

# Chapter 1: (Un) Settling In

“The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.” – Carl Jung (1875 – 1961)

It started one Friday afternoon in the early summer of 1991. I gazed out my front window at the home across the street that had stood there vacant for over five months. When it was occupied, it blended well with all the other ranch-style houses on the block. But since the former occupants had left, the lawn had gone to seed and it looked very much like what it was; a vacant home. I kept reminding myself to get over and clean up the yard so I wouldn't have to look at it; but that wasn't going to happen and I knew it: I'm too lazy.

Today the house looked different, though; instead of a vacant lot with a 'For Sale' sign poking up through the three-foot tall weeds, a U-Haul trailer sat jackknifed in the driveway, angled toward the front door. It was the tiniest U-Haul I'd ever seen, and I wondered how anyone who could afford to buy that house could pack all their belongings into such a small space.

Normally, I would have ducked down under the window and slithered to the back of the house so as not to be seen, and thereby suckered into lending a hand, but what I was witnessing kept me captivated. First of all, the man was wearing clothes I hadn't seen since the last time I browsed the clearance rack at the local Goodwill store. Secondly, he was squatting down on his haunches like he was trying to control a terrible bowel ache. He just squatted there, staring at the driveway beneath him, not moving a muscle. Because he faced the other direction, I made the decision to stay and view the outcome, expecting him to bolt for the bathroom at any moment. That didn't happen. I must have stood there for a full two minutes; and he didn't move once. There was definitely something wrong with this guy.

I shook my head as I made my way to the front door, knowing that I was being duped into helping this Bozo lug a three-ton refrigerator up a flight of stairs, but it didn't seem to make any difference to me at the time. I needed to see what was going on with

this guy who could squat and stare at the sidewalk without moving for a whole three minutes.

I made a quick glance up and down the cul-de-sac to see if someone was out mowing their lawn or working on their car, but it was still fairly early in the afternoon, and there was no one in sight. I was going to have to fly solo on this mission.

As I made my way across the street I kept expecting him to glance in my direction with a look of complete confidence on his face that suggested 'Gotcha'. As I made my final approach, I craned my neck to the side as if he might jump up at any moment and slash my throat. That didn't happen either. Instead, I cleared my throat and muttered, "You need a hand with something?"

Without so much as looking up or even acknowledging my existence, almost as if he had known me for years, he said, to no one in particular, "Did you know an ant has two stomachs?"

"I beg your pardon?" I replied, assuming that I was having problems with my hearing.

"An ant has two stomachs," he said. "It has a smaller one in the front of his abdomen, called a crop, and the larger, real stomach, attached behind it. When a friend brushes the ant's mandible with its antenna, the ant regurgitates honey into the mouth of its friend. That way ants can store food for sharing, while at the same time digesting the food they need to survive."

"Fascinating," I replied, half interested, half wondering who the nut we had moving in across the street from us was.

"Some worker ants become so engorged with food that they literally can't move. They just lay there like a slug until enough friends come by so as to remove the contents of his crop until he can move again," he continued, indifferent to my indifference. "It's kind of like a nature-built refrigerator."

There it was. The refrigerator line, I knew he'd get to it, just not this fast. This guy was sly. Go ahead, I thought, break it to me; I was dumb enough to fall for this stupid trick. I might as well blow the rest of my Friday evening helping this lunatic set up camp in my neighborhood; no other psychotics on the block I can lend a hand to this evening.

“Bryce Anderson,” I said, extending my hand, while at the same time hoping he’d at least glance up at me from the single red ant that he’d spent upwards of four minutes watching now.

“I beg your pardon,” he responded warmly as he arose. “JP. It’s nice to meet you.”

“JP?” I pondered out loud. “Is that short for anything?”

“Not as far as you know,” he quipped while fumbling with the latch on his U-Haul.

He may not have been divulging much, but it was crystal clear he was hiding something. He had intended to be humorous with his last remark, but it was obvious he’d used it before, and I was not going to be able to pry any more information from him. So I didn’t try; I left it at that, which disturbed me greatly. Unanswered questions and I don’t get along well at all.

“I don’t have much in here,” he said. “And I don’t want to tie up your whole afternoon. If you’d just give me a hand with my couch, I’d greatly appreciate it.”

As he swung the back doors open, I gasped in disbelief. The U-Haul was indeed small, but his belongings only filled half the space. A couch that looked like it may have been popular in the early seventies absorbed the bulk of the space. It had a puke green background color with wild orange and purple flowers plastered on it. A yellow dot adorned the center of each colored flower. Aside from his psychedelic couch, he had a small black and white television set, and some pillows and blankets. All I could see other than that were books; thousands of them. They weren’t even packed in boxes. They were just placed neatly on the couch and floor. He must have driven incredibly slowly to get here so that they didn’t sprawl all over the place.

“So what brings you to Montana?” I asked.

“The land. The people. I heard it’s a great place to live. I came to see if it was true.”

“Where you from?” I asked.

“I came by way of Colorado Springs,” he offered, reluctantly.

I wondered if that meant that he actually lived in Colorado Springs, or if he drove through Colorado Springs on his way from Detroit. Either way, I decided not to pursue it. I remained silent for a while. I waited at the back of the trailer while he climbed up and over the couch to the front to grab the far end of it. He carefully lowered the books that were on the couch to the floor of the trailer. We hefted it quite easily and ascended the four stairs to his porch. We set it down as he unlocked the front door.

“Let’s just set it right here in the front room,” he nodded toward the far wall.

We plodded back to the trailer and I hefted some rather large books into my arms to help him with the payload. As I picked up the books, I noted that they all seemed to be extremely old, although each one of them was in excellent condition. “I’ll go over to my house and get some boxes to make these easier to carry in, if you’d like,” I chimed.

“That’s really not necessary,” he remarked, as he removed the books from my arms. “You’ve really given me all the help I need, already. Thanks for lending a hand,” he turned from me and ascended the stairs again.

I glared at him for a moment wondering whether or not I should protest, but it was obvious to me that he didn’t want any more help, whether he needed it or not. Something was up with this guy, and it wasn’t natural.

I sauntered across the street and opened our front door when I was struck by a thought. I turned briskly and stared at the front of the old green box-like jalopy that had pulled the tiny trailer to our neck of the woods. As I suspected: his car brandished current Florida plate number PKA 37Y; not Colorado plates, as he had led me to believe.

Partially relieved for having salvaged my afternoon, but very concerned over who, or what, had just moved in across the street, I made my way through the door and into the kitchen to hunt for something cold to drink. I needed to do some detective work.