

## 5. ALEA

When I first meet Alea, she complains of constant headaches. She tells me that it is caused by psychological factors. She suffers from an imbalance in her soul, an excess of melancholy. She is able to correct this by sleeping a great deal.

“Isn’t this a chemical imbalance? You could take medicine.”

“It’s nothing like that. My psyche senses an imbalance in the universe. Like a misalignment of the planets. As long as this continues, I will continue to feel things in this way.”

She thinks that she will be short-lived. She wishes for some calamity to carry her away.

“Most mornings I cannot get up to face the world. Or to be more accurate, the world is afraid to face me.”

She continues to expound on her theory, “It is not so much that I am suffering in my soul. It is deeper than that. It is more like I am possessed by another spirit. That spirit drags me down.”

She does not offer this explanation as an analogy. She means it very literally. “This is how I survive. I am not making this up.”

She is beseeching me to rescue her from her persecutors. In her case, the rescue must be cosmic. She expects me to pass somehow into the supernatural world so I can battle her demons. She also dismisses any attempt to find a social explanation of her feeling.

“It is entirely the result of these forces acting on me.”

I wonder what makes me remotely interested in her dilemma. Alea has a charm that revolves around the mystery that she exudes. You can notice this in her presence when she comes into a room. She always seems to be dancing on air. She hears music in her head, and she is drawn to the dance.

“I wish that there was more that I could do to help you get rid of your headaches.”

“You just need to tolerate my methods.”

And I try to give her the leeway that she needs. I want to discover her secret ability to see. Can she predict the future? Or does she only see the way out of her morass?

I tell myself that she has special powers. She has only applied her visions to her own reality. But given time, she can no doubt discover wonders for us all. I am overjoyed to spend time with her.

“I don’t know why you want to hang out with me. I must seem depressed all the time.”

Even though she is given to her melancholic bouts, she retains her moments of clarity. If she could see like this all the time, what would she discover. I imagine her to have x-ray eyes. She can see the inner workings of things. If she has inner vision, does she have inner touch? I see her tinkering with the hands of time. She will eventually contemplate time travel.

“I told you that I am beset by an infernal spirit that haunts my night. This possessor is from another time.”

I now wonder if she can travel with the spirit back to its time of origin. In doing so, can she escape the constraints of the present. I want to put a face on this creature. It is not enough to be possessed. The possessor might easily be an aspect of the host personality. If we are encountering a true possession, she would have to be in contact with an entirely independent entity.

“I am telling you, as I have said again and again, I am not the source of this possession. This thing enters my body.”

I wonder if there are any pleasurable sensations that accompany possession. “It’s not sexual, is it?”

“You seem to have an almost perverse interest in the possession.”

“It does stimulate your libido?”

“I never said anything of the kind. That seems to be more your interest. The feeling is much more towards the morbid.”

When she tells me this, I can almost sense the chill in her eyes. The eyelids seem to bear this darkened pallor. It is almost as if she has donned excesses of dark eye shadow although I know this is not the case.

“Have you ever done something that you regretted?”

“Of course. You wouldn’t be human if there wasn’t something that you regretted.”

“But what if you kept doing that same thing over and over again. Do you know what that would be like?”

“It would be a problem.”

“I met this man. He did things to me. The only way that I could be myself was to be with him again.”

“It sounds like love.”

“It was more of a possession.”

“Tell me about your man. Where did you meet him?”

“It wasn’t like I met him anywhere. He just sort of appeared. Like in a dream.”

“It was like a fantasy.”

“He was real.”

“Where did he come from?”

“From somewhere perfect.”

“Nothing is ever that good. After all, even flowers wilt, and then they decay.”

She could feel things collapse around her.

“That’s how I feel now.”

She wants to be as overly dramatic as possible. She wants to convince me that she is suicidal. She jumps into the water hoping that I will save her.

“It’s a dirty fountain. It’s not even that deep.”

“I still need you to help me out of here.”

She actually feels more humiliated than anything else.

I meet a man in a bar.

“Do you know Alea?”

“Why?”

“She has stolen money from me. I want you to kill her for me. I’ll get you off.”

“Why would I want to kill her?”

“I know that you need money.”

“If she’s taken money from you, then she has the money. I probably can get a better deal from her.”

His name is Vaughan.

“Have you ever killed a person before?”

“No, never.”

“It can be a pleasurable thing.”

I feel like reporting him to the police. But if what he say is correct, Alea is in trouble too. I meet Alea for supper.

“I’d do anything for you.”

Alea doubts me, “Would you die for me?”

I tell her about the man that I’ve met.

“We could fake your death, and get even more money.”

She laughs, “He’s someone that I know from the theater. We were playing a joke on you.”

“Why would you do something that silly?”

“We were testing you.”

“Did I pass?”

She claims that she is from a family of wolves. That she does strange things at night.

“You’ve told me that story already. You just like drama in your life.”

“Have you even taken poison? Let it seep into your system. Constrict your breathing. Give you pains in your stomach. Then at the last moment you take the antidote.”

“Why would you do that?”

“It makes me feel really alive.”

As I talk to her, it appears that she is also another self entirely independent of the Alea that I know. I wonder if this is another trick that she has learned in the theater, to take on other personalities.

“Would you make love to me in public?”

“What would that prove to me?”

“It would prove to me how much you want me.”

“It would prove that I’m an exhibitionist. That I have a problem.”

Her talk is arousing. It keeps me curious

“You can do what you want with me.”

“Where’s the challenge?”

“That others will find out. I’m wearing no underwear. Do you want to have sex in the stall in the toilet?”

She is showing me another side of her. She tells me that she makes love like an animal. Then she reverts back to her human side. I am trying to get beyond these outer shells. She keeps adding more.

“I need you to kill for me. I already tested you. I know that you would kill me if I asked. I want you to kill a man for me.”

“I want to help you. I’d do anything for you. I don’t think that I could kill.”

“I’ll have to kill myself if you don’t do what I ask. I can’t have a life if this man keeps after me.”

“I want to help.”

“I want you to kill him in front of witnesses. I will get you off. I will be your alibi.”

“I don’t need an alibi. I haven’t done anything wrong”

“You will.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you’re with me, he’s going to want to kill you too.”

“Who is he? The guy that I met earlier.”

“I don’t want to die until I’m ready.”

“I thought that you told me to kill you.”

“That’s the only way that I can get away from him. Unless you kill him.”

“It sounds like he has special powers.”

“He always finds me. I run away from him. But he always finds me.”

“Even if I killed him, they’d just tie the weapon to me”

“There is nothing that ties you to him.”

“You do, my love.”

She talks to me more about her possession.

“It’s not like you howl at the moon.”

“No, but I do feel the strangest sensations during the full moon.”

“Strange how?”

“It’s hard to explain.” Her face bears the mask of death look. “I’ve suffered from insomnia.”

“That’s not that unusual. We all go through bouts of sleeplessness.”

“It’s not that. I feel like I’m changing.”

“Changing how?”

“I don’t know how to explain it. Like I’m growing wings or another limb.

“A metamorphosis.”

“Something like that.”

Her transformation is more than physical. It is supernatural.

She continues, “Last night I was able to fly with my wings.”

“Everyone has flying dreams.”

“It’s not just in my dreams. I wake up with muscular pain. But it’s in a phantom limb.”

“I’ve woken up with the worst pains. I feel like I’m having a heart attack.”

“This is different. It’s the feeling that a baby bird has when it’s just learning to fly. It’s about mapping all my everyday sensations onto these brand new limbs. Coordinating it all together.

“That makes no sense.”

“Oh, it does. That’s what a baby does all the time. Moving her hand and connecting it to a feeling in the arm. The coordination of tactile and muscular feeling.” She opens and closes her hand. “I am going one step beyond that.”

I see her a few days later. Her mood is more somber.

“I feel this pressure from this feeling.”

“Is this like the entity that was taking you over before?”

“This is more intense. It’s pulling me in.”

Her feeling is becoming more desperate. She is being sucked out of the real world into this other realm.

“It’s almost a limbo for me. I have virtually no awareness of this other existence. But now we are sharing perceptions. I can feel the drain. Something is sapping my strength.”

“You are just feeling tired.”

She props herself against a chair.

“This is not normal fatigue. I am dragged across the bridge that separates two universes.”

She explains how others have undergone the same sort of transformation. They have adapted much better. They have acquainted themselves with their phantom. Her story is full of gaps.

“We all feel the touch. The momentary sensations. We don’t know what to make of them. We don’t want to believe that there is this other identity out there trying to take us over. But it is happening to all of us. It is coming over me faster.”

I wonder, “Is that all there is to it?”

“There’s more. It’s really bizarre. This limb has a life of its own. An entity. It’s more like I’m joined to it, and it’s moving me. Like the next stage in evolution, into the supersensual realm.”

She is waiting for her ghost to emerge full-fledged.

“I never feel as if I’m living my own life. It just seems so temporary. Something that is being taken from me. The rug is being pulled from under me. I negotiate this uneasy truce with this thing. All the time it is pulling my life away from me. This sick hunger is feeding its whims at my expense. It is preying upon my soul.”

She continues, “I am trying to pull myself back from the brink. But it is pulling me just as hard the other way.”

She is trying to dominate this parasite.. She feels that she may be on the verge of a breakthrough.

I question her, “Maybe it thinks of you as the parasite.”

She is despondent. Her breakthrough is short-lived. She has met an immovable force. She will have to make do with an uneasy companion. She is unable to subdue the creature.

She is now a ghost rider. She is being carried along by the entity. She still retains consciousness.

“I cannot overcome this ghost. I need to come to know it.”

Her ghost is like a person stuck between two world.

*You can only live if you die like me.*

The words of the ghost now haunt her.

“Now that I know the circumstances under which the ghost died, I can more clearly understand what is happening to myself.”

She learns the story. Alea claims the woman’s heart had been betrayed by her lover. He first meets her when he is struggling for his fortune. She has the caring soul that has helped him develop his confidence. Over time she had been cast off by her lover for someone more elegant and promising. His new lover is the daughter of the owner of the man’s company. He will be made vice president after his marriage.

Alea’s alter ego threatens the marriage. She will reveal her affair. This will be the

scandal that will prevent the proposed union. The man meets his ex-lover by the river. They are on a dock. They struggle. She falls and hits her head as she falls in the water. It is night time. He cannot find her. He leaves her to die.

From that point on, she seeks to avenge her death. That is why she has taken over Alea. She wants to again feel love. She wants to walk the earth again.

“The man must be long dead.”

“But her debt is not paid. That is why she haunts me.”

“You are not involved with such a person.”

“Wallace, you are not going to betray me.”

“I hadn’t planned to. Why?”

“Only bad thing will result if you do.”

I could feel her curse descend over me.

She could hardly work. I took pity on her and let her come to live at my place. With each day, the ghost seems to gain more control. Aggressive outbursts are standard fare. At first I can ignore her. It isn’t a big deal. She is always be apologetic afterwards. Nothing is broken, and there is no harm done.

“I’m really sorry. I don’t want you to throw me out on the street.”

“Don’t worry. I know what you’re going through”

She can’t sleep. Her days and nights become reversed. In the deep of night she can find a power that would seem to light her way. She lives off this energy. But I can see it drain her energy. In the morning she is listless. By the afternoon, she is nervous. During the evening, her aggression manifests itself.

“If I could sleep, I would. Just get off my back.”

“I’m only trying to make suggestions.”

“I know. I’m not very good at listening.”

We both muddle through. I sleep while she wanders the night. She might watch TV or listen to music on the headphones. She is envious of the fact that I can fall asleep on cue. She seems to begrudge me the fact.

“You didn’t even go to bed at all last night.”

“It’s my fault.”

“Try to lie down. Just relax. Close your eyes.”

“If it was that easy, I would.”

She falls asleep to television in the late afternoon. It is all that separates her from complete psychosis.

“We need to sleep. Just to make us sane.”

“Don’t you think that know that?”

“Maybe a drink would settle you down.”

“That’s all that I need to do is to drink.”

Her hands are starting to shake. She is pale. She is afraid of the sunlight. She walks around like a zombie. I imagine that she is sleepwalking. She is constantly engaged in a low-grade sleep.

“That is how I get my rest. I never exert myself.”

“Maybe you need something to get your life in order. Some discipline.”

She can't really work at this stage. I am afraid that nothing will snap her out of this. I sense the spirit is actually overcoming her personality.

"You didn't have to abandon me like that."

"Alea, what are you talking about?"

"The way that you fucked me over for that other girl."

It is the ghost talking. She is trying to relive the scene on the dock where she was pushed in the water. She pushes me. She is trying to hold on. She seems faint and passes out on the floor. I put her on the bed. This may be the only way that she can rest.

As the days pass, she is almost in a coma. When she is awake, she just stares at the ceiling. I should take her to the hospital.

"I'm going to take you to see a doctor."

"I don't want to leave here."

"You're hardly eating."

"I had some soup today."

"I never saw you get out of bed."

"When you went out, I made myself something to eat."

I find the can of soup in the garbage. She's had some soup and bread.

"I need to get you out of here."

Days later, she switches to another personality. She is up and pacing all the time.

"What do you want from me?"

"I'm just trying to take care of you."

"If you cared, you'd shut your mouth."

"I'm just trying to help."

"You're in the way. You should have left me dead as you found me."

One morning I am sleeping late. I move slightly on the pillow. I wake up to this shaking and a thud. She has just planted scissors inches from my head. If I had not moved, she would have stabbed me seriously. I grab her hand and disengage the scissors."

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm just playing with you."

I hold her down. It doesn't seem like play at all.

"They're fucking scissors. You could have taken my eye out."

She needs to be institutionalized. This is beyond me now. I am able to calm her down. She quits making noises like a raging cat. She is now sitting with her head down.

"Is there anyone that I can call? Anyone that can help?"

"I don't really have a family. I'm not an orphan or anything. But they don't live here. I haven't seen them in years. I think that I was in a trance. I didn't mean to hurt you. I don't know why I did it."

Either do I. I don't know what I can do to stop her. I take the scissors away from her. Next time, it could be a hammer. And her aim could be perfect. I hold her. She rocks in my arms. I take her to bed and put my arms around her as I fall back asleep. She is next to me when I wake up.

"Wallace, I think that I love you."

I am still in shock from the night before. She disappears for a few days. I feel that my

stray cat wanders has wandered off. She appears in the middle of the night, days later. She looks as if she has been through the mill. Her hair is wet and hanging from her head. She is barefoot.

“Where have you been?”

“For a walk in the rain.”

We both laugh. She is all wet. I give her a hug.

“I just want to sleep. I’m sorry for what happened. I promise that it will never happen again.

The dreams and the anger seems to have passed. The ghost is not to be seen for days. We find a bliss together. We enjoy eating. She smiles. She makes jokes.

I am drawn to her. Her dark black hair falls to her shoulders and complements the dark makeup around her eyes. She is a lost soul. Perhaps she is starting to find herself.

I hold her close as we fall asleep. She has made me breakfast in the morning. I hold her hand and look into her eyes.

This is our time of peace. After the turmoil, it is welcome. I don’t even talk about the past. I know that storm clouds are brewing somewhere. For the moment, I ignore it all. I live for the silence. We embrace the night. We welcome the dawn.

Our placid lifestyle seems ideal for her recovery. After days she has a confidence that she has always lacked previously. I assume that she has dispelled her ghost.

“Wallace, I want to get my own place. To start working again.”

There is a shop that sells jewelry and other assorted crafts. She gets a job and starts to feel some regularity in her life.

“I’m sorry about all the weird stuff that was going on. I think that I was afraid of you. I was afraid of myself around you. That I would feel too comfortable.”

We eat breakfast together. Her strength has returned. But she is not burdened by her wild moods. She has little trouble falling asleep. The scissors incident is long behind us. I had feared a prolonged hospital stay for her. Her days away had given her that needed transformation. Now she seems to be fully recovered. I am surprised at the natural quality of the cure.

I meet her in the park after her work. She is in good spirits. We get a take out dinner. She is making jokes. Her bouts are now ancient history. How did she regain her mental health so remarkably? Even her dress is not so dour. The change is overwhelming.

I wonder how long this will last. She has so accustomed herself to turmoil. Now she is trying to adapt to the rigors of the mundane. A soul so nurtured on drama must suffer from lack of stimulation. Nevertheless, I hope that this peace might be the very thing that will lead her back to a sustained health.

I entertain an alternative to her well being. What if the entity has finally been victorious? She is subdued simply because the phantom has completely absorbed her personality. That would hardly explain the dissipation of the aggressive tendencies. Some other factor is mitigating these demons from manifesting their dominance. I err on the side of optimism. Still, there is a cynical bone that I must satisfy. What could make the tumultuous soul resolve into a creature of such placidity. What moves beneath those adorned surfaced. Is there a wild-eyed devil in hiding in her glance, in the smooth waves of her hair?

She will not yield. The facade is complete. No hidden gremlin pokes out its face. How



is this transformation accomplished? Its method would be the foundation of a psychic medicine. I want to get to the bottom of things. How can she balance her sanity against such a vile history? There are even skeletons that she has hid in her closet far away from my view. I walk in these corridors afraid that something might pop out and frighten me. But even the hallways of her mind are bereft of anything remotely disruptive. The cure is complete.

Where formerly I was the rock, I sense an instability creeping into my consciousness. This all seems to sudden. I don't want to say that I long for the days of old. Far from it. I just don't want to accept a false sense of security if that's what this is.

It is not as if a new personality has truly come forth. Rather the old one seems to have been drugged. I am waiting for the next episode to explode on the scene.

One day when we are eating she turns to me with absolutely no expression and states: "A straight razor does its work ever more severely than scissors or a knife. Many a heart has been stilled contemplating the cold steel."

"Where does that come from?"

"It was just a thought that came into my head. It has neither rhyme nor reason. Maybe I've thought it up during my idle hours. My life is starting to seem very boring to me. I have always hope for this consistency. Now it is killing me. If I suddenly disappear one day, I hope that you won't come looking for me."

"Why would you say that?"

"I may be called from afar."

"Are you feeling possessed again?"

"No. But I know the reason that I am sane is because I have accepted the demons. I share a oneness with my persecutors."

She has not revealed such fundamental truths to me before. I could only suspect what has happened.

She actually disappears for a few days. I hunt down friends to see if they know anything. She turns up just as mysteriously. She is again calm and does not talk about possession. The cure is working beyond my view. I want to know what is happening.

"You can't know. Because nothing is really happening."

As time moves on, her disappearances seem more frequent. Now and then she will say the strangest things. Otherwise our time together is entirely harmonious. I consider that she spends part of her time as another personality. The rest of the time she returns to herself.

"You told me that nothing is happening to you. But you are disappearing more and more frequently. What is really going on? Tell me. For both our sakes."

"I have not been totally up front with you. The entity still haunts me. But I can make it go away for long periods at a time. When it resurfaces, I have to get away. To lock myself away in a completely isolated place where it can do no damage to anyone else."

"Your time away is happening more and more."

"I can't stop myself. It has control over me. I hate to admit it. We have negotiated a truce. But it is not living up to it's part of the bargain."

I fear for the worst. That one day her disappearance will be permanent.

"Is there nothing that I can do to stop it from happening?"

She holds me, "I am the only one that can influence. That is why I need total

concentration. I need to be away. You will only provoke it. Then I will have to do harm to you.”

Her home remedy seems hardly to be working. But it is her decision. I just want to change her mind. Somehow!

The next week, she is gone for five days. I have missed my opportunity to track her. While she is gone, I consider my options. I depend on finding more about her secret journeys.

When she returns, she again assumes her jovial airs.

“Do you really hate your life that much that you have to hide away?”

“No, I love what I have. I don’t want to jeopardize it.”

“But you are missing for longer and longer periods. I feel that you are hardly around.”

“You have to be patient with me.”

“Where is the evidence?”

“I am here. What more do you want?”

“I want you to be with me. Stay with me and everything will be all right.”

“Stay with you, and I will only end up hurting you.”

“Maybe you should leave for good.”

I try to take it back before I have said it. The words roll off my tongue and are too slippery to pull back.

“Did I hear you right?”

“I just miss you too much?”

“You have to be patient.”

But neither of us have enough of that. With the coming days even her lively spirits seem moderated.

“I hope it wasn’t what I said to you.”

“You only spoke the truth. Something is wrong. I thought by disappearing that I could cast off the phantom. It isn’t working. When I dream, it inhabits my thoughts. It is creeping closer and closer. It is not that I find my life boring. I do not. But its influence is just too much to bear.”

She is around only for a few days. And she disappears again. I expect to see her back in a week. After more than two weeks, I am worried. I receive a letter the next week.

*I am sorry for all the troubles that you have undergone. I will do my utmost to make it up to you. I am working now. I live in Boston. I will send you money for all your troubles. I am forever yours. We could not be together. I hate that fact.*

*Someday we will be reunited. Until then, keep me alive in your thoughts.*

I am tempted to go up to Boston. One day I visit Chicago. I am walking across the courtyard of a skyscraper, she is there. I wave. She doesn’t see me.

I walk over to where she is standing. She still hasn’t seen me. She is with a man. They are arm and arm. She looks different. All sunny. I have never seen that disposition.

She finally turns my way. She wants to avoid me. I catch up with her. She sends the man on his way.

“Did you follow me here?”

“This is totally accidental. How have you been?”

“I couldn’t be better. I was in a hospital for a while. They gave me stuff to manage my

problems. I needed to leave everything behind. Everything that reminded me of that time.”

“You look great.” She blushed. “Do you work here?”

“Not in this building. I live in Evanston. My friend works here.”

“I am glad that you are happy.”

“I wish that I could spend more time with you. I don’t want to think about those days. I thought the stupidest things. “

”You’ll never come back to DC.”

“There would be no point.”

I have spent a year trying to figure out what has gone wrong. I have always thought that I pushed her away. Seeing her in Chicago appears to change all that. But does it really. I sense that the spirit is now alive in my place.

My fear is for myself. If the entity could captivate her so easily, then it might be available to take over me. I have changed. I am not the same Wallace.

Since she has left, I have seen other women. I am paralyzed. I cannot get over her. I did not love her misery. But it all gave me a sense of purpose. Now I feel that I am floating in the nether world.

One day I am on the train. I see her get off. She waves to me. I jump off the train. But I do not see her.

Another time I am coming back from a conference at the Olympia Hotel. I am sure that it is her in the park. She gets up just as I am in approach. I run to catch up with her. I cannot find her. Maybe she does live in Chicago. I am not sure. None of her former friends have heard anything. I wish that I could find her. I leave it to chance.