

8. THE PORTRAIT GALLERY

I have been hired to do a series of portraits. They are all part of a collected work. All the individuals are accomplished in their field. It is part of an artistic project sponsored by one of the major corporations in the city. The intent is to show the accomplishment of the city by highlighting the contributors to its greatness.

Steve Fisher is an imposing man. He is a world renown novelist. His books describe the relationship between trauma and memory. I am invited to do his portrait in his home. He has his study prepared for me. He leads me to the room. It will take me about an hour to get the lights set up. I am working with a make up artist. I want everything to look good. I also have Angel with me. She is my photographic assistant.

I can tell that this is going to be difficult. Mr. Fisher has tried all his life to control the image that people use to recognize him. Behind this image is a maze of complexity. Mr. Fisher wants people to see the rather straight forward portrait that he uses to order his narratives. He tries to distill human motivation in terms of simple emotions. Revenge. Anger. Affection. He is obsessed with the code that he has established for himself. He uses it to smooth out the kinks in his own characters. All their tribulations are due to this inability to make sense of their plan in the universe, in his universe. This is why he is such a puzzle. He wants me to see him without a past. He is only the man that is here before me. The writer. The arranger. His characters have histories. He does not.

I am being paid well for my services. In some respects, I am being paid for my silence. Steve Fisher agreed to do this sitting for just that reason. He does not want to be probed. He wants people to see him for what he is. What he is is a man with clarity and vision. He does not want to appear to be driven by forces out of his control. He is the prime move. He makes things happen, and others follow his orders. They accept the system that he offers.

Steve Fisher is dressed in a blue wool blazer. It is a spring lightweight jacket. He wears a cream colored shirt and a rose-colored tie. His hair is combed meticulously. There is not a hair out of place. He is the ideal model for one of his characters. He is a star.

This is all the more reason that I need to reject what he is giving me. I need to discover another side of Steve Fisher. He resists my probing. He resents the effects of the light. Instead, he wants to shine in his own way. How can I shake him up? I don't need to do a thing. I cut imperceptibly. He is not aware of the dissection. I am the perfect surgeon. The incision is invisible.

He is a little uncomfortable with the intense heat of the lights. I work fast. I need to be correct. The make up artist sees that he is sweating and dabs his face. Her job is still intact. He does not come out of character. He needs to make me feel like an interrogator. That way I might tune down the extremes of my gaze. I cannot oblige him.

He realizes that he has made a commitment to the project organizers. But he does not want an intrusion into his life. Those are the very terms under which the organizers undertook this project. They want me to capture the surfaces that make this city what it is. For my part, I want to reveal. That is why I have agreed to do the work. That is who I am. I am an artist. If they wanted someone to flatter, they could have hired someone else. I am here to portray the truth.

There is a very seamy side to Mr. Fisher's personality. I want to spare no effort in eliciting this quality from our meeting. As I am uncovering this layer in his character, he is doing everything that he can to resist my incursions. He feels that this is a battle of wits. Unfortunately for him, I am taking the pictures. I am framing his frustration.

Mr. Fisher is not used to this arrangement. Usually he can turn the tides on his opposition. He is finding it difficult to manipulate me. In my world, he is blind. He gropes in the darkness in the hope of finding some reference. Just as he thinks that he has found his way, I shoot a more powerful blast of light his way. I am not going to let up. I know that he is angry about the project. But it is too late for him to quit. It would only make him look bad.

I am able to discover the dark shadows that make him such a luminary. As a writer, he is able to determine the path of his characters. He has learned to manipulate the situations to support his tinkering. So everything appears natural to his readers. It is the same thing with his social interactions. He can impose context and watch as others fall in line. He has trained himself for just this game. He knows how to adapt the world to this facsimile that he has created. Once he has snared the fly into his web, it does his bidding. His net is strong and extended. He takes his time in ensnaring his prey.

His best technique is to cast himself as a mild-mannered personality. He gets his opponents to detail the cruelty of Mr. Fisher's novels. He lets them fall in line as they elaborate their fascination with his constructs. Their curiosity gets the better of them. They only realize that they are ensnared when it is too late. Their screams accompany the application of the most torturous demonstrations.

"Please stop!"

He appears deaf to their entreaties. It is this diffidence that I am working to capture in my photographs. He wants to make himself seem dignified. I show that his dignity exists at the summit of a mountain of ruthlessness. He has no comprehension of human sympathy. He will not feel for his fellows. His rejoinder is why should he. His mission has been to smash the sham of the civilized society. In the process, he allies himself with the most depraved bunch. Sure he may be correct in exposing a dominant hypocrisy. But he is only carrying on that degenerate tendency on his own.

"I write to uphold the best in mankind. Even at its most corrupted, there is still room for redemption. I live with that hope."

And he does. He is the shining example that he holds up. He finds loads of compatriots for his parties and other recreations. Once he has hooked the denizen of the nether world, he can begin his descent into the further reaches of their private hell. He makes no secret of his attachment to wealth.

"We never force anyone to do things. They just feel so much freer around our ilk."

As the roaches crawl away in darkness, they have become adept at inflicting their barbarism on the entourage. It is only natural when their everyday life extends this dominion. This is his testament to normalcy. Everyone wants what he has. This is the sign of an independent society. It is how we advance. This is progress. This is growth.

"We need to let off steam some how."

He is so right. As the lights bear down on him, I realize that my method of interrogation has found success. I have kissed the lips of my jailer. I have found the key to my imprisonment.

“Mr. Fisher, I can get you something to drink.”

I am playing the servant to his master. He does not realize that I am turning history on its head. He can no longer pose so imperiously after my portrait. Mr. Fisher will need to hide in shame. After all, how could he really survive without the props that have made him a celebrity. He will now have to hide. When he does work to impose his regime, he will only be inviting his subjects to revolt.

I guess that I am giving too much credibility to my insights. But that is what makes me such an observant witness. I am afraid that these insights are so subtle that I am the only one who really sees their application.

Instead of concentrating on these wonders, I could photograph the flower vendor or the ice cream salesman. The subway ticket taker. In their relentlessness, they do not live under a disguise. I find it distinctly more provocative to expose these captains of industry. Perhaps I am only giving in to the corridors of power. The layers that I document are part of the initiation path to our meritocracy. I am being included in their midst. They love it. I give them proportion when they have none. I offer them an epic quality. I make them gods.

As myth-maker, I offer them a valuable service. We are in cahoots together. In the tales of the ancients, Zeus ruled by his caprice. He could trick humans and gods alike, and they were powerless against him. Even his foibles were a testament to his power. I am able to pierce this invulnerability.

It is somewhat disheartening to realize how much my audience wants its spectacle. It exposes Zeus only to usher in another demi-god. I feel that I am helpless in my pursuit. Knowledge is not enough.

For Mr. Fisher, the opposite effect applies. He pretends that he is chronicling his society. But he is trying to shape it into the vision that he embraces. He only adds to the uniformity. There is little that I can do to break his hold.

When the cruelty emerges from his application, he only revels in it. He has waited for this moment. All that he can get from the power of suggestion.

“I think that I’d like to leave now. I really didn’t come here to have this happen.”

“I never forced you.”

“If you don’t let me leave now, you’d be forcing me.”

He has already played his hand, and he does not want to let go. Not this late.

“Listen, bitch. You’re going to fuck me, or I’ll expose you for the frigid little cunt that you are. You’re just a cock tease.”

As they do lines of coke, both of them can laugh about his tirade.

“Mr. Fisher, you’re such a brilliant actor.”

“Thank you my dear. Now suck my cock before you leave.”

These facts remain undocumented. That is my job. But am I only seeking to replace him. Don’t I want the fawning fans who give me my due. Where my wish is their command. Obedience. A forgotten art.

The intricacies of Mr. Fisher’s world fascinate me. They justify the turns of my own depiction. Where else could I create interest for my abstractions. My devotion to color. The variations of shading. The deepness of hue.

I have brought his cardboard world to life as he does the same thing time after time. This

is his secret. His representation of desire. He recognizes how we all want to feed that same animal. Tenderness is just a pose in that further exploration. It is a way of resting the body before throwing the self into the gasps of appetite.

I embrace what he offers. Mr. Fisher can now do my bidding. I seek the groupies and sycophants that believe they are deriving wisdom by staying close to him.

“Your sperm tastes like science.”

“Then why do you spit it out?”

“I am resting my brain for today.”

If Mr. Fisher has sought innovation, I am becoming a hanger on. I am a dupe. Worse, my intellect has betrayed me. He seems smug in this realization. I have become a pornographer. I have rendered his desire on the lens. I have made it palpable. Satisfaction is only a breath away. All the players in his orgy only follow in line. Once we have tasted this delight, we only want more. It becomes our reason to live. I have taken it further. I have caught the one who watches. I have made him into the subject matter. The viewer will only wonder what is he staring at. I need to do more if I am to accept my assignment.

So the struggle becomes to reconstruct what he is looking at. In the end we have to know. We want to have the same gaze as his. We are his children.

How do I want to see my sisters? I am submitting to my commandant. Their lithe bodies ready for the sport. My lips, my hands—all is only to ready to bring the images alive. What will spur the enactment. The celebrity. The promise. I seek just that thing for myself. Let it rain on me. I want my pennies from heaven.

This is the ultimate pornography. A world where there is nothing else but devotion to power. Everything can be seen. Everything can be owned. I am only bearing greater testimony to his adept.

He has rendered me naked. And the only way not to lose myself is to clothe myself in desire. But it is the same desire that I have found in my portraits of Mr. Fisher. I am becoming Mr. Fisher. I want to accompany him on one of his adventures. Where I pluck a sweet young thing from her habitat and can trade her for another of infinitely more charm. If I have any sweetness in my repertoire, I can use it to become a significantly better player. I am involved with other players who have learned all the twists of the game. They do not let up. In rest, they have discovered other forms of stimulation. This is their embrace of pain. All the time, this high, they never have to let down.

Mr. Fisher is a guru. He promises complete abandonment to pleasure. He couches it as a form of enlightenment. It makes him seem like some kind of master. Come on, dear Mr. Fisher, lead the way. He is the Pied Piper playing his seductive melody for the kiddies. Take us on another ride.

Doesn't this make him all the more frightening for the masses? It would if they did not share in his affliction. That is his very goal. He has to seduce others into accepting the norms of his pursuits. Everyone can have their taste of paradise.

“You have to love what we have. Anyone can succeed if they apply themselves. This is not like other places where people are limited by birth. The son of a plumber can become president. Anything less would be leveling, settling for less. Ralph, you have to give in. You don't want to end up a frustrated revolutionary. Enjoy it. Don't listen to the cries for help. They

don't really exist. You can't help those who have already drowned. Those who won't embrace life. That is what I do."

Can anyone see beyond the veil? To see is to know too much. That is the frustration. Mr. Fisher has used his skill to elicit another level of obedience. His torture was only a step in gaining more pleasure. Now he applies that feeling to others. They will give him more because they too have suffered. They have tasted the remedy. He can save them.

I hope that I have not failed in my task. He is good. Just as I seem to corner him, he slips away.

"As you develop, you realize that the world is so much more complex than your art. You try to make people do what you expect. But they always surprise you."

I am sure that they do!

Aaron Whiting is the former head of a software company. He was tasked with monitoring executives' progress. The software offered a psychological profile of the individual. It tracked his potential as he made his way through the ranks of the firm. His software could gauge the future performance of potential candidates. It became an invaluable tool to observe the inner workings of a corporation. After amassing a fortune for himself, Aaron decided to branch out in more humanitarian direction. Now, he works in problems of conflict resolution. He sees arbitration as part of an overall model of social harmony. Aaron now fashions himself a bit of a prophet. His intent is to moderate the aggressions of the scions of industry. He is a man of the twenty-first century.

Aaron does not want to others to focus on his race for the top. He feels that his success was only part of a natural process. That is the reason that he sees his tale as different from so many other stories of accomplishment. He sees himself as fundamentally a scientist, an observer of process. Someone who measures progress and applies his understanding to further innovation. He has emphasized this same philosophy in his approach to management. He is attuned to the results of merit. He has used his approach to break down the more clique-oriented views of the organization.

Despite his easy-going mannerisms, there is a deep resentment for anyone who might question his motives. There has always been an undercurrent of suspicion around Aaron Whiting. But he has made every effort to deflect this criticism. Despite my initial misgivings, I have agreed to an outdoor setting for his portrait. We set up by his pool. This means that the lighting will be trickier. We will have to use reflectors to compensate for the daytime shadows. I need to find the night time that lingers behind his mask of good cheer.

He immediately tries to make me feel at home. He gets me a drink.

"Great to have you here, Ralph."

"Thanks for giving me your time, Mr. Whiting."

"Call me Aaron."

His familiarity is rather off-setting. It makes my viewpoint more difficult to maintain. I don't want to get caught in mind games like happened with Mr. Fisher. But Aaron is doing just the same thing in his own way. It is unbearable. He does not hide. He gives me everything. He tries to make me feel at ease. I can feel that he is taking me over. Even the setting is too his liking. I am sweating. He is cool and calm. I need to find the key. I know that he is a snake. As he slimes around me, I realize that he will not succeed. He is not as perceptive as Mr. Fisher. He

cannot get inside the mind. He only skirts around the psyche. I am too disciplined for his style.

It is only later on that I realize that he works by a war of attrition. Even as I feel that I am winning, he is wearing me down. I have to hold on. Otherwise, he will take me down before I do my magic. What can I discover about him? What is his weakness? He acts casual. But he works too hard. He makes his challenges too early. He does not let the play proceed naturally. Once he goes in for the kill, he is entirely vulnerable. His failure only makes him completely exposed. He has surrendered his software firm for just this reason. He is not strong; he is weak. He wants to be supportive. But he is so used to dominance. Impatience always was a mark of his tenure as his company head. He cannot conceal this. His philanthropy comes at a price. He gives only if he can receive. There is a dark cloud on his sunny day.

Ariel Ursula Sims is the head of a biotech firm. She graduated from the University of Washington and went to work in Seattle. She distinguished herself as researcher for her firm. They realized her vision and soon promoted her. She used her skills to progress further in the company. Her intelligence enabled her to comprehend the intimate relationship between development and economic progress. She still feels more at home in the lab. When she feels that things are going terribly for the company, she retreats to her former place of refuge. She feels that all financial dilemmas can be solved with some new breakthrough on the technical front. She has been proven correct time and time again.

Due to her certainty in the realm of science, she avoids those situations that might challenge her omniscience. She has simplified all the complexities of everyday life. Even in her home life she has sought that same degree of placidity.

“Do you like my hair?”

She has just had it done for the shoot. She seldom treats herself in this way. Her clothes are very functional. She tries to add little details, a scarf or a necklace, that indicate her touch. But she is still very much immersed in a world of work.

Her body is in great shape. She bikes and works out to relieve stress. Her muscles are well tone. She walks with an air of confidence. She is still a little afraid to endure the lights. I try to be as understanding as possible.

Since she has risen according to the book, she has little comprehension of a world outside this regularity. She knows that there is something else. She has visited that world. She has taken vacations there. But she always returns to her protected space.

If I disturb that realm, will she be defensive? I work hard to open her to my interests. I want to show that the drive has a toll. She resists my probing. I wonder if she has ever tasted true pleasure.

“It’s an illusion that gets us to hold on to the transitory.”

“So what is permanent.”

“Knowledge. Friendship. Family.”

She lets the social order do the talking for her. There appears to be no envy in her world. The process is transparent.

“What about those who find you a puzzle?”

“There’s really nothing to wonder about.”

Her poses seem so rigid. I need to body to find its natural form of expression. She is

tensing up. I need the visual equivalent to a massage. I turn off the lights. We will return later. It is time for her to recover.

If she gave too much, would she start to question her perfect world. When she first married, she questioned herself. She was afraid that she was surrendering something that was better left protected.

“Science never sleeps.”

There would be no science if the scientists didn't rest. That is where all the ideas become truly organized. What does she know that frightens her.

“The thing that's weird about your photos is the sense of exaggeration. You can't present things as they are, you have to distort things. You change the images.”

“I see with the inner eye.”

She wants another vision. I am trying to offer that for her. I am doing my best.

When we start to shoot again, we bring a new viewpoint to the set. She accepts my direction. But this is only the first step. There is more to come.

“I don't know what in science corresponds to your work.”

“This is supernatural. Mind over matter.”

“You wish. Even the mind is matter!”

“But it projects in new ways.”

“You cannot forestall the march of time. You can only learn how to use it in your favor.”

Time is central to her organic realization. It is what distinguishes life from things without. I am trying to use my camera to do the same thing. The record is inanimate. But there is a life force captured in the pictures.

“It is fascinating how the photograph corresponds to the sense of identity. It is the physical projecting into the abstract realm and vice versa.”

I try to make sense of her speculation. I wonder if she is contradicting her initial remarks about science. I have her look far off. I want her to see something that is not there. The full effect will only be evident when we print the photos.

She needs to explain something to me about the imprint of identity.

“It's in the DNA. It's who you are.”

“Is that your theory of the life force. Complexities of carbon molecules until it speaks the self.”

“Something like that. You can taste a person in a kiss.”

“Let me try!”

They both laugh.

She is adamant, “Really!”

“That's a myth. It's a building block. It's what makes the memory. But it's a record of the experience not the experience itself. I don't pretend a photograph of a person is that person.”

“It's not the same thing.”

“Oh, but it is.”

“What do you mean?”

“I'm not the first person who believed that there was connection between the photograph and the ghost that makes us a person.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“That in the reflection I capture the ghost not the real person. The ghost who really governs what we do.”

“You do.”

“The DNA is a template for the combination between the organism and the environment. It allows the organism to make a record and react to the world that it creates. But the record is not the feeling itself. You know that.”

“I’m not sure what I know.”

“Then I have succeeded. That is what I do with my art. I break down the complacency of everyday life.”

“You break down our identities.”

“You could say that.”

“What do you give us in its place?” She looks cheated.

“That’s not my job. I set the animals free from their cages.”

“We’ve become used to the cages.”

“That is a tragedy.”

Angel Butler is chief editor at the publishing house that she directs. It is in the forefront of new fiction in the city. She has managed to lure a larger company to distribute her material. But she retains full control over the works. The larger company is impressed with her track record. She has done well in establishing her niche market.

I arrange to have her photographed at a university library. I even have a few students as extras in the background. This would seem to violate the terms of the portrait. But I like what this implies. It makes Angel seem more active in her world. She prides herself on her precision. She is hands on at every step along the way. She has even lured authors for lesser amounts when they realized the care that she would take in promoting their works. She believes that she is showing a side of humanity that would remain obscured in Mr. Fisher’s works. Nevertheless, they have worked together as he is one of her prime stars of the house.

I realize what I can get from her. She has used her knowledge to freeze her artists in flight. The texts are rather quaint in their depiction. I want to see the hidden side. I am ready to shake things up. I wonder if she is ready for me.

I tell her that I’m working on a novel.

“You’ve handled this shoot so imaginatively. I bet you’re writing something interesting. Tell me about it. I can always use a good new novel.”

“It’s the story of Walter. He’s a writer. He’s working on a novel. This other guy claims that the novel is a plagiarism.”

“That’s not that new an idea. It’s a variation on *Phantom of the Opera*.”

“But Walter hasn’t even had his novel published, and he’s already being harassed by this guy.”

“That sounds confusing.” She seems almost stern as she is telling me this. She adopting the style of a teacher lecturing a wayward student.

“It gets more involved than that. Walter realizes that his novel is based on these cryptic emails that he’s been receiving at work.”

“This is even more absurd. There’s really no market for this sort of thing.”

“What kind of novels do you publish? Mr. Fisher writes some pretty fucked up shit.”

“Mr. Fisher is a legend. He’s working on a novel about a high school kid who shoots two gang members. Then he gets moved to his relatives in Georgia. And he’s tempted to go back to the same kind of life again.”

“That seems like just another crime story.”

“Mr. Fisher is skillful at portraying the boy’s motives. It’s a basic story. Your story sounds contrived.”

“Mr. Fisher is trying to hide his own violent tendencies. My novel is an honest exploration of the character’s motives. Walter becomes frustrated and violent.”

“Ralph, don’t you ever feel a little violent yourself?”

She is in fact pissing me off. This is her style. She tries to use method to deflect her personal attack. That way she seems totally immune from any comeback. I need to portray that hideous side of her. The empress has to be exposed for what she is—nothing but a clown.

Again I am able to use my talent to reveal. She can talk about the sword-like precision of Mr. Fisher. His portraiture has nothing on me. She is a lap dog kneeling before her master. I hate the obvious put down. It is my only option. I gave her a chance to learn from my influence. She has ignored my offer. So be it.

In my photos, she appears ineffectual. She waves her hands to give orders. She is only batting at the air.

My portraits have taken on a life entirely independent from the commission. The committee is pleased with my work. They note my vision. For myself, I have become so involved in this other thing. I realize that my lens has the power to tell a story. The story so contradicts the rather upstanding images of these Brahmins. I am bringing them back to reality. More than that I have used the pictures for a study in shadow and contrast. The effort of these individuals to dominate their world is shown to be illusory when the world is resolved to its actual components.

I recognize how powerful is the image. Even when we look at something real, we see it mediated through the photograph. We have learned to freeze experience into a moment suffused with all this power. It is like smelling a flower. The initial impression flows into this intoxicating perfume. We look at the world in the same way. We make it fit into our repertoire of perfect images. We wait until our subjects are posed. We concentrate on those characteristics that inspire us. A smile. A glance.

We have learned to bring images to life. That is what turns us on. What makes us something more than ourselves. We become gods. We can give, and we can take away. The image offers us the opportunity to break down experience into those components that excite us. It is the most concrete thing because it is the most abstract thing.

Imagine looking at a flight of birds. If it is reflected on a lattice-work of glass, the birds are these masses of color. The shapes capture a truer form to the flight. It emphasizes the unity of the flock for that brief instant. The focus is on the perceived wholeness noticed by the viewer. The birds are moving with purpose towards a destination. But for the viewer, that destination is now. It is in the mind’s eye.

I feel that I can then pass to the next stage of seeing. This is in a place way beyond what I have just described. This is the mystery. The ultimate integrity of the image. I am on the verge of discovering the magic. My subjects were afraid of this power. That is what their disguises

have protected them against. It is what they have tried to avoid all along. It is their faith. I confront them with a contact that they work to resist. This is all that there is. The touch behind the touch. The thing itself. They breathe deeply to reassure themselves that what they have is so real. And they can pretend so consummately. But they only delay their confrontation with the life force.

Ariel recognizes that there is something else going on. She calls me up.

“The photos got me to wondering. I need to see you to discuss my feelings.”

I meet her for dinner at a Japanese restaurant. Her words become tones in space. I string together the music.

“I needed to see you. I feel so restless since our sitting. I can’t figure out what you did. But you left this impression on me.”

“The project gave me an excuse. I am way beyond that now.” I take a sip from my water glass.

“I want to become a new person. I just don’t know where to start. You’ve contradicted something that I thought was so basic to my being. My science.”

“How do you mean?”

“I always thought of these basic substances, these principles of organization, offered the key to all complexity in my life. None of that really explains the emptiness that I feel. That is what your session did. It showed me a magic that had nothing to do with my world. I realized how my world lacked for something. Tell me what it is?”

“I’m a photographer, not a philosopher. I know what you’re saying. But I have just as much difficulty putting it into words.”

“This is even more than that. I haven’t been able to work. When I’ve been like this before, I could head to the lab to reestablish order. But all that is gone. I wonder about my vocation.”

I have made an impression. I only wish that Mr. Fisher had not been so impervious to my influences.

“Maybe you’ll think differently after you eat.”

“I want to think so. I am trying to make sense from the simple things in my life. It does not appear to be enough. It lasts for a brief moment.”

I manipulate my shrimp tempura with my chopsticks. I delight in the burst of flavor. How could I capture this with my camera? It is more than the delight on my face.

She continues her introspection, “All my life I felt that I was following this book that told me what I was supposed to be. I feared failure. I worked hard at school. I found my reward in my degree, in my work. I still do. At least until now.”

“Don’t think of it all as something so radical! Take it slowly.”

I wonder if I will be able to heed my own advice. She has discovered hints of what I already accept as overwhelming. Angel Butler’s comments still sting. They relate more particularly to my photographs. I feel disheartened. Even though Ariel is supportive. Will the market work to exclude those insights that it does not want to see? It is over before it has even begun. It is not enough to feel this personally. I have a vocation to share my insights with the world. I have learned a new language. I am ready to translate. I am only afraid of those who cover their ears.

I know that Ariel thinks that I have something special to offer her. I have only opened her up to a new realization. I am not her spiritual advisor. She will have to delve into her own past and unravel the threads that have become entangled.

I am able to include a number of other pieces in my gallery opening. I am not restricted to the portraits. This adds to the understanding offered by the character shots. It provides a deeper context by showing the roots of my insights. My study in shadow and form. With this contrast, my subjects now appear even more driven by forces that they cannot control. Their utter helplessness is in evidence. Against such force, they do everything that they can to maintain decorum.

I wonder if I can extend my insight further. Is this realization only confined to the psychological? Or have I really discovered an explanation for the universe as it is? Is my work a threat to the social order?

I am becoming taken by myself. My sense of importance. Who else has come to this sense of place for himself? I know that I am a little touched by this power. But it is there. I can feel it.

Again, Angel Butler's stubborn insistence reminds me how much work is left for me. I have only started to see. The exhibition hall is deserted. They have all been impressed by my findings. But the ghosts still weave through the room. They want to silence me. But I will not yield. There is something so particularly satisfying in everything that I have discovered. The portraits showed me what I have observed all along. Now, I realize how I can unlock the mystery. The paths of glory lead to the grave.