven't.