

36. A BAD PRESENCE

Both my horrendous dream and my readings in psychology had convinced me that we were nothing more than a repository for our memories. If we lived our lives based on traumatic events, then we would be in for constant tragedy. But if we simply erased the harmful memories, the body would have no record of a horrible past. This seemed to be my goal. I did what I could to put all the pain from my terrible dream out of my mind.

I was able to take a rest from my work. Lee asked if I wanted to go into town. I told him that I needed some time to take it easy. I had got so wrapped up in Cody's life that I was losing track of my own. I needed some help to get back on track. I knew that I was as isolated as ever. I would have to unravel the tangle on my own. This wasn't the first time that I had been overcome by solitude. I had used my imagination to paint a celestial garden for my own safety. I could survive within its boundaries. But the noxious weeds were taking over. And I was having trouble keeping out their negative influence.

It had appeared that I had escaped a harmful domestic environment. Nevertheless, something had followed me in my journey. And now, it was all ready to make a place for itself. The intruder wanted to call this house its home. I felt that I would be able to resist any dreamlike phantoms. But I was shaken to the core by a sense of complete disquiet. My experience of the night before had only been a mirage. Behind the scary exterior, there were more troubling questions. And I was getting lost in the muddle.

If I was leading Cody across the continent, I felt triumphant. In a more introspective mode, I felt defenseless. Maybe, it wasn't such a hot idea to sit alone in my room. But I didn't have the energy to get up. I felt as if the gig was up. I didn't want to contemplate the kind of darkness that surrounded Rose. I could feel that cloud come over me. I needed to shake it off. There was no drinking in my secret spot with my old friend. I need to learn how to work through it. But I could not see the end of the tunnel. I was crushed.

Reading had been therapeutic. Sadness was simply a slice of the rainbow. And rich blue blended into other less melancholic shades. I needed that richness of life to bring me back to the world. It was funny how the world of words seemed so much more vibrant than thoughts left on their own.

"I like your green coat."

I remembered that silly phrase from last night. I relaxed in my chair and worked to recover my composure. I needed to take a walk outside. Later on.

When Lee returned from his errands, he knocked on my door and handed me a package. I noticed a scar on his hand. It reminded me of a detail that I had forgotten from my dream. My escape had been facilitated by a nasty bite that I had inflicted on my intruder's hand. Of course, he couldn't have healed so quickly.

"Oh that, he looked back at me. A raccoon bite from when I was young."

"Tough one," I replied.

He nodded back. I could almost feel the teeth marks going in the flesh. I looked him in the eyes. He looked away. It was as if he knew something, but he didn't want to say. I was positive that he couldn't read my mind. But he sure wish that he could. At least, he could send a chill through my bones simply giving me that stare. That was probably satisfaction enough for

him.

Lee had just delivered my copy of Harriet Fleming's book. This was hardly the time to read more psychology. I'd have to let it wait for a couple of days.

I tried to follow my own philosophy. It was a little scary. Obviously, it wasn't as easy as I thought. Some memories were buried deeply inside with roots so extensive that it was almost impossible to shake them off. I did what I could to get rid of the after-effects of the dream. But it was way more than that. I hadn't just been overcome by a unpleasant nightmare. The dream struck a nerve that had already been paining me. I was afraid to pursue the origins of my feeling. I had too many doubts about myself.

Where would my questioning lead? I prided myself on my acute awareness. This fear only brought me closer to Rose's predicament. Her consciousness was like an iceberg with so much beneath the surface. What was exposed was meant to repress most of her actual experience. So she was constantly balancing herself between the two worlds. She could never accurately describe anything that happened to her. She was immediately editing out details that seemed too painful. Once the horrible event had passed, it became too long gone ever to recover in its actual form. She was hardly living her own life.

I couldn't let the same thing happen to me. I left home because the juggling of my alternate lives had become absurd. Now, I couldn't make any more excuses to myself. I needed to be honest. I hated to admit it, but I was creating a distance from my own past. It would ultimately be irrecoverable. Eventually, I would have to find new roots. For the time being, this wasn't going to happen. So my dreams took on a more realistic appearance. They spoke to another truth that I may have been repressing while I was at home. What I had taken with me was my real psychic baggage. And it was quite onerous.

I had all these memories of a childhood with Bill and June. How could I possibly question their authenticity? But each experience seemed to come with a lesson. And the lessons were more prominent than my memories of what had actually occurred. That could have been the intent of my programmers. I hadn't seen Cody today. Was he even alive? Had he ever been alive? Were they monitoring my actions? Was it all about my recovery not his?

They knew about my reading abilities. So they filled the house with the right books that would guide me in their direction. I reviewed the scenario. It just seemed too silly. If I was reading aloud at a pace that Cody could follow, then there was no way that I could ever read him all the books in the library. Besides. I already had some familiarity with much of what I was reading. So this couldn't be part of the program.

My knowledge gave me a certainty more potent than my memories of my parents. But that certainty didn't assure me about those memories., just the opposite. They told me that I had experienced something that had nothing at all to do with my parents. This independence seemed strange. They hadn't influenced me. They didn't even seem to be my kind. And I had no way to go back there and check things. All my experiences of Bill and June were memories. I wasn't going to call them up. I needed to stay out here. But I started to feel as if this had always been the way.

I hadn't set off on the road to find out who I really was. That seemed weird. There wasn't a family in California or Michigan ready to claim me as their own. I didn't want to be owned any more. I had knowledge from books. But it did not imply collectively that I had single

origin that I could trace back to my real parents. The books spoke of a more complex fabric of the human mind. Only those people who were afraid of books thought differently. I wasn't trying to reduce all human thought to one basic idea. Cody was being exhorted to be free. Did this serve Lee Tate's intent for him?

My approach must have seemed a little haphazard. But I had my own purpose. I was bringing the man to enlightenment. How could his education work otherwise? If someone was offered the benefits of knowledge, would he eventually find appeal in domination over others? I needed to know the answer. This seemed so fundamental to the process. But the question also told me a great deal about my own feelings.

I had been quite excited about the prospects of psychology. I was ready for it to tell me all the secrets about myself. I just didn't appreciate how it sliced open the psyche like a ripe melon. I felt that there was more substance to a person. There was just so much more in the world that couldn't be explained by appealing to the psychological defenses of the self. Psychology enshrined its own brand of moralism. Simply to disagree with its perspectives left the individual open to accusations of megalomania. Some might object that I really had no grasp of psychological method. I vehemently disagreed with such a characterization. I refused to submit to psychology's pseudo-scientific explanations.

My supposed confidence did little to assuage my feelings of discomfort. Maybe I did need some supernatural mumbo jumbo to make things right. From day to day, I was filled with this uncertainty. I brought such import to my every gesture. That was why I found special significance in my relationship with Cody. I was offering him transcendence. Others had left him to wallow in his earthly limitations.

With such lofty aspirations, my earthbound melancholy only seemed more severe. The confrontation with the intruder had enabled me to personalize my internal battle. I could blame him for my severe malaise. I was almost matching Rose's risky attitude. She'd get a new guy to screw her over so that she'd have someone to get mad at for her deeper problems. I just had no idea who was the mystery man. I scoured my brain to see if he really did correspond to someone who I had met before.

The idle observer might have found my analysis too weighty. Psychology got to the heart of the matter much more quickly. But I wasn't looking for a diagnosis. No cure would do for what I was really feeling. But I couldn't let things get out of hand. I had work that I had to do. I needed to get back to Cody. I took my time off in stride. I couldn't dwell on this silliness. It wasn't taking me anywhere.

I wanted to dismiss the nightmare as only an occasional interruption. It was hardly a pattern since I had arrived at the house. I usually slept soundly. But I now felt that my days of comfort were over. Cody wasn't really making progress. I was going to end up back on the road with nothing to show for my efforts. I didn't think that I'd be able to handle what was coming up next. All the burden was being placed on me. Whichever way I tried to arrange things, they kept looking exactly the same.

I felt the barrage coming at me from all sides. It wasn't simply a material threat to my well being. I was being hit by something greater than that. The whole planet was turning against me. This was metaphysical. I couldn't simply wish my problem away. I couldn't rush back to the green zone. I couldn't clap my hands to make it all better. I was sinking deeper and deeper.

Psychology would provide a chemical explanation for my troubles. But I was suffering from a disorder of the psyche that could not be remedied by extended treatment. No relief would set the universe back in its proper order. It wouldn't send away the dark presence that was shadowing me. It wouldn't make Bill and June into two angels. I didn't want that kind of solution. If there was a pill that would make it all better, I wanted the therapist to give it to somebody else. I needed to have my wits about me. Besides this existential threat, I had to keep my eyes on Lee. If I wasn't completely aware of what was going on, he was going to pull a fast one on me. And I couldn't have that happening.

I was ready to confront my dark angel whatever his path. The more my troubles felt oppressive, the more invisible that I was becoming. I couldn't enlist Cody's help. There was no one in the outside world that I could call. It would be a mistake to retreat into myself. So I floated in the nether world. I would get a few practical things accomplished. Then I would slip back into the fog.

Experienced writers had a skill in breaking down a situation. I felt that I needed to be more precise about my feelings. That way I could more easily deal with the threat. Some of my dilemma was of my own making. I could brush all that away. Then I could get to the essence of my problem. It was just that each practical success did little to chase away the nightmare. So the intruder remained stationed in his dark corner.

I was going around in a circle. I had moved forward with the results of my analysis. I had traced my memories back to their source. I had created a new identity for myself. But I had also brought to life an entity who was prepared to hinder me at every step. On the other hand, if I had created this monster, I could wish him away. Good luck! He was telling me that he was more part of my being than my conscious identity. This was silly.

If this was a bad story, I needed to close the book once and for all. Thinking about it only made it worse. How could I stop thinking about it? If I put him out of my mind for a short while, could I ask myself if I had been successful? This would only bring him back for a dreaded encore. He was the house guest who would never leave. But he now resided in my psyche.

I was desperate. Ghost hunters had better results with their prey. And this was already the daytime. I couldn't wait until the next morning for it all to be better. Another nightmare would really throw me for a loop.

I had been able to measure my own difficulties against the struggles of the masters. This had given me a sense of nobility amidst the absurdity. Now I was wallowing. And there was nowhere to grab on to so that I could make my exit. I wanted to run around the room and scream. I wanted to break down and cry. I wanted to bang on the walls. I wanted to get into it with Lee.

"What is going on here? Answer me!"

Again nothing. My horror had emerged from my vulnerability. I wanted to think of myself as strong. This only meant that once I was knocked off my pedestal that I would only fall deeper. It was the feeling of being completely naked with myself.

I repeated the nightmare in all its terror. This playback came with a critical variation, an audience. He was not acting alone. There was a group of people watching my humiliation on camera. So I existed in two places at once. I was being hit by the intruder. And I was also sitting with the studio audience seeing myself get pummeled. The spectators wanted more. They had come for blood. It wasn't enough that he was hurting me. They wanted the assault carried to

its ugly conclusion. Where could I find any sympathy in this mass? What good would books mean to this crowd? They had what they wanted. It was a circus. If my pain was real, that only egged them on more. They wanted to participate. They were getting rid of their frustrations.

“Are you all embarrassed to call yourself human?”

“They weren’t. Their knowledge had taken them to this point. It encouraged their sadistic intent. With each knock down, the crowd rose to their feet. They could taste their victory. The blood washed around their mouths. Their teeth were ready to dig in.

“Who is ready to eat?”

Concession snacks filled their hands. They munched on hot dogs coated with ketchup and mustard. They stuffed themselves with popcorn. They washed it down with beer and soft drinks. These were my brothers and sisters. And they wouldn’t let up. They sought the ultimate sacrifice.

“Why are you doing this to me? All of you!”

They had all been battling their own intruders so I was really no different than they were. Why would they show me mercy? This was the deal that they had made. I was accepting their suffering so they could dispense with it themselves. They were doing this to me because they could. It gave them the assurance that they needed to pull themselves together.

Could I do the same myself? Could I take my place in the crowd while the intruder pulled someone else into the stall. Wasn’t that the trick? This wasn’t a personal grudge. It was political. The only way to cast off the metaphysical hurt was to make someone else do the hurting! Was this realization sufficient to send my demon packing for good? This wasn’t how I thought about things.

The dark angel was merely a hired hand. That only made him more pathetic. He couldn’t stop. This was how he earned his living. He thought that he was good at it. He was ready to take a bow. They loved him just as long as he didn’t get too close. But he was always up close and personal. He’d caress their necks. He’d breathe on them. He’d let them know that he was following closely behind them. Then he’d assume his rightful place on stage.

I was already familiar with a culture of self-indulgence. This simply took it to the next level. Engorging the self was only the start. They all needed a material reminder of their satiation. They welcomed a feast of blood. It was too grotesque to think about. I had become so accustomed to the elegance of language. Now that was being reduced to its elemental form. I hated it. I wanted my books back.

The camera came in close for another blow. I was ready to wake up. I was ready to turn the channel. Why would they stop now? He had me on the ropes.

“I’ve had enough of your game.”

It wouldn’t be over until I was over. How could I make myself forget this experience? It was a dream. That was that! I walked around the room. I looked in the hallway. No intruder! Why should I bother?

The intruder was using my listlessness against me. I was doubting my reality. I was questioning my own motives. I was afraid of my shadow. I was doing myself in. He owned my nighttime and my daytime.

Bill and June had never entrapped me so successfully. Indeed, Bill and June were cartoon forms of my nemesis. I was again convinced that I had created them as convenient substitutes for

the opponent who I could never defeat. I wanted to know my real history. How had I come to this point?

I didn't want to stay here anymore. But I didn't relish a life on the road. I couldn't go back home. I wanted an independence from all this crap. I appealed to the heavens for deliverance. And if it wasn't forthcoming. That didn't mean that my job was my reality. I would have to deal with it temporarily. At the same time, I would have to find ways to be more creative.

Each day I was losing more of myself. I was dwindling down to nothing. However, if I was fading away, I had become virtually undetectable to my enemies. This was an old technique that I had used to escape the wrath of June. So I had finally slipped out of the grasp of my intruder. But I still needed help with that ever-present malaise.

I summoned Rose for an all important imaginary tete-a-tete. She'd know what I has to do. She se appeared out of thin air with a whirlwind of answers to dish out to me.

"I don't dwell on my problems like you do. You live inside your head. So some guy in a dream is just as real to you as someone that you know personally."

"I'm not that bad. It just gets a little lonely here."

"You chose your fate."

"Where else was I supposed to go?"

"My aunt in Nebraska."

"That would have really worked out."

"You never know."

Rose could tell that her advice wasn't enough.

I dogged her for a better answer, "I can't deal with it. Any of it. At least I have money here. And a job. Your aunt would have treated me like a baby."

"She's not like that. She's a modern woman."

"That's what you say."

Rose gave me a twisted face, "You can't let go. You never could."

"I have important things to think about."

"Like bringing to life a dead man."

"He's not dead."

"Almost. Whatever you're doing, you're fooling with the supernatural. And it started playing tricks on your mind."

"So you do believe."

"I'm not saying that."

"What are you saying?"

She looked a little freaked out: "There are these forces that you don't want to mess with. It's a given. The mind is a fragile thing. I know better than anyone else. I keep pushing the envelope. I've seen things that would freak you out. I want to say that it's drugs. Or something like that. My imagination getting carried away. But it really has gotten carried away."

"That would explain that weird guy in my dream."

"That isn't the half of it."

I thought that she might be talking about sex stuff or something.

"Are you saying that guy was going to do something?"

“It was a dream?”

“Still I wonder.”

“Chloe, you are so frustrated that you can’t deal with your own feelings. Everything is overboard in your mind. Crazy shit.”

“Are you saying that I’ve lost my mind?”

“I’m telling you that you have to learn how to enjoy things.”

Rose kept pushing her hedonistic philosophy. Something made those demons dance around in her head.

“I can’t let that much uncertainty in my life.”

“I can’t have it any other way.”

It was becoming clear why I couldn’t contact the real Rose. She didn’t offer me an alternative. She only made me feel more out of control. Once I had tasted the fruit, I couldn’t go back to the discipline of Bill and June. But I couldn’t stay out all night either. I liked the peace and quiet that I had found here, even if it was temporary.

Rose had given me enough verve to side step my little demon. I had really been going off the deep end. And I wasn’t sure how I was going to end up. To solve things I ended up calling to call on the loopest person that I knew to give me the needed balance. It gave new power to my creativity. If my questions about June and Bill had sent me into a panic, my memories of Rose counteracted that feeling.

I was hardly ready to claim greatness on my own part. But I didn’t mind flirting with that exalted feeling. I wanted to believe that I had wings, and that I could fly. Too much of that belief and I would get carried away again. So I needed to moderate my excitement. Rose was right. I couldn’t let go. But if I did, I felt that I’d be back in the predicament that I had just escaped. So I was very reserved in victory.

I was becoming familiar with artists who weren’t afraid to head into the stratosphere. They had none of the protection that pop psychology today offers so many people. Celebrity seemed to feed off the surrender of the self to such a public persona. People had become afraid to give any validity to their own emotions. This would just make them different than the norm. Like Rose, they were unable analyze their own experience. Then it would just be dwelling on their own selves.

If they couldn’t cast off their mania, they couldn’t help but seek professionals who would implore them to get rid of their real feelings for plastic substitutes. They did this to get away from their self-absorption. But that was all that they knew. Everything had been reduced to personality. They denied themselves while taking everything personally.

An overload of the self required an anesthetic. The healthy self became the medicated self. People created a bubble to keep out any real human contact. Rose rejected this mind-control. But she lived in her own cocoon. The experience ended up heightening the highs and lows. If the individual couldn’t face his problems head on, then they would just take on a life of their own. In mutation, the end result became so much worse.

Everyone was living this constant otherness. They tried to form their image to accord with the expectations of others. And they measured their own success against the macabre theater of celebrities. The audience fed off blockbusters that exploited the over-flowing of useless emotions. And when it all got to be too much, another session of therapy. Or more

medication. Then a new army of haunting creatures was released on an unprepared world.

People just said get over it. What else could they do? They thrived on public acceptance and a constant we-speak. They couldn't countenance an emotion that couldn't be packaged and shared with everyone else. They said that they wanted to take their own path. But they always embraced the norm no matter how bizarre it might appear. No one could slow things down. Life was always lived after the fact. Besides a surplus of unexplained emotions, there was a ton of pictures that put it all in perspective. The right pose would work wonders against the doldrums.

No one actually lived with his past. There was no past. Cheap nostalgia enabled the recycling of the tritest of songs and movies. Every gesture was staged. You couldn't pass up the saccharin. Even the most cynical souls, like Rose, had their own stage directions that they followed to the letter. There were a few nomads who drifted on the periphery, but they carted around bits and pieces of a real life so they were hardly a threat to the continuum. Jealousy and petty squabbles inspired a greater devotion for a tawdry notoriety. Celebrities mugged just enough so that their impersonations could be learned by the general public. This was the advancing progress of civilization.

I wasn't unaware of the chemical nature of our mind. But how could a pill stop the onslaught of a flaring emotion. It might help at first. But it would end up making the self defenseless against the more intense stampede to come. I could imagine a therapist cataloguing all my shortcomings. I would have my own pharmacy after such an analysis. So what! It wouldn't really fix anything.

"Here's a pill to get rid of the monster."

And that would be it for bad dreams. But the bad reality wouldn't disappear that easily. Or could it? People who were impatient with the world could find ways to avoid any situation which really demanded extra special concern. An entourage of body guards could fight off the riff-raff. And the closed gate could keep out the rabble. Oh the blessings of the tabloids!

There had to be a resort where people who hated their privacy could get away so they could be photographed trying to escape their rabid fans. If you never had have any emotions that originated independently of anyone else, then of course, you would need to pretend that you valued your privacy above all is. You had to take flight just to be with other people who were exactly the same as you were. Of course, celebrity wouldn't even exist without the public. But it was so urgent to fabricate a clandestine life that you couldn't directly share with your fans. Then the tabloids would get a hold of all your secrets, and you'd have to pass your time creating new ones.

Too much of a well-worn emotion and a pill would let you feelings-hop to a state of numb elation. Your life would be like watching TV all the time. Feelings could be turned on and off like pressing the remote. Why bother working your way through a forest of confusing emotions? If you couldn't immediately put you finger on how you really felt, then you could take something to put you back in the pink. And thus, you could quickly extricate yourself from any messy entanglements with other people.

Family and community would follow the exact same discipline. No wonder Josh had been such a little tattle-tale. He had been raised to be a snitch. He was afraid to think independently from Bill and June. Of course, he believed that his smart ass attitude meant that he was reasoning on his own. But his callous cynicism was a sure sign of a sociopathic nature.

And his notion of empathy ended beyond the circumference of his dinner plate. They had raised him just like a prize poodle. This was the new version of educating you child well. He knew when to ask for his reward. But first, he had to do his amazing trick.

Even the most traumatic experiences could be milked for their maximum effect. Truly complex emotional experiences would permanently be connected to something totally out of our control. That way no rational argument would ever rise to the level of real passion. Such a development would mean that citizens could barely influence the governance of their community. Any glimmer of political awareness would always be redirected to a panoply of reactive options. It would be like ordering from a glossy menu.

We all had surrendered to the machine. It was just that its cuddly organic front made it difficult to recognize as such. No one would ever get angry enough to want to change anything in their surroundings. If they did, they would be an ideal candidate for reprogramming. A few inspiring words and some medication, and they would lose their will to do anything. There would be no possibility of tracing back our feelings to their root causes. That would only keep the anger festering in our psyche. It was time to get back to work. Literature of real significance had been replaced by romance novels and true crime stories.

I thought about what it meant to stand on the shoulder of giants. My sessions with Cody convinced me of a richness of human experience that had been compromised by our contemporary world. This was the ultimate meaning of his education. It wasn't about reducing our thoughts to their corresponding symptoms. We didn't need the critic as therapist reminding us how we had been lulled by our culture. Such an approach to trauma meant that we dulled our critical faculties before we ever began a reasoned analysis of what was happening. Instead, we needed to cherish our emotions as they were the only record that we had lived on the earth. There already was a mystery. We didn't need professional readers adding to the mix.

Freedom originated in the assertiveness of the individual as she recognized her connection to the world and to other people. I was making Cody aware of the exuberance of this moment. Once his body was completely imbued with this feeling, he would wake up. He had been knocked low by his sense of conformity. He couldn't find the wherewithal to rise above the chaos. I reached out my hand. I invited him to explore the New World!

No matter what was happening around me, no one could take away my new understanding. In June and Bill's world, I had been forced into the shadows. I was hardly a social being. Now, I was stepping into the light. Look out world!

I heard a knock at my door.

"You didn't seem so good this morning. Is everything all right?"

"I am doing very well. I just needed some time to catch my breath,"

Lee asked, "Is there anything special that I can do for you?"

"I'll be OK. I'm just going to get some dinner in a while."

"I went out and stocked the kitchen today. So there are a lot of choices."

"Thanks!"

He still freaked me out. He closed my door. I heard him walk down the hallway. Then I heard the strangest echo from my dream.

"I'm going to do something nasty to you, little girl. I'm going to take you apart."

I rushed to the door to see if Lee was still in the hallway. He wasn't. I had simply

remembered these words from the dream. But the voice was so much like his. All that I could think about was his strange grin.

His news about the groceries convinced me to head down to the kitchen to get something to eat. I had been sequestered in my room for too long. I made myself a tuna sandwich and ate it at the kitchen table. It was still light out. I had begged off reading to Cody today although I probably needed it more than he did.

I took a sip of apple juice and stared out the window. This was almost like a rehab facility for me. I was drying out. I just wasn't ready to make amends with my past acquaintances. I was happy staying where I was.

It was wild how Lee left me alone so much. I could have explored more. But that was probably would violate the intent of our deal. He simply assumed that I would know my place and not investigate his operations. It was all pretty modest. He ran things on his own. But he had visitors coming in all the time. There was something sinister going on.

Lee retreated back to my world of dreams. I finished my meal and cleaned up. Then I went back to my room. I left the door open. I had nothing to fear. And I didn't want to feel as if I was in jail. I watched the sun go down. It was still relatively light in my room so I waited to turn on the lights. I sat in place and enjoyed the calm. I felt the dusk wash over me. I welcomed its gentle tide.

Tomorrow I would start my work again. I felt invigorated. There now seemed a clearer purpose to what I was doing. It had little to do with Lee. I was going to make my own rules. And if there was a spark of life inside that brain of Cody Brainerd, I would bring it back to life.

I wasn't afraid of the night this time. I had a fire burning inside me that would help light my way. But that didn't stop my curiosity about the nature of my assault. The trauma resonated with all its power from the night before. It was only a dream, but it seemed to be no mere coincidence. I almost felt that I was being pursued by a celebrity stalker. He took all the liberties of someone who acted as if he knew me.

Celebrities owed their livelihood to their ability to express themselves through a series of observable gestures. But they would always get freaked out when their fans became enamored with their images. The viewers believed that they have a special intimacy with their idols. The more that they believed, the closer they could get to true love. A crazed fanatic would cross the ocean to be with someone who they had only seen on the cover of a magazine in a supermarket. The celebrity stalker had become convinced that he could discover spiritual fulfillment due to his special knowledge.

My attacker was just as turned on by his inspiration. I had no idea who he was. But he felt that he knew me better than I knew myself. So this gave him the privilege to have his way with me.

A horror movie would play up this invincibility on the part of the viewer. He invaded the private space of his prey. He experienced little interference as he conducted his surveillance. Souvenirs were available to reward his search. And lay in wait for his victim. The movie pointed to the ultimate vulnerability of the spectator. But he traded his own weakness for a ton of aggressiveness. He felt that he knew her just by observing her from afar. He picked her out of a crowd so she appeared special. He felt that was in complete possession of her.

Writers have also understood this connection with their readers. They have constantly

played upon the reader's knowledge to create mystery about what remained unknown. Each new clue only clouded the picture. The reader would beg the writer for a clearer explanation. Why would reveal his tricks?

In a most unusual way, it was all starting to make sense. This dream had not been of my own making. It hadn't even originated in my psyche. It had been shoved in there to help me create a particular view of myself. I was beginning to observe the actual profile of this grand author. I was ready to call him out to stop messing with my life. How far would my complaint take me? I had been obsessing about erasing Bill and June from my experience. Would it be that easy? Was Lee Tate only a stand in for a more formidable master?

I thought about Cody. Was he masquerading being in a coma? Was he the puppeteer? I could feel that my strings were being tugged again and again. I was sure that my audience was finding things more and more contrived. There was reason enough to feel that I never had sufficient cause to run away from home. So here I was back in my room alone. My door was open. But I didn't see a soul in the hallway. I tried to imagine who might be downstairs. Was Cody in his room waiting for me to come back? Or were Bill and June making coffee in the kitchen? Was Rose waiting outside for me to sneak out by a window.

"I can take you anywhere that you want."

Lee surprised me. I jumped.

"Sorry to startle you. You were deep in thought."

What did he want? What did he ever want?

"I'm getting ready for bed."

"I'll just close your door."