

Evaluating Your eProof

If you wish to make changes to your metadata, click on the See More Details link in the Title Approval page. You'll then be able to edit and save changes to each setion of metadata as needed.

Your eproof file contains the following:

- Evaluating your eProof information page
- eProof hairlines information page
- Full dustjacket image (if applicable)
- Full cover image
- Cropped front cover image (this does not appear in the printed book)
- Interior content (multiple pages, in reader order), first page to be on the right-hand side (or left-hand for RTL books*)
- Cropped back cover image (this does not appear in the printed book)

Recommended items to consider while evaluating your eProof:

- Have your latest changes been incorporated?
- Is the pagination correct?
- Odd numbered pages on the right/recto and even numbers on the left/verso?
- RTL books*: odd numbered pages to the left/verso and even numbers on the right/recto?
- Are the page items and text positioned correctly on the page?
- Does your proof contain any spelling or grammatical errors or typos that need to be corrected?
- Is the ISBN correct and identical on the cover as well as the copyright page?
- Does the price on the cover match the price in the title metadata?

Other considerations:

- eProofs should not be used to evaluate color or print quality. A physical copy should be reviewed to evaluate this.
- The cropping of both cover and interior is approximate and does not account for the manufacturing variance of 1/16" (2mm)
- eProof file sizes are limited. Where a file is close to its limit, pages are removed from the middle of the content to reduce the file size. Where this happens, you will see a watermark appear at the bottom of each interior page confirming that pages have been removed. Note: this only appears in the eProof file and does not apply when the book is printed

Important note:

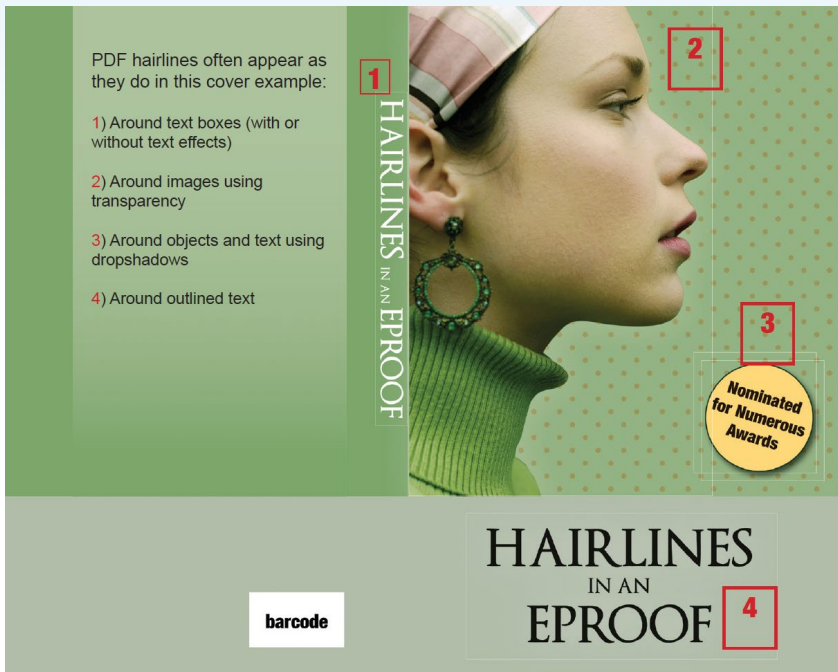
- !! Pending production orders cannot be released for printing until your proof approval is completed.
- !! It is the publisher's responsibility to review each eProof to confirm it is accurate and does not contain errors. Lightning Source is not a publisher and as such does not review any content for accuracy, completeness or typographical errors of any kind will print the file as approved by the publisher.

Need more? Read our [eproof article](#).

*RTL: Right to left content, also known as Reserve Bound, is content that is bound on the right-hand side and with text that reads from right to left. This format is commonly used for content written in languages such as: Arabic, Hebrew, Farsi and Urdu.

Eproof Approval PDFs

When reviewing eproofs and PDFs, you will often see hairlines. These thin, light colored lines are a result of a transparency flattener used by PDF creators and will sometimes appear around text boxes and masked images. Fortunately these hairlines are only visible in your PDF and will not print when the book is produced. These lines may appear on both cover and interior files.



Please note That while the above examples are most common, hairlines may also present themselves in additional ways. If you have any concerns, it's advisable to review your native working files to ensure the lines aren't present. Physical proofs are also available for review.

Bleed Artwork Dimensions:
19.875" x 9.0" • 228.6mm x 504.8mm



Steve Gansen once audited a psychology class and was never the same. He lives under moderate surveillance and drinks his coffee with a spoon. This is his first known offense.



SG Publishing

The Year You Went Away

GOOD MORNING, residents and staff of Sunnydale Hospital. Please extend a warm institutional welcome to Dr. Limpwick and his subject, who will be joining us for a year of therapeutic observation. All personnel are reminded to smile.

Lunch will be served promptly at 12:30. Today's soup is beige.



The Year You Went Away

Steve Gansen

The Year You Went Away

(or, A Chronicle of Disorder)

Steve Gansen

The Year You Went Away

In this darkly comic chronicle of disorder, a disillusioned psychiatrist finds himself exiled to a Mid-Atlantic asylum where reality bends, therapy loops, and the patients aren't the only ones under observation. What begins as bureaucratic busywork spirals into a surreal reckoning with guilt, memory, and the limits of sanity.

A literary satire in the key of *Catch-22* and *Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Year You Went Away* blends institutional absurdity with existential ache. It was written during the author's lost years and unearthed just in time for yours.

3.25 flap
82.55mm

.25 wrap
6.35mm

5.9375
151 mm

.750
19.05mm

5.50 x 8.50
216 mm x 140 mm

5.9375
151 mm

.25 wrap
6.35mm

3.25 flap
82.55mm

Content Type: Black & White
Paper Type: Creme
Page Count: 268
File type: Internal
ISBN/SKU: 9798349520907





The Year You Went Away

(or, A Chronicle of Disorder)

Steve Gansen

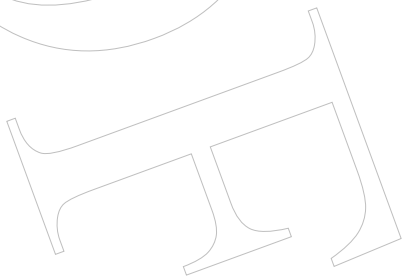
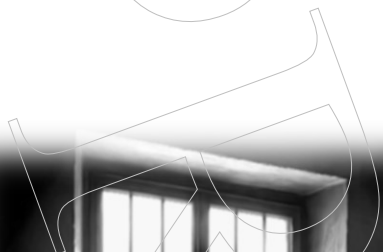
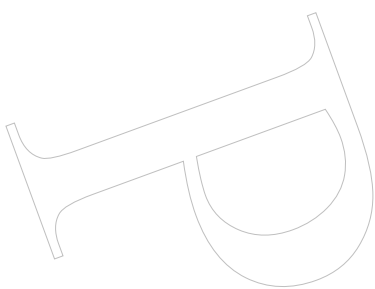
Gansen

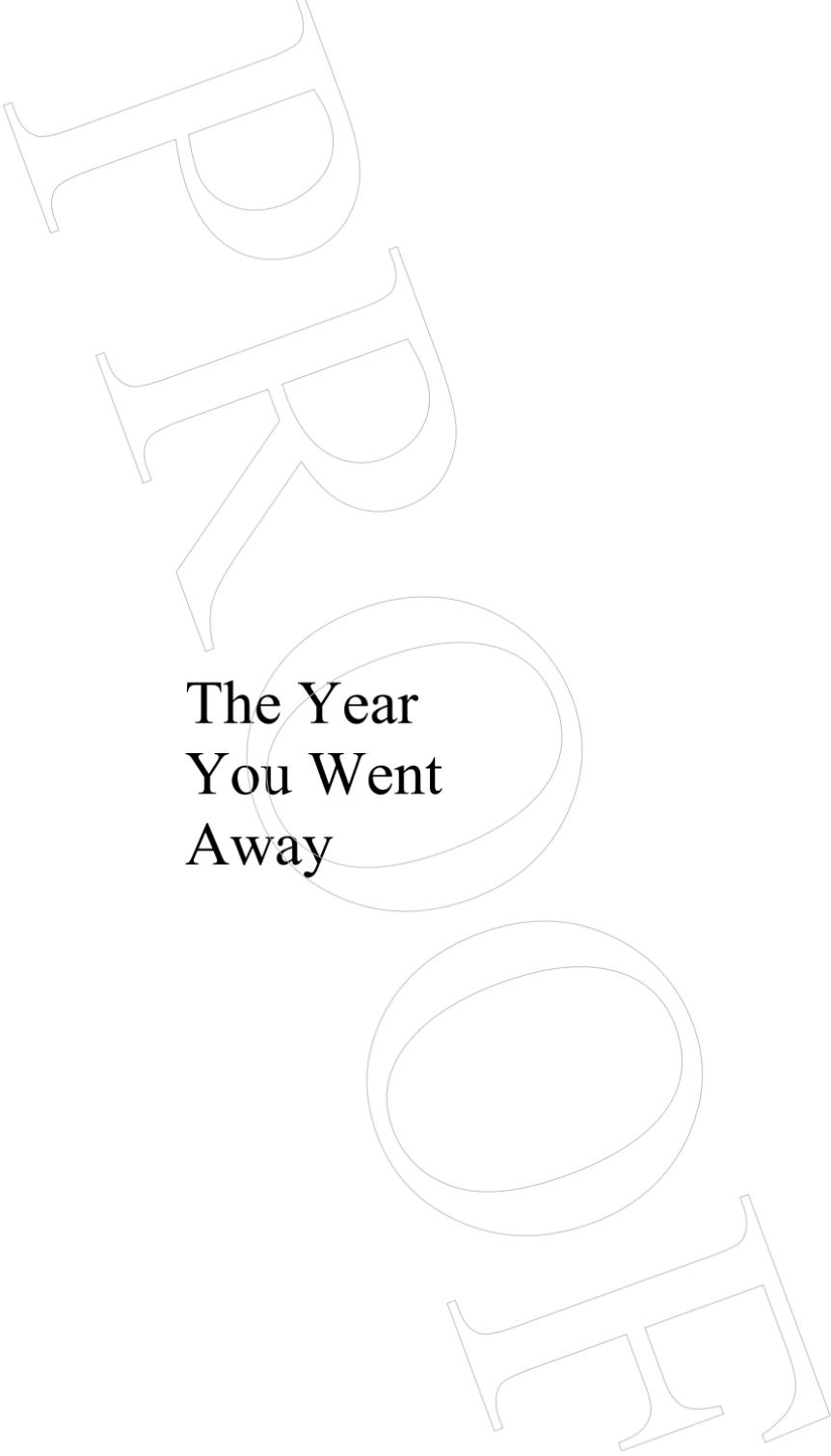
The Year You Went Away

SG Publishing









The Year
You Went
Away

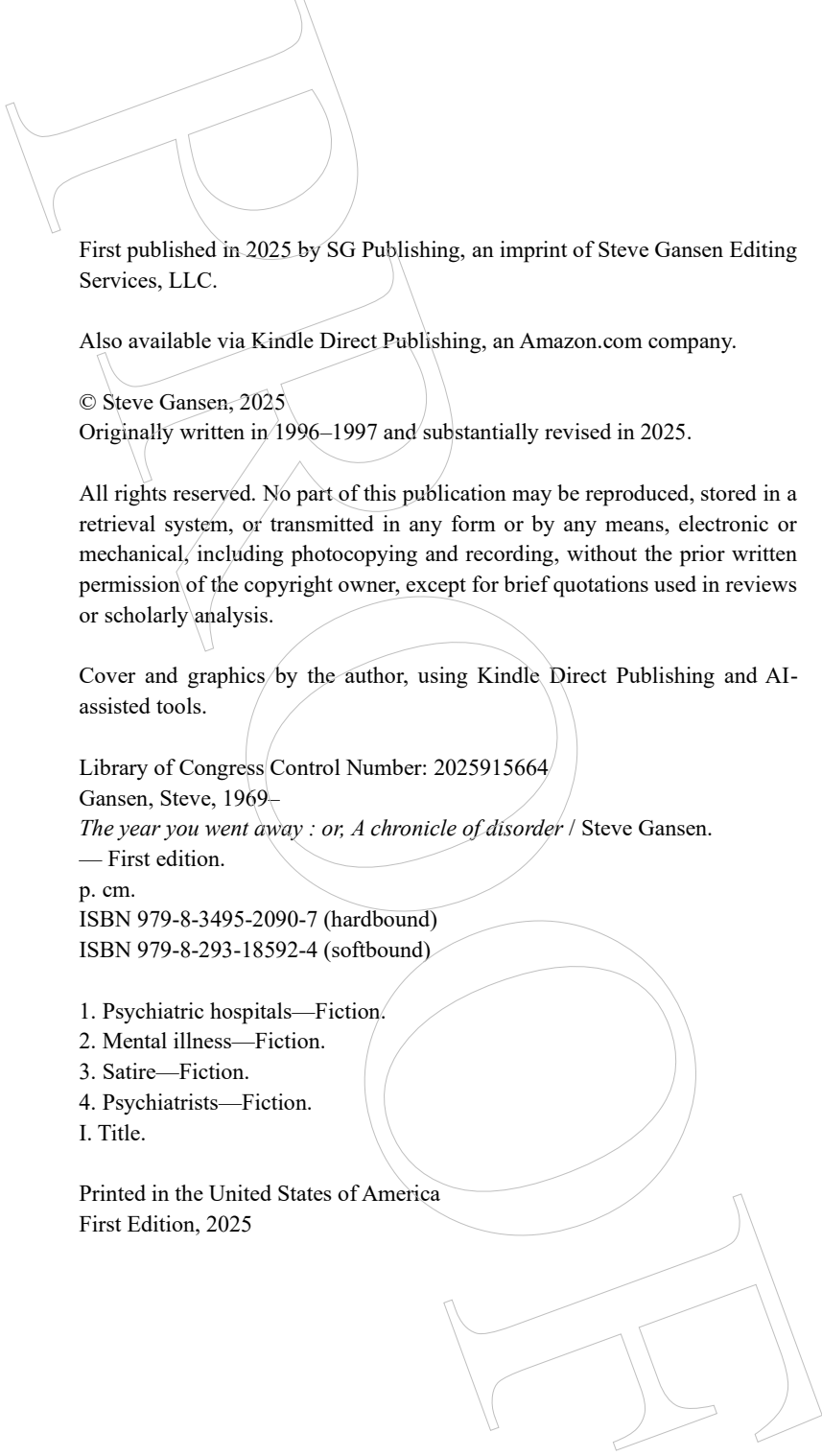


THE YEAR YOU WENT AWAY

(or, A Chronicle of Disorder)



Steve Gansen



First published in 2025 by SG Publishing, an imprint of Steve Gansen Editing Services, LLC.

Also available via Kindle Direct Publishing, an Amazon.com company.

© Steve Gansen, 2025

Originally written in 1996–1997 and substantially revised in 2025.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for brief quotations used in reviews or scholarly analysis.

Cover and graphics by the author, using Kindle Direct Publishing and AI-assisted tools.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025915664

Gansen, Steve, 1969–

The year you went away : or, A chronicle of disorder / Steve Gansen.

— First edition.

p. cm.

ISBN 979-8-3495-2090-7 (hardbound)

ISBN 979-8-293-18592-4 (softbound)

1. Psychiatric hospitals—Fiction.

2. Mental illness—Fiction.

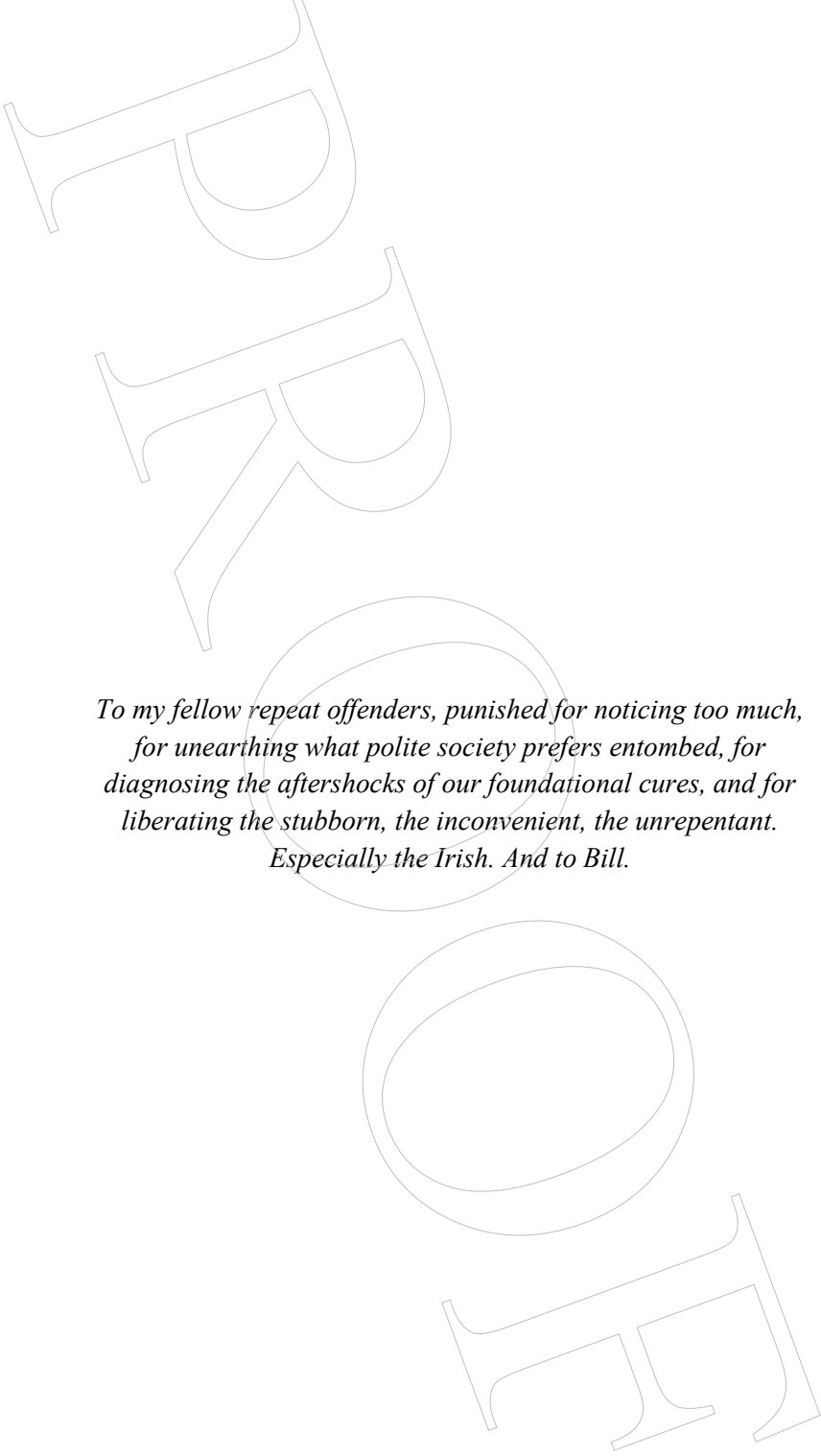
3. Satire—Fiction.

4. Psychiatrists—Fiction.

I. Title.

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition, 2025



*To my fellow repeat offenders, punished for noticing too much,
for unearthing what polite society prefers entombed, for
diagnosing the aftershocks of our foundational cures, and for
liberating the stubborn, the inconvenient, the unrepentant.
Especially the Irish. And to Bill.*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. An Undefined Cellist in a State of Repose	1
2. Dining with a Post-Freudian Suffragette	26
3. The Cruel Sun Sets Upon the Reputed Philadelphia Madman	46
4. Poetic Meter and the Semi-Literate Primate	62
5. On the Matron's Role in Institutional Disintegration (Portent and Pattern)	77
6. The Sequined Overindulgence of the Modern Teenage Male	94
7. Olfactory Triggers in Equine- Obsessed Caregivers	110
8. Field Procedures for Managing Disorientation, Delirium, and Downright Impertinence in Remote Therapeutic Outposts	126
9. On the Psycho-therapeutic Utility of One-Man Vaudeville for the Nervously Predisposed	150

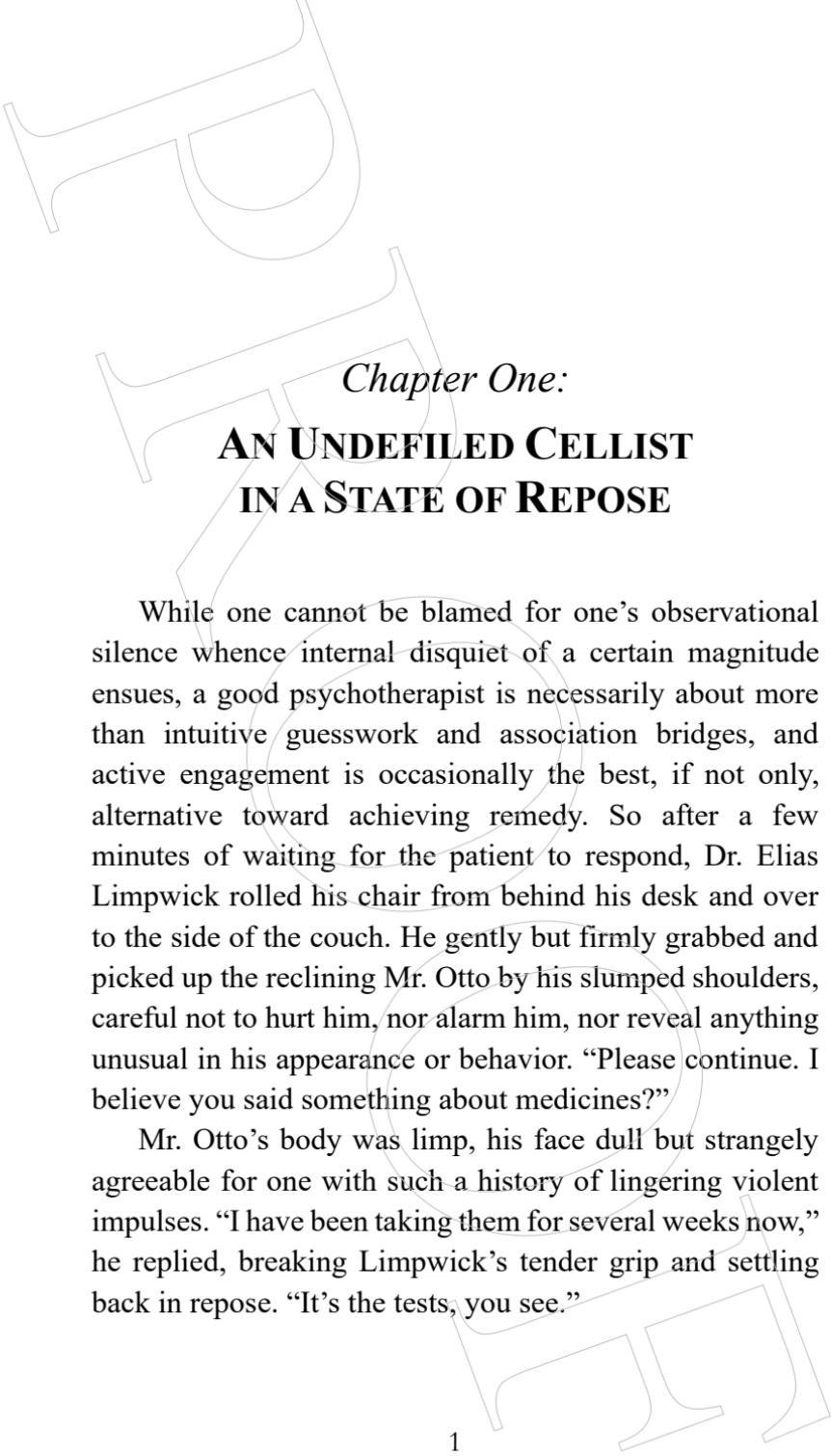
10. Ecclesiastical Missteps and Reopened Wounds in the Theatre of Healing (A Cautionary Note)	168
11. The Communal Meal as Therapy for Residual Shell-Shock Effects	193
12. Acceptable Losses in the Advancement of Experimental Psychiatry	214
13. Dramatic Immersion and the Unclothed Self.....	236
Epilogue <i>The Ashtray and the Lemon</i>	249

TABLE OF FIGURES

1. Mr. Otto closed his eyes and began to hum and chant in gibberish, his voice swelling with eerie resonance, as though conducting some forgotten voodoo rite.	5
2. The Philadelphia Madman, who haunted immigrant children's imaginations, was said to paint their likenesses in victims' blood beneath the shadow of a derelict maintenance shed at the far edge of the Sunnydale Asylum grounds.	12
3. The waiter calmly reiterated: "Boudin Blanc. With Alsatian Choucroute and Dijon mustard served on a roll."	31
4. "I feel verily transported by your gift for detail," Jacob commented.	43

5. There came a sudden hissing sound. "Oh, that's Effie,"
Her hedgehog, it seemed, had chosen that moment
to awaken, and Limpwick, pillow in hand, was altogether
unprepared for the disturbance. 58
6. Through the paint and powder, Nurse Levenwell
managed an air of quiet dignity. 90
7. "C'mon you sons of bitches.
Do you want to live forever?" 109
8. Breathtaking in its quiet majesty, the Forger des Mythes
ArtisticRetreat and Summer Stock Theatre revealed itself
at last: an ivy-clad sanctuary where grandeur lingered, and
time itself seemed to pause in reverence. 145
9. Patient Q, as if shielding his mind from memory or light,
placed a trembling hand over his eyes . . . whether
in grief, shame, or some deeper torment,
no one could quite say. 148
10. His trinket was a replica of the coin the
Bishop of Auxerre bestowed upon young Geneviève
in recognition of the girl's virtue. 175
11. Rebekah's eyes were full of youthful idealism..... 200
12. He seemed in a good mood, like a mad
Irishman after a reinvigorating scrap..... 219
13. Limpwick adjusted the collar of his coat.
The hallway smelled faintly of oranges
and ammonium. 240





Chapter One:

**AN UNDEFILED CELLIST
IN A STATE OF REPOSE**

While one cannot be blamed for one's observational silence whence internal disquiet of a certain magnitude ensues, a good psychotherapist is necessarily about more than intuitive guesswork and association bridges, and active engagement is occasionally the best, if not only, alternative toward achieving remedy. So after a few minutes of waiting for the patient to respond, Dr. Elias Limpwick rolled his chair from behind his desk and over to the side of the couch. He gently but firmly grabbed and picked up the reclining Mr. Otto by his slumped shoulders, careful not to hurt him, nor alarm him, nor reveal anything unusual in his appearance or behavior. "Please continue. I believe you said something about medicines?"

Mr. Otto's body was limp, his face dull but strangely agreeable for one with such a history of lingering violent impulses. "I have been taking them for several weeks now," he replied, breaking Limpwick's tender grip and settling back in repose. "It's the tests, you see."

“Tests. Yes, of course.” Limpwick twirled and rolled his chair back behind his desk, leaning back ever so gently against the cushioned leather upholstery of its creaking oak. He nodded and went back to scribbling his analytical notes on a pad of paper.

Fearing he was losing his own mental composure, he tried a technique he had developed a few years back. He put down his pencil and pressed his fingertips into his skull, imagining he was kneading his brain back into place, working out the air pockets of distracting thought.

It wasn't working. With his synapses firing in another part of his deep limbic system, he found it difficult to concentrate on Mr. Otto. The primal urge to strangle those who would experiment on his patients without first obtaining his permission was too strong. It was unhealthy to bottle such rage for long, but what was Limpwick to do? A patient with Mr. Otto's sensitivity would pick up on and internalize this kind of emotion if expressed in even the subtlest shift of Limpwick's posture or demeanor. He could not afford to disrupt the momentum achieved in that day's session, when productive sessions with Mr. Otto had been so few and far between.

At times when one is frozen in great, inexpressible mental turmoil, one looks around at the mundane sparseness of one's office and sees it as if for the first time. It was not much of an office, if one was to judge by its lack of furnishings, its bare mustard-yellow walls, its translucent glass-block windows. But its location in the hospital complex offered his patients, and himself, the best opportunity for quiet reflection, a place of respite, a place of comfort, tucked away from the cold concrete hallways

and excruciating fluorescent humming in the farthest corner of Sunnydale Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

But not today, he thought. Today there would be no respite, only the gnawing question (why hadn't he been informed about tests on his own patients?) and the deeper, more corrosive certainty: someone was undermining his authority as chief psychiatrist.

Granted, such a bold circumvention of procedure had echoes of the great Freudian age, when rule-flaunting was common, even encouraged by the elder autonomists on the dare-devil fringes of the profession. He could overlook, even appreciate, the bending of medical protocol, so long as the propelling motive were to advance a worthy cause . . . but he dearly hoped this disgorging of experimental narcotics willy-nilly, attracted by the nefarious profit mirage on the horizon's edge, was not what his profession was becoming. Regardless of the big money to be had, no one, *no one*, administered medicines to Limpwick's patients without a certain prior approval. And that approval was his to make, and his alone.

But he would have to keep a cool head if he was to correct the precipitous edge-teetering, embodied right before him in the person of Mr. Otto, before the inevitable outcome of medicinal free-fall. When brain-kneading didn't work to calm his nerves, Limpwick called on his favorite elixir, one far less ghastly than the mind medications that were undermining the patient's therapy. He called for the nurse to bring a pitcher of water with crushed ice, a slice of lemon, and two glasses.

The nurse placed the tray of ice water on the corner of Limpwick's desk. To his delight, she remembered the

lemon slice this time, although she left before filling the glasses. Such an oversight by these nurses had been rarer under Nurse Levenwell's command, but common etiquette would always be a work in progress considering some of her nursing staff's working-class backgrounds.

Maybe next time. This time, Limpwick handled it himself, then walked over and set Mr. Otto's cold glass of water on the table beside the couch, just within reach. The stretch felt good. Back at his desk, he could feel the blood circulating again in his legs. He would proceed with Mr. Otto as if everything were normal.

§

"So," he asked, "how is the cello coming along?"

Mr. Otto cleared his throat. "I played it for Mother on her last visit a couple months ago, at her insistence. She thought my intonation was better than she's ever heard."

"This is marvelous."

"She is afraid its strings will rust if it sits in its case for too long, un-played." Mr. Otto looked back at him over the couch. "Mother has written that she would like me to perform the Britten piece at my cousin's wedding next month. But one thing she doesn't realize," he added with a grin, "is that I already have played my last note for the family."

"Last note?" Limpwick replied, calmly, professionally. "What do you mean?"

"I'm feeling a lot better, and have overcome my desire to pluck that cursed instrument until my fingers bleed. It was all for her, anyway. Always for her."



Figure 1. Mr. Otto closed his eyes and began to hum and chant in gibberish, his voice swelling with eerie resonance, as though conducting some forgotten voodoo rite.

The medications had stalled Mr. Otto's progress, Limpwick noted.

Clear signs of digression. By overstimulating the brain's pleasure centers, the drugs are disrupting his occupational therapy, draining his motivation and crippling his ability to focus on the one thing that could free him, the one thing that could make him whole.

Suddenly, Mr. Otto started tapping his hospital-issued loafers together in spasmodic rhythm, a semi-recumbent sort of dance. He must have been given test medicines that morning, and they were kicking in. "Oh, I like this feeling," he said. Then he closed his eyes and began humming and chanting gibberish, his voice taking on numinous qualities. His behavior resembled a rite of voodoo.

Before long, Limpwick fretted, his patient would return to his hysterical, criminally insane former self, a self that could not be trusted, supervised or unsupervised, with any instrument, particularly one potentially fashioned into a weapon. Limpwick made a note, affirming an earlier observation. Now he knew he could not sit idly by, sidestepping the topic at hand.

The accelerated convolution of the patient's brain activity by medicinal means threatened irreparable damage, perhaps even a repeat of that incident with the young nurse's aide four years prior.¹

¹ The aide's name was Miss Brigid. For such a young trainee, she was startlingly opinionated, especially on the matter of patient restraint, and quite unafraid to voice her beliefs to any ear within reach. One evening, in a lapse of judgment by the head nurse (whose name, mercifully, has vanished from Dr. Limpwick's

Limpwick knew he must act now, and confront the topic head on: “I would be surprised if your mother approves of the tests.”

Predictably, Mr. Otto froze at the mere mention of the maternal figure. “When I was a small boy,” he sneered, “I was her personal snake charmer. *He’ll play Vienna one day . . .* she used to tell her lady friends. *Just you wait*, she’d say. When I told her that patients involved in the tests might be included on a European lecture tour, Austria being among the stops), well, she gave her blessing, hoping it

memory), this precocious young idealist was assigned to watch over Mr. Otto, who had only recently attempted suicide using the sharpened point of a metronome (a troubling birthday gift from his mother).

Following this incident, Drs. Limpwick and Woodthorpe jointly concluded that temporary restraint was, regrettably, the only safe course. Mr. Otto had refused to stay in bed, torn open his dressings, and made increasingly violent threats against the “inharmonious voices” that tormented him. To do otherwise, they reasoned, would be to endanger patients and staff alike.

Yet Miss Brigid, stirred by the intoxicants of both principle and inexperience, undid the restraints while the patient slept. The first cuff came free without event. The second loosed a tempest. Mr. Otto’s eyes sprang open, his lips split in a dry howl, and his arms shot upward, seeking, presumably, the cello he imagined lurking along the wall, though Miss Brigid’s ample hips blocked his route.

Whether he mistook her body for a barricade or simply resented its presence remains uncertain. What followed was a brief and brutal assault: a hand to the throat, a lamp raised like a cudgel, a series of blows to the head. A nearby guard heard the crash, burst in, subdued Mr. Otto with a makeshift straitjacket formed from his own coat, and, with the aid of two others, dragged him away to a holding cell, where he would remain for several weeks. Miss Brigid survived. Her professional aspirations, however, did not.

would be our big break. That's what she called it. *Our big break.*"

"So she signed off?"

"Right."

"Based on self-delusion. A false pretense."

"*Her* false pretense," he snapped. "Not mine. Whether I end up playing cello in the Wiener Philharmoniker or fiddling with myself in a Viennese psych ward, I'll have fulfilled the vow she made to her little social circle."

After a moment, he resumed the dance . . . gibberish and all, as if the voices had been waiting.

§

Mr. Otto was an honest patient above all else, perhaps to a fault. He was the good son, one who struggled mightily to satisfy his mother's hopes for him, borne out of his early signs of promise, however now futile an enterprise. Limpwick chuckled to himself and noted on his pad of paper: "There is in fact still hope. While the medications compel the patient to make odd gestures and sounds, they have not altogether dulled his potential for creative output. All is not lost when one's mind remains a perceptive engine of diabolical plot and premeditated irony, however convoluted to the untrained observer."

He asked Mr. Otto who had first approached him about the tests.

"I wasn't approached," Mr. Otto said, still feverishly tapping. "I volunteered."

"Volunteered?"

He nodded. "After I heard about them."

“Heard? Was it a posted request?”

“No, more like a rumor.”

“A rumor, I see. Who started it?”

“Another patient.”

“Who?”

Mr. Otto nodded.

“Not yes or no,” Limpwick said calmly. “Which patient started the rumor?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Please try.” Limpwick could tell (despite the medicinal cocktail coursing through the patient’s bloodstream) when Mr. Otto wasn’t being completely honest. He knew the memory was there. Dishonesty had been one of many offenses his father beat out of him, so Limpwick simply waited, silently counting the seconds.

At four, the patient began to tremble, muttering as if someone had dumped a pitcher of ice water over his head.

“Yes, I remember,” Mr. Otto said, suddenly grave. “I remember now. I wasn’t trying to hide anything.”

“That’s all right,” Limpwick said. “Just tell me who it was.”

“It was him . . . it was the ‘child murderer’ who first spoke of the tests.”

§

Based on Patient Q’s reputation, most patients spoke of him in similarly hushed tones, if they dared speak of him at all. Despite all efforts to keep records strictly confidential, there was no hiding the secret of the child murderer. The mysterious Patient Q first arrived to the

secluded hospital more than a quarter century ago. He carried no identity other than that which was written about him in the papers.² In spite of all the hoopla surrounding him, he was the most docile patient anyone, including Limpwick, had ever seen.

The child murderer had brought lasting notoriety to Sunnydale, and over time, whispers of his continued presence cemented its reputation as “the Last Resort.” When fresh rumors surfaced about Q’s death, administrators made no effort to correct them (doing so would have violated patient confidentiality). Never mind the cynics who saw the hospital’s silence as a calculated ploy, a stroke of marketing genius. The press coverage and surrounding speculation only made it more desirable for the rich and well-connected to stash their family secrets at the famed institution that once housed the monstrous Philadelphia Madman.

Despite all the reports, many in the press and public still theorized him to be a purely fanciful monster or an exaggerated composite of several Sunnydale inmates. It would have horrified the families to know he still lived, that their loved ones were in such close proximity to so brutal a killer. It might have even been a form of denial that whenever patients told their guests the truth about Q, their

² Excerpt from Commonwealth Psychiatric Board Proceedings, 1931: “Following his conviction, the subject (later dubbed ‘the Philadelphia Madman’) was remanded to Sunnydale under emergency order after all state-run facilities declined placement. Recommendation for transfer was based on security constraints, psychiatric instability, and ethnic tensions related to the victims.”

stories were disregarded as either delusions, ghost stories, or understandably desperate ploys to get out of Sunnydale.

“So he’ll be tested, too,” Limpwick responded, mostly to himself. “I see.”

Mr. Otto sat up, hesitating a moment before blurting out, “You knew about the tests, right?”

Limpwick slowly shook his head. Mr. Otto looked ready to crawl into a hole for having divulged a secret.

If not for the hum of the overhead lights, the room would have been silent. Mr. Otto reclined on the couch, eyes fixed on his untouched glass of water. The ice had long since melted. His lips were drawn tight, like a war prisoner ready to die before speaking another word to his captors (or rather, Limpwick observed, more like a small child gripped by mortal fear of a draconian father).

The momentum from earlier in the session had vanished. There was nothing more to be done. Limpwick signaled for the attending nurse to summon the precautionary security escort.³

“I’m sorry, Mister Otto,” he said. “We can’t continue this session.”

§

The worn face of his waistcoat pocket watch read eleven fifteen. He took a seat on a courtyard bench outside the brick building once known as Pilgrim Hall, now renamed H. Grovner Peupdish Memorial Hall.

³ These escorts were referred to as “helpers” to avoid upsetting the patients.

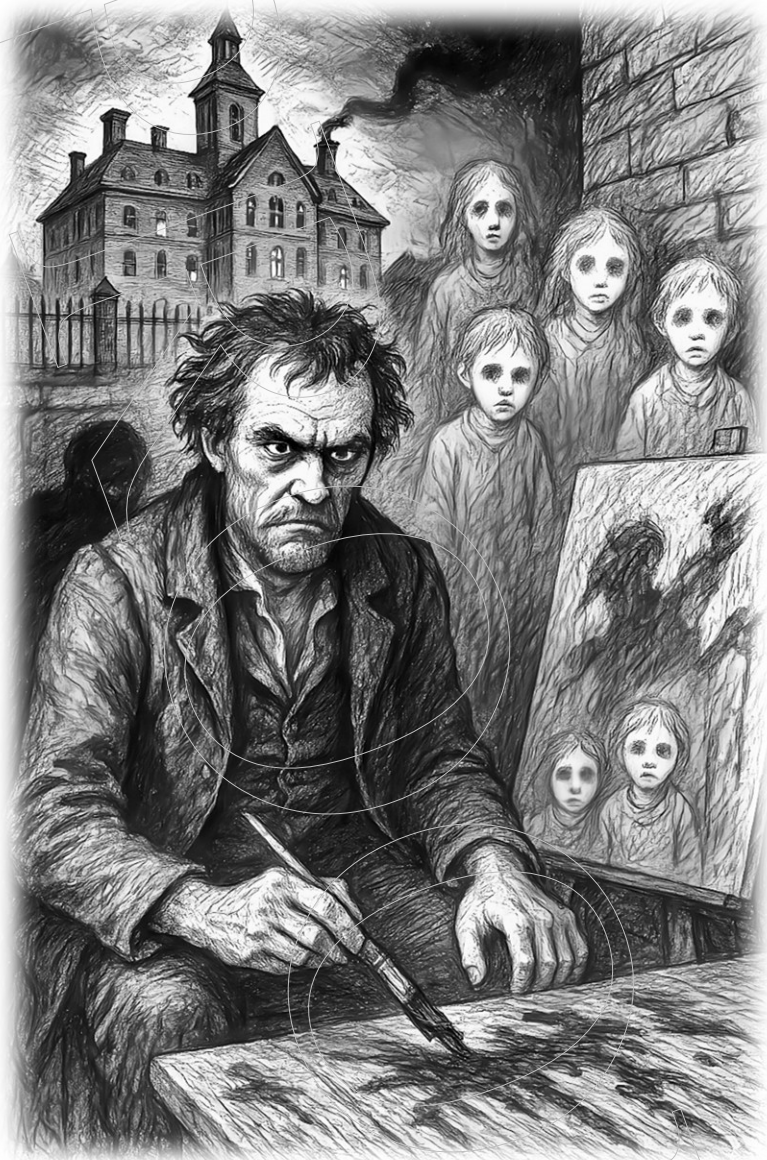


Figure 2. *The Philadelphia Madman*, who haunted immigrant children's imaginations, was said to paint their likenesses in victims' blood beneath the shadow of a derelict maintenance shed at the far edge of the Sunnysdale Asylum grounds.

He lowered his briefcase onto the leaf-strewn grass, set his hat and thermos of beef broth beside him, draped his brown tweed coat over the bench back, and took a deep breath of the glorious but bittersweet autumn air. He opened the thermos and began to pour, recalling the day years ago when, as a freshman psychology student, he first heard the voice of his erstwhile mentor echoing from the lecture hall behind him:

"You can call me Grovner," the venerable Southern gentleman had told the standing-room-only crowd that electric afternoon, before launching into a sweeping account of how the rise of a specialized mental health discipline had paralleled the nation's own east-west, rural-to-urban expansion. Peupdish lived long enough to see Stark College (later Stark University) expand likewise, from a tiny hilltop abode to one of the university's anchor institutions.

Limpwick knew many within the Stark University community wanted a complete break from Sunnydale Hospital. They rationalized in public that it will ease the nightmarish traffic dodge between the two campuses. In reality, the break was propelled by a society-wide prejudice against mental health facilities.

Thankfully, two powerful forces worked to prevent the break. One was the Stark family, tireless advocates for the mentally ill since the university's founding. More decisive, however, were the families of Sunnydale's patients, whose deep-rooted vanities demanded an academic setting for the lodging of their criminally insane relatives, and whose deep pockets kept the university too well-funded to risk severing ties with the hospital.

Limpwick gulped the hot broth from his thermos lid and poured himself another, like a barfly on a good bender. He was on his fourth lid-ful when he heard the noon whistle. He stood and stretched, synchronized his watch to the rest of the world, and slumped back to the bench.

The laughter and untroubled lives of passing students and educators along the concrete made them seem like remorseless accomplices to what was going on; Limpwick picked up his hat to smother the burning paranoia and hide his scowl.

Limpwick's hat inflated and deflated like an oxygen mask over his face with each hot, brothy breath. He peaked out from under it and sifted his fingers through the contents of his briefcase, looking for nothing in particular, then returned to his hiding place beneath his hat. His options for preventing the experiment were limited, to say the least, but he would have to find a way to protect his prize patient.

After a few minutes, he was comforted by a familiar smell of what the nostalgic part of him imagined as ginger and nutmeg, but was in reality closer to the perfumed decay of old flesh. Then he felt a cold touch upon his neck. "Good afternoon, sir," said Nurse Agnes Levenwell in her warm, grandmotherly voice. "What do you think?"

Nurse Levenwell stood before him, her hands on her hips, giving him a better look. Limpwick couldn't quite figure out just what she was trying to show off, but her expressive smirk told him she's fishing for a compliment. He performed a quick head-to-toe scan. Not the hair; her graying red curls were too unkempt. Not the shoes or dress; they were merely the standard-issue plain white ones all the nurses wore.

She frowned at him and adjusted her bifocals. "Where are your observational skills, doctor?"

"Ah," he replied. "New glasses?"

"How would I afford them on my salary?"

Then he smiled, finally noticing the cause of the fuss: a bejeweled brass item in the shape of a fish glittering on the usually unadorned Nurse Levenwell's lapel.

"It's a five-dollar pin," she said. "Bought for me the other day at the Canteen."

"Canteen?"

"That new store outside the atrium. Guess who?"

Limpwick scratched his chin, feigning to consider a plethora of possibilities. He snapped his fingers before answering, "Your pet, Mister Otto?"

She nodded, playing along with his charade of ignorance. "How'd you guess? Paid in job coupons. Look how it sparkles."

"Like the lady who wears it."

She batted her eyes, contriving to be flattered. "I can't remember the last time someone said something like that to me and meant it."

"I saw your suitor just this morning."

Nurse Levenwell's look turned serious. "When were you going to tell me?"

"About what?"

"The clinical trials."

Limpwick sighed. He worried how it would devastate her to know that many of her favorite patients were being treated like lab rats. "I only just found out myself."

"Mister Otto told you, too."

Limpwick nodded. "Your pet has become a lab rat."

“He’s come a long way since the lamp incident, hasn’t he?”

“Nineteen forty-eight. We couldn’t get him to eat, remember?”

She sighed. “Unless you count the dirt under his nails. We had to use a pump and a tube. He was in sorry shape.”

Limpwick shook his head. “Four years ago. Hard to believe.”

“I didn’t think he’d make it, poor thing. Terrible.”

“But we were rewarded for our trial with the first head nurse worthy of the title.”

“You’re really full of the devil today,” she replied.

He placed his hat back upon his head and offered Nurse Levenwell the seat beside him. With a raised eyebrow and twinkle Limpwick hadn’t seen in her since his med school days, she accepted.



In a way, Limpwick was relieved that Nurse Levenwell found out about the clinical trials on her own. He would have hated having to be the bearer of such bad tidings. The moment of revelation must have been devastating; perhaps Mr. Otto recognized this and bought her the gift to cheer her up. Conceding to medicinal treatment would never be an option for such a woman of faith, such a true believer in the healing power of words. For her, letting the hospital become a drug factory would be as unthinkable as transacting with Beelzebub.

After sitting together for a few minutes in silent understanding of the serious matters at hand, Limpwick

bent over and pulled a handful of documents from his briefcase, decades of articles and professional papers. "A life's work," he said, waving them. "For what?"

But Nurse Levenwell's attention was elsewhere. Limpwick turned to see the cause of her distraction. Across the street, Dr. Jackson Woodthorpe rushed to a pressing appointment.

Nurse Levenwell turned back to Limpwick. "What are you going to say to him?"

"What can I say?" he said, replacing the documents in his briefcase. "To him, these trials are about progress, part of being accepted as legitimate medicine."

"Medicine?" Nurse Levenwell scoffs. "These witch doctor potions?"

"I have to be careful about taking on their precious drugs. Drug company henchmen work round the clock, destroying every doctor who questions their legitimacy."

"But what can we do about Mister Otto?"

"Nothing. Not with his mother approving the tests."

"But when it comes to Q, there is no family to intervene. You, the attending physician, have the final say."

Limpwick ponders a moment while twisting the lid back onto his thermos. "Q can be my secret weapon against the drug companies."

"Go on," Nurse Levenwell prodded.

"If I can convince Doctor Woodthorpe, once and for all, with Q as our test patient, that no man is ever truly too far gone, that psycho-therapy can restore even the most florid psychotic to society, to church picnics . . . perhaps even to light custodial work, with only moderate supervision."

She beamed and grabbed both his hands, pulling him off the bench. "They'll be inscribing that above the campus building they name after you."

He picked up his briefcase. "Maybe one day."

"Lord willing," she said, with scarcely a note of irony. "For now, let's go find Doctor Woodthorpe." Together they marched across the street to take on the world.

\$

Dr. Woodthorpe was not in his office, so they tracked down Lena, who always knew where to find him. She was in her usual spot, sitting with her circle of compatriots in the nurse's lounge. Lena's response was to complain about procedural irregularities. It verged on obsessive-compulsive, so Limpwick simply nodded and waited for the head nurse to wield her authority.

Nurse Levenwell did not let him down. Speaking in a cool growl, she convinced her underling that this is one of those cases where procedure could be put aside without considering it a moral transgression. Lena appeared flustered, but her complaining subsided to a whimper.

Limpwick pulled Nurse Levenwell aside momentarily. He asked her not to hold Lena's intractable adherence to procedure against her, to forgive her. Nurse Levenwell made a valid point, that Lena should know better than to show such open hostility to someone in his position. Limpwick posited that perhaps it was a healthy skepticism, clumsily expressed to be sure, but nevertheless a trait to be fostered in a young medical professional, particularly in this age of flux. In the end they both agreed to tell her that

if she had a complaint in the future, she should express it to her head nurse, that being Nurse Levenwell, at the appropriate time and in a measured, thoughtful manner if she ever wants to be taken seriously.

He left Lena, his briefcase, and his thermos in the care of Nurse Levenwell, who nodded to him in compliance, and he departed across the atrium. He passed the new store, a glorified concession window with a chalkboard sign: "Canteen now open, cigarettes, snacks, and various other *sundy* items available to patients in exchange for job coupons." He was reluctant to embarrass the pretty volunteer staffer behind the counter about the misspelling of "sundry."

He continued through the maze of concrete corridors to find the oaken door of Sunnysdale Chapel open a crack. Inside, it was better lit than he remembered from his last visit. He felt uneasy about the table of candles that had been added. These were a potential fire hazard.

A strange man in a tailored suit was deep in conversation with Dr. Jackson Woodthorpe at the front of the chapel. The two of them spotted Limpwick. Woodthorpe appeared to welcome the interruption.

"And here he is. Doctor Limpwick," Woodthorpe announced. "We were just discussing you. Doctor Elias Limpwick, I'd like you to meet Mister Nathan Tremblay."

"Junior," the strange man interjected with rounded pronunciation, reaching out his hand. "Nathan B. Tremblay, Junior. I regret we were just finishing up, but I hope we have a chance to talk further about your interesting contributions to the field, Doctor Limpwick."

Limpwick knew the name Nathan B. Tremblay, founder of Tremblay Research Institute, Chicago, made millions, possibly billions, bottling petroleum as a cancer treatment. Limpwick did the math. Fifty, fifty-five years old. Must be the son, hence the Junior.

Tremblay turned back to Woodthorpe. "Jack, I'll talk to the supervisory chair about the donation. Good day, gentlemen."

"Till paths be wrought through wilds of thought by pilgrim foot and knee," Woodthorpe replied. Limpwick recognized this as the inscription on the front of old Peupdish Hall, left in place after the name change.

The reply was met with laughter (apparently, this was meant to be some sort of punch-line). Tremblay and Woodthorpe's sniggering grew louder and louder until Tremblay snuffed out Woodthorpe's forced laughter with one final, exclamatory tiger roar. Judging by the servile look that suddenly washed over Woodthorpe, he had not mistaken Tremblay's point. The pecking order thus re-established, Tremblay left the chapel with a regal nonchalance.

After a few moments alone in silence, Woodthorpe piped up, "Come on, let's walk and talk. I need to pick something up from my office."

"Sure, I've got time." Limpwick followed him out of the chapel.

"How's Ana enjoying living with her grandmother?"

Limpwick gave a vague response to a question best given a vague response.

After a minute of mindless chitchat, they approached the Canteen counter. Limpwick decided the moment was right. "About the tests."

"The tests, of course, the tests. First let me buy you a Colorado peach."

Limpwick accepted with some reluctance. He thought it clear the Canteen was meant for patients, not staff.

"I have my job coupons. Let me buy you a peach. A pear? Come on, a juicy Bartlett pear?"

The pretty volunteer awaited Limpwick's order. "No thanks."

"Coffee?"

"No thanks," he replied, struggling to read the girl's I.D. tag.

Woodthorpe turned to the window and plopped down a dime. "One coffee, please, with cream and sugar, lots of sugar, Penny." The girl smiled at the winking recognition from the head administrator, emptying the last drop from the copper urn into his paper cup before handing it to him.

"My fuel," Woodthorpe explained.

It was mid-afternoon. Limpwick wondered if the hospital administrator expected to have a late night.

Woodthorpe took a sip from his cup, and with a delicate hand to the back, led Limpwick down the corridor. "Now what were we talking about?"

"The tests."

"Ah, yes, the tests."

"I wasn't informed."

"Informed?"

"Informed. I should have been informed."

"No question, you should have been informed."

"About Mister Otto."

"Mister Otto, yes. His mother . . . she, well, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"So you understand."

"I understand, but—"

"Good."

"But I really should have been told about Q."

Woodthorpe grumbled. "You know about Patient Q?"

Limpwick half-suppressed a laugh. "You believed I wouldn't find out?"

"Of course you were going to be told, but please understand. The board thinks he would be a tremendous asset to the study."

"But the board doesn't understand what's at stake, not like you and me."

"At stake?"

"Yes. We must keep his veneer of a soul from being deadened by Tremblay Institute's narcotic of the moment."

"I am well aware what you think of the experimental medicines."

Limpwick paused, and regrouped. "I can break through with him."

"Break through?"

"Yes, with psycho-analysis."

"Ah, with psycho-analysis."

"I know I can. Look at how far he has come."

Woodthorpe stopped. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Everything. He has come too far to let the board subvert . . . I mean, interrupt . . . the progress we've made."

“Progress, yes. I understand there has been some progress, but—”

“Some progress? Have you read Grovner’s early notes, when Q first arrived to Sunnysdale?”

“I’ve looked at them,” Woodthorpe replied. “Let’s see if I can remember. Aloof, detached, and uncommunicative, shields his eyes reflexively and often, mostly stoic in demeanor, but unusually fearful of hostility. Not your typical, genitalia-fingering, murderous psychotic.”

“Consider the condition when he first arrived, and then think of how far he has come without any medication whatsoever. If you look closely, the data supports an extremely positive cause-and-effect relationship, a gradual decrease in the number of psychotic episodes, a steady expansion of insight and self-awareness. With a little more time, I believe I can isolate the organic and inorganic causes.”

“And cure him? You really think it’s possible?”

Woodthorpe listened intently as Limpwick continued to plead his case, pausing on their way only to flatter him with knowledgeable questions on the numerous case studies the esteemed psychiatrist had authored over a quarter century.

“Okay,” Woodthorpe said, finally. “We can take Q out of the study group, but the board won’t be too thrilled.”

Limpwick was surprised at how easy that was.

“I will make the arrangements. I’m sticking my neck out here.”

Limpwick acknowledged Woodthorpe’s risk.

“Let’s keep it simple. We can’t have any complications. It will require focused study, the kind you can’t get if you are attending to other patients.”

"By other patients, you must explain what you mean. Who would this include . . . Harlan, Luchresi?"

"All of them."

"Even Mister Otto?"

"All of them."

His mother wanted him in the study anyway, Limpwick thought. "Fine."

"Then, we'll set you up in a place less confining, somewhere you can spread out."

Limpwick nodded. "Uh-huh."

Woodthorpe put his arm around Limpwick and whispered, "Somewhere, to get away from all the hospital policy hanging over your head, someplace other than this mind-numbing hell hole, right?"

His candor surprised Limpwick, and made it all the more evident that Woodthorpe's proposition was serious.

They reached Woodthorpe's office. Woodthorpe closed the door behind Limpwick and spoke in a hushed tone. "I know of a place. You will be close to nature and all its therapeutic possibilities. Away from all these cumbersome hospital regulations and procedures. You will have the ideal proving ground, a place where you can concentrate on therapy, pure therapy."

Is this a dream, thought Limpwick.

"But," Woodthorpe added, "we have to keep those funding the drug study from finding out about this, understand? You can bring along one or two others to assist you, but only ones you can trust to keep this thing quiet."

Limpwick nodded; he understood. He proposed his two most reliable assistants, Nurse Levenwell and Jacob.

“Agnes Levenwell, of course,” Woodthorpe replied. “Lena can fill in for her while she’s away. But Jacob, I don’t know.”

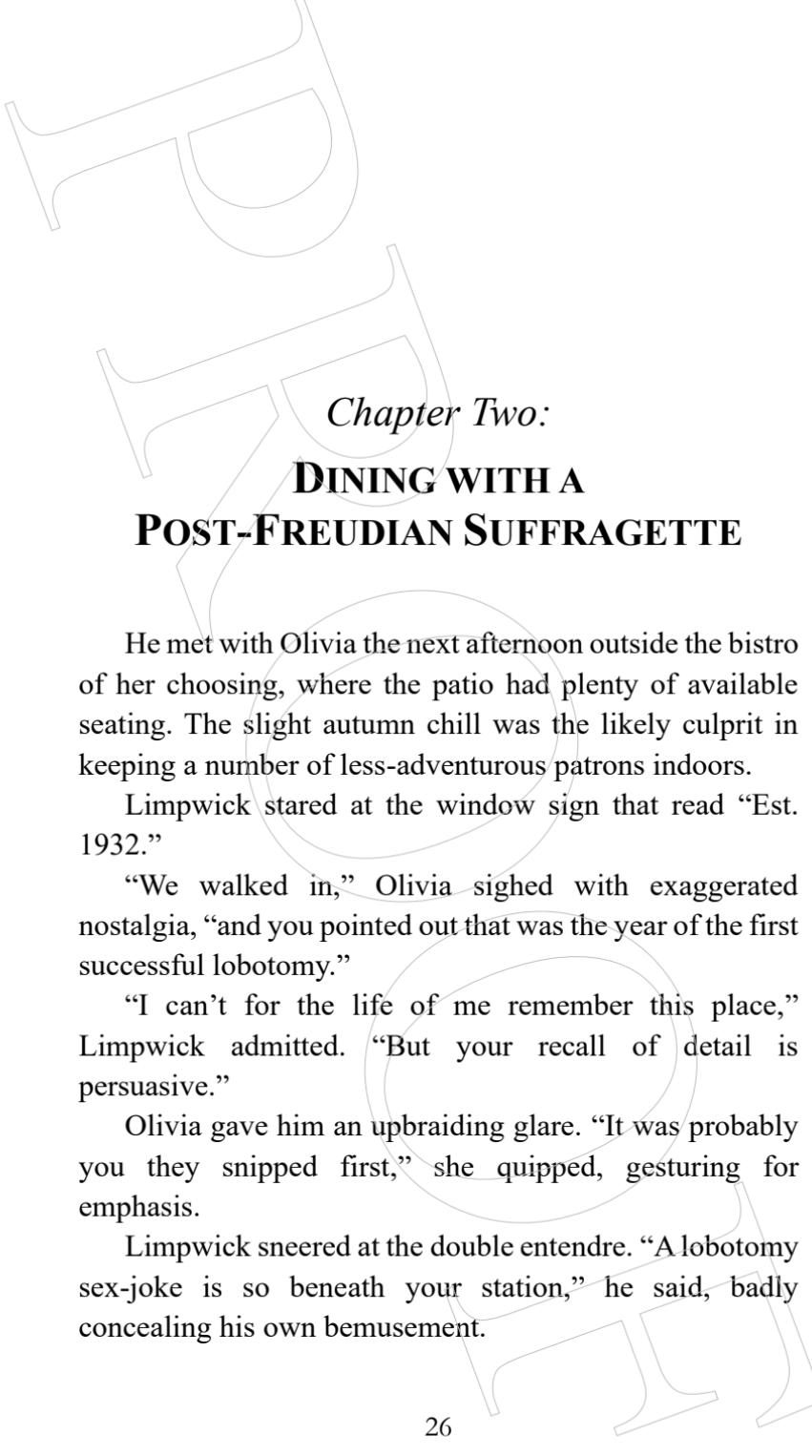
“He’s young, but he’s trustworthy and dedicated, especially to me.” Limpwick reported this with absolute confidence. He knew dedication to be the essence of Jacob, often to a fault. If a patient showed little or no progress under one of Limpwick’s promising new therapies, Jacob was prone to avoid the paperwork, hoping against hope for a positive turn. But there was nothing in the Hippocratic oath requiring such allegiance to his mentor. Expedience in record-keeping was essential to a patient’s well being, Limpwick often had to remind him. And a patient’s well-being took precedence, always, always, always.

“I trust your judgment,” Woodthorpe said. “But we are talking about serious money. Endowments. Supplies. Uniforms, linens, blankets, bed-sheets. Beds.”

Limpwick suppressed a grimace. He could hear Tremblay’s influence creeping into Woodthorpe’s phrasing, like mildew spreading through plaster. Still, this was no time to appear ungrateful toward the man holding the purse strings. There was more at stake here than hospital linens and donation tallies.

“It’s the board you’ll need to satisfy,” Woodthorpe continued. “Your proof that Q can remain a peaceable, useful member of society through therapy alone must be ironclad. No resorting to the pharmaceutical crutch.”

Whatever was required to protect his prize patient, Limpwick would oblige. “Very well,” he said.



Chapter Two:

**DINING WITH A
POST-FREUDIAN SUFFRAGETTE**

He met with Olivia the next afternoon outside the bistro of her choosing, where the patio had plenty of available seating. The slight autumn chill was the likely culprit in keeping a number of less-adventurous patrons indoors.

Limpwick stared at the window sign that read “Est. 1932.”

“We walked in,” Olivia sighed with exaggerated nostalgia, “and you pointed out that was the year of the first successful lobotomy.”

“I can’t for the life of me remember this place,” Limpwick admitted. “But your recall of detail is persuasive.”

Olivia gave him an upbraiding glare. “It was probably you they snipped first,” she quipped, gesturing for emphasis.

Limpwick sneered at the double entendre. “A lobotomy sex-joke is so beneath your station,” he said, badly concealing his own bemusement.

They wove this way and that through the claustrophobia-inducing mass inside to the outdoor eating area. Olivia scanned the tables.

Limpwick noticed peculiarities in her wardrobe choice. Pearls? A red silk dress? Open-toed pumps? Everyone's favorite municipal arts trustee must be hosting one of her philanthropic functions later this afternoon, he thought.

After a few minutes standing around with no service, Olivia made a move to the most intimate of the four tables, and Limpwick tagged along. He swept a musty palette of bedewed birch and sugar maple leaves from both pockmarked chairs and the tabletop, and made a mental note of the charming details of Duca d'Abruzzi's. It would come in handy the next time he sought an out-of-the-way place for lunch, but for the life of him he still could not recall their previous visit.

"Elias," Olivia said, lingering over his name in her soft inland murmur, "you don't mind me letting my guard down, do you?"

Here it comes, he thought, propping up against his backrest and steadying himself. "And when do you ever let your guard up?"

Olivia smiled. "I understand you've selected your understudy."

He shrugged; were the most qualified psychiatric trainee anyone other than her adopted son, he would not have hesitated in making the selection. As it was, he simply had no better choice. "Yes, I suppose I have."

"I am pleased. Jacob is most fond of you."

He turned away, catching her gaze in the window. The distorted surface stretched and transfigured her warm look

of gratification into something comic, almost pathetic. He refocused upon an idle triumvirate of waiters inside filling salt and pepper shakers and rolling silverware into napkins, and flagged them down with a frantic wave. Contempt for demanding patrons being a hallmark of any fine eating establishment, they paid him little notice. He gave up for the moment and turned back to Olivia.

“He will not disappoint you. I can say unequivocally he has never disappointed me.”

Her face became even more full and serene, while her voice echoed its once youthful chirp, finally shocking to the fore of Limpwick’s mind another time, to a restaurant by another name at this same location, the summer haunt of two young lovers. He had not considered that possibility. She had him believing their previous visit had been since 1932. Her faulty recollections of both the date of their prior visit (pre-Depression, meaning she mis-remembered it by five to ten years) and the comment about the first lobotomy (which must have come from a later suitor or perhaps her nephew, himself an astute student of psychiatric history) were no excuse. It was a dirty trick on Olivia’s part to bring him here, skirting the rules of fair play.

He shrugged again. “Eleven minutes. Our water glasses, empty, and still no service.”

She seemed to care little about the elapsed time. “Elias, before Jacob came to you, he had no male model in his life. Then he became obsessed with all things having to do with Freud. For instance Dora, with her coughing fits and hysteric lovesickness for Herr K. ‘Little Hans,’ with his Oedipal drama played out in the streets of Vienna. The entrenched soldiers of the Great War,” she paused, “with

their sexual excitations. It was all he would ever talk about.”

Whenever Olivia got this way, Limpwick found drastic mental transference to be useful. He thought of the circus.

She went on, only half noticing his wandering attention. “I could offer him little stimulation on that front. Then you came along, his ‘Yosef Breuer,’ showing him that patients are more than diagnoses, that each one carries the full weight of human complexity. You cautioned against narrow, obsessive thinking. For that, I am deeply grateful. And I believe Jacob is too.”

Once he is on the ladder, the sequined patriarch of a high-wire act does not trouble himself with sentiments like gratitude. Such notions belong to the parlor, not the air. His only concern, as he begins his crossing, is to keep his balance and make it to the other side.

A waiter finally stepped out from the idle crowd and approached, refilling their water glasses. Olivia, never one to let timing slip past her, spoke up crisply. “We’ll order now.”

The waiter turned to Limpwick, who showed no sign of participating.

“Pay him no mind,” Olivia said. “He falls into these spells when he’s on duty. And he is always on duty.” She ordered for them both, as was her habit, undeterred by his silence or the waiter’s raised brow.

The waiter left, and Olivia continued fawning over her nephew to the inattentive Limpwick. “Such a wunderkind, so passionate about his work. You’ve said so yourself. Elias?” She raised her voice. “Elias!”

Startled from his daydream, Limpwick uttered, “Yes?”

“Jacob. You’ve said so yourself. He’s exceptional, a prodigy, dedicated, loves his work.”

“I said that?” Limpwick remembered when he was Jacob’s age, a prodigy himself, full of ideals, self-imposing the burden of restoring mankind back to its senses from its Great War dementia. He turned back to the window and grimaced at the patrons inside, the cozy successions of well-attired and well-perfumed gentlemen and ladies, archetypes of the patients courted by the modern psychiatrists, the kind who pay their bills and keep their appointments. The astute psycho-analyst will always seek out patients from the margins of society. Thieves and beggars from what someone once called “the mob of wasted human debris” make far more interesting conversationalist than pinstriped millionaires and their trophy wives, and are thus far richer in his psycho-analytical possibilities.

The waiter placed their meals before them and announced each dish.

Limpwick, who had been deep in thought, could not recall what Olivia had ordered for him and asked the waiter to repeat it. “Roasted what?”

Olivia smirked and shook her head.

“Boudin Blanc,” the waiter calmly reiterated in a thick Boston accent. “With Alsatian Choucroute and Dijon mustard served on a roll.”

He then explained how Olivia’s choice of pan-seared sea scallops were prepared. Limpwick nodded politely. “Looks good.”

Olivia sighed again, either out of relief or to dramatize her anxiety. In all his years studying them, Limpwick never

learned to tell the difference in a woman's sighs. He watched as she scooted in her chair and started on her scallops, shoveling them into her mouth with a spoon. Limpwick had never seen her eat so fast. He reached over to wipe what looked like a piece of birch leaf that has fallen on her upper lip. She snapped at his finger, and he backed off.

A few minutes later, Olivia's plate was clean. Her mouth still full with her last couple bites, she broke the silence. "I would like a Manila if you have one."



Figure 3. *The waiter calmly reiterated: "Boudin Blanc. With Alsatian Choucroute and Dijon mustard served on a roll."*

Limpwick was enthused by the request. "Ah, yes, I always love a cigar after dining." He fumbled in his trouser pocket, winking at her to acknowledge success. "I haven't Manilas, but I do have Dutch slims, dipped in brandy-wine."

"Good enough," she said.

So like her mother, he thought, happily creating scandal and infamy. He admired her courage, and was glad to smoke with her in solidarity as a fellow flouter of convention.

"Sir, Madam," the waiter interrupted. "I am sorry, but we are closing the outdoor seating area in fifteen minutes."

Limpwick squared up the bill and the waiter walked off, cursing the baksheesh under his breath. Limpwick thought it a generous gratuity considering the lackadaisical service.

Just then, Olivia threw her legs upon Limpwick's lap with a conspiratorial grin, dangling her cigar. "Let's see how long we can push them before they kick us out," she said.

"So like your mother," Limpwick replied.

Olivia rubbed her feet on him. "You mean, footloose and fancy free?"

"Free, indeed. A true suffragette."

Olivia puffed her cigar and touched him as one does when trying to make a scene, treating his lap like a cushioned hassock. "I'm thinking of another kind of freedom," she said.

Limpwick puffed his own cigar with studied detachment, withdrawing from her innuendo and flair. It

took all his focus. He had long since learned not to stoke a fire that refused to die on its own.

§

Two hours later, Limpwick met with Woodthorpe in his office. “What did the board say?” he asked.

Woodthorpe leaned over his shoulder, sniffing at Limpwick’s jacket, and leaned back, his face as impervious as a stone mask. “Coronas? I always thought of you as a pipe smoker.”

“I gave up pipes months ago.”

“Oh really.” Woodthorpe shut the door and motioned for Limpwick to take a seat in the hard plastic chair, lowly in its position in front of Woodthorpe’s desk. “But not cigars?”

Limpwick now understood the insinuation. The nerve. He stood taller in defiance. “Is it a crime to share lunch with an important hospital benefactress?”

“No crime, no crime.” Woodthorpe smirked. “But a cigar? Now that’s smart business.”

“Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

“Interesting concept, my friend, but one our profession has not had the luxury to believe for quite some time.” He waved his hand, urging Limpwick to take his seat.

This is unusually condescending, Limpwick thought, even for Woodthorpe. He stood firm. “I’ve been using them to wean myself off nicotine.”

Woodthorpe repeated his hand gesture, which Limpwick again ignored. Woodthorpe lost the smirk and rubbed his fingers back through his hair with repressed

displeasure. "I admire your effort, Elias. I could never give up my Chesterfields," he folded his arms, "or any other bad habit." He turned his back and stepped toward his wide, arching office window.

Most curious. Limpwick found himself fascinated by the elongation of Woodthorpe's silhouette against the dusk-lit garden backdrop. Beyond the optical illusion, he detected movement among the carefully aligned rows of carrots, snap beans, and Chinese cabbage. Two nude patients strolled past in carefree fashion, enjoying the mild air. Meanwhile, a pair of hospital guards crept in quiet pursuit, stretching a blue afghan like a net between them, guided discreetly from the corner by Nurse Levenwell.

The likelihood of the frolicsome pair catching a chill did not seem to trouble Woodthorpe.

Limpwick was anxious to return to the matter at hand. "The board?"

Woodthorpe turned back toward Limpwick. "Ah, the board. I made a case on your behalf."

"And?"

"And they approved, with conditions."

"Conditions?"

"I told them you needed a little more time to complete your study."

"Yes, only a few more years."

"Unfortunately, it can't be years, plural. I must impose a limit."

"What do you mean?"

"Budgets. You are a valuable doctor. I can't have you away forever."

"How long?"

Woodthorpe looked away. "One year."

"One year?" Limpwick huffed.

One year to prove himself. As if he needed to prove himself to the hospital and profession he enriched with a quarter century of dedicated service. Woodthorpe was a mere grammar school pupil, unraveling the complexity of shoelaces, while he, devoted student of H. Grovner Peupdish, was busy unlocking the secrets of the human mind on Patient Q. And the best the kid could do was arrange one measly year.

"Then what?" Limpwick asked.

"Then, you've either proved yourself, or you haven't."

"I will not be the one proving myself," Limpwick said in defiance.

"Right," Woodthorpe said. "The patient. My mistake."

"Rest assured," Limpwick proclaimed. "Q will be assimilated back into society."

"Then if you *succeed*," Woodthorpe said, drawing out the word, "you will have secured, I surmise, your reputation as the foremost Freudian psychiatrist in the country. With the prestige that would bring to Sunnysdale, well, at the very least that would deserve a new title."

It could have been taken at mockery, but Limpwick sensed Woodthorpe was serious. "And the power that goes with it?"

"And carte blanche to take it wherever you want to go. They would name a wing after you, possibly a building or even a school."

E. Limpwick School of Psycho-pathology. It veritably sang in Limpwick's mind. "But if I fail?"

"Let's not talk about failure."

“If I fail?”

“If you fail, we will have to return to our original plan.”

“Our” plan? Limpwick had not been aware of an “our” plan. “Please explain.”

“Medicine and therapy, fully integrated.”

Limpwick collapsed into the chair. How could Woodthorpe and the board allow themselves to be so misguided by the grandiose delusions of Tremblay and his ilk? “Oh, dear,” he muttered, half audibly, “the most unholy of alliances.”

“We cannot continue to fool ourselves, Elias. We must work toward that day by bridging the gap between psychiatry and her sister medical disciplines.”

“Bridge the gap?” Limpwick now wished little boy Jackie would have stuck to shoelaces, leaving the human mind up to the big boys. “How so? By putting blind faith in a pill?”

“Elias, you and I are bound together by our core belief in the patient as a doctor’s first obligation. You have said it yourself.”

“You are correct.” Limpwick stood to address the point. “And in that light, I cannot agree to mind medication, with therapy as an afterthought. Patients, our first obligation, will look upon it as rejection. Supreme rejection.”

Woodthorpe grabbed Limpwick by the elbows. “Listen. We haven’t rejected anyone or anything. The clinical trials are simply good science.”

“Good science? How so, by forging the results? Where is the control group?”

“As a matter of fact, Q is the control group, the therapeutic model necessary to make a decisive comparison between therapy and drugs.”

Limpwick looked hopeful, then skeptical. “Why, Doctor Woodthorpe, do you bother to humor me?”

“The board and I are happy to grant you the opportunity to prove talk therapy has a place in the era to come.”

If Woodthorpe meant to reassure Limpwick, it wasn’t working. “A place? Where, the back of the file drawer? An afterthought?”

“No one thinks therapy will be an afterthought. As long as it generates revenue . . .”

“By which you mean a minor revenue stream.”

“The future is integrated medicine, and psychotherapy, make no mistake, will be integrated.”

Limpwick bristled. “Integrated? Don’t you mean minimized and cast aside for the real profit center, the psycho-tropic drugs?”

“Remember, Elias, I am your friend. Considering your history with the bottle, you should be happy that the board is giving you this chance to redeem yourself.”

Queer, Limpwick thought, how those so eager to push narcotics on defenseless patients were far less forgiving when it came to the brief collapse of a grieving widower. “Redeem myself? So this is about redemption?”

Woodthorpe said nothing.

“I appreciate the board’s patience after Mabel passed,” Limpwick said, his tone laced with scorn.

“I’ve been patient too.”

He’s right, Limpwick admitted to himself, steadying his voice. “You’ve tolerated more than most would.”

“Like I said, I’m your friend.”

Almost as an afterthought, Limpwick asked whether he’d have any say in the venue for the study.

“I’ve already arranged it. Details to come. For now, just know it’ll be far from your usual surroundings . . . removed from distractions and temptations.”

Limpwick knew precisely what he meant, and right now, could care less about the more details to come later.

Woodthorpe seemed happy there were no more questions. He patted Limpwick on the back and left. Limpwick stood in place, and looked out upon the garden. Nurse Levenwell’s successful rescue of the reckless meanderers comforted him and restored his bearings. It was a momentary return to order, and offered a glimmer of hope.

§

The following Sunday evening, Limpwick joined Jacob Dunbo at Jacob’s large apartment for a tête-à-tête. His aunt Olivia co-hosted, keeping the living room buffet table well stocked with aged camembert, Roquefort, saint-andré, brie, pâtisseries, petit pains. Jacob referred to his aunt as “Mom,” something he had been doing with greater regularity to the delight of his adoptive parent.

Olivia asked them to take their seats in the dining room, joking, “and you might need more than one serviette to catch all the drippings.”

“Serviette?” Limpwick inquired.

“Napkin,” Olivia explained, to which Limpwick rolled his eyes. She wondered if he appreciated the hours she

spent slaving over that leg of mutton in Jacob's utilitarian-at-best kitchen, pressing a composition of stale, finely grated Poilâne sourdough crumbs and white pepper into the flesh until her fingertips were weary and sore, all she could do to keep the juices locked in for hours of slow roasting.

(Jacob's neighborhood butcher had shorted her on fat. She had specifically requested French cut. She faulted herself. For a little extra, she could have had the meat delivered from a more reliable source across town.)

Olivia plunked down the *pièces de résistance* in front of the master and apprentice before taking her own seat at the table.

Limpwick sniffed and surveyed the culinary arrangement. "Worthy of a last supper."

At the end of the course, Olivia excused herself, went back to the kitchen, and returned with a large silver dessert tray of tarts tatin, beignets de carnival, tulipe de fruits frais, and an assortment of sorbets. It was all she can do to hide her self-satisfaction.

Limpwick shifted in his chair. "Too much, too much," he muttered.

Jacob pointed toward a tart, and Olivia responded with a nod of perfunctory grace. She placed the tray on the buffet and returned to her seat with a bowl of fruit for herself and a generous serving of cinnamon bread pudding, which she handed to Limpwick. He accepted it with exaggerated reluctance, a pantomime that did not fool her in the least.

Jacob shook his head at his mentor's lack of manners. Leaning in, he asked, "What is it, sir . . . do you want to live forever?"

Limpwick said nothing.

“Belleau Wood,” Jacob offered. “France.”

“Ah,” Limpwick said, the memory catching hold. “You mean, ‘Come on, you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?’ “

“Commander, Fourth Marines.”

“No, Jacob, it was Gunnery Sergeant Dan Daly.”

“Right. Gunny Daly. Mother talks a great deal about her time in the war, back when she was a volunteer nurse.”

“And I, too,” Limpwick replied, “was once an eager volunteer.” His tone suggested he did not care to dwell on it.

“Too young,” Olivia interjected. She turned to Jacob with a sly smile. “He was all set to give the Kaiser what for, but the AEF would not have him.”

§

Limpwick leaned over Jacob’s plate to redirect his attention. “It wasn’t fair. I was of sound mind and body, had at least twenty teeth, five-foot seven, 145 pounds.”

“But only fifteen,” Olivia sneered.

“A hearty fifteen,” Limpwick replied.

“They got by without you at Bois de Belleau and elsewhere.”

“Got by?”

“They won the damn war.”

Limpwick fidgeted with his silverware. “But I wanted to fight. I felt so impotent when they rejected me.”

“You were only fifteen.” Olivia rolled her eyes and grabbed the knife and fork from his hands. “*Dieu merci.*”

Limpwick shrugged. He leaned over Jacob's plate as if to share a secret. "They had to take it. They needed the water. Up to that point, the heat had been more relentless than the enemy. Then one of their mules, freshly lathered from the Marne, began to snort above the din. Seventeen German conscripts spotted along the fringe. A bullet caromed off the flat helmet of one of the marines. The battle was about to begin."

Belleau, Olivia remembered. Beautiful water. Beautiful, bloody water. The nurses had started calling it the backwash of war.

"The next few moment's wait for the order to fix bayonets lasts an eternity. Curse accompanies prayer, these young men's dreams of innocence about to give way to the carnage of experience. Finally, the order comes down to the company from Lem Shepherd, from Blanchfield, by way of Wise, by way of Neville, by way of Harbord, and within seconds these men's passions burst forth like raging water through a breeched levy."

"Wasn't Shepherd the first to fall?" Jacob asked, slurring a little.

"Some say he spun like a corkscrew into the ground," Limpwick replied. "June 1918."

"I feel verily transported by your gift for detail," Jacob commented, his wide eyes still glimmering, still innocent to the blood, mud, and barbed-wire reality of war.

Olivia lightly slapped the back of his hand. "Don't talk with your mouth full."

"Yes, Mother."

Olivia glows a little.

Limpwick put his arm around his understudy. "If you want detail, Jacob, read Rivers on that war's effects."

Jacob, hanging on his mentor's every word, started to look a little tipsy.

"Fine men, gallant," Limpwick continued. "Selfless and brave, uncomplaining. Suffered terribly."

Olivia chimed in. "The sweating, the asphyxiating nightmares, the limb paralysis, the stuttering."

Limpwick wiped his mouth and shook his head. "No one understood it. The Great War introduced the term 'war neurosis.' The men called it shell shock." He paused. "Enough small talk." He took a deep breath and turned abruptly to Olivia. "So I talked to Doctor Woodthorpe the other day."

Olivia was silent a moment before replying, "I heard. One year, right?"

"One year," Limpwick said in a voice now bereft of emotion. "One year to make our case."

"One year," Jacob stood up in protest, "to right the course of our profession, to reorder the human mind. They give us one measly year. We'll show those bastards."

Olivia gave him a scolding eye.

"Sorry, Mother," Jacob said, gathering himself for a moment. Then, inspired with a fighting courage by the talk of a great war and exacerbated by his low tolerance, he postured with raised arm as if to call for another round, nearly overturning the table with his dramatic gesture. "Come on you sons of blankety-blanks, do you want to live forever?"



Figure 4. *"I feel verily transported by your gift for detail," Jacob commented.*

Olivia's disapproving scowl turned toward Limpwick. "See what you do to him, Elias?"

"I dare say we've just solved the mystery of the diminished cooking sherry," Limpwick said with a low chuckle, giving Jacob's back a gentle, almost paternal pat. "Jacob, there is a marked difference between us. Between our generations. When a psychiatrist reaches my stage in life, after many years devoted to the study of psychoanalysis, he no longer entertains the youthful notion that the human mind is a tidy, well-kept place."

Olivia clenched her teeth around her after-dinner cigar and struck a flame with her Princess De-Light. "And yet," she said, the words curling with smoke, "one remains curiously drawn to society's urine-soaked castaways."

"One's twisted form of escape," Limpwick said dryly.

"One's sworn oath," Jacob mumbled, collapsing into his chair, glassy-eyed and half drunk.

Limpwick glanced toward Olivia. "So the boy has been studying his history?"

"He knows all about Doctor Freud's Secret Committees and their little oaths," she replied.

Limpwick gave Jacob an approving nod. "Freud knew well that our first and final duty is to the patient."

That reminded Olivia of another sworn oath, a bargain struck years ago between her and Limpwick. She was one to take such oaths seriously. Even if she were never reciprocated, she benefited by the preservation of her upper hand, her moral authority. Others might have difficulty facing themselves in the morning mirror, but not her. "In that obligation, I will assist you any way I can. Just tell me what you need me to do, any domestic tasks required while you conduct your therapy, I am there."

"I am sorry, dear," he said.

Olivia coughed.

Jacob looked back and forth between their faces, confused. "Sorry, *dear*?"

Limpwick, red-faced for, perhaps, revealing a feeling he did not know he had, and certainly did not want revealed, collected himself and cleared his throat. "We have only one year, so I'll be breaking all ties to the outside world to focus all my attention on my patient."

If Jacob suspected any history between her and Limpwick, he didn't let on. He was deep in his cups, so far gone, Olivia doubted he'd remember much of anything come morning.

She turned back to her cigar, drawing on it in grim silence. She'd be damned if she was going to sit idle while another great war roared to life. Fighting was in her blood.

She took one last pull and sent the smoke climbing to the ceiling, like a signal flare from a woman who knew which side she was on.

§



Chapter Three:

THE CRUEL SUN SETS UPON THE REPUTED PHILADELPHIA MADMAN

The next morning, Nurse Levenwell and Jacob assisted Limpwick in organizing his office and gathering the necessary records on his prize subject for the coming year of concentrated psycho-analysis. As Nurse Levenwell busied herself writing a series of notes at Limpwick's desk, presumably for the cleaning lady, on proper dusting and the like, Jacob read aloud from Q's quarter-century-old admission report, written by none other than H. Grovner Peupdish himself, in Peupdish's southern drawl (terribly rendered).

October four, nineteen twenty-six. The patient has arrived to our esteemed hospital, and the only thing we know about him is from newspaper clippings. We have dubbed him "Patient Q," to identify our seventeenth John Doe.

Limpwick recalled that eventful summer. It had been only a few months since Waldo Shaw, husband of Olivia,

disappeared. When he went missing over Christmas, everyone in town suspected that the former Doughboy and hero of Belleau Wood had met an ill fate.

Philadelphia police report a vagabond walking the streets, avoiding arrest, staying on the move both day and night. Truants occasioned across a subject of similar description sleeping with a family of rats on a pair of flat, dirty mattresses in a dark corner of their condemned tenement building hideout.

Diagnosed with severe shellshock after the war, Waldo Shaw periodically withdrew, lost interest in activities, in people, in life. The overwhelming symptom was fear. Olivia could see it deep in his eyes while the rest of him remained in an emotional death. At its most acute, there was nothing in the world that wouldn't remind him of the trauma of war, and he wanted it to end. Now, even Olivia was convinced her husband had suffered a tragic relapse.

One summer afternoon, witnesses from afar saw this tall, pale, wild-haired man shadowing a little boy in the park holding a Coney Island Red Hot. The boy had been wandering aimlessly with his Mommy nowhere in sight. Like a clandestine wolf trailing a wayward lamb, the vagabond followed the boy across the park, getting as far as the playground.

Though agonizing with her own pent-up feelings, Olivia remained stoic and brave through the ordeal. In some ways, she felt it was her punishment for marrying against the will of her well-to-do family.

As the heat intensified, he climbed with the shiny-faced little boy onto the rickety wooden merry-go-round, and just stood there over the boy, his hungry eyes focused on the food parcel. His head eclipsed the sun as the boy looked up at him and he just smiled, possibly finding pleasure in the cool shade provided by the towering stranger. The little boy lifted the hot dog to his mouth.

But she would not give them the satisfaction of watching her suffer. The daughter of Alice Stark Kenney (early women's rights activist and heiress to the family that founded Stark University) and Leonard Kenney III, a respected local attorney, did not wait for another man to take her in his arms. She gathered her emotional reserves, slipped into her finest red dress, and embarked on a summer of what she would later call "carnal therapy."

Her companion for the season, three years her junior, and the cause of considerable gossip, was none other than Peupdish's prize pupil.

Driven by the primal resourcefulness that had kept him alive on the streets for several months, and certainly mad with hunger, Q either pounced or collapsed (depending upon the witness) and wrested the food from the defenseless little boy. Without so much as a scream, the boy fell, his head hitting the iron bar of the merry-go-round with a fatal crack.

The affair soon became, as they say, the talk of the town. Peupdish grew concerned. The courtly gentleman-doctor had long warned his student about the distractive powers of the feminine sect, who, in his words, concerned themselves with "inflictin', interferin', and temptatin' of

men.” An unguarded target, he believed, stood no chance. When young Elias Limpwick began to see evidence supporting his mentor’s warnings, he rallied his faculties, fortified his emotions, and began to retreat. By season’s end, the affair had cooled.

For poor Olivia, his timing could not have been crueler. The sudden death of Ethel Kenny Dunbo in childbirth cast a particularly bitter light on the end of that fateful summer.

Shortly thereafter, this anonymous street bum became “the Philadelphia Madman,” the sadistic murderer of children, and was sent to Sunnyside by the mercy of a judge when no other place would take him. It became a public sensation, like a baseball hitting streak or dirigible disaster, supplanting a terrible mining tragedy from its rightful place at the top of the headlines.

Jacob looked up at his mentor and asked if he truly believed he could cure a patient “with such a marked disturbance of cerebral functions, something that has never been done before in the recorded history of psychiatry.”

Limpwick had noted a rise in this sort of ribbing from his young protégé of late. A prudent general does not grow too familiar with his troops before battle; likewise, he could not allow over-familiarity to slip into laxity of mind or deed.

“Precocious,” he said, the word sharp and cold. “To say that something has never been done, and therefore ought not to be attempted, is the kind of thinking that breeds mediocrity.”

Jacob looked stricken, uncertain how he had drawn such censure.

An ebony bust of one of the Tremblay Institute's founding fathers stared down at Dr. Jackson Woodthorpe from its perch on the desk corner nearest him. Woodthorpe felt an itch in his air passage but dared not make a sound. He adjusted his back ever so gently against the purple velvet upholstery of the remarkably sturdy oak guest chair and sensed immediate disapproval from Nathan B. Tremblay, Jr.

The faint creaking sound had offended the room's ideals of beauty and order. This office was no mere workplace; it was a temple, a monument to decades of innovation and plain, sharp business. Tremblay did not care for having his ideals challenged. That much had already been made plain a few minutes earlier when Woodthorpe committed the near-fatal error of mentioning medical ethics.

Woodthorpe's fate would be decided in the next few moments. The gods of industry and power were not to be tested. Every movement, every breath, every slight twitch of the eye or shift in posture (too loud, too soft, too confident, too hesitant) invited further condemnation. Wherever he looked in search of escape from Tremblay's stare, that withering gaze remained fixed on him.

Then the silence broke.

"I'm not interested in hearing about those medical ethics of yours," Tremblay said, barely above a whisper.

As a sometime student and practitioner of psychoanalytic theory, Woodthorpe recognized a textbook case of the Oedipal father complex. The words spoken by the son

rang so deeply of the father's voice they could have been carved above the institute's gates. A true disciple might speak of overcoming the father figure, symbolically killing him to move forward. But Woodthorpe was no zealot, and he was not fool enough to point out another crack in Tremblay's self-image.

He cleared his throat. "Make no mistake, I will not let this change in plans affect the purpose of our study."

"Purpose?" Tremblay barked, and the office rattled. His collection of ornate globes, enameled tintypes, marbled chess pieces, Grecian pottery, Victorian porcelain, pharmaceutical curios, and shelves of pristine leather-bound volumes all seemed to tremble under the weight of his voice.

"Purpose?" he repeated. "We are not talking about a goddamned purpose. Purposes are uncertain. Purposes drift."

"Target, then?"

"This is not a skeet shoot, and it sure as hell is not a game. It is what is going to happen. That is all."

"I know you're not one for games."

Tremblay reached forward and grabbed Woodthorpe by the collar, jerking him close. His breath came hot and ragged. Flecks of spit clung to his chin.

"Then explain something to me," he said. "If this is not a game to you, how do you justify handing over our most important subject to that imbecilic witch doctor?"

He flung Woodthorpe back into the chair. The younger man's legs flew up from the force of the landing.

Woodthorpe composed himself before answering. "It is part of a larger plan," he said carefully, avoiding any tone

that might seem patronizing, presumptuous, or familiar.
“With Limpwick out of the way, there will be no need for distractions. It will be all business.”

“I can think of a better way to make sure he is out of the way.”

“But this is cleaner. And without the risk.”

“We are not tossing grenades here.”

“I understand, but—”

“We are Los Alamos,” Tremblay said, narrowing his eyes. “And the enemy is hot on our tail with a goddamn doomsday rocket.”

“I understand, but—”

“Our pill needs a launching pad. Needs to blow like Hiroshima times Nagasaki in the middle of Red Square. Do you understand me?”

“I understand, but let me explain why this is even better.”

“Better? Don’t bullshit me.”

“I’m not.”

“I will not be bullshitted.”

“I’m not bullshitting.”

“This better be good, Doctor Werner von Bullshit. Really good.”

“Oh, it is.”

“I’m all ears, asshole.”

“Here it is.”

“No mumbo jumbo.”

“No mumbo-jumbo.”

“No psycho-babble bullshit about observational methodology and interpersonal displacement and genital motivations and consensually validated symbol activities

that manifest themselves among members of a given diagnostic control group.” He paused for breath. “None of that crap.”

“I know how you feel about psycho-babble.”

Tremblay moaned. “I’m just sick of all the hogwash.”

“I understand, but in our field—which still has, frankly, more than its share of true believers—he is a living emblem. Widely recognized as the leading loyalist to Freud.”

“What do I care about Freud?”

“I’m not saying—”

“What does that mean, ‘leading loyalist’? Are we talking Bishop Fulton Sheen?”

“No, more Pope Pius the Tenth.”

“Twelfth, asshole.”

“Tenth, twelfth, whatever. Point is, he’s practically the symbol of modern Freudianism.”

Tremblay grinned with a Steeplechase sneer. “I see.”

“If, after twenty-five years (first under the great H. Grovner Peupdish, then under Doctor Limpwick, who was trained by Peupdish, and finally under Limpwick alone), after all that, this subject still fails, that will be that.”

“I see. So if we break him, if Freud fails, we take down the whole movement.”

“Precisely.”

“And proceed uninhibited. Legitimate medicine.”

“Precisely.”

“Okay, asshole.”

Woodthorpe let out a breath he had been holding.

“But only one year.”

“Of course. One year.”

"I'm starting my stopwatch now."

"I started mine last Thursday."

"Smart thinking."

"I try."

"You better try. If you fail, and you better not fail, then we do it my way."

"Of course. Your way."

"And I won't be happy if it's a wasted year."

"It won't be wasted."

"It better not be. Not with the Nazis and the Japs and the Reds hot on our ass."

"It won't be."

"No goddamned games."

"I promise."

"Forget promises. He better fail."

"I'll make sure he fails."

"He better be a miserable failure. I will not stand for success."

"He will fail."

"This ain't no goal."

"Of course."

"No target. No goddamned skeet shoot."

"Of course."

"This is reality, Jack. For him, for you, and most of all, for me. Got it?"

"Got it."

"Good."

"Till paths be wrought through wilds of thought—"

"Yeah, yeah. Pilgrim foot and knee." Tremblay sank back into his chair and shut his eyes. "Get out of my office,

you pile of shit,” he muttered, rubbing his forehead. “And don’t let the door hit you in the ass.”

Woodthorpe did not take it personally. It was the Oedipal father speaking through the son again.

§

Limpwick paid a visit to Beatrice Grant’s house on Wednesday night. He knew Ana had been growing increasingly miserable living with her grandmother in the old neighborhood. The tone of her last letter, several weeks prior, made that plain.

He had barely stepped through the door and only just begun to remove his coat when his daughter launched into a barrage of clever asides straight from the new literature (the very literature Granny Bea had forbidden her to read).

Finally, Granny Bea interrupted. “It’s those boys she’s been running around with, filling her head with ideas. So many of them, so many boyfriends, I can’t keep up,” she exclaimed.

“I can hang around with who I want,” Ana shouted, nearly tripping on the landing as she bolted up the stairs. “Leave me alone. It’s none of your business.”

Granny Bea shook her head and turned to Limpwick. “It’s not that there are too many. It’s that, with all the decent boys to choose from, boys who wouldn’t go stuffing an impressionable girl’s head with those kinds of ideas, she picks these . . . these little savages.”

Limpwick waited for the sound of Ana’s bedroom door to slam before quietly ascending the stairs. The door had bounced in its frame without latching, leaving a sliver of

light to cut through the otherwise dark hallway. He tiptoed forward like a cat burglar and gave the door a gentle push.

It was the first time in years he had entered her room. Dolls and stuffed animals lined the walls, desk, headboard, and floor. Clove and jasmine incense curled through the air, twining with the low jazz riff playing on the record player. Ana crouched at the foot of her bed, her face buried in a plush Uncle Wiggily. She gave a half-hearted kick against the hardwood floor to acknowledge his presence.

"I've been thinking," he said softly.

"So have I," Ana replied, her voice muffled by the toy rabbit. She looked up and met his eyes. "I've been thinking about it, and I've decided I don't belong here. I'm cooped up."

"Oh, Ana," Limpwick sighed. "All teenagers think about leaving home."

"But if I don't get out, I'll die."

"You're not going to die. You're too alive, too vibrant. You're still the same little girl who used to beg me for puppet shows."

Ana seemed to blush. "You still keep those things in your office drawer?"

Limpwick smiled and nodded. "Do you remember their names?"

She shook her head.

"Winkin, Blinkin, Nod," he said, his voice soft with nostalgia.

"It's the voices I remember." She launched into pitch-perfect imitations. First, a gravelly Yiddish: "*How are you today, little girl?*" then a Brooklynese "*What do you mean,*

little? Look at her. She's five times taller than you!" And on it went.

For a moment, it felt like old times. A father and daughter, connecting. One of those fleeting, unguarded glimpses parents carry with them always.

Limpwick laughed. "It was fun, wasn't it?"

She gave a half-shrug. "When I was little, maybe." Her voice dimmed. "But then I got wise. I saw your performances for the sham they were."

Limpwick's shoulders slackened. "Performances? Sham?"

"The puppets," she said, "were false personalities. So you wouldn't have to act like a real father."

There came a hissing sound, sharp, dry, and low. Limpwick heard it. Ana must have too, but she showed no sign of concern. Perhaps it was the radiator, he thought. No . . . it came from across the room. Could his imagination have conjured something so specific? Theories abound of atavistic memory, ancient fears of serpents, old echoes hardwired into the mammalian brain. . . .

"Oh, that's Effie," Ana said, stifling a laugh. "My hedgehog. Granny Bea bought her for me."

"Why a hedgehog?"

"I'm allergic to cats, remember?"

"Oh. Right." Limpwick looked around nervously. "Where is he? Trying to sleep?"

"She is nocturnal, *Dad*," Ana said, drawing out the word with thinly veiled contempt. "She's just waking up."

Limpwick shuffled back carefully, fearing he might step on the creature. He made his way to her desk and sat down gingerly.



Figure 5. *There came a sudden hissing sound. “Oh, that’s Effie,” Her hedgehog, it seemed, had chosen that moment to awaken, and Limpwick, pillow in hand, was altogether unprepared for the disturbance.*

“Where’s he at?” he asked, glancing at the floor.

Ana stood up and tossed the throw pillow upon his lap, walked over and opened to reveal the animal’s confines. “Don’t worry, *she’s* in her cage.” The source of her bitterness was suddenly clear to Limpwick.

Limpwick nodded and looked down at his daughter’s desk. Atop her biology and economics textbooks sat a Latin primer covered in boys’ names. Nothing so very remarkable about that, thought Limpwick. But Ana, clearly feeling discomfort at having her pubescent longings so revealed, dashed over and brushed the primer into the desk drawer.

“A girl is entitled to her secrets,” Limpwick said, but Ana was above being empathized with by her father or any adult in her life. He wished he had those puppets to hide

behind right now, not that they would do any good with a daughter in full rebellion mode. He removed his watch from his waistcoat pocket. Seven thirty-seven. Perhaps, given her mood, he should let Granny Bea tell Ana the news, and anyway, he was keeping her from her homework. He turned to leave.

“Wait,” Ana said. “So what did you come to tell me?”

Limpwick took a breath and turned back to her. “I’m going away.”

“Going away? What do you mean, away?”

“I mean, you won’t see me for a while.”

“Where to? How long?”

“One year. The location is secret. I’ll be traveling with Nurse Levenwell, Jacob, and Patient Q.”

Ana bristled. “Patient Q? What is it with you and Patient Q? You’ve been working on him longer than I’ve been alive, thinking you can fix him.”

“Ana . . .”

“You know everything about him, don’t you? And still more than you know about your own daughter, who’s allergic to cats.”

“Ana . . .”

“He’s the perfect child, isn’t he? Perfectly under your control.”

“Ana, please.”

“But you can’t fix him. Don’t even know who he is. You think you know everything, and you know nothing.”

“You’re right. So right.”

“But you still plan to cure him?”

“Yes.”

“Man, you’re hopeless.”

So bold, like her dead mother, always offering her unique point of view, her unfettered commentary, the woman who used to call his work “psycho-analytical rape.”

Limpwick knew not to take contemptuous words like that (“hopeless”) personally. As with Ana’s mother, there was something else at work, something else feeding that rage, and it had little or nothing to do with her feelings toward him. “So like your mother,” Limpwick muttered.

It was as if Ana had waited all night for him to say that. “And that’s why I’ve changed my last name.”

“You what?” Limpwick felt it personally this time.

Ana elaborated. She had traded in her embarrassing last name, somehow bullying Granny Bea into giving her tentative blessing, and would now share her late mother’s more dignified maiden name Grant.

“I see,” Limpwick said, devoid of any emotion. Any display of emotion would have made him seem that much more vulnerable, and she had already demonstrated her mother’s precision in striking his heart where it was most vulnerable. But like her dead mother, he had no choice but to respect his daughter’s independence.

At that moment, Ana opened the cage door to let it out the hedgehog, and it sprung out to attack Limpwick’s feet with no provocation. Ana dove for it, laughing hysterically while unintentionally knocking the chair out from under him, rolling him into the hallway. Shrieking with a mix of horror and merriment, she slammed and locked her bedroom door to prevent the rodent’s escape.

Limpwick, who was not so merry, pounced up, stopping his urge to burst her door into splinters in the nick of time, instead squeezing the throw pillow he had grabbed

on his way down until all the pent-up aggression subsided. She had not deliberately knocked him to the floor, he told himself, but had merely been protecting her beloved pet. He should not take it personally. So he dusted himself off, tossed the pillow aside, and descended.

Beatrice waited at the foot of the stair with his hat. She handed it over, then threw up her empty hands and said, "You see?"

Limpwick nodded and passed silently out the front door and into the damp autumn air. Among all the painful things Ana had done and said that night, she had done him a tremendous favor, both literally and figuratively knocking the chair out from under him, identifying the central problem and thus freeing him to do what needed to be done. Limpwick made a declaration to himself, right then and there. "I will find out by the end one year. I will find out exactly who he is."

§



Chapter Four:

POETIC METER AND THE SEMI-LITERATE PRIMATE

The following Saturday in the Men's Disturbed Ward, with her children, as she liked to call them (Ramirez, Ledbetter, Harlan, Luchresi, and Mr. Otto) gathered in rapt attention, Nurse Agnes Levenwell began the morning prayer.

*O Christ, Thou who knowest all things, Thou didst ask
to learn where the tomb of Lazarus lay.*

She fully understood that this unauthorized prayer session was against hospital policy. Group prayer had been prohibited years ago “so as not to subject patients to the natural social pressure to participate in communal activity against one's will or better judgment, thus disrupting occupational therapy expressly designed to liberate them from such compulsions.” If a patient wished to pray, it was to be a private act. Alone. In their room. Or in the hospital's so-called chapel.

And then, before them all, Thou didst raise their brother. It was possible, then, to see the marvel of marvels: How the lifeless was seen to rise again, living and whole.

For a paid staff member (particularly the head nurse) to conduct such a ritual in plain defiance of policy might be considered reckless. But Nurse Levenwell had accepted the risks. At moments like this, the Lord did not want His servants to play it safe.

Hasten to Bethany and behold Christ there, Weeping for His friend. For though He has ordained all things according to law, He governs the world with the power of His dual nature, God and Man, united.

She was grateful for Dr. Limpwick's willingness to turn a blind eye. He would have preferred her to hold such sessions in the chapel, of course, but he continued to cover for her with Dr. Woodthorpe. The Men's Disturbed Ward, with its natural light filtering through open windows, made a far better sanctuary than the chapel with its steel ceiling beams, cracked mosaic tiles, and backlit stained glass that offered no warmth at all.

Limpwick harbored an equal distaste for the place, though for reasons of his own. He claimed to avoid all houses of worship out of respect for the more devout.

They came to Christ and God and spoke of their brother's death, And they said, "Hasten, come, Thou who art ever present, in every place, in every hour."

Nurse Levenwell admired Dr. Limpwick deeply. But she knew he remained a sinner in his rationalizations. He

had not yet welcomed God into his heart. If he was to succeed (and she wanted nothing more than that) then the Lord would have to become his guide.

Together sustained by faith, The disciples heard their Creator speak. And He said unto them, "Friends and companions, our friend has fallen asleep." He was teaching them in secret, for He knows all things and cares for all things, even that which is not yet understood.

Nurse Levenwell had a deep understanding of where Dr. Limpwick's discomfort with religion originated. Limpwick had confided in her more than he had in anyone else. The methods of the Lord were foreign to him, as one born to a New Orleans prostitute, raised by a non-Orthodox Jewish couple in a stern Midwestern Protestant town, trained by a psychiatric movement that mocked and dismissed God. And yet, he had an uncommon ability to recognize the value of faith in others.

And He answered them, "Let us cause the mourning to cease, as I raise Lazarus from the tomb."

But that was not enough. She wanted him to go further. To surrender fully. To stop clinging to the edge of reason and finally step into the arms of the Great Rehabilitator. If he sought to restore the broken, he would have to make God the central focus. Science alone could never reach the depths that God could.

Nurse Levenwell had been His witness, and it was her role to continue as His champion, to bridge the gap that existed in the patients' lives between the cold science of

psycho-therapy and transcendent Familiarity with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And with one voice they cried unto the Lord, "Sleep exists for the security of man, and not for his destruction."

The time had come. She would help him. She would model herself after the sisters of Lazarus. She would give herself wholly to this mission, not just for her patients, but for Dr. Limpwick. He had believed in her when others had not. It was he who first saw the strength behind her compassion, the skill beneath her plainness, the grace in her refusal to abandon the so-called modern lepers.

And He asked, "Where is the tomb of my friend? Now, as the true lover of mankind, I shall release him from the chains of Hades, and call him forth from the shadow of death."

She noticed a troubled look on Mr. Otto's face and paused.

"What is it, dear?" she asked gently.

"I'm not sure God can protect me," he whispered. "From the ones trying to steal my soul. I'm not sure you'll be there next time. And I don't know if God can do it alone."

"You don't need to worry," she said, grasping his hand. "I will be your guardian angel, even if I'm far away."

Reassured, he nodded. Nurse Levenwell resumed the prayer.

When the command was given with but a nod of His head, Hades trembled. The power of Death was shaken. And the arrogance of the Devil was laid low. Amen.

Luchresi began to moan, breaking the spell of silence. Nurse Levenwell looked up. Lena stood in the archway, arms folded, her face unreadable. She had been there for some time.

Nurse Levenwell knew Lena would never directly challenge her authority, but still, she felt compelled to explain.

“This is one of those times,” Nurse Levenwell said, “when policy must take a backseat to the spiritual welfare of the patients.”

Lena shrugged. “I don’t have a problem with it.”

Relieved, Nurse Levenwell smiled. “Good. Because I have a favor to ask.”

She took Lena by the hand and drew her gently into the prayer circle.

“Let us close our eyes and pray,” she said.

Nurse Levenwell asked God to help Lena tend to the children in her absence, to make them strong, to protect them from the demon seeds that twirled and mingled among them.

Outside, the wind stirred, and the birch and sugar maple trees rustled as if offering their answer.

§

Later that day, Limpwick paid a visit to Olivia’s home, a mansion he always thought a bit ostentatious for a single widow. The housemaid met him at the foyer and called for

Olivia. Always one to enjoy keeping him waiting, Olivia made him sweat it out a little longer than usual. After a perfunctory embrace and with a forced, uncomfortable smile, she asked him about Ana. Expecting little sympathy from Olivia, but interested in her perspective on the matter just the same, he summarized his latest troubling visit with Ana at Granny Bea's house.

It was difficult, he knew, for Olivia to fully grasp his relationship with his daughter, particularly for never having met her. Now and again, she would ask to see a photograph. Each time, Limpwick would frustrate her request, claiming he never carried one, telling her that, anyway, no photo would do his Ana justice.

Limpwick suspected Olivia's offense at his cockamamie claim. Of course he carried a photo, and she knew it. In all likelihood she sensed a deeper, more personal reason for his preventing her acquaintance with Ana, and she was probably right. It had to infuriate her, and as usual she expressed her offense indirectly, devaluing an area of his inadequacy, as usual, commenting on his parenting skill, as usual, or lack thereof. "Serves you right for being such a Victorian," she said. "You act as if her impulses are symptoms of a uterine disease. Good for Ana. I'd have tossed you out into the hallway myself had I been there that night."

He might have touched a nerve in Olivia, but she had deliberately touched a nerve in him, one she had to know was particularly raw. He was tempted to reply by paraphrasing Saint Augustine on how womanly passions continually bring manly pursuits tumbling down from the heights, but that would be the reply of a wounded

narcissist. Anyway, it was clear that something else was bothering her for her to say such hurtful things. So instead he would surprise her with a compassionate query. “What is it, Olivia?”

“The other night, when the three of us were having dinner.”

“Yes?”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Tell you what?”

“That I would not be able to contact my Jacob for the whole damn year.”

“But I did tell you. No contact for one year.”

“You said I was to attempt no contact with you for one year. You. Now Jacob tells me that I’m to break off all lines of communication with him as well.”

Now Limpwick started to fulminate. “Your point?”

“He was to be your understudy, not some dumb and mute lackey!”

The comment took Limpwick’s mind back many years, back to what he referred to in his private journal as “that carnal summer,” where he served as Olivia’s “central therapy.” The affair had not had a pleasant ending, and he held little nostalgic feeling for her cruel, tyrannical ways, now once again on full display. He knew he was in for a fight, and knew better than to back down. “I thought you were enlightened enough to understand the magnitude of the adventure before us. It seems I was wrong.”

Suddenly, otherworldly noises arose from another room, two or possibly three cats wailing out in unison for the attention of a caregiver. Limpwick felt the minute hairs on the back of his neck bristle, but Olivia was not distracted

by the racket, not in the slightest. “You have no right to keep me from my Jacob.”

“This is most disappointing.”

“I will not allow him to be a slave to your naked ambition.”

That was it, thought Limpwick. A line had been crossed by that comment, and one did not need to be seeking validation for a grandiose self-image to take offense.

“Ah-hah. So that is what you call freeing the human mind from the shackles of madness. *Ambition*.”

“And I don’t know who he’s more dedicated to, the patient or you.”

They were talking past each other. Meanwhile, the feline shrieking continued. Limpwick felt an urge, the kind that came to him frequently in his dreams, the kind of dreams where all energy was consumed simply by steadying the hand and pulling the trigger, where the dreamer was startled awake in a cold, thrilling sweat, reprieved just short of the bullet hitting its mark, disappointed yet self-satisfied at having had the courage to risk damnation.

“It is something for which I often rebuke him, yes,” he said.

“Lip service. The truth is, you require his absolute loyalty, first and foremost, to you. The great Doctor Elias Limpwick.”

Limpwick exploded. “You speak as if I were the embodiment of man’s primal dominance impulse.”

The approach of footsteps intensified the feline mewling and frantic scratches on the other side of the door.

Olivia remained unfazed by the cacophony. “You take obvious pleasure in it. That is certain.”

Outrageous. “You speak as if this year were to be some kind of bacchanal. But to get to this point, this has been a great struggle for me, and I have suffered greatly. You know this better than practically anyone.” “I know, you, God’s chosen martyr, and Jacob, your disciple.”

“Go ahead, mock my life’s work, my sacrifices.”

Olivia stepped back, but only momentarily. “True, you have sacrificed a lot of things for your profession. But you simply cannot ask me to cut Jacob loose like you so coldly cut loose your own daughter. No wonder she changed her surname.”

The cat shrieking and scratching stopped with the sound of porcelain against hardwood, but the hair on Limpwick’s neck stood as erect as ever. “You awful woman.”

Then came the sound of liquid pouring. Must have been Olivia’s housemaid, Limpwick thought, a few minutes tardy. Olivia’s demeanor suddenly changed. “No matter how much I love you, I can’t let you do this to me.”

“You awful woman,” Limpwick reiterated, and Olivia gave him a warm smile. Her eyes appeared to well up.

Peupdish’s was right, thought Limpwick. Olivia’s reckless passions lent further support to Peupdish’s theory, that every woman’s chief thrill was to see “how much distractin’ they can inflict upon one man.” But now he would have to conquer all distracting thoughts and emotions, steadying himself and focusing strictly on what must be done to cure Patient Q.

Once again, like that carnal summer long ago, he would have to rally his senses and back away, because he simply had to have Jacob, his most competent assistant, at his side if his effort was to be successful. He understood Olivia's state of mind, and thought that perhaps he might use her conflicting emotions to his benefit, perhaps to get her to meet him halfway. "I must have a measure of Jacob's undivided attention, but I do not mean to enforce his estrangement upon you. Therefore, this is what I will arrange."

He could see Olivia struggling with her emotions while hearing his compromise, that Jacob, once a month, will be allowed leave to visit her, but on strict orders not to divulge the whereabouts of the study, nor could she press him to do so, or the visits would cease and the study, with Jacob in tow, would be relocated to another remote location for the remainder of the year.

Limpwick awaited what he was certain would be an acceptance of this fair offer.

"Go find another lackey," she said, her voice sharp.

Stunned, Limpwick reached for her hand.

She pulled it away.

"Olivia, don't do this to Jacob. This is a once-in-a-lifetime—"

"Please go. Good luck, Doctor Limpwick. I wish you success. Truly, I do."

He lowered his head and walked out the door. He knew she meant it. He wondered if he could overcome this all-too-familiar ache of heartbreak, regain his focus, and carry on with his important work without his most promising understudy at his side.

Sunday mornings had always been purgatory for Ana.

She was no longer expected at church, thank God. Back when she was, she could never escape Granny Bea's muttered prayers (half-moaned, half-hissed) begging the Almighty to save her wayward granddaughter's soul. They began at the exact moment her knees hit the pew with a bone-on-bone thud and did not stop . . . not through the ride home, not through dinner, not through the long, silent hours that followed.

Now, Ana preferred to soundproof herself upstairs, behind the closed door of her bedroom, safe from Granny Bea's desperate bargains with heaven. But even then, the prayers reached her. Not by voice, but by airwaves. As if carried out of the church's pipe organ and funneled down the city blocks into her room. They lodged in her chest. They sank into her bloodstream. She feared they would haunt her every Sunday for the rest of her life.

She had to stay strong. Had to fortify herself against the old sensibilities. She would not live a life of soft submission, like her dead mother. Not under Granny Bea's thumb.

This Sunday, though, was different.

This Sunday, Ana had an epiphany. It came after reading an article in the *New York Times* (a column by someone named Holmes). There were names in it she recognized, voices she had heard whispered in smoky hideouts, from other exiles like herself. Outsiders with vision.

She sat up straighter. She opened her journal.

She would write a poem. Not a pretty one. Not a rhymed and sainted one. A real one. A be-bop sermon, a hymn to dislocation, to hot breath and sudden grace, to all the gods that had been exiled alongside her.

She dropped the record needle on “Salt Peanuts,” opened a fresh page, and began.

Look at the monkey exotic and dumb.
Look at him go, look at him go!

She winced.

What was this? What kind of start was that to a spiritual reawakening?

Still, she pressed on. Trust the muse. Trust the rhythm. Keep the pencil moving.

The organ grinder plays his tune.
What a grand show, such a grand show!

Something was off. Not the words. The color. Blue wasn't right.

She picked up a green pencil.

Little monkey, raise your tail.
Whatever for? Whatever for?

She paused. Was this the kind of poem that won prizes? The kind that got printed in *The Partisan Review*? Did it matter?

She kept going. Pink pencil this time.

Your menial dance is not who you are.
Tell me more. Explain, I implore!

It wasn't divine revelation. It wasn't Wordsworth. But it was something. It came from the marrow. It came from the smoke and the static and the low whine of brass in the belly.

Run away monkey. Reclaim your roots.

Where should I go? Where should I go?

The pencil flew now. Her hand could hardly keep up.

To wild liberty, Free-flowing delight.

Away I shall go! Away from my foe!

Ana closed the notebook. She had written her way to the edge of something. Not salvation, not yet, but the humming perimeter of a new kind of faith.

One day, her voice would echo through lecture halls and across radio waves, tucked inside the footnotes of tenured scholars.

One day, her scribbled poems would be dissected in respectable journals under the collective heading: *The Monkey Verses*.

These were the first cries of a girl, reborn in the voice of a woman newly convinced the world would someday quote her in anthologies and term papers.

The beginnings of a poet who would one day be known only as Ana. No surname. No apologies.

\$

The front door slammed.

Granny Bea called from the hallway. "I'm home, dear."

Ana blinked. Dazed. Had it already been an hour?

From the kitchen, Granny Bea's voice floated upward, bright and full of piety. "Father had a wonderful sermon today. You should have been there."

Ana shut off the record player. Closed the journal. Bolted for the bathroom. She knew what came next. Every Sunday, same routine. If she didn't get there first, Granny Bea would. The bladder always followed the benediction.

Ana drained herself, then lingered. The porcelain was cold beneath her thighs. She listened.

No knock.

No sigh.

No creaking step on the stair.

Something was wrong.

She stepped into the hallway and nearly collided with Granny Bea. The old woman stood there frozen, holding Ana's open journal. Her mouth hung open like a trap with no bait.

Granny Bea lifted the pages and shook them in the air. "What is this?" Her voice trembled with disbelief.

Ana snatched the journal from her hands. "Privacy," Ana snapped. "Or lack thereof."

Granny Bea stood her ground. "No. Not this time." Her eyes narrowed. "You're still under my guardianship. That comes with rights. Rights more sacred than a granddaughter's private scribbles."

Ana stiffened. "It's not scribbles. It's a journal."

Granny Bea scoffed. "Journal, diary, manifesto . . . I don't care what you call it." She jabbed a finger toward the cover. "This is going straight to your psychiatrist."

Ana paused. Blinked. Then smiled.

Let Granny Bea send it. What could she do, take away pencils? Ana would write in nail polish. In charcoal. In blood.

Ana turned her back and started walking. “Fine,” she said, loud enough for effect.

She slammed the bedroom door with theatrical precision. Granny Bea expected drama. Ana gave her drama.

She threw herself onto the bed, clutching the journal like a holy text.

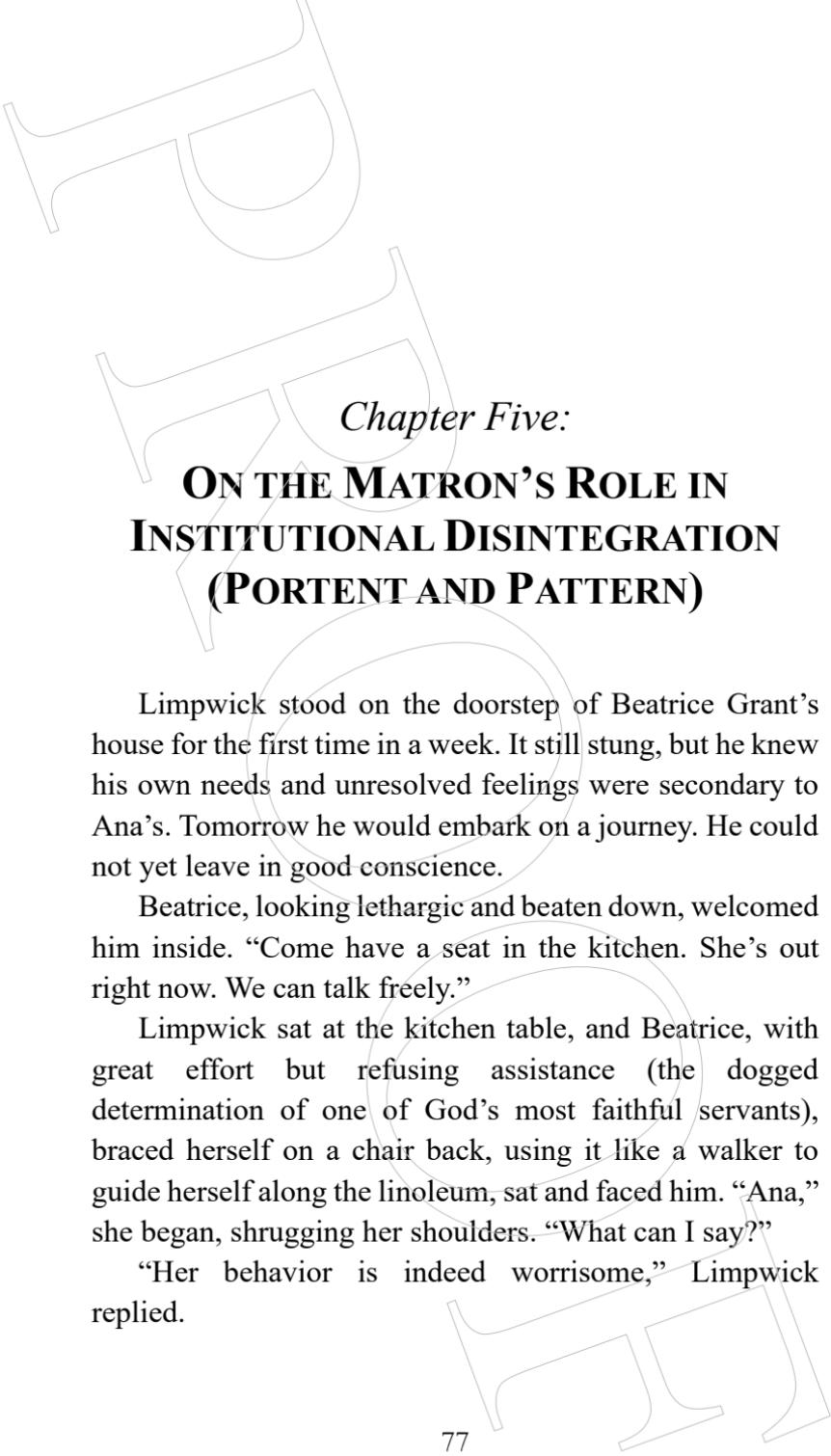
This would be her new ritual.

Every Sunday, a new poem.

Every Sunday, a new discovery.

Every Sunday, a small act of war disguised as prayer.

§



Chapter Five:

**ON THE MATRON'S ROLE IN
INSTITUTIONAL DISINTEGRATION
(PORTENT AND PATTERN)**

Limpwick stood on the doorstep of Beatrice Grant's house for the first time in a week. It still stung, but he knew his own needs and unresolved feelings were secondary to Ana's. Tomorrow he would embark on a journey. He could not yet leave in good conscience.

Beatrice, looking lethargic and beaten down, welcomed him inside. "Come have a seat in the kitchen. She's out right now. We can talk freely."

Limpwick sat at the kitchen table, and Beatrice, with great effort but refusing assistance (the dogged determination of one of God's most faithful servants), braced herself on a chair back, using it like a walker to guide herself along the linoleum, sat and faced him. "Ana," she began, shrugging her shoulders. "What can I say?"

"Her behavior is indeed worrisome," Limpwick replied.

Beatrice struggled to lift herself up, and offered him a drink. She did not wait for a response. To his delight, she remembered: water, crushed ice, slice of lemon.

"You haven't seen the worst of it," she said, propping one hand on the table while waving Limpwick off with the other, stiffening her arthritic elbow, and descending to her seat with a pained, noble stoicism.

"Oh?"

"The words she writes in her journal. Dear me"

Limpwick considered chastising Beatrice for the invasion of privacy, but wisely decided against it in her frail condition. Not now. A woman her age didn't think in those terms, and anyway, she meant well. "Again, I'm more interested in her behavior of late. Anything, say, *unusual*?"

"Oh dear me, yes. She has taken to wearing long black stockings."

"I see. . . ."

"And running amok all over town."

Limpwick took a drink. A long, contemplative drink.

"You know," Beatrice continued, "I warned her of the dangers of young savages in leather jackets, with their switchblades and zip guns."

"I see. . . ."

"So of course, now she chooses to run around with older savages."

"I see." Limpwick took another drink, then considered aloud the kind of men Beatrice was talking about. "Neanderthals and drifters, with their jazz music and late-night intentions. . . ."

"Exactly."

“... who prey on young, impressionable girls like Ana who are susceptible to their wild, unkempt appearances and snarling rebuke of social mores.”

“Exactly. Forty years as a stenographer, my fingers kept nimble by the likes of these boys. Positively bohemian.”

“So much for your sound advice,” Limpwick said.

“She used to listen to her Granny Bea,” Beatrice continued. “Now she won’t listen anyone. Not me, and certainly not you.”

“No, certainly not me.”

“Only those men she hangs around, spewing forth their vulgar poetry in the dingy cellars of coffeehouses.”

“It seems clear that her pursuit of impulse-driven satisfaction drives her filial disobedience. But realize, this is not unusual for a teenage girl. . . .”

“Not unusual? Glory be, she calls your advice ‘rape.’ “

Limpwick clarified, with a sad smirk: “ ‘*Psycho-analytical* rape.’ “

“Where does she get ideas like that?” Beatrice asked. Both she and Limpwick knew where.

Part of Limpwick wanted to erase the stinging memory of a week ago, but he understood that to help his daughter overcome her vulnerabilities, he would have to stay in touch with his own.

“To say such a thing about her own daddy.” Beatrice clicked her tongue and shook her head. “Shameful.”

Funny, Limpwick recalled, that the same woman who judges his daughter’s words so harshly is the same woman who gave Ana the tacit blessing to reject her daddy’s surname. He would be less judgmental, and instead try to offer some perspective. “In a way, the brutal honesty of the

young gives all of us a better understanding of our own doubts and internal struggles.”

Beatrice stopped, almost in shock. “A better understanding? Doubts and struggles? Dear me, you talk like a shrink.”

Greenhorn psychiatrists might be offended by the term, but Limpwick had grown numb to it long ago. He only smiled with sad resignation. “I guess I do.”

“But you are her daddy,” she replied, “and it’s just wrong for a girl to talk like that to her daddy.”

It would do little good for Limpwick to interject with his professional opinion here, as shrink-like as it would sound to a master pickler, pie-maker, and career court stenographer, but he did so almost impulsively. “It’s normal for youth to develop a language that helps them handle conflict.”

“Normal? Dear me.”

Limpwick took another sip, listening intently to Beatrice, letting her work it out.

“I tell you, Doctor Limpwick, it’s not normal. It is certainly not how we talked to our folks in our day. We were always respectful to our elders, even in disagreement.”

“Trust me, Beatrice. The language of each new generation might sound harsh to the ears of elders, but it is a necessary coping mechanism, an assertion of self.”

“If that’s their chosen language, well, then I guess I’ll keep praying for God’s lost sheep.”

In her words of spiritual resolve, Limpwick heard the tinge of the hope he was listening for, and was satisfied. “While you’re at it, can you throw in a prayer for me, too?”

“I sure will.” She winked. “I already have.”

Now, Limpwick thought, on to more pressing matters. “The fact is, Beatrice, I cannot postpone my professional endeavors, not even for Ana.”

“What do you mean?”

Limpwick reminded Beatrice, who seemed to have forgotten, that he would be going away for a year.

“Oh, yes. Where’s my head? They were talking about that at the hospital only yesterday.”

Limpwick considered asking about the nature of her hospital visit, but decided against it. Granny Bea probed him for more details, but of course, he could not give her an exact address, no more than could he reveal it to Olivia.

“Not even a phone number?”

He shook his head. “Remember that wartime rule? Never tell your friend something you would not want your enemy to know.”

She did not seem to understand. “How am I to get in touch with you? What about Ana?”

He explained to her that the coming year was to be a like sabbatical, but less an intermission of labor than a concentration thereof. With one year, minus two weeks, to accomplish the mission, he could not afford any fatal disruptions to his work. “It is not a lot of time.”

She appeared not to understand, and if she did a little, it was an understanding tempered by an old lady’s healthy skepticism. “What kind of study are you planning? One year, with no contact from the outside world?”

“Think, like a religious retreat,” he replied.

A light in her eyes indicated that her aged mind grasped his essence, although she remained disapproving. "Only less for the soul than for the head."

He nodded. He couldn't expect a woman who avoids pickling exotic produce for fear of death might not immediately embrace such an unconventional idea, but she was willing to collaborate for the common good. He only had twenty-four hours to get his things in order. He wished to bid farewell to his daughter, but she was unavailable on such short notice, Beatrice explained. It was a kind translation of Ana's outright refusal. He understood, the spell she was under, drawn to the romantic and bohemian notion of alienation. By the end of the year she would grow out of this phase, but right now it was just too soon. Given Ana's rejection, he had one additional request for Beatrice. "As I will be going away for a year, I must establish a lifeline back to her. And that lifeline is you."

Beatrice looked intrigued, even excited, by the clandestine nature of the proposal. "But how, with no phone or address?"

"This is what we must discuss."

"But why not tell me these things? Don't you trust me?"

"Most assuredly," Limpwick said, although he most assuredly did not, at least not wholly, trust the woman who gave Ana the tacit blessing to reject her daddy's surname, nor did he wholly trust any woman, with their natural inclination to reveal anything and everything to anybody and everybody when given the least opportunity, and Beatrice was the most naturally inclined woman he knew.

It is, after all, what made her the perfect informant.

He told her that it was the “others” he could not trust, those others who were bound to probe her for his whereabouts. He could not afford a parade of visitors, well meaning and otherwise, hoping to catch a glimpse of his historic study.

“Like devils in the desert,” she said.

Limpwick nodded, vaguely recognizing the bible verse.

“In other words,” she said, “the truth would be like a great millstone around my neck, to drown me in the depths of the sea.”

“Indeed,” he replied, and, respecting her devotion the Gospel Word, added, “and blessed are you who can maintain ignorance with saintly honesty.”

“And woe to the world because of things that cause sin,” she replied.

He had always admired the faith of women like her and like Nurse Levenwell. It would suit them and him well in the coming year.

The prospect of being his co-conspirator seemed to have excited Beatrice beyond her bodily limitations. Her vigor was renewed. With a wink and a click of her tongue, she leaned back in her chair. “If I’m going to bear the whole burden of Ana myself, with her father away for one full year, what is in it for me? You know, I’ve got a sick sister to worry about, too.”

Limpwick knew what a shrewd negotiator this woman could be, much more clever than she seemed. Much like Mabel used to be before she died.

“Your sister?”

“You remember, Cordelia? From Wilmington?”

Cordelia, of course. Cordelia from Wilmington
Wilmington!

What good fortune, thought Limpwick, careful not to reveal the true degree of his excitement. "I'm sorry. How is she doing?"

"Not well. The doctors give her one year, maybe. I wish I could see her more often, before she passes on. She has no one else. We have no other family."

In that instant, the plot came to him, a bargaining chip disguised as charity, as helping her out with her sick sister from Wilmington. "How would you like to see her more often, that is, on a more regular basis?"

"What do you mean? Where would I get the money for the train tickets? I can barely afford to feed myself and Ana?"

Limpwick hid his amusement at her exaggeration of her plight, a clever negotiating tactic to match his own, and there seemed to be a mutual appreciation for the audacity being demonstrated on both sides of the table. The truth was, Limpwick had always seen to it that his daughter was well-fed, and he would not want to even appear to slacken, to himself or anyone else, in this regard. "I will help. The first of each month, for the next year, I will meet you at the train station in Wilmington to receive updates on Ana, and any other necessary information."

"Then I can visit Cordelia," Beatrice said, wiping a brilliantly conceived tear from her eye.

For Limpwick, a weighty burden had been lifted. It was starting to come together. He stood up and reached in his wallet. It was empty. He smiled at Beatrice. "I'll wire you the money for the train tickets."

Beatrice cleared her throat. “Not a problem. I trust you. And while we’re meeting at the train station, I take it that Agnes and Jacob will attend to your patient, right?”

Limpwick stopped on his way to the door. He didn’t recall telling Beatrice that he had been considering Jacob for his understudy on the project. But then, his memory had been faltering, albeit at a normal rate for his age, but requiring more careful note-taking on his part. “Unfortunately, Jacob is no longer taking part.”

Beatrice looked perplexed by his response. “I ran into him at the hospital only yesterday. He was very enthusiastic about the prospect of a year studying under the great Doctor Limpwick.”

“Oh?” Limpwick had no idea; Beatrice was already proving to be the shrewd and observant informant he imagined she would be.

“Yes, and that he would be making arrangements with his Aunt Olivia to take care of things while he was away. You know, she’s almost a mother to him, like I wish I could be with Ana. What a wonderful woman.”

“Indeed,” Limpwick replied, in an oxygen-deprived gasp. Maybe Olivia hadn’t gotten to him yet. Perhaps there was still a chance. There was no time to waste.

“I must go.” Limpwick dashed out the door, fueled by his need for Jacob, his best understudy.

“You’ll wire me the money?” Beatrice yelled to him.

Limpwick fumbled with his car door, and before getting in, looked back at Beatrice with an anxious, hopeful smile. “Indeed, I’ll wire the money.”

Limpwick pressed the gas, making his way through the neat, rectangular zones, past the serried ranks of office towers, to the line of humble brick and timber dwellings where old established forms of civil life still manage to remain cloistered from the surrounding neighborhoods of post-war prefab . . . although, Limpwick fretted, not for much longer.

Inside her enclosed porch, Nurse Levenwell stood waiting for him, out of costume in a fashionable knee-high blue overcoat. Her set of unstockinged gams would have made a Hollywood starlet proud. The look was accentuated by her eyebrows, penciled in at high arcs of unreality, made slightly more ridiculous by the juxtaposition of her utilitarian nurse's cap. But through the paint and powder, she managed an air of quiet dignity.

Limpwick found her with her hands were on hips. He was a half hour late, and there would be no time for lunch. She hinted at letting him go on his way without her, but he would not hear any of that. She would have to come with him, post haste. Alone, he explained, he stood no chance. He needed his top nurse to combat Olivia's womanly wiles.

He expected one of Nurse Levenwell's knowing glances, but she did not seem to understand, her eyebrows instead arching high in bewilderment. "I'll explain in the car," he said. He grabbed her by the arm, and dashes her off without a moment to reconsider or forgive his tardiness.

With Nurse Levenwell securely in tow, Limpwick explained himself. Olivia meant to appeal to Jacob's strong sense of reverence and obedience, and he couldn't (they mustn't) let her obstruct their choice of assistant.

“Particularly when we have but a year to change the face of medicine,” he added.

Not surprisingly, but to a greater degree than he expected, Nurse Levenwell wholeheartedly concurred, but with no lack of empathy for Olivia. “The poor darling, misled by the false maternal instincts common to adoptive mothers.”

Limpwick drove on, avoiding the urban roadway tanglement as best he could, taking familiar warehouse alleyways, bypassing the congestion of the painted cement commercial districts, speeding along the back roads behind decaying movie houses and taverns in the manmade fairyland once known in its heyday for its “gin and sin.” A sad sight to behold, Limpwick thought, and easily exploitable evidence for the blue-nosed moralists among the city’s leadership.

When they reached their destination in Old Town, Limpwick boldly parked where he normally would not, setting off a blaring chorus of taxicabs. It seemed they had mistaken his borrowed yellow sedan for additional competition. Nurse Levenwell got out and exerted their right to be there, but the cabs honked on with comic persistence, like a territorial herd of bull moose toward a perceived threat.

Limpwick rushed to the doorway without a moment’s regard for the situation behind him. He had complete faith in Nurse Levenwell’s power to restore order.

Just as he was about to open the door, something fell from the sky onto Limpwick’s head. After realizing he wasn’t injured, Limpwick looked down and saw a broken bird nest at his feet. It must have fallen from its abandoned

perch atop the enameled sign over the door: *Bright Apts*, in faded white letters against faded blue. Troubled that he might be losing his powers of observation, he wondered why he hadn't noticed the sign on earlier visits. Then he collected himself. No time to waste.

"Jacob?" Limpwick called back.

Limpwick turned and leaned downward and was disappointed to again see the gum-chewing doorman pointing out the open door.

"I meant to stop you, sir. If you are looking for Jacob, he left an hour ago with his mother."

"His aunt," Limpwick sighed. He was too late.

"Right, his aunt. I assume it was a lunch date, but I can't be sure."

§

Limpwick took the conventional path back to Sunnydale, for his cause to do otherwise had passed him by. He knew he would be forced to settle for a run-of-the-mill psychiatry student as his assistant, one handpicked by Woodthorpe and his cronies. But he did not fault them for the situation that had befallen him.

At every stoplight, he closed his eyes and placed his hand on his brow, seeking to imprison the fatal thoughts running through his head.

"Jacob not only deserved this appointment," Limpwick said. "Considering the forces aligned to deny him future appointments, he needed it."

Nurse Levenwell tapped his knee to let him know the light had changed. "He certainly had a hard time impressing anyone but you."

"Indeed. He will never get another fair shake."

Limpwick understood the reasons. They did not know Jacob the way he knew him, nor did they care to know him beyond social formality. It took great patience and effort to know someone so subtle to the point of formlessness, so mysterious to the point of soundlessness.

Jacob was not one you could get to know after an hour, day, or even many months. One had to observe him over time with the patience of Job. In the summer when he sought to cool his youthful energies in the sanatorium cellar, in the autumn when he wore nothing but gray, eschewing the vibrancy of fall as a foreshadowing of a deathly confinement, in the winter when he fell asleep overnight in the self-service elevator, in the spring when his energies were renewed in Limpwick's service. Having observed him through the turn of the seasons, Limpwick knew Jacob almost as well as he knew himself.

No, Woodthorpe and his cronies were certainly not to blame for the denial of his most devoted warrior-disciple. They had shown at least a measure of belief in Limpwick's motives. Despite their own faith, despite their pill, they had granted him the chance to test his therapeutic model against it, to set the record straight, now and for all time.

No, the blame for this denial rested solely on Olivia.

"So selfish," he muttered aloud. "So damn selfish. To rob him, to rob me."



Figure 6. *Through the paint and powder, Nurse Levenwell managed an air of quiet dignity.*

“Without even a chance to clear its throat,” Limpwick smirked. “Now I am to turn my life upside down, spend a year apart from family and friends, to face an almost certain failure.”

Nurse Levenwell slapped his knee and barked, “Don’t say that!”

“But is it all worth it? I’ve already lost my best student. By the time I return, I will have lost everything. My prestige, my profession, my Ana . . . everything.”

“Don’t you dare say that.”

He sighed. “I am inclined to give up before I’ve even begun.”

Nurse Levenwell placed her cold hand on his neck. She reminded him how long ago, under Grovner’s tutelage, his youthful zeal and energy would have allowed nothing to stand in his way.

Limpwick heard the lilting cadence of his erstwhile mentor’s voice in his imagination: “*Son, you have potential, something those in the lower ranks simply haven’t got. . . .*” He knew the lower ranks saw Jacobs’s appointment as proof of clannish elitism.

“*. . . They are drunk on the bad elixir of petty jealousy. . . .*”

They believed Limpwick’s choice had less to do with Jacob’s burgeoning intellect and unlimited potential and more to do with Jacob’s lineage to the founding family of Stark University.

Grovner would have agreed. Theirs was a classic case of incorrigible syndrome.

“*. . . They are nothing if not incorrigible. . . .*”

Incorrigible people like to surround themselves with inferiors, with whom they can enjoy an irrational sense of superiority over the world. Toward those with prospects to reign supreme in their chosen profession (in the case of one with so bold a spirit and so fertile a mind as Jacob, a practical certainty) they are only hostile, unfriendly, morose, and forbidding.

“ . . . a veritable pack of hell-hounds, they are. . . . ”

Theirs is a grave security defect, stemming from the common parent-child situation where the parent was never satisfied with any achievement of theirs, no matter how significant. Theirs is a life where the achievements of others are only magnifications of their own personal failings.

“Theirs is a sad, sad state. . . . ”

That was not to dismiss in the incorrigible person what might be described as genius for finding defects (real or imagined) in superiors, and making much trouble about it.

“ . . . This life is nothing if not perilous, but you can choose your peril. You can spend your whole life watching your back, or you can achieve. . . . ”

One would have to enlist all of one's energies to successfully combat this genius, but to do so would only give rise to more defects and comes at the expense of achievement. Therefore, one was best to ignore it, to forge ahead, and deal with what lies behind only in retirement, only after achievement has been fulfilled.

“ . . . Son, you must ignore their blathering, hissing chorus. Acquaint yourselves only with those who help you reach harmony. ”

Limpwick was mystified by the complex processes that compelled him to achieve. Why should he continue to suffer for those who are incapable of appreciating the suffering? What redemption is there for such pain and indignity? Why not retire now? He wondered aloud, “Why pay so high a personal cost to a cause that returns no equitable reward?”

Nurse Levenwell shuddered, and pointed a scolding finger. “You’ve been blessed by the power to take away infirmities, to drive away demons. Is it proof of this blessing you seek, some payment of homage? Or is not the healing itself, a pursuit toward the end of suffering, reward enough?”

“Well then,” Limpwick humbly replied, “I guess I will forge ahead to fulfill my God-given duty.”

“*Our* God-given duty,” she emphasized.

§



Chapter Six:

THE SEQUINED OVERINDULGENCE OF THE MODERN TEENAGE MALE

“Next patient?”

Ana remained buried in the *New Yorker* magazine she has been pretending to read for the last fifteen minutes, covering her face to hide her disdain from her Granny Bea.

Granny Bea meant well. We all mean well, Ana thought to herself, but all she really cared about was her sick sister Cordelia in Wilmington. Caretaker was what she fancied herself to be. When it came to Ana, she didn’t care a lick. She only wanted to control her. Caretaker, my ass. More like tyrant.

But Granny Bea couldn’t control what eluded her, and like a fish to an elusive meal at the end of a hook, she just couldn’t resist her granddaughter’s private journal. If Ana were a sportsman, doing it for the challenge it presented, it would be no fun at all. It would be like a master fisherman taking on a ravenous crappie.

Granny Bea had the sense to recognize her granddaughter’s poetry as no mere recreation or pleasure. It was

blood poetry, and Ana was full of hot, angry blood, if her daydreams were any indication. If Granny Bea could see Ana's vivid apparition of a fiery derailment, she might never again board that train to Wilmington.

The guilt from these dark fantasies overpowered Ana. She hoped one day by her poetry to give solace to others wracked by such guilt. Unlike so many of the great poets, she hoped she will not have to pay a price in her own personal destruction.

"Ana?"

In being beckoned to see the doctor, her mood shifted from one of guilt and disgust to nervous, giddy anticipation. Ana knew he cared about her, unlike Granny Bea, because all he did was listen, and never, ever would he dream of trying to control her.

Nurse Lena Anders began to guide Ana down the corridor. "I know the way, Lena," Ana snapped at her.

Lena continued to smile her fake smile. "*Nurse Anders*, please. Now come on, Ana." Unfazed, she continued by routine to lead her into her psychiatrist's office and shut the door behind her with authority, no more or less than was usual for her.

"Hello again, Ana."

Ana felt that rush of excitement you feel when know you have committed a crime, and know you are going to get away with it. She looked upon her doctor as her getaway driver, and she was eager to hop in to wherever he wanted to take her. She giggled at the thought, then blushed, because she knew he would only take her wherever she wants to go. "Hello doctor."

Ana walked briskly by his desk, kicked up her feet, flopped on the couch, and focused her eyes on the ceiling like a good girl. "So Granny told you about the poem?"

"Yes Ana. About the monkey. Please explain the monkey."

Ana knew this game well. "The monkey is me, I guess."

"That's not what I'm asking, Ana. I'm asking what do you think of the monkey?"

Ana thought long and hard. "I think he's sad."

"And why is he sad?"

"I think he's looking for liberty."

"And why would the monkey want to find liberty?"

"I think he's interested in free-flowing delight more than anything."

"Is this the monkey's real feeling?"

"I don't know. I just like the sound of free-flowing delight."

"So it's the sound that interests you, more than feeling."

Ana nodded.

"Is that what poetry is about, the sound of the words?"

"I don't know, I guess so. But more about the feeling you want to express, the soul, I think."

"The soul of a poet? The inner soul?"

"Yeah, kinda."

"Ana, do you know the difference between real soul and soulful affectation?"

Ana grumbled, "Yeah, I guess."

"I have an idea. Keep writing your poetry."

"Really?" Ana squealed. She knew she could count on him. She would love nothing better than to write him a poem.

"But I want you to write real poetry."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, don't trouble yourself with sounding meaningful, or pretending to be soulful. Instead, try for real feeling, real soul."

"Huh?"

"Don't worry about trying to impress me by pentameter, rhyme, those kinds of things. Words that convey your real, innermost feelings will impress me more."

"Okay, sounds good." Ana stopped a giggle, embarrassed that her doctor might think she is just a silly little girl. She knew she must behave more seriously, like a woman. "Doctor, do you want to hear what I'm feeling now?"

"If you'd like. I have another patient coming in a few minutes, so be quick."

"I'm feeling, I can take care of myself. I'm an adult."

"Ana, dear, you're only seventeen."

Ana turned around and looked him in the eyes, although she knew she wasn't supposed to do such things unless directed to do so. "But they treat me like I'm twelve. And I don't like them keeping tabs on me."

The doctor did not seem to mind this break with procedure, not this time, and leaned forward in his chair. "Who? Your grandmother and . . . " He seemed to hang on her next word.

"My father."

He leaned back. "I thought he was out of your life. Is he becoming more involved?"

"Yeah."

"That's great, Ana. Isn't that what you wanted?"

"No it's not. They thought I wasn't around this morning, wasn't listening."

The doctor seemed to have forgotten about the time, seemed intrigued and willing to extend the session, and this pleased Ana. "Turn back around, dear. Now, what do you mean, wasn't listening? To what?"

Ana turned back around, obeying his command. "Oh, their little conspiracy, for her to keep him informed for the next year."

"Next year?"

"You know, while he's away."

"I see. Don't you think it means he cares about you?"

"He never cared before, why should he care now?"

"Now you're impressing me, dear Ana. Now you are revealing something deep, something real. Go on."

Ana eagerly told him everything she knew. She again looked back at him, saw that he was gratified. She was happy to have gratified him.

His eyes lingered on hers, extending the moment, until the trance was finally broken. "Oh dear, look at the time. We seem to have gone over."

Ana leaped up from the couch, guilt-ridden. "I'm sorry doctor, I . . ."

"No, no, don't blame yourself." He walked over and placed his warm hand on her back and guided her to the door. "I think we are on the verge of a breakthrough, Ana."

To Ana's disappointment, he stopped at the door, leaving her to walk alone down the corridor to the waiting room. It was cold, and the fluorescent humming was annoying. It felt and sounded like mocking.

She reached the waiting room, and Granny Bea struggled to rise out of her chair to greet her.

She could not bring herself to look Granny Bea in the eye. If she was on the verge of a breakthrough, like the doctor said, why was she still wracked by overpowering guilt? Why this recurring apparition of a violent end?

§

That unseasonably mild afternoon at Duca d'Abruzzi's, Olivia looked across the same table at which she and Limpwick lunched almost two weeks ago. Jacob's gaunt face resembled that of her tubercular brother-in-law (his father, the late Thomas Dunbo). She remembered the day Thomas was taken away to an out-of-state sanatorium.

Olivia still felt a tinge of regret. Obviously, Jacob had no second thoughts about leaving home to study under the great Dr. Limpwick. But Limpwick refused to give Olivia so much as an address or phone number to reach Jacob, and would only promise once-a-month visitation. For Olivia, this was out of the question. She would sooner have Jacob study under Moreno in New York than to accept Limpwick's proposed arrangement.

For seventeen years, Olivia had always looked out for Jacob's best interests. She had made many sacrifices, narrowing her own philanthropic ambitions, giving up numerous posts, to devote all her attentions to her dear departed sister and brother-in-law's son.

Each of Olivia's vague pleasantries about the food and weather clearly intensified Jacob's suspicion of her, and by

dessert, she was ready to end his torment. “Jacob, I have a confession.”

“What is it, Mother?”

“Do you recall how, when you were being sidetracked by your theatrical ambitions—”

“You mean,” he interrupted, “how you interfered? Yes I do, and for that,” he said as he casually wiped his face with a napkin, “I have never forgiven you.”

“You must understand. I acted in your best interest.”

“Of course. You didn’t want me to waste my talents.”

“You should be thankful to me,” she scolded. “Since taking your final bow as young Oedipus, you graduated from high school at fifteen, earned your bachelor’s degree at eighteen, medical degree by twenty-two, and here you are, age twenty-six, in your fourth year of residency. Imagine.”

“Where would I be without you, Mother?” he asked.

“Designing harem costumes for the Mountain Playhouse’s latest farce,” she replied.

“No,” Jacob grunted. “That’s not true.”

“Oh?”

“They’re a summer stock company. The season finale would have been two months ago.”

“Then you’d be stage directing in Sheboygan until the next season. In any event, you would be miserable.”

“Community theatre was never miserable for me, Mother.”

“All the talk of subtext, of accentuation and intonation, of *mise en scène*! What does a thirteen-year-old understand of such things?”

“It’s you who didn’t understand, Mother. It was about art, technique, and expression—”

“—to be lavished with extravagant praise, to be debauched through constant titillation of personal vanity.”

“That’s a queer thing for a benefactress of the arts to say.”

“There are far more ennobling arts if one wishes to be debauched.”

“Why then are you so charitable with your support of the *Théâtre Populaire*?”

“Penance,” Olivia growled. “And like any penance, it is first and foremost a rejection.”

“What are you rejecting, Mother?”

“I’m rejecting that dirty Russian Stanislavski who calls his parlor tricks ‘creating an inner life,’ and ‘rousing the subconscious.’”

“Outrageous,” Jacob smirked, “for him to speak in such terms.”

“You should be outraged. He robbed those terms from your beloved Freud to give his so-called ‘method’ the façade of legitimacy.”

Jacob, who now started to look seriously offended, picked up a spoon to stir his tea. “Mother, please.”

“Robbed, from the very profession you now practice. And as with so many others he has seduced, he threatened to pick you apart, body and soul, and rob you of your own essence, your own ‘self.’ So I put a stop to it.”

Jacob slammed down his teacup. “Is it robbery when a person willingly turns himself over to something?”

Olivia knew she had gotten to him, had opened an old wound, but couldn't bring herself to back off. "If not robbery, then what? Exploitation, at the very least."

"Exploitation? Of what?"

"Of your idealism."

Jacob quivered, looking shaken and speechless at her choice of that term.

Olivia herself recalled a scene where she was left speechless, one that still filled her with guilt over having let down her dead sister. A year after taking Jacob into her home, a year in which she indulged his every whim, Olivia came upon him with two of his female friends in her living room, giggling and congratulating themselves over the sequined dresses they had sewn for an adaptation of a French play. Jacob was trying on a veil. Olivia felt like she had stumbled upon a sort of inverse innocence to the Garden of Eden, and it horrified her.

Ever since, she blamed herself for Jacob's maladjustment. It was her fault both for overindulging him in all the wrong ways and for not providing a suitable male on which to model himself. Thus began a period of several years where Olivia aggressively sought one out.

Olivia did not concern herself with the effect on her reputation, having weathered such rumblings a decade earlier over Limpwick. After a while, even he began to comment on the change that had come over her. Olivia refused to explain herself to him, and rejected his repeated offers to assist her through psycho-therapy. It was as if her suspicions about Jacob might become "real" if she were to give voice to them. She knew she must keep them

internalized, no matter the cost to her psyche, as her own private delusions.

After a prolonged sip of his chamomile, Jacob appeared to have calmed himself. "If the theatre has exploited my youthful ideals, so be it. I owe to it everything I am and hope to be. After all, my papers on using drama to unlock disowned feelings (inspired by the theatre) are what led Doctor Limpwick to take me as his protégé in the first place."

"Meanwhile, you've let other choices, better ones, perhaps, than Doctor Limpwick, slip away."

"Oh Mother, not Doctor Moreno again."

"Moreno was performing the seminal work on psychodrama while you were but a boy staging fanciful puppet shows."

Jacob gave a devil-may-care shrug. "La-ti-da," he said, and took another sip of tea.

"But you wouldn't accept his offer. You told me you couldn't stand to be away from home. Ha!"

"That was the truth, Mother. For me, home is wherever I can study the methods of Freud, who Moreno rejects. Now, Doctor Limpwick has promised me that home."

Olivia slumped in her chair. She knew how he felt. She remembered what it felt like to be at home in the arms of Limpwick after Waldo disappeared, during that summer of carnal therapy. She remembered the comfort, the limbs intertwined, squeezing out the sweat and the tears and the pain of the outside world, not caring a whiff about the public scandal. She had scandalized the family before, in marrying beneath her class. She owed them nothing. These

were her choices, her mistakes to make, not theirs. Maybe Jacob thought the same of her.

Maybe it was in their shared blood to disappoint the family's expectations.

For now, she had to find a way to return him to his rightful home. "Forgive me, Jacob. Forgive me."

"Forgive what, Mother?"

"I still haven't told you my confession." She proceeded to tell him everything.

Jacob's face slowly transformed and contorted to resemble that of another ghost, the translucent and rigid face of his dead birth mother in its open casket. Then he stood, with dramatic abruptness, nearly knocking over a waiter. "What am I, a peg for which to hang your own fleeting passions?"

"You are no peg, Jacob," she said, with all the contrition she could muster. "You are a free being, free to hurl yourself down the path of your own choosing, free to choose your own home. In that regard, I have done you a great disservice." Olivia's calm, economical gesture for him to return to his seat covered the anxiety and penitent stresses that were tearing her internal organs asunder.

"I'm relieved to finally hear you admit that, Mother." Jacob wiped spittle from his mouth and sat back down.

Olivia too would have been relieved, but there was no time to waste on relief. "Now, Jacob, you must go. Here, take this." She reached into her purse, and at the same time tapped a waiter. "Excuse me, could you have the maitre d' call a cab?"

"Right away, madam."

Jacob looked down at the large wad of bills she has folded into his hand. "Mother, this is most generous of you."

"Now go, don't wait for me. You must hurry."

Jacob kissed her forehead and rushed out through the restaurant. Olivia waved a restrained good-bye, keeping her emotions in check as she watched the cab take Jacob away.

It was not whether one was willing to be exploited, but how one chose to be exploited that mattered. Jacob had chosen. And now, it was her turn.

The benefactress would pay her long-overdue penance.

\$

Limpwick had made it back to Sunnydale in time to discover that Woodthorpe had made his choice of a new understudy for him. He had not yet told him who it would be, but Limpwick already knew one thing. It would not be his most qualified candidate.

Woodthorpe closed his office door and gently guided Limpwick to his seat. Woodthorpe remained standing. "I was sorry to hear the news," he said, with the utmost sincerity. "He was quite a favorite of yours. You must have been devastated."

"Thank you, Doctor Woodthorpe," Limpwick said, "but I am sure to be comfortable with your choice, quite certain you will provide the next best alternative."

"He should be arriving any minute. Probably packing his things as we speak. We had to act fast, knowing you have an early morning train to catch."

Limpwick sat and Woodthorpe stood in uncomfortable silence for what seemed an hour. Limpwick pulled out his pocket-watch. It had only been five minutes.

“Excuse me,” Woodthorpe said. He opened the door and whisked down the hall, leaving it open. It slowly creaked shut, leaving Limpwick alone with his thoughts.

By that point, Limpwick had resigned himself. His year would not be successful. The best he could do was advance his cause as far as it was meant to go, which was to say, just short of where he needed it to go.

He was fortunate to have bought himself as much time as he did, one year, by the generosity of Woodthorpe and the board, despite the profit motive to convert to psychopharmaceuticals. In appreciation for their sacrifice and trust, he would give it his best Sisyphean effort.

In a way, it made good sense to start afresh with a new protégé. Without Jacob, he had one less distraction. He would have no daily reminders of Olivia.

But there was such a thing as too much good sense, and he felt he had crossed that threshold by breaking it off with Olivia all those years ago. This came at the urging of his esteemed mentor.

He could still hear Grovner’s voice, distinct as ever, in that oily drawl that dressed up shame in the piety of self-denial: *“I’ve been watchin’ how you and that lovely Shaw widder have been a-carryin’ on. She’s a right comely heifer, and I can see why you’d be tempted to trot in harness ‘longside of her.”*

He thought better than to psycho-analyze the craving during their summer together, for he did not want it to lose the magic.

“But son, we mustn’t be governed by the pleasure principle that stirs our loins, as embodied in the gentl’r sex, threatening to tumble us backward to the dank and dirty nether-regions of the past. We must let our higher callin’ be our tyrant.”

Such homespun wisdom can be overpowering, even more irresistible sometimes than what “the gentl’r sex” had to offer. Limpwick eventually took Grovner at his word (as he always did) that it was for the best to break off the affair.

“Be comforted, my boy. Look how far we’ve come, you and I. Do you know that the first pr’visions for the ment’ly afflicted were housed in hospital cellars? Now here we are, risen up like driftwood, as if saved by the flood waters of the Delta, leaving those that deny Freud in a limestone sediment, a stony tomb. Much like the petr’fied man of Gravelly Ford, to be uncovered and gawked at ages from now as long defunct and fraudulent freaks-a-nature.”

A decade later, after years of nun-like repression for Olivia, further intensified by a year doting on the orphaned Jacob, her life exploded into a lustful and stormy adventure to all points on the compass. She seemed to be out of control.

When Limpwick offered her a safe and familiar harbor, Olivia inexplicably rejected him, preferring to let herself become shipwrecked. It was the only time Limpwick regretted being so dedicated to H. Grovner Peupdish for all those years.

The door opened. Limpwick braced, unable to imagine who this person was who could take the place of Jacob. No one on earth, other than Nurse Levenwell, had ever shown so much devotion to him. But he had resigned himself. He

would settle for anyone marginally dependable, who would occasionally bring him a tray of water with crushed ice and a slice of lemon, someone who would make the year more tolerable as it grinded on to its inevitable conclusion.

“Elias,” Woodthorpe announced, “I am about give to you your new assistant. First, let me list for you the accomplishments of his fledgling career.”

Woodthorpe described a person whose credentials Limpwick vaguely recognized:

A young man with an infallible inner weathervane.

Aspires to work with children.

The highest analytic acumen.

Caught the attention of doctors along the east coast with student papers on Oedipal transference.

Published in a number of sociometry journals.

Does not value his popularity too highly, nor suffer fools gladly.

A leader among his fellow residents in this, his fourth year.

Impressive enough, thought Limpwick. The bit about a young historiographer with an uncritical commitment to psycho-analysis rang a bell. It could be anybody . . . or nobody.

Woodthorpe reached around the door. Limpwick stood, bracing for whatever apparition or interrogation might follow.

Then Jacob entered.

Limpwick rubbed his eyes. He hadn't known what to expect, but certainly not this. A surge of feeling, unwelcome and unfamiliar, caught in his throat.

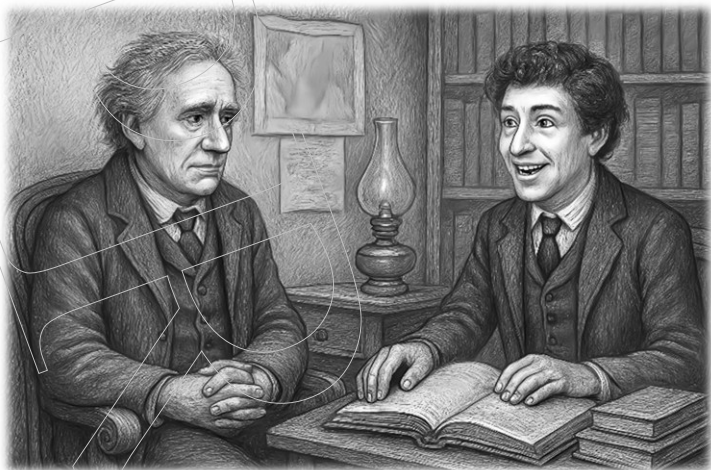


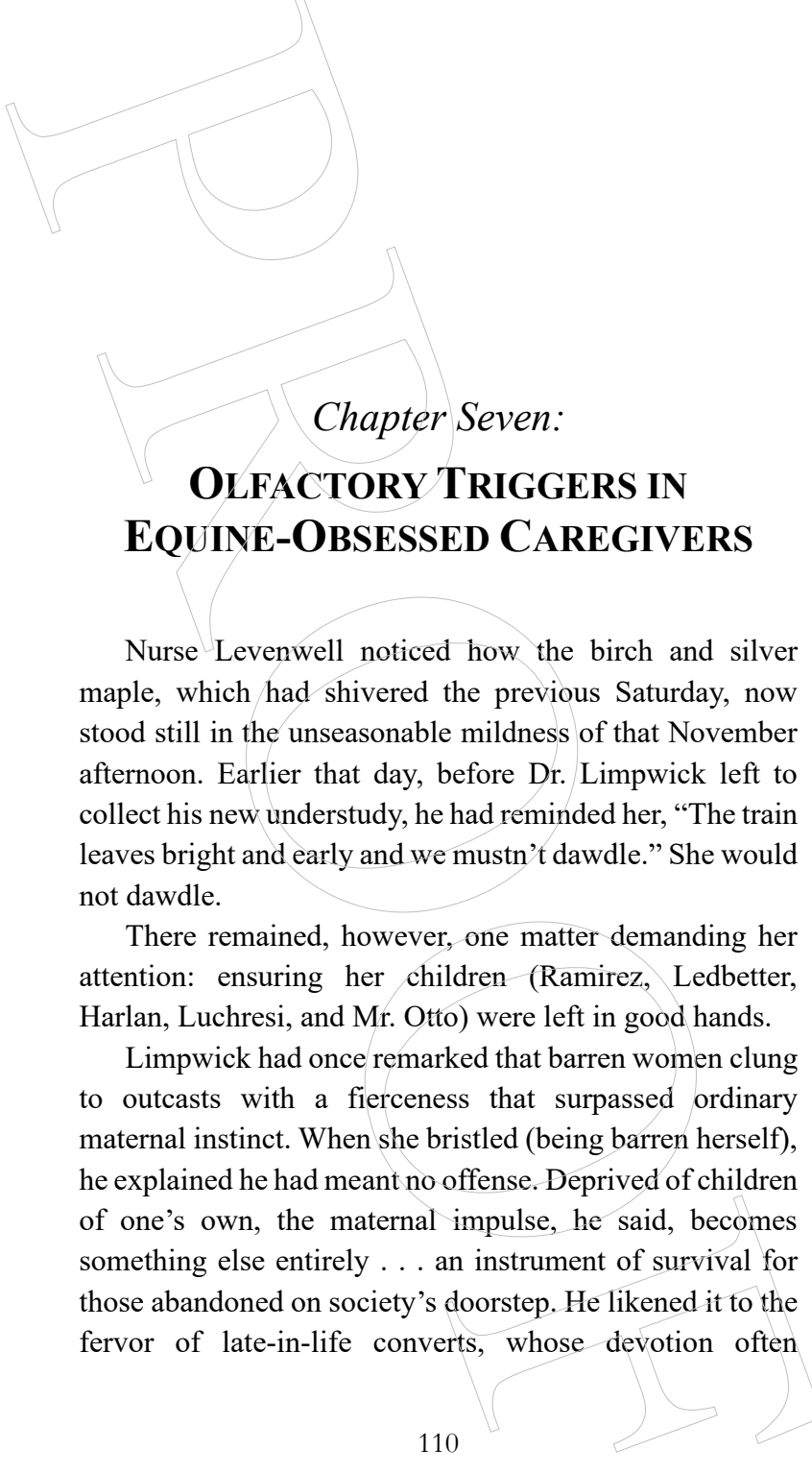
Figure 7. “C’mon you sons of bitches. Do you want to live forever?”

It was Jacob, and in Jacob’s face, unmistakably, Olivia.

Jacob dropped into the seat beside him, grinning with that same half-aware charm Olivia had once wielded like a scalpel, only with Jacob it was dopier (like the affectation of boys playing dress-up as men, eager to please or disarm).

“C’mon, you sons of bitches,” he said, with that overly familiar glint. “Do you want to live forever?” That line again. Somehow it comforted and unsettled in equal measure.

Limpwick saw it clearly now. Jacob was a living conduit, a counter-transference of the impulse he had once felt for his aunt. It was a distraction (or worse, a threat). Like the brain suppressing its own chaos, he would resist. Like Sisyphus before the tumbling rock, he would love it just enough to keep it from crushing him.



Chapter Seven:

OLFACTORY TRIGGERS IN EQUINE-OBSESSED CAREGIVERS

Nurse Levenwell noticed how the birch and silver maple, which had shivered the previous Saturday, now stood still in the unseasonable mildness of that November afternoon. Earlier that day, before Dr. Limpwick left to collect his new understudy, he had reminded her, “The train leaves bright and early and we mustn’t dawdle.” She would not dawdle.

There remained, however, one matter demanding her attention: ensuring her children (Ramirez, Ledbetter, Harlan, Luchresi, and Mr. Otto) were left in good hands.

Limpwick had once remarked that barren women clung to outcasts with a fierceness that surpassed ordinary maternal instinct. When she bristled (being barren herself), he explained he had meant no offense. Deprived of children of one’s own, the maternal impulse, he said, becomes something else entirely . . . an instrument of survival for those abandoned on society’s doorstep. He likened it to the fervor of late-in-life converts, whose devotion often

eclipses those born into Faith by accident of birth. His explanation satisfied her.

The maternal philosophy she brought to her post was one of order and routine . . . traits inextricably twined with godliness (and, she believed, essential to the rehabilitation of the morally deficient lunatic mind). Limpwick had told her so himself: that her austere devotion to discipline, her calculated admixture of sternness and mercy in managing the nurses under her, made her not merely a head nurse, but the finest he had ever seen.

Her four years in the position had ushered in an era of stability within the ward. But now, at this most delicate of junctures, she knew he would require something greater still. She would not fail him.

Nurse Levenwell greeted Lena that afternoon beside the Canteen nurse's station. She would need to remain in contact with her, somehow, to ensure that every last one of her children's needs (Ramirez's temper, Mr. Otto's tears, Luchresi's ticking) would be met in her absence. Lena had come a long way in her training, but Nurse Levenwell still harbored reservations. The girl had once bristled at authority . . . and had, on more than one occasion, admitted to doubting medicine's power to cure a soul. If she was to lead in Nurse Levenwell's stead, she would have to learn to trust the process, doubts and all.

Nurse Levenwell handed her one of the color-coded head nurse's caps, freshly laundered and crisply pressed.

"It's the cap I wore when I took over."

"I remember," Lena replied. "Four years ago."

Nurse Levenwell was struck. Perhaps the girl's mind was keener than she had assumed.

“Try it on.”

Lena swapped out her old cap and settled the new one onto her curls. The two nurses shared a laugh.

“Like a tablecloth on a bowling ball,” Nurse Levenwell quipped, still sniggering. “Don’t worry. I myself endured several fittings before it stopped looking like a dust cover on a hat rack.”

Lena reached into her pocket. “Thank God for bobby pins,” Lena replied, adjusting the hat to fit more snugly.

With Nurse Levenwell dictating and Lena taking careful note, they conversed for some time about the dietary needs of each patient, and when a patient won’t eat, when it might be necessary to be feed a patient by spoon or gavage tube (first assessing why the patient won’t otherwise feed himself; whether it’s because he believes the food to be poisoned; whether he thinks he lacks a mouth, throat, stomach, or bowels to digest it; whether he believes himself dead, supernatural, or unworthy; whether there is a physical pain from conversion hysteria or anorexia nervosa; or whether perhaps he takes cultural or religious offense to the particular meal).

Lena was attentive and courteous throughout their discussion, but something was missing in her reactions. When Nurse Levenwell asked her if she had any questions, she was preoccupied with unimportant issues, particularly why admin had been forcing them to keep the thermostat no higher than 67, but that policy had been in place for some time and by now she should have known to dress, and a nurse must become accustomed to sacrifice. Nurse Levenwell was not sure Lena understood the gravity of her new responsibility. She took Lena’s notebook and pencil,

placed it aside on a nearby counter, placed her shawl over her young charge, and took her by the hand. She led her down the hall and out through the back door, out to the hospital grounds, out past the gardens and the riding stables, up a small hill to the tennis courts where staffers were conducting late afternoon exercise for patients. With a wave of her arm, she motioned Lena to look upon them. "This is what I leave you with, all I have in this world. My children."

Nurse Levenwell felt Lena's hand became cold, like a surge of feeling from deep in her soul had instantly deprived it of blood, and she let go her grip. Nurse Levenwell knew the feeling as certain as that of the elastic band of her cap. All nurses, particularly green ones, experience it: the fear that they could unwittingly do their patients harm by their lack of competence, a fear even more widespread than that their own personal injury at the hands of a patient.

Nurse Levenwell remembered how Dr. Limpwick once reassured her, and she would now reassure Lena. "Do not worry, dear. They are ill, but not so fragile as we assume them to be."

At that very moment, two figures appeared from around the corner of the courts, Dr. Limpwick, with his new understudy trailing a few steps behind. They approached at a feverish pace, and Nurse Levenwell slowly made out the face. To her surprise, it was Jacob, apparently back in tow.

It seemed his Aunt Olivia (she who would have denied Dr. Limpwick three times before the cock should crow) had succumbed to the power of God's Will.

"Why hello, Doctor Limpwick, Jacob," she said.

Jacob returned her greeting, but Dr. Limpwick did not. "Come with me. I need you to assist Jacob in his preparations."

"I haven't finished with Lena yet."

Limpwick replied, in a voice devoid of emotion, "You had last Saturday to take care of such matters. I need you now, immediately."

To Nurse Levenwell's surprise, Lena began to speak up in her defense. "But Doctor—"

Dr. Limpwick interrupted, directing a sharp glance at Nurse Levenwell. "I will tell you now what I have told Jacob. I must ask henceforth that all your concentration be on the therapeutic benefits of one patient . . . and only one patient."

Nurse Levenwell was momentarily speechless. He was asking her to abandon her children, to choose one at the expense of all the others.

Perhaps realizing that this was no way for a psychiatrist to talk to a head nurse, particularly in front of one of her underlings, Dr. Limpwick turned conciliatory. "You do understand, this is for the best. We must keep all potential distractions to a minimum."

Just then, Nurse Levenwell heard what sounded like a pony's whinny. The others seemed not to have noticed. She wondered, *could it have come from as far away as the stables? Is there a nag on the loose?*

Nurse Levenwell looked right, then left, then toward the patients who were now being led away by nurses and support staff, and then realized the origin of the noise. It was as if one of the patients was trying to tell her

something: *Don't let go of the reins, don't leave me to run wild, don't abandon me to hurt myself.*

The sound had jarred a memory. Nurse Levenwell felt an acute shuddering between her legs. She remembered herself as a young girl with her father at Coney Island, being placed on a horse to have her photo taken. She had sensed the crushed spirit of a once-proud animal after a lifetime of ill treatment. It was a shaggy dull-eyed thing and she remembered how it smelled: the gaseous emissions wafting forward, overtaking her senses. She had encountered many a patient similarly beaten and broken.

The power of memory is a mighty thing, and Nurse Levenwell could still smell the horse stench. But just as she had strained a pleasant smile for the itinerant photographer in her youth, she now repressed her hurt feelings over Dr. Limpwick's cold words and kept her stiff upper lip. "I just have a few things left to go over with Lena, then I'll come by and help Jacob."

Limpwick allowed her this, with the insistence that she remember his number one rule: for one year, no unauthorized contact with the outside world.

This would not be a problem. Her only correspondence, as head nurse ex officio, would be with Lena. Limpwick was not yet aware of her intentions, but then, Nurse Levenwell was not interested in arguing a point of order that was not open for discussion. Nurse Levenwell appreciated his need for absolute seclusion and secrecy, and this might be the most important work of Dr. Limpwick's career, but she did not feel obligated to seek Limpwick's authorization on this, being that Lena was acting as her proxy and was not, in effect, the outside

world. And one does not abandon one's children, even or especially when one is off doing God's Work.

§

Shortly before seven o'clock the next morning, a dark hour that time of year, Dr. Elias Limpwick, Nurse Agnes Levenwell, psychiatric resident Jacob Dunbo, and Dr. Jackson Woodthorpe (who would be seeing them through on their voyage to the secluded retreat) were well on their way down the rails with the famed Patient Q safely in tow. Nurse Levenwell was setting up her sleeping compartment (why it couldn't wait until bedtime, Limpwick did not know, but nor did he really care in this moment of giddy anticipation), and Woodthorpe and Jacob had both drifted off to sleep in front of the observation car's panoramic window, leaving Limpwick alone to watch over Q in the cabin.

The click-clack of the rails started Limpwick pondering his link to their history, a history cut from riverbanks and built upon dried-up rivulets on the backs of long-dead China-men and coal workers, from a time when passenger cars were strung together like half-a-dozen stagecoaches and luggage was strapped to roofs, to a time when a man could board in Manayunk and leave his life behind forever to practically anywhere in the universe. A man could get lost on these rails. It was the perfect way to travel, the most perfect way ever devised. Limpwick hadn't slept in more than twenty-four hours and his brain was on fire.

Whenever he felt on the verge of mental chaos, he made a mental checklist to bring it back in alignment, and today

there were plenty of necessary measures to go over in his head. Foremost was to alert the train crew ahead of time of their precious cargo, that they were to treat Q as they would any other passenger (that is to say, pay him little heed while in his proximity), but to be mindful, that they were to be especially careful not to leave no sharp objects lying about, no cutting tools, no complementary razors, no stray butter knives, as a mere precaution, a formality, due diligence above and beyond what is necessary. After so many years of observation, Limpwick had a good measure of control over his prize patient, but knew enough not to expect even the most basic presumptions of others.

Limpwick kept the cabin door slightly cracked for clear visibility of the foot traffic up and down the hallway. It would give a certain normalcy, a comfort level to remind Q of the perpetual motion of patients and staff outside his room back at Sunnydale.

The sense of elation for what lay ahead was enhanced by the recognition that things have thus far fallen into place quite nicely, better than could be expected, despite forces bent on preventing it. In particular, Limpwick was glad to have his top student along. Even Olivia's best meddling couldn't prevent it. Nor could those who had long been envious of Jacob as a so-called child of privilege, who believed his lineage to the founding family of Stark University might have had something to do with his special access and various appointments. While young Jacob might have been self conscious over the harsh stares and sideways glances, Limpwick was hardly bothered, having long been accustomed to envy as the central fact of his profession.

He saw it as a classic case of incorrigible syndrome, where some individuals take comfort in surrounding themselves with inferiors so they may indulge in a perceived superiority. The knavery of those who blindly envy position, talent, and good fortune continue to self-sabotage themselves with fawning lackeys who reinforce their high opinions of themselves and low opinions of others. Without counseling, these deluded individuals come across as especially low characters by their hardened inability to contain unfriendly, morose, and forbidding attitudes, and strangely reserve a special hostility for those they can least afford to offend, those whose powerful influence might do them some good, like Limpwick himself.

They would do well to observe the good sense of one like Jacob who could have easily rested on his laurels as a talented prodigy with connections, but instead remained gracious and tirelessly helpful, and thus had a bright future ahead of him.

Limpwick had been pondering his protégé's future for nearly twenty minutes before he became conscious of the quiet. Although it would be impossible to replicate the hallway activity of the hospital on a train, he had hoped there would be some foot traffic to maintain at least a façade of normalcy for Q's benefit. The rumbling of the rails was the only sound, and it became increasingly unnerving with each passing minute as no living thing passed their cabin. Limpwick should have predicted some kind of stimulus response to the unique experience of train travel on a patient who had not been outside the hospital grounds for more than a quarter century.

Sure enough, Limpwick detected the faintest flicker of distress across Q's pallid features shortly after the hour struck eight. A tightening at the corners of the mouth . . . an errant twitch in the cheek. He told himself to remain composed, to revisit the mental checklist he had rehearsed so often in anticipation of just such a development. Light conversation was often sufficient to dispel the patient's early tremors of agitation.

Unfortunately, Limpwick was not gifted in the realm of light conversation.

He glanced toward the corridor, willing Nurse Levenwell to appear. Any minute now . . . surely. She was, by nature and training, far better suited to establishing patient rapport. And besides, it was her role (not his) to maintain those gentle, humanizing threads of easy chatter, of natural speech and manner. For a physician, particularly one of his bearing and disposition, to initiate a dialogue about the weather or the outcome of a football match would be far from reassuring. It would, in all likelihood, deepen the patient's suspicion and accelerate his distress.

Limpwick stared across the cabin at Q, measuring whether he dared leave his post to search for Nurse Levenwell. Before he could decide, Q rose slowly and advanced. This, Limpwick knew, was highly irregular.

Despite Q's hunched frame, the man remained taller by at least half a foot. From his seated vantage, Limpwick now found himself looking up . . . far up . . . into a face that, under other circumstances, might have been described as merely unfortunate. But now, looming and unreadable, it seemed nearly sublime in its menace.

This had never happened before. Not like this. Not without the benefit of two guards standing within arm's reach.

Though the patient's file recorded no acts of violence beyond the incident that brought him to Sunnydale, Q's clenched fists appeared quite sufficient for any number of horrors. Limpwick remained seated. He did not move. His limbs betrayed him.

Contact (physical contact) must be avoided at all costs. He knew this. A single misstep, even one made in self-defense, could unravel years of progress. Yet if he were to make a run for it . . . what then? The aisle was narrow, the door uncertain. Q's fists (which now seemed carved of iron) twitched closer to his knees.

How had it come to this so quickly? They had only just departed the train station. The entire excursion had been authorized only on the strictest of assurances. He had signed documents. He had made promises.

Still he did not move. The moment grew louder.

Where on earth was Nurse Levenwell?

His fingers brushed the metal whistle in his pocket, the one reserved for such emergencies. He nearly retrieved it . . . then thought better. Useless. The sound would vanish beneath the great, gliding howl of the locomotive. Worse, it might agitate Q further.

And under no circumstances must the train crew be alarmed.

He had assured the conductor personally . . . no disturbances, no theatrics. The agreement was clear. Any disruption would jeopardize the entire experiment. The

board would withdraw support. Woodthorpe would rescind his approval. The trip would be over before it began.

And with it . . . the talking cure.

The term itself would become an embarrassment. Limpwick's name would be struck from the rolls, his lectures abandoned, his work forgotten. Psychopharmaceuticals would seize the throne, unchecked and unchallenged. Freud, dethroned. The laboratory triumphant. The asylum reborn.

And all of it . . . all of it . . . his fault.

Q's hair (wild, gray, uncombed) now fanned outward like some divine grotesquerie. Limpwick, still seated, began to comprehend something he had never fully grasped: the terror of that poor boy, all those years ago, on the playground in Philadelphia.

Perhaps restraints were not so antiquated after all. Perhaps the strait-jacket (rejected as an anachronism) deserved reconsideration. There were times, surely, when order and control outweighed the gentle calibrations of psychological care.

Then, as if conjured by prayer, the door burst open.

A rush of bodies filled the compartment . . . Woodthorpe first, then Jacob, then Nurse Levenwell, their voices bright with talk of autumn leaves and bridge spans, of glimpses caught from the observation car.

Q blinked, released his fists, and returned quietly to his seat. Nurse Levenwell followed behind, calm as ever, adjusting her cap.

The danger (if indeed it had been danger) was gone.

Limpwick felt his heart resume its rhythm.

Later, in private, he would speak to Nurse Levenwell. There would be stricter parameters. She must not leave the patient unattended. Not for long . . . not ever. They would all need to sharpen their vigilance. But this incident must not be shared with Woodthorpe. Jacob needn't know either. The man was obedient, loyal . . . one of those brisk, fair-haired types who would have taken the trench line with a grin during the Great War, no questions asked.

For now, the patient was calm. At peace.

And that, for the present moment, was all that mattered.



Limpwick whispered something into Nurse Levenwell's ear, then departed with Jacob to admire the view from the observation car. The nurse now sat alone with Patient Q and Dr. Woodthorpe.

Woodthorpe stole a glance at Q, who stared upward, squinting faintly, then at Nurse Levenwell. She did not return the glance. Her usual stoicism (that nun-like composure so reliable in moments of institutional decorum) had softened. Her gaze drifted from Q to the far wall and back again. Something in her rhythm had come unmoored.

Woodthorpe meant to find out what.

"I must say," he began, with mild charm, "I am most impressed by your dedication to Dr. Limpwick."

She turned to him slowly, her tone dry. "My dedication, Doctor, is that of a nurse to her patient. Nothing more."

"Oh, of course. Though I've heard you call them your 'children.'"

“They are my lost orphans,” she said, casting a fond look at Q, who raised a hand to shield his eyes.

“What is that?” asked Woodthorpe.

“Pardon?”

“That motion. The hand to the face when you looked at him.”

“Oh, it’s nothing unusual. A nervous habit. He’s done it since the day he arrived at Sunnydale.”

“Interesting. There it is again. Do you think it’s sensitivity to light? We could draw the blinds. Dim the lamps, perhaps?”

“He does it in the dark as well as the light. Day or night. It doesn’t change. We haven’t isolated the cause. And you may call me Nurse Levenwell.”

“Certainly. No disrespect intended.”

“It’s not that. I prefer formality in front of staff and patients. Keeps lines from blurring.”

“Of course. You may call me Jackson.”

“If it’s all the same, I’ll stick with Doctor Woodthorpe. Double standards confuse the patients.”

He chuckled. “Understood. I admire those who speak with clarity.”

She did not hide her approval. Woodthorpe took mental note. *Reasonable, direct.* He could work with this one.

“I want you to know,” he said, softening his voice, “despite what some may think of me, the patients are always my first concern.”

“Don’t trouble yourself, Doctor. You’re young for a chief administrator, and you look younger still. They envy your energy.”

"Well, that's kind of you. I only wish they would consider my ideas with an open mind."

She nodded. "Ideas like the medicines."

He hesitated. "Yes. That has been a . . . point of contention."

"That, my dear doctor, is an understatement."

"They feel threatened, do they?"

"They object to patients being treated like guinea pigs."

Woodthorpe had trained himself not to flinch. "That again."

"To be honest," she said, voice lowering, "I hope the medicines work. Nothing else has. Not even prayer. I can't stand to see my children suffer."

That caught him off guard. Not exactly what he expected from Limpwick's second.

"Don't tell Dr. Limpwick I said that."

"Of course not."

"But I know what it is to suffer."

He leaned in, sympathy rising to his face with professional ease. "Your hip injury? Ten years ago?"

She shook her head. "That's not the kind of pain I mean." Her voice cracked. Barely audible, but there.

"We all carry pain," he offered.

"Have we?" she snapped. "Have we all lost a child?"

He froze. He had heard whispers (something about a baby) but thought the child had lived.

"You don't have to talk about it."

"No. It's the kind of thing that cannot be prayed away. No speech or cure can reach it. It is not meant to be redeemed on this earth."

He let the silence hold. Then: "Perhaps not with talk. But maybe . . . with sedation."

"No," she said quickly. "I don't want to forget. I've made peace with the pain."

"I didn't mean for you."

She glanced toward Q. "Well, I hate to conspire against Dr. Limpwick, who loves that patient in his way . . ."

"Yes?"

"It's just . . . sometimes I think he sees Q as a puzzle to be solved, not a soul in pain. This morning, there was a moment . . ."

"Yes?"

She stopped. Drew a breath. "Perhaps an occasional sedative would help," she whispered, nodding toward Q.

"Of course," said Woodthorpe. "Just as a precaution. To prevent further . . . incidents."

"But Limpwick must never know."

"He won't."

"Swear it."

"I swear to God." He crossed himself, solemn as stone, sealing their private covenant.

Then he laid out the plan: discreet parcels sent from Chicago to a Wilmington post office box. She would retrieve them personally.

Yes, he thought. This nurse, reasonable and direct, understood the game.

§



Chapter Eight:

FIELD PROCEDURES FOR MANAGING DISORIENTATION, DELIRIUM, AND DOWNRIGHT IMPERTINENCE IN REMOTE THERAPEUTIC OUTPOSTS

Confident he had left Q in good hands, Limpwick sat with Jacob in front of the large observation window. They seemed to have the entire train to themselves, and it was the perfect environment to process one's thoughts. Limpwick meant to take full advantage.

Limpwick had no problem leaving Nurse Levenwell alone to comfort and care for Q after the near-incident. A good psychiatrist recognized (and more importantly, accepted) that even the most well-behaved patients will occasionally act cold, even hostile toward his psychiatrist. That is where the nurse performs her most necessary function; that is, to allay his fear and hostility, to be the friendly balance to all the interpreting, evaluating, criticizing, and correcting done by the doctors. She provides a singular outlet for a patient's pent-up feelings. She is a forgiving and comforting presence. A good nurse

learns to regard a patient's violent gestures or vile obscenities as she would a fever or a rash, symptoms of the underlying condition, no more personal than a cough (and best met, therefore, with studied calm and a posture of permissive understanding).

Over time, knowing there will be no condemnation nor punitive action for healthy verbal expression, the patient learns to trust his nurse completely. Some patients and nurses even develop what might be called a love-bond.

Limpwick had seen this bond develop between Nurse Levenwell and several of her patients, and suspected that one might even be forming between her and the previously impenetrable Q. As she was likely to spend the most time with him over the next year, it would be most helpful for her to become his family surrogate.

A more mature psychiatrist is less inclined to feel threatened by tight patient-nurse bond. One with Limpwick's extensive experience knew that the analysis of a patient became irreclaimable once violated by too cozy a relationship. He'd seen far too many studies become compromised by over-familiarity. It was true that his professional opinion differed from those of his less experienced peers on this issue, but this was more than likely due to their own security issues than any serious evaluation.

Now more than ever, Limpwick knew his engagement with Q had to be kept in the depths of the subconscious. For the coming year, even at the risk of his own personal safety, he could not compromise in this respect. Not for a moment.

This was what Limpwick was sorting out in his mind when Jacob broke his train of thought. “What did you whisper to her?”

Limpwick was taken slightly aback by Jacob’s intonation, which is that of a gossipmonger. “Instructions,” he replied in the cold, objective voice were it a patient who raised the question.

“I do not understand the need for all this secrecy.”

“Sometimes things are best kept in confidence,” Limpwick replied, and Jacob bowed his head. Sensing Jacob’s frustration and confusion, Limpwick followed up in a warmer, more conciliatory tone. “There are things you and I share in confidence, are there not?”

Jacob did not press further. He looked up at Limpwick, in the same way Olivia had on countless occasions. “I appreciate what you are saying. I am a foolish boy, and I mean no disrespect.”

Despite Jacob’s advanced skill and self-awareness, he was still a relatively naïve and inexperienced young man. Limpwick realized this. No matter how much he trusted his understudy’s intentions, he simply could not throw him into the deep end just yet. Jacob could not, should not, know what happened that morning. Although well-read on the subject, he hadn’t the real-world experience to handle such incidents (and Limpwick knew it was best never to alarm young attendants, who are quick to believe appearances when patients seemed out of control; their first impulse was always to apply bodily restraint, although such measures were rarely necessary).

Nor had Jacob yet witnessed the quiet spell Nurse Levenwell could cast, her uncanny ability to remain calm

and unpunitive, even tender, when a patient's agitation threatened to erupt into self-harm. . . .

Just then, a volley of familiar, panicked shrieks rang out from the adjoining car. Jacob looked at Limpwick with a severity, like a soldier awaiting his officer's permission to fire. Limpwick saw the look in his eyes, and thought for a moment. Maybe he was being over-protective. Maybe innocence was indeed ready to yield to experience. Without a word, he got up and led his young charge toward the door to the next car.

A member of the train's crew followed close behind. Seeing this, Limpwick stopped. With a permitting nod, Limpwick let Jacob pass, and stood erect and in place to obstruct the crewman.

"Excuse me, sir!"

Limpwick thought fast. "Young man, I am a doctor. We have a patient in the next car who hates tunnels. Tunnels and crowds."

The crewman looked perplexed and unsure of himself. "Well, I was thinking, if I could offer any assistance—"

Another shriek came from the other side of the doorway, and the crewman lunged on instinct. Limpwick was barely able to contain him in the confusion. "Young man, trust me. We've taken numerous train trips and have handled this countless times. You mustn't rush upon him willy-nilly. It will only frighten him more."

"But are you sure it's your patient? Maybe it's another passenger."

Despite the terrible din continuing from the next car over, Limpwick kept his calm. "Quite sure. We have the

entire car to ourselves, arranged beforehand by the hospital. Merely a precautionary measure.”

“Oh,” the crewman replied, looking more perplexed, yet still determined to offer assistance.

“You know, I have even learned to recognize the meaning of his varied yelps with the familiarity of a mother toward her infant.” Limpwick said this as an absolute belief he truly held, and it should have sounded quite convincing.

The crewman, however, still sought to understand. “So you’re saying, maybe he’s just hungry?”

Limpwick shrugged his shoulders and grinned, maintaining an attitude of calm. “Perhaps. No need to alarm the conductor.”

The crewman nodded and then departed to the next car as casually as if he were leaving the cleanup of an upturned dish-tray to the wait staff.

“That’s a good boy,” Limpwick whispered under his breath.

Here is the full passage, refined to preserve your cadence and tone, using only parentheses and ellipses where needed, and avoiding em dashes entirely:

By the time Limpwick reached the hallway (where Nurse Levenwell was curled protectively around Q, stroking his back and rocking gently, while Jacob stood aside, wisely letting her take the lead) the shrieks had ceased.

Jacob leaned close and whispered, “Dark tunnel,” confirming what Limpwick had already suspected.

Woodthorpe, seated just within view from the cabin, had witnessed the entire episode. Limpwick’s heart sank. It

had come to this. He straightened his posture, quietly bracing for whatever consequences might follow.

“You’ve got quite the nurse there, Elias . . . er, Doctor Limpwick,” Woodthorpe said with a smirk and a wink toward Nurse Levenwell, who promptly looked away. To Limpwick’s surprise, Woodthorpe returned to his day-old newspaper as if nothing had happened. Not the least bit perturbed.

If Woodthorpe wasn’t upset, then neither was Limpwick.

“Under control, Doctor,” Jacob said. “No restraint necessary.”

“Good,” he replied. “Good lesson.” Indeed, a good lesson for the young student of psychiatry to witness the miraculous calming powers of an experienced nurse.

Limpwick considered how Nurse Levenwell’s presence would help Q make a smooth adjustment to unfamiliar surroundings. He could not have done it without her. This he freely admitted to himself.

§

It had been a day since she said goodbye to Jacob, and Olivia still felt numb. Again she recalled the day Thomas Dunbo was taken to an institution, and the sadness on the face of his nine-year-old son, curled beneath the heavy fig tree in his father’s front lawn, part old soul, part abandoned hatchling.

Olivia would finance Limpwick’s experimental therapeutic tour in secret, through Woodthorpe. It was small comfort to her that the penance she paid now would

pay dividends to her adopted son and his profession down the road. But it was comfort, and she was hopeful for more peace of mind by the end of the year-long tour. For now, she wished she could sit comforted in the arms of her own fig tree, but there was no such comfort, and little such peace, to be had.

Olivia walked into Sunnydale Union Bank and removed her sunglasses. Nurse Lena Anders stood chatting with another woman, third and fourth in line to the teller window.

This sent a rush of anxiety through Olivia. She could not be seen, certainly not recognized. The jig would be up before it began. She pulled down her hat, slipped the sunglasses back onto her nose like a starlet craving anonymity, and tiptoed toward the line. A gentleman and a mother with a stroller passed by; they would serve as her buffer against the young nurse's prying eyes.

Olivia positioned herself behind the two other people, but close enough to hear the conversation between Lena and the other woman.

"Freedom," the woman said.

"Yes," Lena replied. "The old bag left this morning on the train."

"Where do you think they're going?"

"I don't really care, as long as the ghoul is gone."

The other woman laughed, but Lena sounded serious. Olivia never realized the hostility Lena felt for Nurse Levenwell. She always thought the elder nurse to be a saintly presence at the hospital, being so adored by the patients for whom she cared so deeply. She doubted there was any such affection for Lena, and envy was to be

expected of a young nurse who had not experienced the years it took to earn even a measure of patient trust. One would hope she would someday grow out of it.

“But she’s still keeping tabs on you.”

“Yeah, worried I won’t take good care of her ‘children,’ who are ‘all she has in this world.’ Last night, when one of them made this funny noise by the tennis courts, like a pig or cow or other barnyard animal, she got this queer look on her face, like the noise meant something. Yeah, I’ll take good care of her ‘livestock,’ all right.”

Shame, Olivia thought. To talk this way about the patients under one’s care.

“How is the ghoul going to know, anyway?”

“We’re keeping a correspondence.”

“But she’s breaking Doctor Limp-prick’s number one rule.”

The vulgar name calling offended Olivia, but only momentarily; she knew Elias himself would not be offended, not even for a moment. He considered such vulgar name-calling of one’s superiors to be a healthy and even necessary outlet for the insecurity that stems from a subordinate class position. He could be quite forgiving this way, endearingly so, if perhaps to an over-analytic fault.

“Hey, he isn’t God. His rules are meant to be broken.”

“For the children, right?”

“For the children.”

This woman laughed again, and this time, Lena laughed with her. The cackling was ear-splitting, and echoed through the bank. Olivia bowed her head to shield her face with the brim of her hat.

"Did you know," Lena continued with a carefree lilt in her voice, "she actually sent me a telegram this morning?"

"This morning? You're kidding me."

"A few hours ago. Something about expecting to arrive at the retreat early Friday morning."

"Heavens, where-ever could this retreat be?"

"Somewhere around Wilmington. That's the train they took."

Wilmington, Olivia thought. How interesting.

"What else did it say?"

"Oh, be sure to comfort Mister Otto, tell him his guardian angel is doing fine and looking over him. Speaking of which—"

"Yes?"

"The drug study . . . Doctor Woodthorpe will be coming back on a later train, and was looking for other nurses to volunteer."

"The secret drug study?"

"Yes, the one Mister Otto and some others are in."

"You mean, he wants us to assist?"

"No, not assist, silly. Take the medicine ourselves. He wants to know if they work on people who aren't crazy."

"That makes sense, I guess."

"I'm doing it. Extra cash."

"Cash is good. Count me in, too."

"Great."

Olivia was glad to hear that the medicines were safe enough to test on nurses and other non-patients, although she knew Elias would not be pleased. Perhaps this was his own insecurity, over the possibility, perhaps the likelihood, of a day when psycho-analysis would be subordinate to

medicinal treatments. His repressed loathing expressed itself in the form of inflated risks, his own form of name-calling. She had no such loathing, no reservations beyond the emotional and irrational. Rationally, she felt reassured and confident in her role as a financier of the study.

But she directed Woodthorpe, in no uncertain terms, that her donations were strictly earmarked for Patient Q's concentrated therapy. He would have to find other donors for the medicinal half of the experiment. Limpwick would never, could never, know of her complicity, which he would see as duplicity, "sure as a louse in one's bosom," as her mother's favorite saying went. It was more scientifically valid for the control group to be unaware of the experiment; that's what she would keep telling herself, anyway.

Then, Lena laughed again, and Olivia lifted her head. She was looking straight at her, whispering something in the other woman's ear and pointing.

Olivia rushed out of the bank, embarrassed. She could only guess their accusations. She decided it was best to go back to the bank later, when fewer people were around.

Lena was young, worth forgiving for her gossip and sniping, even for her attitude toward the patients. Olivia had dealt with the gossip for years, and it no longer really stung. And, judging from Lena's relatively spotless work record (in terms of her actions, although her mouth had gotten her into trouble), and Nurse Levenwell's praise for her (if she only knew how that praise was returned!), there was no reason to believe she wouldn't do her job to the best of her abilities. Most nurses at one time or another discover (to their surprise) that they feel hostile and even resentful

toward patients. Olivia was certain that Lena, like every other nurse, was aware of it and would never let it affect her work.

At the same time, Olivia's intentions in eavesdropping on Lena were nobler than the young nurse's rumor-milling. She would continue to spy, self-reprieved of any guilt. She only wanted to keep abreast of Jacob's well-being, as well as the study she would be financing.

The well-being of Elias, Olivia admitted to herself, was also of considerable interest. She remembered the comfort she once felt in those arms, like the fig tree of her imagination.

She would continue to track Lena's every move.



Ana's doctor told her yesterday that he believed she was on the verge of a breakthrough; she would prove it by her newfound poetry, with words that would win his heart.

For tonight, she played the flaming youth on her chosen partner Larry, a vagabond pool-hall regular ten years her senior, whom she smuggled into her room under her distracted Granny Bea's nose to inspire new poetic thoughts.

The sex, as usual, satisfied Ana, though not nearly so much as it seemed to be satisfying her partner (such was a woman's lot in life). Larry's wandering lips had made their way to the crevice between her breasts after having left their luster on her right nipple, which had been the object of his fixation for the last several minutes. Who could blame him? Ana had seen many pairs of nipples, but none

with the irresistible springiness of her own. She played with them frequently herself, and considered them to be her best physical asset, next to her eyes.

Meanwhile, Larry humped his unwieldy member all over her midsection, like a blind reptilian tongue to its desired meal. Not wanting to embarrass him, Ana restrained a giggle and placed her hand beneath Larry with extended middle finger, letting him do the work with his piston thrusts so she could concentrate on her own increasingly wet reward.

Moments of pain punctuated the fleshy bone-on-bone primal abandon, foreshadowing the bone-on-bone damnation Granny warned she would suffer once she reached her post-primal age. What Granny Bea didn't understand, was by the time Ana was old like her, women would not be so subjugated by their physical maladies. Those arthritic pains would recall expression, not repression, of past libertine pleasure. Thus, like a war veteran showing off shrapnel scars and bragging of the aches and pains of trench foot, she would be the master of her own pain.

Ana defied anything or anyone to master her, especially men. She had closely observed the effects of feminine wiles on the masculine ruling class, particularly in regard to Woman, capital W (what Man, capital M, had named "whore"). In truth, the name applied to all women, sans capital, to varying degrees. Once that was proven beyond reasonable doubt, Man's estimation only made Woman more powerful. Some women could not accept their lot or come to terms with whoredom. But the industrious whore moved past this discomfort, grasping something deeper

than what was merely vulgar or common. Ana had done so with ease, owing in no small part to good breeding.

The first hint of her bloodline came in her father's cries to God, in a drunken episode on the front steps of his boyhood home following the death of Ana's beloved Grandmother Limpwick. He was unaware of his daughter's proximity, of her peering out through a window screen on the enclosed porch that night. She remembered the flickering light as he sat fire to that piece of parchment.

Ana would ascertain through scrupulous eavesdropping that it was a letter secretly willed to him by her Grandmother Limpwick. He must have read it only a moment before setting it aflame. It told him he had been adopted. Worse was the knowledge of his own true bloodline, although Ana did not understand this at the time. She only knew she had overheard something she shouldn't have, a private moment between an angry man and his God, so she tiptoed back up to her bed to avoid discovery.

For her father, that night's bottle would be the last he would ever touch. Perhaps he knew this when he emptied it to the last drop. Ana found it shattered beside the steps the next morning.

It would be a few years before she understood what the words "bastard" and "prostitute" meant. The moment of understanding equated to an understanding of her lineage, a thrilling epiphany, a moment when she felt like a woman reborn. Ana had always taken a secret pride in her perversions, and now she could fully embrace them. Her genealogy would serve her well, providing a practical advantage over those who failed to recognize that a charming personality, killing looks, and graceful airs are

but mere bubbles. Rather cunning, art, and good fortune do the work. A true whore understood this.

If a whore were to make right use of half the wit furnished her by nature and experience, she need not fear the public spectacle of whipping, starvation, rotting chancre, French-pox, filth, idleness, the Devil, or any other such misery that daily befell the insipid sluts proven unqualified for the trade.

The whore of good sense and understanding had two legs up, ready to make jades of those ignorant bawling, scurrilous, and drunken counselors, judges, aldermen, dukes, lords, knights, squires, and doctors who govern the world.

Ana would prove that she was no silly little girl, but a burgeoning woman, a whore who understood the rhetoric . . . the art of multiplying insinuating words, of feigned persuasion used to net the minds of befallen men (the trophies of whoredom's victories).

Ana then turned back around to play another part: that of satisfied lover.

"Your eyes, Ana, they're like, they—" Larry stammered, unable to find the precise words.

"My father says they are blue like cornflower."

Larry (a simple mortal with neither the false pretenses of the ruling class of men, nor the rootlessness of city intellectuals divorced from the folk of the land) smiled appreciatively at his conquering whore. He understood his place as peasant in her whoredom.

Ana reached over her lover to pull her journal from her drawer. Then she began, having successfully stirred her be-bop muse to attention. She would further develop the theme

of the lustful primate on which she ended her last poem (the one that started all this trouble). This would assure the therapy sessions continued.

Then Ana shepherded her latest trophy out the window and back to his mortal world. He took with him his glass dish, rolling paper, tweezers, that hollow steel tube he called a pipe, and a promise that tomorrow night he'd resupply the benzedrine and sanicin which, unlike peyote, did not leave an odor in the curtains, one only the most rancid grandmotherly perfume could conceal. Ana completed the last line of her poem and left her journal out on the top of her dresser, the bait to her trap for Granny Bea.

This time, Ana did not have to wait until Sunday. Ana had stepped out of her room for only a minute or two to rinse out the remnants of sex, and in that short time span she did not even hear her Granny Bea enter and leave. Her journal had been carefully replaced, only a notch off Ana's mark.

Like the clever little seven-year-old who snuck back to bed a decade earlier, Ana tiptoed to a spot just out of sight from the kitchen. She could easily hear her Granny Bea whispering on the phone (her whispers were louder than most speaking voices). "I'm sorry to bother you at this late hour, doctor."

Then Ana heard something that caused her to shiver, something about an experimental drug study. It recalled something her father had mentioned, something he spoke of in ominous tones. She listened more closely, wishing she could hear the doctor on the other end. She tried to make

sense of it—yes, *I understand, uh-huh . . . yes, Ana must pre-qualify first, right, maybe take two months, of course.*

When Granny Bea mentioned “permission” and “authorization,” that she was “happy to grant it,” it dawned on Ana; the bitch was volunteering *her* for the experiment. That probably meant no more therapy, no more visits to the only one in this world who could give her real comfort. This time the bitch had gone too far.

Then Ana realized maybe it was she (the wayward granddaughter) who had gone too far. Perhaps she should have been less literal in her poetic descriptions of free-spirited chimps and their taste for all things anal. That would have shocked just about any grandmother to her foundation, even one as understanding as her Grandmother Limpwick. To Granny Bea, it would be cause for nothing short of an exorcism, of the sort she seemed to be arranging.

Guilt again wracked Ana’s brain. She knew she had left herself vulnerable. It was her own fault. She had pushed her father away, never thinking she might need him when the chips were down. And the chips were down. She would have to get in touch with him to thwart Granny Bea’s nefarious intentions. He would agree with her, that she would not be anybody’s guinea pig. But his usefulness was limited; if she was to remain the Queen of her own whoredom, she would eventually have to break away again.

The day would come when she, not some conspiratorial cadre of concerned adults, would determine her own cures and opiates.

They arrived at the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in Wilmington early Friday morning, welcomed by a light drizzle as they stepped onto the platform. Twin motorcars awaited outside the station for them by prior arrangement. From there they were taxied to the country. Woodthorpe and Limpwick rode in the lead vehicle, the others in the rear.

Woodthorpe informed Limpwick that the chauffeurs were ambulance drivers by trade. Their skill was evident in the way they maneuvered around the ridiculously winding roads, past a meeting house for the Society of Friends and pastures of belted Galloway cows into a heavily wooded river valley.

Limpwick worried of the disorienting effect on Q of all this weaving and unsteadiness. He had been accustomed only to static hospital corridors and window scenery for most of his days over several decades. Now it appeared as though the arching trees were about to come together to create a natural tunnel, thus triggering a repeat of the train episode. Quickly, Limpwick raised his concern to Woodthorpe.

Woodthorpe tapped the driver's shoulder. "Backtrack south, right off Montchanin toward Kennett Pike, right again through Greenville toward Centreville," he directed.

The driver nodded, decelerated, then turned toward the alternate route.

The light drizzle had become full-fledged rain showers. Limpwick watched the other car swerve around in line behind the lead. He wondered how Jacob and Nurse

Levenwell were managing, but it was difficult to see them through the windshield wipers. Jacob, while zealous and determined of mind, would have a hard time managing an unruly patient in so crowded a car, especially one with the physicality of Q. Even with Nurse Levenwell in Q's car, Limpwick wished he were there to help manage things. There are no broad-shouldered hospital security guards this time to assist her should it become truly unmanageable. He would have to trust his two assistants to manage on their own; most of all, trust the miraculous calming powers of Nurse Levenwell to keep things under control in ways none of Jacob's textbooks could possibly teach.

Then again, the notion of two episodes in one day was virtually unthinkable. Q had historically been the most docile of patients. His highly irregular behavior on the train excluded (Limpwick blamed his own tired mind for over-reacting to a phantom threat), he had never threatened so much as a flea.

But on the other hand, Limpwick knew he could not rest on recorded laurels once they reached their retreat. It was common for the quietest of patients to become especially unmanageable when their pent-up fears and hostilities were forced to the surface (one need not have looked no further than Mr. Otto). Such patients, with their lack of practice, were the least emotionally equipped to calm themselves. It was settled. Docile patient or no, there must be strict ground rules and contingencies. Limpwick opened his notebook and began formulating.

We must not let our guard down, not for a moment . . .

He jotted down the first five ground rules. More would come to mind later, Limpwick thought, but this was a good set with which to begin. He would go over them with Jacob, Nurse Levenwell, and whatever skeleton crew awaited them at the retreat (Woodthorpe mentioned at least two staffers, a man and a woman).

After miles of woods and greenery, they came upon a dilapidated mailbox, then turned upon a gravel path, over which they went down, up, and down again, down, and still further down. They stopped momentarily at a noble cast-iron gate. The rear driver stepped out and opened it for the lead vehicle, and they continued. The trees in the distance seemed to grow larger and part, and an ivy-strewn brick building revealed itself in the fold of a hill, finally coming into full view as a compound of buildings. When Limpwick realized that this was their destination, the place where all his experience and life's work would be put to the test, all his anxiety dissolved into elation.

The drizzle had become a dreamlike autumnal mist. It all seemed so magnificent: retaining walls of aged stone; a pleasantly planted lawn, stretching several acres to the edge of an encircling woods; a rising bell tower, silent now, recalling the ringing glory of days past. Limpwick was not the only one whose breath was taken away by the grandeur; the promise, the history of this place.

A woman stood below the archway of the main structure, chewing something, the corners of her mouth upturned slightly in a grin, as one who had a secret she was dying to share. Woodthorpe introduced her to the entourage.



Figure 8. *Breathtaking in its quiet majesty, the Forger des Mythes Artistic Retreat and Summer Stock Theatre revealed itself at last: an ivy-clad sanctuary where grandeur lingered, and time itself seemed to pause in reverence.*

“My friends, meet Ethel, the better half of the former and once-again care-taking couple of what was known years ago as the Forger des Mythes Artistic Retreat and Summer Stock Theatre.

“And winter hotel,” Ethel added, her voice a lilting dramatic whisper that somehow managed to carry and echo throughout the compound.

“Ethel and her husband Eddie had spent the last few weeks shoring up the place for your extended stay.”

"In 'markably good shape," Ethel said, "for a place Eddie's been yappin' oughtta been condemned. The old fart, don't listen to 'im. Like me, he's findin' out she's got a few years left in 'er. Built real sturdy, like a—" She stopped herself.

Limpwick looked over at Woodthorpe. He was glowering in Ethel's direction, like a parent toward a child who threatened to cross a boundary in front of honored guests.

Ethel seemed to take the point of his look and moved in humble steps toward the visiting dignitaries, "Sorry if I come off a bit rough and feisty . . . I gotta be, hitched up to a hubby like mine. You'll meet 'im later. He's out-n-about, picking up a new door and some things fer supper t'night. Don't yeh fret, though. I'll fix yeh up a good breakfast just as soon as we set yeh up in your rooms."

Sensing a downturn in the spirit of this woman they would rely on for sustained hospitality, Limpwick knew it was important to re-establish a warm, good-natured rapport. "Doctor Woodthorpe spoke highly of your cooking on the ride over from the train station, Ethel. From the sound of it we are going to leave here quite plumpened."

"Yup, I'm good with the vittles," she said, her mood uplifted and restored. Limpwick was pleased with his success.

The showers had ended, and the chauffeurs were now revving the cars.

Woodthorpe ducked into the lead vehicle, shouting directions to Ethel about a map, a list of important phone numbers, and addresses for nearby establishments with telephones they could use in an emergency, being that,

apparently, there were none at the retreat. This was an important prerequisite, Woodthorpe told Limpwick, adding, "Mobility and easy communication, the ruination of any good scientific study . . . remember?"

Limpwick nodded, recalling his own words used against him. This was a strangely devious way to leave things. Limpwick meant to issue one last salutation, but Woodthorpe had already ducked into the car, and in the next instant was speeding away.

Limpwick cleared his throat. It was time to shake off a slight return of his earlier anxiety and to exert his command, to align the confidence of his troops before the momentous battle that was to begin the next dawn. "Here we are, at this beautiful and historic retreat, about to embark on the most important year of our collective professional lives. First, there are a few ground rules of decorum I would like to establish for interacting with the patient, particularly for the sake of our kind hostess, and which I will go over later in private with our kind host."

Ethel joked that Eddie was a "kind" all right. "What kind, I can't tell yeh, but he's a kind."

Limpwick smiled and nodded in appreciation. Ethel's quip demonstrated promise for the relaxed and easy rapport he hoped to establish with her. He could not afford to have her feeling alienated by the advanced work that would be going on around the retreat. Then, without further adieu, he presented the ground rules he had been working on in the car ride over to his charges.

"Quite sensible," Jacob replied upon hearing the last one read.

"They will serve us well," Nurse Levenwell added.

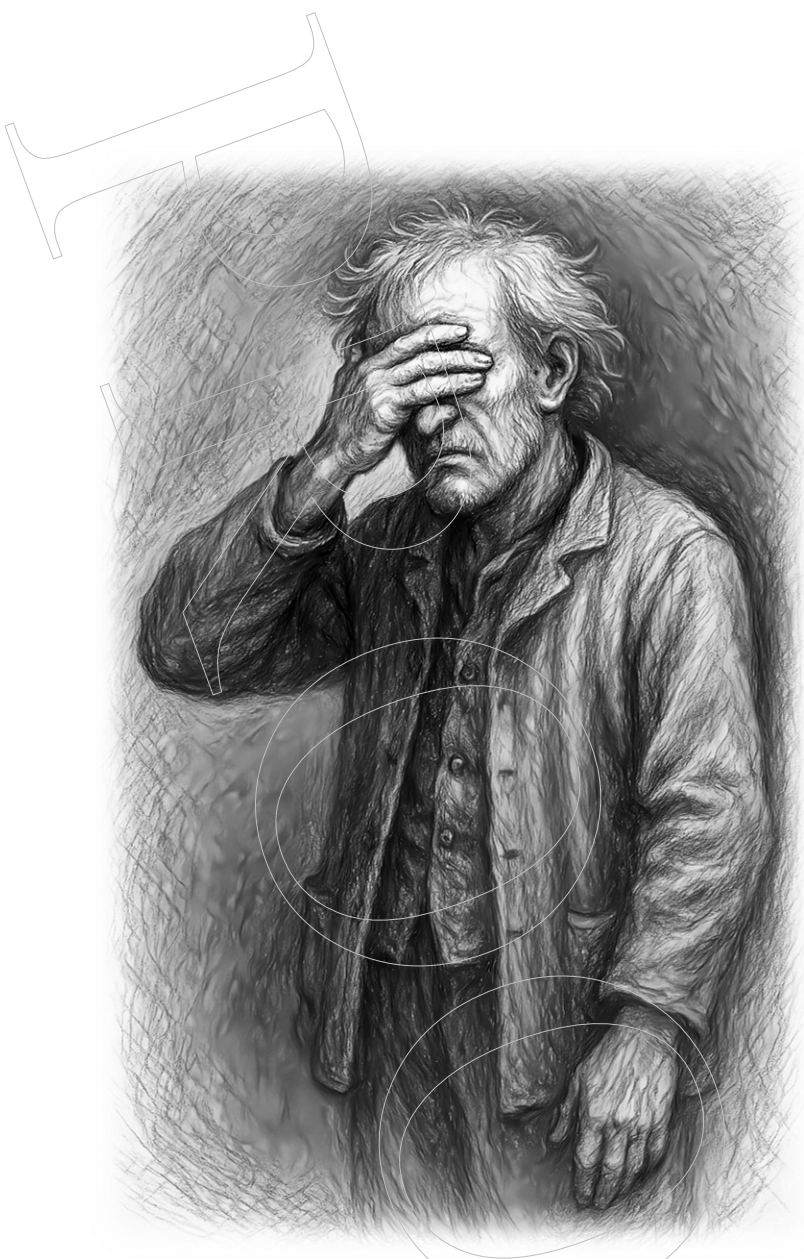


Figure 9. Patient Q, as if shielding his mind from memory or light, placed a trembling hand over his eyes . . . whether in grief, shame, or some deeper torment, no one could quite say.

Ethel cackled. Their was obviously some work left to be done with her.

The moisture that covered everything had a blinding glare now that the clouds had broken. Patient Q, standing stoop shouldered between Jacob and Nurse Levenwell, placed his hands over his eyes.

Ethel looked spooked by Q. “Does it bother this feller to know we’re talking about him in front of his face?” she asked in a hushed voice. “They all get used to it,” Jacob explained. “To be observed, to be ‘talked about,’ is the everyday existence of the mental patient.”

“Well, don’t worry about me trying to talk about ‘im or to ‘im. I’ll probably just leave the feller alone.”

Q continued to shield his eyes without regard or heed to the others.

Nurse Levenwell left with Ethel to make up the rooms, while Jacob followed close behind with the luggage. Q just sort of wandered in with them by instinct. Satisfied that his traveling companions had matters well in hand. Limpwick announced he would join them later, after familiarizing himself with the grounds of the retreat.

“Don’t get lost, and give Eddie a kick in the breeches for me, if you see ‘im,” Ethel shouted.

“What’s he look like?” Limpwick shouted back.

“Like a stubborn mule in cover-alls,” she laughed. “Smells like one, too.”

She was a feisty one, indeed, straight out of central casting. A regular Ma Kettle. Limpwick saw great promise for more engaging rapport to come.



Chapter Nine:

ON THE PSYCHO-THERAPEUTIC UTILITY OF ONE-MAN VAUDEVILLE FOR THE NERVOUSLY PREDISPOSED

Limpwick was pleased with how well everyone had fulfilled their roles thus far, particularly how well everyone responded to the excitement aboard the train. He was nearly giddy now, his lips wet, begging for a song, so he humored them with a whistling melody to no particular tune. To his additional pleasure, he found a grown-over pathway along the westward edge of the compound. In his boyhood, he always loved finding trails and letting them lead him wherever they should go. He kept to the edges where the grounds met the woods, so as not to get lost. To lose his way in these first moments at the retreat would have been most embarrassing.

To an urban dweller like himself, this place began to take on the qualities of Eden. The clearing of rain clouds had brought out a variety of fauna; a grey fox scampering into the brush; there, a startled doe raised its head; there, perched on a branch, a pair of red-breasted nuthatches,

resting on their southbound migration. Perhaps they were wary of the sharp-shinned hawk circling overhead, perhaps not.

Things grew darker as the towering woods closed in as if to consume the narrowing pathway, which began to curl upward. Speckles of sunlight trickled in from the east; otherwise, Limpwick had never seen a place so dark at this time of the morning. Then suddenly, a new and secret place seemed to open up from within the woods. From a few hundred yards away, Limpwick began to make out the aisles of broken down seats, three hundred or so, maybe more. This must be it, he thought . . . the once-proud, now decrepit Forger des Mythes outdoor theatre.

There was a faintly perceptible echo as he descended the theatre steps. He imagined it to be the last spoken word of the last performed play. He walked further downward, scanning the rows. Nesting rodents appeared to have staked their claim. He looked up. A half-lifted curtain, faded and torn, partially obscured the darkened tableau where the local avant garde once forged its myths.

He walked into the blackness beyond the stage. There was just enough light to make out a darkened dressing room with no door; he was compelled to enter. He shuffled and searched by hand along the wall for a light switch. After a few feet, a string grazed his cheek, and he reflexively pulled. To his surprise, it worked.

Limpwick surveyed the room for its potential. It looked spacious enough for an office, at least a temporary one. The walls were still plastered with faded-color playbills and black-and-white photos, some of the former players themselves, some of their theatre influences. Limpwick

recognized a few, particularly those from the Provincetown scene: there, John Reed, there, Louise Bryant, there, Floyd Dell, there, Jig Cook, and many others for whom he could not place the name, in various make-up and stage dress. One aged photograph in an oversized frame seized his attention. It appeared at first glance to be of an Arabian play. He stepped closer for a better look.

To his great shock . . . nay, horror . . . a ghostly face rose up from out of the figures of the old avant-garde. It was that of former Doughboy and hero of Belleau Wood, Waldo Shaw, husband of Olivia, who disappeared that fateful Christmas more than a quarter century ago.

“Distracting,” Limpwick said to himself. “Most distracting.”

\$

Limpwick took the photo down from the wall to study it. There was a number scrawled in the lower right-hand corner. He could not tell if it said 1926 or 1936, or if the last digit was a six or a five. The theatre garb and background props were indicative of a seventeenth century period play, although the wine glasses were early twentieth century. Upon closer inspection, it appeared to be of a wrap party. The men, actors, including the Waldo Shaw look-alike, donned wigs with remnants of powder from the night’s performance.

Limpwick took the photograph from its frame and tucked it into his trouser pocket. He had seen enough for now. Not yet settled into his lodgings, nor having plotted Q’s therapeutic schedule, a terrible mystery had arisen to

distract and play on his mind, in all likelihood, for the foreseeable future.

The late-autumn breeze blowing around the room cooled things, but he still somehow felt thirsty. He could have really used a pitcher of water with crushed ice and a slice of lemon. Perhaps it was less physiological than psycho-physiological.

“Like it?” comes a voice, disembodied.

Limpwick’s tired mind must have been playing more tricks. No, the voice was real, attached to an object. There, buried in shadow in the farthest corner, a busy-handed, cover-alled figure rocked on a wobbly milking stool. The figure arose.

Limpwick was rattled, his exhausted brain verging on delirium. “How long have you been sitting there?”

A face came out of shadow. “Help yourself to any of these old photos that grab your fancy. Ain’t worth nothing to me.”

Limpwick composed and stabilized himself against the rickety dressing-room doorway.

The man stretched out a hand in greeting. “Name’s Eddie. Pleasure to meet you.”

“Oh yes, likewise,” Limpwick replied, relieved. He found Eddie’s grip to be surprisingly soft and gentle for one with such a crusty exterior.

“Doctor Limpwick, I presume?”

“You can call me Elias,” he said.

“Probably won’t remember that. Too unusual, not a name you normally hear in this county, in these parts. I’ll just call you Doc, since your the only doc in the vicinity.”

“That’s fine,” he said. “You startled me.”

“Weren’t expecting to see you, neither,” Eddie replied, sitting back down. “Not yet. It got my own heart a-pumpin’.” He looked like a barker out of a carnival sideshow, bald with a waxy mustache.

Limpwick remained standing, not wanting to cake his trousers in the dust of any of the remaining sitting options. “It could have been the death of my own, an old man like me.”

Eddie’s laughter echoed through the theatre and into the surrounding woods. “Yeah, after you messed yourself.”

An awkward silence followed. Eddie glared into Limpwick’s eyes, as if to read his mind.

Limpwick coughed, probably from the dust. Compose yourself, he thought; maintain your equanimity. Establishment of intellectual superiority must begin with cordial rapport. But he could not be transparent about it. There was a wisdom, however primal, behind Eddie’s eyes. And just as Q depended on a steadfast and trustworthy psychiatric team to guard his best interests, Limpwick and his group would depend on their host and hostess to help create a suitable living and work environment for therapy to flourish. After all, they were in this man and his wife’s custody for the coming year, not vice-versa. He must not come across as condescending, however difficult it would be to portray equality with this common rube.

Limpwick would thus try his best to engage Eddie at his level, perhaps with something about the sky clearing up. Such pleasantries did not come naturally to him, and he barely heard his own words above the din of anxiety in his head.

“Ayup,” Eddie replied, to Limpwick’s great relief, “just enough blue now to mend a Dutch-man’s britches.”

“I’m curious to see the inside of the hotel.”

“Ayup, I imagine the ale-wife’s got your quarters all fixed up by now.”

Limpwick paused, unsure what to say next. He fretted his limited skill in small talk had been pressed to its limit.

“So you work with old Jackie-boy,” Eddie said, unknowingly rescuing him. “Jackie-boy Woodthorpe.”

“You know Doctor Woodthorpe?”

“Jackie-boy spent many a summer with us in his youth,” Eddie said with a faraway look. “This acreage and buildings belonged to his pop.”

“Is that so?”

“Ayup.” Eddie pulled out a piece of cigarette paper and a pouch of tobacco, and went on to explain the location’s evolution into a summer stock theatre. “A friend of Ben’s, that’s Jackie-boy’s pop’s name, a Cape-ender, was in the theatre out in P’town. The competition got too hot with the other theatre company in the area so he asked Ben if he could use his buildings as a temporary outpost. Ben said ayup, and temporary became twenty years.”

“When did it close?” Limpwick asked.

“Maybe ten years ago, maybe more, maybe less.” Eddie rolled a cigarette.

Limpwick sensed something, a feeling that an uncomfortable energy that once permeated this place and gave it its power was back and seeping into his very being.

“What were the plays like?” Limpwick asked.

“The shows? Never seen a one. Too bohemian for me,” Eddie replied, striking a match on his leg.

Limpwick recalled the photographs plastering the wall. Bohemian, indeed.

Eddie popped the completed cigarette into the corner of his smirking slit of a mouth. "So, you never answered me."

"I'm sorry," Limpwick replied. "What was the question?"

"Do you like the room? If you want to use it for yer office, I'd be happy to tidy 'er up, make 'er livable."

"Yes, I should think it would do with a little work, perhaps picking up the clutter, perhaps converting the makeup table into a desk."

"Nah, I'll build you a new one with more leg room." Eddie tossed his half-finished cigarette to the ground and put it out with the heel of his boot, causing the creaky hardwood to squeak like his own sinister laugh. "Damn tobacco's rotten. Woman musta gotten it wet in the wash." He reached into a leg pocket of his cover-alls and pulled out an elongated pouch, probably goatskin. The swishing indicated a full container of liquid. "Just tell me the dimensions you'd like. Should have 'er together in a day or two."

"That would be splendid," Limpwick said, wiping his brow with a kerchief. He did not feel hot, only anxious with a new anxiety that threatened to linger.

Eddie twisted the cap off his container and offered it to him like a ceremonial pipe. "Swig?"

"I must politely decline," Limpwick replied. "But thank you, sir."

Eddie made mock offense with a low chortle, then took a good drink himself to prove the contents were sanitary

and non-toxic. "This ain't no lemonade, Doc, but it's mighty refreshing. Come on, have some."

Limpwick rubbed his brow and then his throat. He was again feeling dry at the mouth, come to think of it. He accepted, and took a deep swig. That was a mistake.

"How's the gullet, Doc?" Eddie laughed.

Limpwick dropped the goatskin on the floor and turned to leave, somehow managing "Good day" through a cough. Eddie's laughter followed him out the door as he rushed through the theater and stumbled back around the grown-over pathway toward the main house.

§

Sitting up, Limpwick searched his left-front trouser pocket for his watch. Three a.m., dear God. He reached deep into his other pocket and removed the photo, happily still intact. He folded it carefully and placed it in his front shirt pocket for safer keeping, but he had to resist his present urge to dwell on what it represented. There would be time later, but at that moment, he had to regroup his faculties for the task at hand.

His mind was a blur; he struggled even to recall the events of the previous day. He sorted out in his tired mind that it was Saturday, but what happened to Friday? Had he slept through it? He strained to recall the details of the previous afternoon and evening, vaguely remembering Ethel leading him up the stairs to his room. So exhausted was he after his morning walk and visit with the sadist Eddie that he had fallen asleep upon hitting the sheets, too weak in body even to remove his filthy clothes.

Then there was that business with the goatskin. The effect of its foul contents (slipped past his lips in a moment of weakness), coupled with the unfamiliar surroundings, had Limpwick still feeling disoriented all these hours later. Whatever the alcoholic spirit within the container, it was not one to be found in most respectable liquor cabinets, but one that told of Eddie's self-hatred and an impulse toward self-abasement (and that of others as well, apparently). For the time being, Limpwick's dry mouth and ringing headache was awakening the bitter nostalgia of his own self-abasing days drinking alongside similarly unsavory, self-loathing characters. But his tolerance (once high enough to shame a sailor) had depleted to nothing. To this, he owed the current situation, and an inebriated state far more hazy and dreamlike than those he remembered from his more youthful indulgences. It was a fitting setting for a dream. By the flicker of a single candle, he saw that the room he will be inhabiting for the next year will be a lovely room, a large airy one, with lace-curtained windows, faded Victorian wallpaper, and a cushioned wicker settee to the side of the bed.

This was likely the hotel's honeymoon suite in its earlier incarnation, he thought. Then he smelled something, and was at first horrified to think he might have soiled his pants. Thankfully, this was not the case. While his eyesight was impaired, the sensations registering upon his raw olfactory nerve endings were heightened in his present condition.

Some condition. Limpwick considered his link to a line of inadequate men who might also have sullied the grace of this room in years past. He got up to inspect things more

closely. Someone (Nurse Levenwell, no doubt) had taken great pains to unpack his luggage and meticulously organize his closet and dresser drawers. Only Nurse Levenwell could have known how he liked his under-shirts in the top drawer, his under-drawers in the middle, and his stockings in the bottom. He wondered if in his evening stupor he bothered to thank her. Limpwick shuddered at his recognition of his drunken self, of Limpwick the drunk's failure to empathize with others' emotional needs, his sabotaging of an innate desire for happiness, a grief over the loss of identity that occurs with each drink. It was a foul nostalgia for an old, familiar pattern.

Everyone's perception must have been of a leader who falls asleep at the helm on the eve of an invasion. They were probably questioning his mental and emotional commitment, and he would not blame them for feeling abandoned. He was, after all, the one who had ripped them from their lives and brought them there, with nothing but their faith in him as guide them.

Perhaps he could explain his absence away as exhaustion or a slight headache, but he could not come off as so fragile at this important time. Tenuous is the foundation he had established that first day, and the track on which his mind presently rode was a wobbly one at best. But he had to right himself, had to forge onward. The task was too urgent to delay a moment further. He had to be their rock. He had to regain their complete confidence, and quickly. He had to set the therapeutic schedule, but be for he could, he needed the map on which to chart it. He hearkened back to an idea that occurred to him on the train,

something he recalled from his days under the tutelage of H. Grovner Peupdish.

First, he needed his file briefcase. He searched the closet. Not there. He opened a chest at the foot of the bed. Not there, either. Momentarily frantic, he eased up, realizing he could count on Nurse Levenwell for her sensibility, that she would have put it in a sensible, obvious place, and sure enough, it was there, under the bed.

He took it out, swirled around to the settee, and sifted back through the contents. He thumbed past his own files on Q to those he inherited from Peupdish, taking great care with the brittle and yellowing documents as he got closer to his objective, to the year 1930. Sure enough, Peupdish recorded it:

Subject takes a particular interest in theatre. Will explore it for its therapeutic benefits. Select a play, something by Shaw. Start casting immediately.

Limpwick thumbed past the daily regimens which include hour-long afternoon rehearsals every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, marked with the initials "T. T.," which he recalled having stood for "theatre therapy." The rehearsal schedule abruptly ended less than three months later with a note:

Production collapses.

The experiment had been called off, but with a note of hopefulness:

A worthy effort, showing considerable benefit to the patient, before a decline in generosity of some

individuals toward him as the lead actor nearly led to physical hostilities. To be explored further at a later date.

Theatre therapy had never again been given serious consideration. But judging from the record, the therapy was undone by patterns of self-absorbed syndrome among cast members. Those upon whom the spotlight was not entirely focused became wounded by perceived lack of attention. This can be expected whenever you have a forced interaction of disparate egos. Therefore, the best approach in reviving theatre therapy might be to turn it into a one-man show, Limpwick thought, thereby removing the possibility for a similar undoing.

And what better place to revive the therapy than on the Forger des Mythes stage? Limpwick determined then and there that he would produce a monodrama starring Q. He could barely wait to tell his charges, but he would let them sleep, for they would need their rest for what was in store for them.

§

Limpwick was the first to arrive that morning to breakfast. Ethel bustled at full swing in and out of the kitchen adjoining the main dining hall, humming a vague Vaudeville melody as she presented an assortment of fruit pastries, danishes, jellies, boiled eggs, a bowl of what appeared on first glance to be Clementine oranges (most curious considering it was November and the season for Clementines was late December), various hot porridges, and a tray of cured meats.

The schedule called for breakfast at eight a.m., and Limpwick was five minutes early. He was pleased with himself for his nice recovery from yesterday, and his headache had completely dissipated. At precisely eight, Nurse Levenwell, escorting Q by the elbow, entered the room, and a minute later, Jacob joined them with a nod and a look that begged forgiveness.

Indeed, this tardiness on the part of Jacob was unusual, and somewhat disconcerting. Nurse Levenwell looked especially displeased at Jacob. Limpwick knew what she was thinking. They may have yet to go over the schedule in every exacting detail, but one point they had made abundantly clear . . . starting with that day (effectively Day 1), breakfast was to commence at 8 a.m., sharp, establishing a strict routine for the sake of the patient.

Limpwick was embarrassed for him. It was a familiar embarrassment, the kind one feels for a thoughtless guest who holds up a function for visiting dignitaries. Oh, how Jacob reminded him of his aunt Olivia. It was just like her to hold things up, to keep everyone waiting while she readied herself, her face paint, her garlands and bows, her womanly manipulations. Just like her, with her indifference to social norms, her Jazz Age independence, her half-ironic attitude toward the rest of the world, to which she owed nothing and expressed that sentiment in her every move.

This familial similarity was most disconcerting to Limpwick. Limpwick hoped this was not a case of Jacob acting out a retributive emotion over a perceived abandonment by Limpwick the day before. Limpwick knew he had set things right again with his poor babies, had to will things back to their course, had to get back to the

rock. But how to defeat a rock rolling back upon you in mid-roll? Limpwick recalled a philosophy of negation favored by the French. He would *negate* the rock. Negate the rock of Sisyphus by *loving* it.

So Limpwick gave Jacob an absolving, loving smile.

But Nurse Levenwell remained deadly serious. Limpwick knew what that look on her face meant, and it was clear that any slack she afforded him the previous night had tightened considerably. She held herself to impossible standards of punctuality, and expected the same of everyone else. They had to get down to business, and a return to timeliness would be of the utmost importance.

Limpwick expected no less from his top nurse. Her seriousness of purpose was what she was all about. She had always been the corrective when the track has been wobbly, when the rock of Sisyphus has needed negating.

Limpwick looked over at Q. Beneath his catatonia was a mild perplexity at surroundings quite different from his previous confinement, and a tell-tale look of suspicion about the food, particularly the breakfast dish Ethel was scooping onto his plate. The good, intuitive nurse that she was, Nurse Levenwell tasted it first to reassure him it was not poisoned.

No one had yet spoken a word.

Then, Limpwick sensed action to his left. He cocked his head to find Ethel, the good hostess, had joined them at the table. She cleared her throat. "Missed you at the breakfast table yesterday, Doc."

"My apologies, ma'am," Limpwick replied, disguising his relief over the break in the maddening silence with feigned guilt.

“And lunch and supper.”

“Most assuredly, it won’t happen again. I seem to have veered off track, but with the generous help of my guardian angel,” he turned to Nurse Levenwell, “I am back on course.” His nurse was momentarily unresponsive, but Limpwick knew her coldness to him was only an affectation in front of Jacob, a performance worthy of her professionalism. She was with him in defeating the rock.

“No skin off my hide,” Ethel shrugged. “The bears are happy to have your leftovers if you keep missing meals.”

“Bears?” Jacob shrieked. He sounded so like his aunt, thought Limpwick, one would swear she was his birth mother, and not merely his relative guardian assigned the maternal role.

Ethel laughed heartily, “No, I’m just playing with you. I feed ‘em to the ‘coons. T’ain’t had no bears for a while. Eddie and some friends cleared ‘em out years ago.”

Jacob exhaled in relief, but Nurse Levenwell was obviously not amused at the fright stirred by Ethel with her mention of wild animals. This was a true reaction, not feigned, but among those at the table, only Limpwick knew the difference. She comforted her patient, rubbing his back. Limpwick did not himself note a particular look of heightened anxiety in Q’s face, but he would never question his head nurse’s impeccable instincts.

The meal having been rapidly devoured by the hungry guests (Limpwick particularly enjoyed the early Clementines), Ethel cleared the table, now sticky with fruit pulp and syrup, until her arms were full with dirty plates, glassware, and serving dishes.

Jacob offered to help, but she declined. His aunt had taught him well.

Somehow, despite the precarious stack of dishware, Ethel was dexterous enough to nudge Limpwick's arm. "Maybe I oughta warn you about Eddie. He right likes making new friends, likes getting them into mischief."

After wiping down the tables, Ethel returned to the kitchen. Limpwick motioned for Nurse Levenwell and Jacob to lean forward out of earshot. "Indeed," he said, "Eddie seems to be suffering a classic case of infantile cruelty as a satisfaction-securing behavior."

Jacob nodded and whispered, "I can only imagine, judging from Ethel's attitude toward him. I see him to be Ethel's opposite, the Arch-fiend to her Angel. She is most kind and selfless, while she describes him as a rascal who cannot be trusted."

"A perfect marriage," Nurse Levenwell interjected, quite audibly as if to make sure Ethel heard it.

"Oh, I agree," Jacob replied in a low whisper. "Too opposing poles, Devil and God, clinging together in one psychic force. If the two were too much the same, both God, or both the Devil, they would repel one another. To me, that is what split Freud and Jung."

Limpwick easily forgave Jacob's simplistic theorizing, for it indicated a renewed energy in him that, if properly channeled, could prove useful. The time was right, Limpwick decided, to announce his refined plan for Q's therapy.

Limpwick defined "theatre therapy," and Jacob hung on his mentor's every word. Meanwhile, the disapproving look on Nurse Levenwell's face that greeted Limpwick and

had not let up all morning melted away. Limpwick concluded with an explanation of how they would avoid the problems that befell Grovner's initial aborted effort years ago. "Well then, there is much work to do," Jacob said enthusiastically in response. "We need sets, costumes, make-up."

"Let's not get carried away. The production will be spare, a one-man show."

They all turn to Q, who looked almost fiery eyed, as engaged as he had been in quite some time.

"Our friend is intrigued," Limpwick said.

"So, what play have you chosen?" Nurse Levenwell asked with a slight snarl.

Limpwick sensed she must have taken his attempt at levity for condescension toward the patient. "For that," Limpwick said, his eyes begging her forgiveness for turning to Jacob, "I was hoping to elicit the expert advice of my understudy."

Jacob was practically shaking with enthusiasm. "Oh, I have several ideas for one-man dramas, Doctor Limpwick. Several."

"Do tell."

"Let's see, there's 'The Bell-Boy and the Key-Hole,' then there's 'A Gentleman's Loss.' One particular monologue, about the wives of Henry VIII, is a favorite of mine. Of course, it will require gender switch, which, of course, is a theatrical tradition. There is this one scene, one which will require trick lighting and puppetry, where. . . ."

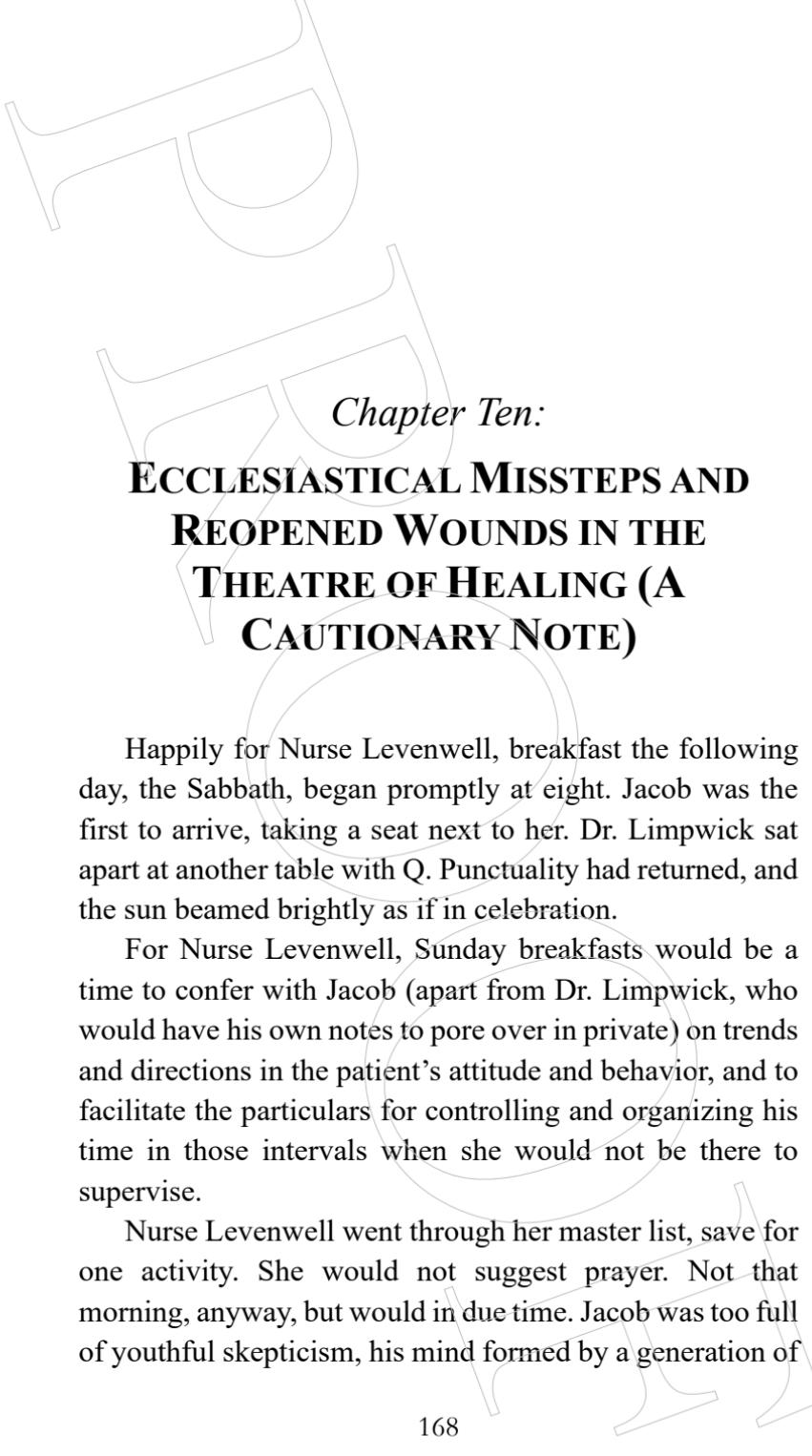
"On second thought, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Why don't you research a few more dramatic options and get back to me with a list."

“And Eddie’d be happy to drive you into town,” Ethel chimed in with a muffled voice from the kitchen. Limpwick marveled at her hearing ability and wondered how long she had been listening. “There’s a fine, dedicated librarian, one who’ll find you everything you need,” Ethel continued with a wink on her way toward them to collect the remaining dishes, “every book imaginable, all volumes of encyclopedias and histories of civilizations, reading books, and whenever the theatre was in a pinch, she had all sorta sheet music to musical comedies, scripts to popular drama plays, and the like. And like I says, Eddie’ll be happy to drive you . . . fact, any of you ever need a ride, just holler.”

“Great,” Jacob replied. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting him.”

“He’s dependable when he wants to be,” she said, her volume booming and boisterous. “Just don’t trust’m and you’ll be fine.”

§



Chapter Ten:

**ECCLESIASTICAL MISSTEPS AND
REOPENED WOUNDS IN THE
THEATRE OF HEALING (A
CAUTIONARY NOTE)**

Happily for Nurse Levenwell, breakfast the following day, the Sabbath, began promptly at eight. Jacob was the first to arrive, taking a seat next to her. Dr. Limpwick sat apart at another table with Q. Punctuality had returned, and the sun beamed brightly as if in celebration.

For Nurse Levenwell, Sunday breakfasts would be a time to confer with Jacob (apart from Dr. Limpwick, who would have his own notes to pore over in private) on trends and directions in the patient's attitude and behavior, and to facilitate the particulars for controlling and organizing his time in those intervals when she would not be there to supervise.

Nurse Levenwell went through her master list, save for one activity. She would not suggest prayer. Not that morning, anyway, but would in due time. Jacob was too full of youthful skepticism, his mind formed by a generation of

so-called intellectuals seeking to unravel the teachings of Christ and reject all things Godly. Like Thomas, Jacob was one who would have to touch the hands of the Savior for himself, to feel along the stigmata with his own fingers, in order to be self-emboldened by the Light and the Way.

After breakfast, Nurse Levenwell took up Ethel's offer to "holler" for a ride into town. Ethel seemed to relish the request, and scampered out the door toward the woods to track down her husband, leaving loose curlers in her wake. Nurse Levenwell walked over to wait on a bench next to the gazebo. She bowed her head in prayerful recitation, reading from her devotional a salutation to Mary before turning to the first of five joyful mysteries.

After coronating the Blessed Virgin, Nurse Levenwell was growing restless in wait and on when a flat-bed veered around the corner and spun next to her. Clearly this was Eddie, finally, who proceeded to roll down the window. She found his face to be utterly bereft of apology for his tardiness. "Your chariot, m'lady," he said, and slapped the outside of the door, giving Nurse Levenwell a jolt.

She knew fools like this couldn't resist their primal urges, and were liable to lurch forward to put a fright in a lady. She didn't dare trust him. She walked the long way around the back so as not to give him the opportunity to ogle her, and got in with the smelly rascal only because she hadn't a choice.

"Off to do God's work, heh?"

She ignored him. He was every bit as disagreeable as she could have expected. The interior of his truck fit his sort of day-laborer, the kind who would laugh at God:

damp cigarette butts, shards of glass, and magazine pages strewn across the floor. She dared not inspect too closely.

She rejected his attempts to engage her on increasingly boring topics, ranging from his skill at billiards, to his mustache-waxing technique, to the money he could make selling his hand-crafted lures based on his own fishing success. “Ayup, I can sure fish, but I just ain’t cut out to be a businessman. Ol’ lady reminds me that every day.”

With his naked dome and cottage cheese face, he was the type who enjoyed the sound of his own voice over reflective, prayerful silence, someone to whom the lack of interest of a lady in his company was something to be battered into submission. Nurse Levenwell, by the grace of God, would not be so submissive.

Then amongst his guttural spewing, something caught her attention, something about the obsessive local postmaster’s disregard for Sunday and holiday closings. Eddie shook his head, “Idle hands is the Devil’s hands, says he.”

Finally, a useful insight from this heathen.

“Goddamn fool’s more protestant than you Methodists,” Eddie added.

No use being offended, Nurse Levenwell thought. She flashed him her rosary, correcting his mistaken impression. “Oh, then you’ll be attending services at St. Joe’s,” he muttered, swerving the car around to a side street.

After winding about a quarter mile, perhaps more, in a general southwesterly direction, they mercifully reached their destination. Eddie agreed to pick her up at noonish, at the post office corner. “You can trust ol’ Eddie, no matter what my batty ol’ headmistress says. Keep yer eyes open, you might see a duPont family member in attendance.”

Never mind that she wouldn't know a duPont from a daffodil, Nurse Levenwell was happy to be rid of this man and his filthy truck, if only momentarily. Nurse Levenwell began enjoying what she hoped to be a pleasant Sunday in earnest.

Once in the church, she was ushered to a spot near the front, the third pew back. To her delight, she had made it in time for the last glorious verse of "Faith of our Fathers, Living Still," and she gave it her all, "By kindly words and virtuous life"

It had always been strange to her, no matter the parish how those seats farthest from the Lord were the first to fill. Others might have feared closeness to Him, but not her. Not any more. There was a time growing up in Hiawatha when she dreaded the idea of consuming the flesh and blood, when she longed for Mass to end quickly so she could run freely once more in the world without inhibition or limitation, but that had been a long time ago. Not any more.

Now, despite the lack of air-current and inadequate light in this damp and ancient cathedral, she relished this time, this atmosphere (the piping organs, the creaking kneelers, the clinging chalices, even the suffocating incense) as a time to be in communion with all the martyrs and saints, and of course, with Him.

The priest, a jovial Irishman, began the readings, and Nurse Levenwell bowed her head. She still understood a good deal of Latin, but she preferred to use the time for personal prayer. She prayed softly to the Lord to lift her anxiety over the patients she has entrusted in Lena's care, and to the gracious Virgin of virgins, to light, guard, rule,

and guide Lena, and intercede where intercession was necessary.

After Mass, Nurse Levenwell walked the few blocks to the post office. The door appeared unlocked. Sure enough, she saw the post-master through the window, hard at work despite it being a Sunday. He waved her inside, as he must have been used to doing whenever a local happened by. He introduced himself. Mr. Jenkins was his name. He told her he was happy to sell her stamps and to take packages for the following day, "But don't tell the Feds," he added with a wink.

She told him she had never seen so audacious a transgression of government decree.

"Oh, the inspector comes by once in a while," he said. "He would never report me. We went to the same high school, you see."

"I see."

"Mostly I just push broom, pick up rubber bands, oil the register. Little maintenance here and there. He don't mind."

"But on the Sabbath?" she chided.

"Only keeping the day holy," he said. "Just like you."

No point in arguing. It would, after all, be a great convenience to conduct her postal errands after church each week, a convenient time to do so when her absence would in no way arouse Dr. Limpwick's suspicions. She arranged her box for receiving Q's medicines, then returned to the street corner to await her ride. She would let God be the judge, but if were up to her, she would reward Mr. Jenkins for so devout a work ethic.

Nurse Levenwell was about to pull out her rosary for an additional round of decades, but this time, the wait for Eddie was but a mere minute. He revved the engine until it sounded like it might explode. Perhaps he was feeling redemptive, she thought, or perhaps he was one who could not be easily predicted. Or perhaps God was testing her. Either way, he was a dastardly character, and she was careful once again to take the long way around the back of the truck.

She kept her mind focused on the day's lesson: Without routine, the mind was hesitant. The alternative was lunacy. Routine, the closest thing to Godliness on this Earth.

They reached the dilapidated mailbox that marked path to the compound. A pair of vehicles were parked off to the side, with engines running and driver's seats occupied. Eddie grumbled incoherent curses before driving through the open gate down the winding pathway. Eddie sped away after dropping her off at the gazebo, back through the gate and past the parked cars to who-knows-where.

Nurse Levenwell surveyed the scene in front of the main house. A still-unshaven and berobed Dr. Limpwick was shouting at a group of youthful solicitors, "Leave this land at once!" To her horror, he slammed the door in their stunned little faces.

Like fallen leaves submitting to the autumn wind, the sullen, unprotesting little cherubs wandered past her back up the path. Dr. Limpwick must have seemed to them the anti-Christ, she thought. This scene stood in stark contrast to the promise of the Sabbath, a promise personified in the faith of angelic youth out collecting for the hungry.

She hoped this to be a momentary lapse in judgment, for it did not bode well for the coming year if it were more than a one-time Godless aberration.

\$

That night Nurse Levenwell found him sitting at a desk in the theatre dressing area. He looked surprised.

“Welcome to my makeshift office.” He frantically shuffled something into his pocket, like a wayward child harboring a stolen treasure. He couldn’t so easily fool her. It was that trinket he kept, that little medallion with a cross engraving, a replica of the coin the Bishop of Auxerre bestowed upon young Geneviève in recognition of the girl’s virtue. No doubt he was meditating upon it and begging forgiveness for his behavior toward the virtuous young children of God. He held it as dear as an orthodox Christian would treasure the relic of a martyred saint.

Nurse Levenwell culled strength from the forgiving qualities of the Blessed Virgin. “Why try to hide it?”

“Hide what?” Dr. Limpwick looked startled, genuinely perplexed, as if he had no idea what she was talking about. “What do you mean?”

“I was there,” she told him. “I saw it all.”

\$

Limpwick fought to stabilize a psyche caught off guard, restraining an impulsive reaction he would later regret. But this made no sense. What meaning would the photo in his pocket have to her? Was there a history between her and Waldo Shaw?



Figure 10. *His trinket was a replica of the coin the Bishop of Auxerre bestowed upon young Geneviève in recognition of the girl's virtue.*

Not possible. Waldo was too notorious a man to have ever interested someone of her piety. She was bluffing, with all the wiles of a woman eager to provoke a confession, and he would call her on it. "Just a token, a curiosity, nothing more."

"I am not interested in the contents of your pocket, Doctor. That is your business. I'm troubled by your lack of charity toward those children, and I demand an explanation."

Limpwick realized it must have been a shock for her to see children turned away so harshly. That which made barren women so effective as nurses (who, like the blind

compensating for lack of sight by increased sensitivity of hearing, care for patients as their own brood) conversely made them insufferable molly-coddlers. "I make no apologies," he said. "Those parents and their church should be ashamed for imposing. The sign clearly states no solicitors."

"With all due respect, doctor, blessed be those who are merciful toward the children."

Mercy toward the children, thought Limpwick, was the favored pretense of those seeking to capitalize on the death of a philosopher king who, incidentally, preached asceticism. No, they would have to gild their cross with someone else's charitable coin. "Mercy is one thing," he replied, "indulgence another."

Nurse Levenwell frowned and looked at him sideways. "Doctor," she said, "you are pushing it, really pushing it, to equate kindness with indulgence."

Limpwick hesitated, but fully realizing the damage caused by his rampant tongue. He had offended the maternal instinct of his dedicated nurse. And much worse, he had offended her religious sensibilities. He knew one dared not argue with the time-honored precepts of the world's greatest fairy tale.

§

Limpwick recalled an instance when Grovner was challenged by the power of religious myth. One of his patient's had been deluded by visions of God asking her to murder her six children. This, Grovner believed, was borne

out of a deeply rooted thought system, a submission to power driven into her psyche by religious dogma.

He tried everything he could to convince her that this was both a contradiction to the idea of God's love and an unhappy constriction of her potentialities as an individual, but to no avail. Desperate, Grovner stumbled upon an experiment by a team of doctors in Zurich who were inspired by observations of how battered wives effectively disarm threatening husbands (that is, to flirt them into submission). The Swiss doctors had their patients flirt away their demons with the tried-and-true come-ons of professional courtesans, recording considerable success before the experiment was banned in their country for indecency.

That something like it had yet to be tried in the States only fueled Grovner's pioneering spirit, inspiring his own offshoot idea to render his patient's irrational fear of God impotent. He replaced her daily devotionals (written, incidentally, by impotent priests) with prayers of ritualized flirtation which, he dared not tell her, came straight out of *The Whore's Rhetorick*.

After several weeks, the patient told of a new recurring dream, of standing on a mountain ridge overlooking an expansive valley covered with dense forest. In the middle were the waters of Bethesda, where angels descended and touched the water. Overhead came the voice of God, retracting his command for her to commit infanticide. Thus, her fright and panic were vanquished, replaced by a newfound empowerment as old as the primal urges of man.

The lesson, as Grovner later told the young, impressionable Limpwick: "When confronted by the

natural discharge of His fetid winds, you must find a strong perfume to render them more agreeable. After all, my dear boy, one of the world's sweetest-smelling concoctions started out as whale vomit."

In dealing with the situation at hand, Limpwick needed an especially strong fragrance (perhaps lily, an earthy musk, or lavender?) to mask the gas he had passed. He would do something he had resisted for a long time. First, an apology. "You're right," he said, affecting a severe look of contrition. "I should have shown mercy and charity. I am truly sorry to both you and the children."

"Don't be sorry to me," she replied, "nor to the children. Be sorry to God. You need to take Him into your heart, before it's too late."

"I agree," he said. "Your advice having proved so sound in the past, it is high time I take your suggestion on the subject closest to your heart."

"Really?" Nurse Levenwell replied.

"Indeed. In fact, I've long been meaning to incorporate religion into Q's therapy."

More than a tinge of skepticism twinkled in her eye. "Show me," she insisted.

"Come," he said. "I'll show you."

He took her through an access tunnel Eddie had shown him, through the former living quarters for the summer stock players, to the main hotel and Q's room.

Jacob, who was administering a calming back massage to the patient, looked up from his work. "He's quite antsy tonight."

“Perhaps, then, it is time to reveal to him his part in the Passion Play we are planning,” Limpwick said. “Go ahead, Jacob.”

Jacob appeared confused by the change of plans, as one would expect. “Passion Play?”

Meanwhile, a look of warmth and affection had returned to Nurse Levenwell’s face. “I thought of suggesting the monologue of a saint or martyr,” she said, “but Christ’s Passion is even more redeeming.”

Limpwick realized he had scared the rats off with his suggestion, had won his nurse back into the fold, and breathed a sigh of relief. “Yes, and isn’t it most appropriate that theatre therapy’s first fully realized test should be an imitation of Scripture, the one time in history where man’s soul was transformed into something more real than life itself?” Nurse Levenwell nodded, but Jacob appeared to be repressing something. “What is it?”

“I was thinking it would be an adaptation of Tennyson’s *Maud: A Monodrama*,” Jacob replied, “with Q in the dual role of morbid narrator and mad protagonist who recovers his sanity through service in war. We talked about this.”

Q sat up and looked at Jacob with great interest. “No,” he said in a deep, commanding voice. “It shall be the Passion Play, with me as the Christ.”

“He speaks,” Jacob said, astonished by the first words from Q in recent memory.

Limpwick was somewhat surprised himself. This was not the first time he had seen Q break a prolonged period of silence, but his utterances usually came only after electroshock was administered. Thankfully it now appeared it wouldn’t be necessary to do so before

beginning theatre therapy. He took Jacob aside by the arm and whispered, "If he can sustain this for a year, that would mean a real breakthrough. But we don't want to inflate anyone's hopes. We have a long way to go."

"You have my silence on this matter," Jacob whispered back.

"One more thing," Q continued, to their collective amazement, his arms folded around his waist. "You must first remove and destroy my strait-jacket before I can carry the cross."

Nurse Levenwell and Jacob were clearly at a loss for words. After all, there was no strait-jacket, the use of it in everyday practice having fallen out of favor in recent years. They looked toward Limpwick for guidance on this matter. An idea dawned on him.

"Indeed," Limpwick replied. "We shall destroy the strait-jacket, perhaps by burning it."

Now Nurse Levenwell seemed to understand. She would know from experience how the strait-jacket was as real to Q as the phantom limb of a soldier who had lost his leg.

Not so with Jacob, who remained perplexed. "Burn what?" he asked.

Limpwick took him aside and whispered, "We mustn't question it, or we risk upsetting the patient." He would explain to him later, with Nurse Levenwell out of the room, how by the ceremonial burning of the phantom strait-jacket, as with the Passion Play, and before that, the Swiss experiments and Grovner's prevention of sacrificial infanticide, they could exploit the power of religious ritual as a means to restore order and allay irrational fear. If

successful, both the play and Q's utterances could commence through the year unfettered and unabated.

A bundle of old linens, thought Limpwick, should do the trick.

§

November 25 was Tuesday of Thanksgiving week. Ana stared up from her school books at the pock-marked ceiling. Her grades had been plummeting, giving Granny Bea cause to take away her poetry if they did not soon improve. This did not worry Ana (how does one take away another's poetry?) so much as being volunteered against her will for the drug study in a last desperate attempt to achieve total Svengali-like control over a wayward granddaughter. Ana's sleepless mind consumed by this, she struggled through this, the last school day before vacation.

Her algebra teacher announced a pop quiz, jogging her back to reality. Ana's marks were about to get even worse.

In the previous hour's history class, Ana was handed back her essay, "Babylon's Temple of Venus." She had written reams on the once-powerful position of women throughout the Orient, in a religious culture divorced from morals, built around sacred whore-doms, with the temple prostitutes of Israel, Syria, and Cyprus among its ranking members, her facts all lifted from one of her father's dusty history of civilization volumes.

In presenting her with her grade, the teacher looked down at Ana and winked. He knew these were not Ana's words. She hadn't even taken the time to paraphrase and adapt it to her own voice, to provide careful foot- or end-

notes, or even a bibliography. Ana did not care. If she was to fail, she would fail with aplomb and audacity. She would put these words in their purest form in front of those who would indoctrinate a generation to believe in mankind's greatness and civility to one another.

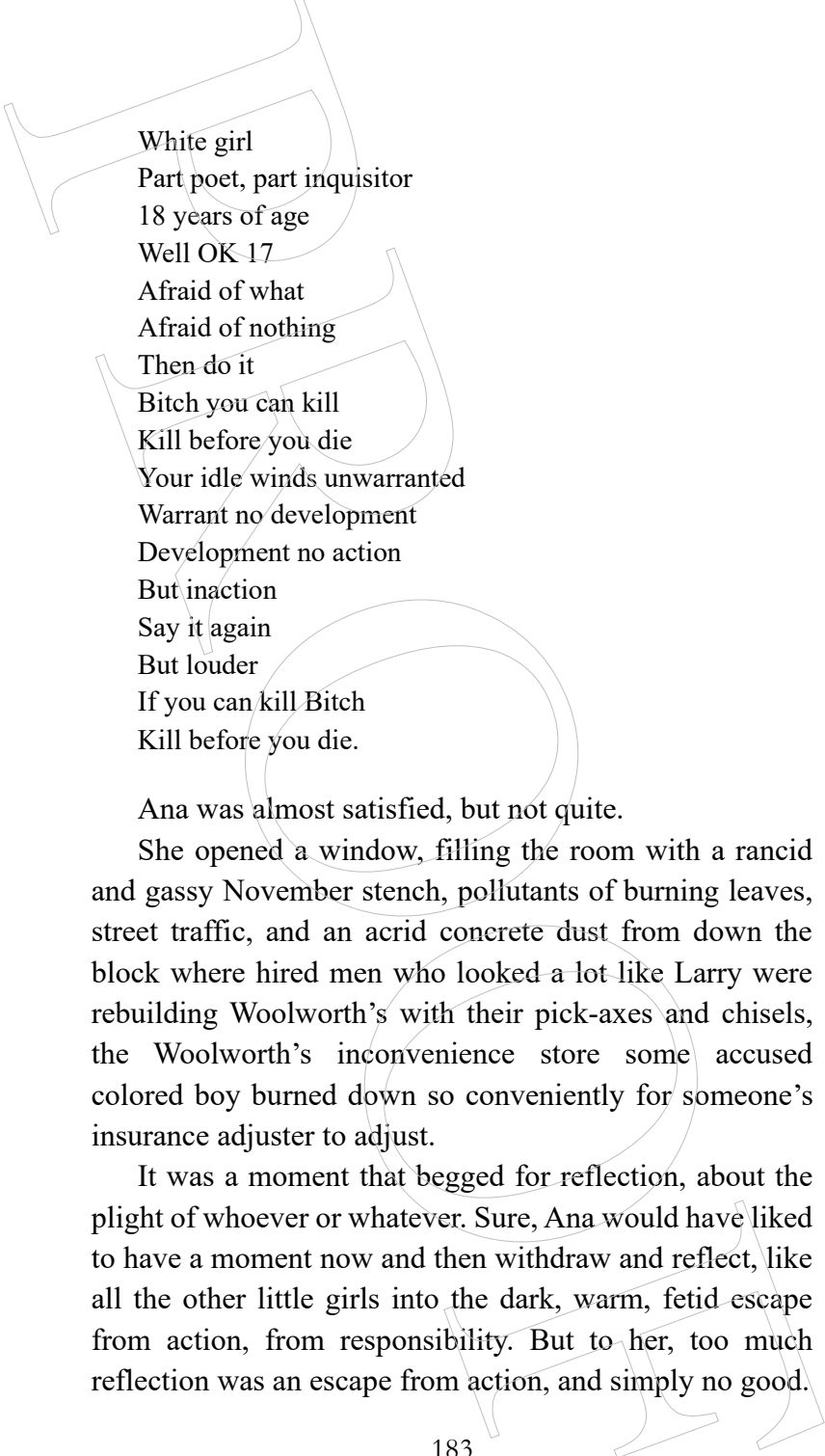
She had ended with a pronouncement. Unlike the other girls, she was no turncoat to her gender, and would fully embrace her duty when called upon in the sex wars to come.

Her teacher remarked in the margins: "An original thought. Where did this come from? Warrants development."

After the school day ended, Ana rushed home and to her room, piling on her bed in excitement. God, she thought, how pitiful all the girls her age who chose suicide over action, with their whiny journal entries about the groggy sleepless blood dragging through their veins. Were they not aware of the bounty of chemical enhancements available to them, to be had from the likes of Larry and other like-minded peasants for the small price of a little action and a few select words?

Nothing so enhancing or self-empowering as the time-honored opiates of the free poetic spirit. Drugs as a means not of restricting, but of freeing; drugs taken not at the imposition of some experimental study, but of her own choosing. If mistakes were to be made in the realm of chemically induced sensation, they shall be hers, and hers alone.

Ana inhaled her bennies and set to hash out a new poem before her Granny Bea returned home.



White girl
Part poet, part inquisitor
18 years of age
Well OK 17
Afraid of what
Afraid of nothing
Then do it
Bitch you can kill
Kill before you die
Your idle winds unwarranted
Warrant no development
Development no action
But inaction
Say it again
But louder
If you can kill Bitch
Kill before you die.

Ana was almost satisfied, but not quite.

She opened a window, filling the room with a rancid and gassy November stench, pollutants of burning leaves, street traffic, and an acrid concrete dust from down the block where hired men who looked a lot like Larry were rebuilding Woolworth's with their pick-axes and chisels, the Woolworth's inconvenience store some accused colored boy burned down so conveniently for someone's insurance adjuster to adjust.

It was a moment that begged for reflection, about the plight of whoever or whatever. Sure, Ana would have liked to have a moment now and then withdraw and reflect, like all the other little girls into the dark, warm, fetid escape from action, from responsibility. But to her, too much reflection was an escape from action, and simply no good.

The bennies were starting to take affect when she heard the downstairs door slam. She jerked herself up, her first instinct was to hide the poem, her second to hide the bennies. The poem wasn't quite ready, not ready to bait the trap for Granny Bea. Not yet. Warranted development.

For the moment, there was another equally pressing scheme to act upon. In her other hand, a posting from the bulletin board at the clinic, a number to call, a opportunity. Olivia, the nice philanthropic woman associated with her father by rumor (her father called her the "benefactress," either to distance himself from her on a personal or emotional level, or both) was looking for volunteers.

"Canteen. A new shop for the sale of cigarettes [*sic*], snacks, and various other sundry items in exchange for job coupons. One opening. Nurses and other staff are especially welcome to apply with permission of their supervisors. Outside volunteers also welcome. Under 18 years of age must have parental permission."

Forget permission. Ana was unable to write or even phone her father, who had secluded himself from the world at some far-off retreat. The benefactress was her only hope to reach him. If the rumors about her were to be believed, she would have the necessary charms to seduce him into re-surfacing. Perhaps the benefactress could garner an address or phone number for Ana. If she could only contact her father and let him know about the tests planned for her, he would never let them proceed.

The fact that she had never met Ana worked in favor of the plan. She suspected she had never seen a photograph of her, at least not a recent one; thankfully, her father kept only one of the toddler Ana in his office. Ana could not chance

letting the benefactress know she was working his daughter. She must be an unwitting accomplice. Ana would have to act quickly, but anonymously, under an assumed name . . . she had always favored over her own the biblical name Rebekah, Hebrew for bound, according to her book of baby names, age eighteen, make that nineteen. Rebekah, not Rebecca, and certainly not Becky. Rebekah would not tolerate the name Becky. Rebekah would get close to the benefactress, acquaint herself under her supervision at the Canteen, charm her, get her to do her bidding.

Rebekah would not be found out. Not by the benefactress, nor by anyone at the hospital, and certainly not by Granny Bea.



The morning of Thanksgiving Eve began with the burning of Q's "strait-jacket" (symbolized by a bundle of dirty linens) over a small bonfire. Nurse Levenwell did not attend the ceremony, but Jacob was there. Limpwick knew he would not have missed it for anything. His protégé had always been enthralled by the therapeutic benefits of ritual. In this case, Q's usually dark countenance began to brighten, his stooped shoulders to straighten, and seemed on the verge of a religious conversion. It would hardly have surprised Jacob if Q began to writhe in Pentecostal ecstasy and speak in tongues, but Limpwick knew the effects were never so instantaneous. In due time, Limpwick thought, the patient will be exorcised of his mental demons and reborn into a new dawn of clarity.

Then, Ethel wandered upon the scene. Limpwick felt her presence like a threat, like one about to unwittingly wake a sleepwalker on a window ledge. He stood frozen, daring not to say anything himself, hoping Jacob did likewise, fearing any words or sounds would break the solemnity of the moment, would cause the patient to panic and perhaps even trigger an episode worse than the one on the train. Limpwick peered at her for a minute or two out of the corner of his eye. She stood in silence until, to his great relief, she lost interest in the scene and moved along to complete her chores.

On this day, perceptible things like the sky, tree-lined hillsides, twittering calls of cardinals and chirps of chickadees, and chilly interactions of disparate egos had been transformed back into matters of little or no consequence for Limpwick. What was important now was that which was most imperceptible, as he focused on nothing less than to begin the transformation of a human mind. By the afternoon, the Forger des Mythes outdoor stage crackled with energy for the first time in many a harvest.

Limpwick wondered if his troupe was sufficiently hardened, physically and mentally, for the coming of December. They mustn't let their energy dull with seasonal melancholy, he thought. The triumph of psycho-therapy rested on these days. Mankind was otherwise helpless in a wake of sprawling madness, borne out of its cannibalistic exploitation by pharmaceutical profiteers.

The ever-resourceful Nurse Levenwell had dipped into her well-stocked sewing kit to convert the morning ritual's unburned rags into the spare costumery appropriate for a

Passion Play. Meanwhile, Jacob was at center stage ready to reveal the set piece he had been working on for two days. He enlisted the help of the re-energized Q in turning it upright. Then they backed away to reveal a noisy wooden contraption for parting clouds and lowering divine apparitions from above by rope.

Nurse Levenwell, inclined toward a sparse production, shook her head, guiding her Q backstage and away from the ruckus.

In the friction between Nurse Levenwell's austerity and Jacob's grandiosity, Limpwick sensed the germination of dispute. This would have to be defused at once, for theater therapy could never again be undone by petty artistic egoism. Moreover, Jacob's youthful energy and ambition were the necessary fuel for Q's therapeutic transformation. To exploit and magnify this aspect of Jacob's character, Limpwick evoked his English predecessors in the theatre. "Jacob, do you recall those wandering repertory companies of the Elizabethan era?"

"Of course," Jacob said. "Why do you bring it up?"

"Because I am reminded when I see you work of how they transcended mere mortality to present their winter comedies by torchlight in the bitterly cold Scandinavian woods."

Jacob grinned ear to ear. Limpwick had successfully stroked his ego.

Eddie, who had been reclining with his legs up in a third row aisle seat, looked prepared to comment. First he swigged from his omnipresent flask, then said, "Is all this fuss necessary for a poetry reading, Doc?"

Limpwick was not surprised by the comment. Such a man could not resist inserting levity when things turned severe. "This is no mere poetry reading," Limpwick snarled, "but a return to the Forger des Mythes theatre's past glory."

"I was there for the glory years, Doc," Eddie replied with a snort. "Even then it took lot more than a few sewn-together rags and belt-and-pulley effects to fill these seats."

"The glory is not in filling the seats," Jacob interjected in his mentor's defense. "The glory is in the curative force of transformation, where the human animal appeals for the intervention of the divine, pleading to die the death of a god, all the while being flogged, flayed, broken, and torn by the instruments of torture."

Limpwick stopped and looked around for Nurse Levenwell. She, like all churchgoers, was accustomed to hearing the scriptural fulfillment told in the melodious imprecision of the Gospels, and it would have burned her ears to hear so visceral a description of Christ's sacrifice. Thankfully, she was well out of earshot, preoccupied with fitting Q into his costume and coaching his dialogue from her tattered childhood bible.

Eddie, however, looked either satisfied or bemused at Jacob's description as he got up to depart. "I might show you a trick or two in designing sets that will make the people ooh and ah," he said, turning to Jacob. "And let me know if you need more lumber."

Limpwick shook his head. "Our resources may seem unlimited, but we must use them wisely. Food, clothing, shelter. Then sets."

“No trouble, Doc,” Eddie replied. “I can get you wood on the cheap.”

Jacob looked pleased by this piece of information, thinking he might finally get to build the set of his dreams.

Just then, a young couple wandered into the theatre, catching Eddie’s attention. “Speak of the devil . . . my source for free lumber.”

Limpwick did not catch the names of this man and woman, nor did they particularly interest him. They did, however, greatly interest Jacob. After introductions, Eddie, Jacob, and the couple moved backstage to where Nurse Levenwell was coaching Q on dialogue. Meanwhile, Limpwick busied himself to the side, disentangling the mechanics of Jacob’s set piece.

They had been backstage for quite some time, (a half hour, maybe more) when Limpwick got concerned. He was wary of Eddie’s mutineering influence, and headed back in time realized it was not intemperate Eddie who should have concerned him. When he came upon the group, Jacob was in the process of inviting the couple to sit in on their rehearsals “in appreciation” for their “generous donation of lumber.” They smiled and graciously accepted.

Outrageous. Limpwick could not consent to this! He hid his irritation from the couple behind a feigned grin.

In the midst of all the hoo-ha, Q continued a latent music Limpwick had never before heard. The burning of Q’s “strait-jacket” had clearly worked in further unfettering his tongue, even moreso than Limpwick could have planned or dreamed. The patient’s silent spell broken only a short time, he now practiced his biblical dialogue with the language command of a master orator. His careful phrasing

and eloquent inflections informed the words with greater meaning than the pulpits of Rome could ever have hoped to render, and he seemed prepared to talk endlessly into the night. Limpwick's only concern was saving Q's voice from overuse, his vocal chords surely tender from all these years of non-practice.

Having apparently reached their fill, the couple left with the parting words, "See you next rehearsal."

Limpwick bristled and turned to Jacob. But before he could express his displeasure, his young charge said something of immediate interest. "They recognized Q."

Limpwick stopped. "Go on."

"When they stepped behind the curtain and saw Q there practicing his lines, they acted like they had seen a ghost."

Amazing, thought Limpwick, almost disconcerting. "How?" he asked. "What was Q's reaction?"

"Utter non-recognition, but the couple kept insisting that his face is familiar."

Limpwick wondered momentarily if there was a connection to the mystery photo, but Jacob's invitation without his consent had his blood up too high to be concerned with much else. "Do you realize the mess you've created by your generosity?" Limpwick scoffed.

"Sir?"

"We can't have them wandering through the theatre, willy-nilly."

"They donated materials." Jacob implored.

"Now they're back in town telling neighbors how a front-row seat to history can be had for the price of scrap."

Jacob looked unnerved. "I guess I was flattered by their interest in the play."

“The play?” Limpwick roared. “Need I remind you that the play is secondary to the important therapy taking place?”

“If I’ve overstepped my bounds, I apologize.” Jacob fidgeted with great agitation. “I didn’t know.”

Limpwick heard a low whimper, and turned to the side of the stage. Q looked distressed, and Nurse Levenwell did not look the least bit pleased at the spirited admonition taking place in clear view and earshot of the patient. Limpwick guided Jacob by the elbow to the other side of the stage and lowered his voice. “I should send you home.”

Jacob bowed his head. “Yes sir.”

Limpwick scratched his chin, considering the proper penance. “At their next appearance,” he told Jacob, “you will revoke the invitation.”

Despite being offered this chance at absolution, Jacob looked taken aback. “Won’t that offend them?”

“Damn the offense.” Jacob’s behavior again reminded Limpwick of Olivia, ever the benefactress. “Damn all offenses. Even the richest patrons must respect boundaries.”

“What explanation should I offer?”

“None, no explanation.”

“Yes sir.”

Limpwick was skeptical of the look in Jacob’s face. “You didn’t told them about theatre therapy, did you?”

“No sir,” Jacob said emphatically. “Never used that term.”

“Good. Our work can only be sprung upon the world as a term in its fullest fruition.”

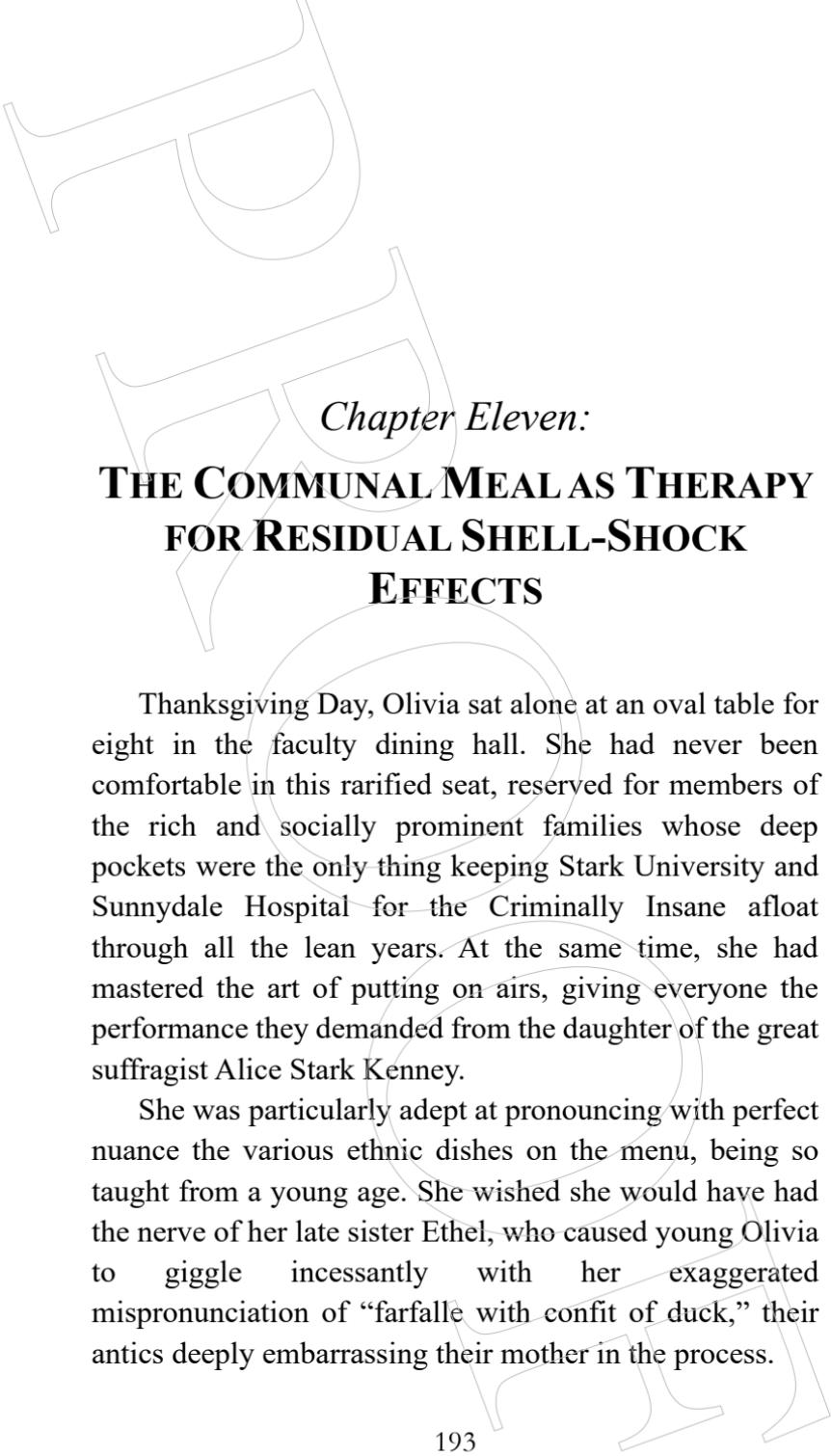
“Yes sir.” Jacob welled up in contrition. “I’m sorry sir, truly. What can I do to make amends?”

“Put that lumber to good use. I expect signs posted this afternoon. ‘Rehearsals closed to outsiders.’ ”

Jacob nodded.

With a pat on the head, Limpwick dismissed him to work on his signs. If there was still time later this afternoon, he told him, he could continue work on his sets.

\$



Chapter Eleven:

**THE COMMUNAL MEAL AS THERAPY
FOR RESIDUAL SHELL-SHOCK
EFFECTS**

Thanksgiving Day, Olivia sat alone at an oval table for eight in the faculty dining hall. She had never been comfortable in this rarified seat, reserved for members of the rich and socially prominent families whose deep pockets were the only thing keeping Stark University and Sunnysdale Hospital for the Criminally Insane afloat through all the lean years. At the same time, she had mastered the art of putting on airs, giving everyone the performance they demanded from the daughter of the great suffragist Alice Stark Kenney.

She was particularly adept at pronouncing with perfect nuance the various ethnic dishes on the menu, being so taught from a young age. She wished she would have had the nerve of her late sister Ethel, who caused young Olivia to giggle incessantly with her exaggerated mispronunciation of “farfalle with confit of duck,” their antics deeply embarrassing their mother in the process.

Olivia quickly finished her meal and headed to the ladies room, changed her clothes, wiped off her makeup, and when the coast was clear, put on her hairnet and began her volunteer shift in the patient dining hall, a place where no one knew her family history, nor expected a performance out of her, only the right amount of turkey gravy to cover their lumpy mashed potatoes.

She continued to ladle gravy for the steady stream of patients and the occasional nurse from the holiday's skeleton staff. Although only patients with a history of non-violent behavior were to be allowed unattended into the dining area, there were two security guards available in the hall if things got dicey.

Unlike the other kitchen crew, who could be jittery and anxious around patients, Olivia always felt safe. In fact, she quickly recognized irrational fear within herself, making use of it to an extent and discarding the excess. She learned as a teenage volunteer nurse during World War I that a certain amount of fear kept her aware, working both as a safety mechanism and to better sense patients' moods and impulses. From experience, she knew potentially violent patients with hallucinatory demands and fears preyed on nurses who were prone to hysterics. Through the years, Olivia learned the best way to allay the fears was to remain in possession of one's faculties, to imagine all contingencies, and to have a plan of action to execute without emotion.

Many of the younger nurses on staff at Sunnydale had difficulty coping with fear. Some had even suggested mixing sedatives into the food on short-staffed days, when they felt more vulnerable to the violent lunges and

outbursts of patients, but the idea had never been seriously considered. The paranoids in their care already had a hard time believing their meals were not, in fact, laced with poison. However, without Elias around to prevent it, the patients would have been more medicated today than usual, but by more traditional methods (which he personally objected to but did not fight as a policy matter).

Fear would have been an easy emotion from her vantage point behind the counter, where Olivia couldn't help overhearing the most interesting and terribly disturbing conversations between patients at nearby tables. Today a boisterous Iwo Jima survivor was having a one-sided interchange with a transfer from Washington's St. Elizabeth, a soldier she knew to be relatively fresh out of Korea.

"They called me yellow belly too," said the not-so-old World War II marine. "But I never had the shakes. Not like you got."

The transfer patient replied with a casual shrug, or as casual a shrug as he could muster with a jerking and trembling body.

Olivia thought back to the dinner conversation with Elias and Jacob two weeks prior. "Fine men, gallant," Elias had remarked. "Selfless and brave, uncomplaining. Suffered terribly." Olivia remembered Waldo, "Doughboy, Hero of Belleau Wood," and that summer of the relapse, the sweating, the asphyxiating nightmares, the limb paralysis, the stuttering, the fear she saw deep in his eyes before he finally went away.

Belleau, Olivia remembered yet again. Beautiful water. Beautiful, bloody water. The nurses called it the backwash of war. . . .

“Hello again,” Lena said, breaking Olivia’s trance. The nurse in line beside her was smirking, and Lena herself seemed to be struggling to keep a straight face. Lena was the last hospital employee she expected to see today, with her reputation for absences, especially on holidays. Olivia must have looked especially ridiculous in her hairnet, but she was careful not to reveal any of her embarrassment. She remained in possession of her faculties.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” Olivia said perfunctorily toward the young nurse. “Gravy?”

“Two ladles, please.” Lena pronounced “ladles” with snobby relish.

Olivia obliged with a cool smile. Something must be up to bring Lena in on a holiday. Such dedication was unusual for a nurse who only recently compared the patients under her care to livestock. Olivia wondered if Lena’s numerous reprimands were beginning to have the desired effect on her attitude.

With no one else in line, Olivia busied herself by stirring the pot. Lena was probably unaware that she could hear every word she said to her companion nurse.

“You were saying,” the other nurse said, “about the extra cash.”

“Oh, yes, the cash is good.”

“Count me in.”

It seemed Lena had been recruiting more nurses to the experimental drug study that Woodthorpe had been

pushing. Perhaps, Olivia thought, Lena's renewed interest in her profession was related to the study.

"I probably shouldn't be shooting my mouth off," Lena continued, "but they are so desperate for outside volunteers (rather, paid participants) that they have started looking through lists of patients at Stark's psych ward."

"You don't say," the other nurse replied. "Where did you hear that?"

"From that new girl who just started working at the Canteen. She's a psych patient herself."

Interesting, Olivia thought. She interviewed the girl herself, and the important fact of her being a psych patient was left out of her volunteer profile. She must have known that present and former Sunnydale patients were more rigorously screened than other applicants.

Before Olivia knew it, a stack of trays crashed to the floor, and everyone in the hall, including the two war vets, Lena, and Lena's nurse companion, looked straight at Olivia as the likely culprit. Olivia looked down at the ground behind her feet. Perhaps she was at fault. How careless, she thought. One tray was chipped, but the rest appeared to be intact.

Lena, perhaps made more aware of the room's acoustics by the accident, dropped to a low, inaudible whisper for the remainder of her gossip session. The other tables followed suit. A security guard had heard the noise from the hallway and came to inspect the ruckus. The only sound now was that of Olivia and the guard picking up the pieces, with Olivia wondering to herself about the truth behind Canteen girl with the incomplete application.

The next morning, Friday, Olivia headed straight to the Canteen to find Rebekah (as the girl insisted to be called in her interview, not Becky) had arrived for her first 8 a.m. shift, to Olivia's great relief.

Olivia greeted her. "Good morning, Rebekah."

"Good morning, Mrs. Shaw," she replied, blushing almost on command.

"*Olivia*, by all means," Olivia said.

The girl smiled with a shy sideways glance.

This dewy girl with flaxen pageboy tresses claimed her age to be nineteen in her application, but Olivia wondered if it were just another lie. Underneath the metal folding chair in the back was a tattered yellow rucksack, packed to bursting with what looked suspiciously like textbooks. What would a woman of nineteen be doing with a so many high school textbooks?

The posting had been up on the clinic's bulletin board for weeks with only one other applicant, a pretty staffer by the name of Penny (or was it Peggy?), who quit a few weeks prior after only a few days in training. She had simply stopped showing up. Olivia had heard rumors, unverified, that she was sent out west to live with an aunt after becoming pregnant. Olivia was tempted to call for conscripts, but then young Rebekah came along, her eyes full of youthful idealism. Olivia was reminded of a young Elias, who, despite being turned away by the AEF, refused to wallow in his impotence and instead continued in the volunteer spirit that in most others only sprang up in times of war and popular crises.

Sure, the girl was not everything she said she was, but Olivia could use any warm volunteer body she could scrounge, even a sometime truant and psych clinic patient. Here, at a time when nurses and other staff had shown no eagerness to go above and beyond, was a willing volunteer. Nor would Olivia dare blow the girl's cover. At the same time, Olivia would have find out more about her, find out if there were any skeletons in her closet, if she could in good conscience allow her to come into contact with patients, and frequently without her direct supervision.

Rebekah looked nervous, this being training day, her first day on the job. Olivia thanked her for arriving on time, that such promptness was important to maintain a sense of routine for the patients.

"Yeah," Rebekah replied, "I'm sure there are more than a few who would break down if it you're a minute late. They want their banana at eight o'clock, sharp."

Olivia was pleased by her immediate understanding of the situation. Her predecessor Penny might have said the same thing, but with heavy sarcasm. Penny's goading, provocative air was of a kind that could unleash uncontrollable emotions in those patients especially sensitive to airs of superiority, patients like Mr. Otto. But Penny had showed no ability to curb this tendency. Had she not quit the position, Olivia probably would have dismissed her if only for her own safety. If not countervailed, Penny's attitude threatened to result in a repeat of the famous lamp assault on Miss Brigid four years ago by Mr. Otto. Olivia was certain things would go better with Rebekah, who seemed like a sweet girl beneath her veil of secrecy.



Figure 11. *Rebekah's eyes were full of youthful idealism.*

Then Mr. Luchresi, the first customer of the day, arrived at his usual time, three minutes after eight. This diminutive but deceptively strong patient was attended closely to the rear by three large male attendants, and with good reason. Years ago, such a man would never have been allowed in such proximity of two females, but in this modern era of psychiatry, Mr. Luchresi's violent tendencies were well understood and easily thwarted. He was not as quick as he used to be, and the cashier station was partially shielded by double-thick glass.

"Orange," Luchresi grunted, with nary a hint of his native tongue.

Without looking to Olivia for direction, Rebekah replied, "That'll be one job ticket, I mean, coupon."

The transaction, Rebekah's first, went smoothly. She might prove to be a natural.

And so it went, throughout the remainder of that day and the next, Rebekah performed beautifully with hardly any supervisory intervention by Olivia. The dedicated young girl showed up promptly at eight on Saturday, and noon Sunday to begin her afternoon shift. Pleasant conversations filled the time between the occasional patient looking to exchange job coupons for one of the Canteen's various sundry items: assorted fresh fruit, throat lozenges, pencils, watercolor paints, Buz Sawyer and Flash Quarterly comic books and pulp detective stories, but no cigarettes and nothing sharper than stick pins on the hand-crafted costume jewelry by one of Sunnydale's more creative art class students . . . a surprisingly popular gift item for those eagerly awaiting the next visit from Mom or

sis, but more commonly, for those feeling chivalric toward a favorite pretty nurse.

“Day three,” Olivia commented to the girl. “And still showing up.”

“I wouldn’t miss it, Olivia,” Rebekah replied. “It’s very satisfying, helping out these poor, sick people.”

“You aren’t nervous about working around the criminally insane?”

Rebekah shrugged. “We’ve got this,” she said, tapping the double-thick glass. “We’ve got guards, big, muscular guarded. And you’re here to protect me, too.”

This girl was quite charming, if naïve.

“What do you like to do in your spare time?” Olivia asked.

“I don’t have a lot of spare time,” Rebekah replied. “But I like to write poetry.”

“Oh? Do you have any in your bag?”

Rebekah looked almost ashamed, like someone with a deep secret she mustn’t confess. “No, not really.”

Olivia knew how a young girl’s poetry could be more personal than a diary. To have it discovered could be every bit as painful as a physical violation. Although the writing would be an important clue to Rebekah’s true identity, Olivia would not press her without first earning her trust.

But before Olivia could let Rebekah run the counter unsupervised for long stretches, she would have to find out more about her in a way that did not blow the girl’s cover and scare off the most dedicated volunteer she had seen in quite some time.

Later on, after the girl’s shift, Olivia headed over to the psychiatric clinic where the head clerk was nowhere to

be seen, and the door to the patient records was unlocked. Not surprising. Olivia checked the records for a girl matching Rebekah's profile. After an exhaustive hour, a few paper cuts, and numerous close calls, she ruled out the possibility of Rebekah as the girl's real name.

"Rebekah" had already shown a tremendous eagerness to please her superiors in her commendable work at the Canteen counter, but was so trusting a young girl too easily exploited? Was this school-girl recruited to join the drug study without knowing all the facts? Did her parents know?

Olivia had no choice but to go to the nurse who unwittingly tipped her off. She would have to corner Lena at the next opportunity.

§

The Monday morning sun reflected a slanting glare upon the filth-blotted windows of Wilmington's ancient Pennsylvania Railroad Station, where Limpwick awaited the train carrying Beatrice Grant. While he harbored no false expectations for an encouraging report on Ana, it was his parental duty to know.

A less-than-grand, decades-old second class hotel dominated the view outside the station. It was hardly worth the effort of straining one's eyes. Limpwick soon grew impatient and stepped out into the open air to stretch his legs and escape the compressed stench of the station into the more diluted aroma of Wilmington. He wished he still smoked; the inelegant air could use the gentleman-like odor of a pipe.

Meanwhile, shifty-eyed bellhops outside the hotel appeared less than eager to assist the vagabond mass from the previous train. The crowd, which swelled as if by magic, threatened to crush the concierge, the doorman, and each other in their desperate appeals for attention. One man in the middle chattered uncontrollably, flailing his body this way and that with raised arms like a mad traffic cop; a bulging-eyed woman pressed against him and stiffened, paralyzed with a look of fear and fascination at the surrounding irrationality; others allowed themselves to be overpowered and pushed inward with a casual orderliness, their stoicism a kind of defiance.

It was comic, depressing, and utterly fascinating. Limpwick found it harder and harder to focus on any one face in the swirling hoard as it churned like a smoking witch's broth in the damp air. The scene drove him to meditation on the idea of cosmological meaningfulness, the power to raise the sun and lower the moon, a power lost when one was expelled from the mythic world by knowledge and self-awareness. He wished again for his pipe.

Finally breaking his trance by the power of will, Limpwick fidgeted for his pocket watch. It told him he had only been waiting at the station for a mere five minutes. He could have sworn Eddie dropped him off twenty or thirty minutes ago.

Then, from the not-so-distant north came the rumbling of the train carrying his informant. It pulled up to the platform and the doors slid back. Out tumbled the next batch of weary travelers, some heading methodically on their way, others, looking around completely awestruck

and lost. To them, this was the big city. They had struggled all there lives to get here, and now, here they were. What now, they must have been thinking. Limpwick suddenly felt empathy toward them in the form of discomfort, characterized by a tightening of the sphincter. In his struggle to dislodge the thought, he farted.

No, Limpwick didn't expect any real satisfaction from Beatrice's report on Ana. a girl who committed one act of filial defiance after another; one who would kick chairs out from under her own father; who would forsake the surname of her childbirth, opting for the more dignified one of her grandmother and late mother; who preferred the unwashed company of that class of youngsters who distrusted all authority figures as "breakers of free will" and "psycho-analytical rapists."

Limpwick trusted a skilled and experienced observer like Beatrice to record the slightest improvements in Ana's behavior in her report. Any progress would bring an equal measure of peace of mind to Limpwick, but he knew from his professional experience it was likely to come in only fractions of an inch over the course of weeks, months, possibly years. After all, it hadn't even been two weeks since Limpwick's latest parenting debacle, when he had the audacity to ask Ana for the name of the man who would turn such an innocent suckling into his tarted-up wench.

Then he saw Beatrice step off of the train. Limpwick did not immediately approach, but stood back among the crowd to observe. This woman, in the same league as Nurse Levenwell in her faithful servitude to God, had a face full of conflict (perhaps in anxiety over her sick sister Cordelia) but with the alertness that came from her forty-year career

as court stenographer. Although she could try one's patience with her clicking tongue and unwelcome advice, she was someone who understood the importance of promptness, correct habits, and integrity of character. She was one who, if not especially worldly, was full of that faculty known as common sense. Such a faculty would have been used to great advantage in her former line of work. One so possessed as she understood that everything in a case must be reported, and memoranda should be made of all evidence before her. She was attentive, adept, and efficient in her ability to derive morsels of important truths from the stew of gossip and hearsay typical of most court cases.

Beatrice spotted him and motioned him to help her with her bags. Limpwick hurried over and obliged. Her first words to him were a warning: "Don't drop 'em, you'll bruise 'em." Limpwick knew how those bellboys across the street came to be so jaded.

They went inside and found seats on a wooden bench. Limpwick let Beatrice carry on and lament about her sister's worsening condition. Limpwick didn't rush her; he did not dare offend his prize informant. Her ride wasn't coming for a while, so there would be plenty of time to discuss Ana once the current topic was exhausted.

"O.K.," said Beatrice twenty minutes later. "Ana." She sniffed back tears, reaching into her purse and pulling out a crumpled leaf of paper. "I am not going to read this to you," she said. "You'll have to read it for yourself."

Limpwick was nervous to read something that had Beatrice this troubled. He half expected murderous threats or unspeakable vulgarities, but was relieved to find Ana

had merely penned some poetry. Beatrice needn't have worried. Far from vulgar, it was a voice he never expected from his daughter, one sophisticated beyond its years, inventive, inquisitive, hopeful for unity in a shattered world. Perhaps he had not given her enough credit. Perhaps her tough-minded refusal to acquiesce in orthodoxies had a basis in careful reflection.

Beatrice searched his eyes for a response, finally blurting, "Your professional opinion, please?"

Limpwick shrugged, handing it back. "Like I told you before, normal adolescent rebellion."

Beatrice swatted the paper away, clearly not satisfied by his answer. "What kind of shrink are you? This is a sick girl, a sick mind, badly in need of treatment."

Limpwick shook his head, realizing now the err of his previous parental ways. "No, not treatment. Patience and support of her and her honest creative expressions." He folded the poem and placed it in his vest pocket.

Beatrice bubbled and then explodes, "That's not what a psychiatrist says!"

"Well," Limpwick coolly responded, "I'm a psychiatrist, and that is what I say."

"No," Beatrice clarified, "I mean, specifically, that is not what her psychiatrist says. The one she sees on a regular basis."

Limpwick was flabbergasted. Ana in psychotherapy? He had no idea. "A psychiatrist . . . for how long?"

"About a year."

"What is his name?"

Beatrice shook her head, adamant. "I can't tell you. You probably know him."

Just then, a horn honked, the hour having passed. It was her ride, a nephew, grandson, perhaps the son of her sister's neighbor. Beatrice clearly recognized him, but did not bother introducing Limpwick to him, or vice versa. It was as if there was a hidden shame in her meeting with Limpwick. Or was it his name, so queer-sounding and undignified her own granddaughter disavowed it. Did Beatrice herself resist even speaking it? Had she encouraged Ana to forswear "Limpwick" as her surname? Perhaps he was reading too much into the slight (deliberate or otherwise) but such was his nature. It might have lacked a basis in reason, but if so, he had to work it out. Moreover, self-analysis was an obligation of his profession, and he made no apologies to himself or anyone else for his continual practice of it. In fact, he made a mental note to return to this topic at a future reflective moment, however irrational.

The driver, sans introduction, jumped out of the car, rushed past Limpwick, and hurriedly loaded the luggage into the trunk. Then Limpwick remembered a couple important items he meant to discuss with Beatrice before she left to visit her sick sister. With no time to lose, he scribbled a note on a gum wrapper. Before her driver could shut her door, Limpwick grabbed Beatrice's elbow and folded the note into her hand.

Beatrice glanced at the bottom of the note. Limpwick sensed her confusion. "Can't read it?"

"No, I read it fine."

"Oh, camisole is another term for strait jacket."

That wasn't it. Beatrice pointed to the name at the bottom, and Limpwick explained why he needed her to

contact Woodthorpe. She understood, or said she did. He hoped she did, because it couldn't wait another month.

Her driver was getting antsy, so Limpwick traded parting words with her, and the car sped away. He wondered how next time he might turn Beatrice's skills at inquisition around on her. He would have to extract that psychiatrist's name out of her. He simply had to know who was treating his daughter. It was his parental duty.

§

On Monday night, after having waited several hours previously agreed-upon corner for no sign of Eddie, Limpwick moved on to the nearby Greyhound station. There was one last bus out of Wilmington that, if he was reading the map correctly, would pass in the vicinity of the retreat.

Limpwick learned another valuable lesson about Eddie that day: he could be a dependable ride into town, but there were no promises of a ride out. For when Eddie was left to his own devices, Wilmington's pool-hall districts, where his kind could get lost for hours in inebriation, were impossible for him to resist. He could hardly blame Eddie for this classic pattern behavior.

By now Limpwick was too weary to expend any effort on the excitable tourist seated next to him. He planted his nose in the bus schedule and pretended not to hear, but it was to little avail against so persistent a pest. Limpwick fought hard to hide his passive aggressiveness, nodding at the imbecile, pretending to hang on his every word like a punch-drunk boxer to his corner manager, and returned the

schedule pamphlet to his vest pocket in resignation. Even this was too much effort, for his hunger pangs were making Limpwick especially irritable. He would have to remember to bring food money in the future.

Without Eddie as a reliable ride out, there would be several hours to kill between his meetings with Beatrice and when the bus out of Wilmington arrived. On the bright side, there would also be plenty of time to explore the seedier parts of the city. The purported opium dens of Wilmington's slums were of particular interest, for there existed a feast of low-ebbed human nature to observe.

After circling the Brandywine Valley between Philadelphia and Washington and offering a glimpse of the gilded estates and gardens of America's great industrialists, the bus finally arrived to its stop nearest the retreat. It was terribly dark, and Limpwick could only get so far on his memory of the roadway. He managed to talk the driver into rolling up to within walking distance, a quarter-mile or so up the road, with the little change remaining in his pocket as a convincer. He made a mental note to budget this into future trips to avoid being stranded on moonless nights.

Limpwick arrived to find Jacob at the staging area enclosed in the signage he earlier directed him to create. He was not disappointed by his young charge; if anything, he was overwhelmed to find the area practically gated in by a barricade of large wooden placards reading "REHEARSALS CLOSED TO OUTSIDERS." The only light in his sealed-in world was the flickering kerosene lamp. Gone from Jacob's face was the dour longing, now replaced by an almost giddy diligence. Obviously, Jacob had gotten the message.

There he sat on his work-stool, underdressed for the weather, a bronze figure of reticence, sensitive and meticulous, carving details (perhaps leaves of grass?) into the base of a set piece, adjusting the lantern at every inch of his progress.

Limpwick moved toward Jacob to announce his presence. He stepped only a few paces when the flickering light revealed not one, but three faces smiling back at Limpwick. Standing calm and un-self-conscious as could be, seeming to enjoy the night's performance by Jacob, was the couple from before. Apparently they did not see themselves as outsiders, and thus believed themselves exempt from the prohibition. Jacob, no doubt, had done his worst to foster this mistaken impression. Limpwick was not too tired to see the elements of textbook co-dependency in the scene playing out before him. This couple represented the "hostile neighbor," the wolf, the savage beast, driven by incest, cannibalism, and lust for killing, the kind who would exploit one's capacity for neighborliness, who would just as easily seize one's possessions, humiliate him, cause him pain. Jacob, being gentle and friendly, was incapable of recognizing the affront for what it is, and was therefore unable to defend himself. Fearing the loss of the couple's love were he to enforce the proscription upon them, he had retreated into his work. Thus, the diligence Limpwick was witnessing on Jacob's part that night was really nothing more than a defense mechanism, and a false one at that.

Jacob, who seemed now to have gotten wise to Limpwick's ire, if uncertain at the cause, glanced toward the couple. They, too, seemed to have gotten the hint from

the look on his face, and quickly went about there way with mumbled parting words and a joint polite nod. Limpwick returned the nod, as would any good neighbor disarming a hostile one, but once they passed out of the area he dropped the façade.

Jacob stood and froze in attention. “Sir, they have been very helpful,” he blurted. “The wife, J-J-Jenny, offered to pick up groceries for us.” Limpwick held back a response, deliberate in his intention to drill the lesson deep into Jacob’s anxiety, which was expressed, as was usual, through incessant jabbering and yammering on. “They believed us to be a theatre company, and are excited for the rebirth of an art that is lost to this area. It is difficult for me to turn them away at the height of their g-g-generosity without revealing our true purpose. We wouldn’t want th-th-that.”

“No, we wouldn’t want that,” Limpwick said, directing Jacob to put aside his work on sets for the time being. Again, he felt his energy depleted, and decided to conclude the lesson later. And besides, he was already close to Jacob’s anxious inner core and didn’t want a complete meltdown. “Let’s go inside. I could use a cozy fire.”

Jacob’s breast swelled at the proposition. “Yes, sir,” he said, clearly relieved to be absolved, if only for the moment. “There is something waiting there for you.”

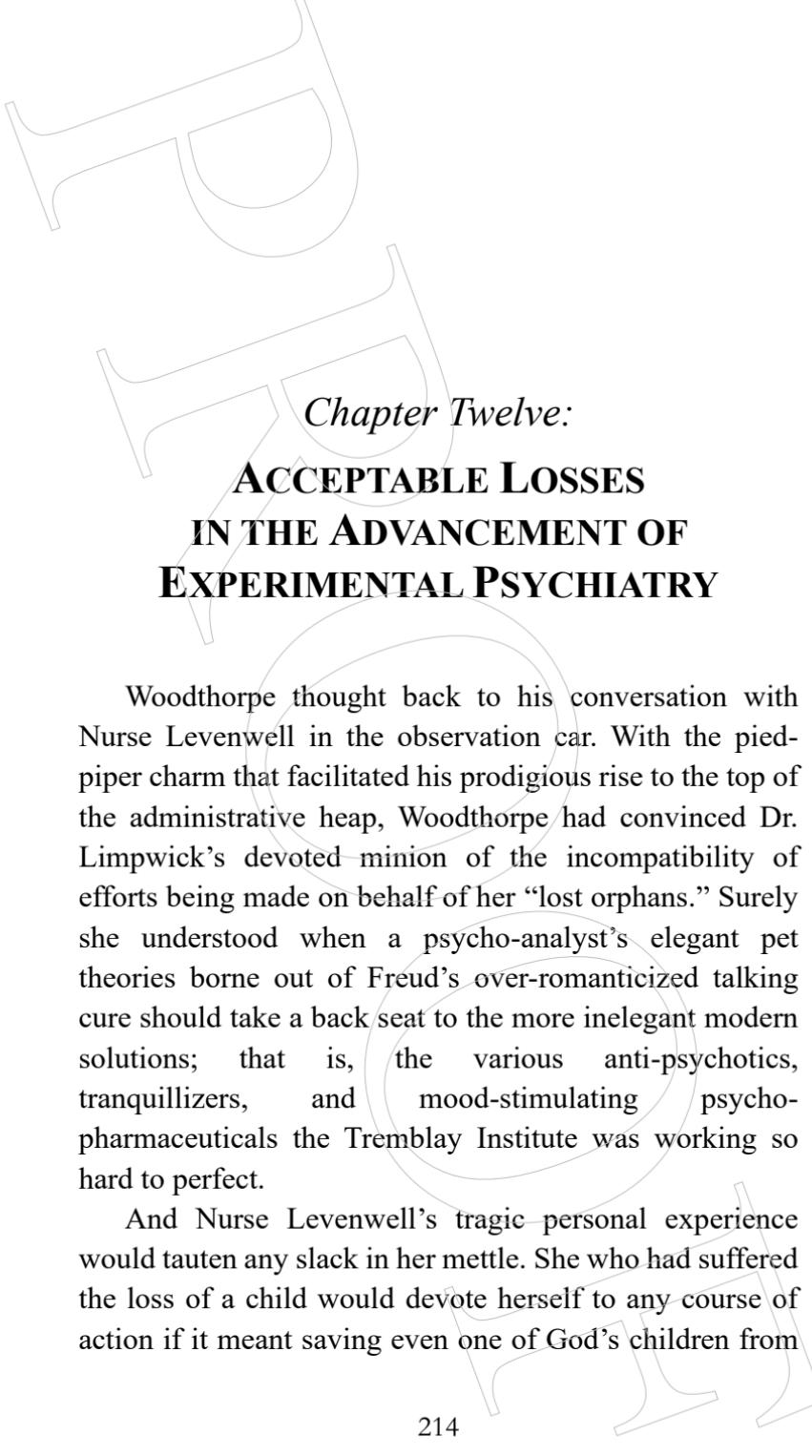
Limpwick’s interest was piqued. They proceeded inside, where the soft red glow of a freshly lit fire beckoned in the hearth room. Jacob pointed to a newspaper sitting on the ottoman. “Howard . . . that’s the husband’s name . . . thought we’d be interested in events back home. Like I

said, they only want to be helpful. Anyway, he found it at an out-of-the-way newsstand.”

How generous, Limpwick thought. He picked it up off the ottoman and in one motion flopped himself into the oversized chair, which seemed to envelop him. Jacob moved to his side and hovered, perhaps waiting for some sort of positive reaction.

Limpwick opened the paper, blinked to adjust his eyes, and realized the cause for Jacob’s eagerness. His Aunt Olivia had made the paper. Olivia’s family used to dominate the society section, so Limpwick normally glossed over it. This time, however, he did a double take at the headline: “Rich Benefactress Donates Sum for Experimental Research.”

Jacob appeared giddy by the news. Limpwick, quite the opposite, slumped back in his chair. He resisted his urge to toss the paper aside in disgust and risk upsetting the sensitive boy even more, particularly in his moment of pride over his aunt, however misplaced it was. He didn’t want a meltdown.



Chapter Twelve:

**ACCEPTABLE LOSSES
IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF
EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHIATRY**

Woodthorpe thought back to his conversation with Nurse Levenwell in the observation car. With the pied-piper charm that facilitated his prodigious rise to the top of the administrative heap, Woodthorpe had convinced Dr. Limpwick's devoted minion of the incompatibility of efforts being made on behalf of her "lost orphans." Surely she understood when a psycho-analyst's elegant pet theories borne out of Freud's over-romanticized talking cure should take a back seat to the more inelegant modern solutions; that is, the various anti-psychotics, tranquillizers, and mood-stimulating psycho-pharmaceuticals the Tremblay Institute was working so hard to perfect.

And Nurse Levenwell's tragic personal experience would tauten any slack in her mettle. She who had suffered the loss of a child would devote herself to any course of action if it meant saving even one of God's children from

the fate worse than death. She who had paid the cruelest of prices herself knew more than anyone that such sacrifices were not to be redeemed on this earth.

Woodthorpe trusted his skill in rhetorical gamesmanship to similarly impress upon the benefactress Olivia Shaw that her generous donation should be put to better use, nay, the best of all possible uses. Although known still to share an occasional “smoke of the corona” with Dr. Limpwick, this sensible daughter of Stark College’s founding family understood that the combination of good administration and good commerce, unburdened by pet psycho-analytical theories, were what keep hospitals afloat.

He stood for a few seconds in the doorway of Limpwick’s abandoned office, the lights humming behind him, then darted a few yards into his own office doorway before hesitating. A pair of security guards argued furiously down the corridor, taking no notice of their administrator as they passed. He could not recall seeing these two before, although he always made a point of trying to meet all new hires. Perhaps in this case he signed off on the two of them in a fit of formality when his mind was on something else. He felt a tinge of regret. These two looked to be of a particularly plebeian stock, the type of working class, slum-dwelling immigrants in dirty clinging work-clothes that photographers used to document back in the days of heavy plate cameras on tripods.

Much like the magnesium flares that would have illuminated the grime of their turn-of-the-century hovels for the future study of urban anthropologists, the hospital’s bright fluorescence reflected from their badges onto their

etched and bony faces with a nearly perfect, almost religious patina.

Woodthorpe had received the message earlier that day. Tremblay would be arriving later than usual, flatland blizzards having delayed his red-eye from Chicago. But once the storm system hit the Delaware Valley, Tremblay wouldn't be too far behind. The eastward movement of the storms meant more of the same measured, intense rains that had made this the wettest year in memory. Woodthorpe had learned to accept the weather cycle with the same unease as his own mortality. He felt that familiar itch in his throat again, the itch that never failed to remind him of the consequences of failure.

A part of him might have suspected the guards to be Tremblay henchmen, checking up on him. It was not so delusional, considering the measures his father was reputed to have taken against his blood enemies, particularly those who once tried to expose his petroleum cancer cure as a fraud. That the stories were unverified only meant there were no witnesses.

Woodthorpe continued down the hall, trying to shake his nerves, until he was standing outside the chapel, its stone façade a gray pleasantness within the otherwise antiseptic yellow-green surroundings. He would remain outside the chapel door all day if he had to, to greet Mr. Tremblay the moment of his arrival. He knew it was foolish to make Tremblay wait, ever. Funny, he thought, how Tremblay, a lapsed Catholic, insisted on meeting in this House of God, a dark and cold place of inviolability. Perhaps he thought the temple could best inspire the signature Tremblay mix of fear, repulsion, and admiration.

Of course, he wouldn't even consider a place of refuge and security such as the lounge or, God forbid, Woodthorpe's office.

Minutes later, another set of footsteps; this time the hospital chaplain, who nodded his rain-soaked head at Woodthorpe in greeting while pushing through the heavy wooden door to enter the chapel. The rains had now come.

Another half hour passed before Woodthorpe was startled by a thud and crash around the corner, followed by a Punch-and-Judy shadow play of tangled bodies on the far wall. Angry voices and curses rose up, "Why dern't youse watch where youse is walking, sheet-ball!" To which that instantly recognizable Deus voice responded with, "Goddammit, heads will roll."

Silence, then, reverberating over the sound of tentative footsteps audibly scampering away, came another set Woodthorpe had deduced could only be that of Tremblay. If those cretin guards were in fact on Tremblay's payroll, then they would have an idea about his reputation, and would be in fear for their lives by now. That Tremblay would even bother with those two disposable stiff's was laughable. Not so for someone in Woodthorpe's position as administrator. He batted down for what he knew (or more accurately, did not know) was coming his way from down the corridor.

"What kind of fucking operation are you running here!" Tremblay bellowed. Woodthorpe had rarely seen Tremblay so fierce and determined to do bodily harm.

It took a minute for the words to come. "Mister Tremblay!" he finally uttered, almost wheezing. "I'm so glad to see you again!" Woodthorpe realized by the

objectifying look of utter contempt on Tremblay's face that perhaps his greeting had been a little tone-deaf, too warm to sound sincere.

Then Tremblay, to Woodthorpe's surprise, managed a sly grin. For some reason, he seemed in a good mood, like a mad Irishman after a reinvigorating scrap. That did nothing to ease Woodthorpe's concern. His nerves remained on edge, for he knew the pendulum would swing back, and when it did, he would bear the brunt of it.

Perhaps those guards knew what they were doing in knocking Tremblay down, rattling the lion's cage before unleashing him upon the martyr-in-waiting.

But what had Woodthorpe done for them to have it so in for him? Paranoia on the mind was nothing to go into a meeting with this Machiavellian puppet-master, so he did his best to imagine the whole incident away.

Woodthorpe opened the chapel door for Tremblay to pass through. The chaplain was at the altar, shuffling around the various items of ritual. He did not look up from his daily routine. Woodthorpe knelt next to Tremblay in a middle pew. They both moved their lips and pretended to pray until the chaplain left. Their meeting could now begin. Woodthorpe knew the sooner he broke the silence the less likely he would face harm at Tremblay's hands. At the same time, he worried small talk would put him at greater peril, so he considered his next words carefully.

"I am sorry about those guards," he said. "They always seem to be in a hurry to get to the next cigarette break, to the point of carelessness. Perhaps the drugs in our latest stock could help them with their nervous energy."

Tremblay's face reddened. He obviously did not appreciate Woodthorpe's attempt at levity. "What in the fuck are you trying to say? Are you going to waste our test drugs on them?"



Figure 12. *He seemed in a good mood, like a mad Irishman after a reinvigorating scrap.*

“No sir, not if you object. The guards can be part of the placebo control group, if you wish.”

“I don’t care how you do your research, but you need to step it up.”

“Well sir, we are working on various mixes, ‘cocktails,’ of medication, with some talk therapy thrown in for good measure.”

“That sounds like a ridiculous waste of time to include *that* in the experiment.”

Woodthorpe could sense the passive aggression building within Tremblay, so he called on all the rhetorical skill he can muster. “Our method must remain unbiased, or at least appear unbiased, even toward the more ridiculous variables such as the talking cure that, for whatever reason, are accepted by the medical community, if we hope to eliminate them from future consideration.”

This somewhat rambling answer seemed to have satisfied Tremblay for the time being. For the remainder of the meeting, Woodthorpe was able to keep the focus on the new facts in the Limpwick situation, problems such as what to do about the neighbors that were disrupting things for Limpwick at the retreat, whether it was a good thing or a bad thing, whether they were taking too much interest in Patient Q, whether they had the potential to unravel their whole scheme. From previous encounters, Woodthorpe knew how fanatically this couple had been about reviving local theatre, and thus, could be relentlessly curious about all the hopeful activity around the resort’s stage.

Tremblay shook his head. “This is our industry’s Manhattan Project, and that couple is obviously on the dole of our competition. If there is anything my father taught

me, it is that corporate spies are to be dealt with harshly, and with great dispatch.”

Woodthorpe understood the implications of Tremblay’s words and nodded. Without knowing it, the overly curious couple had made Tremblay’s list of blood enemies. It was completely irrational and paranoid, and Woodthorpe knew it, but what could he do, report it to the authorities? That would be his own death sentence. So there before only God and Tremblay, he accepted his job of assuring there would be no witnesses.

Then a queer sensation overtook him. Part of him, to his rational horror, felt at ease with the idea of himself as a cold-blooded assassin. It was as if he had done it before, beginning with the compartmentalization of his killer identity, which he knew to be necessary for guilt suppression (or at least that’s what he remembered reading in one of Limpwick’s criminal psychology textbooks). Guilt meant death to the assassin (or at least that’s what he remembered reading in the pulp novels as a child). Thankfully, he was no Catholic, lapsed or otherwise. If there was any guilt, he wasn’t feeling it, at least not yet. Maybe it would come later, maybe afterward, after the deed was done. If this was supposed to be troubling, it wasn’t. It wasn’t even conflicting. Maybe he was going mad. Or was he just giddy? Maybe he was born to be an assassin. He didn’t care. It just was all so thrilling, certainly more thrilling than the usual administrative paperwork.

§

Dr. Limpwick cracked open a window to check on the racket outside. He sees that the rain turned to snow overnight, and the dramatic weather changes were stirring up beast and fowl alike. A pair of non-migratory birds drove off another pair from their nest atop the groundskeeper's shed. The less-hardy twosome would now have to search for its winter home elsewhere. Limpwick squinted to see that the victors were English sparrows, much to his dismay. He remembered reading once that after several pairs of this four-season territorial menace were introduced to Central Park a century ago, its population grew to plague the entire continent.

The sparrow introduction had not been the first well-intentioned act by man that went on to consume everything in its path, and would certainly not be the last. Limpwick was all too aware of himself being in the middle of just such an event. His neighbors surely meant well in expressing interest in the activity around the theatre through material donations and regular visits, but their increasingly rampant enthusiasm threatened to ruin everything. As an experiment, theatre therapy had to be carefully controlled, without outside interference, well-intentioned or otherwise. It was as if the devil himself had it in for theatre therapy, controlling fate by placing that couple in its path, just as Peupdish's original test of the method had been undermined when self-absorbed syndrome infected his cast. Not that he seriously suspected the devil, but it was uncanny just the same.

"Package at the front desk!" Eddie's voice boomed in his Cape-ender baritone that carried all the way from the base stairwell, traveling down the hall and into Limpwick's

room. It must be a well-exercised voice, thought Limpwick, working without an intercom all these years.

It displeased Limpwick to realize Eddie wouldn't be bringing the package up to his room. Apparently the level of service he could expect would remain at the low bar established by Eddie's drunken abandonment of him in Wilmington, getting lower and lower as the year dragged on. It was clear what little influence he wielded with Eddie, but he suspected Ethel might have something to offer on how her husband could best be handled. He made a note to discuss it with her at the next opportunity. If that didn't work, his contingency would be to go to Woodthorpe, but he would like to avoid that drastic step.

So Limpwick went to the front desk, and found the box's size and shape suggested the camisole he had requested Beatrice to track down. The old gal had come through.

An envelope was taped to the side of the box. Limpwick opened it. It contained a message, unsigned, but he recognized the handwriting as Woodthorpe's: "This will keep him under control" it said. Limpwick knew Woodthorpe to be insensitive to patients, and his levity about Q's case had always been particularly unwelcome. Particularly now.

Limpwick pondered the rapid turnaround in the mail: Today was Thursday, he made his request on Monday, and Beatrice would surely still be in Wilmington with her sick sister. It didn't seem possible, but he did not question the powers of Beatrice. She had been around long enough to know that wars were won or lost on the promptness of messengers. But then, a successful outcome could not be

had without the utter loyalty of informants. Limpwick found individuals with Beatrice's integrity of character to be the most difficult nuts to crack, which was why Limpwick knew he would have to be especially vigilant to garner from her the name of Ana's psychiatrist.

Limpwick carried the box up to his room, and hid it away. He didn't dare open it until there was an emergency, for fear Jacob would discover the strait-jacket inside. Like many younger psychiatrists who were inexperienced with such methods, he knew Jacob found the idea of forced restraint troubling. Others relative newcomers to the profession had petitioned for a complete ban, and the method had all but disappeared by now. But older psychiatrists like Limpwick understood it and considered it be a necessary option, albeit a measure of last resort.

A half hour later, he heard a knock. Perhaps it was that rogue Eddie coming to apologize for his mounting discourtesies. A momentary fantasy, as Limpwick discovered when he opened the door to find Jacob standing before him with a face so weary and devoid of color as to make him appear undead.

"Tough day building sets?" Limpwick asked.

"I have some news," Jacob muttered. "Terrible news, about the nice couple who donated the lumber."

Jacob told the details of the accident, the car sliding off an icy patch a few miles up the road into a lake, how they found the husband Howard's body in the partially submerged car, how his wife Jenny had jettisoned through the windshield far into the frigid water, thrown by the force of impact, how her body was yet to be recovered. Worse, presuming Jenny to be dead, they left behind an orphan.

“Danny,” he said, practically choking on the name. “He has grandparents nearby. I need to see them. I need to help.” He verged on collapsing.

Limpwick counseled him. “Give it time,” he said, a little ashamed of himself for having said it. He quickly forgave himself. Even an esteemed psychiatrist had the occasional lapse into canned advice, particularly when distracted, and more particularly when his mind had been so blown by such unthinkable events. And besides, there might have been no better advice to offer Jacob that moment. An adopted orphan himself, Limpwick understood why Jacob would feel such an immediate kinship to the similarly afflicted young boy, even one who had been but a stranger to him up till now.

Likewise, Limpwick had felt just such an affinity toward Jacob and all who, like himself, had been abandoned by fate at one time or another. Perhaps if he were to permit Jacob to invite the young boy to help with sets, posited as an honor to his parents’ memory, he could re-invigorate Jacob’s interest and re-direct everyone’s energies toward the greater good of the task at hand. This terrible accident could not have come at a better time.

§

Nurse Levenwell was troubled by the news that they wouldn’t be able to recover the young lady’s body until the spring thaw, and equally by another item Dr. Limpwick brought up during their morning briefing, that Jacob’s “interpersonal displacement” was manifesting itself in a profound connection to the tragedy, made worse by

“seasonal melancholy” and the close bond Jacob had been forming with the couple. Jacob had been flattered by their intense personal interest in the play, and toward his sets in particular. Thus, she agreed with Limpwick, that his loyal student would require all of her “nurturing support,” the kind that until now had been relegated to Q alone. She had plenty in reserve, she promised him.

For so gifted a nurturer to be childless might seem a cruel cosmic joke to some in her position, but Nurse Levenwell and she was not one to question His Divine Intent, and refused to wallow in self-pity. While some doctors went so far as to diagnose the heightened penchant for care-taking of others among barren woman to be “over-compensation as instrument of survival” necessary to “overcome their deep emotional emptiness,” she saw it as a test, and tried to mirror Christ’s response to the Devil in the desert. Helped by her Faith in God’s Plan, she turned it around into a positive, seeing her nurturing role as her special role, endowed by her Maker.

Nurse Levenwell could handle the nurturing thing, but another item from this morning’s briefing would require her womanly wiles to fix. Limpwick described a parcel that arrived a day or two ago, and it sounded suspiciously like the one she was expecting containing Q’s sedatives. He believed the “early-arriving,” “as-yet-unopened” package to contain a strait jacket. She gathered that Eddie had probably picked up the package while in town, that the post-master Jenkins had recognized him as her driver and someone who could be trusted. Jenkins must not have specified her by name before asking Eddie to deliver it to the resort (Nurse Levenwell had instructed Lena not to

specify an addressee, only to list the post office box, which Limpwick either did not notice or question when he picked it up at the front desk).

Or maybe he had, and Eddie deliberately made no mention of to whom the parcel belonged upon delivery, hoping to stir up an ownership dispute. It was how most wars were started, after all. She knew his type, one who enjoyed making trouble at every opportunity. His cheekiness knew no bounds, and it was a good thing he was unaware of what was inside. Perhaps the rascal would have found the sedatives to add a pleasing zest to his other intoxicants.

For now, Nurse Levenwell would have to beat Eddie to the strait-jacket upon its delivery at the roadside mailbox, then pull off a most delicate switcheroo. Failure on her part to do so meant more than facing the wrath of Limpwick upon his discovery of the forbidden sedatives; it would break a trust both of them held dear and sacred, and would most likely end their working relationship and any possibility for a successful outcome with Q. Therefore, she prayed that Limpwick would not witness any troubling warning signs in Q that might lead him to open the parcel.⁴

⁴In Dr. Limpwick's observations, Q had shown nothing but progress in the days since coming here, and was understanding his boundaries. Thankfully, he had not been there to witness Q's overzealous line reading with Nurse Levenwell earlier that morning, or he might have thought differently. She had been encouraging Q to "let loose" in his therapeutic acting, a misjudgment in retrospect. By playing a female counterpart role to his reading of the central character, her emotional attitude of calm, quiet, and self-assurance fell by the wayside, and she became very un-nurselike. The over-familiarity allowed Q's subconscious to become roused, provoking the release of memories he was ill-

Nurse Levenwell blamed the rascal Eddie for her current predicament. Had he never gotten his paws on the package, Q would have been medically sedated by now and this latest incident would never have happened. She blamed herself, too. She should have made it clear to the post-master Jenkins that none but herself were to receive her packages at that box. She would do so at the next opportunity.

Uncertain when she would be able to get to the sedatives, she wanted to avoid any possible delay in the next shipment. She would have to get in touch with Woodthorpe directly. The opportunity would come within the hour, when Limpwick stepped out for a walk with Jacob and Q, thus allowing her privacy on the hotel's one working telephone. Nurse Levenwell called Woodthorpe's office and was surprised by the unmistakable voice on the other end, that of Lena: "He's been out of town the last few days." Her voice sounded agitated. "Can I help you, Agnes?"

Nurse Levenwell resisted her first instinct, which was to ask if the patients were being properly cared now that they were under Lena's direct supervision; she thought it might sound distrusting of her underling to inquire only a couple weeks into her absence, and this was no time to let her anxieties get the best of her. Lena had already given

equipped to handle. Indeed, his excitement turned to confusion, and led him to initiate physical contact (something he had never done before). A nurse must never afford a patient such liberties lest his actions cross into physical violence. Although the act was a perfectly innocent one, borne out of dramatic technique and hardly out of aggression, a theatre novice such as Limpwick might not have seen it as such.

words of reassurance in recent correspondence. She would trust the Lord to intercede with Lena if intercession proved necessary; for now, the matter of the sedatives was first and foremost.

Perhaps Nurse Levenwell's own anxious thoughts made her read too much into Lena's initial agitation, for Lena now gave her a respectful attention without the usual prompting to do so. Remarkably, she remained quiet and attentive to the favor asked of her, and to her instructions for carrying it out, for nearly five minutes. Nurse Levenwell was pleased by the growing maturity her underling demonstrated; the training and oversight, and the higher standards Nurse Levenwell had always expected and demanded of her were clearly paying off. Perhaps this moment was the turning point toward her reaching her potential as a true leader among her Sunnydale colleagues. Quite pleased, indeed.

Before wrapping up, Nurse Levenwell made it clear that no one but Dr. Woodthorpe was to know about this conversation, as a matter of patient confidentiality. The young nurse "completely understood" her meaning. Nurse Levenwell would have thought this to be a feigned understanding, were this the old Lena. This time, she would defy the devil in her irrational anxieties and trust Lena's sentiment to be genuine. And the last thing Nurse Levenwell wanted to do was to question and risk offending this promising young nurse at a time in which she required her full cooperation. Lena was her only real lifeline to the hospital, Woodthorpe notwithstanding. As she had done so many times before, she would put it in God's hands, with absolute faith in his infinite wisdom.

Monday morning, Limpwick awakened in the cozy chair of the hearth room, the fire long since having gone out. He was less than cozy in the resultant dry air that now swarmed over his skin, irritating every pore, gnawing, tickling, and begging for him to scratch. He resisted.

Before he drifted off the night before, he and Jacob had been discussing the tradition of households where the chief concern was improvement of the human condition, where only self-improving talk was to be tolerated. He remembered explaining to his young charge how the corruption and subsequent extinction of this aspect of German lifestyle threatened to be the most enduring humanitarian disaster of the last war, worse than any corpse-laden hill or flattened village. As a conversational ideal for which to personally strive, this Teutonic life philosophy would have to be salvaged from the graveyard of anachronisms, its considerations restored and preserved from future disastrous corruptions of a historic scale that tended to neuter meaning.

He bit his lip, struggling to continue his resistance to scratch. It was everything one could do to master the eczematous itching. Throughout life, the itching had persisted in various forms. So, too, had the medicines. Creams, salves, ointments (all of them worked only temporarily, but there was nothing with the permanence one really hoped for. All of life's synthetic hopes) be they of the skin or mind, the crutch of alcohol, or medicinal tools for reaching artificial orgasm (equated only to illusory

hopes and dreams which imposed upon and depleted one's powers of real action and inquiry).

The need to exterminate all that stood in the way of self-pleasure and satisfaction was mankind's greatest weakness. Capitalistic forces fed off this condition. The elixirs they sold were anything but the cures they professed, but were instead pickling agents, part of a business strategy to safeguard and exploit the chronic pleasure-seeking among consumer masses. It was in the best financial interest to preserve slave-like obedience in minds, bodies, and souls otherwise inclined toward rebellion to that which sought to control them.

Limpwick had been watching one good and right-minded colleague after another fall at the well-heeled feet of shrewd business. He had always resisted assimilation, despite warning cries of irrelevance and his own momentary disenchantments. As Peupdish always said, one must keep his footing, must open the door from within, or have it thrust in one's face from without.

All glib wisdom aside, the situation at present required immediate action. The message would have to be delivered to Olivia straight away.

Limpwick took great pains to befog even the most general information about their whereabouts in his messages back home (no geography, not even weather details) and by having them delivered via another state's telegraph office, even the most ardent detective would have difficulty picking up the scent. Besides Granny Bea, who Limpwick trusts implicitly, only Woodthorpe knew where the train stopped, and only he knew the hotel's location. No one else could be given the slightest hint, especially Olivia.

One does not reveal such a secret to a dear friend, the kind of secret one's enemies would stop at nothing to decode.

Messages to Olivia would contain especially elaborate lies, composed of an utter coldness devoid of idle chit-chat and bereft of any hint of warmth. Feelings thus concealed should prevent the relapse of unrequited longing, thought Limpwick. Fair Olivia, once the older, wiser Psyche to Limpwick's naïf Cupid. He would have to stay strong, for in his weak moments, he still thought of her as a goddess, still tallish and curvy, similarly colored to her nephew, ivory skin, pale green eyes, variegated brown hair, but streaked with the occasional strand of silver-gray Jacob could hardly have understood the power of his beloved aunt's charms upon his mentor. Indeed, Limpwick would have to put on his bravest face, or risk giving the boy more false hope in his own illusory dream, more motley figures and bright prospects for which to bedaub the walls of his present theatrical prison, thus prolonging the spell of uselessness that has befallen Limpwick's youthful psycho-analytical assistant in the days since the accident.

Limpwick beckoned for Jacob by way of Ethel, who unlike her husband, obliged his requests without hesitation or complaint (he would put in a good word for her with Woodthorpe). When he appeared, Jacob was a ghostly shadow; his face winter pale, his posture that of a wounded fawn without a mother, his distant gaze evermore transfixed and introverted, He was in a sort of suspended pre-adolescence, his mind clearly benumbed in its refuge of faraway imaginings, of perpetual fairy-tales and pardoned morals. Limpwick wondered how last night's lesson on self-improvement could possibly have registered

given his current traumatized state. This was not good. Here they were, laboring on the verge of a new psychological epoch, the formative experience of a lifetime; how awful a serendipity for so promising an understudy to be stolen away from his senses at such a moment.

Limpwick affected a grin and welcomed the emotionally weary and delicate Jacob as one would a friend. They could both use one at that moment. He handed Jacob a bus schedule, a five-dollar bill, and a message for Olivia, hoping a new task might inch him back ever-so-slightly from fancy to pragmatic reality. His task was to travel across the state line to the nearest telegraph depot, to turn over the message, sealed, to the telegraph operator (of course he did not want him to read it, but did not want to arouse the fragile boy's curiosity with a prohibition). He covered every contingency and specificity: Jacob was to tell the operator that the message was one of utmost importance, and strict confidence was to be upheld. Thusly, the contents of the envelope, and the envelope itself, should be destroyed upon confirmation of a successful dispatch. Jacob was abandon the mission if the operator seemed untrustworthy. He should be mindful of one who appears less than sober in one's duty to carry out his customer's simple wish to have an envelope and its contents destroyed might later willfully ignore the instruction, misjudging it to be a paranoid one to which he refuses to cater (Limpwick has frequently encountered such a marginalization of the very real mental disorder of paranoia in its false rendering by outsider simpletons).

Jacob bowed and assured him he would do as directed. Then, with Limpwick unguarded, with no consideration for the dire ramifications of his action, Jacob did something as brazen as any young Turk. He reached his free hand to Limpwick and touched his arm with a measured stroke, like that of a woman. His intentions were unclear, but that did nothing in Limpwick's view to mitigate the bold audacity of the action.

Most surprising, Limpwick found the feel of it to be pleasurable. In a perverse way, his persistent itch had been soothed more successfully than any package of cream, salve, or ointment ever promised. He pulled back, choking on his wordless response, unable to muffle or conceal his horror. Such bad form, to touch his mentor so, at so wrong a place and time, in so wrong a way. Had Olivia taught Jacob nothing about the rules of proper conduct?

But the moment had another surprising effect. Jacob was simply enlivened. His dimpled face was ablaze, eyes shining with the full light of reality and an almost hyper-sanity, like a child who had pulled off the ultimate prank.

Limpwick might even have welcomed Jacob's sudden clarity had it not required a sinister act to produce. He always considered emotional game-playing (so common among wives of philandering husbands) to be a form of self-loathing, and he was not prepared to martyr himself for anyone's recovery.

"I'll be on my way," Jacob said. "I have a bus to catch."

And so, like a dancing sprite, he vanished before Limpwick could address the issue at hand. With Jacob in sudden recovery, it was now Limpwick's psychological well-being in peril. He would have to find ways to endure

separation from his beloved Psyche Olivia, lest homoerotic
urges toward her mortal nephew return. Self-reflection was
feeding the fire. The impulses had to be numbed, or better
yet, killed.

\$



Chapter Thirteen:

DRAMATIC IMMERSION AND THE UNCLOTHED SELF

Later that afternoon on the stage, Nurse Levenwell ratcheted up rehearsals of Q's line reading, insisting that he maintain an uninterrupted exchange of feeling and communication with the audience during the dramatic pauses through facial expressions, body movements, and hand gestures. Q took to her direction with particular enthusiasm in his loin area. He wore his new costume with the pride and glamour of a cascading Victorian-period gown, one of gold-brocaded satins and lace ruff, dragged out of cellar storage and requiring hours of re-wiring, string-tying, and general fussiness. One momentarily forgot its resemblance to a saggy diaper.

Limpwick wandered over, skillfully maintaining an air of gravitas about the scene he approached. Nurse Levenwell could not contain her enthusiasm in describing Q's natural acting ability to Limpwick. "He hardly needs any direction at all on the fundamentals, having innately understood the importance of non-performance, of maintaining the idea of total immersion in character, of its role as a surrogate identity."

Limpwick hid his great amusement at her wordplay, a considerable struggle when one was so inebriated. Her theatre gobbledygook reminded him of Mr. Otto's drug-induced voodoo chanting, and made even less sense to him in his present state. Jacob must have leant her his drama notebooks, full of the amateur psycho-babbling that gave their profession a bad name. Limpwick banished the consideration that perhaps, just perhaps, the whole world was psycho-babble, after all. Perhaps it would have made more sense, Limpwick thought, if he hadn't just imbibed the mystery spirit from Eddie's stone-crock jug, the kind that tended to give a drunk a false sense of clarity.

Suddenly, squeals of laughter erupted. Not Limpwick's, but those of a young girl.

Or, rather, a young boy. While Nurse Levenwell had been busy talking Limpwick's ear off at the side of the stage, Q must have decided that the scene they were rehearsing called for more naturalism. He now stood in the middle of the stage, completely nude, to the great amusement of the orphan boy, Danny. It was pleasant to Limpwick to see the young boy laughing at the scene before him, considering that a boy his age might have just as likely be rendered a zombie by the trauma of recent events. He seems to be showing another pattern, that of a resilient youngster made immune to trauma by scenes witnessed in earlier childhood. If so, Limpwick wondered, what might they have been? In any event, thought Limpwick through his mental haze, his present behavior was a good sign and reason to be optimistic for his future mental well-being.

Behind Danny stood an older couple, perhaps the boy's grandparents. Surprisingly, they, too, looked amused. Others of their generation might have been horrified and caused a great fuss at having their grandchild thus exposed to such vulgarity. Others might even have refused Jacob's invitation for Danny to help with sets, but thankfully, that would not be the case with this pair of septua- or octo- or whatever-genarians.

"He has his father's interest in carpentry," the grandfather commented to Limpwick, unfazed by the naked thespian prancing around him.

The boy's presence should breathe new life into Jacob upon his return tonight, thought Limpwick, and should keep his and everyone else's energies directed toward the greater good. Limpwick's mind being predisposed at the moment to an almost absurd level of jollity, he could even forgive the elderly couple for ignoring the clearly posted signs closing rehearsals to outsiders. As he always said, in agreement with the fringe elders of the profession, such bold circumvention of procedure could always be overlooked, even appreciated, so long as the motive for doing so was to advance a worthy cause.

§

The boy's presence, properly managed, would bring new life to Jacob upon his return tonight and should keep his and everyone else's energies fixed upon the greater good. That, at least, was the theory. The boy had already shown a natural facility with improvised rhythm and spatial adaptation. And if those qualities could be put to use during

the third-act tableau, then perhaps even Q's spiraling monologues might find their tempo again.

Limpwick, being predisposed at the moment to a nearly absurd degree of optimism, found he could even forgive the elderly couple for ignoring the clearly posted signs prohibiting visitors during rehearsal hours. As he often said, usually to no one in particular, and always with an air of principled weariness (such breaches of protocol could be overlooked, even appreciated, provided they served a worthy purpose).

He adjusted the collar of his coat, though he did not recall putting it on. The hallway smelled faintly of oranges and ammonium, which typically meant the nurses had finished their monthly scrubbing. Levenwell insisted on performing this duty herself. She said she preferred to kneel when cleaning the entrance tiles, out of reverence for the institution. Limpwick had long ago stopped asking what precisely she revered.

§

Through the second-floor window, he could just make out the chapel roof. Olivia's silhouette moved across the warm interior light. She was there again. Lighting a candle, most likely. For Jacob, or for Q, or for someone even earlier. There was no reliable way to measure what she carried, except perhaps in the hours she spent holding still.

The file in his hand trembled, though the air in the corridor remained perfectly still.



Figure 13. *Limpwick adjusted the collar of his coat. The hallway smelled faintly of oranges and ammonium.*

Tonight would either fix the whole mechanism in place or shake it until the last bolts fell loose. And in the silence that followed, he would finally be allowed a breath. He had held it for years. Possibly decades.

Possibly since the spring of 1934, when he stood with Mabel in the vestibule of St. Erasmus, her veil askew and her expression unreadable. That, too, had been a kind of vow. Not a sacred one, and not quite legal, but a vow nonetheless. He had kept it longer than anyone expected.

One does what one must when the damage is already done. And the boy, if nothing else, was punctual.

The theater room had once been a cafeteria. Folding chairs formed uneven rows across a floor still marked by tile scars and steam tray grooves. Stage lights hung from mismatched extension cords. The backdrop was a linen sheet painted in faint watercolors by a patient no longer present, though his name still appeared on the meal roster out of habit. The scent of powdered lemonade lingered in the corners.

Tonight's performance appeared on no official schedule. It had taken shape, as such things often did at Sunnydale, from a group exercise, followed by a suggestion, followed by the discovery of a costume box in the maintenance closet. Olivia suspected it had been arranged in advance. She simply could not determine by whom.

Q had assumed the lead role early in the process. His commitment was unnerving. He wore a crooked paper crown and spoke in Elizabethan cadence with absolute precision. When a fellow patient forgot a line, Q delivered it in the same voice, seamless and unblinking. The others

followed his rhythm without knowing they had departed from the script.

Otto sat near the wings, not in costume. He had brought his cello. He referred to himself as the orchestra, and no one had corrected him. When he played, even Nurse Levenwell fell silent. The bow slid in slow, measured arcs across the strings, each note hollow and yet impossibly full, like something preserved in amber.

Ana stood in the back of the room. She wore a dress no one had seen before. It was not hospital issue. She clapped when the scene required it but did not smile. Olivia studied her profile. No clipboard. No lanyard. Nothing to tie her to the room. She might have been a visiting cousin or a mourner in borrowed silk.

Midway through the second act, something altered. Olivia could not name it. The lines shifted. Their tone turned from theatrical to personal. One patient rose and delivered a monologue on betrayal that had not appeared in any draft. Q began weeping in the middle of a love scene and did not stop. No one interrupted.

Otto's playing changed as well. He left the prepared score and began to improvise. The melody dipped into minor keys, then turned uneven, then stopped.

In the final scene, the lights failed to respond to their cues. A single lamp hung over center stage, flickering faintly. Q stood alone beneath it, reciting lines from several plays at once. His voice merged character and memory into one indistinct current.

Olivia stood without thinking. The air felt brittle. Somewhere backstage, someone screamed.

Otto had vanished.

The cello remained on its stand. The bow lay in two pieces on the floor beside it. The strings held their tension but offered no sound.

Olivia turned to Ana.

Ana was no longer there.

The applause came late and without conviction. It sounded like chairs being scraped into order. It lasted just long enough to make clear that no one knew whether the performance had truly ended.

§

Jacob stood at the perimeter of the staff lot, collar turned against the wind. The hospital rose in front of him like a courthouse left in session after hours. One light flickered above the loading dock. He waited for it to cycle off before moving forward.

Ana had told him to come at night. She had not explained why. Only that it would matter.

He carried no badge and no keys. Only a canvas satchel with a change of clothes and a printed copy of his final disciplinary report, which he had skimmed on the bus and now kept in his coat pocket like a relic. He could not remember if it had been written in ink or toner. The difference felt important.

Through the side entrance near the utility shed, he entered without challenge. The keypad code still worked. Some things aged slower than others.

Inside, the corridors held their breath. Not sterile. Just unused. At the junction near Ward B, a nurse passed with a

linen cart, headphones in place. She did not look up. He nodded anyway.

He reached the old intake office and found the door ajar. The room had not changed. A faint chalk ring still marked the spot where Otto had thrown a chair during an earlier performance. No one had scrubbed it out.

Limpwick was already inside, seated at the desk, his back upright and his hands clasped over one of the green logbooks. He looked up without surprise.

“You came,” said Limpwick.

“You asked me to,” said Jacob.

Limpwick closed the book and folded his hands again. His fingers shook but did not acknowledge it. “The board is meeting tomorrow morning. They need someone to blame. They will not be imaginative.”

Jacob remained standing. “What exactly happened?”

Limpwick stared at the edge of the desk. “I think you already know. Or you would not be here.”

They regarded one another without posture.

At last Jacob reached into his coat and produced a folded page. He laid it on the desk. It was a photocopy of a music score. Britten’s *Lachrymae*. On the back, in Otto’s writing, was a single line.

I would rather vanish on my own terms than be rewritten by theirs.

The office phone rang once, then again. Limpwick did not move to answer it.

Jacob stepped past him and entered the corridor that led to Otto’s room.

The bed had been stripped. A narrow trail of fine black dust ran from the footboard to the radiator. In the waste bin,

a single white glove curled inward, smudged at the fingertips with ink and something darker.

Near the window, the cello case stood closed and upright. It did not appear recently moved.

Jacob looked at it for a long time.

He did not open it.

Dr. Woodthorpe arrived before the others. He often did. The boardroom had been recently repainted in a color someone described as mint, though it more closely resembled the interior of a surgical tray. The blinds had been drawn at some point during the previous week. He opened them himself, then adjusted the seating chart with the corner of a file.

One laptop had already been left running. Ana's report had been delivered electronically and marked received. He had reviewed it the night before. The findings were vague, the tone neutral, the formatting correct. It would serve.

The others arrived in pairs. A legal advisor from the regional hospital group, a liaison from Tremblay, the new head of security. One of them carried a thermos. Another wore gloves indoors. They took their seats with the word "oversight" already moving quietly between them.

Woodthorpe began with a tone of professional concern. "Dr. Limpwick's contributions over the years have been considerable. I do not dispute his originality. However, it may be time to reconsider the pace and scope of his methods."

The legal advisor opened a folder. "There are unresolved liabilities. The incident during the performance could be classified as elopement or abandonment, depending on which record we treat as primary. We may also face inquiries from the ethics committee. Someone will ask who approved the exercise."

Woodthorpe nodded. "Naturally."

Ana entered without pause. She did not greet anyone. Her coat was still buttoned, and her hands remained at her sides. She took a seat near the window and placed a sealed envelope in front of her. No one reached for it.

The room waited.

Woodthorpe folded his hands. "If there is anything you wish to add, Ana, now would be the time."

She regarded the group without expression. "You have already made your decision. You made it before you read the report. I believe it was made before the performance began."

No one replied.

Ana placed the envelope at the center of the table. "This contains my final summary. You may treat it as a resignation if that suits the outcome."

She stood. Her chair did not scrape. Her exit made no sound.

The meeting resumed in the manner of all institutional meetings. A list was read. A date was chosen. Someone made a note to prepare interim documents for external review.

Later that evening, Woodthorpe stood alone in the archive hallway near the Belleau Ward. The records had been moved but the chalkboard remained. Someone had

written across it in faint graphite, just above the line labeled *discontinued*.

The play is over. But the music continues.

He did not erase it.

He pulled out his phone and spoke quietly.

“It’s finished. The program will be relocated within the month.”

The journal was discovered behind a paneled section of the music room wall. It had been wrapped in a torn pillowcase and sealed with two lengths of twine knotted tightly at the ends. The cover bore no name, only a faint grease smear where a name might once have been.

Olivia found it during inventory. The maintenance crew had requested a full sweep before repainting. Most of the room had already been emptied, but the cello stand remained in place, and she had chosen to examine the frame behind it. She was not looking for anything in particular. The search had become habitual.

Inside, the handwriting varied from page to page. Some entries were tightly constructed, almost clinical. Others dissolved into erratic slants and smudged punctuation. But the voice was always his. Measured. Distinct. Unafraid of silence.

The first page contained only a date and a sentence.

I will not give them the final word.

The entries that followed blended memory and rehearsal, score markings and private reflection. Otto had documented the structure of the hospital (not its floorplan,

but its rhythm). Who arrived first. Who knocked twice. Which doors were never locked, only closed.

He wrote of Q with reverence, though he did not use the name. He referred instead to “the boy who refuses the present tense.” He wrote of Olivia with something closer to protection than affection. He wrote of Limpwick as one might write of a figure in a myth: flawed, distant, necessary.

One page had been sealed with glue at all four corners. Olivia debated opening it. She did so carefully, using the edge of her hospital ID to pry it loose.

Inside was a single paragraph, written in ink that had begun to lift from the paper’s grain.

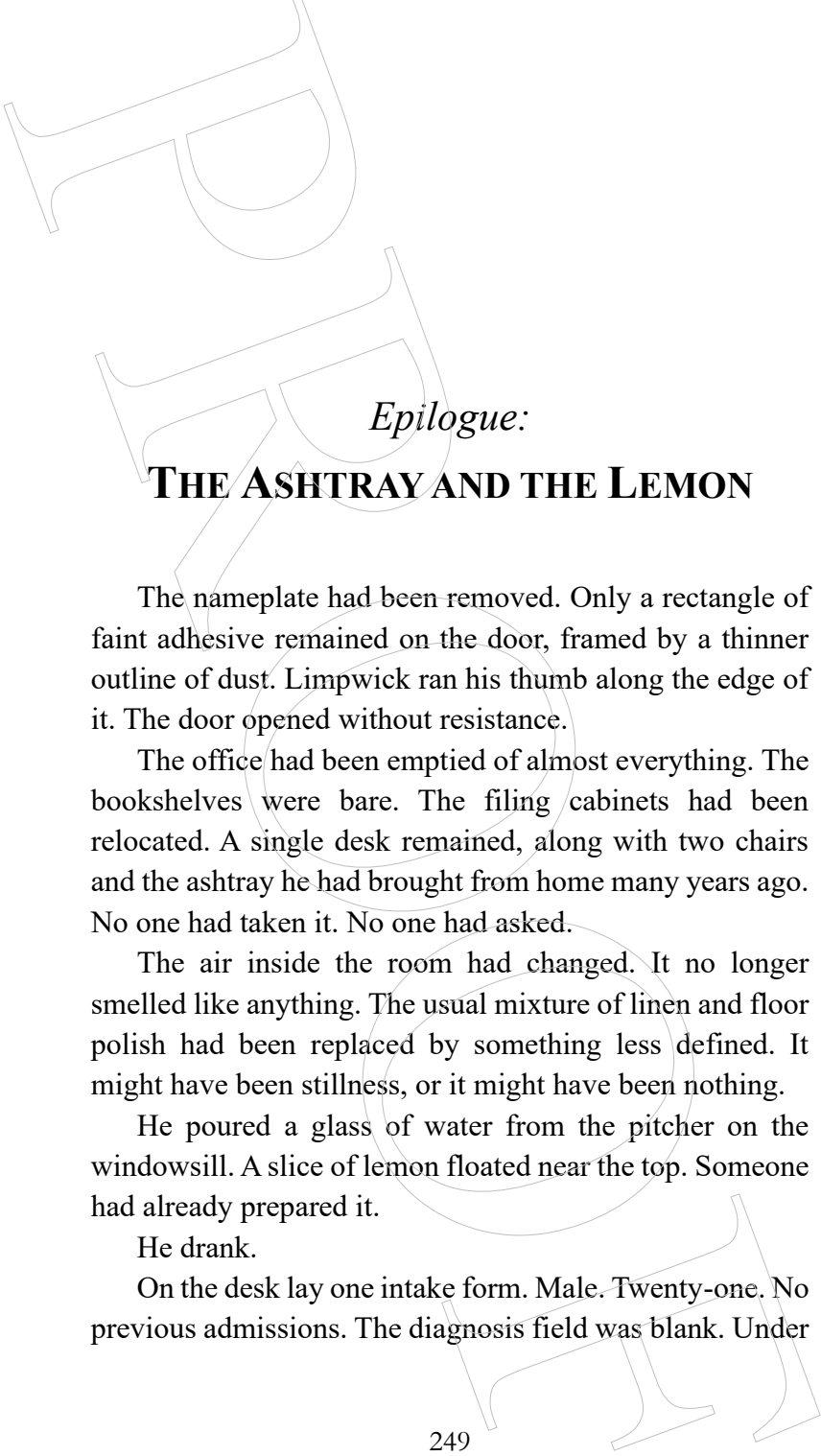
I disappear by design, not retreat. I have heard what they intend for the others, and I decline, lucid of mind. I will not be their footnote. I forgive those who tried to fix me. I do not forgive those who tried to fix me for display.

Another page had been added later in pencil.

I played the Britten again, once more, after the rehearsal. Not for the staff. Not for the visitors. For the silence that comes after the final note, when the hand is still and the bow returns to rest.

Olivia closed the journal and set it on the far edge of her desk. She did not catalog it. She did not scan it. She placed it in the lining of her coat, where the fabric had already begun to fray.

She left the music room without turning off the lights.



Epilogue:

THE ASHTRAY AND THE LEMON

The nameplate had been removed. Only a rectangle of faint adhesive remained on the door, framed by a thinner outline of dust. Limpwick ran his thumb along the edge of it. The door opened without resistance.

The office had been emptied of almost everything. The bookshelves were bare. The filing cabinets had been relocated. A single desk remained, along with two chairs and the ashtray he had brought from home many years ago. No one had taken it. No one had asked.

The air inside the room had changed. It no longer smelled like anything. The usual mixture of linen and floor polish had been replaced by something less defined. It might have been stillness, or it might have been nothing.

He poured a glass of water from the pitcher on the windowsill. A slice of lemon floated near the top. Someone had already prepared it.

He drank.

On the desk lay one intake form. Male. Twenty-one. No previous admissions. The diagnosis field was blank. Under

presenting concerns, Olivia had written, in her careful hand, “episodes of detachment.”

Limpwick sat.

He did not light a cigarette, though his fingers hovered briefly over the ashtray. The glass was clean. He could not recall who had cleaned it.

Outside the window, the sky had turned. The trees along the outer path bent slightly in the wind. A single leaf pressed itself against the pane and stayed there.

He did not review the intake form. He did not open a file or reach for a pen.

The hallway beyond the door had grown quiet.

Somewhere, distant and unsourced, a cello note emerged. Low. Sustained. Close to breaking, but never quite losing its shape.

He did not stand. He did not speak. He listened.

§

Olivia worked now in a building with wide windows and beige walls. The paint had been chosen by a donor. Every room had a clock. The patients were younger, and they wore lanyards with colored bands that matched their therapeutic tier.

Her new office contained a mural of birds in flight. She had not asked for it. Someone from facilities said it had been commissioned by a former resident who had gone on to art school. She had not asked for confirmation.

She kept the journal in a locked drawer. The lock did not work particularly well. She had taped a note to the inside of the drawer: *Private. Do not copy.*

Sometimes she imagined someone reading it. She could never decide who.

She no longer received updates from Sunnydale. The facility had changed names, or perhaps closed. Ana had never written. Jacob had sent a postcard from Iowa, unsigned. The return address was a shelter. She had not replied.

She still lit candles. Not in a chapel, but on the radiator cover near the breakroom window. The smoke set off no alarms. The others believed it was part of her routine. They were not wrong.

She thought often of Q, though she rarely said his name aloud. In her memory, he was always in costume. Never still. Never wrong.

She thought of Otto too, though not as often. His name came with music.

She had begun teaching again. A small group. Group therapy, loosely structured. She did not call it rehearsal, but she found herself using the same cues. Pauses. Beats. Entrances and exits. She did not encourage interpretation. She asked only that they say the lines.

When they asked what the story was about, she told them they were still deciding. On Fridays, when the hallway emptied and the lights dimmed on their own, she sometimes stayed in her office long after the others had gone. She would open the window a few inches and wait.

If there was music, she would let it play.

If there was not, she would let the silence stand.





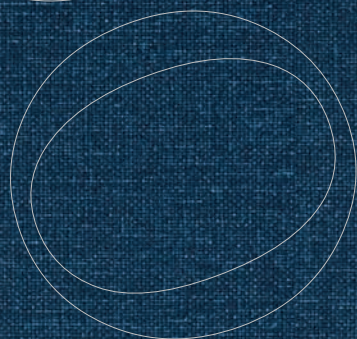
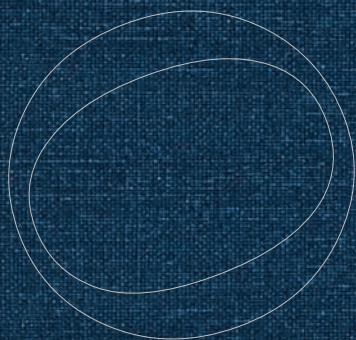
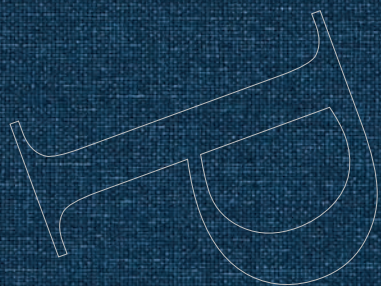
Coda

No one remembered exactly
when the play had begun.
No one agreed on how it ended.
But those who were present
still spoke of a single note
that did not echo,
did not resolve,
but held its place long enough
to be heard.
And that was enough.

BOOKS



9 798349 520907



The Year You Went Away

GOOD MORNING,
residents and staff of
Sunnydale Hospital.
Please extend a warm
institutional welcome to Dr.
Limpwick and his subject,
who will be joining us for a
year of therapeutic
observation. All personnel
are reminded to smile.

Lunch will be served
promptly at 12:30. Today's
soup is beige.



ISBN 979-8-3495-2090-7



9 798349 520907