

ON THE OTHER SIDE

I hadn't lasted very long in Omaha. I had no idea why it didn't work for me. After Chicago, I couldn't live in less vibrant city. And I couldn't very well go back to Chicago. And I couldn't head to New York or LA either. If I was going to live somewhere, I needed a smaller town. I settled on Lincoln, Nebraska. It wasn't that far from Omaha. But it offered me a clearer vision what I needed to do.

I was able to get room in a house near campus. I didn't have to pay that much per month. And I could last for a few months. If I liked it, I might stay longer. I told the landlord that I was taking classes. He didn't ask too many questions. I'd make a go of it. I'd be able to read in peace. If I was lucky, I could make some friends.

I had been having the weirdest dreams in Omaha. I didn't believe that it was the city. But it did me well to get out of there. Once I had accommodated myself to my new place, everything felt great. I could walk to campus. I could get food from a natural food store nearby. There was even a washer and dryer in the house.

My room had a separate entrance. I had my own kitchen. There was no reason that I couldn't make it work for me. I didn't have to deal with anyone else's drama.

Once I had everything in place, my life seemed pretty uneventful. I found a thrift store and bought some clothes. I went to library and stocked up on books. I spent a couple of days just getting my bearings. I was lucky that I had save enough money to take care of my expenses for a while. I didn't have to worry about working. That meant that I could get myself in order. I felt that I had a lot to do. It wouldn't be as simple as trying on a new dress or changing my hair. I had to get deep inside of myself and clean out all the demons. I no longer had to be afraid that my nightmares would come to life. And I was pretty sure that there weren't any more monsters around the corner who were waiting to jump out and scare me.

I could have managed pretty much the same in Omaha. But Lincoln was more laid back. I could enjoy that aspect of the city and leave it at that. I wouldn't have to network in some chic part of town. I could take care of my business, and people would leave me alone. In a big city, there was just too much random noise that could overwhelm my inner calm.

I no longer had a grand purpose for my life. I wasn't trying to rehabilitate a sick man. I wasn't trying to graduate from high school. I wasn't preparing to go to college. None of the great competitions of life mattered of me. If the sun rose every morning, that was excitement enough for me. Some people thought that it wasn't right that a person could ignore the petty squabbles that consumed their lives. If I didn't run around screaming that the sky was falling, then I might as well have been from another planet. I just couldn't take it upon myself to change the world. I had barely scraped by with my soul intact. Maybe when I was older and wiser, I could raise the flag for change. For the time being, I needed to take things slowly. If I could feed myself and stay warm at night, that seemed like a pretty major task.

I sat in the easy chair by my bed and looked out the window. I had no plans to read. There wasn't anything important to take care of. I was going to relax. That was my privilege. I had done pretty well as a miracle worker. I just hoped that I had a few tricks left for myself.

I had done well in my escape. As much I was congratulating myself, I realized that there were probably loads of kids in this community who were in the same predicament that I was.

Their solutions could be a lot more radical. They spent their days zoned out in a perpetual chemical haze. Their alternative was a hurt too difficult to bear. My hearts went out for them. I just wished that I could send them a little love to help them through.

That night I had the strangest dream. I was back in Saint Louis. I was down and out and living on the street. The dream was too real. I could barely scrape together enough money to get a room. I had this weird feeling that I had been through all these terrible things. I couldn't figure out what else to do for money. So I had let my desperation guide me. I had glimpses of these scenes of violence. It was all so vague.

I tried to look at myself in the mirror. I wanted to see what this kind of life had done to me. This was way more than running from Lee. I had worse enemies. People who caught up to me and did things to me.

Why couldn't I see the images more clearly? It was one thing to feel as if someone was chasing me. But if he really did catch up with me, I wasn't sure how I'd live down the attack. Whatever had happened, I had trouble functioning. I could barely stand up. That only made things worse. Each time that I went down, I was even more vulnerable to being attacked.

I was sure that I had escape this feeling. But it was lodge deep inside me. And my longing became worse and worse. There was nothing that I could do to get rid of the pain.

There came a point that I didn't care anymore. If this was how it was going to go down, I just needed to get something for my troubles. But that only made me feel worse. So I wanted to mess myself up even more.

I had trouble breathing. I was coughing. I was trying to stabilize myself. I was slipping deeper and deeper in this hell. It was all about an exaggeration that kept getting worse. If I was doing this to myself, I should have been able to stop. Something monstrous was eating away at my integrity.

What took me back to Saint Louis. I began to think about the serenity that I had attained in my flight from there. Had I simply imagined that? My dream made it impossible to return to Lincoln. I had willed myself to Chicago. I had imagined myself arriving in Omaha. All along I was still in Saint Louis. That was my only pleasure. I could ride that belief as far as I could. My ability to invent a life for myself became better and better. I would descend deeper into my delusion. I would travel around the country in my mind.

In my ecstatic moments, I would find myself farther and farther away from Saint Louis. I would build my castle in the air. And I would never have to come down. But when I hit rock bottom, I would be dragging myself along the streets.

Was Saint Louis only a reflection of another experience that I was afraid to face? What would it be like if I gave in completely to my vision of Saint Louis. Every attacker would succeed in his attempt to break me apart. After a while, I would have to admit that I was letting this happen to myself. I wanted this because of something that I expected to get from it. This made me flashback further. I was in the heart of my darkness. This was before Bill. This was the shadowy figure that haunted my dreams.

If my terrible feeling was real, then I was using my dreams as a way of pretending that none of this was happening to me. But here I was on the streets of Saint Louis. I was dirty. I was diseased. I was beaten. This was who I was. All my desire to head off to some other destination was the vain hope that held together my days. But I would never escape from this

reality.

I looked so bad that people were afraid of me. If I tried to talk to someone, they would run away. My burden simply became so great that I was unable to save myself. I remained on the verge of collapsing.

What had made this dream so intense? I had a number of experiences like this when I stayed with Cody. I had read him books that pointed a way out of my distress. But that did little to ease my instability. If I put all these feelings together, I became desperate trying to sort myself out. Everything returned me to my time at home. But if I relived the incidents at home, it only reminded me of something antecedent. It was just like the dream. I would black out when I came closer to the source of the pain.

Again, I became convinced that I was exaggerating things. This was only a symptom of being on my own too much. The psyche had a tendency to make up stories in order to subdue harmful emotions. And that was just what I was doing.

Why had I let these stories get a grip over my conscious life? I had memories of Bill and June. There were no longer around. I had no intention of going back to them. And they weren't helping me live my life now. That was the end of my connection to them. Why couldn't I just clap my hands and make it go away? If my experience with them were fake, what would happen to the rest of my memories if all the fakeness disappeared? My whole world seemed tied up with my experiences at home. Simple thoughts would just fade away. I would be helpless. I would be wandering the street.

My dream was making more sense. It showed me that my sanity was tied to my ability to keep myself together. I was feeling more and more threatened. But I had fought off all the attacks. So I shouldn't have been so upset by a nightmare. I wasn't in Saint Louis anymore. I had no reason to go back.

It wasn't as if I had forgotten something back there. That was part of my overall discomfort. I felt as if I had been living my life through things. I remembered every detail of my room at home. I thought about what it was like to live in Cody's house. All that was past. I left it behind. I couldn't carry it with me. I didn't want to. But I was feeling as if I had left myself back there with all those things.

The nightmare became more omnipresent. I looked around my room in Lincoln. Things almost went out of focus. I tried to blink my eyes to make it all reappear. Where was this going? My dream had been deeper than I thought. I wanted to wake up. And if I woke up, where would I wake up.

I didn't know what day it was. I couldn't tell where I was. Which room was this? All the bad feelings from Saint Louis were coming back. I had tried to get away from there. I had done everything that I could to deny that I was still in the city. But that was where I was. I was losing myself completely in this beat up hotel room. Damn! Damn! Damn!

I wanted to jump up and down to make it all go away. I didn't have the strength. I couldn't even keep away. I was slipping out of consciousness again.

Whew! That had been so real. It made me afraid. In the middle of the day, could I simply flash back to a painful moment like that. Next time, I wouldn't be able to wake myself up. Had Lee given me drugs? Was I part of one of his experiments?

I was back with Cody. He was still in the coma. He couldn't hear me scream. I could

hear Lee coming to the door.

“Chloe, I know that you’re in there.”

I couldn’t say a thing. I just wanted him to go away. I could feel him outside the door. He was going to kill me.

I needed to wake up. Where did I want to end up?

“Take me back to Lincoln. Someone, anyone.”

This time I was screaming out. Someone would hear me.

I still wasn’t sure if anyone had heard me. But the nightmare had ended, It was early morning. I was in Lincoln. It wasn’t as if I needed to go anywhere. I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

I needed to get out. I had been in this room too much. I could read all that I wanted. But my imagination was playing tricks on me. I needed to make that stop. And the only way that I could make that happen was with a dose of real life. I had established my routine. I went shopping. I’d take walks to the library to get more books. I needed to add other experiences to my life. I had become too self-enclosed.

The next time that I went to the grocery store, I lingered in the aisles. I hope that someone would notice my hesitation and take it as a sign to ask me how I was doing. People only thought that I was in the way. They’d reach over me to get at their produce. They’d look at me strangely as if I was delaying them from going about the business of living. This wasn’t working. It was almost as if I wore a sign that asked people to talk to me. And they were ignoring me. They realized that I was insane.

It wasn’t as if I was desperate to change things. If not for my weird dreams, then this was a quite enjoyable life. I just had to take it for what it was. If things were really all right, then I was upsetting the apple cart. I didn’t need to make my life worse than it already was. I had never had this kind of happiness before. So I was afraid that I was squandering a gift. But if it was so great, what was the reason for my discomfort. I couldn’t let my dreams destroy my enjoyment. That was really crazy.

I was sure that some people took their dreams as an indication that something was messed up in their lives. They’d track their way back to the source of the dream. Then they would have to face their actual fear. But I knew what I had to fear. And he wasn’t living in Lincoln. I knew no one in Lincoln who threatened me in any way. I had been through this again and again. If I thought about my upset, it wasn’t going to put me deeper in the hole. It was only temporary. And yes, I could clap my hands, and it would all go away.

That made me feel pretty good. I wasn’t going to have to stand on the town square and confess my sins. I wouldn’t have to inform the residents that I was trouble in their midst. I could live my life in peace and quiet. So why had my experiment gone so awry at the grocery store. Maybe I picked the wrong time. Or I was trying too hard? I needed a method. I could pick up a book that could help me through my shyness.

It was none of this. If I was going to make friends, it would happen in good time. I they were people that I could trust, then they wouldn’t respond to lost girls with signs around their neck.

“Please, help!”

I had to laugh at myself. I had been through so many crises that I thought things were

really wrong if there wasn't some problem to work through. I needed to enjoy my life just as I was living it. And that was that.

The police weren't going to show up at my door. There weren't buried bodies to find. There were no skeletons in the closet. And if there were ghosts in this house, I hadn't come across them yet.

I made myself some lunch. I calmed down. Later on, I would go for a walk. But there was nothing urgent to take care of. Relaxation was new to me. I needed to learn to savor it. Maybe, I just needed a nap.

The next day, I thought that I would explore the university. This was why so many people were in Lincoln. I needed to find out more.

As I got closer to campus, it started to freak me out how many people there were. They all were deeply involved in their lives. They were rushing to class. Or getting ready for work. Or heading to the library to study. They all had a purpose. I wanted to jump into their lives and play along. But I didn't know where the ride began. So I kept walking around. I felt like the kid in the proverbial candy store. It was too much to digest.

Why had I done this to myself? I should have tested the waters and gone home. I was plunging deep inside. This wasn't like high school where they would make fun of the new kid. Some people wondered why I wasn't in a hurry like everyone else. But the majority didn't even notice that I was there.

This was a different kind of crowd than in a city. In a sense, people didn't really notice their surroundings. Here and there was a person like me. He drifted through the crowd without a clear direction. Maybe he was looking for an office. Or he had just failed an exam. I wanted to wave.

I went to the student union, and I found a lounge. There was an empty chair so I sat down. A few people were joking with each other. But most of them were so serious. It was like the dentist's office. They were going to have a tooth extracted. Maybe a little anesthetic was what everyone needed, I wished that I could oblige.

Did high school students dream of a place like this? What was the big deal. I didn't feel a sudden sense of liberation. But I did feel that I could make my way within this group. What would I have to do to be more incognito? I was dressed OK. I had the right demeanor. I just needed to pretend that I was going somewhere important.

I walked over to the library. Students needed an ID to go through the turnstiles. That wasn't going to work for me. I needed a deeper cover if this was going to work. Lee probably could produce the necessary identification to succeed at this mission. I was severely limited from my side.

I needed to be more resourceful. I wasn't going to follow someone and try to learn his method. I could go back to the union. But that wasn't going to work. No one was going to notice me there.

"Excuse me, I was looking for the English Department."

I gave him a weird stare. I had no idea where to direct him. I should have said something to him. I let my best contact just walk away. What was I supposed to do now. I froze in the middle of the quad. There were buildings all around me. I was even more confuse.

I was again at Union Station. This time I had no ticket. I was really in a predicament.

Where was my sign? I wanted someone to help the lost girl.

I suddenly got caught up in a rush of people. I tried to move away, but I was trapped. I was being carried forward. The next thing that I knew, my group turned a corner, and I was being ushered in a building. I needed to act quickly. I didn't have any books. But I had a note pad. That seemed good enough. Everyone was going in and out of doors. I couldn't waste my opportunity.

A door opened on a large classroom, almost the size of an auditorium. I stepped inside. There were seats at the back. I could join in and not get noticed. This was perfect. I had been offered an invitation into a new life. I did the only natural thing. I took it. What could go wrong? I needed to play along.

I somehow stumbled into a sociology class: The Politics of Group Identity. It sounded pretty interesting. The class took place in a large auditorium. So I could pretty much blend in with everyone else. The instructor was Dr. Shara Coleman.

There were too many student here for her to take attendance. That meant she had no idea if I was really on the roster. It would be fun playing the part of a student.

The class was somewhat advanced. A number of students were in there because it counted towards the sociology major. Dr. Coleman employed traditional methods of social analysis. She worked to quantify a lot of the aspects of her study. But there was a serious theoretical bent to her teaching. Here, she speculated on more complex notions of shared identity. This went way beyond correlating spending habits with political attitudes. She combined psychological analysis with her sociological observations. It wasn't simply a matter of individual participating in a social group. What fascinated her was the manner in which the group assumed a psychological identity. It acted as an organic whole.

She joked about the extremes of fan identification with their sports teams. This was Cornhusker territory, and she didn't want to tread on too many people's toes. With that example, she was able to relate quite well with the students. She wasn't trying to be critical of the average person. But she was bringing a more discerning eye to things that we took for granted.

As I walked out of the hall, I tried to listen to what the students were saying. It seemed as if the lecture hadn't phased many of them. That didn't mean that Dr. Coleman had failed. In fact, her lecture was quite well organized. When it came to essay projects and exams, everyone would be well-prepared. But there was too much going on in their lives to worry about social groups. They were here to learn, but they weren't going through some kind of spiritual transformation. And there were other classes to worry about.

I really wanted to learn more about what Dr. Coleman thought. Since I really wasn't a student, I didn't want to ruin the opportunity. So I kept my thoughts to myself. Her ideas intersected with my own experience. I was interested how a more private individual like my mother could relate to people like Lee Tate. Lee worked behind the scenes. But he was interested in mass psychology. Both Lee and June were interested in pressure techniques that affected the psyche. Lee had the undivided attention of Cody. And I had to live with my mother. If the researcher wanted to influence large swathes of people, how could he develop techniques which would have the same effect. Advertisers had already come across all kinds of methods to affect the public at large, Their style of presentation seemed quite consistent with the discoveries of Dr. Coleman. It was all about creating an alternative self that existed only in the public realm.

The private individual would feel excluded if she didn't make herself available to these public experiences. She allowed the personal transformation.

Next class, Dr. Coleman introduced an analysis of advertising. She talked about just the sort of thing that I had been thinking about. She gave the contours of this public self. She compared the technique a lot to theater. This went beyond concentrating on sense impressions that recalled memories in the individual's past. In a sense, these media prodigies cloned the family to accord with their vision for commercial life. A conscientious parent felt that it was a solemn duty to maintain these images of a harmonious family life. It wasn't sufficient to buy the appropriate products. People would have to use them in conformity with the lifestyle that they were being sold by the manufacturers.

How could one realistically oppose such a view without upsetting the apple cart? What happened to kids who were able to recognize the bizarre scenario that had taken hold in their household? Most of them didn't have the skills to resist. So they found their own scripts that perpetuated a similar group participation. They all surrendered to the *Family*.

Lincoln was a big college town. And a lot of the students were fairly progressive in their attitudes. But Dr. Coleman was really pushing things. No one wanted to admit that he had been fooled by some mass scientific experiment. And Dr. Coleman's students didn't want to think of themselves as lab rats. If they bought something out of the money that they earned at a part-time job, that was their decision. They weren't being instructed by the master robot.

If such psychological conditioning was taking place, when would it be possible to recognize its effects? Could the subject resist the methodology?

I again tried to eavesdrop as the students left class. Few of them seemed that interested in the lecture. I heard a couple of students discussing basketball. Others were talking about sorority parties. Dr. Coleman could have insulted their way of life, and they would take it all in stride. They make their notes and repeat them back for the final exam.

I had come to value my privacy. I didn't see myself as a martyr for the cause. But now I wanted to get involved. I wanted to say something. Did the students' relative inactivity mean that they didn't believe that totalitarian outlook could get a foothold in this county? If their freedoms were really at risk, they would all be on the front lines. Or were they all brainwashed?

I wondered what it would take for Lee's attitudes to gain universal appeal. June was ready to join up with Lee's army. But she kept a lot of her views to herself. Her friends weren't marching behind banners. They weren't members of a private militia that was enforcing a unified point of view. As it was, Lee simply appeared to be a frustrated individual with a superiority complex. How could he make his beliefs more acceptable? Would he eventually be the welcome guest speaker at the Lincoln, Nebraska chapter of the new political order? In unity, was strength.

Did Dr. Coleman care if her views influenced our political discourse? She wasn't expressing an interest in politics simply to complete a few journal articles. She spoke like an activist. She was trying to rally a critical point of view.

She knew what she was dealing with. Many of the majors were fulfilling requirements. They would take it all in stride. A few well-placed ideas could make the students a little more enlightened. In their future jobs, they might influence policy in a favorable way. What more could she wish for.

I didn't want to believe that we were taking our freedoms for granted. Every day we resisted the temptation to give in to a rigid lifestyle. We were all waiting for the call for something better. It wasn't hopelessness or regret. But people had been let down too many times before. So they were all cautious.

I went back to my room. I had my books. I had my comfort. But I was again waking up to a cause. Lee and June weren't anomalies. They lived amongst. Worse, they lived inside of us. I took Dr. Coleman's admonishments quite seriously. Her study was clearly prescriptive. I wasn't going to ask her how to get involved. But I wanted to learn more.

It was exciting going to class. I realized that I could do college without any difficulties. The hard part would be getting in. I hadn't even finished high school. And I hadn't come here with the idea of pursuing a degree. Moreover, I didn't want to draw any more attention to myself by seeking out my high school records. This was only a way for me to pass my time. I needed to take it for what it was.

I picked up a novel and put all the thoughts about college out of my mind. I was on a deeper mission. Dr. Coleman's students were learning. But they weren't responding to her actual message. College wasn't about such a major commitment.

The more that I attended class, the more that I filled out a profile. Other students began to notice me. Some smiled as I made my way into the building. I was enjoying the attention. No one was going to report me to the police. No one was going to follow me home and try to harm me. This was refreshing.

When I returned home, I was even more excited about what I was doing. The next time that I went to class, I noticed that the girl across from me had been staring. After class, she approached me.

"I see you here every time. And you look so interested in what's going on. But we never talk."

She surprised me. I just wanted to run away.

"Hi!" That was all that I could manage to say.

As I started to walk away, she asked me, "Do you want to get some coffee? My treat."

I really wanted to duck out of there. I felt as if she was one of Lee's spies.

"My name is Donna. You have no reason to be afraid."

She could tell that I was a little suspicious.

Donna told me that she had taken another class with Dr. Coleman. "I really like her."

"Her class really is thought-provoking.

"I've never seen you before. Did you transfer in?"

I needed to make something up quickly

"I just moved here. I'm thinking about going to school. So I wanted to see what it was like."

"It's great. I can take you to some of my other classes."

Donna seemed so excitable. I appreciated her positive nature. She seemed so different from Rose.

"Where are you from?"

I told her that I came from Chicago. That was sort of true. I didn't want her asking me too many more questions. We were getting along so well.

“I’m from Omaha. I was afraid that I wouldn’t like living away from home. I’ve been her for two years already. I live in an apartment.”

I told her about my room.

“That’s so neat. We have to study together sometime.”

I smiled back.

“Oh, I forgot that you weren’t actually in school.”

“I wouldn’t mind helping you on your project.”

“That would be really cool. I could use someone to talk to.”

Donna had loads of friends. But none of them were that close. She wasn’t even with a guy.

“I study a lot. I’m not a crazy partier. Maybe when I have more time.

We both laughed.

“Chloe, you’re really different than most girls that I meet. I really like you.”

I couldn’t have imagined a better friend.

“I really want you to come to my creative writing class. I’ll talk to Mr. Briggs. He’s my teacher.”

“I’d love to. I’ve thought about being a writer.”

“Seriously. That sounds so neat.”

After coffee, I took her number and agreed to call her tomorrow.

The next day she was feeling under the weather.

“I can’t make my creative writing class. We’ll catch up at Dr. Coleman’s.”

Dr. Coleman’s class really got me thinking. I had already come into contact with Lee Tate. Who was the man in the office with Lee who was giving him instructions? I felt that I had only skimmed the surface of something that was so massive that I had no idea where it ended. I tried to familiarize myself with the organization that was submerged from the surface. Who did this involve? What did they intend for the country/

At times, freedom seemed in such short supply. We were all waiting for our oxygen to boost our spirits. Freedom of inquiry was a cornerstone of our liberty. But we were living in a time when scientific method seemed to be in disgrace. People were told not to believe what was right before their eyes. As their observational skills waned, they became more subject to political control by others. This was exactly what was happening under the advice of people like Lee Tate. They let ideology cloud their reasoning skills.

I imagined that there was a book that detailed what was going on. It read like a novel. Maybe, I kept it on my coffee table. Picking it up would strike fear in me. It wasn’t paranoia. I was starting to see a systematic character to what was happening. As I read on, the picture became more harrowing. I became riled up. I wanted to act. What was I supposed to do?

These monsters of horror had come to life. The literature was more than real. It read like fiction because no one wanted to believe it. I wanted to convince just one person. But if I talked to the wrong people, I myself might be turned into the authorities.

The novel had an eloquence in trying to depict the intricacies of their operation. This was not conspiracy theory. Each step in the argument was based on facts that anyone could see. I thought about Lee’s training. It was all pretty standard. He had no qualms about violating people’s rights. Assassination was simply one skill among many. If he deemed someone to be

an enemy to the state, he was judge, jury, and executioner. He lived in a world where he would be honored for being such a quick thinker.

There was a lot more to it. June and Bill were the ideal candidates for this mind control. They awaited their order. Everywhere that you looked, there were eager people who were ready to sign up.

I was seeing the picture. These things were supposed to be secret. Then they could get away with it. But it was all documented. What could we do?

In the novel, everything would appear hidden. Characters would assume aliases. But these fronts were all transparent. Why were so many people take in by it? Why were they all going along? I wasn't sure what I needed to do to keep things from getting worse. Was it all my imagination?

Dr. Coleman had her research. I just assumed that she knew. What this her book? Was she writing under a pen name? Had she disguised what was occurring in a book of fiction. That way, no one would be the wiser. But I had heard what she was really saying. Could I count on her help?

I wish that some of the students had been more helpful. Donna seemed very friendly. Could I make her understand?

I went back to reading my novels. I liked a good story. I was living in Lincoln. The corn crop would be harvested in the fall. The livestock would be fed. The sky wouldn't fall. Did it really matter?

I hadn't come to Lincoln to make waves. If I had wanted to find some conspiracy nuts, they were everywhere. This wasn't the same. In conspiracies, people seldom admit how their own actions have facilitated a coup mentality. I knew exactly what was going on.

At the heart of this way of thought was a serious contradiction. The more that the surveillance state relied on technology, the more its exponents found it convenient to deny hard science. They used devices that relied on finer and finer calibrations of measurement, but they demonized anyone who expected such consistency of application in other fields. If biology read more like a fairy tale, then the citizens would have less of a foundation to question these perverted uses of technology. Magic abounded. Movies relied on special effect on the belief that such sleight of hand was only a pale reflection of the more providential wonders that ruled the universe. Newton and Einstein only saw part of the truth. If the whole universe hadn't been created in a day, then the scientists had to go back to the drawing board until they could correct their models to agree with angelic licence.

Meanwhile, politics allowed itself to mimic such primitive models. The very people who touted original intent seldom had the communication skills to capture the subtlety of the often-cited documents. For them, scripture was never a text that allowed for a nuanced reading. Dogmatism reigned supreme. How could such believer ever aspire to please *Nature's God*? If man was born to eat fast food burgers, then the holy of holies must have created such delectables before the day of rest.

I couldn't envision Lee Tate passing out fliers for a tent revival. He needed to resort to more subtle means. How could he ever get the congregation to gather in one place? Dr. Coleman was doing her best to explain how these ideas made a foothold in the public consciousness. Did she know how pernicious thing had become? How many people were

susceptible to the constant bait and switch. As their paychecks plummeted, they all prayed for manna from the sky. When that wasn't forthcoming, they stuffed their hands with lottery tickets. They could spend a whole night scratching if only their wallets would oblige. And if gambling was habit-forming, there were suitable programs for the weak-willed. It was all a game that no one was supposed to take that seriously. And once in a blue moon, the stars would align and the numbers would all pop up right like a quartet of singing Aces.

Lee had perfected the melody, but his voice was always too hoarse to sing it right. He got me to add some embellishments of my own. But neither of us had the authority to command a crowd of adults. I was beginning to understand what it was going to take. Everyone wanted a savior. Someone who told them that it was OK to crack the whip as long as the damn thing didn't snap back and crack them in the head., You could lose an eye like that. But it wasn't really about seeing. Miracles could be faked. But you couldn't fake the touch.

As much as they might deny their provenance, it all dated back to the faith-healers. And it was always more about belief than reality. Appropriate stimulation could get a believer going. All that he would need for total acceptance was the final act of contrition. Then the healing could begin.

It all seemed so extraordinary in fiction. That was why no one would ever believe what I had seen. But Dr. Coleman knew all this. She had notes that corroborated all her theories. If I could just get to her. I still wasn't sure if I could trust her.

During our next class, I looked around in the hopes that I might test out my hypothesis. Who was really listening? When I looked at everyone, Donna waved at me and smiled back. At least, she was on board.

After class, we were going to hang out. I'd get her to show me her notes. She had Dr. Coleman before. She could probably answer my questions. I paid special attention today. I wanted to make sure that I took it all in.