

# LIFELINE X

## A Doctor Hightower Novel

### PART ONE: FALSE PROPHECY

#### Chapter 1: A Beginning of the End

Morrison, Colorado

Winter, 2020

“Look, Mister Wallace—I don’t have much money. But I was told that sometimes you help people with legal problems on the cheap. Is that true?”

“Well, Mister Davis, I guess I wouldn’t want to say, ‘on the cheap,’ but I do have a friend, or maybe just a contact with someone who will sometimes help people in distress without any fee. He’s a little odd—some might even say, uh, crazy. But he’s a brilliant man who has all the money he needs and likes to dabble in a case or two every so often, just to amuse himself. Tell me about your legal issues.”

Malcom Wallace was often uncharitably described as ancient. No one was certain about his age, but many guessed seventy-something, although some thought it was more like ninety. He had been a high-powered criminal attorney in Denver for more years than even he could remember. After retirement he moved to Morrison, a quiet mountain community in the foothills outside Denver. He sought solitude, but instead found isolation. After years of boredom, he’d opened a small office on one of the quaint, quiet streets in downtown Morrison, to have something to do. He mostly handed out free advice on divorces, legal disputes between friends

and relatives and, when the case demanded, steered people to one of several practicing attorneys in the area. His law license had long expired, but the authorities ignored him because he was harmless.

One person he would on occasion refer people to was Doctor Thomas H. Hightower the Third. Hightower had an active law license, but no one in Morrison knew what he was a doctor of. The most often-heard answer was a shrink. Wallace had bumped into Hightower before he retired, and found him to be strange, brilliant and a little scary. He seemed to take on only cases that fascinated him and had almost no concern for any of the other poor people who needed his help. He lacked empathy but was always polite. In a different time and a different world, he would have been called a gentleman, if maybe a cold-hearted one. His manner was almost regal. Everyone thought he seemed out of place.

“My wife, Elizabeth,” Davis was nervous and kept wringing his hands as he explained, “she’s being scammed by a fake priest or something. She has given him money—money we don’t have to spare. She won’t listen to me. She says he’s giving her a sense of well-being, whatever the hell that means. I approached the guy—probably lost my temper, but I didn’t do anything. The creep’s name is Brother Baxter. How phony is that? Anyway, we got into an argument, and he slugged me. Knocked me on my ass. I blacked out. When I woke up, I’d been arrested and charged with trespassing and assault. The bastard hit *me*. I never touched him. They’re saying I’ll most likely get sixty days in the county jail for petty assault. I just went back to work in construction—if I’m in jail for two months, we’ll be on the street. I just need someone to talk to the cops and get this straightened out. A guy I met in jail gave me your name. Can you help me?”

“You need a lawyer. I’m not technically an attorney anymore, but I can refer you to one. Your other option is a public defender. They’re good, honest lawyers, and they can help you at no charge. I think I have a card here somewhere.” Wallace started shuffling papers on his not so tidy desk.

“Yeah, they already told me about that. I talked to this lady, Lani something-or-other. She said no doubt, if I pled guilty, they’d give me probation for maybe a year. I told her I didn’t do anything. Why should I plead guilty? She looked at me like I was stupid or somethin’ and shrugged her shoulders. I don’t want to be on probation for a year. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Wallace sighed and dropped his eyes to the floor. Davis’ legal problems were not major, although profoundly serious to him. Based on what he knew, Wallace didn’t think Hightower would be interested in something this mundane. Now, if Davis had murdered the religious charlatan, that would be most interesting. But, no, he was claiming innocence on a very minor offense. His best option was the public defender, but it could be hard for Davis to go back after his last experience. Wallace was thinking about options when his phone rang, a landline with a ring loud enough to disturb the neighbors. In the age of smartphones, Wallace preferred the comfort of an old and trusted instrument that wasn’t smart, but very efficient at one thing: phone calls.

“Hello.”

“Mister Wallace, hope your existence is going well. Was pondering my lack of stimulus and began wondering if you might have any interesting cases hanging about?”

“Mister Hightower, what an amazing coincidence.” *Or was it?* “Just now, I’m talking to someone who could use some help. But this is really a small matter.” Out of the corner of his

eye, he saw Davis shoot him a dirty look. “It involves some dealings with a religious man who may have taken advantage of a lady. When confronted by her husband, it’s the husband who ends up in jail.”

“What’s the religious man’s name?”

Wallace covered the phone with his hand. “What was the name of the religious guy who took your wife’s money?”

“Brother Baxter.”

“His name is Brother Baxter.” Wallace listened to Hightower’s response. He hung up. “He wants to see you immediately. He also said that you should never contact Baxter again-- unless you don’t value your life.”



Hightower’s heightened nerves and emotions all made sense to him now. The pieces were falling into place. Baxter was alive. He couldn’t believe it. He’d seen him die. *Maybe this was someone else.* As soon as he thought that --he knew it wasn’t true. Baxter had been his nemesis, the man who swore to end Hightower’s existence, once dead, now alive. He had no choice but to act. Leave evil alone and it only grows. But here, in Denver? How did he find me?

Hightower was tall, maybe six-three or -four. His full beard was neatly trimmed, and he wore his hair long, sometimes in a ponytail. His hair and beard were mostly gray, but he did not seem that old. He wore simple, frameless glasses. He was noticeably overweight, but no one had ever described him as fat. Hightower referred to himself as a widower, but never provided details. He always seemed to be alone.

His house on Spring Street in Morrison was a small, modest, wood-frame with several large trees in the yard. On one side was a small sign, carved in wood; “Doctor Hightower.” His neighbors thought he was rude, maybe a snob, and unfriendly. Some thought he might be hiding from something—not an uncommon condition in the mountains. His immediate neighbor, who had only talked to him a few times, told others he was an asshole. Few people bothered him, which was the way he liked it. There had been rumors some years ago that he might have been running a meth lab because of mysterious smells detected around the house on occasion. It was a live-and-let-live neighborhood, so nobody complained.

In his basement, Hightower sat at his massive desk, papers and books scattered haphazardly across it. He had several computers and multiple screens arranged on the desk. The basement most resembled a lab of some sort, with worktables and a large amount of scientific equipment. He puffed on a pipe. Pipe smoking was no longer a normal habit of the day, something from his past that he clung to as elusive comfort.

A light, one of a series along the top of the back wall, blinked. That indicated someone at the front door. He pushed a button, and on a large-screen monitor appeared a plain man, looking worried and maybe angry, standing on the porch. Hightower pushed another button and spoke into a microphone. “You from Wallace?”

The man looked about, surprised. He hesitated. “Yes, yes. He sent me.” He looked ready to bolt at any moment.

“Come into the living room and take a seat. I will be there in just a minute.” Hightower used other monitors to watch as the man entered the house and finally sat down, constantly looking around.

Hightower marched into the room, wearing his most glorious black robe. He also had on his special lift shoes which made him almost six feet, six inches tall. The man on the sofa gaped, a look of shock and stupidity.

Hightower chuckled to himself. “What’s your name?”

“Davis—Davis, sir. Jim Davis.”

“Calm down, Mister Davis. I will help you with your problem. But I need you to promise me something.”

“What, uh, what do I have to promise?”

“You can’t tell anyone about our arrangement.”

“Even my wife?”

“Especially your wife. You will leave here, and never see me again. And you will never talk about this to anyone. Can you do that?”

“I don’t understand, Mister. How can you help me if you don’t exist? What’s this about, a rich man’s fuckin’ joke?” Hightower could see the transformation from terrified man to someone who thought he was being made fun of. Even mice will attack if you push hard enough.

“Your problem’s not a ‘fuckin’ joke’ to me. I’m going to make it go away. But you can’t be connected to me, or you and your wife could be in danger. If you don’t want my help, you can go now.” Hightower turned his back and headed to the kitchen.

“No, no wait. I need help. It’s just—well, it’s just that—how can you help me? Are you going to court? Will you talk to the prosecutor? How?”

“I’m sure it doesn’t matter to you how, if you’re relieved of this problem, right? Do you have paperwork on your arrest and charges?”

“Yes.” Davis pulled out the copies of the documents he’d been given and handed them to Hightower, careful not to touch the huge man.

“The answer to your question is, ‘Magic.’ You don’t need to know any more. Okay? Now go, and never come back. In three days, your problem will be resolved. Go!” The last word was said in a booming voice. Davis jumped up and ran out.

Hightower went back to the basement to make a connection with an ally in Bangkok, Thailand. Using the most sophisticated encryption software and a VPN server, he was comfortable this was a private conversation.

*“Need to change some data in government server. Jefferson County, Colorado. Case CV-8725602 Mister James Ray Davis. Magistrate Court. Ryan Fitzgerald. Division V. Want this case dismissed by DA. Quote cost.”* The message was sent. Within minutes there was a response.

*“Have accessed before. Easy. Cost \$1,000 USD. Wired to same account as before.”*

Hightower moved to a different computer and accessed his bank account in Ireland. He put in his wire request and waited. Soon he had confirmation: “Funds transferred.”

*A response came in. “Thanks. Will have results in one day.”*

Hightower smiled. Davis would soon be out of the system and forgotten. No file, no case, no problem. Magic. Now it was time to deal with Brother Baxter. How, when and other

details were not clear at this point. But there was no avoiding the confrontation ahead. His hands were sweating, his heart was racing, and he was smiling. The bastard Baxter would die again.