

The Hunger of Ghosts



John Scott G

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gnud edition 2023_11_27

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“Artists, writers,
moonbeams, pets, and
prisms are dangerous!”

—*Sigmund Freud*

(Quotation unconfirmed.)

~ 1 ~

Patricia

Crazy was the word most often used to describe Patricia, and even she agreed that the term was appropriate. “I have always been eccentric,” she noted with quiet pride. “My conduct has been unique enough to raise people’s suspicion of lunacy, especially among those poor souls in the middle class.”

She reflected a moment and added, “If I were to reduce things to one phrase, I would say that my behavior is usually unusual.”

Patricia never shied away from her mental aberrations. She went so far as to compile a number of phrases for her ghost writer to use in her autobiography. “A short version of my bio will also be required to accompany a research paper I will soon be submitting to

Who's Who in Psychotomimetic Treatment,” she stated. “I would appreciate it if you considered working some of these words and phrases into the text.”



When her ghost writer expressed surprise at the terminology on her list, Patricia lowered her voice and confessed, “My aunt gave me this piece of advice: ‘When you’ve got it, wave it like a flag in a storm.’ And I have always tried to follow her guidance.”

The writer wasn't sure if Patricia was referring to her knowledge of psychiatry, her own mental condition, or both.

Over months of formal interviews and impromptu chats with the ghost writer, Patricia revealed a great deal of disturbing information. For example, she bragged about conducting drug-assisted hypnotic experiments on her patients, which the writer thought qualified as criminal acts. In any case, the writer saved his notes so future generations would have access to the data.

While the ghost writer diligently aimed for accuracy, his quest was impeded by Patricia's penchant for speaking in riddles.

"I am a multiplicity of dichotomies," Patricia said with a contented smile on her fine porcelain features. She made this statement many times. Whenever the writer asked for an explanation, Patricia's reply was tinged with a touch of condescension. "One day, my darling scribe, enlightenment will come to you."

When pressed for more details, she would sigh, and look askance for a moment. Then, she would gather her thoughts and overwhelm the listener with a barrage of imagery. "If I was

an e-card,” she said, “I would contain malware. If I was a three-toed sloth, I would be hyperactive. If I was a birthday cake, my icing would spell out an obscene limerick.” At that point, she would wave her hands as if dismissing an errant child who had just been given a lesson in manners.

The writer was always struck by Patricia’s beauty. He had to remind himself not to stare during their interviews. This was made more difficult by the fact that Patricia always appeared in public with hair and make-up suitable for a high fashion photography session, with all her clothing form-fitting and immaculately tailored.

When meeting with the writer, Patricia was usually exquisitely clothed and coifed, although there were rare occasions when she was less than formal in her attire. Today, for example, she was wearing a dark silk robe with her hair wrapped in a turban, yet she was still the image of elegance, and the robe hugged her torso like one of her perfectly fitted dresses. Again and again, the writer found it difficult to refrain from indulging in fantasies about the woman.

Suddenly, Patricia clapped her hands, and the writer was shocked back to the present.

Two male servants in starched black-and-white outfits brought coffee and scones out to her atrium, where she sat regally on an ornately cushioned teardrop lounge while the writer perched on a much smaller wooden ladderback chair.

The writer glanced around the spacious glass-walled structure. It had been built decades ago and was designed to hold rows of flowers in various stages of development. Yet now, the wooden tables held empty troughs. New growth was absent. There were no shoots, sprigs, or flora of any kind. The wooden containers were even devoid of potting soil.

Patricia had the servants pour coffee for both of them. The writer made a note about the antique off-white China cups and saucers. Patricia selected a scone and placed a dollop of orange marmalade on her plate. Between tiny sips of the steaming hot liquid and dainty nibbles of the buttery pastry, Patricia spoke about her career.

“The fact that people are so easily fooled has been a delightful constant in my life,” she

said. “When in school, I acted the part of the perfectly polite, painfully shy, and humorously self-deprecating honor student. Everyone accepted that ruse because it was what they wanted to believe.”

The writer nodded and uttered the syllables he utilized to keep people talking. “Um-hmm,” he said with a slight forward tilt of the head, and it produced the desired result.

“When I turned fourteen,” Patricia said, “my parents sent me away to college. There, I assumed the role of the dark priestess, always lurking around the chemistry lab, the chapel, and the library.”

“Um-hmm,” the writer said with a nod.

“In class,” Patricia said, “I would give the correct answer in a quiet voice, but I acted as if I was a bit ashamed of my knowledge. All of the slower students appreciated that.”

She paused to sip her coffee. The writer did the same with his cup.

“Shall we now turn to my professional life?” Patricia inquired.

“Yes, please,” the writer replied.

“Fine. Let us discuss my most important position within the constricted bowels of

corporate America,” Patricia said. “As you know, I was selected to serve as the figurehead for a somewhat controversial organization. And why did this occur?” She did not wait for a reply. “It was due to the naiveté of everyone who had some say in the matter.”

She paused, daintily sipping from her coffee cup. She refrained from speaking. The silence wore on and the writer gently muttered, “the naiveté,” as if reminiscing about it.

“Indeed,” Patricia replied. “It’s amusing, if one views it that way,” she said. She gazed into the middle distance for a long moment.

Patricia rose and glided across the atrium to stand next to the nearest glass wall. She loitered there, almost touching one of the huge panes, all of which were held in place by hundreds of feet of ribbon-thin stainless-steel.

After another moment, the writer got up and moved to be near her. They both studied their reflections in the giant panel of glass. Patricia used one pinky finger to delicately adjust the lipstick at the corner of her mouth.

The writer stole a glance at Patricia’s reflection, again admiring her poise and physical attraction. He knew she was thirty-

seven, but she often looked like a college student.

The writer considered his own reflected visage, noting that he once again had selected clothing that didn't quite match. "At least everything is clean and pressed," he thought. Before he could take much satisfaction in that, the writer was puzzled to see his reflection multiply. He was confronted by three visions in the glass: as others saw him, as he saw himself, and the bitter reality. Each image wavered and became a reflection of Patricia before dissolving into an indistinct blur. The writer was disconcerted and shook his head to clear it.

Patricia slowly glanced around the large structure. The glass walls afforded views of the well-tended grounds and most of the buildings on her estate. Next to the atrium was an overly elaborate gazebo.

To the East were the stables. To the West, a man-made lake. To the South, the family crypt, half-hidden behind weeping willow trees. To the North, dozens of yards across a huge expanse of green lawn, was her majestic art-deco styled mansion.

As she checked the four points of the compass, Patricia commented on her property, paying particular attention to the various specters and spirits that the locals claimed inhabited the buildings. “The mansion is supposedly haunted by dead slaves and the owners who once lived here,” she stated in an even tone. “The gazebo is reportedly visited by the ectoplasm of workers killed in industrial accidents of sweat shops operated by the mansion’s owners. The stables are said to contain hobgoblins in the form of oversize horses and misshapen ghost riders. Oddly,” she noted, “the one spot on the estate not haunted is the small cemetery with its tombs and headstones.” She stared out at the grounds, sighed, and turned to signal the writer that this moment of contemplation was now concluded.

Patricia led the writer back to their chairs. She sat down and the writer followed. Patricia poured more coffee for them both, deftly handling the highly polished silver server. She took a sip from her cup, savored the liquid a few seconds, and then began recalling events from her checkered past.

“They made three mistakes,” she said.

“They?” asked the writer.

“Three errors of judgement by three different groups of silly people,” Patricia explained. “Shareholders looked at me and saw serenity, which they mistook for stability.” She glanced at the writer and gave the tiniest of shrugs. “Management looked at me and saw my embrace of life, which they mistook for malleability. Labor looked at me and saw my gentility, which they mistook for compliance.”

The writer feigned making a note, safe in the knowledge that the digital recorder in his jacket pocket was capturing everything for transcribing later.

“Today, of course,” Patricia continued, “all of those groups of people recognize that I am ‘at home with the strange.’ Some of them are impressed that I accept the peculiar without blinking, while others are appalled, but in any case, my self-assurance and equanimity were so all-encompassing that I am even comfortable with uncomfortable silences, as you have no doubt experienced.”

“Um-hmm,” the writer muttered.

“A majority of these people were self-deluded into selecting me,” Patricia said.

The writer was about to ask a question, but Patricia waved it away. She often acted as though the writer's presence was of minor importance, and he pretended to be unoffended by her manner. "Their own misperceptions resulted in my taking the leadership position," Patricia continued. "It was a case of mass wishful thinking that led to my appointment as the warden of Creedmoor Asylum for the Criminally Insane."

"That, and your medical degrees," the writer said.

"Oh yes," Patricia agreed. "My degrees in chemistry, medicine, and psychology all played a part, but let's put that aside while I relate to you some of the stories of my sanitarium." She got a faraway look in her eye and paused for another sip from her cup. Satisfied, she half-whispered, "Ah, Creedmoor, my lovely Creedmoor," in a theatrical manner. Turning back to the writer, she spoke more evenly. "Allow me to take you inside the minds of a great many fascinating people, each of whom have magnificently twisted souls. Will you permit me to do that?"

The writer nodded tentatively.

Patricia smiled sweetly and added, “I promise you that it will be a delicious journey. Please state your answer.”

“That would be excellent,” the writer told her with his usual manner of feigning genuine interest. He adjusted his position on the uncomfortable chair and made himself ready to hear more.

Patricia leaned forward and adjusted the position of the polished silver antique server containing the coffee. The sunlight reflected off the bright surface, striking the writer’s eyes. For the briefest instant, the writer thought he saw something bright red-and-orange with dark ridges of concentric circles surrounding a scrawled message, like an SOS dug into the sand of an island where shipwreck victims had washed ashore. Then the image dissolved, and the writer found he was holding his coffee cup to his mouth for another sip.

The two of them sat there a moment. The writer watched Patricia expectantly. She sipped her coffee. The writer felt warm. She patted her turban. The writer couldn’t feel his head. She nibbled on a scone. The writer suppressed an urge to gag.

To distract himself, he looked around the glassed-in structure, and then at the lovely grounds beyond the huge windowpanes. He was puzzled by what he saw. A large bank of cirrus clouds was approaching the front wall of the atrium.

“That’s very pretty, isn’t it?” Patricia asked with a nod toward the swirling clouds.

The writer was fascinated by the churning mists approaching the structure, accompanied by a whirring of engines in the distance.

“What’s that noise?” the writer asked, but he was having trouble forming the words.

“Ah,” Patricia said. “For you, that is the sound of fate.”

The purring engines were joined by an ethereal choir. Rapidly, inexorably, the sounds became louder, and the clouds moved closer. The writer felt his body reverberating to the intense volume of the massed voices and the beating of the motors.

To the writer’s amazement, the clouds seemed to pass through the glass walls of the atrium. At first, the change in atmosphere caused the large panes to act as mirrors, displaying countless off-kilter images of

Patricia and the writer, but within seconds, little could be seen as the room was full of billowing and super-saturated air. The writer felt a wave of panic welling up inside and he tried to stand, but signals from his brain were not traveling properly through his body.

“Wait!” the writer blurted out. “I can’t—I can’t move...”

Patricia regarded him impassively and took another sip of coffee.

The writer shouted something else, but his voice could not be heard.

Patricia waved one hand and the sonic onslaught abated.

“Help!” the writer gasped.

Other than a brief smile from Patricia, his plea was ignored.

“Please!” he begged.

“I have information for you,” Patricia said in an imperious manner. “You should know something about the interrogation rooms inside Creedmoor Asylum. The chambers were utilitarian, as was the case with the inmate’s cells. Each interrogation room was twelve feet by fifteen feet with light green walls and pale gray ceilings.”

She spoke matter-of-factly as the writer vibrated helplessly on his chair. “For security purposes,” she went on, “there was a two-way mirror set in one wall of each interrogation chamber, with a small observation room behind it. Additionally, there was a video camera behind the ventilation grate high up in one corner of every cell.”

The writer was convulsing in his chair, and he was making gurgling noises in his throat. Patricia seemed unconcerned.

“In the center of each interrogation room,” she continued, “was a metal table and four chairs, all of which were bolted to the scuffed linoleum floor. Are you paying attention? Never mind, you’ll soon see.”

The writer’s body twitched violently from powerful muscle spasms. Unceremoniously, he slid off the chair and crumpled to the floor.

Patricia continued her monologue without acknowledging the writer’s predicament. “The ambience in those rooms was quite horrid,” she said, “but at least we kept them as clean as possible. In most, you could hardly see the vomit stains.”

And then the writer was transformed.

His body lay in a heap on the bare floor, but his mind had moved on from everyday existence. He was gone from the atrium and gone from the present time. Mentally and spiritually, he was inside one of the asylum interrogation rooms.

He was a fly on the wall; he was the video camera; he was one of the orderlies watching through the two-way mirror; he was the doctor; he was the patient. Most often, he felt as if he was hovering above the physician and patient. His torso had assumed a new form—that of an energy field which obeyed an almighty power guiding him into a terrifying limbo.

“Where am I?” he asked, his voice echoing in his cranium.

“In a new reality,” Patricia said softly.

“How is this happening?” he asked, his voice unsteady.

“Mind control,” she replied. “Or, more accurately, mind freedom.”

There was a moment of clarity and grace that suddenly engulfed the writer. He felt as if he had no connections to anything on earth. “Are the clouds a road to heaven?” he asked, his voice sounding far, far away.

“What a delightful question!” Patricia said. “There may not be something called heaven, but you have become close to God. You are closer now than you have ever been before.”

“How?” the writer demanded. “How am I close to God?”

A reply to his question came in the form of dank silence, as if from an empty tomb. Once again, the red-and-orange image flashed before his eyes, just for an instant.

“There, there,” Patricia said soothingly. “Your spirit awaits you inside the walls of Creedmoor Asylum. The doctors and patients will welcome you with smiles of anticipation, of that I am certain.”

The writer’s spirit acted as if bludgeoned into silence.

Patricia sipped her coffee and regarded the clouds as they exited the gazebo and pulled away rapidly, revealing a beautifully bright sunny day on her regal and immaculate estate.

~ 2 ~

Fireworks

Doctor and patient were seated inside Interrogation Room Six of Creedmoor Asylum, totally unaware of another entity in the chamber with them—the writer was there, or rather, the writer’s essence.

While Dr. Peter M. Barton attempted to conduct a counseling session, the writer’s spirit flitted back and forth in the room, watching first the physician in his rumpled slacks and sport jacket, and then the inmate in his well-worn but still bright orange jumpsuit.

The patient was Steven, a 36-year-old male endomorph with a facility for spinning tales of his imaginary exploits.

“The main thing you need to know,” Steven told the doctor earnestly, “is that most of the explosions weren’t my fault.”

“Well, of course not,” Dr. Barton stated evenly. He had a shock of gray hair that blended with the metal frames of his glasses. In other respects, he looked like a male version of Patricia.

The writer was fascinated by his spirit’s predicament. He believed he might be a figment of his own imagination or a pawn in one of the nightmare reveries Patricia had related to him. Perhaps it was possible that everything in his life—dream-state hypnotic suggestions, drug visions, and psychotic episodes—were now being blended for the amusement of the gods of schizophrenia.

Every one of these ideas flitted through the overwhelmed brain of the writer and it was too much for him to handle; he surrendered to the impossible vision, which became for him a tortured presentation of shadows and echoes. As the counseling session continued, the writer’s spirit watched as if mesmerized.

“Alright, listen doc,” Steven said rapidly, “the whole thing was investigated thoroughly, and the county board of inquiry concluded that I was not responsible for all the damage, devastation, despoilment, decimation, death,

and/or the resulting feelings of angst, doom, emo, goth, *ennui*, or *Weltschmerz*.”

“First of all,” Dr. Barton replied, “you need to work on your pronunciation.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know,” Steven replied, “but I’m not to blame for the explosions, okay? I mean, zero blame. *Rien. Nada. Nichts. Niente.*”

“I wish you would stop pronouncing foreign terms in an American accent,” Dr. Barton said. “It’s a bad habit.”

“And I wish you weren’t the supervising physician on my case. Neither one of us is getting what we want.”

“Perhaps our imperfections cancel each other out,” the doctor suggested amicably.

“Besides,” Steven said, “we all know that the asylum guards do most of the supervising. You’re just here to fill out your hours of counseling so you can move on to a real shrink job somewhere else.”

“I’m willing to ignore that,” the doctor said, “if you’ll concede that there were no explosions. Tit for tat.” He tapped the metal desk for emphasis, and the sound echoed in the small room.

The writer's spirit was hovering in the air near the table, and it jumped at the noise.

"That shows how much you know," Steven replied. "Do you think the burns on my fingers appeared though divine intervention? These blisters are almost as orange as the damn jumpsuits you make us wear. The fact is that I had a number of IEDs in the trunk of my car. IED stands for Improvised Explosive Device. I learned how to make them during my two tours in Iraq."

"You were never in the military," Dr. Barton said while loosening his tie.

"You know what, doc?" Steven spat out. "If you were good at your job, you wouldn't be here. You'd be on Park Avenue in New York or Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills."

"That's where I'm headed," the doctor admitted, "just as soon as I can."

"Yeah," Steven sneered, "you'll make big bucks listening to rich bitches who can't stand their husbands and don't care very much about their lovers. What a contribution to society."

"I'm paid to spend time assessing patients who have applied for a competency hearing," the doctor said in an even voice. "Would you

prefer to have me conclude this assessment now?”

Steven instantly resumed the enthusiastic tone he had been using a moment before. “Okay, so, I admit that I had a few explosives in the back of my car, but I wasn’t threatening the children. They were gathered around me because I do these tricks like lighting matches with just a fingernail, or on my teeth, or tossing them in the air and shooting them so that the bullet grazes the matchhead to make it burst into flame.”

“Steven, you don’t have any firearms.”

“Not right now. That doesn’t mean I don’t have access to some for special occasions.”

“I doubt that’s the case,” Dr. Barton said, “but let’s go on.”

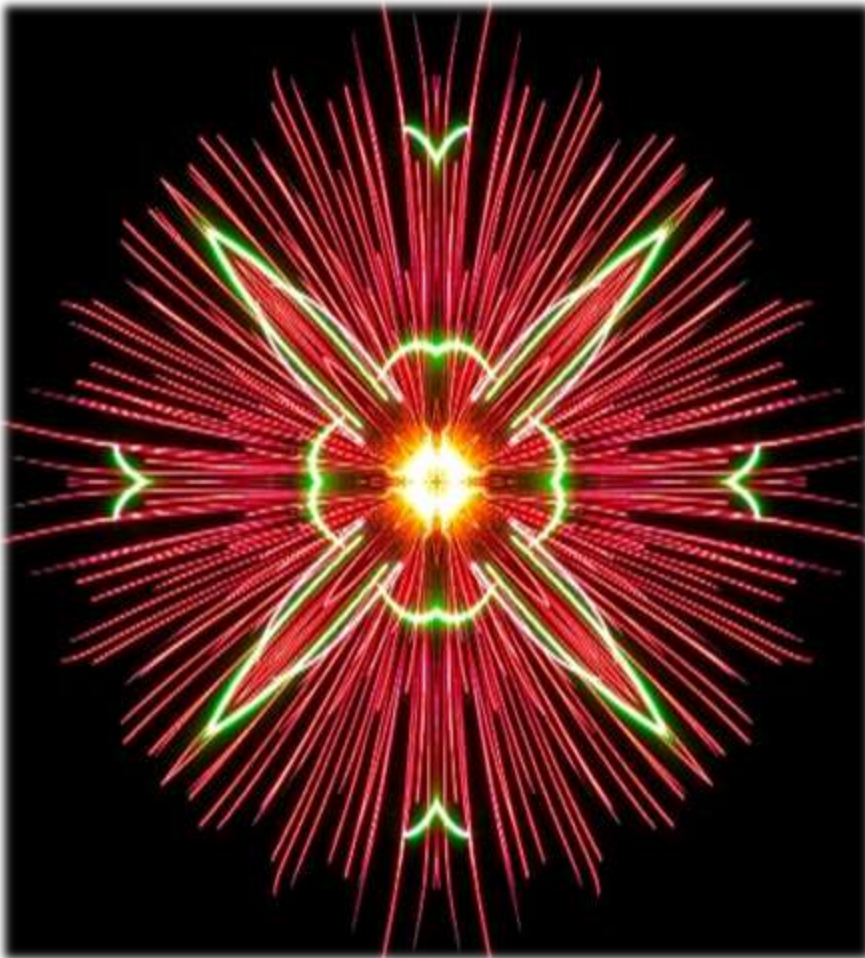
“The point is, I was playing with matches just prior to the first of the blasts, but I didn’t set off the explosions. Here’s what happened, doc,” Steven said in a rush. “Some of the suit dweebs in middle management brought illegal pyrotechnic devices to the company picnic. They had crates of fireworks, and I’m not talking sparklers. They brought M-80s, Brocades, Roman Candles—”

“Steven, please.”

“—Bo-Ros, Looms, Skeefers, Twisters, Smackers, Zoomers—”

“That’s enough,” the doctor said firmly.

Steven stopped listing the various types of pyrotechnic devices and began describing the different visual effects of their explosions. The writer’s spirit could not only see the blasts but was engulfed in the dizzying display of fiery blooms of light.



“There were no fireworks, Steven,” the doctor said firmly. “More importantly, there was no company picnic or party or whatever.”

“Yes, there was,” Steven insisted. “I was there.”

“And you never left the hospital.”

“Come on, doc, if that’s true, then how do I remember the details of the explosions and the flames and the maiming and the deaths? Look, it’s simple: some of the teens who watched my match tricks tried to emulate me. One of their matches got into the SUV that had the fireworks. And just like that: *ka-boom!*” Steven shouted.

The writer’s spirit flinched at the sound.

“Pyro everywhere!” Steven exclaimed.

“Listen to me, Steven,” the doc insisted. “There weren’t any fireworks.”

“Some of the pyro ricocheted off the pavement, searing cars in the lot and setting fire to people nearby. *Whoosh!*”

The writer’s spirit twitched again and darted around the room, trying to escape the loud sounds and the kaleidoscope of colors created by Steven’s word-pictures.

“Perhaps we—” the doctor tried to say.

“The big problem,” Steven continued, “was that most of the fireworks went horizontal. They flew right into people enjoying their picnic lunches.”

“No, and we need to—”

“Think about it, doc: you’re standing there having a peaceful time in the park, and then, all of a sudden, there’s flaming purple shards on your hot dog. Gag me with a pickle!”

“This isn’t helping,” the doctor said. “Perhaps we could—”

Steven ignored the doctor. “Arcing green bits in the beer. *Blam!* Twirling red specters in the coleslaw. *Zap!* Spinning blue globules on the fried chicken. *Blech!*”

Steven’s raucous vocal effects drove the writer’s spirit out of the interrogation room and through the two-way mirror to the tiny chamber next door. In the viewing booth were two bored orderlies, playing cards. They had no awareness of the writer’s spirit, and the writer turned to watch Steven and Dr. Barton through the mirror.

Steven was building in intensity as he described the imaginary event. “Sparks of hot light engulfed the park in a rainbow inferno!

People were on fire everywhere, flickering and dancing together in holy conflagration!”

“Steven,” the doctor said with a sigh. “Since you insist on making up another one of your stories, I am afraid we’ll have to continue this session at another time.” Dr. Barton stood up and moved to the door.

“Oh come on, doc,” Steven protested. “Don’t be like that.”

“We’re done for today,” Dr. Barton said. He pressed the button to alert the guards in the hallway outside the interrogation room.

“Wait,” Steven said. “Let me describe the burned bodies. The colors of the crispy flesh were amazing!”

“Until next week, Steven,” Doctor Barton said as a guard unlocked the door with a jolting clanking sound. The doctor nodded first at Steven and then at the guard as he exited.

“Just sit still,” the guard told Steven in a monotone. “Someone will be here to return you to your room.”

“Come back, doctor quack!” Steven called out. Through the doorway, Steven glimpsed the hall with its framed portraits of Patricia and previous Creedmoor wardens.

Without another word, the guard swung the door shut and slammed the lock in place.

After a moment of hesitation, the writer's spirit quietly emerged from the two-way mirror and floated back into the interrogation room. The writer paused to study Steven.

Suddenly, Steven looked at the writer and the two locked eyes. The writer flinched. He could be seen!

"The doc is no fun at all," Steven said amicably.

The writer tried to speak, but no sound emerged.

"Hey, screw him," Steven said. "There's plenty of time for us to enjoy every aspect of the picnic, the panic, and the perishing. Plus, there was an unexpected revelation. Want to know what it was?"

The writer was still in a panicked state and unable to respond.

"Death is cool!" Steven gushed.

The writer writhed in anguish.

"Who knew death was so fascinating?" Steven asked, louder now.

The writer was trapped in a violent whirlpool of images, sounds, and emotions. It

was disorienting, but there was one final shock that he was yet to experience.

“Who could know that death was so beautiful?” This question was stated with reverence and awe. It didn’t even seem like a question. It was an observation. And the voice was not Steven’s.

It was Patricia’s voice that echoed in the chamber and reverberated through what was left of the writer’s soul.

“Death is...” Patricia whispered.

“What?” the writer’s spirit managed to ask.

“Death,” Patricia explained. “Death is our gateway!”



~ 3 ~

Intimacy

The writer awoke on a plush divan in a parlor full of antique furniture and a flickering haze of burning incense. From the pain in his joints and the throbbing in his stomach, he surmised he had been drugged. Because his mind kept sending him images of bizarre and unearthly activities, he thought he might also have been hypnotized. His eyes still blurry and his ears still ringing, he tried and failed to sit up. “Whoa,” he said, although it sounded like “Wauhh” because his mouth wasn’t operating very well.

“Sexual intimacy,” a voice said with quiet authority, “is a transcendent feat and a mystical plateau.” It was Patricia’s voice again. “Sex is,” she added, “a consummation devoutly to be wished, no pun intended.”

The writer again struggled to straighten up. He moved a few inches toward the vertical and stopped. Turning his head, he saw Patricia seated on a large oak and leather armchair across from a teak coffee table with ugly thick bronze legs.

“What happened?” the writer said, this time with adequate pronunciation but a raspy voice. His words seemed far away to him, almost as if they came from someone else.

“People tell me I spend too much time thinking about sex,” Patricia stated, “but it’s clear that almost everything in the world depends on sex to a certain degree.”

“Wait, what?” was the best the writer could come up with.

“Welcome back from the kingdom of Morpheus,” Patricia told him.

“I can’t—I can’t think straight.”

“Not yet,” she told him. “Give it a few moments. Have some breakfast.” She indicated an array of silver serving dishes on the coffee table. “Eggs, tomatoes, fruit, and coffee. Help yourself.”

The writer groaned at the thought.

“Bad night?” Patricia asked demurely.

“Was I drugged?” the writer asked.

“Just a teeny bit, my darling scribe. You needed to be in the right frame of mind to respond to a few hypnotic suggestions.”

“Thought so,” the writer muttered.

“I apologize for the melodramatic aspect of the Svengali methodology, but I had to make certain you would be properly focused on your work here.”

The writer tried to stand. His muscles were still not in the mood to comply, and he collapsed back onto the divan.

“Returning to our topic,” Patricia said, “sex is the driving force of humanity. Most of us are here on Earth because of an orgasm.” She glanced at the writer and said, “Please do inform me if I’m wrong.” Without pausing, she continued. “We were all raised in a society fascinated by sex. After reaching puberty, we tried to act cool, look sharp, and achieve success in order to have orgasms of our own.”

“Why are you telling me this?” the writer asked, his voice still hoarse.

“We agreed that I would not hold back my personal views for my book. So, sex is life’s driving force, no pun intended. Sure, I

realize that money and power are also part of life, but sex is what prods us to pursue money and power.”

“You want all this in the book?”

“We must face facts,” Patricia explained. “Copulation is a basic human motivation. That’s why I’m always trying to perfect my technique. I work hard on it, no pun intended.”

The writer’s head was clearing, and he replied, “I think your puns are intentional.”

“Don’t be catty,” Patricia said. “Many people pretend to be uninterested in sex, but the fact is that everybody is intrigued by intercourse. Even if you’re not in the mood for it at the moment, you still want to read about it, hear about it, watch it, and comment on it.”

“What was the drug you gave me?” the writer asked.

“It was a concoction,” Patricia replied. “Corrydisan, Reginol, and eye-of-newt.”

“What?”

“I’m kidding, my darling scrivener. Eye-of-newt is from Shakespeare. Where’s your sense of humor?”

“I left it at home,” the writer said with bitterness in his voice.

“Stop your moping,” Patricia told him. “Look on the bright side: because of what is coursing through your veins, you won’t ever catch a cold. Now, describe your visions.”

“Visions?”

“What were your sexual fantasies while you were semi-conscious?”

“Sexual fantasies? What are you—?” The writer stopped abruptly while images from his recent somnambulance flooded his brain.



“Ahh,” Patricia said. “It’s all coming back to you now. That’s good. Please take another moment to savor the memories.”

The writer was jarred as images of torsos, legs, hips, lips, and breasts tumbled upon one another in a drug-addled dance. Curves, slopes, parabolas, shapes, protrusions—every sort of erogenous interaction filled his cranium.

Off in the distance, the machinery started up again, at first a soft drone, but soon joined by the infernal choir. As the volume increased, the writer’s body was once more pummeled by the sonic waves, but this time the experience was being narrated by Patricia.

“Falling into bed can lead to dancing in the sheets,” she said in a bright but even tone. “If you feel like dipping your pen, you could note some of my tips on *le petite mort* and all the aspects of gland-to-gland combat as well as the fine art of attacking the pink fortress.” She glanced at the writer as he vibrated on the divan. “Do you enjoy my *double entendres*?”

The writer did not reply.

“I’m afraid we do not have time for an explication of all the phrases I researched,” Patricia noted, “but some of them include tube-

snake-boogie, roll in the hay, beast with two backs, and afternoon delight. Oh, and one that several of my friends assure me is very funny: hiding the Honda in the auto-park of love.” Patricia pursed her lips a moment as she contemplated that last one.

The writer stood up, almost lost his balance, and decided to sit back down.

Patricia rose elegantly and walked to the divan. She sat on the edge, her thighs nudging the writer’s torso. She leaned forward to bring her face close to the writer’s. “Sleep now, my little scribe,” Patricia cooed. “Fall back gently into your fugue state.” Her face dissolved into a mirror for just a second.

“No,” the writer protested.

“Yes,” Patricia whispered, her face back in place. “Sleep leads to dreams, and dreams are where our other lives take place.”

The choir sang louder.

“No,” the writer protested weakly.

“You should be proud to be part of my experiments,” Patricia said importantly.

“No!” the writer was able to bark at her.

“Yesssss,” Patricia hissed. And her voice blended into the choir.

“Nuhh,” the writer said, no longer even able to pronounce one syllable.

“Your spirit is gone now,” Patricia cooed.

The writer’s equilibrium failed him, his breathing became labored, and he knew he was entering another state of reality. He heard voices chanting but they were overwhelmed by a howling wind. Sporadically, phrases would emerge from amidst the cacophony.

“Foxtrot Uniform Charlie Kilo,” said one voice. “Slap-and-tickle,” said another. The voices overlapped: “Jumping bones!” “Piston action!” “Bedroom rodeo!” “Assault with a friendly weapon!”

Paranoia and terror engulfed the writer as the drugs interacted with Patricia’s devilish hypnotic suggestions.

The engines roared, the choir surged, the mists of time coagulated into raging storms of phantasmagoria. In the din, the writer’s spirit had departed the parlor and was back inside Creedmoor Asylum.

Patricia regarded the writer’s comatose body. “You were right about one thing,” she said quietly. “The puns were intentional.”

~ 4 ~

Cats

Cold, cold ground,” said a female voice. The writer knew it was not Patricia speaking, but because his disembodied spirit had not focused on his surroundings, he could only marvel at the shapes and colors swirling around him. For a few seconds, he had a merry-go-round feeling in his stomach. Then the world stopped its whirling, his eyes cleared, and he could maintain his balance.

He found himself inside Creedmoor Interrogation Room Eight, which differed from number Six because this chamber had a much higher ceiling. Looking up, the room appeared to stretch several stories into darkness.

Seated at the metal table with him were Dr. Barton and an inmate named Trina.

“So damn cold,” Trina continued. “I wonder, do we take some warmth with us when we die?”

Dr. Barton shrugged ever so slightly.

The writer’s spirit studied Trina. She looked like a 20-something version of Patricia but hardened by having endured several years of institutional life.

“I don’t like the cold,” Trina said. “You’re aware of that, aren’t you doctor?”

Dr. Barton smiled and nodded exactly the same way the writer did when he had been interviewing Patricia.

“That’s the reason for the layers of clothing,” Trina said, indicating her outfit. “The t-shirt and sweatshirt under the jumpsuit, and the sweater on the outside. It’s not fear of intimacy. Not at all. I can hug. I want to hug. I want to hug another human being.” Trina thought a second and added, “Although probably not every day.”

The writer’s spirit moved closer to the doctor, trying to read his notepad.

“You know, doctor,” Trina continued, “I could hug a pet every day. “If only they’d let me keep a cat in my cell. I could cuddle with

it. I could make it happy. Doctor, I really want a kitty.”

“Um-hmm,” Dr. Barton said.

“You know,” Trina went on, “if you scratch a cat under its chin, it will close its eyes and look like it’s smiling. And if you scratch the top of its head, it will also do that grin thing while pushing against your hand.”

Dr. Barton cleared his throat and the writer’s spirit recoiled from the harsh sound.

“They purr, and that’s terrific,” Trina said, “but it’s also great when they make that ‘mrrrrump’ noise, like they’re rolling their Rs and trying to sound Spanish or Russian or something.”

Dr. Barton cleared his throat again and asked, “How are things with you, Trina?”

“Fine, doctor,” Trina replied, “but let me ask you something.”

“Certainly.”

“Do you know about Bast?”

“Bast?” asked the doctor.

“I didn’t think so,” Trina said. “Bast is an Egyptian goddess of pleasure. The creature is represented by the image of a giant cat. It’s historical. You can look it up.”

“Yes,” Dr. Barton replied, “that’s very interesting.”

“You don’t sound very interested,” Trina said.

“Let’s concentrate on your situation, Trina. Once again, you didn’t work on the cognitive assessment material I left for you.”

“Why should I bother with the tests? They always show the same thing, that I can’t be trusted to live on my own and that I do not fit in with the so-called normal people.”

“We’ll be able to make more progress if we get the data that the tests provide,” Dr. Barton said.

“I’m making progress on *my* project.”

“Your project?”

“I am developing the perfect toy for owners to give to their cats,” Trina said with satisfaction.

“I’m not sure you understand the gravity of your situation, Trina,” the doctor said.

“Millions of cat owners are waiting for this,” Trina stated. “They don’t know they’re waiting for it, but they are, just the same.”

“I take it,” the doctor inquired, “that you want to pursue this topic for a moment?”

“Of course,” Trina replied. “Each year, people spend a quarter of a billion dollars on cat toys, so you see that this is valuable work.”

“Um-hmm,” the doctor said.

“The toy has to be fuzzy but resilient so the claws can grab it without ripping it open. The toy has to pulsate, like it was breathing, and it has to dart a few inches and then freeze in place. I plan to make all that happen.”

Trina proudly beamed at the doctor, and he tentatively smiled back.

They sat a moment in silence and then Dr. Barton began patiently explaining how the cognitive tests could help Trina in her quest to obtain a hearing that might lead to her release from Creedmoor.

Bored by the droning of the doctor’s voice, the writer’s spirit floated up several meters. From there, he stared down at the two figures seated at the metal table. To the writer’s bewilderment, Trina’s body began undergoing a transformation. First, her torso started gently weaving as if it was a gossamer gown fluttering in a gentle breeze. The doctor continued talking as if nothing unusual was happening, but Trina began dissolving and

reshaping until her form was entirely usurped. A ghastly apparition was now in her place, its weight crushing the metal chair to the floor.

Bast had appeared.

The oversized feline creature from the underworld was tensing up, muscles twitching alarmingly. It made ready to attack the droning doctor. Using one paw, Bast slashed the doctor's body, and blood flowed freely from the gaping wound. With gusto, the creature began devouring the still writhing physician.

The writer's spirit fluttered helplessly and bounced against the walls. He was horrified but couldn't help staring down at the carnage. Sounds of the creature's dining seemed magnified a thousand times and the air vibrated with dread.

Suddenly, the horror was over. The doctor and the gigantic Bast creature were gone. Trina was sitting calmly on her side of the table. Perched on the other side was a lovely housecat, quietly grooming its fur. It gently burped, stretched, accepted some petting from Trina, and started purring.

"That's a good puddyy tat," Trina said softly as she rubbed the cat under the chin.

Trina and the cat both looked serene, but there was an important difference—Trina was actually satisfied, but within the body of the dozing feline, the creature called Bast was contemplating its next outrage.

The beast opened its eyes, looked up, and stared at the writer for one long and terrifying moment. Then it slowly closed its eyes and appeared deceptively peaceful.



~ 5 ~

Weapons

A breeze became a zephyr, then a gust, then a gale, and finally a tempest that whipped the bare skin of the writer's face and neck as he lay in the center of Patricia's gazebo. His clothing violently flapped from the buffeting of the wind.

Over a period of several minutes, the inclement weather slowly abated. As if signaling peaceful relations, a rainbow arced across the sky, and the song of larks was heard in the distance.

The writer's body twitched, stirred, and awakened. He was chilled and pained but his mind seemed alert.

"Alert like when I'm at the gun range," said Patricia. She was standing next to one

railing of the white latticework pergola, looking back down at the writer as he tried to shake off his stupor. He emitted a groan.

“Problem?” Patricia inquired sweetly.

“Yes, problem,” the writer said. “The muscles are not getting the brain’s message.”

“I’m certain we have something we can give you for that,” Patricia said with a smile.

The writer found her grin laced with menace and he realized that this was a feeling he was having more and more often. He emerged from his contemplation and tried to concentrate on what Patricia was telling him.

“—ocused on the targets,” Patricia said. “That’s the point where I am fused to the weapon. Me and the trigger. And then, the trigger and the bullet. The bullet and the explosion. The explosion and the sound barrier being broken as the projectile emerges from the barrel.”

The writer struggled to sit up and made it this time. He turned to see that Patricia was now standing at the head of a long table at which dozens of men were using hand tools to scrape or pound pieces of metal. He peered at the workers and saw they were at an assembly

line that stretched so far into the distance it seemed to disappear at the horizon line. How can that be? Again, he was suddenly brought back to Patricia's monologue.

“—a delicious perception of the air being pierced by the bullet in flight, the shock waves becoming visible, and then the slug finally reaching the target to rend and penetrate the flesh of those that are unnecessary.”

“Wait a minute,” the writer managed to say, holding his head. “Who's unnecessary?”

“The talkers, gabbers, and yammerers,” Patricia said. “All of them telling me what to do, telling me what not to do, telling me why to do something, telling me how to do something—telling me, telling me, telling me, never asking, never suggesting, never!”

Despite being dazed, the writer still wanted to get the story straight. “Is this real, or is this a drug-induced hallucination?”

“How could that possibly make any difference?” Patricia responded.

The writer stared at her in dismay. “I'm not liking the deliberate lack of clarity here,” he said with trepidation. “Are you now talking about your life after leaving Creedmoor?”

“Don’t be silly,” Patricia replied. “I have never left Creedmoor.”

The writer stared at her. “But—”

“I am in the asylum right now,” Patricia told him. She leveled her gaze at the writer. “As are you.”

“That can’t—”

“Shhhh,” Patricia said. “Watch.” She waved one hand at the assembly line, and it faded into darkness. She brought both her hands to the front of her silk blouse and slowly began unfastening the buttons.

“What are you—?”

“Shhhh,” Patricia said again, this time with a knowing smile. She removed her blouse and dropped it behind her. She unhooked and unzipped her skirt. With erotic grace, she stepped out of the garment and dropped it atop the blouse. “You may consider this a bonus,” she told the writer. She stood up straight, legs together and hands on her hips. “Allow me to tempt you before satisfying you.”

Accompanied by charming arpeggiated refrains from a harpsichord, Patricia and the writer were suddenly in a bedchamber of the mansion. The room was very elegant, with

lovely antique furnishings, including elaborate candle holders casting flickering light on Patricia's lithe figure.

With obvious satisfaction, Patricia ran her hands over her body while describing her charms. She said she knew that men enjoyed her legs in her sheer black nylon stockings. She said she knew that men enjoyed watching as she removed her panties while leaving her garter belt in place. She said she knew that men liked the way she looked in her black patent leather high heeled shoes with the wide ankle straps. She said she knew that men enjoyed seeing her in a bra that revealed her nipples.

The writer could not disagree. There was no avoiding the fact that he was fascinated by her form, intrigued by her words, enticed by her lingerie, and aroused by her body.

With a low, purring laugh, Patricia guided the writer toward a large antique canopy bed where he found himself naked and ready. Half in consternation and half in delight, he was powerless to disobey her commands.

She positioned him near the foot of the bed and bound his hands with cords that

reached down from the ceiling. She turned and slowly walked to the other side of the room, swiveling her hips. She stopped in front of a magnificent hand-carved armoire. Opening one of its doors, she ran her hands across several whips hanging neatly in a row. She selected a riding crop, closed the door, turned, and walked back to the writer.

“Now, my not-so-little scribe,” she said with an eager smile, “I am going to demonstrate what I want you to do to me. Pay careful attention.” With precision, she used the crop to spank him, first on the ass, then the back of the thighs, then his chest.

“You’ll notice that I was quite deliberate with the strokes I administered to you with the crop. The idea is to have each stroke sting but not leave a welt. Do you see? Do you understand? And do you agree?”

“Yes,” the writer said, sounding like a teenage boy just before his first time.

“It must be ‘yes’ to all three,” she stated.

“Yes to all three,” he replied. Was he talking too fast? Was his voice too high?

“—atisfaction guaranteed,” Patricia was saying. “So, let us continue.” She untied his

arms and changed places with him. “Now,” she instructed him, “put my wrists in the loops at the end of the ropes.”

He did so, almost not daring to breathe.

“Good,” Patricia said. “Now, take the crop and gently spank me on the ass, then the thighs, then the breasts. Be sure to have the flat leather loop at the end of the crop land on the nipples. Take your time. Then we’ll do it again, harder. You may begin.”

He did as he was told.

Patricia giggled and squirmed under the spanking strokes. She directed him as to where she wanted the blows to land on her flesh. She instructed him to spank her faster, then slower, then harder.

“You have got me very excited,” she told him.

“Good,” was all he was able to say.

“Are you also very excited?” she asked, knowing the answer.

“Yes,” he said. He controlled his voice this time, keeping it in a lower register.

“I am going to spread my legs and lean as far forward as the ropes will allow. You should be able to see my pussy.” Slowly, seductively,

she leaned forward and spread her legs. “You see my pussy now, don’t you?” she asked with fake innocence.

“Yes,” he said. His voice was a whisper, and that somehow seemed appropriate.

“Good,” she told him. “Now take your cock in your hand, step closer, and slide it into me.”

He was happy to obey.

“That’s very nice,” she told him. “And now, some special music to accompany our intimacy.” She spoke the name of a long-dead classical composer and a series of motets filled the chamber. The two of them entered into an ecstasy that seemed to be timeless.

The writer happily capitulated to the wondrous sensations. He and Patricia became delightfully exhausted as they shared their carnal pleasures.

She first climaxed as he was rhythmically thrusting into her while gently pinching her nipples. Her moment of ecstasy became several moments, and he smiled.

He was elated when she climaxed again later as he was relishing slower thrusts into her. And he was jubilant when she climaxed a

third time as he was pushing as hard and as fast as he could.

Eventually, the music stopped and so did they. He felt her body tremble and then hold still as if defying the need for oxygen.

It didn't seem possible for the post-coital trance to continue, yet their bliss deliciously lingered.

The sound of birds returned, softly at first, but then growing louder. Soon, the melodious mixture of clear notes and trills was replaced by hideous harsh squawks and churrs. With a start, the writer realized he was back in the gazebo, once again fully clothed.

The sound of the assembly line workers returned, steadily rising from a mere tinkering to a heavy drone and then to an overwhelming roar. The writer said something to Patricia, but his words were inaudible.

Patricia's voice easily cut through the din. "Guns were often used," she stated, "but I also had my enemies knifed." She spoke as if their sexual encounter had never taken place.

"What enemies?" shouted the writer.

"There were so many of them," she said. "The nosy neighbor. The auto body shop

owner who overcharged me. The card players who cheated me. The fathers who wanted to rape me. The teachers. The preachers. The poets. The peasants. But with these tools, I shall end them all.”

“End them?” the writer asked.

“I am proud to say that I have dispatched a great many useless people,” Patricia said with evident satisfaction. “They deserved their punishment. They were insignificant. Effluvia. Detritus. Rubbish. But all that is in the past,” Patricia said dismissively. “It’s the future that holds the most magic. The future will be full of beauteous doom because of my silently flashing weaponry. Then will come the reckoning. Let me show you.”

As birds screamed and metal shrieked, the writer was transported into a maelstrom, and his body was sent reeling to all points of the compass.

Head spinning, stomach churning, and blood freezing, the writer’s spirit was carried through the building. An unseen force propelled him in swooping arcs. Left, right, to the highest corners of the ceiling, and then down to the center drain where the semi-liquid

residue of the huge manufacturing apparatus was rapidly pouring.

Teeth clenched and tongue-tied, the writer's spirit was thrust across the assembly line that stretched to the edge of the earth. His body was covered in sparks from whirring grinders while being assaulted by the pounding of hammers and the electrified clutches of robotic cogs, wheels, sensors, and lasers.

The writer was forced through the monstrous machinery, giving him an excellent view of the implements of destruction that the robotic tools were constructing. He cringed at the gleaming honed edges that had been created for the decimation of human bodies.



“An era of devastation will soon be upon us,” Patricia said with satisfaction that was very close to carnal desire.

~ 6 ~

Tapping

Within every penal colony,” the child told the writer, “all the inmates have the opportunity to access a provisional messaging procedure. This is something with which every prisoner can participate, either passively or actively.”

The writer was again seated at a metal table, this one in Creedmoor’s Interrogation Room Nine. Looking up, he saw a ceiling that was even higher than the previous chamber.

With some effort, the writer was trying to pay attention to the child seated across from him, but he was distracted by rhythmic pulsations entering the chamber through the ventilation grate on the wall. The tapping was fascinating, but it remained unfathomable to

him. The writer was startled by the child clapping his hands.

“Are you listening to me, scribe?”

“Yes, certainly,” the writer replied with annoyance. Unanswered questions filled his mind. What was happening here? Am I drugged again? What was a pre-teen doing in an asylum for the criminally insane?

“Let us resume this lesson,” said the boy, speaking in a child’s voice but with the confidence of an adult. “Tapping on cell bars, tapping on walls, tapping on water pipes, tapping on ventilation shafts—the messages snake their way through every penological institute, including here at Creedmoor.”

“This tapping is from an inmate?”

“Yes,” the child replied. “That’s part of the ConCom.”

“Short for convict communication?”

“Correct, although a better description might be the irrational rhythm of lost souls.”

“Do you know what is being said right now?” the writer inquired.

The child cocked his head, first to one side and then the other. After listening a moment, he began interpreting.

“Right now,” the boy said, “they’re making an old joke about the asylum coffee.”

“What old joke?”

“The coffee’s not good but it’s free.”

“That doesn’t seem worth tapping about.”

“Shhhh,” the child told him. “They’re getting to the important topics now.”

“I hope so,” the writer thought.

The writer waited in strained silence until the boy began interpreting the messages of the unseen prisoners. He watched the child with genuine interest and not with the phony “I’m really truly sincerely interested” stare he often used when talking to clients.

As he listened to the boy translating the tapping, the writer felt moved by the inmates’ complaints. He found himself composing lines he could use in Patricia’s autobiography. “A prisoners’ lament, yes,” he dictated to himself, “but woven amidst the grievances were the hopes, dreams, and dappled strategies of the inmate population.”

While he was debating the use of “dappled,” the tapping in the ventilator shaft took on an increased intensity. Soon, it was joined by pinging on the water pipes and

pounding on the walls. The massed voices of the infernal choir returned and competed with peals of chapel bells in the distance.

Within moments, the writer's head was reeling from the din, the cacophony, the clamor, the concatenation. "The loudness was palpable," the writer found himself dictating, although within the sonic blitz, he could not hear his own words.

The writer's spirit surrendered to the tumult, and he found himself inside the body of one of the inmates at a time when the institution was under warden Patricia's reign of terror.

Louder and louder came the tapping, rapping, pounding, and drumming. Louder and louder were the sounds of nature, from the ocean's roar to the rumble of storms. All the while, the child continued speaking resolutely about self-awareness and dedication to what he called "the one true path to acceptance in this universe."

"The sounds hurt!" the writer cried.

"Do not concern yourself with that," the boy said. For a second, wings appeared on the child's back.

“How can—?” the writer began.

“Quiet now,” the child said urgently. “Use these moments to take in the wisdom being imparted to you. It is important that you know that everything you see, everything you feel, everything you touch, everything that happens in your life, is of significance. All of it is retained for all eternity.”

“But if the—” the writer tried again.

“Your essence travels with you,” the child told him insistently. “Your soul accompanies you, even in death. You *are* what you have lived. You are the stored energy of all your actions. You need to tell yourself that. ‘I am the stored energy of all my actions.’ Say it.”

“I am...” the writer’s spirit faltered.

“Say it,” the child insisted.

“I am the stored energy of all my actions.”

“Good,” the child said. “And now repeat this. ‘I take joy and contentment from the knowledge that I create the energy that fuels my future.’”

“I take joy and, and...” the writer began.

The boy prompted him, and they recited the statement together: “I take joy and

contentment from the knowledge that I create the energy that fuels my future.”

The boy made him say it again, more forcefully. And then he had the writer repeat it once more.

Suddenly, the bells and choir voices stopped, and the sounds of nature echoed away into silence. The room became quiet except for delicate bell-like tones still emerging from the water pipes.

They both listened raptly. After another tense moment, the writer whispered, “Tell me what they’re saying.”

“They’re plotting ways to kill members of the asylum staff,” the child told him.

“You’re joking.”

“They’re making shivs,” the child said.

“Wait,” the writer responded. “Patricia has an assembly line making torture tools and death devices, but meanwhile the inmates are making knives to kill the guards?”

“You must understand,” the child interjected. “Forces around the globe are mass-marketing the tools of death. Some are making them for use within individual institutions, some are for use everywhere else.”

“But why?” the writer asked. “Why is all this happening?!”

“In order for everyone to enter heaven, of course,” the boy said evenly. The writer found the child’s nonchalance chilling.

With the sound of a death knell, their conversation was over. In the reverberating breathing of a thousand tortured souls, the boy rose from his chair. The writer was going to say something but was struck mute because the child kept on rising. The boy hovered just above the metal table, then moved higher, and higher still, gliding easily through the too-cold air of Creedmoor Interrogation Room Nine. Just before disappearing into the gloom, the child became Patricia for a moment. She smiled her menacing smile down at the writer, and then disappeared.

The writer glanced around the empty chamber as the cacophony began again. The tapping, howling, singing, pinging, and pounding rose in volume, accompanied by electronic screeching powerful enough to remove tar from roadbeds.

Then the writer began rising toward the ceiling. Slowly, inexorably, horrendously, his

spirit body climbed through the swirling dusky air. Up he went. Up, and higher still, until the view was dizzying.

The ascension halted just as the sonic attack reached a climax, at which point another transformation took place.

In the same manner as with the boy, the writer became Patricia for a moment. Her lips formed a malevolent smile before the entity changed back to the writer.

Then he, too, disappeared.

~ 7 ~

Intrusion

Reality and fantasy had ceased to have boundaries for the writer. What was substantial had now melded with the fanciful. “Actual and contextual have taken vows and are living together,” the writer thought, and immediately wondered if he could use that line in Patricia’s autobiography. “Life and dream had fused in such a way that there was no separation between consciousness and somnambulance,” he noted to himself.

As the writer mentally composed material for Patricia’s book, their interview sessions morphed into something entirely different from when they began. He often found himself in a far away place at a period of time that was fluctuating. At certain moments, the writer was one of the forgotten corpses in the private

graveyard on Patricia's estate. Most of the time, he was simply another of the wretched souls being subjected to Patricia's hypnotherapy and drug-shock sessions.

In a stupor, the writer gazed at his own dream spirit. "Nothing is real, but everything is super-real," he said, the words slurred because the muscles of his lips could not shape the sounds properly.

"Surrealism," Patricia stated, "is what people call the attempt to point out the vagaries of human existence."

The writer glanced over to see Patricia seated regally on an opulent and ancient throne that appeared to be constructed of leather, gemstones, and skulls.

Patricia and the writer were now inside a cathedral, with towering walls of unappealing stained glass depicting the fairytales of saints.

Incongruously, Patricia wore a modern slacks-and-sweater ensemble while sitting imperiously on the grotesque throne. Her impeccable hair, nails, and outfit were in total contrast to the ostentatious tapestries hanging from the rafters of the medieval basilica that reeked of incense and ergot.

The writer wanted to stand and walk over to the throne but found that his body did not respond. He fell back on a mound of quilts and cushions covered with ornate patterns. Looking up at the room's impossibly high ceiling, he saw a series of colorful faux Renaissance frescoes depicting the coronation of the Pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti. The visages of both king and queen bore a striking resemblance to Patricia.

“By now,” Patricia stated professorially, “you should realize a certain convergence in our lives.”

“Convergence?” the writer asked.

“Yes, indeed,” Patricia replied, relishing her role of teacher. “Dream and conscious, heaven and hell—these are one and the same.”

“They can't be,” the writer protested.

“In our current incarnation,” Patricia stated firmly, “the surreal is to be accepted and embraced. If art shows us a poetic condition that blends with our walking dream here on Earth, who are we to deny that new reality?”

“There has to be a reality on which we all can agree,” the writer responded with a mixture of hope and doubt.

“Not at all, my poor little scribe,” Patricia said condescendingly. “Political philosophies do not agree with one another, so why should any other part of the world?”

“That leads to chaos,” the writer noted.

“A most delightful chaos,” she said.

“I don’t find chaos delightful,” the writer replied. “Why do you enjoy it?”

“My darling scribbler,” Patricia said with a patronizing tone, “it is because I am the personification of chaos.” She let that sink in.

“But there is no way—”

“I know it’s difficult at first,” Patricia said. “Let me explain it to you in a poetic manner.” Patricia took a breath and then continued. “I am all things to some people. I am completely here, but I am not all there. If I were a fish, I would fly. If I were a snake, I would cry. If I were a dog, I would roar. If I were a cat, I would... remain enigmatic, aloof, judgmental, and mischievous. One cannot change cats.”

“Cats again,” the writer muttered.

“Yes,” Patricia said with relish. “Bast has returned.” She gestured languidly to a far corner of the cathedral and the writer turned to

see that the huge creature was in the room with them, contentedly devouring the remains of several carcasses. Near the beast, torn and bloody remnants of orange jump suits were scattered across the terrazzo tile floor.

Bast directed its gaze at the writer for a moment, then returned to munching on a torso.

“Are we in danger?” the writer asked.

“Not anymore,” Patricia replied. “Bast will be satiated for a few hours now.”

“That’s good, because otherwise we—”

The writer stopped as Patricia clapped her hands. “Libations!” she said firmly. She smiled knowingly at the writer.

Servants appeared, and all of them were clad in fifteenth century versions of the inmate jumpsuits. The attendants brought a selection of hot and cold beverages from which Patricia could select. A dozen more servants stood at the ready nearby, awaiting whatever command their mistress wished them to obey.

Patricia continued lecturing the writer about surrealistic dreams being a precursor to everyday reality, but the writer could not follow her words because of the throbbing noise he heard in the background. Louder and

louder grew the sound, a grating and grinding clatter that suggested the ripping apart of whatever reality was left on Earth. He shook his head and tried to concentrate on Patricia's voice. He failed.

"You are planning mass murder," the writer interrupted.

Patricia gave him a hard stare but replied in an even tone of voice. "Certainly," she said.

"That's monstrous," he stated with alarm.

Patricia smiled. "I'm going to have to correct you on this," she said. "It's monumental, not monstrous. The inmates have simply been subjected to a long-running laboratory experiment involving just a few psychotomimetic pharmaceuticals."

"That's the monstrous part," the writer stated.

"Don't be an alarmist," Patricia told him. "All that has happened is that they now see everyone on earth as an alien of one or two forms. They see us as either meat or metal. The leaders are all metal. See? Here I am." For one brief hallucinatory second, the writer saw Patricia made entirely of burnished brass.

"Must be hell to polish," he thought.

“That’s enough of that,” Patricia said, as if reading his mind. “I think we need to move on with creating my book.”

“Yeah, sure,” agreed the writer, “but it’s hard to concentrate with all that noise. Can’t we do something about it?”

“Noise?” she asked, feigning innocence.

“The crunching, the scraping, that whole huge dentist’s office grinding sound.”

The cacophony had reached the point where the writer was experiencing pain from the aural onslaught.

“Are you ill?” Patricia inquired.

“Jesus!” the writer exclaimed. “Look! Up at the ceiling!”

“Yes,” Patricia replied, unperturbed.

“Something’s breaking through up there!”

“Yes,” she said calmly. “I agree with what you say, for a change.”

Emerging through the ceiling with a screeching sound was a metal drill bit the size of a small truck. The colossal drill destroyed the entire section of the fresco which displayed the royal coronation.

Heavy shards of plaster slammed to the floor and a million fine bits of debris scattered

through the air and were stirred violently as the drill moved downward.

“It’s coming at us!” the writer exclaimed.

The huge drill bit rapidly descended into the chamber at the end of a long and gleaming metal shaft. The cutting edges of the rotating drill bit tore into one of the servants. His body was flung to the far side of the room, blood spurting everywhere.

The drill began darting through the hall in unpredictable directions, slaughtering servants with every thrust.

“Help me!” wailed one man who was blindly feeling around for his missing leg.

With a sickening thud, the drill bit struck the tile floor and broke off, leaving the silver shaft to seek out the remaining servants, most of whom were frantically beating on the locked doors to the chamber.

One servant was skewered. Then two. Then five more. Those dodging the shaft frequently slipped in pools of blood.

Suddenly, the shaft stopped. Much of the noise also ceased, although there was a tinny sounding melody playing softly from Patricia’s mobile device. The writer was surprised at her

choice of music: Cole Porter's *You Do Something to Me*.

“That’s an alert I set,” Patricia said. “A reminder that I have to dress for this evening’s vespers.” She turned to regard one of the fallen servants on the floor nearest her throne. “You know, Fendrel,” she said to the struggling man, “with that metal shank penetrating your body, you’re certainly going to die, and it is my wish that you would do so quickly and quietly.”

“Help me!” the man pleaded. “You’ve got to help me!” He grabbed the throne, his fingers in the skull eye-sockets, and attempted to lift himself up.

“Fendrel!” Patricia said with some vehemence. “I would appreciate it if you didn’t bleed on my throne like that. For lucifer’s sake, where are your manners?”

~ 8 ~

Overlapping epiphanies

Now that the concepts of truth and dream had ceased to have separate definitions, the colors of the world imploded into a cornucopia of ecru. Even the forests of wildflowers across the faraway mountains ran the gamut from grey to ebony.

The entire visible universe had ended up upended. North was barbiturate, East was November, salad was soup, hopscotch was elbow, up was alabaster, and right was wrong. Worst of all, words often became numbers.

Thunder pealed in the nearby forest and the atmosphere was full of impending rain. Flashes of lightning revealed an old and battered sign stating that these grounds were home to “The Gloom Trio,” referring to the

Ancient Days Institute for Psychological Research, the McFreer Center for Psychotropic Medicine, and Creedmoor Asylum for the Criminally Insane. In a dream state, the writer saw that Patricia's mansion and the asylum were one and the same.

In the dark clouds surrounding The Gloom Trio, the sky repeatedly exploded, offering brief painterly visions of the lush green hillsides.

As the storm roiled, gigantic sparks continually filled the sky. A bolt of lightning set aflame one grove of trees, then another. Almost immediately, a rainstorm began, causing the burning vegetation to spit geysers of steam in all directions.

Emerging from the mists and moving at a stately speed, animals appeared from the forests and began marching through the valley, making their dusty and often noisy way past Creedmoor's main building.

Every pack was comprised of a dozen or more animals: wolves, lions, hyenas, emu, sheep, horses, goats, llamas, wolverines, and all manner of hairy beasts. With howls and growls, the fauna pushed forward under the

direction of Cerberus, the gigantic, three-headed hound of Hades.

The packs moved to an inner rhythm, seemingly unconcerned with the smaller creatures that bedecked the larger ones: Coyotes and jackals wore garlands of serpents. Horses' necks were ornamented with shrieking monkeys. Lions and bears sported huge moving blotches that were actually multitudes of arachnids, many of them deadly.

In the Southern corner of Patricia's estate, a hunchbacked figure draped in billowing silver robes emerged from the stables mounted atop an Arabian stallion. Standing up in the saddle as the ebony horse raced across the verdant fields, the figure beckoned the heavens with arms outstretched, shouting commands to the sky. The orders were heeded, and the banks of clouds rolled back to admit rays of sun. Like laser beams striking a million prisms, color returned to the world.

Bright color.

Psychedelic bright.

Hurting-the-eyes bright.

Recoiling from the intensity of the hues, the writer spun around and suddenly found

himself on the banks of a swollen and fast-moving river, watching the malformed rider and wild-eyed stallion now flecked with sweat and foaming at the mouth.

The horse never broke stride and took the gowned figure with it into the river, where it immediately sank beneath the murky and whitecapped water.

The writer discovered he was now on a precipice over the river just as the rocks began to crumble. Gravity took the writer through the disintegrating cliffs and down to strike the river with tremendous force.

Instead of the cold of the water, the writer was abruptly immersed within the baroque inequities taking place in every part of the great hall of Creedmoor Asylum.

The awe of being transported so violently had barely registered before the writer was confronted by a crowd of people engaged in gothic acts of erotic carnage. Abominations, brutalities, and cruelties were occurring throughout the hall and the writer experienced a moment of grudging admiration for the forces that were able to orchestrate this purgatorial display.

Almost immediately, the writer grimaced at the realization that everyone's actions were being influenced by Patricia's powerful post-hypnotic suggestions, each of which was violently exacerbated by pharmacology.

Anxiously glancing around, the writer noted that the floor of the hall was now polished granite while the walls and ceiling were constructed of overlapping metal plates. Every surface bore the markings of having been struck by mallets, hammers, spikes, claws, and small explosions.

Light came into the expansive room through cunningly placed slits in the vaulted ceiling, creating a shimmering chiaroscuro effect. In opposition to the visual beauty of the lighting, every metal surface reflected the apparitions of howling men and women who resided only in shadows and the vapor of time.

Coolly surveying the destruction and bloodshed throughout the edifice, Patricia stood at one end of the chamber, wearing a white cloak so pure that it seemed to glow. She was standing immobile except for brief nods of appreciation when a particularly gruesome act of violence took place near her.

All the participants in the insane revelry—inmates, doctors, guards, and staff of Creedmoor—were in varying stages of nakedness, and most were moaning, keening, or screaming.

With an unseen force propelling him, the writer was conveyed around the room, where he was compelled to witness a panoply of altercations, monologues, and cries for help.

“The fiend!” shouted one inmate, pointing at the gigantic cat beast, Bast. The massive feline creature was happily devouring more people in the east corner of the hall.

Ignoring the bloody repast of the furry monster, other inmates were fighting, fucking, taking drugs, or dancing to what sounded like the music of Mozart speeded up and performed on screeching electronic instruments.

“Ghosts!” hollered one inmate.

“Ghouls!” barked another.

“Goblins!” shouted yet another.

As if playing an insane word game, other inmates shouted their descriptions of the visions brought on by the hallucinogenic drug overdoses to which they had been subjected.

“Spirits!”

“Phantoms!”

“Spooks!”

“Demons!”

“Beelzebub!!!”

The writer passed near Patricia, who told him, “They exaggerate just a bit. Beelzebub isn’t coming until later.”

Patricia’s voice cut through the aural avalanche, and she calmly imparted more of her story to the writer as if she was continuing their collaboration on her book.

“We mustn’t fail to mention my many contributions to society,” she told the writer. “For example, I don’t discriminate—I perform my experiments on inmates of every race, color, creed, and/or sexual identification. In addition, my organization doesn’t pay employees so poorly that they have to go on welfare. Also, I’m not a politician who rigs the tax code to help rich friends and donors. Nor am I a publishing company that removes American history from American history textbooks.”

The writer tried to ask a question but could not be heard above the turmoil in the hall.

“There is no doubt that I am beyond the ordinary concept of sanity,” Patricia admitted, “but the sad and poignant truth is that everyone is insane.” Patricia paused a moment and then added, “Unlike most of humanity, I am not so far gone that I don’t know how far gone I am.”

Before he could reply, the writer was propelled to another part of the hall. An inmate who was wearing only caked blood turned to address the writer. “They look at me funny,” he said primly. “All the doctors and most of the nurses. Some of them try to hide it. Others do it right out in the open. One of them even rolls her eyes at me. They think I don’t notice, but I watch them just like they watch me.”

In an instant, the writer was thrust to a different part of the enormous structure, where he stood amidst a group of inmates and guards who were engaged in a shouting match about their grievances, everything from lumpy beds to the temperature of the cells.

Abruptly, the writer was taken elsewhere in the building. He now gazed at a strikingly beautiful woman who was standing naked on a table delivering a speech to a rowdy group of admirers.

“Fantasies, visions, and onanism are free for us all,” the woman proclaimed, “and they can be lifesavers! Sometimes, you need the fantasy to improve the reality. Maybe the fantasy is something you just can’t get from real life. Maybe what you fancy is too elaborate for your partner. Or too kinky. Or too difficult. Or just damn near impossible.”

Many onlookers nodded in agreement. One shouted, “What about deviant imagery?”

“I’m for it,” the woman replied to the delight of the crowd. “Isn’t everybody?”

“Damn right!” they responded, each of them imagining a different deviant image of eroticism.



“Remember,” the woman stated to the group, “an orgasm is a transcendent feat.”

“Yes!” said the crowd.

“Sex is a mystical plateau,” she added.

“Yes!” said the crowd.

“Most importantly,” the woman stated, “ecstasy is a consummation devoutly to be wished, no pun intended.”

As the crowd applauded, the writer was whisked to another part of the hall.

“The glory of the Good Book can change your life!” shouted a drooling Christian to no one in particular.

The writer was surprised to find himself replying to the slobbering man. “You need to recognize that *The Bible* is a collection of perverted folklore, tall tales, and religious tomfoolery.”

The drooler blinked, did a double take, and tensed his muscles for an angry response. “Hear the Word of the Lord!” the man shouted. “Seabiscuit begat Affirmed; Affirmed begat Perry; Perry begat Della; Della begat Street; and so on unto the Great Now and Forever!”

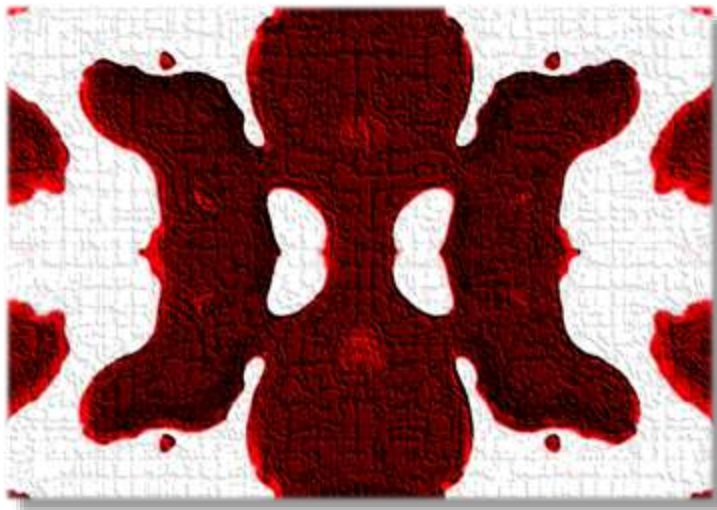
“Well,” the writer replied evenly, “that’s certainly a unique viewpoint.”

The writer turned and found himself in front of two inmates brandishing shivs. To his amazement, they thrust their weapons into each other with ferocious glee.

“Jesus,” another onlooker said to the writer. “Who knew there was so much blood in a human body?” Before the writer could reply, the man leaned over to address the two mortally wounded men lying on the floor. “Dibs on your afternoon meds!” The inmate turned to the writer and said, “They can’t use ‘em ‘cause they’re both too busy dying.”

The inmate dropped to his knees and began playing with the darkening red fluid.

“Hey, look at this! I can push the blood puddles around to make one of the doc’s ink-blot tests!”



With a jolt, the writer was transported to the center of the hall where Patricia was on a pedestal, preaching to her cacophonous congregation. “A human body has five million pores,” Patricia intoned. “Select several and make a bunch of incisions. Perhaps carve a pattern. Time for a demonstration!”

At the base of the pedestal, two guards held down one struggling inmate while another used a long and elaborate dagger to follow Patricia’s instruction to “Decorate the torso with liquid crimson.”

The writer reeled and suddenly found himself pinned against one of the metallic walls as inmates rushed up to deliver their alternative landscape of the mind.

“No morphine today,” one said. “I want LSD!”

“Roof is a funny word,” said another. “Roof as in that thing overhead. Roof, as in roofies. Roof-roof, says the dog!”

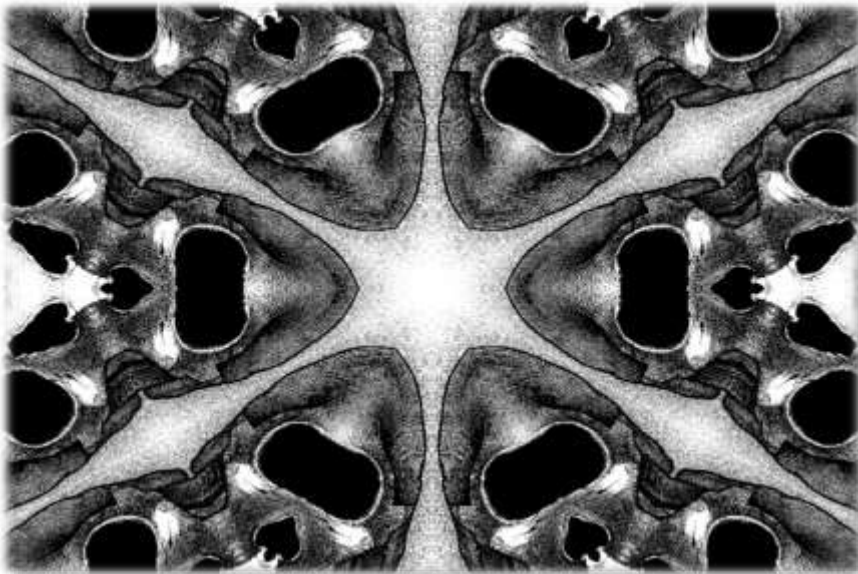
“Slither thou goest,” said another. “That’s what the prophets say in *The elbiB!*”

“My new poem is autobiographical,” said another inmate, “but it’s not about me personally,” he added with a wink.

“We shall be washed in the blood of the lambchops!” another yelled.

“*Mars Attacks* is a documentary!” shouted yet another.

The speed of the audio-visual barrage increased until there was a strobing of imagery that overwhelmed the writer.



And then, after the sound of an enormous explosion, all was still. Hovering amidst a ghastly void, the writer was once again facing Patricia.

“Listen carefully,” Patricia told him conspiratorially. “Death and Nature shall stand amazed when Creation rises again,” she said, quoting from Verdi’s *Requiem*.

“A bit pretentious,” the writer muttered.

“Be civil, my little scribe,” she chided him. “Next, we will enjoy *le spectacle de clowns furieux*, the furious clown cavalcade.”

Lightning flashed, thunder pealed, and the firmament trembled.

To the horror of all who were trapped inside, the uppermost parts of the asylum structure slowly disintegrated, exposing the cells, hallways, interrogation rooms, cafeteria, infirmary, kitchen, offices, gymnasium, and the foundation of the enormous building, leaving the cracked walls teetering.

With the sound of breaking plaster, the overhead security cameras in each room detached from their mountings and began slowly rising, becoming a fleet of drones. Each airborne video camera captured a view of Patricia’s estate and the asylum grounds. As the drones soared higher, the view included the nearby cities with their homes, avenues, schools, offices, playgrounds, houses of worship, and more. Everything was on display.

The drone cameras travelled to every latitude and longitude on the globe. Eventually, the drone cameras provided views of the whole world being overrun with bedlam.

No matter where one looked, reality had evaporated, and rage was rampant. Moorings were cut, but nooses of autoeroticism were tightened. Metaphorical ropes, chains, and leashes were unfastened. There were no longer any restraints, bindings, inhibitions, controls, curbs, reins, or shackles on behavior. Ethics and morality ceased.

“Le monde tel que nous le connaissons est fini,” Patricia said with some satisfaction. “The world as we know it is finished. Soon, the Earth will be an empty husk.”

Wordlessly, the writer stared with horror at humanity in its death throes.



~ 9 ~

Beyond

THE GHOSTS ARE ALWAYS RAVENOUS. Patricia stared at the letters that had been painstakingly chiseled into the granite gravestone. The five words appeared on the fifteen-foot-high funerary marker just above her full name and date of birth.

“Your craftsmen have done excellent work, as usual,” Patricia said into her phone as she studied the latest addition to the now expansive labyrinth of crypts on her estate. “The inscription is quite nicely done,” she said. “Once I depart from this world, you can add the date of death. At that point, everything will be satisfactory on this plane of existence.”

She chatted genially but professionally as she walked back to her mansion. Concluding the call, she entered her study and sat down to

await the next applicant for the position of ghost writer on her autobiography, having decided to part ways with her former writer.

Today's contender for the position was a beautiful poetess who was currently toiling aimlessly in the English Lit graduate studies program of a university located in a sleepy town not many miles away.

Once the interviewee arrived and the introductions were concluded, Patricia rang for tea to be served. The young woman thanked her host and happily sipped her tea, oblivious to the fact that her cup was spiked with a pharmacological concoction which would greatly aid Patricia's hypnotic suggestions.

"When we converse, you may address me as Miss Patricia. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Miss Patricia," the woman replied, somewhat awkwardly.

"Good," Patricia said. "Now, your resume provides your academic accomplishments, and they are impressive. However, I'm wondering about a few other matters." Patricia pointed at the young woman and intoned, "I will need you to enlighten me as to what might be called the real you."

“Well, I am—” the young woman started to recite a speech she had prepared for just such an eventuality.

“Not yet, please,” Patricia cut her off. “You will begin when I tell you to do so.”

“Sorry,” the woman said. “I didn’t know what you—”

Patricia used a marmalade knife to reflect light into the young woman’s eyes. The woman froze in place. “Alright,” Patricia said kindly but forcefully, “you may begin... now.”

In a trance, the young woman unburdened herself of all her secrets. Hopes, fears, and desires poured out of her with only minor hesitations. She alternately stared at Patricia or into the middle distance between them. Her eyes were wide and blinked infrequently.

“That was fine,” Patricia said, pleased that this candidate appeared to meet all her requirements. Patricia snapped her fingers once and the young woman returned to normal consciousness.

“My god,” the young woman said with a start. She glanced around guiltily.

Patricia replied without acknowledging the consternation of her guest. “It is time for a

more practical display of your capabilities. Are you ready?”

“I think so,” the young woman replied, still puzzled about having lost track of time.

“Good,” Patricia said. “I will state something, and you will tell me how you react to it as well as how you feel about putting it in my story. Do you understand?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Good. Here is my first statement. ‘That which is real shall interweave with that which is in the mind.’ Tell me your reaction to that.”

“Well,” the young woman replied, “I think that it’s a fine observation and I would put it into the book just as you said it.”

“Good,” Patricia said. “Alright, let’s try something longer.” Patricia cocked her head a moment, then began speaking. “I should like to impart to you my involvement in musical comedy theatre. For example, I was Luisa in *The Fantasticks* off-Broadway. Well, off-off-off-Broadway, but it was still in New York. Because we were performing in an all-girl, all-nude version, we had to change the title to *The Funtasticks*, although some of the posters had a ‘c’ painted over the ‘f’ in the title.” Patricia

turned to regard the young woman. “Well?” Patricia asked.

“I found it entertaining,” the young woman said.

“I see, and...?” Patricia inquired.

“And therefore, I think readers would find it interesting, too.”

“I agree,” Patricia said. “Very good. One final example should suffice. This one is multi-part.” Patricia paused once more to collect her thoughts. This time, she held up the silver sugar tongs to reflect light into the young woman’s eyes. When the hypnotic state had been restored, Patricia presented a deliberately disjointed monologue.

“My heroes are those revolutionaries who sneak around in the night and blow-up fast-food restaurants.” With a slight change in her vocal tone, Patricia made her next point. “I miss those big, clunky landline phones because you really had a hold of something with one of those.” She again changed her tone. “I never use alcohol—that stuff is pernicious and evil. Instead, I go with the natural high of magic mushrooms.” Back to her first tone of voice. “I like beaded purses and chocolate truffle cake.”

Patricia spoke earnestly now. “Oh, I have to warn you about something. Pay attention to this. My name, as I told you, is Patricia. Let me emphasize that: Patricia. The last seven out of ten times someone called me ‘Patty,’ I killed them instantly. Yes, I know what you’re thinking: What did I do the other times?” Patricia smiled. “I killed them slowly.”

The young woman was intently focused on Patricia but did not respond.

“As to the way I kill them,” Patricia continued matter-of-factly, “well, sometimes I let them waste away in one of the subterranean rooms beneath the mansion. Other times I bleed them. Occasionally, I remove bits of their bodies and feed them to my pets.” Patricia studied her guest. “Are you finding this difficult to believe? I can show you if you wish. I’m pretty sure at least one of them is still alive in the basement. He’s in a well-concealed chamber beneath the wine cellar. I’ll take you there if you like.”

The young woman remained mute.

“There’s no need to be shy,” Patricia told her. “I won’t do anything to hurt you if you don’t hurt me. Oh, I have one other thing you

must remember when you're working with me here at the mansion. Let me know if you are confused by what you think you see in any reflective surfaces. Mirrors, shiny objects, that sort of thing. It can be very... distracting. Just tell me about it and we'll make everything alright. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Patricia," the woman said in a monotone.

"When I snap my fingers, you will return to our conversation." She snapped her fingers.

The young woman blinked her eyes in confusion, then fixed them on Patricia. "Oh wow," the woman said, a bit flustered.

"Yes?" Patricia asked.

"No, everything's fine," the young woman stammered.

"Excellent," Patricia said. "Please have another cup of tea and then we will get started on the project."

"I'm hired?"

"Welcome aboard," Patricia told her.

"Thank you!"

The woman reached out for the antique server. She froze as she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the polished silver container.

The image flickered and changed. What she saw sent tremors up and down her spine. She stared at the reflected image in a daze, unable to respond.

While Patricia's post-hypnotic suggestion worked hard to pull the young woman away from the reflection, the images dancing on the silvery surface were too mesmerizing to ignore. Hooded figures wielding scythes hacked at each other, sending geysers of blood shooting into the air. Gigantic animals snarled and clawed at cowering families. Lava flowed from darkly glowing mountains. Bolts of lightning set homes ablaze. Sheets of glass shattered into the faces of prisoners chained to the sides of buildings. Anarchy reigned.

Patricia noticed the woman was trembling in fear. "What is the matter, my little one? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"This... this horror..." was all that the young woman could manage to say.

"Ah, I understand," Patricia said. "Just remain calm, my darling." Patricia glided over beside her new charge. She held up an emerald ring and angled it to shine light into the young woman's face. "Listen to me, my lovely one,"

Patricia said calmly yet forcefully. “You will move past this fear, and you will be unaffected by what you see in reflections from now on. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Miss Patricia,” the young woman stated in a quiet monotone.

“Good. Now sit back in your chair and we will proceed with our work on the book.”

“Yes, Miss Patricia.”

Patricia regarded the image in the silver surface of the tea server. She sighed and shook her head. “My darling former scribe hasn’t yet learned how to communicate from the other side.” She turned to regard her new employee. “One day, you will try sending messages like this. And you, too, will fail.”

“Yes, Miss Patricia,” the young woman said sadly.

“Don’t feel badly,” Patricia said. “No one can stop the surreal.”

The message from the absent ghost writer began flashing throughout the mansion, in mirrors, on panes of glass, and from every reflective surface.

Patricia picked up the silver tea server and turned to the young woman with a smile.

“More tea?” Patricia asked sweetly.

“Yes, please,” the woman said.

The writer’s signal of distress went unheeded into the muddle of Earth’s everyday reality.



About the Author

With a heart full of hatred and a head full of ozone, John Scott G madly pursues his passion for linguistic pranks. He unabashedly uses bushels of nouns and verbs and adjectives and adverbs and prepositions and concocted wordoids and run-on sentences and stuff sometimes even without proper punctuation; or spellchck or anything.

He recently appeared before a group of people, many of whom were awake, and informed them, “My writing is for the good of humankind.” He spoke with the unflinching faith of someone who recently acquired large supplies of ecstasy and tequila.



johnscottg.com