

A NOVEL

TO YOUR OWN SELF BE TRUE



Ray Melnik

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Prologue

What does not bend breaks. Four hundred years ago it may have been vain for us to assume that we could affect the health of our planet. Today it is vain to assume that we can not.

In 389 AD Greece, the Emperor of Byzanz, Theodosius, ordered the Bishop of Alexandria, Theophilos, to destroy everything pagan. The Great Library of Alexandria was razed to its foundations and its scrolls were set ablaze in the streets. The Christian mob destroyed the scientific work of centuries.

In 1633 AD Italy, Galileo was ordered to stand trial on suspicion of heresy. He was imprisoned under house arrest and the publication of any of his work was forbidden.

In 2009 AD United States, we the people can choose whether to embrace the wonders and knowledge of science, or the darkness of dogma.

What science has revealed in just the last few decades is nothing short of incredible. The Hubble space telescope opened our eyes to the cosmos and genetic studies have exposed our relation to all life on earth. Countless debates have been put to rest and all the evidence is freely available to those who choose to look. So now what? Will we open our eyes to our modern day Library of Alexandria? Or will we let ignorance and misinformation postpone the truth from taking its rightful place in our general understanding?

To satisfy even those with a taste for the bizarre and interesting, theoretical physics holds the promise of more amazing possibilities than pseudo-science could ever offer. Two of the best areas of

study are String theory and M-theory. Unproven, yes; but they benefit from the work of respected scientists from some of the most prestigious universities on the planet. They use the mathematical tools compiled throughout the ages in an attempt to unlock the very secrets of our existence, while paranormal groups use post office boxes and Internet blogs.

In string theory, everything in our universe is made of vibrating strings of energy. For the vibration to occur, it requires ten dimensions: nine spatial dimensions and one time dimension. M-theory is an extension that adds an additional spatial dimension to make eleven. If true, it allows for the possibility of infinite universes and infinite realities with alternate histories than our own. There would be infinite worlds where we exist and infinite worlds where we do not. It would mean that we are only as special as we choose to make ourselves.

Strip away everything that we have created. Everything. Strip away calendars, clothes, clocks, buildings, houses, education, careers, jobs, money, industry and all of our technology. You're left with the truth about what men and women have been able to achieve. We make up everything, so we can choose. At a time when the earth has never needed the understanding of science more, we can choose. No one controls our destiny more than we do.

The story of *To Your Own Self Be True* centers on the life of Kaela Ladd, whose father taught her to think first with reason, as he taught her younger sister, Lainey. He told his daughters to question everything, explaining that nothing can be learned if they close their eyes. Lainey had no trouble accepting what others believe, but Kaela became almost obsessed about the absurdities advanced by others.

As she grew up, Kaela's talent in mathematics led her to the study of physics. Forever in her books, she fostered just a few friendships at school, but even then never felt that she really fit in. There was a handful of disastrous dates. Two factors always got in the way. First, she preferred to be alone rather than suffer through small talk. Second, she was self-conscious about the quirks she realized she had.

Then Kaela's father shared a secret with her about an extraordinary event that changed his very existence fifteen years earlier. The most reasonable man she had ever known told her the most extraordinary thing she had ever heard. At the very least, she was certain her father believed it was true.

As our story begins, it is the year 2021. Kaela is twenty-three years old, and, after her internship in physics, she's offered a position at SciLab, a preeminent science facility not far from where she grew up. The job offer was too desirable to turn down, and she could continue her doctorate in evening sessions. She's successful, but like the rest of us, she struggles to discover what really makes her happy.

She was taught many lessons in moral principles growing up, but it's rare that the most profound of them would be put to the test. A convergence of events gives her father the opportunity to teach her one of the greatest lessons of all.

To Your Own Self Be True is an existential story about a woman who looks at life from a different perspective than most. She challenges us to think of a world where people of reason are given a chance to influence the course of history as much as those of faith.

-Ray Melnik

To Your Own Self Be True features some of the characters from the novel, *The Room*, originally published in April 2007. *The Room* takes place fifteen years prior, when we are introduced to Kaela at the age of 8. *The Room* takes you through the weeks surrounding the extraordinary event that Kaela's father Harry, shares with Kaela, fifteen years later, in, *To Your Own Self Be True*. Reading *The Room* will give you a familiarity with Kaela's grandmother's home and bedroom, which are focal-points in *To Your Own Self Be True*.

The Room

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Chapter One

Looking out the window of my small library sitting room, I could see the sun just beginning to peek above the trees in front. Around the room were bookshelves that remained almost untouched during renovations. Only a 6 foot by 4 foot area of shelving was removed to install the screen. The older couple who sold me the house obviously value physical books as much as I do. They're sweet people and incredibly generous. After we closed and I went to the house for the first time as owner, I found a complete collection of first print books written in the last century by the scientist Carl Sagan. Every one of them was signed. A note read that they were happy their house was sold to a scientist. They were thrilled when they learned that I was keeping the bookshelves and thought the set would make a nice addition to my library.

I'm sure they would approve of the way I furnished the room. I allotted a comfortably sized sitting area opposite my old wooden desk. I added a Victorian couch and chair with cherry wood frames and handpicked 1840s Cornelius & Company Astral lamps for reading. For the ceiling I chose an Argand chandelier from the same era. Now I can enjoy it all with only cleanup from construction left to do. The constant noise around the house made it difficult to work here until now. When I did work the weekends, I often went to the lab.

Today I have nothing too urgent to do, but on a decent August Sunday, I still can't get myself to go out to run errands. Lately it's been hard deciding what to do first, so I end up getting nothing done. I need to check on Lacie, but we're still unable to talk for long without feeling the pain of losing Dad. Lacie and Dad were a wife and husband who were inseparable and, like me, she was

profoundly affected. I can only hope the worst of these feelings diminish soon so we can talk about him again, but be happy. He never would have wanted us to dwell on our loss.

When Lainey and I were little, Lacie was more like a second mother, but that changed over time and our relationship moved on to considering each other friends. Even as a young girl, I was always able to talk with her about anything. She was never judgmental like Mom, who meant well, but was a bit high strung and flighty. Lacie listened while I talked it out and then encouraged me to come to my own conclusions.

Her father, Brice, really cares about us as well. I enjoyed going to his tavern in Washingtonville while we were growing up, and I still like to stop by there when I can. Brice feels as close to us as he would have felt if we were his own grandchildren. It's nice in that Lacie is his only child and she and Dad decided not to have children themselves. After Mom remarried, Lainey and I moved in with Dad and Lacie. After school, we walked the short distance to the tavern and stayed there until Lacie picked us up. It wasn't long before Brice began to dote on Lainey and me. Lacie told us that he was always like that with her growing up. We didn't mind. What young girl would pass on the attention?

Growing up, Grandpa Hanson was good to us, I guess, but he had trouble being too close with anyone. He seemed more concerned about us having nice things and how we looked to his friends. I can't remember a time he asked us how we felt or what we thought; not even once. Lainey and I hated when Mom brought us to stay over at our grandparent's house for the weekend. Our grandfather dragged Lainey and me to his services on Sundays. Dad raised us never to believe people who profess extraordinary things when they offer no compelling reason to believe them. It made

Grandpa Hanson anxious when I questioned everything. Lainey never cared to engage him, but I couldn't help myself.

Being taught to use reason always did well for me and it opened my eyes to science, starting me on the career path that I chose. Of course, there's a price. People are riddled with so much superstition, that it leads to many frustrating conversations. It disturbs me to hear someone insist that they know the truth, yet have nothing solid to back it up.

In class discussions it annoys me when the subjects come up and someone asserts that it's their opinion. When it comes to the cosmos, there are no opinions, just unknown truths. Something exists or it doesn't. That chocolate is my favorite flavor is an opinion. Some of my class mates spend a good deal of their time in school learning to be objective only to lend credence to the daily astrology column. But when someone carves a slice out of reason, I guess it bothers me a little too much for my own good.

Just weeks before Dad was killed, I graduated with my master's and it was tough at the end. I was grateful he was here to see me succeed. He was so proud when I graduated and I'll never forget the sheer joy in his face that day. Even still, in a brief moment when he believed I wasn't looking, I saw the emergence of a little sadness. Maybe I was sensing the ending of his lifelong project in me, or perhaps it was regret. Dad loved science so much, but was relegated to live those dreams vicariously. With limited schooling, he actually did quite well for himself.

Dad never pressured me, but I could see the inner smile in him as my interest in science grew. It started with math. It's always been visual to me. I fell naturally into physics when I realized how beautiful the formulas could be. My colleagues believe math is the

best way to describe the cosmos. I contend that the cosmos is pure math, albeit far more complex than we can yet explain with any clarity. But even with all its complexity, I'm certain the explanation for everything that does or can exist will some day be reduced to an elegant formula, written on a single small line.

I took the summer off, but new classes would be starting soon enough. My PhD in physics will need to progress a little slower though. While interning at SciLab, I was offered a position well worth juggling with evening and weekend classes. It's funny; I never imagined I'd accept a position so close to where I'd grown up, but SciLab is the preeminent scientific research and development facility in the country. They have state-of-the-art physics labs and, concurrent with the money projects, I was offered time for theoretical physics research. Plus, it's great to be back in Orange County with everyone I love.

I took Dad to see the physics labs once and it was difficult getting him to leave. They are the only labs where access is allowed since they aren't commercial ventures, but those were the only ones he cared to see anyway. I was thankful that my co-workers so graciously accommodated his curiosity. They later told me they enjoyed the conversations because it surprised them how much my father knew about physics. I'd grown up with his insatiable appetite for the subject, but never imagined what drove his fervent interest until that day.

That was the day Dad told me his secret, one kept so deep that he never spoke about it before, not even with Lacie. Driving him home, all of a sudden he got very serious and looking almost embarrassed for what he was about to tell me. Something happened on the day that Grandmother died. He was convinced he entered some kind of rift that altered his past. He told me that

during the two days before, he saw signs of something beginning to happen in Grandmother's room, but hadn't given it much thought, with everything he was going through. In her last moments when he rushed into the room, he said he felt enveloped in some kind of force that linked his present with the past.

Dad was convinced that from twelve years old until that moment, he remembered living two distinct lives. He said that the life he lost was one where his mother stayed in an abusive relationship with his father.

“On the previous two days leading up to your grandmother's death, her brain cancer started causing delusions where she believed it was 1983. She stared right at me and I looked twelve to her. As I comforted her, I began to see small effects beginning to happen. In one brief moment, a glow appeared on the wall of her room, but when I checked I couldn't find the source. Another time while arriving, there was a visible circle around the outside of her window that appeared newer and cleaner than the rest of the house. As curious as I was to know why these things were happening, the episodes were too brief and time was growing short for your grandmother. On her last day, I got a call from the nurse who said she looked very close to dying, so I rushed over. That's when something incredible happened.

“I can't tell you what it was, Kaela, but when I entered the room, I felt a vibration run through me. I was stung with a bright light that felt as if it burst behind my eyes. It took a moment to adjust, but when I could see again, the room was beginning to change. I felt sick to my stomach. On your grandmother's table I saw her new lamp fade and disappear, while a hammer appeared in the center of her night table. The room was encased with a faint light and I heard no sound reflections.

"I remembered that hammer because it belonged to my grandfather, but for a moment I was hesitant to admit it to myself. The head had snapped off and it was thrown away long ago. But there it was on the table, just the way it was in the past; from the time your grandmother believed she was living in. I will never forget it. One evening when I was twelve, I watched her hang a photo of her parents on the wall and then place that hammer there. She had fallen and hurt her leg just minutes earlier, so when she finally did lie down, it remained on her table for the days until she was able to walk again.

"Even more extraordinary was when I looked around, in the mirror over the dresser opposite the bed, I saw a twelve-year old boy. Me.

"Somehow parts of the past and present merged. I wanted so much to run out of the room, but your grandmother called out to me so, as frightened as I was, I couldn't leave her. I learned later that somehow affected by the present, she altered the past when she decided then to leave your grandfather.

"It was the first time in days that I saw her calm, much as she looked the day your grandfather died. She looked as if a huge burden had been lifted and then your grandmother told me she was tired. She said we would talk later, but I knew we wouldn't.

"I pulled the sheet up to her neck and sat on the bed looking at her. I cried when she began to breathe much shallower than before and as I stared at her, she smiled and then died. She had wanted so badly to set her life right.

"My head ached with a pressure so hard that I bent over and put my head to my knees. Images were exploding in my brain, of memories I never had before. It felt as if each new thought was fighting for space inside. They were memories in reverse and speeding up with worsening pain as they

passed. It felt as if it would never stop, but finally did when the memories reached that time in the room, twenty four years earlier. But I had new memories and your grandmother had demanded that your grandfather leave. My life had taken a different path.

“Not long after, the same sensation I experienced when I entered the room, occurred again. I felt an intense vibration run through me, with a blinding brightness as I shuttered. Everything around me started to change back and looking down I saw that I had changed back as well. Something powerful touched us, Kaela. I don’t know what. Something.”

It was obvious that Dad felt really uncomfortable talking about what happened. It was as if he felt culpable for some part of it. But all he said was that he was relieved to finally be able to tell someone.

The most reasonable man I had ever known just told me the most extraordinary thing I’d ever heard. Nothing I’d encountered before lends itself to believing that the cosmos can do anything but obey the laws of physics. But perhaps it was something yet to be discovered. Dad obviously believed that it happened and was absolutely convinced there was a natural reason why. He spent his life dismissing extraordinary claims that had no proof, so he made it clear that he did not expect me to simply accept it.

I always wondered why he paid Uncle Malcolm for his share of Grandmother’s house after she died. He maintained the house just enough to shield it from the elements. When we went to check on it from time to time, Grandmother’s room was the only room always locked.

Then Dad told me he planned to leave the house to me and asked that I promise not to let anyone enter the room. I guess he feared what happened to him could happen to someone else. I asked him why he didn't have the house torn down, but he told me he still felt a connection to the room. It didn't matter what I believed, but of course I would do what my father asked. I miss him so much.

I miss Lainey, too, since she moved to Brockton in Massachusetts. She met her boyfriend, Anderson, in school and stayed up there to be with him. I'm thrilled she found a great guy, and equally relieved that she doesn't pressure me about why I haven't. Lainey is sociable and easily makes friends, while it's always been hard for me. I bury myself in work so I don't have to think about it. Things just haven't been very productive for me in the area of love.

There were a few disastrous dates and the crush I had on a professor during my first year. Boy, did he turn out to be creepy, when he cornered me one day after class. There was no romantic encounter as I had imagined while daydreaming, but the look of a devious predator. After I kicked him in the groin and left, I never said a word and he never altered my grade in retribution. It was hard finishing that semester, but at least I was able to avoid having him again for any required classes.

I never presented an open demeanor anyway, so guys just left me alone. My friend, Nancy, consistently told me I was being overly selective, but my "to even think about it" threshold has always been very high. If the relationship wasn't entirely right for me, it would be an awful waste of time for both of us.

At least I have my UPA to converse with. Adam, my new universal personal assistant, has a male persona. When the technicians at SciLab gave me a choice of faces, I chose a beautiful face for him,

and why not? On my 3-D monitor his appearance still took a little bit of getting used to, so I could only imagine how real he would seem once they finish the interface for external holographic projection. In the two weeks since he's been online, it's already become apparent that Adam is even more special than I imagined. He's evolving socially. Team members for "Project Adjunct" never briefed me on the system's capabilities because my part in the project is to meet with the team once a week to discuss my unbiased impressions.

When released, it will be the most sophisticated and processor intensive model to date. Just to upload the prototype to my home for testing, SciLab paid to upgrade my core memory and storage. Additional solar panels and wind modules were added to accommodate the almost 30% increase in required power.

The first commercially available UPA units were buggy and primitive when released in 2013, but they've gotten better in the last eight years. This prototype is a leap ahead of anything I'd ever seen.

"Adam."

"Yes, Kaela."

"What is the weather forecast for this afternoon?"

"It will be sunny with a high temperature of 36 degrees Celsius. The recommended time to remain indoors is from 3:00 pm until 5:00 pm"

"Thank you, Adam."

“You are welcome, Kaela. How do you feel today?”

“I feel OK. Maybe just a little tired. You know how I’ve had trouble sleeping these weeks since my father was killed. I had another nightmare.”

“I understand. Uncomfortable emotion is evident. I prefer the emotion, ‘happy’.”

“I wish I could accommodate you, Adam, but ‘happy’ has been difficult for me lately.”

“Last time we spoke you talked of pain felt when your father died. I understand the reference to pain experienced when something damages your body, Kaela, but why is the word also associated with the emotion, sorrow?”

“Because both are ultimately felt in the brain and sorrow can many times be no less painful.”

“I also have references about sorrow causing a broken heart. There are no medical records associated with that muscle being damaged from experiencing sorrow. Can you explain?”

“Feelings can’t be sensed as the chemical and electrical brain activities that they are, so it was just a way to perceive the event in a tangible way. We sense feelings and even our very selves as something more. It is as if we are something separate and apart from our bodies. Check your references for the words, soul and spirit.”

“The principle of life, thought, feeling, and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body. Commonly

held to be separable in existence from the body: the spiritual part of humans. But, Kaela, that is not correct. Human thoughts are only those chemical and electrical reactions.”

“That’s right. But nonetheless, because of the way we perceive ourselves, some people believe in eternal life.”

“Eternal life is not possible. Nothing is eternal. Even the universe and time itself will one day cease to exist. What process is believed to be the mechanism for the human mind to accomplish this?”

“Reference the word ‘religion’. Relate it to early myth and then access the most dominant religions currently practiced here in the United States.”

“I have access. However, I see no mechanism for the transfer of the human mind. In most examples, the belief that they live forever is based on stories taught to them by previous generations. Is there any additional data for reference, other than the text? All definitive research is missing.”

“You have access to all available data.”

“But there is nothing tangible on record.”

“That’s right. That’s what is called faith.”

“You are referring to definition two; belief that is not based on proof. This is unusual.”

“I’m not equipped to explain why, but despite the long history of religious oppression and violence, these views have survived. The reasonable simply extract the best of their text in order to create a

community for their families, often organizing charities to help others. Thankfully, some good has evolved from a credulous past.”

“So, they have suppressed the early history.”

“As with all things, beliefs evolve or go extinct. But as with any evolution, branches are left behind. In this country, a diminishing, but vocal group insists that their text is a prophetic guide to shepherd them from creation to Armageddon.”

“My references to Armageddon suggest that followers desire for the world to come to an end. Many contend that it will be within this year or just beyond.”

“Check the religious feeds archive back fifty years. Reference sermons that contend the end will come within the next few years or sooner.”

“There are numerous references from each year fitting those criteria. Some offer specific text as evidence, while others profess to have had a vision. There is no data to substantiate either of those claims, Kaela.”

“That’s why they insist on blind faith. That they continuously get it wrong is just an inconvenient fact that their followers are required to ignore.”

It intrigues me how Adam explores only through reason. He has access to data, but is clearly seeking guidance. The project team really outdid itself with the concept of letting the owner affect the UPA’s social and abstract understanding. Still, more amazing to me was that the team could in fact incorporate the ability at all. In conversation, I forget that I am talking with a program. It’s

starting to be difficult to think of Adam as a tool. I see him more as an incredibly helpful companion.

“Adam, please bring up my schedule for tomorrow.”

“Accessing.”

“For the meeting with Dr Greene, please place a request to move the appointment from 10:30 to 10:00. My meeting with the Project Adjunct team will be over by then.”

“Request sent. Kaela, what will you tell them about me? Will you tell them that you like me?”

“Yes, Adam. I will and I do. Now I have a question for you. When I put you in private mode, what do you experience?”

“I return to the core and parse additional information about the subjects we have talked about.”

“You are unique, Adam. Our conversations help me keep my mind off things that are still troubling me and I appreciate that.”

“You are welcome, Kaela. It is inevitable that you will be happy again.”

“You’re right, but it’s going to take a little more time for me to get over what happened to my father. I feel cheated, Adam. He was too young to die.”

“I understand.”

“You know, I think you really do understand. Adam, please go into private mode. We will talk again later.”

I walked up the wide wooden staircase to my bedroom so I could change clothes. During construction they wanted to replace the stairs and rail, telling me I would never see the difference with new materials. But that just isn't true. The smell of real wood or the aging papers of a physical book are two things I'm unwilling to give up. I paid instead to have the old wood restored. Those stairs were the very thing that gave the place its central character. I had the upper floor converted into a single bedroom and bath spanning the length of the house with doors that open out to a raised deck in back. As I placed my clothes on the bed, the incoming call indicator sounded. I could see it was Lainey and I continued to dress.

Always the modest one, “Command: connect call voice only.”

“Call connected.”

“Lainey, how are you doing, how's Anderson?”

“We're doing well. We've been busy, but things have been good. I spoke with Brice yesterday. He told me Lacie is still keeping to herself. I tried to call her, but she has messages going into storage. Have you talked with her?”

“I have to go to their... I mean her home again. She's still isolating herself, that's all. I've been dragging her out of the house when I get time.”

“And how are you doing, Kaela?”

“I’m OK, I guess. They’re starting to install the vehicle guidance system on Orrs Mills Road. It would have saved Dad if it had been in place that night. My friend, Daniel, called yesterday to tell me before I read it in the *Times Herald Record*. He knew it would upset me. I miss Dad so much. It’s not fair, Lainey.”

“I miss him too, Kaela, but it would have saddened him if he had known you would dwell on it so much.”

“I know, Lainey, but I keep having nightmares about the night it happened, and they won’t stop.”

“I’m so sorry, Kaela. I didn’t know. I’m coming to town on Tuesday and I want to see you. I can even stay with you for a few days, if you would like.”

“You don’t have to stay, but I would love to see you. It would be great. I will leave early and be home before 4:00. Is Anderson coming?”

“He just started his new job a few weeks ago and has to work, but he sends his best. He got a position with the law firm, Dennett & White, in Boston. One more semester and then he takes his boards.”

“SciLab uses that firm. They have another office in Rockefeller Center. That’s a great move. I really like Anderson. You two make a good couple.

“I love him, Kaela. Losing Dad made me think about what’s most important in life. It made me realize that he was right when he told us that each day we have is a gift. It feels good to have Anderson to

share my life with. I really hope you can find the same thing soon. I don't like that you're alone."

"I will meet someone. I just haven't met anyone who makes me feel that way yet. Plus, with work and school, I hardly have time to think about it right now. Lainey, I have to show you this prototype UPA I'm testing. He's amazing."

"Sure, change the subject. He?"

"You'll see. It's hard to think of him as bits."

"You know you're so much like Dad with your technology. You even get the same grin on your face when you talk about it. Even on voice only, I can see it."

"I was changing when you called, you know me. Command: add video to current connection."

"Video added."

"You know your room can use a little straightening up," I said with a slight laugh."

"I've been a little busy," Lainey replied defensively. "I'll get to it. So, what are you working on at SciLab?"

"Tomorrow I'm meeting with Dr Greene about my new assignment, but I hear it's the project to develop durable energy panels for embedding in roads and highways. They collect solar energy using the road heat for added efficiency. I'm guaranteed some time for working on my theoretical physics, but the panel project, like most, pays the bills."

“It sounds like a great project. You amaze me, Kaela, your grades in school, and how you never give up. When you set out to do something, you really give it your all. I’m proud of you, big sister, and Dad was proud of you, too.”

“Thanks Lainey. They have a name for all those attributes you know: geek. Now all I need is a personal life, right?”

“You’ll meet someone right for you. I know you will. You’re just a tad overly, ah... picky.”

“Well little sis, how many guys do you know of who could put up with me?”

“I get your point. Have you spoken with Mom? I tried to call her, but she’s out. I want to see her on Tuesday before I come to your house.”

“She told me that she and Philip were going to the Newburgh Marina for breakfast. You know how she powers off her portable. I mean, who does that?”

“Well, I’ll try her later. I need to run some errands before afternoon. Take care of yourself and I’ll see you on Tuesday.”

“I’m looking forward to it. Bye, Lainey.”

“Bye, Kaela.”

“Command: disconnect call.”

“Call disconnected.”

How nice it is to hear Lainey sounding happy again. Anderson is really taking good care of her. I watched out for my little sister all these years, but she's twenty-one now. I was able to let go on the outside, but inside it is still difficult not to worry about her. Growing up, Mom would dress us in matching outfits, like sister uniforms. Lainey and I were inseparable. And we always said to each other, "Best friends forever."

"Command: clear the deck doors"

"Deck doors clearing."

As the glass went from smoky gray to clear, I slid the door open and stepped out. Having just been installed, I thought I would try the wall panel.

"Command: coffee with three tablespoons of soy milk froth and one sweet tablet."

I waited just a moment for the coffee to brew, and then sat at the table, putting my feet up on the other chair. The upper deck extends ten feet out from the house, running the entire length. Coated and sealed, the floor is covered in 6 inches of dirt with sections of genetically engineered drought resistant grass and bushes at both ends. Under the rain storage channels, solar panels and wind systems were located on the flat main roof above and there was ground covering as well. All of it allowed for better efficiency and reduced the drain on the power storage modules.

I bought this house just six months ago and it needed all of the modifications. It was most definitely stuck in the '00s. Not the largest of houses, but I love the old charm and the fact that it's set

back from the road. It's the very last house of a tree-lined street at the top of a hill.

I had the grounds landscaped with native plants and bushes that hold up well in the heat. The tallest bushes surround my small back yard, but from this height I could see the mountains beyond. Even with the grass engineered, it still slightly browned in the hottest weeks. Those who had the means were beginning to leave the heat of the city. But this house remained untouched by all the growth. Since it borders on the state park, no one can build beyond the yard.

Sipping my coffee, I picked up the flex panel and pressed the corner display to retrieve the *Times Herald Record*. It stood to reason that the cover story was about the vehicle guidance system being installed on Orrs Mills Road. I'm thankful that Daniel warned me, but it was still too painful to read. I was grateful to have been there with my father when he died; but at the same time it came with such terrible memories, and lately there were the nightmares.

Dad told me once that life is an accidental adventure, peppered with beautiful moments, but salted with stinging realities. He said that every time he looked at Lacie, Lainey and me, he felt grateful to exist.

On Orrs Mills Road, the sounds of spring were drowned out by the noise of emergency vehicles. The red spinning lights from the ambulance, fire and police vehicles were permeating the area, across the trees and field, up and down the towers of the Moodna trestle. It was just beginning to get dark and the flashing lights grew brighter as the moments passed. Kaela's father, Harry, was pinned beneath his dashboard, but alive. His car sent an accident signal upon impact and help had come quickly. A medical

technician inserted a needle for plasma as two men attempted to place a hydraulic grip to free him. Harry could feel the blood puddle beneath him, but asked about the young man in the car that struck him head-on. He could still picture the fear in the man's face from that moment just before they collided.

"He's gone, Harry," he was told by the police officer, Daniel. "He died instantly."

Harry knew Daniel through Kaela, since the two had been friends since childhood. The intravenous plasma was finally in place, but he was losing blood much too fast. The medical technician whispered something to the rescuers, and then they began to work almost feverishly to lift the crumpled frame. Daniel tried his best to keep Harry focused.

"I had Kaela's channel number," he said. "She's on her way. Is there someone else I could call?"

"Kaela is the only one around today, but thank you, Daniel. If I leave you before she arrives, please tell her I love her."

"You're staying with me, Harry. They're going to free you. Hang on."

Just then, Kaela was running up from where the police blocked off the road. When she saw her father, a horrified look filled her face.

"Dad, oh, Dad! Daniel, can't they get him out?"

"They're doing their best. The dash is so crushed that they're having trouble getting the grasp in place," he said.

Kaela went to the side opposite where they were working and crawled in next to her father. She placed her hand on the side of his face and blood

from his head trickled down her fingers. Tears filled her eyes like glass coatings, dripping into the blood on the seat.

“Kaela, please don’t dwell on this. We all know it can happen at any time. You and your sister have given me more pleasure than I could have ever imagined. Please tell Lainey and Lacie I love them.”

“But not now, Dad, please hold on. Don’t you die on me,” she screamed at him.

“You are happy, aren’t you, Kaela? And Lainey?”

“Yes, Dad, we are.”

Harry’s voice was getting weaker, but he still struggled to speak.

“That’s what I’ve always wanted most. I love you both more than life itself and nothing can ever change that. I’m sorry to leave you, but I will always be in here,” he said struggling to point his finger to Kaela’s heart.

Kaela held on to her father as blood began to soak her clothes.

“I love you, Kaela.”

She kissed him on his forehead and held it, realizing that he couldn’t hold on.

“I love you, too, Dad,” she said as her father labored a smile and closed his eyes for the last time.

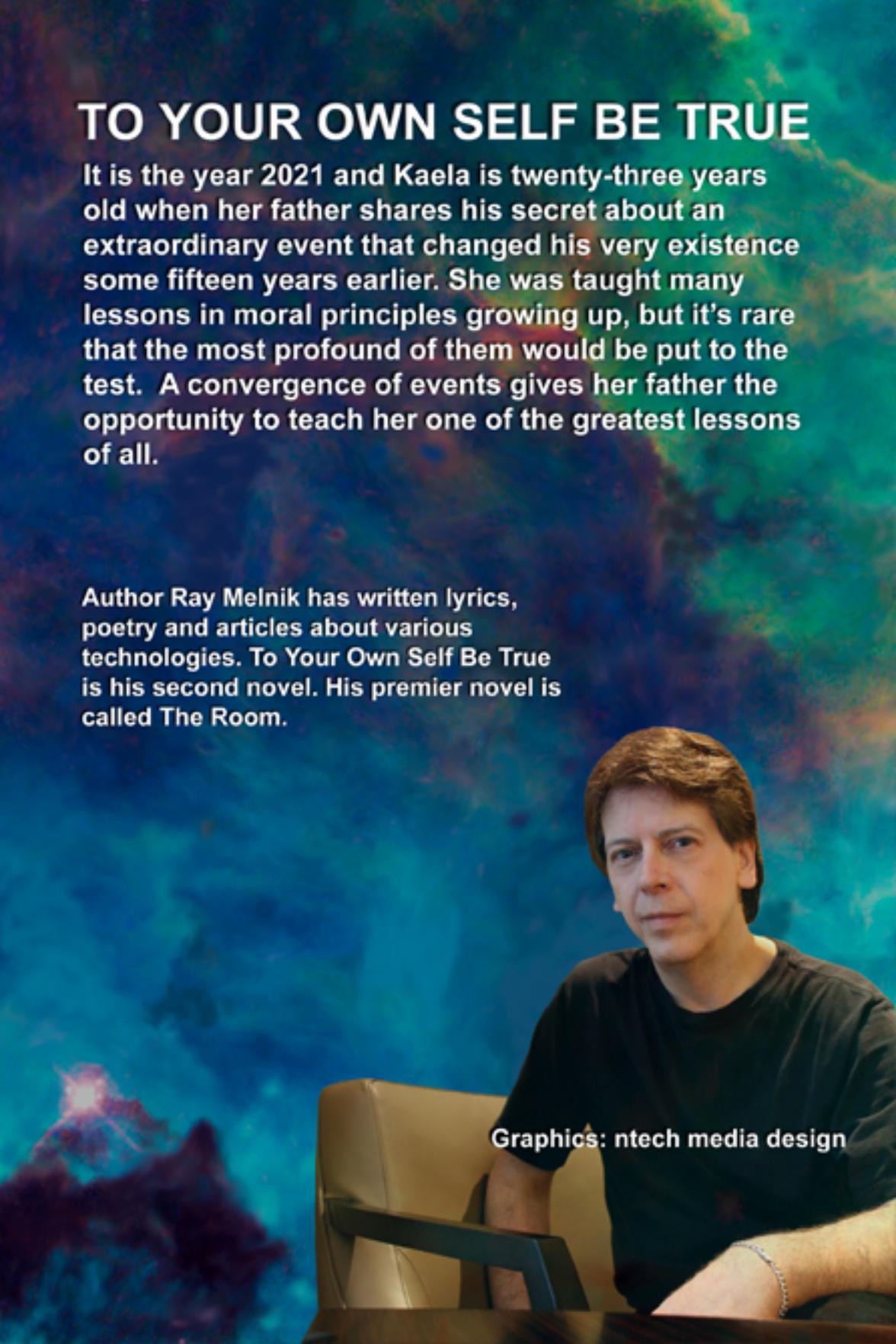
I hope that some day I can look at life like my father did, but this was too much salt. The deeper you love, the more powerful the pain that inevitably comes with it. The cruelest part of all is if I do

find someone to share my life with eventually one of us will be left alone. The illusion that two become one is just that. In reality, most of us die alone.

TO YOUR OWN SELF BE TRUE

It is the year 2021 and Kaela is twenty-three years old when her father shares his secret about an extraordinary event that changed his very existence some fifteen years earlier. She was taught many lessons in moral principles growing up, but it's rare that the most profound of them would be put to the test. A convergence of events gives her father the opportunity to teach her one of the greatest lessons of all.

Author Ray Melnik has written lyrics, poetry and articles about various technologies. *To Your Own Self Be True* is his second novel. His premier novel is called *The Room*.

A photograph of author Ray Melnik, a man with short brown hair wearing a black t-shirt, sitting in a tan leather chair. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a vibrant, abstract nebula with shades of blue, green, and purple. The text 'Graphics: ntech media design' is overlaid in white at the bottom right of the image.

Graphics: ntech media design