

14. CONFUSING MR. STEVENS

I realize that you are a very busy person. But I really hope that you can make some time for me. I have been reading your books for years. I really feel that I know you. Or that you know something deep inside of me. I'm sure that people say that to you all the time. I am not a simple fan. I too am a writer. I feel that I am a very good writer. I could benefit from your advice. Maybe you could help me get my material published. I am sure when you read it that you will realize my sheer genius. I hope that you will not find it so intimidating that you will use it as a reason not to help me out.

You have depicted your characters lost in suffering. The portrayal appears to endorse a form of torture to explain the degree of their depredation. I know that you would defend yourself by claiming that the characterization simply captures the realistic conditions of these individuals. But you seem to take a special delight in devising the details of their predicament.

You are defending a view of behavior that suggests that we embellish those models that are familiar to us. The torturer finds that his only way to express his isolation is to further enhance his imposition. The characters appear lost in a system of actions, each intricately linked to the next. But you display this system. In a sense, you find pleasure in its exposition. I wonder if you would be so sanguine about the method if it was applied to you.

Now I am convinced, that must be the source of your cruelty. You have suffered under such a regime. No doubt the effects have been administered in measured doses. Hence, you have survived to tell the tale. At the same time, you have sought a form of pleasure that seems to take advantage of your previous suffering. It seems a strange combination of liberation and confinement. That these moment of excruciating pain are followed by these idyllic passages of psychic transport that seem to validate the overall experience. Whether it is pleasure or pain, both experiences anesthetize some deeper alienation felt on your part. And this is the reason for your fascination with the experience.

Somehow you have made a name for yourself by celebrating this process. Your writing has given you an escape from the submission that formerly dragged you down. Now, you dominate with your articulate insights. You have succumbed to the very authority from which you sought deliverance. In a true sense, you are the authority. You appear so remote from the effects of your dominion that you feign ignorance about the consequences. You are only attuned to the form of mastery that you now espouse. You are ensconced at the center of power so that you can flatter the reproduction of its means. You speak in the name of free expression. You seek to push the boundaries of the imagination. Your description is colorful. Your language is edifying. All this makes it appear that you are advancing the cause of freedom. But you are in fact paying tribute to a very rigid imprisonment of the psyche. You are spreading an insipid propaganda.

You may wonder how you can make peace with me. Why would you even bother to help me when I have so succinctly delineated your ideology? Perhaps you might note kindred spirit in me. For once, you are not able to get away with your slippery evasions. You might like that fact that you are now face to face with yourself.

I know that realization is often faced in peril. Facing down your self is the last thing that you want to do. You are convinced that the persona that you offer the world is the product of

such a challenge. Any further confession on your part would only encroach on the very things that now flatter you. You would have to confront the corridors of power.

You feel that you are doing just that. You are exposing the emperor in his frailty. That is the purpose of your erudition. It highlights how public discourse has fallen in such disarray. It is the role of the intellectual to return the ship of state to the path of righteousness. You are the moral compass that can help steer civilization back to its intended mission.

Who are you kidding? You have offered your supposed enemies with an iron-clad reasoning that will serve their order unto perpetuity. That the misery of the populace is primarily its own doing. If the self can simply adjust to the rhythms of your fiction, then it can overcome any of the tidal waves sent its way by the ministers of power. Since the self-imprisonment is even more universal than initially suspected, there is a myriad of terrible effects that are simply the result of our own mischief. Things have just got out of control.

In your world, your linguistic constructions offer such clear governance that you seem no longer subject to the very excesses that you attribute to those around you. After all who knows better than you yourself? You have undergone that very devastation. And you have named the origin of your dilemma. You have submitted. So others must see the light.

I attended your college address. You speak very well. And your ideas are provocative to say the least. I really feel that you have gone overboard in advancing alternative points of view. Your supposed tolerance seems to extend to those who have little if any tolerance for others. We are talking about people who would deprive the free speech of others if they had the opportunity. Their thinly-disguised dialogue is nothing but an incitement for people to take the law in their own hands.

You are in the forefront of excusing such opinions. In a free society, it is critical that you expose the links of such fanatics to the kinds of actions that their ideas imply. They talk vaguely about enemies of the state with the idea that the only punishment appropriate for their defined treason is death. You excuse the excesses of these thugs by suggesting that real trauma has made them so diffident in their reaction. Where are your loyalties?

You have gone well beyond advocating their free speech to actually defending their points of view. Where would you have us stop in considering the onerous circumstances that mitigate an outlandish opinion. Didn't the doctors of the concentration camps have ills that they wanted redressed by their methods? And don't we equally have to endure such ills today that can easily be remedied by the application of some good old-fashioned courage. That is why you are such an enlightening voice for the virtuous life. Amen!

I feel that it is hardly sufficient that I am able to isolate these characteristics in your thought. I have to share my discovery with the world. In a sense, I am holding you to account by sending you this note.

"Do you know anything about this guy?"

"I'm not sure that he even exists."

"He says that he was at the commencement address that I gave. He would have needed an invitation."

"They kept track to the people to whom they sent invitations. But each person got a number of invitations. So there was no way that anyone could have kept track of who actually received invitations."

“He must know someone on one of those lists.”

“Are you asking me to track him down? That’s like trying to find a needle in a haystack.”

“It’s better that you find him now. He does appear to be rather threatening.”

“He’s just interested in meeting you.”

“He wants to call me before the Nuremberg hearings. I mean what have I done?”

“I think that he wants to show you how much he’s thought about your writing. He doesn’t mean you any harm. He just feels ignored. And your novels have given him an outlet for expressing his frustration. Take it for what it is. He’s a careful reader, and he thinks about what he reads.”

“Thinks about it? He wants to act it out. He not just an idle fan.”

“He wants to get involved.”

“By hurting me.”

“You’re taking it too literally.”

“I’m a writer. I know the power of words. If he threatens me, he’s not just playing a game. Even if it’s speculation, it’s the beginning of an action. I don’t want to be around when he feels the need to put his words into deeds.”

“You can help direct him in a more positive way. It’s almost your duty. You want to influence your readers. You have to do a little more than pick up your royalty checks.”

“I’m an entertainer.”

“You’re entertaining by using words. You’re playing with meaning. You claim to be having an affect on the world.”

“That’s a pose. It’s not as if I think that the world is really going to change on the basis of something that I say. It can get someone thinking about things. It’s a beginning. But I’m hardly a source for making things happen in anyone’s life.”

“You’re becoming a celebrity based on what you’re telling the world. Even if it’s a pose, it works because people believe that you are a significant influence on their lives.”

“But normal people know how to put that in proportion.”

“You don’t write about normal things. You push those buttons that engender fear. You can’t back off at that point and pretend that everything is OK.”

“If I write about unusual things, then they are just that. Strange. But you can’t expect me to be responsible for every crazy that wants to go off on something that I’ve written.”

“It’s not necessarily going off. It’s an extreme response to something that you’ve said.”

“Response. This guy could just go crazy on me. And you want me to just take it. I want to catch him before he does something off the wall.”

“Catch him. He hasn’t even done anything.”

“That’s enough. He’s thought about hurting me.”

“You want to arrest him for thought crimes. What about your own writing?”

“I’m a published author. I stand behind my ideas. This guy is some lunatic hiding in the shadows. There’s really nothing that I can do to protect myself from him. I don’t even know who he is. He was simply a guest at my college address.”

“He just wants the same kind of treatment afforded to you.”

You serve as the perfect complement to the national security state. You portray man in the state of deprivation who has developed a hunger that is indeed a threat to his neighbor. In

turn, you ask for sympathy for the individual who seeks increased defense against the inroads of daily experience. Consider that his family may have been the victim of some unfortunate accident. Such threats are looming more and more over the homestead, And the only way to save himself is by asserting his right to protection. Only the vigilant state apparatus can adequately meet such a need.

You have overridden a history of cooperation among farmers. You have ignored labor solidarity. It is more convenient to traffic in your self-aggrandizing mythology. After all, what is most needed under the conditions that you describe? A writer who can negotiate the contradictions with his razor-sharp analytical skills and finely-honed vocabulary. Who is up to such a task better than you, Mr. Stevens? The state is calling you. And you are ready to answer the call.

“He is just raising an intellectual point. You have nothing to be worried about.”

“He’s pretty well calling me a fascist.”

“But it’s all part of his argument. It’s almost like an essay that someone might give you in class. He offers the salient points. Then he develops them to conclusion.”

“Conclusion. I’m his conclusion. He is implying that the only resolution is vengeance. He is suggesting that my actions have facilitate something terrible that has happened to him. He can’t take on the state. But he can meet and challenge me.”

“He’s harmless. You have to learn to deal with this kind of criticism.”

“This is not criticism. This seems personal.”

“The only personal thing about it is the fact that it’s addressed to you. Otherwise, he’s just mulling over your ideas. It’s all a matter of public record. You’re being too thin-skinned. You have to expect this once you become a public figure. If you don’t like it, shed the trappings of celebrity and go work at the Union Mission.”

“I can’t hide from the world. I’m good at what I do. I need to get around to people just to do my work.”

“You really are starting to sound like a missionary.”

“I do have a vocation.”

“Admit it. You’re a writer. You’re an entertainer.”

“I’m an educator.”

“Maybe that is part of your function. A small part. You don’t like telling the really nasty stories. The nuts and bolts stories of everyday life. You prefer something with a bit of a shock value. The titillation.”

“I’m not a romance novelist.”

“I’m not saying that you are. But you do lean towards the glamorous even when you portray the seedier side of life.”

“I’m not sure what you’re saying.”

“You portray the forsaken. Those too lost for forgiveness. But you still imply that salvation is an acceptable alternative. You are only interested in the damned because they serve as props to your real characters.”

“You really are starting to sound like him.”

“I’m not really agreeing with him. Just be prepared if one of those unfortunate souls shows up at your doorstep demanding their rightful due.”

“I’m not dispensing justice. I’m a writer. You were the one that called me an entertainer.”

“But you want to believe that you are worth so much more. I know that is what you’re working towards. If you expect more of yourself, just expect others to do the same.”

“But they have to ask for more from themselves.”

“They just might not be ready for such demands.”

“Then why are they so ready to pounce on me.”

“You make the offer.”

I am honored that you have invited me to your prestigious institution. I am glad that I can share my insights about my writing with readers who are so excited about my work. I have agreed to address the topic, *The Writer and Free Expression*. This topic is no doubt motivated by some recent controversies about my work. I welcome the opportunity to address these issues in a public forum.

The writer is not simply fascinated with details of the reality that surrounds him. He has a duty to capture these extraordinary circumstances in his writing. He is a reporter on the magic currents that move beneath the facade of everyday experience. At times, there is a brutality that he discovers in putting his magnifying glass to the human psyche. He cannot shy away from this portrayal no matter how upsetting it might be to the community standards in which he feels confined. The writer does not create these forces. He may not even endorse much of what he portrays. But he certainly is a witness to these uncomfortable facts. As such, his silence is not to be commended. Even if the portrayal is on an unnerving nature, it is imperative that he share the portrait with his readers.

I know that I have been accused of exaggerating the macabre in my depiction of this reality. I make no apologies. If I use hyperbole in my writing, it is with a purpose. I intend to shake up those arbiters of taste who prefer not to strip away the elegant facade of their everyday life. I know that there are some who would like to deprive the writer of his tools of irony and satire. They prefer to tell things *as they are* so that it will not disturb their facile worldview. The writer needs to shine his magnifying glass on the uncomfortable truths of everyday.

There is a purpose in my supposed fascination with the outre. The surveillance society extends far beyond the institutional spying and uniformity of government and corporations. It has become embedded in our character. The writer accepts his vocation to confront the hidden camera. He turn the lens on the camera operator and his collaborators so that we can see the actions of their secret society. It is ultimately the writer’s task to engage how all of us have becoming complicit in our curiosity about our fellow citizens. We have become the worse representatives of this urge to invade the privacy of our neighbors. We have submitted to a most extreme conformity.

If the features of our intrusion of the persons, of our friends, and acquaintances have become all too familiar, then the writer needs to cast this attitude in starker terms. He has to show the attachment to secrecy in a way to underline our fundamental revulsion with such an invasion. So I accept this assignment. I can only report by exaggerating. I can only expose the torturous by inventing the more torturous. I can only show by creating. The fiction of suffering is necessary to offer the smallest detail of experience to

the public.

I hardly sanction the reprehensible that I portray. But to silence my effort is dull the instruments that I use to show us who we are. We cannot be forced to return to an Age of Darkness. We have to intensify the spotlight.

I recognize that my mandate comes with a grave responsibility. I preach for tolerance. In as much we are all implicated in this conspiracy most foul, it is necessary that we use our understanding to better accommodate for the failings of others. Consider the man whose family has been a victim of our present state of affairs. He has been defenseless before the onslaught of the desperate and the aggressive. It is not usual if he seeks protection from the wolves that move in packs and threaten his well being. His tragedies are the very impetus for us as citizens to strengthen the protection of our basic rights. If his serenity has been disturbed by the monsters that this society has created, we cannot even redress the ills of the *surveillance society* until we reassure him that he is no longer defenseless. Security is not a luxury. It is the prime necessity.

It is no wonder that he feels the need to surround his home by a large cast iron fence. It only makes sense that he wants to ride around in an armor-plated SUV. I do not necessarily condone his choice. But I understand it. I sympathize with him. I weep for the loved-ones who have fallen victim to the predators that haunt the edges of our night. I ring out the bell of freedom. Let us appreciate what has been the legacy of this violation of our social compact. Only then can we restore it to its desired state.

If our drive for tranquility has been realized in the transformation of our personalities, the writer needs to sketch our new personas. Our desire for caring has been replaced by an urge to dominate others. And we are all willing to go along this appetite so that we might recapture a lost harmony. Indeed, this vision is at the heart of our pursuit. There is this profound sense of loss that has motivated our wish for a more integral perspective. This is our mysticism. We want to feel complete. We all want our glimpse of paradise, no matter how artificial or temporary. This is our delicious anesthetic. So we have been numbed by our new lotuses that we consume with a vague ravenousness. Just as consuming is the hope for a cure from our attachment. This is how we might again feel loved. My prescription for the present state is hardly to be embraced by the rabble. Difficult times require difficult measures. I am the surgeon, and I am ready to cut.

The self must own up to its heritage. Our tolerance for pain has only made us more readily able to inflict that suffering on others. What we have inflicted on ourselves seems only the logical gift that we inflict on others. When we come to the realization of where ourselves have taken us, we must take a step back. We must discipline our errant selves. We must impose an education that might deter these base impulses. Our language has enabled us to liberate ourselves from the very forms of oppression that we have inflicted on ourselves. We must submit to a new indoctrination. It is our lone salvation.

I know that many still find words confining. They feel the straightjacket of sentences pull tightly on their desires. They feel tongue-tied trying to express the simplest pleasures. They have reverted to a self-imposed silence so that they do not have to face the results of their profligacy. Come back my children!

If our commitment to change requires that we adapt our language, then our

schooling needs to begin immediately. We need to surrender out priggish imps of selfishness to the clarity of frank speaking and cognizant writing. We must seek wisdom at all costs. If this undertaking appears too arduous, then we have not faced down the alternative.

Some have accused me of being erudite. They suggest that I do not write for the people. Poppycock! My prose is an invitation to all of you. It is the new scripture whose exegesis is the cry of the lost soul of the night. I minister to you so that you might do the same for yourselves. I have heard a voice in the wilderness just as you are now hearing my voice. It is not enough to understand the meaning. You have to weave the words into a new fabric. And you must clothe yourselves in garments stitched together from the fabric. Writers need active readers. It is not enough to absorb what you read. You need to live the word!

I am not innocently handing you the keys of freedom. You will have to toil to free yourself from the new oppression. But liberty is your only hope. And you all must strike out on your own to avoid the tyranny from within. This is not simply a suggested course. It is an imperative for all of you. It is your world to remake in your desired image.

I have carefully studied your recent address at the college. You have offered the world a new prescription to tolerate torture. You have couched your defense with elaborate language. But you cannot hide your sympathies for the elite and powerful. In fact, your articulate exposition has caused them to embrace your supposed tribute to freedom.

You begin your address with an apparently innocent argument regarding free expression. You are attempting to deflect the focus away from the intent of your fiction. Instead, you seek a blank check to say pretty well anything you want even if it is of a fundamentally offensive nature. You do not want free expression. You simply want to be immune from significant criticism of your point of view.

You do not simply have a passing interest in domination. It is the hallmark of your oeuvre. It is the supposed learning experience that sets off the enlightenment of the self. The logic is too clear. The self realizes its participation in the detrimental. It recoils in shock from the results of this involvement. You appear overly concerned about the self owning up for its allegiance to this regime.

You hardly abandon the fascination for suffering until the self has completely made use of the instruments of torture. You take pride in the depiction of an individual, who can bear incredible levels of pain. This is a badge of honor. In turn, it feeds a thirst for just this sort of gratification. Of course, in its more extreme forms, this seems grotesque so that this is just the excuse that the self needs not to feel obligated to respond for its affliction. It is not a disease; it is a process. You only jump off immediately before the end. Otherwise, you follow this ride through all its winding turns.

Once the self accepts the terms of its new discipline, it permits the application of these terms to others who hardly have the same tolerance for pain. All for the best. The self can glean some pleasure in the suffering of others.

Education is the prize jewel at the center of your discipline. You suggest that we can liberate ourselves by accepting the same linguistic delineations that are so comforting for you. Without your analytical skills we are subject to being seduced by the affection for weakness. You

offer the terms that can help us break up our dependence. We submit to the new mastery.

How can one possibly endure the stages of your conditioning if there is not some promise of a future paradise? It seems like only a short step from the self-inflicted pain that is so much part of the discipline of academics or sports to a general fascination for pain in general and its subsequent numbing calm. This is heaven for you. The nirvana of the forsaken and damned. Who does not feel that hollow in their soul that if provided with ultimate redemption would not prostrate himself for this sweet reward?

You clearly make an entertainment out of the infliction of pain. And you do this on a sliding scale. If a little bit is pleasurable, even more is delightful. This enjoyment is linked with the intellectual gymnastics that you extol. That is how you avoid the need to answer for your predilection. It is your form of higher learning.

We owe you a debt for having risked yourself under incredible duress so that you might reward us with the morsels of your insight. You are the prophet that we need to lead us to the light. It is only those plunged in ignorance who are unable to learn a valuable lesson from your tutelage. We welcome your exploits.

The writer can finally assume his rightful place in the social order. We know that this is an act of supreme love for your readers. You have made the highest sacrifice. Thank you for this blessing. We listen closely for your latest revelation.

Dear Mr. Stevens,

I am sending you my resume in the hope that you might be able to offer me some kind of help in seeking employment. You will notice that I have written a number of novels that have yet to be published. I hope that you take this as the highest form of praise when I tell you that you are my model as a writer. I have been inspired by your works. I thank you with all my heart.

I realize that my content may be a little more extreme than what exists in your books. I have tried to highlight the lessons that you have left for the rest of us. And if I feel that accuracy is the utmost, I have added to the elements of your portrayal. I do not mean to belabor the desperate. But I can be very helpful in spreading your message to the rest of the world.

My accomplishments are not limited to my writing. I have done significant research into language studies. Many of my insights are extrapolated from direct study of your techniques. You are a master at observing the human psyche.

I feel that I already know you. I have been close enough to touch you. I know you, and I have touched you. You have blessed my efforts. Please rescue me in my time of need.

I know that you are a powerful man. People hang on your every word. You have truly done some great writing. Do what you can to open the doors for me. I know that I will only complement your endeavors. This is not to say that I am a disciple. Nevertheless, you are a worthy master. And I have learned many a lesson studying what you do.

I do have my own unique insights. That is why I would be a valuable companion. If you have inspired me, I would feel honored if I had the opportunity to inspire you. I am not weak link. I will not break the chain. Fortify me. Pick me.

You may wonder what I can do to help you. I am not proposing that I work directly for you. You may want to read one of my books and then pass it to one of your friends in

publishing. You might even pretend that you have written the book.

I do not mean to bother you. I believe that our relationship is of a professional nature. I do not want to do anything to harm that connection. Look favorably upon our connection, and do everything that you can to advance my career. It will be beneficial to you as well. When they take the time to read my material, they will see what a contribution I can be. That will only shine the light more favorably on you.

I know that you will not be able to remain as creative as you have been in the past. I will be able to pick up the slack. No one will even notice that your output has slowed once they see how active I am as a writer.

I am not proposing to write your books for you. But if I did, I doubt that anyone could really tell the difference. This is not to say that you lack originality as a writer. Far from it. You have a style that is unequaled even among your contemporaries. I am not trying to mimic your work. But I would be a worthy complement to your enterprise.

At present, my financial situation has made things very desperate. I am not begging you for help. But I really need you to intercede in some way. I feel that you are my providence, and this is some kind of prayer asking you for help. Hear my entreaties.

Greatness means that you are never too proud to bend your ear towards the needs of others. I really would love it if you could take a little time for me. Even a little friendly advice would be more than welcome.

I am not a helpless soul. I really do have something to give. In some ways, I have way more than the average guy. I may even have more than you have in reserve. You could definitely tap my resources.

“I feel gratified to have you aboard. I’d like to show you what I expect from you. I need you to go through my correspondence. I want to separate it in three piles. The first pile is strictly fan inquiry. In this pile I want you to place requests for pictures or autographs. In the second pile, I want you to include all questions about my writing. This may also take the form of commentary on what I have done. This pile addresses me as a writer, and seeks to make some connection to me personally. In the final pile, I want you to include all business correspondence. This includes requests for appearances.”

“Once you have prepared the final pile, I want you to discover any material that requires my urgent inspection. If there is something that you feel that requires immediate attention, I want you to pass it to my business manager. If it is a request for an appearance that is on the approved list, I want you to pass it to my personal secretary. Otherwise, I want you to dispose of the material.”

“With regards to fan requests, I have a pile of pictures that can be sent out. If they require autographs, I want you to sign them. Attempt to follow the standard that I have given you. You have more than enough markers.”

“In the case where they ask for advice on writing, I ask that you do your best to meet the criteria that I set out in this booklet. I want you to save all letter that you send out so that we may have a record just in case there might be a problem. We can always take the letters and collect them as a book. It would describe my process as a writer. You can help me edit it when I actually have the time.”

“Do you have any questions about anything that I have told you?”

“It seems fairly straight-forward. You are asking me to assume your identity for you fans.”

“In as much as my identity accords with a particular standard.”

“Can I take liberties with the standard?”

“You will of course embellish the standard. But I really don’t want you deviating far from what I have set out in the booklet. We will also have conversations when I get the chance about the material that you receive. I like to monitor what is going out in my name. I can only do this in a limited capacity. But that hardly limits my need to oversee your work.”

“I want to do the best that I can.”

“I realize that. That is why I hired you. I have received loads of requests to help. You just seemed to be the kind of bright young man who I felt might complement the work that I do.”

“I really feel honored to help.”

“I know that it’s a lot of work. I try to pay well.”

“You are more than generous.”

“I can also offer you any help that you may need with your writing. My business manager may be able to facilitate getting your works published.”

“I’m not really at that stage yet. Are you working on a new novel?”

“I have some ideas. As time goes on, I may require your help.”

“I am willing to do what I can.”

“That will be great. I may have you write up some passages for me. I usually work on computer, so I can give you the documents that might need editing.”

“I would be happy to oblige.”

“I should leave you alone. You have your work cut out for you. Good luck!”

“Thanks. I’ll call you if I need you.”

“Mr. Stevens, I ran across this one letter that I felt required your immediate attention.”

“I told you that my personal secretary was supposed to handle that sort of thing.”

“When you see it, you’ll understand what I am talking about.”

Dear Mr. Stevens,

I realize that this is a difficult time for you. You are one of the great writers of our time. But you have only written one true contribution to the great heritage of American Literature. I know that you are presently laboring over a new work I want to offer my assistance if I can.

I realize that you are struggling just to get things together. You do not have the same spirit that first inspired you when you committed a pen to the page. Sometimes success is its own worst enemy. People start to expect you to be how you were in the past. And you can’t live up to those expectations. I know how tough it can get. You are still a worthy artist. I know that the public will be overjoyed when you complete your new work. But for the time being, you are stuck trying to hold together the pieces.

Your real problem is that there is nothing real in your life. You have poured out all your energies in your magnum opus. And now you try to commit yourself to a new work of greatness.

But you have none of the fire that provided for your former greatness. I wish that I could do more to help.

I may be the one salvation that you have. I know your secret. The one thing that gets you jumping. I am willing to help. I can provide what you need to keep you going at night. Of course, my services come at a price. And that price may be too much for you to bear.

I may be the only hope that you have as you realize that your creative resources are quickly drying up. Your life has become far too comfortable to keep on. I am the very thing that can shake you out of your doldrums.

“What does this mean?”

“I thought that you should take a look at it.”

“He really doesn’t say anything. Nothing too specific. What should I make of it. Is it a threat?”

“Not really. He sounds that he knows you.”

“He doesn’t. He’s trying to convey a familiarity. Maybe if he was more specific.”

“It just seems that he’s talking about something about you that only you know.”

“Did you write this?”

“Why are you asking me this?”

“I don’t know. I just had a feeling.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You did write it.”

“So what if I did. Do you have any idea who I am?”

“Not really. You were one of the applicants for my job opening. My business manager told me that you were the best candidate.”

“Of course, I’m the best candidate. I’ve been telling you that for years. Only you don’t read your correspondence. You’re really not up much on your world. You give these lectures that suggest that you have some kind of grip on what’s going on. But you don’t. Not even over your own life. I know that you’ve got a movie deal. And if you play your cards right, you’re set for life. But, Mr. Stevens, you’re an empty man. You’re having trouble coming up with a solid idea for a new novel. And when you finally get it out there, you don’t even know if anyone is going to care about what you’ve done.”

“That may be. But it’s really none of your business.”

“I’m sorry to say that it is my business. You’ve hired me to make it my business. I think about you all the time. I always have. And I am going to fucking beat you to death. I am your one true love. I am the only one who can do anything to help you truly complete your life. You talk tough on the page. But you are really a weak man. I am here to show you that. I am going to cut off your head and shove it up your ass.”

“That sounds like one mean feat.”