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SURROUNDED BY MYTHOLOGY

Fire Support Base Constance:

I Corps

South Viet Nam

0:900

February 5, 1971

Elements of the 402nd NVA Main Force Sapper Battalion attacked this firebase just before dawn. The 170th Light Infantry Brigade sustained numerous wounded and 15 killed. This reporter flew in early the next morning to a camp that was virtually on fire. By most accounts, there were a minimum of a dozen explosive charges set by the invading forces.

The attack began just before 04:00. Sappers, with their skin coated in charcoal, slipped through the perimeter. Under the cover of a fierce mortar attack, they set satchel charges in various, strategic locations around the firebase. The initial explosion of the attack killed the commanding officer, a Colonel Howard J. Pierce.

A firefight raged for several hours before the sappers retreated into the night. Daylight brought the discovery of 20 enemy dead, with several of the bodies clearly visible in the perimeter wire. Medevac helicopters were flown in to evacuate the wounded.

This surprise attack has put to rest the rumor circulating about a total reduction of combat in Vietnam. "Charlie ain't giving up," a somber Private First Class Leary told me, as he completed his morning detail. At least a dozen Huey gunships were in flight within sight of Firebase Constance, proof of a temporary build up ordered by I Corps.

Jim Lewis

St. Louis Chronicle

1. PATIENT 66

I first met Rey Flowers in March, almost three years ago. A colleague, a friend from our college days together at GW University, had requested that I take one of his cases, as a professional favor. I was reluctant. At the time I was stretched thin, filling two positions and deep into a government sponsored study. I had fallen behind on my research. The last thing I needed was more distractions.

"Sarah, I'm telling you this is right up your alley," Pete had said, smiling at me.

"Well, it is. As soon as I came across this one I immediately thought of you."

"You did?" I said skeptically.

"Yeah, it's tailor made for your research model," he said excitedly, smiling.

"Have you forgotten about Patient X?" I shot back, frowning at him, reminding him of a previous patient he had referred to me, who turned out to be a fraud.

"Okay, he was a...a goldbricker, but this is genuine gold we're talking here," he countered. "Besides, you're the one who is always saying how you are looking for challenges--right?"

"When did I ever say that?" I asked, smirking.

We had known each other since our first year in college. After undergraduate studies were completed, our careers seemed to continue to intersect. Now, for the past three years, we had been working for the VA Administration, involved in some governmental research project that was being kept hush-hush.

It wasn't anything like some secret project. We weren't delving into mind altering areas or top secret spy missions. Our work was being kept under wraps because we were

dealing with sensitive research that had the potential to be bad public relations more than anything else. It was nothing glamorous.

I had taken my Ph.D in clinical psychology two years before. It hadn't been easy, financially or otherwise. Pete had been responsible for getting me the job with the VA, which in turn blossomed into a research grant from the Government. Now, at the age of 31, I was director of the VA's program for studying PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

My work, essentially, catalogued some of the end results of war, its residual impact on the men and women who survived physically but not always mentally. The research data I compiled was classified, at least until which time the powers that be saw fit to inform the public what the rigors of combat can do to a human being, with or without patriotism.

The Pentagon and Congress scrutinized my work and were continually looking over my shoulder, so to speak, in order to monitor my progress. At least once a week a 1st. Lieutenant, a woman, and a Congressional staffer, a man, would visit my office for updates. Although they were excessively polite, they nevertheless had the stink of self importance about them. It wasn't long before I dreaded seeing their faces at my door.

Case Study: 66

Rey Flowers. Male. 50 years old. Vietnam veteran.

History: drug abuse (barbiturates), bipolar tendencies.

Meds: elavil, zoloft, thioridazine, risperdal.

Current--paxil.

DOUBLE MURDERER.

Pete watched as I read the abbreviated case bio, where someone had scribbled the last entry in red ink. I looked up at him and back at the note. He laughed uneasily.

"Looks like fun, huh?" he asked, tapping me on the shoulder.

"Sure," I said, staring at him for a moment. "Where is he?"

"I knew it!" he sang out, laughing. "I knew you couldn't resist."

"Oh shut up," I chided, slapping at him playfully.

Rey Flowers was incarcerated at Beekers Hospital. His medical file was a full six inches thick. He was being held in what we therapists liked to call "the barn." It looked like a barn and was even painted a dull, burgundy red. Beekers was a facility dating back to the Civil War, or so it seemed. It was right over the District of Columbia line, in Maryland.

Several of my study subjects were interned there. It wasn't one of my favorite places to visit. In the last decade, due to persistent government cutbacks, Beekers had become the dumping ground for more and more desperate mental health cases, ones in which lost hope defined their shared criterion.

In step with the often violent and unruly patients came the caliber of personnel. It seemed that each and every staff member had, at one time or another, been given formal reprimands and or even demotions. Tension on the grounds was palpable. There seemed to be a steady undercurrent of antagonism between the staff and the patients. More than is usual, anyway.

The director of Beekers was a woman, Dr. Beatrice R. Helms. She had been a

Colonel in the Army. Standing almost six feet tall, she was an imposing figure around the hospital and, as Pete was fond of saying, "took no prisoners." Our professional relationship, such as it was, revolved around her permitting me access to her patients in return for a monthly review of my progress in the PTSD study; which I doctored in order to get around the ban on divulging information, statistics and otherwise.

As a rule, Director Helms didn't approve of women therapists, not on her watch at any rate. Long ago she had decided, herself excluded of course, that women didn't have the intestinal fortitude to withstand the rigors of doing battle against the mind. Actually, in her words, she had told me on the day of our very first interview: "Dr. Greene, I very much doubt you will be up to it...this level of...of mental healing." I had forced a smile back at her, while I ordered my voice not to quake, and replied, "I think I can handle it." She then had let out a whistle, which startled me, then stated, "They will mentally rape you and you'll still have that idiotic smile on your face."

I never smiled around her after that first interview.

When the interview was over, Dr. Helms glowered at me then called in one of her assistants and he then showed me around the grounds. I tagged along with him making mental notes of all the horrors I was seeing. My tour of duty at Beekers had begun.

"Make sure you make them put him in the "Vise," Pete insisted, eyeing me closely, waiting for my acknowledgment.

"I think I know what I'm doing," I said cavalierly, brushing off his concern with a laugh.

"Look, Sarah, this guy is different--I'm telling you straight out," he warned.

"I'm sure Dr. Helms has him under control by now, Peter. Come on," I exclaimed.

"They just took him off of mellaril. The guy is out there...way out there," he explained portentously.

"Is that your professional evaluation, doctor?" I asked sarcastically, chuckling.

"Sarah," he said, grabbing my arm, "promise me you'll only see him when he's in the Vise. Promise?"

"I can't promise that," I stated, looking at his hand on my arm.

"The man killed two people. Read his file. He's like Rasputin and Manson rolled up into one," Pete announced, shaking his head yes for emphasis.

"Sounds interesting. Make a good paper--huh? Maybe I can finally make it into Psychology Today," I shot back, smiling at him.

"Sarah...listen to old Peter here. Drop the sarcasm. Just do what I ask--please."

"I'll think about it. Now I've got to run. Call me later," I called out to him, as I hurried down the hall.

The Vise. It was one of Dr Helms inventions, her contribution to the field of psychiatry. It was medieval in concept and modern in design. Uncooperative and abusive patients were retained in the device and kept there until which time they were rehabilitated enough to interact with the other patients and the staff.

Pete showed me the contraption on my first official visit to Beekers. The Vise was built around a square shaped chair made of hard plastic. Immediately around the chair was a superstructure of interlocking struts made of PVC pipe. Draped over the

pipes and attached by fastening bolts was narrow gauge plastic coated fencing. Once the patient was seated, and the hatchway had been secured, there was just enough room for the patient to sit because the shape of the fence conformed to the contours of the chair. One size fits all.

The Vise wasn't necessarily a temporary holding instrument. Built into the seat of the chair was a round hole, with a stainless steel chute sloping towards the back. A hatch had been cut into the fencing large enough to remove the accumulated human waste that gathered in a bucket which rested on a shelf there.

After several prototypes had been improved on, this latest Vise had been fitted with wheel barrel tires, which gave it a necessary mobility. The entrapped patient could be wheeled anywhere, with or without his or her cooperation. It was not uncommon for some patients to spend a week in the Vise. They were fed through a portal in the fence. A water hose was used to bath them where they sat.

"Those Pilgrims were intelligent people," Dr. Helms had said to me once, as we were standing in the hallway and the Vise was being wheeled past us with a patient screaming out at us as he went by. "The stocks...they were simplicity personified. Wood. Anatomical cutouts. Lock and key. Marvelous," she said, whistling.

"If you say so," I muttered.

"Oh, yes, Dr. Greene, have one of the orderlies show you how to work the Vise. It is vital that you become accustomed to it," Dr. Helms suggested, clapping her hands together happily, while she walked the halls, stopping here and there to pass on commands to her staff.

None of my previous patients or study subjects had been confined to the Vise. I personally, and professionally, didn't agree with the use of the contraption. It bordered on barbarism, a throwback to nineteenth century mental health practices; which certainly matched the prevailing atmosphere of Beekers Hospital.

I would, unfortunately, have no say in the matter. Dr. Helms ran the facility like she must have done with one of her Army commands. She gave despots a bad name, as Pete was fond of saying. He had locked horns with her on several occasions over professional differences.

"The woman relishes combat," he had told me once, shaking his head wearily.

"You have to learn to be a good authoritarian," I teased. "Yes sir. No sir. Can I kiss your feet, sir."

"Do you think the woman wears leather under that lab coat?"

"I was thinking more along the lines of a freshly starched SS uniform," I joked, trying to sound serious.

"Hitler Youth graduate," he added, laughing.

Of course there was nothing particularly funny about the working environment at Beekers. Staff turnover was perpetually at a critical stage. Patients were being warehoused, milked for whatever Government stipend could be squeezed out of them. The physical plant was in near ruins, or so it seemed. Maintenance was, seemingly, non-existent.

In short, I hated the place. Whenever I drove out to the suburbs, passing by all the familiar landmarks along the way, a general feeling of uneasiness came over me, like

maybe--just maybe--I could keep on driving by the place and not notice. But you couldn't miss it.

There it was. First off, you would see the main building, the barn. A John Deere tractor would look perfect parked next to it. Every time I drove up the winding lane that led to the staff parking lot I thought: Where are the cows? Without fail.

Unlike some of the more solvent institutions in the area, Beekers grounds looked like a farmer had just recently plowed them under. Dr. Helms, ever conscious of budgetary restrictions, or, in this case, constrictions, cut corners first when it came time to beautify the landscape. Stark. You might say that. And in the winter it took on a decidedly moonscape appearance.

Patients, the few who were permitted to roam the grounds, were restricted to a football field size area behind the barn, which was encircled by a chain link fence with barbed wire on top. It was affectionately called The Yard. The grass had been worn down to an almost mahogany colored mud. When it rained it was all but impossible to walk across the yard without being mired in two feet of viscous slime. Such is the joys of the work place.

2. PARADIGM SHIFT

I was scheduled to have my first session with Rey Flowers on a Tuesday, 9:00am. The previous weekend had been spent going over his medical files. He had been committed to Beekers Hospital almost ten years ago, and he had not been a model patient.

Yes, I was nervous, but then again I usually was when I began with a new patient, research subject or otherwise. It was normal to be anxious. Although this time I was leaning more towards apprehension. I didn't want to admit it to myself but Pete's warnings hadn't gone unheeded.

Flowers med chart told me that he had recently been taken off an anti-psychotic medicine. The reason, scribbled almost illegibly on the bottom of the chart, said that he had been having adverse side effects. As I thumbed through the file, pouring over the mostly monotonous and repetitious daily entries, I came across the incident report that precipitated the patient ever being prescribed Thioridazine.

A Doctor Elwards had written, with over three pages of notes appended and attached to the end of the file, that Rey Flowers had "inexplicably" become violent. "Patient fixated on the term deconstruction and spoke of his desire to contact a man named Derrida. Asked if he were a relative, patient flew into a rage and attacked me. Patient overpowered me and stole my pen, where he commenced to write on my forehead: IGNORANCE. Orderlies were summoned."

Doctor Elwards, who no longer practices at Beekers, apparently required a dozen stitches to his face. Flowers was then put in restraints for 48 hours and prescribed large doses of an anti-psychotic drug, enough to immobilize a race horse. It wasn't the first time Rey Flowers had ever become physical in his time at Beekers. A long line of incident reports were stacked in his file. As well as numerous entries about his "sarcastically contentious" or "verbally abusive" attitude.

None of my other research subjects fit Flower's profile. I had categories filled

with malcontents and the socially maladjusted, even, and this subgroup was Pete's contribution, functioning degenerate. "Run of the mill desocialization," Pete was fond of saying, with a giggle. I had seen pretty much the gamut of psycho-retardation, a term I had devised to pin a name to the report I submitted to those Congressional watchdogs who wanted to know what I was doing with the tax payer's money.

This was going to be a different case. I knew it. I felt it. Rey Flowers didn't fit into a mold, a psychiatric cubby hole. He had killed two people. Further, it was the circumstances under which he committed murder that was psychologically intriguing.

Pete, ever mindful of my personal well being, had consulted with Dr. Helms about my pending initial interview with Rey Flowers. She had passed on to the hospital staff that under no circumstances was I to see Flowers unless he was restricted to the Vise. No exceptions. Dr. Helms orders were never disobeyed.

I had resisted the temptation to delve into his heinous past. Pete had told me there was a substantial folder at the social science library, our personal tomb of catalogued facts and professional observations. "Check out the newspaper accounts," he had said, raising his eyebrows for emphasis. "Good readin'!" he added ghoulishly.

I thought about it. Then I didn't want to go into the interview with what my favorite Psych professor in college used to call "colliding perceptions." Reading some journalistic accounts of Flowers' transgressions might have undue influences on me. I needed to evaluate the patient without any preconceived biases. "No precepts," I had told Pete, smiling wanly.

"Frau Doktor, ziss is wery gooden of you," he had replied, rubbing his hands

together fiendishly.

Was it? Did I expect to hurdle any unsuspecting obstacles that Rey Flowers was going to erect, psychologically or otherwise? The man had been a problem patient from the beginning. He assaulted members of the staff, as well as some of the other patients. At no time, according to the current files, had any therapist made any headway with him.

The patient is a perfect example of the validity of perpetual incarceration, a previous therapist had written in his file, displaying one of the more candid comments that filled page after page. Devious. Manipulative. Hostile. Aggressive. Evil incarnate. Some of the descriptions had even been underlined, as if the writers couldn't think of anything else to convey their diagnosis. It was remarkably absent of Psych jargon.

I wasn't hopeful. True, I was still relatively inexperienced at this juncture in my career at saving minds. Still, by this point I had interviewed and evaluated numerous patients; although, for the most part, they were mild, even psychologically peripheral cases, ones in which the patient was more of a sociology problem than a psychological one. My naiveté and professional enthusiasm had worn off, replaced by an almost festering sense of cynicism.

My mentor in college, Dr. Burke, had once told me that there will come a time when I will have to "cross the threshold," pass through until you are on the other side looking back. It had all sounded strange then, even mystical. He was a lapsed Jungian and could be forgiven his almost paranormal bent, maybe. Winking at me impishly, Dr. Burke had said, "Sarah, remember not to close the door behind you." I had laughed uneasily, like you do when someone tells a joke that you don't understand. I didn't.

Threshold. Other side. Door. What did it all mean?

Nine. I arrived early, twenty minutes before. On the drive over into Maryland, as I sat in my car going over in my head what I would say first, rehearsing, I tried to deny or at least ignore my nervousness. Doctor Helms called me into her office a few minutes after I arrived. More pressure.

Sitting behind her desk, with a black and white photograph on the wall of Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna, peering over her shoulder at me, she stated in her usual peremptory fashion, "Today is the moment of truth." She laughed, then leaned back in her chair and tapped a pen into the open palm of her left hand. "Tell me, I wager you didn't sleep at all last night. Am I right?"

I hadn't. Not much anyway. I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction, so I replied, "Like a log." My voice came out squeaky and generally unconvincing.

"Prevarication," she cried out, snickering. "I like that. Yeah, I like that alot."

The intercom on her desk buzzed. She smiled at me and punched the button. Her secretary told her about a visiting doctor who had just arrived. Dr. Helms snorted and told her secretary to tell him to have a seat, that she'd be right out.

"I'll let you get on with your appointments," I said, starting to stand.

"No-no, Dr. Greene," she ordered, motioning me back down in my chair. "That's just some lackey from the NIMH. Let him wait. We've got to talk strategy."

"We do?" I said a little more coldly than I intended. "I mean...I don't think there's any time for that right now."

"Oh, is Flowers going somewhere? Does he have a pressing engagement to

get to?" she asked, cackling. "No, I don't think so. Let's just see if we understand what exactly is going to happen here--this morning."

"Happen?" I asked warily.

"Don't play coy, Dr. Greene. We both know that this patient is a potential time bomb. What I don't want to happen is for you to get...shall we just say...mauled. Right?" she wanted to know, staring at me as she leaned forward in her chair.

I returned her stare for a moment then looked away at the picture over her head and muttered, "Dr. Helms, I think I know what I'm doing here. It's very simplistic. I--"

"Is it?" she asked, laughing. "Rey Flowers is anything but simplistic, dear," she announced, tacking on her obligatory term she used when she wanted to be condescending. "The man is a psycho-druid or something. Every facility has at least one. He's ours. He should have been a candidate for Capital punishment but...well, you know how political correctness can be. We get another paying customer."

"What exactly are you afraid of here, doctor?" I asked pointedly, mustering up the steadiest voice I could.

"You want it spelled out for you--huh? Okay. I don't want this creep getting a ride back to the outside, and that means any other facility. No garden club nut houses where he can sit around the landscaped grounds drinking tea and thinking up ways he can slip away and slice and dice anyone else. Understand?" she asked, pointing her pen at me.

"Of course," I stammered.

"Just so we're in agreement here, Dr. Greene," she spat out, eyeing me coldly. "I

don't want you to--in any way--use his war hero status to get him favorable treatment. If I hear one little rumbling about you wanting to go beyond the bounds of this little trumped up research crap you have going, then I'm going to come down hard on you. Don't cross me."

"Dr. Helms, I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," I said in my defense.

"Rey Flowers may have escaped going to the chair because he was a god damn medal winner, but he's not going to escape Beekers. He will die in that damn Vice if he has to. So you go in there and exchange some pleasantries with him, then go back and write it up all by the book. I will review it. Then you can send it along to those imbeciles on the Hill. Life will then go on as we know it here."

She glared at me for a moment, then waved me out of her office. I was shocked. Was there any likelihood that Rey Flowers' status would ever change? I doubted it. He had murdered two people. Then again, it wasn't unheard of for mental patients to be rehabilitated and returned to society, even when they committed egregious crimes. Dr. Helms was making it known in advance that she was removing that possibility, closing that door.

Slowly I walked to room 12, which was to become my cell that I shared with Rey Flowers, the madman. For the next few months I would "verbally joust," in his words, with him. Our shared adventure into mental war was about to begin.

An orderly had wheeled Flowers into the room at 8:30. Since the previous night he had been in an agitated state. I scanned his daily chart before going in. The therapist on staff had noted: Patient "expounded" on various subjects until having to be restrained.

Placed in Vise at 1900 hours. Tried to bite orderly. Received bruise under left eye in ensuing scuffle. No meds administered per Dr. Helms.

Through the portal window in the door to room 12 I watched him for a few minutes. He appeared to be sleeping, with his head slunk back against the Vise chair. A passing orderly stopped in the hall for a moment, then whispered, "Good luck." I returned his smile and glanced back in the room. Flowers was staring at me. Startled, I stepped back away from the window.

Not a good start, I thought, as I regained my composure. I looked up and down the empty hallway. A few corridors over the sound of a woman screaming echoed down the hall. A message for Dr. Helms rattled over the intercom. Two staff members appeared from an adjacent room and disappeared into another room. Their conversation seem to linger in the air.

I took a deep breath and opened the door. Flowers' eyes were closed. Although I had rehearsed my opening line over and over, deeming it important to get a stable footing right away, I couldn't think of what to say. I stood there with my clip board, with the numerous research questions attached to it, the ones that I was expected to ask in order to maintain a consistent study model.

"And the paradigm shifts once again," Rey Flowers said, opening his eyes and staring at me.

"Excuse me," I managed to say, not knowing whether or not I should step closer or not.

He didn't reply. Flowers had closed his eyes again. I watched him. In the Vise it

was difficult to tell about his, in general, physicality. Was he tall? Short. Overweight? Muscular? Skinny? Age indeterminate, although I knew his birthdate. He was 50 years old. Unshaven. Hair shorn, cut close to the scalp. I had seen his eyes, if only for a brief moment. They were green, almost aquamarine. Very unusual.

He stirred in the chair and appeared to be sleeping. I knew he hadn't been medicated. It wasn't unusual to have patients drift away into a stupor if they were on anti-psychotic meds. In fact, depending on the dosage, most of those types of patients were borderline comatose more than anything else. Flowers was playing opossum.

I stood there for a moment. I could see there was a large scar that began at the base of his right ear and ran down his neck, before disappearing underneath his shirt. War injury? I wondered.

"Animal in a cage," he finally stated, sighing heavily. "Did you bring any peanuts?"

I laughed and said, "Rules."

"Ah yes, the esteemed Dr. Helms," he muttered, rubbing his eyes. "She is the jewel of our prestigious Mental Health Program. May she die a hundred deaths." He giggled.

Not knowing what to say, I mumbled something about little progress in the field of psychiatry. He nodded solemnly then unexpectedly smiled at me. It was a disarming smile, one that I was sure he used to his advantage in his former life.

"Do you know why I am here?" I asked, deciding on leading into my work with an interrogative, seemingly handing him, the patient, control.

"Another one," he uttered, shaking his head. "Did you lose a bet perhaps? Is that it? Or you need some more credits to get your Masters degree."

"No, no, it's nothing like that," I explained. "I am involved in a research project for the VA."

"Really," he said skeptically. "And what does the hated VA want to know about me? How I was trained to kill and excelled just a little bit too much? Or, let me see, they want to know if I was aware that the war was indeed over. Bulletin: Viet Nam War is over! Get it, Sergeant Flowers?"

He was pressing his face against the fencing on the Vice, spitting his words out at me. The contraption was literally shaking from his movements. The orderly had forgotten to set the brake on the wheels and the Vice was rolling forward as Flowers gesticulated inside.

"Not quite," I answered succinctly, as I edged over to the rear side of the Vice and kicked the brake with my foot.

"Then what?" he almost screeched, snarling at me through the cage like device.

I stepped back and said in what I hoped was a soothing voice, "We are studying the affects of Post--"

He began to howl with laughter before I could finish my answer. Deep, atavistic laughing filled the room. Flowers was bucking in the Vice, banging his head against one of the supports. I couldn't decide if I should continue to calm him or if my very words were inciting him to be more disruptive. In my pocket was the alarm beeper. All staff members carried one. When it was activated security could instantly pinpoint the

location and send help.

At this juncture I was more dismayed than frightened. I was more worried about how this would look to Dr. Helms. I could just imagine how she would gloat at my ineptitude. After less than five minutes with Patient 66 I had lost control. If the orderlies were called in now it would be professionally humiliating. Further, Dr. Helms might just decide that I was over my head and pull the plug on my interviews with the notorious Rey Flowers.

I thought for a moment, while Flowers continued to rail against the Army, the Chiefs of Staff, even the President. Spittle had begun to collect in the corners of his mouth. A bump had formed on his forehead from where he hit his head on the piping.

"Trained to kill! Trained to kill!" he bellowed out, spitting at me through the screen.

I walked to the back of the Vise and unlocked the brake with my foot. Then I took hold of the back support and began rotating the Vise counterclockwise, slowly, then faster and faster. My shoes were slipping on the tile floor but I still pushed, and pushed. I was getting dizzy.

At first, Rey Flowers continued haranguing me, yelling at the top of his lungs. I pushed on, stumbling several times but jumped back up to my feet. Then I noticed he had gone quiet. I stopped pushing. He was smiling at me.

"Had enough?" I asked, trying to catch my breath.

"Life's a carnival ride," he announced, laughing. "You heard it here first."

That was the beginning of our therapy sessions. Instinctively I had discovered his

defense mechanism, his solution for eliminating any trespassing on his individuality, his, in Flowers' words, "personal sovereignty" by the staff at Beekers. Long before Flowers had decided that by acting as crazy and violent as they believed he was he would be left alone. It was his island he had chosen to live on, removed from everyone but himself.

"I suppose I haven't formally introduced myself," I said, as I gasped for air. "My name is Dr. Greene." I was leaning against the front of the Vise. Our faces were close, on either side of the fencing. There was a twinkle in his odd colored eyes.

"Another hue. Positively prismatic. Verdant even," he said, laughing.

I had survived our first meeting. That very afternoon Dr. Helms had called me back into her office. She was eager to know how the interview went.

I told her nothing of my mini-breakthrough. First of all, I wasn't even certain there had been one. Secondly, I didn't want to. True, Dr. Helms was my immediate superior; but I was technically working on an outside project that was removed from her specific jurisdiction. Of course I wanted to tweak her sense of power any way I could. I don't deny that.

Dr. Helms receptionist grinned at me as I walked through her outer office, while two phones jangled on her desk. She punched the intercom to her boss's office and told Dr. Helms I was there. I heard Dr. Helms tell her to send me right in.

"Sit," Dr. Helms ordered, flicking her hand in the direction of a chair over by a couch that was positioned along the opposite wall from her desk. "So, let's hear it."

"Why did you take Mr. Flowers off Risperdal?" I asked pointedly, wanting to establish a definite tone from the beginning.

Dr. Helms looked at me for a moment, then sat down on the couch and tapped her pen into the open palm of her left hand. I could hear the clock on the wall over my head ticking. The muted sound of a phone ringing seeped into the office.

"Now that is very interesting," she stated, smiling at me. "It would appear that you are questioning my authority. Is that what you are doing, Dr. Greene?"

Stay strong, I told myself, then replied, "Not exactly. As far as I can tell Mr. Flowers has been cross-diagnosed, or, at the very least, never been diagnosed. It would seem to me that--"

"Dr. Greene," she interrupted, holding up her hand to stop me, "let's not delve into matters that might get you into trouble--shall we. Now, listen to me for just a moment. This patient might be labeled an enigma, maybe even a psychiatric mystery of sorts. Right? Well, we are just trying to do our best--aren't we?"

I returned her stare then said, "I'm trying not to laugh."

Dr. Helms frowned at me and stood up and walked back over to her desk and sat down. She fumbled in a desk drawer for a moment then pulled out a file. She tapped the pen on the desk top.

"Dr. Greene, your impudence is kind of refreshing in its way," Dr. Helms announced, smiling at me. "Let's call it bold, shall we."

"Dr. Helms, although I just began this particular--"

"Whoa now!" she called out, motioning me over to the chair by her desk. "Don't get your estrogen flowing. I realize you're full of...of good intentions here, but just let me say that Rey Flowers has been analyzed up one side and down the other. You name a

field, school, even branch of psychology and he's been the recipient of its analytical thrust."

"I see nothing definitive here. That is something that--"

"Hush now, Dr. Greene," she interjected, holding her finger up to her mouth.

"Listen. Are you familiar with zoanthropy? It's one of those abstruse things. Hell I don't even know if it's in the DSM-IV or III-R. Anyway, it would seem that your Patient 66 has a touch of this." She chuckled and smiled at me.

"What?" I said, close to being exasperated. "Beast--right? You're telling me Rey Flowers thinks he's some kind of beast. Is that it?"

"Well, let's just say the diagnosis is fluid," she replied, grinning, as she leaned back in her chair. "The man killed two people. One of them he hunted like an animal. He told the police he felt like a stalking creature; yeah, that's what he said--if I'm not mistaken. And I don't think it was any zoo type animal either. You know, tiger or lion type of thing. No. It was more mythological in nature. Greek maybe."

I shook my head in disbelief and mumbled, "I want to read the police report. I need to study this more closely."

"Ah yes, that might be advisable, then again, maybe it wouldn't," Dr. Helms declared, leaning forward in her chair. "It would seem to me that our Mr. Flowers might not be a good candidate for your research study. Wouldn't you agree?"

I thought for a moment, listening to the clock ticking on the wall. Dr. Helms tapped her pen into her hand. Her chair squeaked when she leaned back again.

"I don't want to make a decision right now," I said, frowning. "Give me a few

days to think this over."

"Normally I would, Dr. Greene," she offered good naturedly, smiling, "but with a patient such as this, well, I think it's best to just exclude him from any extrinsic...you know, invasions. It's not circumspect--don't you agree?"

"Still, I would like to take a few days to go over his case more fully," I said, trying to sound resolute.

Dr. Helms glared at me for a moment then said, "You're not listening to me, Dr. Greene. Who is your research supervisor over at the VA? Perhaps I need to speak with him about this."

Little did she know that was a dead end. I was my own supervisor, if you removed the politicians, who were only there as overseers with their hands on the purse strings. I didn't want to appear recalcitrant. To my way of thinking, at this juncture, the PTSD project was totally secondary to what I wanted to explore with Patient 66. Rey Flowers was going to be my Holy Grail.

"This could get politically sticky," I warned, trying to sound ominous.

"Is that a threat, Dr. Greene?" she asked, tossing her pen onto her desk.

"Congressional committees are unpredictable," I added, letting a smile creep to the corners of my mouth. "It's been my experience that they--"

"All right, I see where you are going with this," Dr. Helms spat out, disgusted. "I will give you one day a week...one hour sessions."

"Two hours," I countered.

"You still report to me though. That hasn't changed. And, remember, meds are

up to my sole discretion," she commanded angrily. "Now get out of my office."

3. FOUNDATION STONES

I had a week to catch up. In that time I wanted to know everything about Rey Flowers. His criminal case was almost twenty years ago. First degree murder.

I interviewed the prosecutor who had gone to trial. He was practicing in nearby Alexandria. "Slam dunk case," he had said, grinning. "The man was a wacko. He killed two men. Made no attempt to conceal any evidence. I would have preferred they lock him up in Leavenworth and throw away the key, but, hey, a life in the nuthouse can't be a bed of roses either. Right?"

No. It wasn't. I told him this, assuring him that as a therapist I knew what evils lurked behind the walls of many institutions. "Good," he muttered, nodding.

It took me several days but I tracked down the court transcripts, calling in a few favors from friends around the Capital. On Monday, the day before our next scheduled session, I spoke with the journalist from the Post who was assigned to report on the case.

We met at a pretentious bistro off Dupont Circle. It was early Spring but pleasantly warm. We sat outside and drank some cappuccinos.

"Bizarre," she said, smiling at me, as she nibbled on a croissant. "It's been awhile but some things you just don't forget. Rey Flowers fits right into that category."

"Did you ever get to interview him...directly?" I asked eagerly, hoping to get

another separate evaluation.

"Yeah," she answered, closing her eyes for a moment, thinking. "Not bad looking," she suddenly said, laughing. "The first thing I noticed was his eyes. Very strange. Pretty, but strange."

"Aquamarine," I offered.

"Yeah, that's right. Different," she said, sipping her cappuccino. "Very cerebral," she explained. "The man had some thoughts that were out there...but he was a thinker type. You know, philosophy, junk like that. You aren't going to believe this but I can still remember what he said--even today."

"You can," I said, urging her on.

"Let's see, yeah, he told me that Western religion had it all wrong...numerically. Christianity, with its three concept...but he called it something else. Trinity or something. Anyway, he said that life was proportionally divided into a living quatrain. That was his exact term: Living Quatrain. Of course I wrote it all down and the whole time I was thinking: What a lunatic."

"Do you know what he meant by it by any chance?" I asked hopefully.

"What am I Aristotle?" she joked. "No, really, he said something about the Greeks, Hippocrites or somebody, being right about the four Humors. Sounds like a band from the 50's. Let's see, there was fire, water, air, and earth. Vital elements or some such nonsense."

"Blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy," I muttered.

"If you say so," she exclaimed laughing. "He was tying it in with the code of life,

what he called A, C, something and I think G. He was a biology Professor for heaven's sake. I thought they just dissected frogs and things."

"It's the basic blocks to DNA. Kind of equals life," I explained, smiling at her. She shrugged. "He was using the initials for adenine, cytosine, thymine, and guanine. What I don't know is what...angle he was using them for. What did it mean to him? Do you know?"

"Like I know. The man was a fruitcake. Who knew what he was talking about," she declared, laughing.

She agreed to fax me over all her articles. Whether or not they would be helpful I didn't know. Pieces to a puzzle, I thought, as I returned to my apartment in Adams Morgan.

I had lived there since college. Most of my friends and colleagues had moved out to the suburbs. Pete thought I was crazy to continue to live in the city, and particularly in Adams Morgan. It was noisy. It was borderline dangerous at night. "Way too ethnic," Pete would say. "I mean after you eat all that foreign food what is there--there?" he would ask, shaking his head. I had no answer except to say the neighborhood had character. The architecture was vaguely Georgian and was indeed alive with ethnicity.

My apartment overlooked a small park with a basketball court. On weekends, when the weather was nice, the court would be alive with players. Their profane shouts would fill my apartment, as they ran up and down the court, trash-talking and whooping when they scored. Unlike other parts of DC, my apartment was in a rowhouse building that had escaped the ravages of urban decay.

The ceilings were high and the walls were turn of the century plaster. I had converted one room into my office, which looked out over the park. It would have been easy to move to Old Town or Crystal City, maybe Vienna. The Metrorail was the lifeblood for so many suburbs. Pete had gone the other way and moved out to the Maryland suburbs. Somehow I didn't want the suburbs or even exurbia. I stayed put, even though the WMATA hadn't seen fit to put a Metrorail stop in my neighborhood. I rented. My only real complaint was the lack of parking. Parking tickets alone were driving up my cost of living.

"Methodology is the backbone of research, your foundation stones," my favorite professor in college, Dr. Burke, had told me. "Devise one and stick to it." I did. And I was.

It had been my habit, from all the way back to my first year of college, to set out (what I called) a work board. I still used a drafting desk I had "liberated" from curbside on L Street. It had a broken leg and the previous owner's sketchings had left telltale ink marks all over the desk top. Two nails had repaired the leg, although it was a little bit wobbly. Tired of looking at the scuffed and scratched table surface, I had painstakingly applied a few leafs of overlapping corking, giving the desk the look of an avant-garde bulletin board.

The desk was situated next to the window, with the table top elevated outward, like a winged creature ready to take flight. My method centered around this draftsman table. From left to right I would tack up relevant files and papers, photos et. al. Anything relevant to my case went on that board.

As I was attaching more papers to the table, my fax machine warbled and spit out several sheets of paper. It was the articles from the Washington Post reporter. On the top of the first page she had scribbled: Forgot to tell you. R.F.'s response to my question about why he did it was: "Because murder is the final beacon." Go figure. Good luck! Let me know how it turns out. Might be a good follow up story in it.

More possible than probable, I thought as I read over the articles. Mostly, they were dry, straightforward accounts of the case written in the almost bland style of twenty years ago, before journalism took on a more sensationalistic and generally editorial tone. What I did learn was more about Rey Flowers, the man and the soldier.

As Dr. Helms had alluded to, he had been a war hero, awarded several medals, including two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star. One of the articles detailed his family background, but gave no indications or glaring harbingers of any future mental meltdowns. For the most part, his upbringing screamed normalcy.

His father had been a code inspector for Loudoun County, in Virginia. Mrs. Flowers had worked in a law office as a legal secretary. There were two other children, a brother and a sister. Rey was the oldest.

As far as my preliminary inquiries told me, he had been an above average student. Apparently there had been no brushes with the law. One of the Washington Post articles detailed even his Little League career. He played third base and his team had gone to the Little League World Series Regionals one year. In High School, he was known as a good athlete, lettering in Football and Baseball. A few college scouts had been interested in him for their baseball teams. There had been a lukewarm offer from a pro minor league

baseball team, a tentative contract had been tendered.

It was the summer of 69 when he graduated from High School. There had been the prom date, which he attended with a Lucy Wiggins. A few quotes in the article had been attributed to her. She had, obviously, been shocked by the turn of events. The journalist had been thorough, I thought, as I read on, delving a little deeper into Flower's background.

He graduated in the top quarter of his class. His mother was quoted as saying he had been accepted at William and Mary and the University of Virginia. The parents were proud of him.

Rey Flowers didn't go to college, not immediately after High School anyway. He surprised his parents by enlisting in the US Army. At first, his parents had been furious. They were as patriotic as the next family, but their son had to think about his future, a future that didn't necessarily include getting killed in the jungles of Viet Nam. Rey assured them he would be all right, that he was doing his duty.

Why? I thought, did he do that. What motivated him? His father had never been one to impress on his son there was an inviolate duty to serve his country. Mr. Flowers had served Stateside in the previous two wars, working in Washington for the government. There was no family history of military service. In fact, Mrs. Flowers' brother was a Methodist minister, who was a known anti-war spokesman.

I tried to imagine the upheaval Rey's decision must have caused in the family when he informed them he was, in effect, marching off to war. Reaction? Tears. Accusations. Hurt. Disbelief. What bond did he have with his father, his mother?

Brother and sister?

In a twist of fate, his brother died in a motorcycle accident the year Rey went off to war. I would learn of this later, much later, after numerous sessions with him, ones in which he would "dangle me over the open fire of revelation," as he liked to phrase it.

He had told me how he came home from infantry training to attend the funeral. Rey Flowers was now Corporal Flowers. He had worn his dress uniform to the funeral.

"Were you proud to wear it, the uniform?" I had asked him, wanting to get a feel for where his mental focus was at the time.

He had stared at me for a moment, smiled, and said, "I was only a toy soldier at that point. I was just finishing up my AIT training. I was a soldier in name only."

I needed to know his state of mind more fully. Those were uncertain times. The anti-war movement was gaining considerable strength. The war was appearing on television nightly. The unbridled carnage, and general sense of hopelessness associated with the war effort, was becoming popular currency. Every day another public figure slipped over to the other side, criticizing the President for conducting what amounted to an immoral war.

Rey was being fed to the war machine, another body. A half a million American boys were involved over there. I was too young, just a baby. My own parents were active against the war. My father had escaped the clutches of the draft by virtue of a high lottery number. When I had reached the age to understand history, I had queried them about their past and their involvement. They called themselves "pseudo-hippies." Like a

dying fad, they had shed the clothes, the hair styles, and the drugs, and stepped into middle-class life as soon as they graduated college.

There were photos. I saw them on occasion, digging them out of my parent's closet. Embarrassing past. My mother pleaded with me not to look the photos over. My father laughed, pointing at a few of the photographs depicting a tall boy with shoulder length hair, wearing a flowery headband. Scribbled on the back was: War Protest--70, DC.

"Okay...so we were hippies," my mother wailed, shielding her blushing face. "We were young--what do you want?"

I laughed. Yet, I was intrigued. Seeing your parents' past in photographs, at least a slice of it, was interesting; okay baffling. My mother, with the long, flaxen colored hair, wearing tight hip hugging bell bottoms, was, well, beautiful. There she was. Smiling. Holding up her hand, flashing the infamous two finger peace sign.

Rey Flowers and my parents were close to the same age. Where was the division? How had my parents, or, more specifically, my father, taken a different path? My father hadn't gone on Search and Destroy patrols. My father hadn't, in a word, killed. What was there, in the fabric of our society, that created two disparate routes?

Rey would never answer. He would never tell me why he chose to go to war. It wasn't because he wasn't articulate enough to express himself. Quite the contrary. Perhaps he, himself, didn't really know.

Was it a sense of adventure he was after? Country boy goes off to war for pursuit of something exciting. Maybe. Did he need to fill a void in his young life? He had

options. College. Sports. Unlike so many boys who went off to war for lack of anything else to do with their lives, Rey could aspire to something.

Woodstock was in the summer of 69. This pantheon of rock music and youthful excess was all over the news that summer. Surely Rey listened to Rock music. There must have been some degree of rebellion fueled by the hackneyed lyrics of any number of musical groups that were prominent at the time. Even I, removed a generation from the incandescent heat of the vaunted 60's, could tick off several seminal artists that lead the charge against the anti-establishment.

Didn't Rey hear the Doors, Jefferson Airplane, or even the Beatles? Weren't the tentacles of teenage revolution reaching to the backwaters of America? I had interviewed countless Vets. They were probably evenly split between draftees and volunteers; but there was a salient dividing point, which broke down to somewhere before and after 1968. With the departure of LBJ went the aura of patriotic jingoism.

Rey came after. There would be no spoils of war. The Tet Offensive had been in 68, leading to the decline of American morale. The war plan was eviscerated. The doctrine of attrition was bankrupted. Mathematical ratios were incompatible with the concept of victory. The killing equation was unbalanced and America was sliding into the jaws of defeat.

"The bell was tolling but the populace was slow to hear," my father once explained to me when I came home one day with homework about the Viet Nam War. I was a senior in High School. My history teacher, a man who had protested against the war, had given us a topic, which was to include an oral assignment.

I worked long and hard on the assignment, pouring over history books and periodicals from the era. I gave my speech to a disinterested class. Viet Nam was ancient history. It was a war we lost. A blemish on our sterling war record. So what.

Only the teacher showed interest. He seemed to grimace as I presented my project, complete with photographs of the war theater and on the homefront. Everyone, it seemed, had been touched by the Southeast Asia epoch of our country's history..

After class, my teacher had called me over and told me in almost a whisper, "I was very impressed by your...grasp of the times back then. Excellent work." He went on to tell me how his older brother had died piloting a helicopter near the Cambodian border. "I still miss him," he said almost tearfully.

Was it? Had I done something notable? I had done the grunt work in the library. I had practiced, and practiced, my speech, getting all the proper inflections of my voice just so. Yet, what did I know? What did I really know about any collective motivation? Nothing. Dr. Burke once told me, "Sarah, you will learn many things in your journey of the mind, but it will never be sensate. Remember that?"

Background reading can only take you so far. With many of my other patients I approached them cold, essentially unknowing. At first, when I was collecting my preliminary research data, I liked this approach. It seemed to give me, for lack of a better notion, a clean vision. I listened to them. I watched. They had stories to tell.

I knew virtually nothing of war, of its hardships, its mindbending properties; a term I used effectively in my reports to the Congressional Committee. One of the Senators, a senior statesman who enjoyed a certain renown on the Hill for being an icon

of earlier days when America was, if not anything else, innocent, clucked his tongue at me when he heard what I had said. He pointed his finger at me as I sat behind the desk, the desk with all my research papers piled high in front of me, and drawled: "Young lady, I don't care for your silly neologisms. I have known war and I have known men who survived war. Can we not agree that war is a complete failure of mankind to implement God's intentions? And be done with it?"

Numbly I nodded, intimidated by such a personage, a man who had been a World War II legend. Done with it? Of course. It was my job, for which I was paid. I had a mission, too. Someone out there in the political landscape wanted me to explain the aftermath of war, of how it impacted on the denizens that participated in the governmentally sanctioned murder.

"Senator," I said as clearly as I could, leaning in close to speak into the microphone, "I am trying to bring a better understanding to...to the horror and...general displacement that results when--"

"I see," the Senator said, holding his hand over the microphone to speak to an aide that was whispering something in his ear. "I fear, Dr. Greene, that this is an exercise in extreme futility. And with all due respect to the splendid discipline of psychology, I am afraid we are only applying window dressing on a very, very complex problem. War has occupied thinkers, poets, and theologians for the majority of recorded history. You, Dr. Greene, while quite competent I'm sure, may not be equipped to bring it all home--so to speak. No disrespect, mind you," he announced with a flourish, smiling at me, while a few of his fellow Senators grinned.

"None taken," I replied, returning his smile.

What could I hope to discern about war's repercussions? I hadn't felt the crippling effects of wholesale fear. I didn't know what it was like to experience raw, unbridled aggression. Blood. Scorched flesh. Cries of unmitigated agony.

"The sound, doctor...the sound," a patient had told me, holding his hands over his ears, as he seemed to almost imperceptibly rock in his chair.

"Tell me about the sounds," I encouraged, leaning forward, gently grabbing his hands, a tactile attempt at connecting in any way I could.

"Jinky...I can hear Jinky," he exclaimed, pulling his hands away, holding them back over his ears.

Private First Class Willard Jensen. Enlisted: June 9, 1967. Died: November 17, 1968. MOS: 11 Bravo. Rifleman. Grunt. KIA. Nickname: Jinky. Hometown: Memphis, TN.

"He liked to play the harmonica," my patient said after awhile, wiping a tear from his cheek. "Everybody called us Salt and Pepper, 'cause we hung out together. Mostly the blacks hung with their own in our company but we got on okay, I guess. We sang blues songs together."

"How did he get the name Jinky?" I asked in almost a whisper, not wanting to interrupt the flow of his cathartic surge.

He laughed and said, "Don't know. He didn't know. One of his boys back in the World gave it to him. In Memphis."

This is what I did. My method. I listened and attempted to assign labels to

whatever salient content developed. No judgment. Very little explanation. On many occasions it was the very first time the patient had ever discussed the pertinent incidents of the war.

"82 mortar round," the patient had said laconically, shaking his head slowly. "Killed him, but he didn't die right away. Blew a hole in his stomach. He...he yelled alot. I tried to help him. I did."

Most times the source of the mental pain wasn't as easily definable as the loss of a buddy on the battlefield. It could be the crushing psychological burden of cumulative cruelty, or the indistinguishable line drawn between acceptable and unacceptable, where the meaning of right and wrong is obscured by the imprecise measures used to ensure your survival.

Technology brought efficiency. Killing had never been so easy, or expected. RTO: radio man. Radio waves crackled with import. Coordinances. Raining ordnance. Napalm. Arc Light retribution, "As if dropped from God," so said one of my patients, an Air Force B-52 pilot.

He was a rare participant in my study. For the most part, each and all of them were infantry soldiers. Close to the ground. In the field. Humping the boonies until their feet ached, while they battled the vanishing enemy, along with tenacious malaria and creeping jungle rot.

He smiled at me a great deal. Flirted even. Captain. Tall. Mustache. And, as he readily volunteered almost immediately, a recovering alcoholic.

"Removed from it all," he declared that first day, raising his right hand to imitate

a plane passing over. "In the clouds."

"But still part of it--the war," I offered, feeling my way along.

"You might say that," he allowed evasively, smiling. "We all did our part."

"Which was?" I wanted to know.

He looked at me for a moment, smiled, then let the smile fade away, before answering. He stroked his mustache, fidgeted in his seat, then said, "Bombs away." He laughed weakly. "Women and children weren't suppose to be there. They just weren't. Besides, you know everybody was involved with the VC. It's true."

Killing axis, I termed it. It was like a pendulum of sorts. It did swing both ways. End result: death. Zulu report: casualty report. Vietnamese died. Americans died. Men. Women. Children. Old. Young. Indiscriminate slaughter, but with a goal in mind.

My patient, the pilot, got to see his handiwork, in color. Time magazine ran a story. Front page. There was a large crater, very deep. Piled high in the impression of the earth was a crumpled heap of children. The Captain had mistakenly bombed an orphanage. Catholic. Visible to the right of the photograph was the blood stained habit of a dead nun. The photographer won a Pulitzer Prize. As life is often circularly connected, I had used the very same photograph in my senior High School history class assignment.

"VC were everywhere," the pilot had muttered, sobbing.

Amorphous enemy. Finality. Another body count.

"Broken men," is what Pete liked to call them, not unkindly. There were women

as well. Nurses. They had put the broken men back together, enduring a rising tide of blood, which lapped at their ankles as they tried to keep human beings whole.

"They told me you might help me," one female patient said to me, looking away, staring at the far wall of the room. "I don't know. That's what they said."

"I can try," I said, non-committal.

She had spoken at length, describing her duties. Modern medicine was advancing. Medevacs delivered the damaged goods with remarkable speed. It was Say's Law applied to warfare: Supply creates demand. It did. Close to 60,000 American men and women died in Viet Nam, which was a lopsided denominator when stacked against the figure from the enemy side, a sum that easily exceeded a million after a decade of war.

"Nothing but blood and broken bodies," the former nurse informed me, staring at the far wall.

I had witnessed that expression before, a vapid, blank stare. Many patients that I had sessions with displayed it. "Zombie-mode," Pete like to call it, having seen it himself on more than one occasion. "It's almost as if they are reliving it when they finally let it out," he had told me when I first got started in the project. "Scary stuff."

It was. These were people who were expected to merge back into mainstream America, many times as if nothing happened in the interim. They were drafted. They joined up. They fought. Combat. Wounded. Human loss. Defeat. Welcome back to the World. Take off that uniform.

There was nothing particularly unique about any of this, this psychological

malady. Quite the opposite. When I had landed this project, something that I lobbied hard for, I immediately went to the Library of Congress and began research on post war adjustments.

There it was. Pick a war, any war. Men, and to a lesser degree women, had always faced the razor edge of personal uncertainty when they returned to society. Sanctioned killing many times couldn't be readily erased. Ones culture, buttressed by any number of functioning mores, didn't always allow for re-entry. Not always.

I read of psych hardships after the Civil War, a war that was enacted in a concentrated area with conflicting social and economic doctrines. Returning World War I Vets were thought to be shellshocked when they couldn't readjust to the rhythms and rote machinations of peace time America. The sounds and piercing terror of trench warfare on the Continent somehow just seemed to linger. Even the very smell of death's decay persisted.

Perhaps the strangest of all, and I am ashamed to admit that it was perpetrated by members of my profession, came after the second world war. The fallout from intense combat, as with other wars, impacted X number of GI's over in the European theater, as well as the Pacific. The wonderful novel *Catch-22*, through its colorful characters, dispenses tales of oddity, as the book portrays the sheer lunacy of war and all of its manifestations. As fiction can often do, it captured the contradictions of waging war when pursuing peace.

In my readings, I came across a little known fact about mental health treatment for the soldiers of that war. The Battle of the Bulge produced horrific results, physically

as well as psychologically. The soldiers fought not only against some of Hitler's more determined troops but had to battle severe winter weather too.

Debilitating cold, snow, and the lack of warm clothing and non-existent housing, led to deaths from hypothermia for some of the troops, who often times died as they slept in a hastily dug fox hole, victims of seductive sleep. In many ways they were the lucky ones. Others succumbed to crippling frostbite on their feet, which most times progressed to raging gangrene. Amputations were frequent.

In the inhospitable snow the men trudged onward, advancing against the German army, pushing them back to the boundaries of Germany. It was slow, hostile work. Artillery and tank bombardments leveled most standing structures, leaving villages in ruins. When the weather cleared, allied planes dropped thousands of bombs, further devastating the landscape.

Men witnessed the death of their friends. Corpses littered the farmlands, frozen solid by the frigid air, left in the open, twisted and contorted as if they were miming their own expiration. Only a nagging sense of survival kept most of the men moving.

This one pivotal battle of the war produced countless "lost souls," as an Army psychiatrist termed them at the time. They were men who couldn't relinquish their minds. Unspeakable agony and fear had scorched their consciousness, leaving them adrift in a sea of doubt and distrust.

The Army, in its dubious fashion, set out to eradicate the problem. Even as I read these accounts I could scarcely believe it. The men--the subjects--were given sodium pentothal. Truth serum. So it is purported to be. What for?

The explanation must have been bewildering back then; and now, after these many years, is borderline crazy. Quackery. What were they thinking of?

The men called the pills they were given Blue 88's, because they were indeed blue. The 88 moniker came from the artillery designation. It was their utilization of self-deprecating humor perhaps.

They took the pills and were sent on a mental journey, led by the staff psychiatrist, who attempted to give guidance as they faced what they feared most. This confronting of each man's personal hell was, theoretically, supposed to release them from any accumulated psychological hardware that was clogging up the works, so to speak. Novel. Not to mention off the charts in psychiatric circles..

Such was the state of my profession when asked to counteract the end results of war. Had it ever been asked that the men who returned from combat suffering from enervating stress might be the normal ones? If one returned from organized killing and didn't manifest any anti-social behavior, were they the abnormal ones?

It was obvious this mental disease wasn't proprietary. War, with its manifestation of applied hatred, was not novel; but, in its singular way, it was absolute. Death equaled victory.

Yet there was no victory for the Viet Nam Veteran. None. They were vilified in the press. There would be no ticker-tape parades. America didn't like to lose and it particularly didn't like losers.

This compounded the problem. Arriving home defeated, and bringing back psychological baggage, wasn't acceptable. Besides, hadn't they killed babies over there?

This was a war that begot no heroes.

4. SEQUELAE

My week was up. Nervous energy kept me awake for most of the night. Our second session was on.

I had squeezed in some background research in the last week. It had taken me a few dozen phone calls but I had located his sister. She lived in Oakton, Virginia, a sleepy town in the suburbs that was undergoing the usual growing pains of the entire region.

It wasn't easy but I managed to get her to agree to an interview, face to face. At first she didn't want to talk about her notorious brother. It was in the past. Buried.

I persisted. She made excuses. What good would it do now? She didn't know anything about her brother. He was older. They weren't that close. On and on.

It's easy to hate yourself when you have to become the pursuer. I never liked it when I saw how journalists hounded people like prey, going after their story at whatever cost. Now, in my own way, I was doing the same thing. It made me uneasy but I kept at it.

I had driven out to Oakton and met her at her home. She lived in a large house on a tree lined street tucked into what was once farmland. Developers were now ravaging most of the area and brick homes were sprouting up in all directions. Every development had a new sign posted out front informing passersby that Willow Creek, Highpoint Estates, and Old Dominion Heights were just around the corner. It all reminded me of

why I hadn't bothered to move to the suburbs.

JoAnn Phillips was 45, with short blond hair. She was tall and tended to slouch her shoulders when she walked. She greeted me warmly at the door despite all the times she had rushed me off the phone when I called her.

We sat in her living room and had tea. It was mid-morning and she told me that she was off work that day. I could see on the mantle two photographs of children, two girls. I asked her if I could record the interview and she nodded yes.

"Like I said before, Dr. Greene, I don't know of what help I can be," JoAnn announced, sitting down across from me. "My brother is not something I like to discuss. I think you can imagine why."

"Mrs. Phillips, I am doing some research for the VA and I need to...to complete some kind of history on Rey. You see, I am trying to formulate something that will give me insight into--"

"My brother is insane, Dr. Greene," she interrupted, staring at me. "I think it's pretty obvious--don't you?"

I hadn't expected this interview to be easy, but I hadn't expected her to be so resolute. In fact, I didn't want to discuss her brother's sanity at all. What I wanted was family history so I could maybe get a feel for their life or at least their lifestyle.

I ignored her question and said, "I hoped I could zero in on your life and your family's. That sort of thing. You know, you could tell me about your childhood, things like that."

"It nearly killed my mother," she announced, standing up and walking over to the

window. She looked out for a moment then turned to me and said, “My parents refused to go to the trial. Did you know that?”

“No, I didn’t know that,” I told her.

“I went,” she stated, laughing uneasily. “I tried to go every day. It was a circus. My brother sitting there staring straight ahead. He never once even looked at me. Not once. He didn’t give a damn about any of it. He actually stood up in court one day and told the jury he was guilty and for them to get on with it. You know, doctor, he didn’t want the insanity plea at all. Oh no. He wanted to die.”

Although it had been twenty years since the trial, it was obvious she was still reliving it. I knew I had gone beyond the boundaries of my research. I was delving into unfamiliar territory. I glanced down at the recorder, watching the tape whirl around.

“What about your other brother?” I asked gently, hoping to steer her away from the trial part.

“He died before it all happened. He was the lucky one, I guess,” she said, sighing.

“I know this is hard for you,” I said, trying to comfort her. “Did you ever get to speak to Rey, you know, after it happened?”

“No,” she said flatly, sitting back down.

“What about your parents?”

“No one did. He wouldn’t permit it. The man was no longer my brother. My brother died over in Viet Nam. That’s what I believe anyway,” she said, dabbing a tear from her eye. “I don’t know what happened when he went in the Army but he was never

the same again. Never.”

JoAnn told me of how her brother was when he returned from overseas. She said that for the first six months he would sit in his room and not come out for days. Her mother would leave food by the door. Mr. Flowers tried to talk to him at first then gave up trying. From his room there would be nothing but silence.

“How did your brother ever, well, make it to college? I mean he did go on to lead a normal life for a certain length of time didn’t he?” I wanted to know.

“Normal?” she shot back, chuckling. “My brother was never that. After about half a year he suddenly came out of his room. He looked like one of those hermits or something. His hair was down to his shoulders and he had a long beard. Weird wasn’t the word.”

“Did he talk to you? Normalcy is relative of course but did Rey interact with his family at this point?” I asked, fumbling with my note book.

“Sort of,” she answered, smiling. “I can remember him sitting down at the dinner table. We were having meatloaf. My mom made the best meatloaf. Anyway, Rey just sat down and starting eating. Nobody said anything to him. In fact, we talked among ourselves and he sat there and ate. Then after he was finished he got up and went back to his room. Gradually he started doing everyday things around the house. But I think it was almost a month before he started actually talking to us, and then it was only for the basic kinds of things. You know, like asking for another helping at dinner or what time it was. He refused to where a watch.”

“No watch,” I mumbled, jotting it down, remembering something about that quirk

I had read recently in a journal.

“None of us asked him about his war experiences,” Jo Ann volunteered. “I mean even my parents didn’t. I would have thought my father might have, but he was afraid to, I guess,” she went on to say, sniffing a little. “I really don’t think they talked much about anything.”

“You were in your teens then but do you remember why Rey went in the Service. I mean it wasn’t something expected of him was it?” I asked, trying to get to some specific items on my list of things to explore.

“Good question,” she mused, staring out the window. “I was in Junior High at the time. The war seemed like something on a different planet. You know when you are that age your life revolves around different things. I have a daughter in High School still. My other daughter is in college. She goes to George Mason. In fact, she’s supposed to be back by now. She had an early class this morning.”

JoAnn was divorced. She eventually went off on a tangent into that subject after awhile and I had to redirect her. I had seen this phenomenon before. Some people just didn’t realize how much they wanted to talk, to reveal as I liked to call it.

All and all I mined most of what I came for. Did I feel somehow dirty afterwards? Yes. Dredging up painful memories was cruel but I hoped to “illuminate the purpose,” as my professor Dr. Burke used to say.

“Can you tell me anything about Rey’s college years?” I asked. “He went to UVA, correct?”

“Yeah,” she replied, pointing to my tea cup to see if I wanted anymore. “He did fine in school evidently because he graduated with honors. Science major. Then he got his masters and eventually went on for his doctorate. He was very bright.”

“He didn’t think of going to college right out of High School. I just can’t seem to grasp his mindset in going to Viet Nam. What I mean is I’m looking for a trigger, something that pushed him in that direction. I know my parents’ friends they all avoided the draft religiously. It seems that every man who could go to college went,” I exclaimed, smiling at her.

“Well, there’s Booker Shelby,” she declared, frowning.

This was the first I had heard the name. It sounded like a character from a Faulkner novel. What relation was he to Rey?

“Haven’t heard that name before,” I offered.

“He was Rey’s cousin,” she informed me. “They were inseparable most of the time. Always getting into trouble. They played football and baseball together in school.”

“So are you saying Rey was closer to his cousin than his younger brother?” I inquired, writing down Booker Shelby in big block letters in my note book.

“Oh, sure,” she replied, suddenly laughing. “Booker was a year older. Lived right down the street. His father, Uncle Tim, was our town’s Police Chief. Whenever the two of them would get into trouble, which was all the time, Uncle Tim would toss them into a cell then let them out later. It was like the family joke.”

“Really,” I said, trying to sound more like an acquaintance than a therapist. “So you think Booker had something to do with Rey’s enlisting? Would he have had that

kind of influence?”

“Might have,” she said, stroking her chin. “They were always off doing guy stuff together. Booker didn’t want to go to college. He wasn’t exactly college material. Barely got through High School. Nobody could figure out why those two were such good buddies. I mean Rey made the honor roll every year and was always reading sophisticated books, while his cousin got drunk on the weekends and went hunting and fishing. They had sports in common, I guess.”

“What about...about their family life? I mean can you tell me whether or not Rey admired his uncle?” I asked, not wanting to influence the thrust of her answers.

“Uncle Tim was like a small town Sheriff. Everybody liked him,” she said, smiling.

“So it might have been Booker’s suggestion to go in the Army?” I said. “As I understand it they kind of sprung this on your parents. Right?”

“Oh boy,” she exclaimed, “did they ever.”

“Then your parents would have most likely disapproved?”

“Definitely. My mother was in shock when Rey came home and told us. He just walked in the door and said he was going to Viet Nam. He had already enlisted. He was eighteen so what could we do?”

“Would it be possible for me to speak to Booker?” I wanted to know. “I mean he could be a fountain of information for me.”

JoAnn looked at me for a moment then said, “I don’t think so, he’s dead.”

“What? Oh,” I said, trying to hide my obvious look of disappointment.

“He died over there,” she explained.

Puzzles have a way of being solved. I was slowly attaining the pieces. Yet when I would locate a patchwork of solutions there would be another panel to piece together.

Rey and Booker had enlisted together. Infantry. Ranger School. They had parlayed serving in the Army into an extension of their childhood friendship. JoAnn had taken out some photographs her brother had sent the family from Viet Nam. There they were, the two of them, in fatigues, in Country.

Rey and Booker, Sergeant and Corporal respectively, were standing by their hooch in a few of the photographs. Booker was the taller of the two, over six feet. He was wearing a flac jacket over a bare chest. He had mockingly drawn a large peace sign on his helmet cover. Next to him Rey was shirtless, striking an exaggerated pose, flexing his biceps. They weren't even 21 years old.

Several of the other photos were taken from a helicopter. You could see smoke rising up from a village below. They had been taken as the helicopter came in for a landing, revealing a flat landscape with swirling dust. The last photo was of Booker standing with his foot propped up on a dead water buffalo. He was holding his M-16 in one hand and a can of beer in the other.

I had seen many photos of this caliber before. When I was doing my High School project about Viet Nam I had collected dozens of photographs to include in my report. This comrades in arms theme was depicted over and over, almost as if it were mandatory to show the bravado in your poses. “Nothing but dumb kids,” my father had said one

night when I had the photos strewn all over the kitchen table while I decided which ones to include.

After researching the subject for several weeks I was steeped in the atmosphere of the era, or as close as I could get anyway. I had read everything I could on the subject. I had even interviewed my neighbor, who had served as a young officer in the 1st Cav. He, too, had photos. At times it almost seemed as if the war had been staged just for the express purpose of permanently recording it in pictures and film.

Viet Nam was, perhaps, the most documented war in history. “Like a murderous TV show every night,” my father had complained on more than one occasion. On a daily basis it was broadcast into American homes, bringing vivid color images of bloodshed into everyone’s living rooms.

I didn’t want to argue with my father about the war, but I was often irritated by his derisive comments about Viet Nam and who served over there. His opinion of the war hadn’t wavered in all the years since. He adamantly condemned the “power brokers,” in his words, who brought America’s might to bear. For my part, I was hesitant to pass judgment on something that I wasn’t a part of. Yet, I was disturbed by my father’s diatribes against the ones who served.

I suppose men like my father felt challenged in some way, as if they had forsaken their chance at courage. American men had always gone off to war. It defined them in ways they couldn’t describe or even understand. Not going, choosing to avoid your duty, was an act of courage but on a different level. Conviction. Where was the moral axis here? I didn’t know. I couldn’t quite get a handle on the motivational impetus.

“The Korean War was a harbinger,” a veteran had told me at the VA, with his eyes twinkling and a wry smile creeping to his lips. “That’s right, young lady, war is not for the politicians, you know.” He was an old man, with a shock of white hair that hung over his forehead. He was forever sitting in the lobby of the hospital in his wheel chair, greeting people coming in and out of the building. He had been wounded in World War II, taking a bullet in the spine. Paralysis was instantaneous. Everyday he would engage me in conversation as I came and went.

Viet Nam had been a quagmire of political intentions, a war fought from the confines of paranoid suspicions. “Like a chess game without the royals,” the veteran in the wheel chair said to me one day, winking. I had smiled back at him and thought nothing of his comment until later. The geo-politics of the time was like a chess game, with geography as the game board. I had actually gone back later on that day to ask the old veteran exactly what he meant by his chess analogy but he wasn’t there. It was the first time I could ever remember him not being in the lobby. I asked one of the women working in the reception area and they sadly told me he had died. Went quietly in his chair. They thought he was asleep.

JoAnn’s daughter arrived home. She was tall like her mother and aloof. She stood just in the doorway and eyed me as I sat on the couch like I was an intruder.

“Tina, this woman is here to ask me about your Uncle Rey,” JoAnn explained.

“Oh yeah,” she said, glancing at me. “Mom, I’ve got some assignment to do for school. Okay?”

She slung her daypack over her shoulder and disappeared up the stairs. I smiled back at JoAnn, who shrugged. I could tell the interview was winding down. I just needed to get in a few more inquiries.

“She looks like you,” I offered, trying to sound polite.

“Kids today,” she muttered. “Somewhere along the line they lost the capacity to be civil--for most of the time,” she said apologetically. “Anyway, she knows very little of her uncle, practically nothing at all. Oh, she knows he’s a nutcase and all but I really don’t think she knows much of the details. It’s probably better that way...don’t you think?”

I nodded yes and said, “I don’t suppose Rey knows much about you and your family. Right?”

“No, I don’t think he does,” she said, and then she started to cry again.

“JoAnn, look, I appreciate your help,” I told her, trying to soothe her somewhat. “What you’ve told me has been a big help. It really has, believe me. I know how hard this must be on you and all.”

“It’s tough when I think about my parents dying and not being able to talk to their sons for the last quarter of their lives. I mean first Toby dies then Rey goes psycho. What a family, huh?”

I didn’t say anything but gave her a sympathetic look, then I asked, “Did Rey have a girl friend or fiancée that you know about? He was never married, right?”

She sobbed for a moment then said, “There was Helen. She and him were going together for almost five years. They lived together in Georgetown when Rey was

teaching at American University. She was a professor there too, I think. I only met her a couple of times. Nice girl.”

I quickly jotted down her first name then asked, “Do you know, do you remember what her last name was?”

“I think it was something like Dolby or was it Colby? I can’t remember,” she muttered, dabbing at her eyes. “They broke up before Rey...you know, went crazy.”

“Do you know why?” I asked, leaning forward in my chair.

She looked up at me then sighed heavily. Body language is something, as a therapist, you begin to readily evaluate. It acts as an aid to understanding your patient’s state of mind. JoAnn’s body language was telling me that I had extended the interview too long and that I had abused my privilege. I needed to ease my way out. The technique of ending an interview was as important as how you began one.

“I have some things I have to do today,” JoAnn declared, standing up.

“I can’t thank you enough. This has all been such a help to me. I really appreciate it, JoAnn,” I told her, as I snapped off my recorder and slipped it into my purse. “I only hope that I can make some headway with your brother and all.”

“Dr. Greene, do you really think you can help Rey? I mean don’t you think he belongs right where he is?” she asked me pointedly.

“I can’t answer that right now,” I replied evasively.

“You can’t,” she said with a hint of ridicule in her voice.

The man killed two people, I heard a voice in my mind scream. He probably should have been executed. He confessed. He was guilty. My therapist’s training

absolved me. Society's sense of revenge wasn't viable for me. Insanity tilted the scales of justice, making them unbalanced.

I hurriedly said good-bye to her and excused myself. I wasn't prepared to justify the criminal courts or to supply any needed sustenance that might tide her over emotionally. It was obvious the advance of time had done very little to assuage JoAnn's sense of sorrow.

As I drove back into DC I had time to think about where this was all leading. I wasn't sure I could ever turn on my recorder again and hear JoAnn's anguished voice. It was as if I had a scalpel and was lashing away, inducing more and more pain. Dr. Burke had always said, "Step lightly among the patient's thoughts." I was stomping and the fact that JoAnn wasn't really my patient didn't make it any more acceptable.

However now I had more ammunition, so to speak. I knew it was going to be a battle with Rey Flowers. He was astute and supremely aware of the system and its workings. The man was dangerous and he was intelligent, two attributes that added up to a severe problem. I knew there was no turning back now.

Another parking ticket was lodged under my windshield wiper on my car. I had returned late the night before after being at a function for the Veterans Administration. Parking spaces on my street were at a premium if you returned after a certain time. On weekends, when all the hated suburbanites trolled the nightlife scene in Adams Morgan, it was impossible to park your car. Still, it was a long walk to Dupont Circle to catch the

Metrorail. I tossed the ticket in the glove compartment.

What to expect? Would Rey Flowers have returned to his personal sanctuary of feigned madness in the past week? Could I connect again?

I timed my arrival at precisely nine o'clock, wanting to avoid an encounter with Dr. Helms. Flowers had been wheeled into room 12 a half hour before. The orderly on duty told me that he was non-communicative. "Let me know if you need any help with him," he stated, barring my way into the room. I told him that I would and pushed by him.

Rey was awake, sitting in the Vise with his head leaning back against the headrest on the chair. He said nothing when I entered. I busied myself with my papers for a moment, wanting him to make the first move, as it were. He didn't.

Finally I said, "Mr. Flowers, today, if you don't object, I would like to record our session."

He snorted and said, "What, no greeting first?"

I smiled at him and announced, "Good morning!"

He didn't return my greeting. The room was quiet. We exchanged glances, while I fumbled with the tape recorder. Then there was the unmistakable sound of him urinating. The urine was dribbling down the chute and splashing into the bucket in the rear of the Vise.

Embarrassment, as therapists go, is normally greatly reduced, or, at least, ameliorated largely because of all the contact we have with odd and strange behavior. Admittedly I was taken back. Flowers, in his tiny prison, smiled back at me. It was a

command performance of passive-aggressiveness.

"I'm hoping this intimate moment that we are sharing will bring us closer together," he exclaimed, laughing. "Don't you?"

"In the interest of what I hope will be a bond of honesty between us, I will tell you that while I'm not disgusted by this display of unusual intimidation, I am somewhat embarrassed," I explained.

"Would defecating send you screaming out of here?" he suddenly asked, grinning.

"Is that what you want?" I wanted to know.

He thought for a moment, then said, "Can I see you naked?"

"Mr. Flowers...is this part of the act that I saw last week? Your attempts at alienation, while certainly inventive, aren't so very effective," I declared sternly.

"Do you want to see me naked?" he countered, laughing.

"Can I start the tape recorder now?" I asked pointedly, holding up the recorder and shaking it at him.

"My-my, aren't we testy today," he teased, grinning through the fencing.

"I thought we had worked through your ruse in the previous session," I countered, turning on the tape recorder and setting it down on a chair in the middle of the room.

"I live by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual," he called out to me, shaking the Bible, "it is my Bible." He laughed loudly and added, "Paralysis by analysis."

"I see you have a very well developed sense of humor," I declared, walking over so I could face him straight on as he sat in his personal prison. "Is that progress or just another vital defense mechanism on your part?"

"Interrogatives...interrogatives," he sang out, giggling in that way I would learn to associate with his wanting to be cooperative. "Does this verbal foreplay happen to lead anywhere, the man asks, hoping upon hope that it indeed does. Are you going to try to be my friend. Is that going to be your approach...or, perhaps, are you going to be my long lost mother figure? Is that it? Doc, that can't be it. How feeble!"

"The tape is running," I told him, trying to sound playful, as if the session was nothing more than an allotted time to hold a conversation. In my other sessions with veterans I had seldom attempted to adhere to any strict patient/therapist juxtaposition. For the most part it was counterproductive. Eliminating any semblance of an authority figure worked to open the way to a transfer of thoughts unburdened by expectation.

"Anthropic Principle," Flowers suddenly announced in a professorial way. "If we can think of it, then it must be legitimate...or some such drivel."

"I'm at a loss here," I said in more of a concerned voice than I intended, because I was confused by what he had said and wanted to, reflexively, analyze why he had chosen to say what he just did. "What exactly does that mean? How does it connect to--"

"Doc, doc, doc," he replied in a patronizing voice, "sequelae, it's your answer. Now you must find the question."

"Enigmatic...another defense mechanism," I said, boldly staring at him.

"Perhaps it is the eye of my soul," he said in a whisper, as he closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the seat.

"I'm not leaving yet," I challenged.

"Dr. Greene," he said in a cold, almost lifeless voice, "if I killed you right this

minute, would it disturb universal order?"

A grin had crept to the corners of his mouth. His eyes were still closed. I could see that he was clenching his fists. Involuntarily, I slipped my right hand into my lab coat and fingered the emergency beeper.

"If I unlocked the Vise, would you? Would you want to kill me?" I asked, straining to sound composed.

Flowers opened his eyes and looked at me, squinting through the fencing. He slowly leaned forward and pressed his face against the hatch. He was smiling.

"The universe is, basically, pointless," he answered, gripping the hatch with both hands.

"Is that an answer?" I wanted to know, as I stepped back hesitantly.

"Have you read Pascal, doc?" he suddenly asked. Not waiting for my answer, he went on to quote: "There is enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition."

"And we know which way you lean," I stated, crossing my arms and returning his stare.

"Release me from my mobile dungeon, doc, and we will discover what exactly dispensation of providence actually means," he said evenly, eyeing me with his odd colored eyes, the ones that I was sure at that very moment were preternatural.

"Would this be some kind of vengeance?" I asked, stepping a little closer. "Is it an act of--"

"Sequelae...Dr. Greene," he interjected. "Fundamental bio-development and...and successive causal connectivity. Interficio ergo sum type of thing," he shouted, shaking

the Vice.

I stepped forward, and exclaimed, "Okay, you have succeeded in frightening me. I'm scared. Is that something that helps you? How does it help you?"

"Oh fair doctor, to paraphrase old Pascal, this is the knot of my condition," he replied, smiling demonically at me.

I glanced at my watch. There was a lot of time left in the session, but I knew you couldn't adhere to time limits. These interviews had a rhythm of their own.

"Perhaps we should leave off here and pick it up next Tuesday," I suggested cheerfully, hoping I could discontinue the process at a working juncture and not construct any nagging barriers that I would have to tear down the next time. "Sound okay?"

"I'll have to check with my secretary and get back to you," he joked.

I snapped off the tape recorder and gathered up my notes. Flowers was humming something to himself. I wasn't sure, but I thought that it might have been the theme song to an old TV show, which was subsequently made into a movie, called Mission Impossible.

I had mulled over whether or not to inform him of my visit to see his sister. To this point I hadn't really settled on an avenue of which to approach him. I wanted to rely on my instincts. Rey Flowers wasn't the type of patient you could steer. There was no concrete gameplan to follow. I was almost certain mentioning his sister would instigate a confrontation. I decided to save the information until a later date. I could use it as a bargaining chip of some sort.

"Next Tuesday, at nine," I informed him, turning to leave.

"Dr. Greene, have you ever read any Nivlac by any chance?" he all of a sudden wanted to know. "The poet," he added, by way of explanation.

I had never heard of him or his work and told him so. He snorted, then told me that I must read his poems for a better understanding of "the recessive encroachment of social opprobrium." As I heard him encouraging me to read this obscure poet, I remembered what one of the other therapists--my immediate predecessor--had written in his file. He had said that Flowers verbal command had lead him to construct his own functioning language, which was heavy on terms and secondary definitions. At some points when he is speaking it is almost as if he has bridged the gap from contemporary English to what might be thought to be a form of future modern English, so the therapist had written.

It was not unusual for a patient suffering from advanced psychosis to construct their own language, something that gave them a sense of freedom, freedom to speak without being understood. It empowered them in a sense, giving them limited immunity from the bondage of their immediate environment. Made sense. Reduce hostility. Undermine the authority that has hegemony over your developed individualism.

Rey Flowers, to me, didn't fit this psychological mold. Not at all. He was not only intelligent but shrewd, and calculating. I didn't see any type of flight response with him. Whatever he aspired to, psychologically or otherwise, had to be on his terms. He wanted control. He would be one to use language as a weapon, an offensive weapon and not a defensive one.

"I'll look him up on the net," I told him, adding, "and download some of his work

so we can go over it together next session."

"Homework for the doctor, sounds like fun," he teased. "There might be a pop quiz."

I laughed and said, "Once a teacher always a teacher."

His mood instantly blackened and he sneered, "What will you learn?"

I didn't reply. Outside the room, I stood in the hallway for a moment. My hands were shaking. Fear, elemental fear, had been something that I had manage to avoid for most of my professional life. There had been a few occasions where there had been close calls with patients, but they had mostly been violent outbursts that had been quickly extinguished by soothing words or, in one case, brute force by a nearby orderly. This was on a different level.

Rey Flowers was like a magnetic force. I was drawn to him. Dr. Burke had advised me that psychology was like a quest, a single minded (read obsessive) search for something. "We're like detectives in our way," he had told me. I wanted to find out. Simple. The where, the how, the when, I could easily track down. It was the why.

5. THE PROTECTOR OF THE WHITE ACRE

Nivlac. One name poets spell trouble, I thought, as I cranked up my computer when I returned home. You could find anything on the Internet. If not anything else, the

net had brought information to combat ignorance all across the world. Of course, often times the delivered information was bogus, which undermined the very intent of the electronic source for knowledge.

Admittedly I wasn't up on my poetry. I fully expected this Nivlac to be a Nostradamus clone, spinning out verse that told all of us what was going to happen in the future, if we just knew how to interpret the couplets or sonnets or whatever. Then again, I might be able to get a foothold into what made Flowers tick.

Beginning with Yahoo, I typed in the poet's name and clicked search. Almost instantly I had several leads, as various websites appeared; although there weren't that many hits. As I suspected, Nivlac was probably some obscure poet nobody had ever read except for a few highbrow professors from backwater Liberal Arts colleges tucked away in the hinterlands, or, worse, the poet might have written back in the Middle-Ages, in Latin.

A half dozen sites beckoned, leading off with one Willard A. Tompkins, Nivlac Unmasked website. It had an edu. in the URL so I knew he must be affiliated with some University. I clicked on the site.

It took forever to load. A college logo appeared. It was evidently a school in England. For the most part, the site was stocked with pithy commentary and analysis of the poet's work and definitely not for someone who hadn't even read the poet's poems. Bombastic comes to mind, as I remember what Willard A. Tompkins had written. He apparently didn't care a great deal for Nivlac or his verse.

Moving on, I clicked on the next website, one that was set up on one of the

numerous domains that are gratis for the author as long as they don't object to advertising being plastered all around their html. This site was written by a woman/girl, a Molly Savor, who, judging by her valley-speak narrative, was definitely American.

She, as was obvious, idolized Nivlac. Peppered throughout the text were snatches of verse, which she grafted onto her thoughts, ideas, concepts etc. As an added touch, she had included scanned photos of several beachscapes. Nice, but it didn't help me much.

The other websites only included bare mentions of Nivlac, almost in passing, referring to him as a post-romantic poet or a neo-classicist. There seemed to be a raging debate to exactly where he fit in the spectrum of poets throughout the ages. As of yet I couldn't find out when he was even born, much less his poetic bent. What nationality was he even?

The last remaining hit, before Yahoo sent me off to Alta Vista and the beyond in search of more material, was simply: Nivlac: His words. Bingo!

As with many websites on the net, you could find plenty of (professionally speaking) nuts. This particular site was, according to the webmaster's note, posted and run by a college student at some University in the Netherlands. As with most of the polylingual Dutch, he offered his analysis of Nivlac in three different languages. I clicked on the English version and hoped I would discover something--anything--that would help me assemble a profile on Rey Flowers.

As it turns out the poet was still alive and lived in the United States, although it was reported that he was in declining health. A few (so it said) rare photos were included

on the web page. One grainy out of focus photograph looked to be taken in front of a large castle, somewhere in Europe presumably. The caption dated the photo in the early 70's. Nivlac was alone and looking, so it seemed, perturbed about having his picture taken.

There was a bio which was sketchy at best, telling me that the poet was thought to be from one of the channel islands. There was no proof of this. No one, apparently, knew much about the man's personal history. The Dutchman wrote that Nivlac was believed to have studied in England.

A truly astounding fact was that the poet had evidently only one solitary poem to his credit; but it was a "colosus" (sic), in the Dutchman's estimation, spanning the length of an entire book. Who was this guy? Was it pertinent at all to my investigation? Yes, by now it had become an investigation more than anything else.

Nivlac took some doing but I finally landed the entire poem on a website that I had to download in Adobe format from an English Department project of some small University in Ohio. It seems the professor responsible for the site had actually met this Nivlac, or so he said in his opening commentary to the poem. He called it, the poem, a natural extension of T.S. Eliot and was, and I quote here, an incisive strike against the modern peril of alienation at the hands of technocratic gerrymandering. Certainly, I thought, as I clicked my mouse quickly to go to the next page of the website.

Writers, poets, musicians who command a cult following is nothing new, especially in the modern day arena where many people are out there searching for something--anything--to merge their beliefs with. It isn't surprising. I understand it.

Nivlac, on the other hand, was somewhat different. He had the almost requisite aura of mystery about him and he was suitably esoteric, two characteristics that usually come with the territory, but the man was different in the respect that he obviously never cultivated any disciples. He was a bona fide recluse and strangely incommunicado.

I could find no one who had talked to him--ever. At least no one who could prove that they had indeed talked to the man. Despite the fact that there was a very long poem, I somehow doubted he existed. It could have been a hoax. The Internet was famous for that. Would Rey Flowers be party to a fraudulent poet? Better yet, would he be duped by one? It didn't seem likely.

The more pressing issue was in the words of the poet. Did they actually hold some kind of portent? Rey Flowers could just be manipulating me further. His well developed sense of humor could be working overtime. He could sit back in his mini-prison and chuckle when he thought of me surfing the net in search of some bogus phantom poet. Still, I felt I had to make the effort. Check out the leads.

The title to the poem alone was unusual and vaguely mocking. As sophisticated gags went, if this was one it certainly took who ever devised it some thought. I couldn't seem to pinpoint the poem's written date. I didn't want to readily rule out the fact that Flowers might have planted the poem himself years before. He had been a biology professor. Perhaps he had a grudge against the Liberal Arts side of academia and he wanted to tweak their world a little bit. I could see him doing that. Sitting in his office on campus writing out hackneyed verse and slipping it into the consciousness of eager

literature lovers around the globe. Sure, it would exactly fit into his type of arcane pranks.

Did he want to bring me in on the ruse or did he want to humiliate me by having me pore over the work and report to him on its merits? This could be his way of controlling me, however remote and ineffective it might be. I hadn't been with him long enough to gauge his intent. After being with some of my patients for any length of time I usually developed an instinct about their intentions. It was inevitable. You spend time with someone, particularly in a situation fraught with psychological import, and sooner or later there are indications, like signposts, that pop up.

"It is the flummox feint," Dr. Burke had told me once, with his eyes twinkling like they always did when he thought I was improving as a therapist. He had gone on to tell me about one of his patients that liked to fabricate personal histories of her family members just so she could elaborate on their importance. It was her way of deflecting scrutiny of herself so it turned out.

Rey Flowers, as I had surmised so quickly, didn't quite fit into any preconceived mold. No. He was all over the place when it came to pinpointing psychological defense mechanisms etc. He could be passive and aggressive alternately, with each method equally successful. I had the disquieting hunch that he was actually utilizing any number of devious psych devices to amuse himself. The most adverse part of his incarceration, as bad as it was, impacted on him when it came to him being simply bored.

So with this in mind I read the poem. It was, well, your usual poetry, I guess. I can safely say I had never cared for poetry when I was in school. Novels, okay, but reading abstruse lines of

conflicting meanings didn't make much sense to me. Anything that leaves so much open to interpretation seems counterproductive for the most part; even if what I do for a living is all about divining obscure meanings.

I include various tracts from Nivlac's book only because they do, in their way, shed some light on Rey Flowers and his state of mind. Even at this point in time I really don't know whether or not Rey placed any significance in what they mean. You can be the judge.

Progress, progress, marching towards the urn,
while muffled voices try to mitigate.

Learn.

Calibrate.

Spurn.

Celebrate.

Whosoever dares beckon doubt;
and off goes reason in pursuit of chance.

Tout.

Stance.

Bout.

Dance.

Hear Thantos growl angrily,
thus listen, please listen to the weeping.

Hungrily.

Sleeping.

Spiritually.

Leaping.

I will tell you that the poem went on for another fifty pages. I didn't think the English language had that many rhymes imbedded in it. At times the verse was sophomoric and then at other times it leaned towards a more sublime content. As I read it I could see where some unstable people might latch onto it and use it as a crutch of sorts. You could point to almost any part of the poem and come away with something to buttress your complaints about the modern world. It could have been worse. I fully expected some websites devoted to just how Nivlac predicted John Junior's plane crash.

Levity aside, I went about reading it as I would any other piece of evidence. I was becoming an amateur detective more and more each day. Only in this case my suspect was already locked up.

I was always a highly organized person. With work, I kept a strict schedule and lined up projects like bowling pins to knock down. Being systematic came easily to me. Only now, at this early juncture in my work with Flowers, I was beginning to fall behind. He was starting to consume my time.

I absolutely hated Fridays because that was when I usually got my little visits from the watchdogs from the Hill and the Pentagon. The two of them were relentless when it came time to deliver the goods to their superiors. On a couple of occasions I had actually hid in Pete's office to escape from them.

There they came, the clicking heels that I now recognized belonged to the Pentagon staffer, the Lieutenant with the sour disposition and the starched uniform. As usual, she would stick out her hand and stand there waiting for the report, noticeably sighing to let me know she was a busy person and needed to get back to the nerve center of the military complex.

She wanted concrete results and she wanted them yesterday. I pegged her for a West Point grad by the way she insisted on acting like a man. I'm being sarcastic but she did put on a hard exterior, a persona that I hoped she could remove when her day at the Pentagon was over.

It was apparent she barely tolerated me by the way she only talked business. When I didn't immediately hand over the file, she would ask for the report and stand directly in front of my desk until she got it. Besides the obligatory greeting, she said little and nothing. I had attempted to draw her out by asking about her job at the Pentagon. Her answers were curt and brief. I fully expected her to give me her rank and serial number, and that's all. It was all I could do not to salute her when she left.

The staffer from the Hill was a little more pleasant, even taking the time to flirt once and a while; but he too was on a mission and wanted to have something to return to the Capitol with. This demand on his time was a gross inconvenience. He worked for a high profile Senator and was used to getting results whenever he was working in any capacity that was connected to the Senate.

"The Senator would like a little more info--if you don't mind," the Congressional staffer said to me, smiling, as he always did.

I glanced up at him from my desk and said, "Take it or leave it."

He mulled this over for a moment then warned, "You don't want to piss this guy off."

Tapping my pen on my notebook, I smiled at him and said, "I'm real scared. Look, I've got work up the wazoo here, so, if you don't mind, I'd like to get to it. Tell the Senator he'll get more 'info' when I have it. Now run along."

He turned on his heels and marched out of my office, holding the two page report in front of him like it might be contaminated. It was the first time I had been rude to him. Although he was only in his mid-twenties, it was obvious he was used to pushing his weight around in the

name of his benefactor. I knew nothing of his “boss” and his political machinery. I was too busy to concentrate on which way the wind was blowing up on the Hill.

Complications were beginning to mount. I had managed to keep on an even keel with my research and my other work by alternating assignments and some long hours on the weekends when needed. Now, with Rey Flowers, I was beginning to lag behind. I wasn’t quite ready to label it an obsession but I was getting dangerously close.

“Can you do it for me?” I pleaded, holding my hands up prayer fashion in front of him. “Please. Those two lackeys from the Hill and the Pentagon are on my case again about completing my reports on time. God, they piss me off sometimes.”

Pete looked at me then shook his head, exhaling. He sighed and said, “Sarah, you owe me--again. This is getting to be a habit. I’ve got my own work to do, you know. I don’t like it when you take advantage of me like this.”

“Look, you, you’re the one who got me into the Flowers case. Now I can’t let it go. I think I’m on to something big,” I said excitedly.

“You sound like a director who just found a new script...or, better yet, you sound like a journalist who has just stumbled onto a big scoop. You are sure you aren’t losing just a little bit of professional perspective here. I want you to think for a second about it. Do you see any warning signs?” Pete chided, laughing.

“Okay, so I sound like a first year psych student...but this time it is something different. It’s intriguing, what can I say?” I told him, blushing at my unbridled enthusiasm. “I don’t think I have to apologize for that--do I?”

“You, oh no,” he shot back, laughing. “Dr. Greene never has to apologize for anything she does. She’s just the cutest little Princess.”

“Stop,” I ordered, holding up my hand. “You are definitely stepping over the line now.”

“If you say so,” he teased.

I was already thinking of other leads. I had placed a call to American University, trying to seek out Rey's fiancée. This would be stepping closer. Although his sister had been a wealth of information, and she had even called me several times after our initial meeting to add a few important nuggets of info, I needed to get even more.

I was in luck. Helen Colby had taken a position as the head of the Physics Department at a local Community College. It hadn't been exactly easy but I had managed to track her down through a former colleague of hers at American.

She was reluctant to talk to me at first, telling me it was an invasion of her privacy. I assured her I was only after some psychological angle and wasn't interested in divulging her life story to the public. She was skeptical. Apparently the press had hounded her after the murders for weeks. One of those tabloid TV shows had staked out her apartment and ambushed her every time she came home.

She lived in Springfield, over in Virginia. We agreed to meet at a bar not far off Interstate 95. Once again I trudged out to the suburbs, fighting all the heavy traffic on the Beltway. I seldom went out of the city that much anymore and when I did it was always a shock to see just how much the metropolitan area was booming. Pete was forever saying that the DC area, in twenty years, was going to stretch all the way to New York City. "It's a perfect example of rampant urbanization," he was always declaring with disgust in his voice.

I had been in DC ever since attending college. Being from a small town in Upstate New York, I found the city exciting. Well at least I did for the first few years or so. I was in college. I was younger. It all seemed ideal in its way. Lately, however, I had been having mild anxiety about the crowded conditions and found myself thinking of my small town America past.

Traffic, as usual, was jam packed on the way into Virginia. I got lost, twice. I made the wrong turn off the Beltway and had to double back. Fortunately I had left myself plenty of time to get there. I didn't want to be late. Who knew what Helen was going to be like? I felt I needed

her input in order to complete some background on Rey Flowers. She was the one person who had been close to him at the time of the murders.

Winter was definitely over and all of the trees were budding with new leaves. Barren limbs had always depressed me as a child. When the leaves reappeared after a long winter in New York it always lifted my spirits. I rolled down my window in my car and drove along with the warm Springtime air seeping in. I never rolled down my window in the city unless I wanted to choke on the polluted fumes.

I got to the bar we had decided on before Helen did. I took a table in the back and sat where I could see the front door. She had described herself as a “fat red head.” She had said this matter-of-factly, as if she might be offering directions to the corner hardware store. In our short conversations on the phone it was apparent Helen had a dry personality and was uncomfortable interacting with strangers.

It was a good fifteen minutes past our agreed on time to meet when Helen finally appeared at the door. She stood there for a moment and surveyed the room. Her description of herself had been accurate. I immediately recognized her and waved her over to my table.

“I’m glad you could make it,” I offered, extending my hand and smiling warmly at her.

She glanced around the bar for a moment, as if I might have concealed photographers or a film crew in the shadows, then mumbled, “I almost didn’t come.”

“I can imagine this has to be...well weird for you,” I said, motioning for her to sit down. “What do you want to drink?”

She looked at me, then around the bar, and answered, “Just some wine...white.”

The interview was underway. It seemed as if I were debriefing a spy or perhaps she was a special witness to a FBI investigation. It was obvious I was going to have to be careful when dealing with her and her apparent paranoia.

“So...let me tell you what I am all about first,” I said after the waitress had brought her

wine. “Like I told you on the phone, I work for the VA. I’m a therapist. Just recently Rey Flowers came to my attention and--”

“Have you spoken with Rey?” she interrupted, leaning forward to speak almost in a whisper.

“Yes,” I replied.

“How’s he doing?” she wanted to know.

“As well as can be expected,” I told her, not wanting to get off track. “He is well taken care of,” I assured her, giving her a sympathetic look.

“What do you want from me?” she then demanded to know. “I really don’t know what went wrong with him. I don’t. One day we were having a relationship and then the next we weren’t. It all happened so fast. Rey just went off the deep end,” she stated, fidgeting in her seat.

We talked. Two hours had passed before I even realized it. As expected, she added valuable information about Rey’s mental state at the time. They had been more or less living together during those eventful months preceding the murders. Although she maintained her own apartment she spent a great deal of time at his. With scientific clarity, she remembered almost everything about the time period.

“Rey was kind and gentle,” she said, looking up at the ceiling wistfully. “When I heard he had killed those two men...well...naturally I didn’t believe it. I really didn’t.”

“Helen, can you possibly tell me anything about what might have been a catalyst for Rey doing what he did? I mean was there something that happened between the two of you or maybe with his family? Think about it for a moment,” I encouraged her, ordering two more drinks.

“His family life was nonexistent,” she immediately replied. “He practically never even called them. His brother was dead. I guess he missed him but he didn’t talk about him much. He had a sister but they spoke infrequently on the phone. He did go home for Christmas...but not for Thanksgiving. Yeah, I remember that specifically because we always had dinner with my

parents in Baltimore. My parents liked him. My dad would talk to Rey about the war and being in the Army--that kind of stuff. My dad had been in World War II, in the Army.”

“Did Rey talk to you much about Viet Nam? Did he ever talk about his cousin?” I asked, checking my recorder to see how much tape I had left.

“Cousin?” she said quizzically. “I didn’t know he had one.”

“Oh,” I exclaimed, surprised. “He died in Viet Nam. Rey and him were in the same platoon. You didn’t know that?”

“First I ever heard of it,” she said, puzzled.

“What about Viet Nam then?” I pressed on.

“Oh I don’t know, I guess he mentioned it once and a while. He never really told me what went on over there and I didn’t feel it was right to ask. I knew that he had seen combat but it was never anything he was ever going to tell me about. I did see his medals once,” she said, forcing a smile.

“You did. Where were they? Where did he keep them?” I wanted to know, as I scribbled in my notebook.

“They were in his storage room when I saw them. He lived in this apartment building that had storage areas in the basement for all of the tenants. I was getting something out for him and there they were. He kept them buried in a footlocker. It was full of military things from his days in the Service. I guess I was snooping a little bit,” she confessed sheepishly.

“He didn’t know you ever saw them then,” I stated.

“Oh no,” she replied quickly. “He would have probably been angry about it. It was his private stuff and all. I never brought it up.”

Rey’s reluctance about reliving his experiences in Viet Nam was typical. I had interviewed vets who hadn’t spoken about their war time in over a decade. For many, the return to “the World” brought immediate amnesia. They conveniently forgot. Dredging up past actions

was hazardous to their mental health.

Helen had met Rey Flowers at American University. He had been on the fast track to tenure. She was a graduate student working as a TA. She was five or six years younger.

“We were a cliché of sorts,” she admitted, laughing. “You know, Dr. Greene, how it is. I was the wide eyed grad student, eager to drop my drawers for the professor in charge. Rey and I hit it off immediately. We were both science geeks. It was kismet.”

As I had requested, she produced some photographs. They were the usual relationship photos. There were a dozen or so of the two of them at a party; in the park; on vacation at the beach. Several were of just Rey. One in particular caught my eye. In it he was standing in his lab, at the college, and was smirking as he pointed to something written on the blackboard.

An idea had been stewing in my mind for several days. Ever since my meeting with Rey’s sister I had been tossing around the idea of using personal photos in my sessions with Flowers. I was going after shock value, pure and simple. It was crude and most likely unprofessional but I thought I needed an edge of some sort.

“Do you think I could borrow these for a few days?” I asked her, hoping she would consent. To my surprise she nodded yes and slid the packet over to me. I looked down at the photograph on top of the pile and what was written on the blackboard in the picture caught my eye. I held it up and looked at it more closely. “What’s this say?”

Helen glanced at it and snickered, then explained, “Rey was always putting up abstruse junk on the board. He’d leave it there for the next professor to see. It was his idea of a joke. His sense of humor was definitely one of a kind.”

I peered at the photo and read: “It is sheer verity and all is never believed unless ideas pirouette in our minds until we capitulate.”

“Sounds like him,” she announced, laughing.

“Tell me, did Rey ever write poetry that you know of?” I asked, tapping the photo with

my finger.

“Rey? I doubt it. He despised what he called the other side. He meant the Humanities end of things at the college. He was always having long debates with some of the other professors about the merits of teaching the students some of the things they did. I think if he had his way they would have eliminated the Arts altogether. He said they were worthless. ‘There is a scream that no one will ever hear,’ is what he always said to them, then he would laugh right in their faces. I think most of them really hated him because he wasn’t just being...you know, snide. He was being truthful. The fact that he was so damn smart made them all uneasy, I suppose.”

“Do you have any of his writings by any chance? I think they would help me analyze this whole thing better. Don’t you?” I asked eagerly.

“I might have some somewhere around the house. He wrote a sort of manifesto once, I think. Yeah, it was about mythology or religion...something along those lines. Very pithy,” she stated, smiling at me. “He would pound away on his tiny portable typewriter at night sometimes. I could hear him muttering to himself as he typed. Genius at work, you know.”

“I really hate to ask this, Helen, but I think I have to,” I said in an even voice, trying to sound professional. “Did Rey ever hit you or was there violence of any kind. You don’t have to answer that if you don’t want to. It’s just that I need to get a sense of what sort of mental state he was drifting into. You understand that, don’t you?”

“Sure,” she replied immediately. “The answer’s no. Never. We had arguments of course but never any physical stuff. It was all intellectualized. I don’t mean to say he brutalized me psychologically either. Rey didn’t seem to be the type to kill anyone. In fact, when I found he was a war hero it didn’t seem possible. This guy was in the Army, I can remember thinking at the time. No way.”

“And when you found out he killed two people, how did you react then?” I wanted to

know.

“Shocked,” she exclaimed. “Look, at that time we had broken up. Things had started to go bad for us just prior to the murders. I was staying less and less at his apartment. Rey seemed to me to be pulling back. There hadn’t been any talk of marriage or anything but there did seem to be an understanding between us.”

“So there was no crises, so to speak? I mean there wasn’t one specific blow-up that might have precipitated the dissolution of your relationship? Think about it.”

“No. There wasn’t. He wasn’t fooling around on me. I certainly wasn’t fooling around on him. Professionally our careers weren’t in conflict. Not at all. It’s a mystery to me. It just all seemed to change.”

“And you didn’t see it coming,” I mumbled, jotting down a few notes.

“Rey was a caring type of person to me, even if he wasn’t there for his family after he returned home,” she explained, cradling her glass of wine in her hand. “You know, Dr. Greene, he would ask the weirdest questions sometimes.”

“Like what?”

“Well, let’s see, once he asked me as we were leaving for class something like: If you had a cold, a really bad one that had you miserable as hell, with a fever and a bad cough, and you knew you were going to have it for the rest of your life, would you want to go on living? That was Rey. In his world of concepts and ideas things were different.”

“What was your answer?” I had to know, grinning at her.

“What? Oh, I don’t remember. I think I told him I would stock up on Nyquil...something like that,” she replied, laughing. “He would always look at me with those beautiful eyes of his and anticipate my response. He really wanted to know what I thought about such things. Rey called it creating facts. It was one of his terms for...for developing your life. Sounds stupid now, I guess, but he was forever thinking, or, as he always put it, thinking for the sake of thinking.”

“Did you feel like you were his intellectual equal? What I mean to say is, was he amenable to your point of view? Did he even let you have a point of view?” I corrected myself, hoping that I hadn’t offended her.

“I suppose there were times that he was condescending and even patronizing to me, but, well, after all I was only a grad student when we met and he was well on his way to his doctorate. On some levels there was a little bit of worshipping going on there. I admit it. Just call me an intellectual groupie,” she joked, smiling at me. “What we had together was nice though. Very nice. At least for awhile,” she said in almost a whisper.

“Would you say that Rey considered himself a philosopher?” I asked, tapping my pen on the table. “What I mean is did he feel a need to explain--for lack of a better word--his existence? I realize this might sound like a perfectly ridiculous question but I--”

“I guess he did. He was always reading philosophical works, but of course by the same token he was always ridiculing them too,” she said and laughed. “I can remember hearing him in the other room laughing out loud at what he was reading. I would look in on him and he would be reading something by Plato or somebody equally not funny. He would read some more then mutter to himself and laugh again. It was pretty comical to see actually.”

It was obvious to me that Helen had preserved many of the pleasant memories of their time together. There had been a maelstrom of media reporting around her when Rey was captured. It hadn’t taken the press long to latch onto her as a viable storyline. She had retreated to her home in Baltimore for almost six months, leaving her life in DC behind. The repercussions of Rey’s actions had reached out long and far.

“Have you ever thought of going to see him?” I had to ask, even though it wasn’t of much help in my research.

“Yes,” she stated, looking away. “But then what would we say to each other now? I mean really, what is there to say? Besides my husband might not care for it if I did that.” She

snorted and smiled at me.

For the first time during the interview Helen got a little bit choked up. She had been remarkably subdued for the most part, almost as if she were talking about someone else who had been in her situation. I attributed her reaction to her composed personality but perhaps had been wrong. The passing of time may have given her a needed buffer.

I then wound down the interview. She gave me her address and told me to send the photos there when I had finished with them. Then she wished me luck with Rey and gave me a wan smile. I thanked her for her time and promised her I would keep her advised as to my progress. As I watched her walk out of the bar I was thankful she hadn't asked about the present day Rey Flowers, the one trapped in a cage, feared, and hated.

"Spontaneous craziness," Pete quipped when I told him about my interview with Helen Colby.

"Very funny," I snapped, as I paced back and forth in my office. "I could use some help here, you know, Dr. Funnystein. Helen gave me some good information but I still don't know what sent him over the cliff."

"Sarah, what exactly are you after here? I mean think about it for a minute. The guy is locked away for the rest of his days on earth. What do you hope to accomplish?" Pete demanded to know.

"I really don't know. But now that I've started I can't get past it. I'm obsessed with it. Every night I get up and go over to my board and I--"

"Let me warn you, Peter, I've gone to the board already," I said smiling at him.

"Oh no not that," he exclaimed, backing towards the door to my office. "Now I know you've gotten serious."

Pete was well aware of my bulletin board method of researching from our college days

together. On more than one occasion he had come over to my apartment and seen me mired in a project with files thumb tacked all over the drafting table. It had been a long standing joke between us for years.

“What I want from this particular case is the why. Yeah, that’s right. I want to know why Flowers did it,” I explained.

“Because he’s nuts,” Pete sang out, laughing. “Could that be it?”

“Do you know how difficult you make it to like you?” I stated, shaking my finger at him.

“The man saw combat. He brought the killing home with him. Sounds reasonable to me,” he announced, as he sat down in the chair opposite my desk.

“Too pat,” I said, shaking my head no. “Something triggered it and I’m going to find it.”

“I’m sure you will,” Pete muttered.

6. IN REMEMBRANCE OF TOMORROW

A week later a package arrived from Helen Colby. She had found a copy of Rey Flowers manifesto. She had scribbled a note, in red ink, on a post-it and stuck it onto the first page. It read: Dr. Greene, If you can ignore the typos then maybe this will help you decipher what went wrong with Rey. Best of luck, Helen Colby.

The manifesto was over a hundred pages. The paper had turned yellowish and numerous pages had been edited and reedited using a blue felt pen, making it difficult to follow the corrections at times. Rey’s frenetic style of handwriting flowed all over some of the pages, creeping down the margins and pooling around the footer section.

If I had been a profiler or maybe clairvoyant I might have been able to pick up all kinds of vibrations emanating from the old, wilted typewriter paper. On the cover page Rey had crossed out the title with the blue felt pen and started a new title just below it. He had left off after the word The. The original title, the working title, was still In Remembrance Of Tomorrow. Rey apparently was meticulous about everything, or, at the very least, unsure of his judgment.

I was eager to read it, even if I fully expected it to be arcane and, most likely, full of highfalutin nonsense. Still, I hoped that it would spell out some lead that might enable me to focus in on just what made Rey Flowers tick. I knew the unabomber had worn his madness on his written sleeve, so to speak, if I can mix and match metaphors and sayings. Perhaps Rey's motivation would be just as easily discerned.

Holed up in my apartment, with my cup of herbal tea and my favorite housecoat on, I set out to read the words of the madman. It took me considerably longer than expected because of my frequent trips to the reference books in my paltry library stacked over my computer desk. The writing style was early Middle-Ages in content, if not anything else, chock-a-block with Latin and referential items pointing off in directions of the darkest periods of antiquity. Although Rey's writing, his syntax etc., was readily comprehensible and not at all unenjoyable, it was nevertheless hard going.

He had managed to make the manifesto a 1st. person affair which went a long way towards giving the reader something to grasp while they floundered along with the wave after wave of inscrutable subject matter. You might drown in the stifling concepts and all but you could still get a sense of the writer and what was evidently his struggle with the modern world. That is to say it wasn't an anti-technology tract by any means. No. What it was, in a nutshell, was a long winded critique of living life within the confines of a mythologized world.

I have decided to include sections of the work here so the reader can arrive at their own conclusions. In the interest of brevity, I had to play editor and excise whole chapters. I

apologize. Enclosed are some of the more lucid examples of Rey Flowers writing.

Excerpt A:

It was the first year of my graduate studies that I took a room in the bowels of the city. I say bowels by way of describing the location in relation to the whole entity. I lived among the souls lost to poverty's grip. My living arrangement was no more than a cell which the landlord called an efficiency. It had one window and one room, with a tiny bathroom adjoining. At no time of the day did the sunlight ever penetrate into the gloom. It was dark. It was cold.

I had taken up Plato's challenge and gone into the cave, but then I was unable to go towards the light of my own reality. I quickly succumbed to the environmental hardships of urban life. I became a hermit. The very word is Greek for desert. And I was living in a world without succor, dying from having no thirst for life.

Flowers goes on to express classical suicidal tendencies. He was attending graduate school in DC at the time. His undergraduate studies had been mostly uneventful at UVA. I had managed to track down his transcripts and even dredged up some comments from his classmates. Although he was older than his classmates, having been in the Army for several years before entering college, Rey didn't seem to be all that conspicuous. However, he did elect to live off campus after his first year.

He went on to have a fairly normal academic career. His social life, as far as I could tell, was somewhat stunted. A classmate I contacted, a man that lived in the same dorm Rey's Freshman year, told me: "Flowers was kind of strange but an okay guy." When pressed further the man elaborated. "He kept to himself alot but there were times he joined in on the goings-on around the dorm. You know, the partying. He wasn't all that wild though and I can't ever remember him getting in on the boozing and drugs. Mostly pot smoking. He did more studying than the rest of that's for sure."

It had been my experience that the veterans that did attend college, fresh back from

“Nam,” generally went through an adjustment period. “One day I was shooting gooks in the boonies and the next I’m doing shooters at the campus rathskeller--like that wasn’t weird,” a vet had said to me once, rolling his eyes and laughing. Of course some of the veterans faced criticism and were ostracized at many of the colleges. Some of the more radical elements of the anti-war movement drew no distinctions between serving your country and participating in wholesale killing.

Many of the veterans slipped into a denial mode and simply disavowed their recent past. It didn’t happen. If they didn’t talk about it there would be no retribution, mentally or otherwise.

I wasn’t certain but I placed Rey Flowers in the group that probably refused to articulate their experiences In-country, leaving a void in their short curriculum vitae. The homefront had gone on without him, creating a divide he wasn’t sure he could traverse. I wondered if day to day he feared--dreaded--the question. Who would ask it? Someone will.

He would sit in class, concentrating, listening to the lecture; and all around him he knew someone was wondering. What was it like? They would want to know if he had, you know, killed someone.

A veteran told me a story of his first day on campus. It was a large State university in the Midwest. He felt fortunate to be able to attend such a prestigious school. His GI Bill was barely going to get him by and he knew he would have to work part time to survive. It would all be worth it in the end after he got his degree.

He was walking across campus, which was alive with students. Autumn was in the air. The leaves were already turning. As he was leaving the quad he passed a guy wearing an army field jacket. He noticed the insignia patch on the sleeve. It was from his outfit, the Big Red One. Instinctively, he raised his hand to get the guy’s attention, then thought better of it and let him pass by. He had consciously divested himself of all things military. He couldn’t risk revealing himself by recognizing his fellow veteran.

“I felt like I was incognito on campus,” the veteran had told me, forcing a laugh. “Pretty sad, huh?”

It was. On many less than subtle levels it created developmental problems in their quest to regain their identities when they returned to their own functioning civilization that they expected to take part in. This was often the nexus, the one problematic hurdle some of them couldn't cross.

I had interviewed men who had returned to Viet Nam a second time because they no longer simply “fit in.” They were outsiders, like a protagonist from a Camus sequel, where the character decides that he is unable to follow the rules in his native land. So they went back. The horror and cruelty of war was more comforting than being a participant in something they didn't understand anymore.

Excerpt B:

I am tortured by textual pedantry. Every waking hour I devote to reading the peripatetic philosopher. I have come to Aristotle's doorstep. I will knock on his door. Like the slaves that he held I will be bound to his commands because he knew men are nothing more than possessions.

His *scala naturae* shouts out to me, saying to me that I have perhaps descended the ladder when I apply Ethics and the cause of my actions. Having forsaken the other Trinity, I have embraced Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, but they too were unsatisfactory. The eye of the soul goes blind.

It is perhaps a very cruel joke when the Angelic Doctor adopted Aristotle's words. Two fools in love with ignorance. They managed to retard science for centuries. And it is no wonder pagan Rome never forgave the Christians for destroying the Roman Empire, an historical entity that had stood the test of time.

I went in search of *sermo humilis*, something to tide me over until which time I could

stomach the chaos the celestial power had bestowed on all of us mortals. Augustine had called the cross a mousetrap to catch the devil. I had long ago rejected Biblical rejoinders as much to do about fantasy. Besides, I was a biologist. The Papists had constructed a religion around a quirk of gynecology. Who seeded Mary's fallopian tubes didn't interest me.

The Greeks, the Upanishads, even Leibnitz's apology to his god about man's incorrigibility didn't satisfy my need for mental sustenance. Was there a *jus divinum*? I was beginning to have my doubts.

It was interesting reading the thoughts of the young Rey Flowers. His "defiant exuberance," a term I lifted from his manifesto, was readily apparent. He was a young college student with a great deal to get off his chest. At this stage in his intellectual development it was obvious he was being pulled in several different directions. His scientific acumen was directing him away from organized religion, something that I suspected his war experiences had precipitated. His family had been nominal Methodists, attending church on only the prominent holidays.

Wrestling with religiosity would have been a normal response for a man who had inflicted harm to another human being and been praised for it. Viet Nam, in particular, stressed the kill ratio, highlighting the specific act of personalized carnage over most everything else. In many ways the war was quantified by how high the pile of corpses had risen.

I took a drive one day to see where Flowers had been living at the time. It was off of Rhode Island Avenue. Urban blight had long ago washed away any decent buildings, leaving a dangerous ghetto environment where predators lurked on every street corner. Washington was a city in which the city limits contained only about one third an area in which to live comfortably. The other two thirds had degenerated into a no man's land where even the police had forfeited any pretense at control.

In Rey's time it hadn't been much different. I tried to imagine him living there, in his

hovel, under siege by the local hooligans and criminals that preyed on the unsuspecting. It was the Afro-American section and his white skin must have been a beacon calling out for trouble.

“Nothing gonna scare me no more,” a black veteran had told me once, as he nervously cracked his knuckles and rocked back and forth in his seat. I knew he was on crack or, at least, trying to get off of it. He was a smallish man, with a shaved head and a tiny mustache. “I’s been there and back, ma’am, and there just ain’t much more they can do to me now--sure ‘nuf.”

I had already had several sessions with him. He was likable but we had made little progress. He had been a tunnel mole in Viet Nam, going in after the Viet Cong, often fighting hand to hand. A booby-trap had blinded him in one eye and there was a chiseled scar just below his right ear from a knife. “Killed his ass with my 45. Boom! Right in the back of the head. The mutter-fucker got me with his knife though.”

I had heard the declaration before about their lack of fear. Many of them had been close enough to taste death. They had seen disemboweled people. They had smelled decay. Most of them didn’t realize they were more frightened now than they ever were before. They had returned from the gates of hell and now had to relegate that part of their lives to dusty memories, or to in effect compartmentalize their future.

Rey had made it through four years of college, tucked away in Virginia, safe for the time being. Then he had moved on to his graduate studies, choosing to go to DC. There was nothing out of the ordinary in this. For all outward appearances, Flowers seemed to be adjusting adequately.

A quick check with a friend at the police department told me that he had no record. Nothing. “The man’s clean,” my police officer friend told me over the phone.

What went on for those six years? Rey was closing in on his late twenties. He worked odd jobs to make ends meet. His sister told me that he called home irregularly. He came home for Christmas. “My mother tried and tried to get him to come home more often but he

wouldn't," JoAnn had told me over the phone, calling just to touch base with me about my research.

I could find no friends at this juncture in his life. Rey had successfully distanced himself from everyone. A professor I spoke with from his graduate school days told me, "Flowers, oh yes, he was the one who always, and I mean always, did his work on time. Good student. Wish I had more like him for sure."

He joined no organizations. There were no girl friends that I could get leads on. Rey had put in his time and gotten his degree, leaving very little trace of himself.

7. TINY BATTLES

This was to be my third session with Flowers. It was time for me to start making some headway. The previous two sessions I had kept purposely short. I knew I needed to pace myself. I was intent on showing him that I had the resolve to take on the conundrum that was his life.

On the drive out to Maryland thoughts of the upcoming session tumbled through my mind. I kept glancing down at the seat next to me where I had placed the photographs that both JoAnn and Helen had lent to me. I was debating on whether or not to use them that day. I knew it would be ambushing Rey, attacking him with a part of his past that he most probably didn't ever want to relive.

It would be a gamble that might backfire on me. Rey could very well resent me for using such a tactic. I could lose him for good. I would become just another adversary for him to taunt and do daily battle with.

I got the usual sense of dread when I saw the Barn come into view; although, because of

my anticipation of interviewing Rey, I had almost looked forward to coming to Beekers. The weather was pleasantly cool and sunny. A few of the patients were mulling around the Yard. One of the orderlies was standing by the fence smoking a cigarette. A couple of the patients, two females, were trying to cage a cigarette from him. He turned his back on them and then walked along the fence.

The duration of patience for every mental health employee was short. Every day you spent with the mentally disturbed brought you closer to indifference about their plight. It was an inviolable fact of life around institutions. Although I hated this trait I nevertheless understood it. The patients had little if any understanding of civility and each of their particular mental illnesses deprived them of any perceived sympathy.

I, personally, could never see myself serving permanently on staff at one of the area institutions. I wouldn't have the mental stamina it takes to endure day in and day out the sheer friction that is caused by striving to understand all of the wholesale insanity. Before long I too would become one of the hardened staff members bent on just surviving my shift.

So it should have come as no shock to me when I arrived at room 12 that day. I had been in enough facilities to know that extinguishing flare-ups was an every day event. Like clockwork. When you had so many disparate mental irregularities under one roof sooner or later there is going to be conflict.

Like the previous two times I had arrived at the door to room 12, this time was no different. I was nervous. I was apprehensive. Part of me was frightened. Then there was that part of me--admittedly deep down--that wanted to verbally joust with Flowers. It held a certain degree of excitement, or perhaps you could call it an allure. Pete had picked up on this almost immediately and teased me about it, telling me that I was smitten, entranced by his sheer evilness. I didn't agree with that assessment but then again maybe I wasn't being honest with myself.

I stopped at the door and took a few, measured breaths. The hallways were unusually quiet for that time of day. At the end of the hall a lone nurse was scribbling on her clip board, logging the daily entries. I peered in the window and saw that the room was empty. Puzzled, I glanced at my watch, figuring I was early. It was a little past nine.

As the nurse was walking by I asked her about Flowers. She didn't even slow down but said over her shoulder: "Bath time!" I knew immediately what she meant and hurried over to where the general population bathroom facilities were.

I could hear shouting coming from one of the shower stalls. Then I heard a loud, almost bestial scream. There pinned against the wall by a jet stream of water was Rey. One of the orderlies was training a large water hose on him.

"Ah, Dr. Greene, you are in time for the baptism," Dr. Helms announced, grinning at me.

"What are you doing?" I yelled out angrily. "This is inhumane."

"It is called discipline, Doctor," she said over Rey's screaming. "Every patient must understand the rules or we will have anarchy and at Beekers we will not permit such a thing to ever happen. Isn't that right, men?" she asked the staff huddled around her. They nodded in agreement.

I could see Rey had a cut under his right eye and he was cradling his left arm. The force of the water had pushed him up against the stall partition. He had collapsed into a kneeling position and was burying his head against the wall to escape the blast of the water.

"That's enough!" I shouted out, grabbing the orderly by the arm.

"Is he clean enough yet?" the orderly asked, looking past me at Dr. Helms.

She waved her hand and he promptly shut the water off. Flowers let out another scream and cradled his head in his hands. Blood was dripping down his face.

"He needs some medical attention," I declared, starting in Rey's direction.

"Now Dr. Greene, I don't think you want to do that," one of the other orderlies said,

taking hold of my arm.

“Let go of me,” I exclaimed, shaking off his hand.

It was an impetuous thing to do really. Some of the patients were unpredictable, and dangerous. I didn’t think of that as I rushed over to him. He was still crouched down in the corner but had stopped screaming.

“I think Dr. Flowers might be needing a band-aid,” Dr. Helms sneered, laughing.

“Rey...Rey,” I said, leaning over him. I didn’t know what I expected I would do at that point. I was just thinking I could comfort him.

“Dr. Greene,” he whispered, and then I saw that he was grinning, “nothing like a good shower.”

I looked down at him, at the blood running down his cheek and at his white skin mottled red by the needle like jets of water. We exchanged glances. His grin quickly faded away.

“Put him in the Vise,” Dr. Helms ordered behind me.

Rey jumped to his feet and scurried in the direction of Dr. Helms, screaming: “My retribution will know no limits!”

She side stepped him as two of the orderlies wrestled Flowers to the ground. He spat in her direction. One of the orderlies smacked Rey in the back of the head, while they tossed him in the waiting contraption.

“Wild Kingdom comes to Beekers,” one of the orderlies called out, chuckling, as he stuffed Rey’s clothes in the hatchway. “Here, Houdini, see if you can get dressed in your cage.”

“I’m sure Dr. Helms takes her riding crop to your chicken-shit ass every night, Boyd,” Flowers yelled through the fencing, snarling. “And I just know you like it.”

“You want the hose again, Rey?” the orderly asked, bending over to pick up the nozzle.

“No, no, our Sergeant Flowers is clean enough for Dr. Greene’s interview now,” Dr. Helms chirped, snickering. “Let’s see if we can get back to normal again. The show is over.”

“I’ll look you up when we’re both in hell,” Rey called out to her. “I’m sure they’ll have a special section just for sadistic dykes like yourself.”

Dr. Helms walked over to the Vice and stopped in front of him. She leaned in close and said, “I couldn’t be sure but I just bet that there are going to be a few VC hanging around down there. Perhaps you can trade war stories with them while you burn in hell, huh?”

“Yes sir, Colonel,” Rey said, saluting.

“Take him out of my sight!” she commanded.

Two of the orderlies wheeled Flowers down the hall. Rey had gone quiet and was sitting back with his head slumped forward. I caught up with Dr. Helms and stopped her before she got back to her office.

“What was that display all about?” I demanded to know.

Dr. Helms eyed me for a moment as if perhaps she was thinking about even answering me or not, then said, “Unruly patients are not coddled here at Beekers, Dr. Greene. You have been around here long enough to know that, I’m sure.”

“What exactly did Flowers do, can you tell me that?” I wanted to know, as I blocked her way down the hall.

She sighed heavily and said, “I don’t believe I have to answer to you, Dr. Greene--do I? Will that be all?”

“How did he get those cuts and bruises? You can tell me that!” I almost shouted.

Dr. Helms glanced up and down the hallway, then pointed her finger at me and sneered, “Let’s not forget what Flowers did and why he is in this institution...shall we. I don’t want you to lose sight of that fact, Dr. Greene. If you think you are perhaps getting too close to your research subject then I suggest you back off and examine your motives...and your methods as well. Now, are we done here?”

“I’ll have to include this in my report,” I threatened, stepping out of her way.

She turned and glared at me, then stated, “You, Dr. Greene, might want to tread lightly around here--if you know what I mean. I’m not one to play games. Consider yourself warned. No one interferes with my command. You had better understand that.”

I watched her walk away and disappear into her office. It hadn’t been my intention of locking horns with her over this. Yet I wasn’t willing to permit her to steam roll over me. There were some grounds for her dismissal if I wanted to pursue them. Dr. Helms ran the facility as if it were her own fiefdom. Her many years as an Army officer had shaped her supervising skills. Being peremptory and autocratic was second nature to her. This was a State run hospital however. She had to adhere to certain specified regulations.

Less than three years before she had been disciplined by the State Board, made to bend and yield to the legislated modifications laid down by the State of Maryland. Dr. Helms, according to Pete, had been on her best behavior for the duration of her probationary period. Of late, though, she had resumed her former practices, maintaining an iron grip on the staff and patients. The staff called her Warden behind her back, among other more colorful monikers.

My first year doing research there at Beekers a female patient had died under suspicious circumstances. There had been a messy investigation. Minimal evidence pointed to a staff member, but ultimately the blame had been passed onto a patient, a man lost to the chemical providence of anti-psychotic medication. The official report stated that the patient in question had resorted to subterfuge and didn’t take his meds. His behavior had then become increasingly more violent, resulting in the female patient’s death out in the Yard.

The staff member under suspicion had resigned after the investigation. Dr. Helms had tolerated the investigation because she was in no position to intervene. The entire matter was soon swept under the rug. Only a few unimportant stories appeared in the local papers. It had been successfully hushed up.

Abuse of patients was a common occurrence at most all of the institutions that I had

contact with. If the patients weren't attacking one another then the staff was using physical force too liberally and frequently. My very first day at Beekers I had seen an orderly manhandle a patient that persistently demanded a glass of water. The orderly had physically forced the patient to the bathroom and held his head under the faucet at the sink. I had to actually pull the orderly off of the patient.

As was required, I had written out an incident report and, to my surprise, nothing was done. The orderly had received no disciplinary action. My first day on site and I had made a lifelong enemy of one of the staff members. It didn't matter. The staff member quit a few weeks later, another statistic added to the high turnover rate at Beekers.

There did seem to be two camps at Beekers, almost equally divided between the ones that accepted Dr. Helms style of supervision and the ones who despised her and how she ran things. It was true you couldn't work at Beekers and be perpetually naive. The facility was a warehouse for the insane. They were there for a reason.

Being humane did have a way of being fluid, transforming from this to that on almost a daily basis. How you treated and responded to a patient suffering from one malady and another mentally deficient patient with atavistic impulses was a delicate balancing act. Most rules didn't apply across the board. No. You had to function on instinct and, it's true, guess work.

"It's not black magic but it is akin to some supernatural condition," Pete told me that first day I arrived at Beekers. He had laughed. We were sitting in his car, parked in the parking lot, and I was trying to get up the courage to face my professional future. "You'll do all right. Just keep your eyes open at all times. Remember, everyone in here is your enemy."

I looked at his grinning face and muttered, "I should have listened to my mother and gone to law school."

Rey had been placed in room 12. He was waiting there for me. I didn't think I could

possibly get an interview off the ground now, not after what had just happened. I was going to have to try. There was a chance that I might be able to form a bond over the incident, however negligible it might be. It was worth a try.

Flowers had left his shirt off and his shoes. He sat there in the Vice wearing just his pants. They were hospital issue, beige, and resembled OR scrubs. With his shirt off, he looked surprisingly muscular.

He had his eyes closed, as he often times did. I busied myself with my notes and tape recorder for a moment, hoping that he would say something. I didn't like to initiate the contact if at all possible. Not with Rey. With my other patients I generally took immediate control of the interview. This approach seemed to put me at a disadvantage though when dealing with Flowers.

I slipped a tape into the recorder and listened. I could hear him stirring in his seat. He then whistled at me.

"Nice ass, doc," he announced, grinning.

His comment hadn't been all that lascivious. There didn't seem to be anything malicious about it either. I turned around to face him, hoping that he wasn't exposing himself or something as an addition to his comment.

"Should I say thank you to that?" I decided to reply, turning on the tape recorder.

"Doctor Greene, you are going to have to turn that thing on as soon as you come in the room. You are missing some of my best material," he told me, laughing.

As I peered through the fencing on the Vice I could now see a long scar reaching from just below his collar bone to above his ribs. It was jagged and at least an inch wide. The scar tissue had turned a darker color than the rest of his chest. I tried not to stare.

"You're still bleeding," I said, noticing a slow trickle below his eye.

He dabbed at the wound with his T-shirt then said, "Tiny battles."

"Is that what it's like here at Beekers, Mr. Flowers?" I asked, stepping closer.

He eyed me for a moment, and I tried not to stare back at his unusual eyes. Blotches of blood were all over the white T-shirt. Rey yawned for a moment.

“Doc, if we are going to do this then I can’t have you asking me all of these leading questions. Talk to me like a human being...not some lab rat that has the capability of speech,” he spat out, irritated.

“Do you talk to anyone here at Beekers?” I asked before I could stop myself.

“You are doing it again,” he chided, frowning at me. “I will agree to talk to you because, hey, you’re good looking and reasonably intelligent, and I need someone to write my life story for me.”

I gave him a startled look and then said, “You want me to--”

“Relax, I was just joking with you,” he said, laughing. “You are wound up like a top, aren’t you? I’m not that intimidating.”

He was. I knew that he knew that. It was a game of leverage. Rey had devised a world in which he participated only in pursuits that were organized around the rules that he laid down. He derived amusement from the order of this minuscule universe and he survived.

“Mr. Flowers, just let me say that I am willing to change my approach...if you think that will expedite matters,” I told him, opening up my note book.

“Well, Sarah,” he began, smiling at me, “I must first off say that William James had it all wrong. There is repetition. Obviously WJ never lived here at Beekers.” He laughed and the Wise shook around him. “Everything here happens over and over.”

He was using my first name to further disarm me. I didn’t want to relinquish that last barrier between us. I felt I needed to hold onto something.

“Maybe it would be wise if you used my last name only,” I suggested, holding his stare for as long as I could. “Dr. Greene will do just fine.”

Flowers grinned at me and nodded, then said, “Why don’t we call each other doctor.

Very antiseptic, right? Let's talk about death--shall we. Every human being wants to know the pleasure of death...the finality."

"Are you certain about that?" I asked, trying to sound flippant.

"Life is death, doc. Haven't you heard that?" he replied, chuckling.

I seemed to be back in a maze again. Everything with Flowers was uncertain, like a comic had said once: I live on a one way cul-de-sac. I suspected that he had been purposely evasive for so long that it had become second nature to him.

"Sounds pretty vague to me," I muttered, scribbling in my notebook.

"Everyone wants death. They either want to die or they want to kill. Now that is simple enough, isn't it?" he said, close to being exasperated.

"Go on, Dr. Flowers," I encouraged, as I wrote down circumlocution and circled it two times.

"Have you read Nivlac yet?" he demanded to know, leaning forward in his seat.

I was relatively certain that he was now leading me in circles, having a private joke at my expense. As a kid I had never liked puzzles or riddles. I suppose I was never that good at them either. Flowers was manipulating me for his own enjoyment. I reasoned that perhaps I could go along and pick my spots where I might cull some vital information as we progressed.

"Yes, and I was going to mention that to you. I have a theory about your favorite poet, this Nivlac character," I told him, emphasizing the last part. "There were a few sites on the Internet that were interesting. I might as well tell you I didn't particularly care for the poem. It was kind of sophomoric at best."

"Literary critic and a therapist, I'm so impressed," he said, grinning at me. "But did you understand the poem? Did you know where the poet was heading?"

I thought for a moment. It might be time I called his bluff, so to speak. I was almost sure it was Rey who had planted the poem and the fictitious poet. He would be the type to derive

pleasure from such an obscure practical joke. It was a masterful stroke of ridicule directed at the Literary establishment.

“No, actually I saw it for what it was. Nothing but a bunch of gobble-de-gook intended to deceive people into thinking it had some literary merit,” I explained, trying not to laugh.

His face fell for a moment then he mumbled something I couldn't hear. It was a small victory for me but at what cost. Flowers might be a sore loser. He could very well shut me out now.

“A confession is in order,” he stated solemnly. “I know when I have been found out. A ruse has a life span like anything else, I suppose,” he allowed, shaking his head. “I am the creator. Did you really think the verse was that bad?”

His question was genuine. It had probably been the most earnest thing he had ever said to me to date. I was, well, thrilled. It might be a door opening for me. I knew I was going to be accepted as an equal in his world, that would have been unthinkable to Rey, but I might be able to gain some equal footing somewhere.

“Bad? Not bad really but sort of...you know, vapid maybe,” I answered, trying to choose my words carefully. “I mean it was deep and all, and I could see where people would read it and run with what they thought was its purported message, you know, but come on here. What was with that style anyway?”

Flowers laughed, and laughed. It was a manic laugh, one that I had seen before with patients who had, as Pete like to say, “a slipping transmission.” Their gears were working yet had a few teeth that needed filing.

“You should have seen some of the imbeciles at American. One idiot actually taught a course on Nivlac. It was delicious to say the least,” he crowed, laughing again. “After I started the joke it just took up a life all its own. I was a myth maker. It made me feel like a god,” he intoned in a husky voice, wavering his voice like a message from on high.

It had turned into a lighthearted moment for us. Joking around, as a concept, wasn't something I did with my patients. When you injected humor into a therapeutic setting it had a way of transforming itself and was unpredictable. I, as a therapist, not unlike a trial lawyer, didn't need any surprises. You wanted to anticipate answers.

I resisted the urge to ask him how it made him feel to wield this hidden power over his colleagues on the other side of academia. Instead, I said, "So, you didn't even have to cultivate the myth or anything. It just took off."

"Look, Doctor Greene, mythology controls us even today. Modern culture spins out of control but strives to seek out its underpinnings," he lectured, wagging a finger at me playfully.

"Which are?"

"Well, they are there everyday in the background. Like patterns. Or maybe more like a map is more accurate. Each one of us has to read it and follow along. And this is a shared trait of our culture. Every culture," he explained. "It's elementary."

"Do you ever miss being a professor, a teacher?" I asked, hoping I could maneuver him into talking about his past.

"Yes...I do sometimes, of course," he replied, tapping on the piping around him in the Vise. "As a man of science I nevertheless was steeped in mythology. It is the flora and the fauna of living life, as it were," he said, smiling, with his odd colored eyes twinkling.

I tried to imagine him in his classroom. What sort of professor was he? I could remember one of my Physics professors. He was a tall man with a bushy mustache. He spoke with a brusque Brooklyn accent and suffered no fools. His exams were notorious for their difficulty. My other science professors had been, as a whole, absentminded or, at the very least, preoccupied. They would arrive for the lectures and trade their lab environment for the sluggish, stultifying one of the classroom, teaching us novitiates the rudiments of their field. It must have been tedious.

Where did Professor Flowers fit in? Did he erect a barrier of condescension, as so many other professor do? Arrogant? Imperious even?. I couldn't decide. He might have been business like but jocular on occasion. Did science have to be serious? Were his students apprehensive about taking his courses, fearful they would receive failing grades?

"I must confess, Dr. Flowers," I intimated, grinning at him, "that I always hated biology. Reproduction only goes so far as interesting subject matter, I guess."

Rey chuckled and bellowed out, "Conceptus, doc. You will have to experience it before you are a complete human being. I assume you haven't yet. That is the burden of the female species. It is foreordained by the life force, I'm afraid."

I didn't know how to respond. Rey, as usual, had lead me down a path with barricades at the end. He was mocking me, that was obvious, but for what purpose. I was beginning to see the outlines of a pattern with him. As with a chess master, he was several moves ahead.

"Can I ask you about that scar?" I suddenly asked, pointing. I had decided to make an abrupt change in the interview.

He ran his finger up and down it for a moment, then said, "Souvenir of war."

"Can you tell me how you got it? Would that be something you would want to tell me about?" I asked in a low voice, leaning in towards him.

"Is that your therapist's voice?" Rey mimicked, laughing. "Do you really want to know how I got this scar? Would that make your time here worthwhile?"

"Only if you want to tell me about it," I replied, stepping back.

"It's a knife wound," he stated matter-of-factly. "I got careless."

That was all he said. I waited for more but it soon became apparent that there wasn't going to be anymore information about the scar. Disappointed, I let it go. I didn't want to be greedy. We had made a great deal of progress.

"Well, Dr. Flowers, I think that might just do it for today," I announced, closing up my

notebook.

“Doc, are you familiar with Aesop’s tale about the ant and the cricket,” he asked me, smirking. “It’s the allegory about the ant and the cricket. The ant is industrious and takes on life as a continuous struggle; while the cricket accepts life’s temporal nature and is determined to make the best of it. Which are you, Dr. Greene.”

I thought for a moment. This was one of his tests or mind games. I could see he enjoyed this aspect of our interviews.

“Questions, Dr. Flowers, questions,” I replied, snapping off the recorder.

He muttered something and leaned his head back against the chair. His eyes were closed. I could see that he had slipped back into his mental fortification, raising the drawbridge behind him. I told him good-bye and he didn’t reply. At the door, I glanced back at him. He appeared to be sleeping.

8. JASON FINLEY

I had made progress. I was reasonably sure of that. After the interview I returned to my apartment. There were three messages on my answering machine. I stared at the blinking light for a few moments. After my meetings with Flowers I needed time to decompress.

Sitting down at my desk, I stared out the window at the park below. Several young mothers were walking their children in baby strollers. I suppose he had struck a nerve with his comment about motherhood. My career, to this point, had usurped all of my time, and energy. I wasn’t certain if I wanted to be one of those women who neglects everything in their life in order to advance at work.

Two failed relationships lay behind me, one long term and one that lasted only a few months. My mother had already begun a crusade to have me married before I reached my mid-thirties. For all of her flower-power background she still adhered to the dictates of conventionality.

As social lives went, I had a marginal one. There was a coterie of friends I socialized with. They were mostly college classmates that had remained in the area after school. A girl friend from home lived in Georgetown and we often got together for coffee; although she was married and had evidently caught the match-making bug from my mother because she was forever trying to set me up with some eligible bachelor she knew about.

I didn't dislike my life. My work was challenging and rewarding for the most part. I was fortunate to have a colleague who respected me, who I loved like a brother. Even the apartment I lived in was a source of "good vibes," as my parents might have said some thirty years ago. It was homebase and comfortable, with the added bonus of being in an exciting neighborhood, or, at the very least, interesting.

Did I need to go in search of complaints? Being analytical comes with the territory, I guess. After being a therapist for the length of time that I had I found it difficult to turn off the mental acuity when I left the office.

Dr. Burke's book lay on top of my desk with a restaurant menu stuck in it to mark my place. I had left it there from the night before when I couldn't sleep because I was thinking of my next meeting with Rey Flowers. Picking up the book, I could still remember when the book had been published. I laughed when I thought of how embarrassed and humble Dr. Burke had been when we all showed up in class that one day and presented the book, enmasse, for him to sign.

It was his first and only book. He had written countless articles and research tracts but had found the time and desire to write just this one book. *The Nurture Of Nature* I read, running my finger along the book's title. The book had only moderate success but to us students it was

like a bible. I can still remember hearing Dr. Burke on a local radio show talking about the book. His publisher had him criss-crossing the country on a PR tour to promote the work.

It was time for me to read the police report of Rey's crime. I had avoided doing so because I didn't want to have any preconceived ideas aligned in my mind when it came time to analyze our interviews. "Nothing should be construed as prejudicial stimuli," Dr. Burke had always warned us. A good therapist has to objectify first and foremost, I said in a whisper, smiling at the memory of my former professor. Sometimes I could still hear his voice and see him fumbling with his pipe that he never seemed to light. We had in fact teased him about the pipe being only a prop for him to use to appear more professorial. He had laughed and told us that he went for that look but ended up looking more avuncular than anything else.

What was germinating in my mind to that point was nothing remotely conclusive. Of course I knew I was going to write something about our encounters. The situation begged for it. I had half way decided to not include Flowers in my VA reports. His case would certainly skewer the results. He wasn't exactly your normal and typical type of research subject.

I flicked on the answering machine and listened to the messages. One was from my mother telling me that I was supposed to call her about something. I skipped to the next message. It was Pete checking in with me after my latest interview with Rey. I went on to the next message. A gruff voice told me that he didn't think he could help me with the murder investigation and that he was sorry. I ran the message back.

It was from a Detective Munson. He hadn't left his phone number but I knew what precinct so I looked up the number. I was routed through several deadends before I heard the same distinct gravelly voice come on the line.

"My name is Dr. Sarah Greene," I told him, tacking on the title in order to add some weight to my name, "and you left a message on my machine."

“Yeah,” he said in a non-committal, vaguely perturbed tone of voice.

Seeing that he wasn't going to be offering any more information, I continued, “So I was wondering if I could speak to you about the Rey Flowers case.”

He didn't say anything for a moment. I could hear the bustle of office noises in the background. A man was shouting for someone to sit down, and now. The distinct sound of a key board clacking echoed in my ear.

“Who are you working for?” Detective Munson finally asked, then I could hear him tell someone to shut-up.

“I'm with the VA,” I told him, hoping that perhaps he had been a veteran and it might sway him somewhat.

“Yeah,” he said again and then he was silent.

There was more clacking on the key board. Someone was yelling in his office. A stream of profanity drifted over the phone line.

“Look, mope, either shut-up or I'm going to stick you in the cage and gag you. Got it?” Detective Munson declared menacingly. “What do you want from me?” he asked me. “Hello?”

“Oh, I want to get a look at the police report...about Rey Flowers. I understand you worked the case,” I said hurriedly, hoping that he wasn't going to hang up on me. “If you can't do that then maybe you can just have coffee with me and we can--”

“Coffee?” he said, like it might have been the most absurd notion in the world. “I'm busy--like all the time.”

“It wouldn't take long,” I assured him.

“You're a shrink, right?” he growled into the phone. “What do you want to do? The man butchered two people. That's really all you need to know, believe me.”

It wasn't easy but I eventually convinced him to meet with me. He told me he was going to be in the Adams Morgan area working a case that afternoon. We agreed to meet in Kalorama

Park because he had sworn off coffee.

Detective Munson, unlike so many people, physically matched his voice on the phone. He was over six feet tall, heavy set with a small paunch that he appeared to be having trouble accommodating because he continually hooked a thumb under his belt and gave it a quick tug. I guessed that he was in his early fifties.

I had told him I would be sitting on a bench at the south end of the park. He had no trouble finding me. He shook my hand then ran his fingers through his Marine style crew cut. It was becoming obvious that he had the type of personality that was always bordering on being irritated. We sat down on the park bench.

“I only have a few minutes,” he stated, looking around the park, scanning.

“Let me tell you what I’m doing with the VA, so it might shed some light on what’s up,” I told him, trying to sound upbeat.

He didn’t say anything and looked away, staring out at the street. He thinks I’m wasting his time, I thought, trying to decide where to start. All of my practiced lines had now evaporated in my mind.

“Rey Flowers brought it all home with him,” he suddenly said, averting his eyes. “He killed some gooks Stateside. I don’t think there’s much else to the story,” he said in almost a whisper.

I could now easily see Detective Munson sitting in on one of my group sessions I had weekly with the Viet Nam vets. He was displaying all of the signs. I hadn’t expected this.

“You were in Nam.” I offered, posing it more as a statement than a question.

He nodded, then looked out over the park. Some kids were running around chasing each other. One of the boys mother was shouting at them, telling them not to go too far away.

“Marines,” he answered laconically.

I went on to tell him the work that I did and about the research project in general. Not

wanting to be presumptuous, I didn't encourage him to avail himself of the VA program. "Think prickly," professor Burke had often said to me when I couldn't build the courage to proceed in an interview. "You are going to encounter some thorns and you might get pricked but you must persevere," he told me, jabbing his pipe in my direction and smiling.

The horrifying details of the murders spilled out of Detective Munson. He recalled almost all of the facts and spared me nothing. I was sickened as he brought me into the crime scenes. I truly believed I had been hardened by all of the sessions with war veterans, but this was different. Many times the vets had sanitized the content for my benefit.

"Human destruction," Detective Munson said, running his fingers through his short cropped hair, "that's what the nut said to me when I slapped the cuffs on him."

"There was no remorse," I exclaimed, struggling with the revelation that I had just heard.

"None," he replied, tugging at his belt again.

"Oh, Detective Munson," someone called out from the street in a sing-song voice, "are you finished playing in the park now? I'd like to get some work done."

"That's my partner," he said sourly. "He's a little shit--excuse my language."

That is when I met him. These things happen this way at times. Some might call it happenstance.

"Who have we here?" he called out, walking up to us on the bench. "Munson, you dog, you didn't tell me you were having a thing. I sure hope Milly doesn't ever find out. No wonder you were being so secretive."

"This jackass is my partner, Detective Finley," Detective Munson said reluctantly, waving his arm in his partner's direction.

Detective Finley was in his thirties, just under six feet, and, you could say, proportioned nicely. He also had a nice smile. A Washington Redskins cap was propped up on his head, tilted back. It was an incongruous look that clashed with his stylish suit.

“Dr. Greene,” Detective Finley said, grinning at his partner, “is that right?” He cocked an eye brow in Detective Munson’s direction, then said, “Is this a professional visit? No oars in the water kind of thing?”

“No, it’s about a case he worked years ago,” I explained, trying not to laugh at Detective Munson’s expense. “I’m doing some research on it...the case.”

“It’s before your time, Finley,” Detective Munson barked. “You were going through potty training when it happened, I think.”

“You know, it really is time for the Department to have mandatory retirement,” Detective Finley quipped. “I mean this man has worked cases before FDR was President.”

“Do you see me laughing?” Detective Munson shot back, tugging at his belt harder.

The antagonism between them, so I believed, was jovial for the most part. The generational difference must have created friction on occasion. They did have to work as a team.

“Look, here’s my card,” I said, hoping to end the professional squabbling. “If you think you can help me with this project then call me. I’d appreciate it.”

Detective Finley took the card from my hand and scrutinized it for a minute. Detective Munson snorted and stood up. He straightened his coat and peered around the park again.

“Dr. Sarah Greene,” Detective Finley read aloud, smiling at me. “Here, take my card,” he said, digging a card out of his coat pocket.

“Maybe I could help you two with your problem,” I joked, which is something I seldom did with anyone outside the fraternity of therapists. It had been a cardinal rule of Dr. Burke’s that a therapist never denigrate the profession for public consumption.

“He’s my problem, the little--” Detective Munson started to say before Detective Finley interrupted.

“We had better get going. It’s time for his morning Gingkolatta,” he said, snickering. “If he doesn’t have it then he won’t remember his way home from work and his wife’ll be calling

wondering where he got to. Happens all the time,” he said to me, holding up his hand as if to shield his words from his partner.

A few days later Detective Finley called me. He was coy. He offered his help with my research project. He wanted a date.

It had been perhaps three months since my last date. That had been a disaster. At the time I had sworn off dates per se. I had spent three excruciating hours at a hockey game, freezing. My ears rung for a good hour after the game. Then my date took me to a, and you are not going to believe this, book reading. Good juxtaposition.

Actually it was a coffee bar where people were allowed, even encouraged to spout out their work. A black woman, still in her teens, read maybe fifty pages about her experiences with a white foster family. The family’s male progeny had attempted to have sex with her, several times. The mother had persuaded her to dye her hair blond. It was an anti-race statement. After those revelations I tuned out and got buzzed on some Madagascar/nutmeg blend.

It was time to try again. My internal date clock told me that. No matter how much I immersed myself in my work, I always needed an outlet at sometime or other.

I opened my door and it began. Jason Finley said hello and handed me a flower, one solitary daisy. He smiled. I kind of laughed.

He was from New York as well. He had lived in a small town on Long Island. After college he had landed a job in DC. It had become his home.

Our first date had been a safe one, a day time one. We went to the zoo. Then he borrowed his friend’s bike for me to use and we biked down the Rock Creek Path. There was no pressure. We had fun.

“Oh boy, Sarah, an Irishman,” Pete had said in a horrible Irish accent when he found out about my changing social life. “Does he have the Irish good looks, lassy?”

“My personal life is none of your business,” I had told him, pretending to be offended.

“Since when?” Pete bantered back, shooting me a look of indignation.

My “fun quotient”, as Pete liked to call it, had risen. I was enjoying Jason’s company. Yet I hadn’t stop working. Inadvertently, or so I liked to think, Jason had become my pipeline to his partner. Although they squabbled a great deal of the time, and there was obviously generational differences when it came time to approach their type of work, they did talk.

Detective Munson had been the very first cop on the case. He had been the one to formally arrest Flowers; and he had been the first one to see the “lair,” as he referred to it as. “He told me it was the weirdest case he had ever been involved with,” Jason had told me, raising his eye brows for emphasis. “And this guy has seen it all,” he added, grinning.

I went back to Flowers’ writings in search of more clues. Jason had taken to examining my board when he came over, commenting on the photos of Rey’s relatives and friends, apparent signs of a normal existence. He had read bits and pieces of the manifesto too.

“Now why couldn’t I talk to my parish priest like that,” he exclaimed one day, laughing.

We were sitting in my living room lazily passing away a rainy Saturday afternoon. He had stayed over the night before, arriving at my door late after his shift was over. My mother had been on the phone when he knocked and heard snippets of our conversation when I answered the door. “Being a good daughter is all about communication,” she had chided me, wanting to know who was at the door. Although I had been seeing Jason for almost a month, I still hadn’t made the decision to inform my mother. Perhaps I was superstitious and didn’t want to jinx the budding relationship, or, maybe, I just didn’t want to endure her endless need of progress reports.

“Which part are you talking about?” I asked him from my desk, where I was poring over my weekly report to my two watchdogs from the Pentagon and the Hill.

“Listen,” he said, holding up his hand, ‘Life beget life, Father, I told the priest. It is one of the attributes of a living organism. How does it feel to be minus that in your life? You are not

unlike a gelding. But then, of course, life by its very nature is a sequence of derivation. Someone had to have had you, right? To which the priest promptly told me that I was a deviant.’ Damn, this guy is good.”

“He is a deviant,” I said over my shoulder, clicking on the spell check.

“But you like him,” he said, walking over to me and glancing at the monitor.

I felt his hands on my shoulders as he bussed my cheek. The spell check had stopped where I made a typo. I deleted it and clicked on Print. My printer whirled into action.

“I don’t like him-like him,” I corrected, swiveling around in my desk chair. “He’s my personal project, of sorts.”

“And that means exactly what?” Jason wanted to know.

“It means that he is intriguing to me. Don’t you have cases that are like that for you? Doesn’t something come along that gets your juices going?” I asked him, turning back to my computer.

“You know what gets my juices going?” he announced, snuggling up to me.

“On a professional basis, Detective Hormone,” I chided, laughing.

“Sure. Just last week we had a case about this guy who killed his therapist because she liked him too much,” he stated in a serious tone of voice. “Very messy...but intriguing.”

“You are so very funny, Detective Funly,” I shot back, brushing his hands away.

“Seriously though, Sarah,” he said, turning me around in the chair. “I don’t need to worry about you around this nutjob, do I? He is locked up--right?”

I eyed him for a moment then smiled and said, “You don’t have to worry about me. The man is always caged when I see him. He is the most feared man at Beekers, believe me.”

“Good,” he stated, satisfied. “What are we going to do today? How about going to a movie?”

“Okay. I think they are showing a Silence of the Lambs retrospective in Georgetown,” I

quipped, giggling.

“So not funny, Doctor,” he said, wagging his finger at me.

9. CASE FILE

Finally I was prepared. I had spoken with people on the periphery of the case. It had gotten me a substantial amount of background. Of course I knew he had killed two men. Brutally murdered, as the journalist from the Post had written. Flowers’ relative and girl friend had taken me back to the time of the crime. I had a feel for some aspects of the case. I felt I had touched on almost everything that I could.

Now I was going to read the specifics. Jason had delivered the coroner’s notes, as well as the crime scene particulars. I would be reading the cold, precise words of professionals doing their jobs. Just another facet, I told myself. It was all being pieced together.

The plan was to get the overview first. Then I would have to coax the perpetrator’s version out of him. I wasn’t hopeful about that prospect. “Dredging up personal demons might not be advisable,” Pete had warned me. We speculated that Rey could very well go into psychotic mode and no one knew what he might be capable of.

“Are you sure you want to read this alone?” Jason had said to me. “I can hang around if you want.”

I told him no, that it wouldn’t be necessary. He shrugged his shoulders and left reluctantly. Then I settled down on my couch, put on a Paula Cole CD, and opened the file.

For obvious legal reasons, I won’t replicate the file here. I will paraphrase, if possible. Brevity would probably serve the reader better.

The first victim was a Viet Nameese man named Vu. He was approximately Rey's age. The victim had been found with his hands bound behind his back on the grounds of the college. He had been beheaded. The coroner noted that there was a clean incision. Swift strangulation was the probable cause of death. No contusions. The head was missing.

"Very tidy," the coroner had told me, after I read the file and tracked him down. He was retired and lived on a farm in Virginia. "The wounds didn't seem to be of a violent nature, if that makes any sense. What I mean is they were done in a way to end life quickly and efficiently. No malice intended," he said, chuckling. "Sorry, I don't mean to be morbidly funny or anything. After a career as a ME you get to be blasé about most everything."

"And the head?" I asked him. "What can you tell me about that?"

"Now that was gruesome, even for me," he replied, rubbing his chin, thinking back. "The vic was beheaded, again very efficiently, with a large knife, and the head was removed to another location. Yeah, that's right. It was located--skull form--at the perps residence."

The file had been disturbing enough. "Calling the coroner of record was overkill, no pun intended," Jason told me later on, scolding me for being too thorough. The cold, precision of a lifeless file didn't register with me. It was all so much forensic-speak, indifferent and detached. I wanted to bore in on the human element, the motivational input.

The second victim was also a Viet Nameese man, named Tran. The two victims were cousins, establishing the obvious link. His body had been found at Arlington National Cemetery, also beheaded. This time around the killing had been less surgical in nature, with more trauma involved.

"Oh yes, the second victim had been through the wringer for sure," the coroner told me, chuckling softly. "I don't mean to be callous, Doctor Greene, but in the scheme of things about this case it did take on...well, different ramifications. You could see there had been quite a struggle between the vic and the perp. A real battle."

“And this head was recovered as well?” I asked hesitantly.

“Oh yes, same MO,” he answered, clucking his tongue. “Byzantine, that’s what I called it. I think one of the reporters ran with that, if I’m not mistaken.”

Two murders, two beheadings, I thought, as I finished up the file. Bestial. Dr. Helms had mentioned Rey’s proclamation of him being a beast. The nature of the crime certainly fit under an animalistic profile. The sheer brutality of it disturbed you.

“Well, how you doing?” Jason greeted me with, after I let him in my apartment.

“I’m still shaking,” I told him, choosing to be honest about it and not adopt some air of psychological professionalism.

“Spooky stuff,” he intoned, wavering his voice for affect.

“What does your partner say about discovering the heads?” I had to ask.

“He doesn’t say too much but he did tell me that they were...how shall I say, prepared. Trophies, that’s what he called them,” Jason told me.

“Who said that, Rey or your partner?”

“Flowers, the sicko,” he replied, frowning at me for even asking.

“Really,” I muttered.

“There were skulls for god’s sake,” he declared, laughing.

“How did they get to be...don’t tell me,” I exclaimed, feeling nauseated.

“He had them propped up on his desk. They make good paper weights,” Jason cried out, snickering. “You can probably buy one on one of the auction sites on the net.”

“I don’t appreciate your sense of humor right about now, Jason,” I chided him. “Two men died, you know.”

“I apologize,” he said. “Really, I do.”

“I don’t think I can interview him again. I don’t,” I told him, shaking my head no. “What am I going to say to him? Can I really get him to talk about it--the crime? What is to be gained

by it?”

“Might help in the psychology arena,” Jason offered, reaching out to hold me.

“Oh sure, maybe I can find an undiscovered syndrome and they can name it after me. Greenism, where the patient collects skulls as mementos and desk ornaments. That would be a wonderful legacy for me,” I said, trying to laugh.

“Do you think you will be on any talk shows? I liked to tape it if you are,” Jason joked. “I could show it to my relatives.”

“Jerry Springer wouldn’t even have me on,” I said, smacking him playfully.

The details had now all taken shape. I had the outline. It was time for me to probe. I was going to have to establish connections between Flowers, the victims, and the outcome.

I fully expected to meet resistance. Flowers had done a heinous act. There had been “no priors,” as Jason said, so where was the dividing point? The police had never established a motive beyond Rey’s manic confession and insistence of guilt. He had been found with the skulls, and, as evidence went, that was a case solver.

“People snap,” Jason had told me when I wonder aloud about the motive.

Had he? Did Dr. Rey Flowers suddenly one day decide that he wanted to kill some more Viet Nameese? Was the Viet Nam war extended? There had been plenty of documented evidence suggesting regression into wartime mode. I had interviewed a vet from the Korean War who jumped from his bed and flopped to the floor every time he heard the booming sound of the garbage trucks in the alley behind his house. His wife had gotten so accustomed to it she seldom woke up any longer.

I had read a case about a man who returned home from World War I and shot out the windows of a street car because he mistook it for a German tank. A few people had been injured by flying glass. The man had been hospitalized for a year and then released. Apparently there had been no more incidents with street cars transforming into phantom tanks.

For the most part these particular cases had been instantaneous in nature, happening as a reflexive action. With Flowers, it had been apparently premeditated. An entire thought process had gone into it. However, it was nevertheless joined to war and its extension into the soldier's psyche long after any armistice.

10. AN INTERPRETATION

Two Viet Nameese men had died horrible deaths. Facts. I had read the crime reports. Could Pete had been correct? Did Rey Flowers simply snap, bringing all of his experiences in Viet Nam to the forefront?

The two Viet Nameese immigrants had been working as janitors at the college. Was their an element of their demeanor that had triggered something in Rey's mind? Why were they killed at different times? Could Flowers have had two distinct and separate episodes of temporary insanity? It was doubtful.

I wasn't certain I could prevail at this juncture in my research. Dr. Flowers would need to be manipulated into revealing the linchpin of his criminal actions. Beheadings. Skulls stripped of their flesh, meticulously prepared for display, frightened and sickened me. "Exponential fear," Flowers had written in his manifesto, going on into detail about man's need to feed on adrenaline induced competitions.

There usually comes a time in therapy when the therapist has to decide whether or not to push some buttons. It's a judgment call. There are no real, concrete guidelines to follow. "Instinct has to be trusted at some point," Dr. Burke was fond of saying. "Discovery of the mind

is a young science,” he would always add, smiling almost impishly.

I sat in my car in the Beekers parking lot. It had rained earlier in the morning, leaving the trees wet. The yard had turned into a muddy swamp. Two patients were slogging around barefoot, laughing, bending over to scoop up mud to throw at one another. An orderly yelled at them to stop and get back inside. They ignored his commands and continued playing.

“Insurmountable reluctance,” I mumbled, gripping the steering wheel, remembering what Pete had called pre-interview jitters. Part of me wanted to march into room 12 and lay it all out on the table, so to speak. I wanted to tell Flowers about my revulsion at what he had done, and the nauseating feeling welling up inside me that I couldn’t control. The other part of me wanted to beg him to tell me why he did it. How could you slaughter two innocent people? Why would you do that? What made you do that?

I took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. It was a quarter to nine. Fifteen minutes. It was almost time for me to be professionally restrained, removing my personal identity and neatly folding it and placing it to the side. “Sometimes you must have the aplomb of a jewel thief,” Dr. Burke had instructed, chewing on his pipe. “In many ways you are absconding with the patient’s engraved truth.” I grinned at the thought, remembering just how my professor had phrased it.

Slowly I made my way to the interview. Dr. Helms was just coming out of the building when I was walking up the sidewalk. She stopped me and demanded the agreed on report that was due. I made an excuse and kept on walking.

“Dr. Greene, don’t think I’m going to permit you to shirk your duties,” she called out to me. “When I had my command I never let anything slip past.”

“Last time I checked we weren’t in the Army,” I shot back before I could catch myself.

“Being insolent is not one of your strongest attributes,” Dr. Helms snapped.

I stopped and turned around to face her, then said, “I’ve been kind of busy lately but you’ll have your report tomorrow.”

“I will expect it on my desk by the end of the day,” she ordered, eyeing me coldly.

For an instant I debated on whether or not I should make a comment about her treatment of Flowers then thought better of it and said, “No problem, Dr. Helms.”

A nurse rushed out the door, calling out to Dr. Helms. She handed her a folder and they exchanged a few comments. I went on inside, hoping my anger would subside by the time I got to room 12. “Watch that blood pressure,” a passing orderly exclaimed, laughing, nodding in the direction of the door to room 12. I muttered something and then stopped to look in the window.

For a change, Rey was sitting in the Vise with his eyes open. He seemed to be staring at the far wall. I immediately saw that since our last meeting he had neglected to shave. With his shaved head and sprouting beard, he looked more menacing than ever.

“And so fungible elements go lockstep/to a whispered marching order./Precept./Fodder./Concept./Border,” he announced in an exaggerated baritone.

“What is that supposed to mean exactly?” I asked irritably, setting up my tape recorder.

“It’s twofold,” he said, fixing me with his distinctive green eyes, the eyes that I was now sure harbored certain evil. “Symbiosis and parasitism, yeah, now there’s an axis of biodiversity.” He then laughed, flashing me a smile.

“I’m afraid I don’t get the joke,” I told him, opening my notebook, determined to guide the interview down the path I wanted to take.

“You don’t have to get it,” he chided, shaking his head. “You do have to respect it though.”

I looked at him for a moment. He was grinning at me. Flowers had already managed to alter the interview, somehow turning it inside out. I didn’t know what to say or what direction I should take.

“Why do you always treat me like Alice in Wonderland?” I finally asked, stepping closer to the Vise. “Is that your own personal mechanism you’ve devised after all of these years of

being institutionalized?”

“Is the fair doctor suffering from raging PMS today?” he answered, staring at me.

“Weak, Dr. Flowers,” I shot back, frowning at him. “I expect much better from you.”

“Even bacteria gets respect, doc,” he said suddenly, chuckling. “I mean it creates havoc in the body, produces a flare-up that soon becomes an infection. Causes pain. Discomfort. Ah yes, life is so mysterious at whatever level.”

“Obfuscation, Rey, is...well, annoying,” I informed him.

He looked at me for a moment, then stroked his forming beard and said, “Do you believe in God, Dr. Greene? Be honest.”

“Yes, of course,” I replied without hesitation.

“I’d have to agree, all and all,” he stated almost excitedly. “If man presumes a need for a god then there must be one. It’s perfectly logical.”

I had a feeling he was doing a bad imitation of Spock from Star Trek but I couldn’t be certain. He sat there grinning at me. As usual, he had succeeded in throwing me off from the very beginning. At times it was like deciphering Middle-English.

“Can you accept the providence of morals, as applied by religion?” I asked, hoping to delve into any sort of morality framework that Flowers might subscribe to.

“In the beginning, man created God, isn’t that how Genesis begins?” he quipped, chuckling. “Don’t get me started on Christian morality,” he sneered almost angrily, changing his tone instantly, “with their moronic Trinity, it all misses a vital element, an integral part. Oh yeah, a thousand years of philosophy, with incredibly pedantic asshole philosophers, and they all missed it--by a mile.”

“What does that have to do with your life?” I asked, knowing quite well that my timely interrogatives irritated him, at times even infuriated him, as they might be trespassing on his thoughts.

“Doc...you were an overachiever--right?” he wanted to know, grinning. “You know what I mean. All your life you were out there trying to please somebody and you did that by trying your best.”

I remained quiet, casting my eyes down at my notes. He snorted then laughed. Slowly I looked up and held his eyes for an instant, then looked away.

“Go on,” I encouraged, motioning with my hand.

“Phototropism is...is in our nature. As in microbiology, we are organisms that seek light, are even drawn to it. Hence religions grasp on mankind. They offer a light source,” he stated. “Ah yes, molecular biology is so underused. So much can be learned from it,” he declared, stroking his stubbly mustache. “Take, as an example, e-coli. It is nothing but a simple bacteria. It lives in us unobtrusively for most of the time but then unexpectedly it can cause death. Contradictions are inherent in living life, large and small.”

He was lecturing now, using his teacher’s voice, enunciating every word. I could easily picture him standing at a blackboard, scribbling notes in chalk, leading his students into unknown and uncharted areas of biology. “Madness is relative to the causation,” a British psychiatrist had said at a conference I attended in London one summer. He had gone on to posit a few, more or less, unstable theories about treatment of disorders stubborn to current methods of therapy. I hadn’t taken him seriously, believing him to be on the fringe of accepted psychological tenets.

“Did you suffer from contradictions?” I wanted to know, as I nervously tapped my pen on my notebook. “How did it affect you?”

Flowers looked at me then continued on, completely ignoring my question. “Take Einstein, for instance. He gave us that wonderful, mind-blowing relativity business, then coupled it with the speed of light thing. His brain was as big as a pumpkin,” he chortled, giggling. “Yet the man couldn’t quite grasp an alternative concept for god. Stymied. Hey Albert, what do you think is out there? You mean even you don’t know! Now that’s funny stuff,” he announced

gleefully.

It came as a decision I made instinctively. No ratiocination. I was making my stand.

“Dr. Flowers, what part did your god play in your murders?” I said calmly, almost matter-of-factly.

Flowers stopped smiling. I could see his jaw clinch and he had gripped the sides of the plastic chair tightly. His right foot was tapping steadily on the platform of the Vise. As a reflex, I took a step backward.

Finally he said, “Dr. Greene, do you understand the nature of probabilities...that is the true implications of it?”

“I took statistics in college,” I replied flippantly, trying to smile.

He returned my smile and said, “Out of this vast world of ours walks the man who killed my cousin. Right fucking here. Within reach. Very eerie stuff.”

“That’s more than strange,” I agreed, too startled to write.

“Yes. Divine perhaps. My god wanted me to exact my revenge,” he declared solemnly.

“You don’t believe that,” I told him, using the stern voice I used when I wanted to convey to a patient my disapproval of their actions.

“Don’t I?” he exclaimed, sneering at me.

The dam had been broken. I just hoped I wouldn’t drown in the coming flood. For the first time Rey Flowers abandoned his devious patois and simply retold his story. I have chosen to include parts of the transcripts taken from the tapes. They accurately portray the incidents preceding the crime and afterwards.

Transcript:

You must understand the power of aggregated probability. Smale’s differential equation spoke to me. It could be applied easily to predators and their prey. A man appeared out of the vast world population. Epiphanies need not all be about religiosity. I would avenge my loss.

It all started with Vu. He worked as a janitor at the college. Some nights I would be working late in my lab and he would come in to clean up. At first, I didn't speak to him. I didn't even know whether or not he was Viet Nameese. He would come in and sweep the floors and empty the garbage cans.

I will say here that I didn't have a gook-complex like some of the grunts in Nam did. Not really. I had successfully left that part of my life in the past. Although, I will admit to refusing to see those inane Hollywood movies about the war. Ignorance. Nothing but.

I suppose I have to start before I went over to Nam. Indulge me, doc, I realize you've done your homework here. Pardon me if I go over old material.

Blame it on Booker, Booker Shelby, my cousin. We were only a few months apart in age. We were more like brothers.

We had grown up together, sharing everything. Baseball. Football. Girls. It had been an idyllic lifestyle in the backwaters of Virginia, very, very Americana. The inevitable disintegration of the American family had yet to reach our small town. We had uncles and aunts, granddads and grandmothers. Hell, we even had watermelon eating contests on the 4th of July. You would have thought Norman Rockwell lived next door.

I would have to say our last year of High School was the pivotal point. Booker had mentioned on several occasions about going into the Service. I hadn't given it much thought. That previous Spring I had taken my SAT's and done well. I had already been accepted at several colleges. My parents readily assumed I would be going off to college in the Fall. I did as well.

As I remember it, Booker and me were down at the river. We had been swimming, using a rope tied to an overhanging branch of a tree to swing out over the water and then drop into the river. Summer had come early that year. It was already hot. We had a few weeks of school left.

Booker was sitting on the river bank, sneaking a cigarette. Our parents disapproved of

course, as did the myriad of coaches we had to listen to. The High School baseball team was in the Regionals again that year. I played second base and Booker played center field. In a few days we were supposed to go to Richmond to play in the first round of the Regionals.

In between drags on his cigarette he told me he was going to check into enlisting when we were in Richmond. I scoffed at that, calling him crazy. "I ain't going to no college like you," he told me, tossing his cigarette into the river. "Shit, they're just going to draft me anyway," he said, disgusted. I tried to convince him that he could go to the community college if he wanted to but he wouldn't listen. I let the subject drop.

Well, Booker was true to his word. When we were playing in Richmond he slipped away to the recruiter's office between games and practices. No one knew about it. He told me on the team bus on the way home after the tournament.

"Are you crazy?" I asked him, lowering my voice so no one else could hear me. "What are your parents going to say?" He only shrugged and looked out the window. After the surprise wore off, I was angry at him.

Booker was scheduled to take a physical and the several battery of tests you have to take to get in the Service. He would have to return to Richmond after school was over. He had chosen the Army without putting any thought into it. He didn't like ships. He knew he wouldn't be flying any planes. It seemed like the natural choice.

(I must add here that Rey Flowers demeanor had radically changed as he revealed his story. He was calm, composed even. It was as if he were conducting a tutorial of sorts. I actually pulled up a chair and slid it close to the Vise to listen, whereas before I had always remained standing during our interviews. It might have been the first time in many years that Flowers had actually spoken in a normal, shall we say, flow of diction. I was entranced.)

Well, I had to make a decision. I could have gone off to college and bid my cousin farewell, as it were. He would be going off to war and I would be going off to get an education.

The two of us hadn't been separated ever. We were born in the very same hospital. He had lived down the street from me since he was all of six months old.

I doubted that I could leave him to go overseas without me. At first, I denied this in my mind. I didn't want to go into the Army. College sounded fine to me. I had spoken with the baseball coach at UVA already. I had visited the campus even. I had partial scholarships lined up.

Booker had neglected to tell his parents anything. He sprung it on them at the last minute, practically before he was jumping in the car to drive to Richmond. Now his father was okay with it, I believe. He probably would have been happier if his son stayed around town and became a cop but he saw the Service as a stepping stone for a young man. His mother was adamantly against it. Guys were dying in Viet Nam every night, right on TV. "I don't want to be one of those mothers you see holding one of those folded up flags at a funeral," she wailed over and over again. "And for what?"

National sentiment being what it was at the time, my parents were aghast at the prospect of one of their relatives being included as a statistic. The war effort might indeed have to go on but does one of my own have to be included? My mother, in particular, scolded Booker for being a fool. She hugged him, got all teary eyed, and said, "Booker, come here and give your aunt some sugar."

The night before Booker was going to be going to Richmond I made my decision. I can remember lying in bed listening to the crickets outside. There was a wind blowing and the streetlight was casting shadows on my bedroom wall from the oak tree in our front yard. I just didn't think I could let him go by himself. It's as simple as that really. I know it must sound stupid.

So. The next morning I sneaked over to his house and got in the car with him. We drove to Richmond together. I enlisted with him. We took the physical and the tests. It didn't take

long. In a few short weeks we were heading to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for boot camp.

Apoplectic was what my parents were when they heard what I had done. My mother cried a great deal and my dad screamed at me. They told me I was throwing away my life, that I had a great future ahead of me. I didn't say much. My brother and sister were disappointed in me as well. My sister in particular, she thought I was going to die. I can remember her bursting into tears and then running into her bedroom and slamming the door.

It was a little different with my brother. We had never been close or anything. I suppose on some levels he had always resented what Booker and I had together. He never figured in the equation; which was odd I guess, being closer to your cousin than your own brother. You'd know more about that doc than me.

Okay, we breezed through Basic and went on to Infantry school and then decided to throw the dice and did Ranger training. We were young studs. Athletes. The physical pounding we were taking didn't phase us. It did of course, but we seemed to thrive on it somehow. We were being trained to be killers.

The best part was that Booker and me were together. I had made Sergeant and he was a Corporal. We knew that after the specialized training the next stop was Southeast Asia.

We only went home twice through all of our training. That little, sleepy town in the Old Dominion was getting more and more irrelevant to us. The visits, for the most part, were a strain on Booker and me. Our parents doted on us naturally. They laughed at our buzz cuts and marveled at our uniforms. We were like a curiosity or something.

The both of us had changed though. Even then. And we hadn't even seen combat as of yet.

Eventually our orders were cut and off we went, arriving in the middle of a monsoon rain. God-damn it was hot. That's the thing I'll always remember. Sticky. Viscid, really. And we thought it was hot at Fort Benning, Georgia. We were the nubes on the block, with our class-

A's looking nice and new, like we were going to a parade. God we didn't know what we were in for.

Nam was about deferring, doc. Yeah, preventing your mind from grasping the ramifications, that was the trick. The mind is its own place, and in itself / can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven. Milton knew of what he wrote, I guess you could say.

Booker was less equipped to ward off the demons. That became painfully obvious after only a few patrols. He was a good kid. For the most part he was still just a country boy from a small town in the sticks. And now he was a part of the Green Machine, one piece of the machinery.

Oddly, it seemed like all of our specific training became obsolete in no time at all. Organized killing was mutating, not unlike a virulent virus. Methods changed. Booker killed his first gook our second week In Country. He was no more than a kid, probably about sixteen. There was a bandanna around his head with three Winston cigarettes stuck away in it. On the stock of his AK-47 he had carved a few Viet Nameese characters. I asked one of the ARVN scouts what it meant and he just shrugged and kicked the dead man's leg disdainfully.

Later on, when we had returned to the LZ, I watched Booker. I wanted to know how he was reacting. He retold the story to another grunt in our platoon, telling him that he had placed the round right into the back of the boy's head. "Took his face right off," Booker had said, grinning. "Damn, you should have seen it."

A selective act of mayhem, I thought at the time, remembering what a philosopher soldier had once written about combat. String together the little selective acts of mayhem and you have a war. Booker had his first taste of destruction.

Mine would come later. We were on patrol. The slick had dropped us in. "There's a gook ville about two clicks up the way," a Latino Private had told me, breathing hard from running. He was from San Diego. He kept a picture card of some Saint taped to his helmet.

“The place is mucho caliente, Sarge,” he had said, grinning at me.

“I ain’t ending up on no Zulu report. Fuck that noise,” one of the other grunts announced, clicking his clip out of his M-16, checking the rounds then sliding it back in.

War had been easy back in training, I thought. Here, there’s no discipline. Motivation has to be peeking for success, I told myself, remembering what some war manual full of classroom theories had said.

At this stage of the war there was no direction and certainly no motivation. “You can kill beaucoup slopes but it’s not going to change a god-damn thing,” my CO had said just that morning, tossing his cigar on the ground and stomping on it. Purpose. There has to be a purpose. It is the one distinct force.

So off we went in search of someone to kill. We took a position on a small hill overlooking the village. There didn’t seem to be much activity going on. They always seemed to know when we were coming.

“Let’s just hose it down,” Booker had suggested, which meant in the grunt vernacular to lay down some machine gun fire.

I took my thumper and placed a M-79 grenade right in the nearest hooch. Besides some chickens and a pig, I blew away an old man. He died clutching his hoe. A rice farmer. A man of the earth. I sent him right back into the ground.

We brought in some smoke and leveled the whole area. Be thorough. No one shall inhabit this land for a thousand years type of thing. Booker, and me, were off to a good start. Real warriors.

The war had been over for some time; we just didn’t know it. Technological superiority had been equalized by sheer human willpower. We were soon going through the motions, following orders that were fundamentally idiotic.

In war, you soon discover that you have lost your soul. I had never been one to put much

stock into religious interpretations of the human element, but you do begin to start a regimen of self-evaluation. Often times it sneaks up on you and before you realize it you are examining a lot of things that you may never have even thought existed. Ethics and morality slip inexorably into a different dimension. Even elemental cruelty assumes another shape.

The rest of us slipped into the void, if you will. We participated fully, humping the boonies in search of destruction; and afterwards we took our downtime to the limit as well. I think Marcus Aurelius put it best: A release of slime by rubbing a woman's innards. Loosely translated of course, so I would imagine. The whoring and drugs took us away from it temporarily. Then we would be back, back to it all over again.

We were all waiting for that Freedom Bird to take us back to the World, but most of us hadn't a clue what to expect once they unplugged us from the madness. Little did we know that DEROS, the date we were eligible to return home, was like being sentenced, sent to our confused destiny--as someone once wrote.

So there we were, waiting to kill or be killed. We saw numerous compatriots either being put in body bags or getting wounded. Some rotated back home, physically unscathed at least. We continued on inflicting damage and death. At times I can still hear the choppers in my sleep, the steady staccato thwapping of the rotors until it blends in with the beating of my heart. For a long time after I got back I could be walking somewhere and suddenly smell the acrid scent of burning flesh in the air.

(At this juncture Flowers slumped in his seat and pinched the bridge of his nose. He was silent for a few minutes. I didn't want to intrude on his thought process so I remained quiet. Since I had pulled the chair up close to the Vise, I could easily see his reactions. At the time I wasn't sure if he was going to continue. After a few minutes he looked up and gave me a weak smile then continued on.)

We were short, which meant, if you don't know, that we didn't have long to go before

going home. Booker had taken to marking the days on the inside of his helmet with little slashes from an ink pen. Superstition suddenly takes on new meaning to a grunt at this juncture. No one wants anything to disrupt the karma, if you will. Bad vibes might screw things up. Fate ruled our personalized universe.

Booker began to do a ritual every morning without fail. He would shave using the same amount of strokes each time. Don't ask me what it meant or how it even got started. Most days he was left with streaks of growth here and there because he had used up all of his strokes for that shave. Then he added another superstition. He would only use this one P-38. That's an Army issue can opener. He kept it attached to his boot. And then there was the T-shirt. He didn't wash it for however many days it was. We all threatened to burn it because it smelled so bad.

We were all grasping for an edge, anything that might prevent our untimely deaths. The more battle hardened you become the less you believe you are invincible. It's an inverse ratio type of thing. Somewhere in your brain there's a voice telling you that everything is finite. It might be that next patrol. An 82 motor round might blow your shit away that next night. You might step on a mine tomorrow morning and lose a leg. You could jump out of a slick and take one in the heart right on the LZ. Hell, I saw a grunt drop to the floor gagging on poisoned nuoc nam fish sauce he was eating in a Saigon restaurant. He died an agonizing death two days later. Charlie was going to get you sooner or later.

You know how Freud said civilization can't exist without a degree of applied repression, well, I used up my quota. I excelled at repressing. Morals--Reduced. Ethics--rearranged. Dying--hope not. My mind was storing up a whole lot of heavy baggage.

Anyway, we were holed up at this Firebase Constance. The war was winding down, so they said. Rumors were making the rounds about all of us pulling up stakes and waving goodbye to Nam. Our patrols had tapered off considerably.

The mood was good. We played hoops on a makeshift court during the day, gambled on some erratic games of poker, and passed the time staying out of the CO's way. Only a few choppers game and went, dropping off some new personnel and supplies. We all hoped it was over.

Nighttime was the crucial period of the day. Apparitions appeared without warning. "The VC dwell in the nether regions of the night," one of my men used to say, changing his voice to sound like Vincent Price. They did. It scared the shit out of all of us. They would just appear sometimes, then there was hell to pay.

It had been quiet for almost a week around the Firebase. We knew we were in a more or less vulnerable position, but we always were. Just three weeks before there had been a night long mortar barrage. Four grunts had been killed and another half dozen had been wounded. The next morning a medevac had whisked them away. Our nerves had been jangled pretty good.

Normally we would have saddled up and mounted a patrol for some pay back, but this time we exercised restraint, as orders from Command so aptly put it. Turning the other cheek had never been one of our options before. My men chafed under the decision, wanting revenge.

Soon we settled into a routine again though. Kind of like a stupor really. Languorous. For the most part we were high-strung and needed specific exercise to stay fit, if you know what I mean.

There was the usual grumbling about the guard duty, manning the LP's and that kind of stuff. I was used to it. Complaining came naturally to all of us.

The night it happened was a real dark night, practically no stars. We had gotten complacent. It had been so quiet for awhile that no one expected much to happen. Where were the dividends in striking at us? The gooks had waited a thousand years for their homeland, what was a few more months or even years?

I was pulling duty in the CP that night. Booker had done some work in the fire direction

center that day and was in his hooch when the attack began. Our hooch was no more than twenty yards away from the CP. It was around two in the morning when I heard the first mortar round land. After you had been in Nam as long as I had you immediately recognized the sound of a NVA mortar round.

The detonation sent me reeling backwards and I landed flat on my back. If you haven't been in battle then the only way I can describe it is: organized confusion. Soldiers know what they have to do. Training does account for something.

I was stunned and lay there for a moment. There were a series of explosions, a barrage. Then I heard another explosion nearby and I could tell it wasn't from a mortar round. Sappers had infiltrated the perimeter and were systematically planting satchel charges. My ears were ringing but I could hear one of the officers screaming something into the radio. The lights had flickered but remarkably remained on. A swirl of dust settled in the bunker.

Then I struggled to my feet and grabbed my rifle. I peered out the bunker and scanned the area. Men were running everywhere. There was another explosion and I saw my hooch obliterated.

There was a vicious firefight going on within the camp. I got a bead on a sapper trying to lay a satchel charge next to the fuel storage area. A quick burst took him out. The Company CO called in a Huey from the 1st Cav. and they quelled most of the attack. Sporadic gunfire went on for the rest of the night.

Harsh daylight revealed the worst. They had killed over a dozen men and wounded maybe another two dozen. "We need a dust off now!" the officer in the bunker was yelling on the radio. Medevacs came and went, as we tried to pick up the pieces.

(Flowers had now begun to relate this to me in a bland, almost detached tone of voice, something I had witnessed on several occasions with other vets. His demeanor did change when he began to talk about his cousin's death. I could see tears in his eyes and his hands began to

shake.)

Booker had been killed. Outright. An explosion had shredded the hooch. His body was in pieces. He probably never had a chance. One of the sappers had laid a satchel charge almost next to his bunk.

I kept his battered dog tags for years afterwards, then I threw them in the Potomac, right off the Memorial Bridge. Don't ask me why. You know, I've never been to the Viet Nam War Memorial. Never.

(His voice trailed off at this point and he closed his eyes. I could see that he was gripping the seat tightly with both hands. He suppressed a few sobs.)

There you have the first part of my allegory, doc. It gets better, I promise you. You will be so fascinated I'm sure. All of the publishers will want to sign you on.

(I asked him if he thought that I was trolling for a book, that all I cared about was furthering my career. He opened his eyes and stared at me for a moment then laughed that eerie laugh of his. It seemed like I might be losing him to his own personal madness but he rubbed his face and sat up straight in the chair, then continued on.)

Mythology has a way of simply crushing you. It's true. Of course myths come in all shapes and sizes. McNamara devised his own myth when it came time to sell the war to the American public. Most of us bought into it. Geopolitics is built around mythology for the most part. Our miserable lives are shaped by it.

Doc, how are you with Greek Mythology? Not up on it? I'm disappointed in you. Everyone should be privy to the great minds of ancient Greece and their compulsion about explaining the universal order of things. Fantastical, but in such a noble and, well, enjoyable fashion.

Then I don't suppose you are familiar with Cacus then. He was the son of Hephaestus and Medusa. He was a bad seed, I'm afraid. Not that fun to be around. He had some worrisome

issues to work out. You might say that, anyway.

(I must note here that Cacus is a mythical monster from Greek mythology; he collected the skulls of his victims and kept them in his cave.)

Okay, there I was doing my teaching thing, working diligently towards tenure like a good little academic should. I didn't make waves. Oh, all right, so I did cause some problems here and there with the other departments, but they were mostly innocuous gags. I was just trying to foster a little bit of interdepartmental rivalry--nothing serious. I got my doctorate. I had a steady girl friend. I hadn't killed anyone. Yet. Life was going to be just fine.

You might say I was happy. Professionally I was respected. I liked my apartment. I drove a late model car. I voted. The adjustment had been made. I was a functioning citizen contributing to society.

At the time, to my dismay I might add, the Viet Nam War was suddenly in vogue. Before the country had suffered a collective nervous breakdown over the damn thing and now all of a sudden here everyone was bending over backwards to examine it. It was in the movies. People were writing books about it. The revisionists were coming out of the woodwork.

Silly pundits talked of the country's need to heal old wounds etc. It was like a gigantic confessional had been set up and everybody was expected to take their turn kneeling. I, personally, found it all despicable. I mean some were saying we didn't lose the war and some were saying we did but damn if we didn't give it a good try. And so sorry about all that hateful criticism directed at the soldiers who actually fought over there. I was disturbed by all of it.

God-damn! you had that Rambo character killing half the population and some other morons doing battle back in Southeast Asia to rescue our MIA's, fighting the war again and this time winning. On the other side of the coin you had films about the existential looniness and our contribution to it over there. Then of course there was the morality play, pitting good versus evil

in the form of combat participants waging battle in almost cartoonish depictions. It was nauseating.

Booker had died so Hollywood could flex its creative muscles. That angered me. Where was the reason? Why in the hell had my cousin died sleeping in a hooch in some fucking backwater country? Why had I killed that old man? So I could keep him from bringing in the next rice crop. Was that it? Did LBJ and Nixon have the power over men to rain death on the land, like Zeus having a temper tantrum?

I didn't want to think about any of it. Slowly, I slipped into my own little world, one defined by my intelligence. I worked in my lab. I wrote my research papers. I studied.

(Rey had worked himself into almost a frenzy at this point. He was continually shaking the Vise. The wheels were squeaking on the tile floor. I didn't want to interrupt but I felt that he needed intervention of some sort, so I quietly mentioned Helen's name. Fortunately it seemed to work as he settled down and smiled at me.)

You know about Helen then. You do your homework, doc. I'll give you that. She was a gem. I guess before her I hadn't realized just how lonely I really was.

The only other companionship I had had, besides the hooker escapades, was with a girl at UVA. And that had been short-lived. She couldn't deal with my personality, or lack of one.

Helen came along when I was just about ready to add that last stone in the wall I was erecting around me. At least for a short time I got to know some average, every day normalcy. We did have some good times for however short they were.

If the gods hadn't had other plans for me we might have gotten married and done the normal thing. Me with kids, now that is funny. A house in Northern Virginia. Two cars. Taking my kid to Little League games. PTA. A middle-class horror story.

She must have been mortified. Poor Helen. So very intelligent but ultimately unprepared to face the fallout. It was unfair to her. She was an innocent bystander. I never did get to

apologize to her.

Didn't matter.

The die was cast the day I found out about Vu's cousin. Like Rubik's cube, I had to align all of the colors. All of the parts--the ingredients--were falling into place. That's right. I had my mission. I had a purpose.

You see phenomenon such as this has a preordained schematic. I was going to follow it. It didn't really matter if I objected to the destination. I was locked on and homing in.

After awhile, I started engaging Vu in conversation when he would come into my classroom. He wasn't particularly talkative at first. His English was stunted but I did make him laugh with my horrible attempts at Viet Nameese. He had immigrated to the US after some arduous years in the new Ho Chi Minh City. He was a boat person who first went to Hong Kong to live in a refugee camp. He got lucky and was permitted to come here, with his mother. The rest of his family had been scattered to the wind by the war. Some of them were dead. Some were missing. It was a typical story of the times.

He lived in a squalid apartment somewhere with his mother and cousin. The plot thickens. Enter Tran.

The more Vu and I chatted the more comfortable he was talking to me. On several occasions he even brought me some gook food and we shared it in my lab. Vu, unlike a great deal of the Viet Nameese, didn't resent or hate Americans. He had never been a VC sympathizer.

I think our little friendship went on for about a month when one day another Viet Nameese man appeared at the door. Vu and I were chatting about old times in Nam. Vu told me that the man was his cousin, but that he didn't speak English very well. He told me his name was Tran. I said hello in Viet Nameese and asked him to come in.

Tran was a suspicious type of person. He reluctantly came in my lab and stood by the door. Vu told me he was a janitor at the school as well, and that he had gotten him the job. Tran

didn't say much the entire time he was there, but stood by the door eyeing me suspiciously. I didn't think much about it at the time.

Another few weeks passed. Once or twice a week I would see Vu as usual and we would have our little chats. I think I even brought him some condiments I had gotten from a Viet Nameese grocery store in Maryland. He was grateful and his usual obsequious self.

We got to talking and I mentioned Tran for some reason. Vu got all agitated and complained about how he was bothersome to him and his mother because he couldn't adjust to living in America. Tran didn't want to learn English and he refused to try to be friendly. Vu then told me it was because he was from the North, as in North Viet Nam.

Bells went off in my head, alarms really. I immediately had sinister thoughts, thoughts I didn't think I could conceive any longer. Like a mental reflex.

I asked a few questions, trying not to sound like an investigator. It took a little while but I finally got Vu to admit that Tran had been in the army, the NVA. Vu quickly added that his cousin had become disillusioned with the Communist's way of doing things and hightailed it out of there. Apparently he had been sent to a re-education camp in the delta and hadn't fared too well. He had fought for his country and he didn't think he had to be instructed on the proper way to honor it.

Let me admit now that I was alive with energy. Every fiber in my body was twitching. Why? I didn't know. I just knew that something was electrifying my senses. Of course later on I realized it was the old battle reflexes kicking into gear.

Now I knew why Tran had been laconic around me and totally reserved. I was sure that Vu had told him I was in the Army and served in Nam. We had been enemies. We had shared mutual destruction. It was a perverse bond.

What did I ultimately think of this new development? I wasn't sure at first. Hatred, learned and otherwise, is always lurking. When you train to kill an enemy it is never

personalized. It is faceless. Devised instructions are carried out. Death results. You bring technological advances to bear and then you count the bodies, so said one of my CO's once. Very tidy explanation.

I had seen my enemy before. Up close. There had been interrogations. I had witnessed beatings. I had heard screams of pain. I had bound hands, immobilizing them so as to better inflict harm. The entire time I had never doubted that if the tables were turned it would be me bellowing out for mercy.

This new revelation soon began to haunt me. I was finding it difficult to concentrate in my classes. My relationship began to suffer as well. Helen, stoic Helen, hung in there, afraid, fearful that I might explode at any moment. Just another Nam vet with the malevolent brain leftover from a S & D patrol. Ho hum. Better not disturb him or he'll make a shish kabob out of your vital parts with that bayonet he always carries in his back pocket.

It was all unfair to her. She didn't know what to expect. It wasn't long before we starting squabbling about everything. She finally couldn't take it anymore and distanced herself from me. Good thing.

You know it is strange but I didn't feel like I was consciously orienting myself. It didn't seem like I was doing what I was doing. I know that sounds patently ridiculous but it's true. My brain was leading me into the abyss. I guess I'm joking. It would be easy to say that I had taken leave of my senses. An insane trip into Satanic ritual maybe.

With a little prying, I find out where Tran had served in the NVA. This information pleased me somehow. I hadn't liked him from the start. He was surly. He was ungrateful. Now I could openly hate him and have a sterling reason for doing so.

There was what I like to call an added bonus though. Oh yes. This is the fulcrum. This sentenced them to their deaths and me to a life of leisure in an institution.

(He paused here, waiting for my reaction. He wanted something from me. Surprise?)

Reproach? I wasn't sure. Frankly, I was baffled.)

Doc, stay with me here. This is the nitty-gritty stuff. You are going to just love this.

Tran served in the NVA regiment that attacked Firebase Constance. Can you believe it? The little bastard was in the 402nd. He was a sapper. After I learned what regiment he was in, I did a little research on the net and found that out. God does indeed work in mysterious ways, huh? R-E-V-E-N-G-E, what can it do for me?

(He sang out this last sentence to the tune of Aretha Franklin's song Respect, a song, incidentally, I could remember my parents playing and dancing to when I was a child. It was a bizarre moment, to say the least.)

What we are talking about here, doc, is transcendental satisfaction. Oh yes. The demise of two men was the goal. It was within my reach. I was stepping out from under quotidian tyranny. That's right. It was an alignment of destiny.

Everything fit. I was going to set the stage. Exacting revenge would be an honest, above board endeavor though. You must understand that. I was going to give Tran his chance as well as his motivation. It would be me who became the maestro of fate.

I will say that understanding--deciphering--the immediate future has a way of crushing you. You have to be strong. Indomitable really. I felt like I could feed off the adrenaline for weeks.

So, it was ordained that I had to kill Vu. Order of sequence was essential. The gods don't like randomization. I understood.

(I note here that Flowers wasn't invoking religious sources per se. A grin had returned to his face at this point and he had a sarcastic tone in his voice. It would have been less problematic if he were attributing his acts to some higher power but I fully believe that he wasn't.)

I liked Vu. I can say that in all honesty. He was an agreeable type of person. Friendly and all. Wrong place, wrong time, and the wrong scenario is all I can say. Sacrificing him didn't

come easy. It just didn't. Of course I was into full on battle mode now. I was prepared to kill and to do it efficiently. Still, he was a nice guy.

How to? That was the question. He was a small man so I could have easily just taken him out by strangling him. Simple. Easy. Clean. I had to think about it.

In the attack on the firebase, Booker had been given the benefit of an instantaneous death; although that wasn't the primary intent. An explosion killed Booker as he slept unaware. Death came quick. There was that fact to contemplate.

I must say here, if you are one to be fastidious about things, I held Tran responsible because of collective guilt. His regiment was an extension of his personal actions. There was no other way to look at it. Be sure of that, doc.

So. Anyway. It was Vu's habit to visit me a few times a week in my lab. Invariably we would share some snack and something to drink. My plan soon came to me. I was going to afford Vu the same benefit that Booker had gotten.

I concocted a potion in my lab, something that would render Vu unconscious. After he was knocked out I would dispatch him with prejudice. Wasn't that from a movie or something? I think so.

My plan came off without a hitch. Vu came in. We chatted like always. I gave him one of those sweet fruit drinks, doctored of course. He drank it. He passed out in about three minutes or so. I took his body into my office. I applied a choke hold, compliments of Ranger training, and he was dead. Add him to the body count, LT. Score one for our side.

(He laughed at this comment. There was a strange look in his eyes now. He kept tapping both of his feet nervously, as he scratched at the stubble on his chin.)

In my mind's eye I had become the beast. Just call me Cacus. It had all begun.

The week before I had purchased a large hunting knife from an Army surplus store in town here. I had spent days sharpening it to perfection. It was stashed in my desk drawer. I took

it out.

Vu's lifeless body was on the floor. I picked him up and carried the corpse into my lab. I wasn't even taking any precautions to speak of. The door to my lab was unlocked. Although it was after hours there were still some members of the faculty around the building. It didn't matter.

There is a large sink in the back of the lab where I wash out dissecting trays and other things I use in my classes. I picked Vu up and wedged him in the sink, then I severed his head. The blood ran down the drain. I turned on the water.

I placed his head in a large beaker full of acid. The intent was to remove the epidermal material. The end result would be a decoration for my cave: a nice skull. I had some time on my hands as I waited for the bleeding to stop, so I went back into my office and graded some students' papers.

It took a little while to drain out the blood and to prepare my trophy. I placed the headless corpse in an industrial sized garbage bag and took it out to where I knew Tran would eventually discover it. He worked the offices in the next building and had to eventually deposit trash on the ground floor. I propped the body next to the dumpster. The order of sequence demanded that he find it, as I had found my cousin's remains.

While I was at the Army surplus store, I had also bought an insignia patch from my outfit in Nam. It was powder blue on one side, with a black panel on the other, intersected by three yellow sabers denoting some long ago hard won battles. On the bottom was inscribed: Fides Pro Mortis. Below that was: 159th Light Infantry Brigade.

After I arranged the body, I pinned the patch on Vu's shirt front. The rules of warfare were about to begin, and they must be honored. Tran and I were going to do battle.

(So many questions had accumulated in my head I didn't know which one to ask first. This almost stream of consciousness interview had totally swamped me. I was at a lost what to

do. Should I interrupt? Ask questions? Get him to explain his motives more in depth? I finally decided to let him go on.)

Tran would see his cousin's dead body. He would see the insignia patch. It would all be launched.

I could see the dumpster from one of the windows in my lab. I stationed myself there and waited. Being ever thorough, I had brought along a pair of binoculars. I wanted to see him, to see his reaction. Perhaps he had seen mine when I ran out to discover the hooch had been leveled by the explosion. Was he watching in the darkness, lurking?

It was almost an hour before he finally appeared at the doorway. He was pushing a trash cart full of plastic bags. I trained the binoculars on him and focused in. At first, he was preoccupied with the trash bags and didn't even notice. "Look, you bastard," I yelled at him. Then he looked down and saw his cousin's headless body. He was perplexed. I saw him recoil. The look of recognition spread over his face. He glanced around him. I could see him reach out and pluck at the patch. Slowly, Tran turned and looked in the direction of my building. He knew.

Now DC was to become our combat frontier. The clock had been started. A meter was running, and not only time would expire. It was, in a word, thrilling. Two trained killers were going to exercise their skills.

Oh sure, I suppose there might have been--at least at this juncture--the minuscule prospect that Tran was going to go right to the cops. Maybe he'd blab to them his suspicions, his gut feelings that the crazy man in the Science Building was responsible for his cousin's death. I knew however that Tran distrusted everyone. His entrenched hatred of Americans would overrule any such action.

Whether he knew it or not, we shared a bond, a connection that tied us together. We had been enemies. We had exterminated. And now we both had grief to share.

Is this delicious stuff or what? Doc, you don't realize just how fortunate you are to be hearing all of this. This information has been fermenting in my brain for over a decade. It's well aged. I'm uncorking it like a fine wine.

(He was, obviously, enjoying himself at this point. Over the years he had been seen by countless representatives of the mental health field; not to mention several TV personalities and their film crews. He had refused to divulge anything until now. Did I feel privileged? I didn't know what to feel. Even as an experienced therapist I didn't handle the revealed material all that well. Simply put, it was difficult to digest the gory details. Yet I didn't want him to stop, so I didn't impede Flowers in any way.)

I was becoming the beast in my mind's eye. The transformation was underway. On course. I could feel the power growing inside me.

Tran was at a distinct disadvantage. I knew where he lived. Admittedly this was grossly unfair. Stalking him would have been ridiculously easy.

Then it came to me. Why couldn't the process of avenging someone's death be entertaining? That's right. I was entitled. Before, in Nam, I had been fighting on Tran's turf. Let the bastard fight on mine for a change of pace. Right? Why not?

That very evening I followed him home. Talk about your virtual reality games. He took the Metro. At first, I remained in the background and just watched him. It was almost comical. Neither one of us had any weapons. I wasn't at all sure what I was going to do at that point.

When we finally got to his stop, I stepped out onto the platform and made sure he saw me. He was standing by the escalator. The gook robbed me of some of my fun by not even acting surprised when he finally saw me standing there. Tran stared at me for a long moment then got on the escalator. I let a few people get on in front of me then I got on too.

We did this slow motion cat and mouse chase all the way to his apartment. It was definitely uncinematic. When he got to his apartment he stopped on the front steps and turned

around. I stopped about twenty yards away from him. We just stood and stared at each other.

Finally I smiled at him and then told him I had been at Firebase Constance and that my cousin had died there. He had this cute little scowl on his face. Very intense, you might say. Then he said something in Viet Nameese and went in the building.

I actually laughed. I don't know, it seemed somehow humorous to me. I had just killed his cousin and here I was following him home. What parallel universe was this?

After that I went back to the college and got my trophy and went home. I was living down by Dupont Circle then. Nice place. A little expensive but aren't they all. I put the freshly bleached out skull right on my desk, next to my computer. Early gothic. It was just what I needed to set the decor off right.

At any rate, I figured that Tran would sooner or later find where I lived. I had fully intended on continuing on with my schedule anyway. "Be vigilant, boys," a First Sergeant used to say to us in AIT training. Well, I was going to be alert. Battle ready.

I had planned for whatever eventuality arose. Packed away under my sports coat was a Glock nine mm I had purchased a few years before when I lived in Virginia. I bought the damn thing on a lark really. Who knew it would come in handy one day? A light weight combat field knife was attached to my belt. Several full clips of ammo weighed down my pockets. All I needed was a chopper to drop me in behind the lines.

What I didn't know then but I do now was that Tran was doing his preparations as well. He had secured a firearm too, and a knife. I suppose I expected this. I didn't think he was going to attack me with his mop and broom. He had apparently borrowed a neighbor's handgun, a Saturday night special, which, unfortunately, put him at a disadvantage when it came to firepower. Hey, he was used to that from the war. Look what our weapons superiority did for us over there.

That next day I taught two classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Sandwiched in-between, I did some lab work. I can remember chuckling to myself about us being two gunslingers out to get each other. What were we going to do, have a gunfight in the street? How about a duel instead. Take ten paces, turn, and fire. That would be the gentlemanly thing to do.

Nothing happened all day. I was disappointed. Then of course the campus was crawling with cops investigating the murder. Tran had wisely stayed away. Two detectives had interviewed me and I told them I knew nothing about the murder. Naturally, it made all the headlines. Headless man found on campus. It sounded like something from the tabloids. The police thought it was somehow gang related, which amused me to no end. Turf war over drugs or something along those lines, so I overheard the detective say to his partner. “Vicious fuckers, sure don’t want to mess with them,” the other had replied, shaking his head wearily.

I have to say I didn’t want to have a protracted battle with Tran. I mean here’s a man who had the patience to wait me out then lower the boom. Damn if it didn’t feel like it was the war all over again, doc. At least this time I was in charge. There’d be no incompetent Generals to screw up the works.

I waited another day. Back to my classes. Maintain the facade. The crime scene yellow tape was still cordoning off the dumpster area. A few reporters knocked on my office door, begging for something, anything that might bring a fresh angle to the crime. One even found out that I had been friendly with Vu. He asked me if I wanted to speak on camera, promising me that it was going to be on the six o’clock news. “Just tell the people how sad you are about losing your friend,” he told me, as he shoved a microphone in my face. The glare of the camera lights blinded me. I told him to get out of my office or I’d have him removed by security. He got all indignant and told me he was just doing his job. I slammed the door in his face.

A full three days passed. Things were starting to settle down on campus. Tran had not returned to work. I checked with his supervisor. She told me he was taking a leave. “That’s

such a terrible, terrible thing that happened to poor little Vu, Dr. Flowers,” she said to me, knitting her brow. I agreed with her and told her that I might go over to Tran’s apartment to see if he needs anything. She told me to tell him to take all the time he needs before he comes back to work.

I sat in my lab later on that day thinking. At first I had been able to, more or less, compartmentalize my predicament. I was a professor of biology by day and an assassin by night, you know, that sort of thing. Pretty laughable. Only now I was beginning to let evil paranoia seize me. It was time to go proactive.

Good old Tran decided it for me anyway. Like a good little gook, he had spent the previous few days wisely, as he followed me to see where I lived. Then he had set up an ambush. Same MO as in Nam. Old habits never die apparently. That evening as I was returning from work the little asshole took a shot at me. The damn round went right through my sports coat. Put a nice little hole in my coat pocket.

I don’t know how he missed me. He had managed to sneak into my building and was waiting in the hallway. Here I come home after a hard day at work and bam! I step off the elevator and as I’m getting my front door key out, he aims and fires. He was all of maybe fifteen yards away. Thank god for cheap handguns because the damn thing jammed after the first round discharged.

I bet old Tran wished he had his AK right about then instead of some nickle plated piece of crap. He fumbled with the gun for a second, while I dropped my lap top and briefcase, trying to get at my Glock. By the time I had unholstered it Tran was sprinting down the stairs. This was it. The chase was on

He headed down the street. Urban warfare seems, on the face of it, so ludicrous, doesn’t it? It was like some really bad cop show on TV. Me following him, blasting away with my handgun. I took two or three shots at him, missing. I think I hit the windshield on a parked car,

shattering it. One round went over his head and took out a lighted advertisement. People were diving for cover right and left. Some trained killers we were.

We ended up running around the streets until he lost me. I was totally out of breath. My physical fitness days were behind me, even though I wasn't that old. In the old days, as they say, I could have probably run him down with no problem. Not now.

I was at the circle. In the distance I could hear police sirens. This wasn't good. Here I was a mad man chasing another man down the street with a gun, and shooting it. Witnesses were everywhere. Then it occurred to me that Tran was probably going to get back on the Metro.

Tran had disappeared running down 19th Street. Wouldn't he then jump on a train at the nearest stop? I reasoned. I hurried to the Dupont Circle stop. It was a long shot. I had no other choices.

In the direction Tran was heading he would probably catch the train at either the North or the West Farragut Stations. Since I already knew he lived in Falls Church, I check the Metro map and saw what line he needed to take to get there. You didn't need to be Sherlock Holmes to figure that out.

It was rush hour so the trains were crowded. It was going to be next to impossible to spot him with all the commuters packing the trains. I decided to give it a try anyway, and, at the very least, I could take the train to his apartment and see if I could head him off before he got home.

As the train pulled into the first stop, I scanned the waiting commuters standing on the platform. I didn't see him anywhere but I wasn't sure. When the door opened to the car I was riding in I stepped out and looked up and down the platform. Then I slowly walked towards the front of the train, looking in all of the cars. No Tran. Then I ran up to the front car and jumped on the train. I wanted to make my search as systematic as possible under the circumstances.

At the next stop, I again watched the landing as the train glided to a stop. And what do you know, there's the little shithead, standing right in front about two thirds of the way down the

landing. I couldn't believe my luck.

By now I had to assume he had cleared his weapon. With all of the people around I was afraid it could make for a messy little firefight between us. I didn't really want innocent people to get hurt in the crossfire. What to do? I could have just waited until he got off at his stop then pounced on his ass. Put a hole in his head while he walked home. I had been to his place and knew some of the streets were dark.

Then I got a brilliant idea. Oh yes. Poetic justice had never been so rewarding. I was almost overcome with nervous anticipation.

When the train stopped, I stepped out onto the platform and hid behind the rush of commuters. I watched Tran get on the train and find a spot standing in the rear of the car. Perfect. I slipped in and sneaked right up behind him. I placed the barrel of my Glock smack against his back and told him not to move. With my other hand, I reached in and grabbed his gun. I leaned in close and smiled at him, then whispered for him to get off when I told him to. Didn't I just love that look on his face! Wish I had it on videotape.

Next stop, Arlington National Cemetery. I was going to take Tran on a brief tour, show him the sights. Rey Flowers, the tour guide.

Prodding him with the gun, I managed to get him to get off the train. It wasn't easy because we had to change trains. He kept muttering to me in Viet Nameese. It wasn't blubbering or anything. Tran was defiant until the end. Got to give him that.

It was a bit of a walk after we got to where I was taking us but we did it. I stayed a few paces behind him after we had gotten away from everyone. There was a wind blowing. I remember that distinctly. It was not really cold but kind of chilly. September that year had been on the warm side.

Every so often he would stop and curse at me, then I would nudge him with the Glock and tell him we didn't have to go much further. He grumbled under his breath and marched on. I

was really starting to enjoy myself.

As you probably guessed, we were heading to my cousin's gravesite. This development had all been extemporaneous I assure you. A stroke of creative genius. Complete the circle kind of thing, whatever that means.

I suppose Tran got the moral of the story too. He was the denouement. We were furnishing the stage directions, I guess. You might say it seemed like that.

When we got to Booker's grave, I ordered him to stop. Then I launched into some lame diatribe against the war and, you know, etc. etc., finally telling Tran to get on his knees in front of the grave stone. He wouldn't. I knew he understood me. So I clocked him on the back of his neck and he took a knee, if you will.

I then told him to beg for Booker's forgiveness. Beg. Seems funny now. Tran wouldn't do that either. Had to admire that, I suppose; although it did infuriate me. I kicked him solidly in the back of the head. He went down on his face and screamed something at me. My Viet Nameese was rusty but I knew he was telling me to just shoot him and get it over with. I kicked him again, this time in the stomach. I held the gun to his head and yelled back at him, telling him that somebody in his platoon had killed my cousin and he was going to pay for it. He shouted out a few obscenities at me, in English.

In retrospect, I didn't manage my prisoner tactics all that well. While Tran was lying on the ground, I walked over to Booker's gravestone and bent down to touch it. Tran took this opportunity to lunge at me with a knife I didn't even know he had on him. Big surprise. That scar you saw on my chest is from the knife wound. He got me pretty good before I could react. I brought the Glock down on his head and knocked him out cold.

I was bleeding bad at that point, but the adrenaline was pumping. I grabbed Tran and dragged him away from the grave over to a group of trees. I took out my knife and cut his throat, ear to ear. Then I hacked off his head. He was wearing a windbreaker so I used it to wrap the

head in, after I drained the blood out. Two trophies, doc, like bookends. A matching set. Just call me sociopathically challenged.

(Rey was smiling at me through the Vise fencing, where he had leaned forward in the chair to stare at me. He was enjoying the shock value of his story. I looked away to write down some notes and then stood up. At that moment, I wanted to step out of the room. I wanted to get away from Rey Flowers.)

Now I had to get back to my place and I was a bloody mess. Very untidy. Needless to say, I couldn't waltz into the local ER with a stray oriental noggin in my possession, now could I? I had to get back to my place. So I called a taxi at a pay phone and went on home. The cabbie didn't say a thing. I jokingly told him I was looking for ghosts in the graveyard.

The reason the scar is so ghastly looking is because I patched it up myself. I think Dr. Frankenstein did better stitching. I did a repeat process on the aforementioned body part and placed it on my desk, next to my Gray's anatomy tome.

Then it was time for me to deal with the aftermath of my actions. Society's reprisal would have to be entertained, don't you know. Even though I was the adorable avenging angel, I had to answer for my actions. That is not to say I wasn't adverse to letting criminology actions take their course. Perhaps I was willing to just let the winds of fate blow a little bit, and if they didn't blow my way then so be it. I would persevere in the knowledge that I had done a noble thing in striking a blow for America and its citizenry. Do I need to say I'm being sardonic, if not down right sarcastic?

A couple days later I walked into the local precinct and turned myself in. My crimes had been the number one topic of the media. I was a celebrity. Another representative of evil. The cops fell all over themselves trying to get me processed, even if at first they didn't actually believe me. Some of them thought I was unbalanced, to say the least. That all changed when they inspected my apartment. Alarms went off then!

Case solved.

11. GOING HOME

Weeks went by. After Rey unloaded on me, I was numb for awhile. I had never evaluated someone who was convicted of First Degree Murder. Truthfully, I didn't know what direction I should head in. If only Dr. Burke were alive, I thought. He would be able to point me in the right direction.

Pete was shocked at first about the breakthrough, but then he wanted to know all of the details, every last one. "What was his demeanor?" "Did you have to drag it out of him?" "Just how creepy was it?" When the two of us got together it could become decidedly unpsychological.

I didn't know where I stood. The very next time I met with Flowers he might resume his former persona and return to his sardonic smokescreen. I was fully prepared to face that. I even expected it. His revealing to me the specifics of his crime hadn't been a two-way street by any means. My participation amounted to nothing more than dictation. Even if I wanted to bolster my ego, I knew there had been no transference and certainly no reciprocating rapport.

Immediately following the outpouring from Flowers there was a break in our routine. For two weeks I was unable to interview him. Dr. Helms informed me that Rey had been isolated for an indeterminate amount of time, locked away in what the staff mockingly called "the suite."

That next Tuesday I had barged into Dr. Helms demanding to know what happened to Rey Flowers. Her secretary steered me right out the door, while Dr. Helms remained behind closed doors. I was furious.

I waited out in the hallway until Dr. Helms came out. She eyed me coldly and walked down the hallway. Letting my anger get the better of me, I followed after her.

“Don’t you get in my face!” Dr. Helms warned, holding up her finger and wagging it at me. “I don’t have the time...certainly not for you.”

“Make time,” I declared, stepping in front of her.

“Don’t push your luck,” she snarled.

“What’s happened to Flowers?” I demanded to know.

“Oh...let’s see, we decided to give him some comp time because he’s been such a model patient,” she replied sarcastically. “He won the first prize, which is two weeks in our best suite. Lucky guy.”

“What did he do?” I almost screamed.

“Read the report--now get out of my way,” she ordered, glaring at me.

There had been another confrontation between Rey and an orderly. I knew the orderly. He was a muscular black man who preferred to use force over finesse when it came to controlling the patients. Altercations at Beekers were almost a daily occurrence, definitely very routine.

I went into the office and pulled the report. Dr. Helms had signed off on the entry, which, in itself, was unusual. Normal day to day operations were almost always cleared by the staff psychologist on duty for that shift. The day nurse had scribbled a report and the orderly had appended an explanation. It all seemed by the book, except for Dr. Helms signature.

Apparently Rey had provoked the orderly by baiting him with racial slurs. There had been a scuffle and Flowers had been “physically subdued.” A sedative was administered and no adverse affects were noticed, I read, shaking my head because I knew what passed as descriptive language was only the vague reportage inherent in all psych files.

There was no mention of Rey being transferred to “the suite.” This in itself was a violation of State regulations. Every change in a patients disposition had to be noted and signed

off on. Now I knew why Dr. Helms' had initialed the report. She was well known for punishing patients off the books, so to speak.

In all my time at Beekers I had never been to "the suite." Pete had mentioned it to me on several occasions but I hadn't taken the time to actually go and see it. I wasn't even sure where it was.

I knew Pete was due at Beekers in a couple of hours so I drove to a coffee shop in the town and waited. I was determined to see Flowers even if it meant crossing Dr. Helms. In my mind, I had made valuable progress with my patient and I wanted to maintain the momentum. It was vital that I keep a connection thriving between us.

"I thought you would be gone by now," Pete greeted me with, as he was getting out of his car.

"I need a favor," I said, hurrying up to his car.

"Oh no, I don't like the sound of that," he exclaimed, looking around the parking lot suspiciously. "Looks and sounds like trouble to me."

"Maybe, maybe not," I said cryptically. "Can you show me where 'the suite' is?"

Pete looked at me for a moment then scanned the parking lot again. He gripped his briefcase a little tighter and held up his other hand as if to stop traffic. Then he took a deep breath.

"Sarah, you know I love you like a sister...but, listen, maybe you don't want to do that," he said in almost a whisper. "Let sleeping dogs lie," he said, trying to smile. "Is that the expression? Does that make any sense?"

"Come on, Pete," I pleaded, grabbing a hold of his arm. "I would consider it a personal favor of the highest order," I said in a dramatic tone of voice. "I'll owe you big time--really big time."

"Why do you do this to me?" he muttered, slapping at my hand playfully. "I'm such a

pushover. I really hate myself at times like this.”

The oldest section of Beekers was nothing but a warren of narrow hallways with the old brick and mortar walls from the Civil War era. It was dark and it was eerie. Some of the staff insisted that it was haunted. In fact, there had been an article in the Washington Post about some Civil War soldier who had died at the hospital and his spirit never left. Purportedly, people had heard the man moaning and calling out his sweetheart’s name.

The modern day Beekers had been built around the old brick structure, with numerous additions added on throughout the years. It was a mish-mash of architecture with construction overlays that defied most rules of design. Several Congressman in the past few years had proposed the entire facility be razed to the ground and another hospital be built from scratch. As always, funding had prevented that from happening to date.

Speaking in hushed tones, Pete and I sneaked down several hallways, heading towards the interior of Beekers. I immediately noticed that once we got towards the older section it seemed to get colder in the building. As if it had been left as a reminder of the past, the barrier door to the original building at Beekers was made of iron, with a small grate window intersected by steel bars.

“This is it,” Pete whispered, stopping at the door. “Are you sure you want to go any further? I mean it is pretty damn depressing from here on in. Trust me.”

“You got to be kidding me,” was all I could say, as I took a peek inside the window of the door. “Looks like something from a Dracula movie.”

“He was a patient here for a few years,” Pete joked. “Who do you think bit Dr. Helms’ neck?”

“Very funny,” I whispered, glancing up and down the hallway. “Let’s go.”

The ceilings to the hallway suddenly plunged to no more than six feet high and the width dropped to about four feet wide. I placed my hands on the brick and they felt cold, and damp.

Somewhere along the line lights had been added but they had seen fit to only mount them every ten or twenty yards or so. Shadows seemed to lurk everywhere as you walked along. Our footsteps made a weird scraping echo sound.

“Fright night,” Pete announced, forcing a laugh. “This is the stuff nightmares are made of for sure.”

“What do they use this area for anyway?” I asked, making sure I stayed right behind him.

“Storage mostly,” he answered over his shoulder. “Let’s see, I’ve only been down here once or twice but--”

“You sure you know where it is?” I demanded to know, latching onto his shirt sleeve.

“Yeah, yeah, relax,” he reassured me. “What’s gonna happen to us anyway? The ghosts in here are all Yankees. We’ll be all right.”

“Again with the comedy,” I chided him, poking him in the back.

“It’s right down this hallway, to the right,” he exclaimed, walking faster.

“Slow down,” I called out to him. “I don’t want to get lost down here.”

Most of the doors to the rooms had long ago been removed or simply disintegrated. In the dim light I could just make out boxes piled high in small rooms. An overpowering mustiness pervaded the air; and the cold, it was as prevalent as the scary shadows. I couldn’t imagine staying down there for very long. Several times I had stopped to check to see if I could see my breath.

Pete stopped in front of a room. It was the only one with a door still remaining. I felt something run across my feet and I gave a short scream, before Pete put his hand over my mouth to muffle it.

“Was that what I think it was?” I asked, trying to catch my breath.

“Some kind of rodent, I’m sure,” Pete explained, looking down at the floor.

“Got the key?” I asked him, stepping up to the door and peering in the small portal.

“Yeah, right,” he said, laughing.

“You don’t,” I said, surprised.

“Like I would really have the key to this damn thing,” he replied, knocking on the door with his knuckle. “Only one person has that and I’m sure you know who that is.”

“Great,” I said, sighing. “I can’t see anything inside. It’s too dark.”

“Move,” he said, nudging me aside.

Pete held up his pen flashlight and trained it through the portal. The feeble light coursed along the brick walls then landed on something in the corner. We could hear someone moaning.

“Let me see,” I said, grabbing his flashlight.

“Maybe it’s the Civil War ghost,” Pete suggested, suppressing a giggle. “You better watch out, I bet he’s pretty horny after all these years.”

Although the small flashlight didn’t illuminate much I could just make out a form lying on the floor. I called in through the portal and banged on the door. There was no response. I banged again and shouted out Flowers’ name. Then we heard some muttering.

“Did you hear that?” I asked Pete, leaning against the door. “Rey! Rey!”

“Damn,” Pete mumbled, looking through the portal. “They really did put him in here.”

“Is this my wake-up call?” we heard Flowers ask, then his face appeared at the portal.

It startled both of us and we stepped back from the door. He was shielding his eyes from the penlight. I couldn’t believe that he was actually smiling.

“Rey, what did they do to you?” I asked, leaning against the door.

“Don’t I get at least a Continental breakfast in the suite?” he wanted to know, laughing, before he almost collapsed with a fit of coughing.

“He’s going to get pneumonia down here,” Pete whispered to me.

“What happened? What did they do with your clothes?” I asked when I noticed he was naked.

“Oh, you know, I committed an imaginary infraction against the dictator’s rules. Same old story. Nothing new. Tyranny is alive and well here at Beekers,” he explained, coughing violently again.

“We’re going to get you out,” I told him.

“We are!” Pete hissed behind me.

“That’d be nice,” Flowers muttered, trying to smile.

I almost ran back to the office, leaving Pete gasping behind me. Dr. Helms wasn’t there. Her secretary told me she had just left. I rushed out to the parking lot. She was just pulling out in her car.

“Stop, stop right now!” I screamed at her, stepping in front of her car.

“What?” she yelled out the window. “I’m in a hurry, Dr. Greene. Can’t this wait?”

“No, no it can’t wait, Dr. Helms,” I shouted back at her. “Let him out right now. Right this god-damn minute!”

“What in the world are you talking about?” she said, feigning confusion.

“You know damn well what I’m talking about. You’ve got Flowers locked in a dungeon and I insist you let him out right this instant. He’s going to die down there if you don’t,” I insisted.

“We’ll talk about this tomorrow, right now I--”

“Now,” I demanded.

“Dr. Greene, I really don’t care to listen to this tone from you...and you know what, I don’t have to,” she announced, putting her car into gear.

“You are going to have to drive over me if you want to leave,” I declared, stepping back in front of her car. “Let him out or I’m going to the State Board. This is not an idle threat, Dr. Helms. I mean it.”

Dr. Helms banged on her steering wheel then yelled out the window, “Very well. Have it

your way. Since when have you become such a patient's advocate? You are nothing but an interfering bitch."

Advocacy hadn't been my intention. I was under no illusions about Dr. Rey Flowers. He was a murderer. He had been convicted. "The specter of human decency always looms," Dr. Burke had said, with that twinkle in his eye he invariably got when he wanted to be droll. It amounted to nothing less and nothing more. So I believed.

Rey was returned to the general population. As Pete had predicted, Flowers did get sick and had to be treated for a bronchial condition. We continued our weekly interviews. I was laboring under the forces of a pervasive sense of anti-climax. I now knew the specifics, the horrifying particulars. What was I going to gain now from our meetings? Was there any therapeutic analysis I could institute? I wasn't certain.

As that Spring progressed, Jason and I began a strong relationship. We just sort of fell into it, I suppose. It was wonderfully uncomplicated.

My mother, (always my mother), had begun to insist on meeting "your Jason." I had manage to put her off for weeks on end. Then she threatened to pay me a visit, with dad in tow. Rather than have her in my life in DC, I agreed to pay a visit home, back in New York. It was not a decision that came easily. By mutual agreement, we decided I would visit them over Memorial Day weekend.

Jason agreed almost immediately. "Why not?" he had said, hopelessly unaware of the pitfalls in visiting my parents tucked away in a small town in Upstate New York. Part of me had secretly hoped that he would put up some resistance, maybe derail the whole incredibly stupid idea. Not him, not my Jason. He just smiled and said we could take his car.

Rumont is smack dab in the middle of the Brittany Valley and sits next to and at times

straddles the large bend in the Chipwa River. It was the seat of the textile miracle in the Northeast United States in the previous century. Cotton was the fuel and cloth was the product. A Frenchman named Pierre L. Rumont founded the town on the banks of the less than mighty Chipwa, which meanders through the state and is mostly a glorified creek in most parts. He built the largest textile mill in the State and brought in immigrant labor, who settled in the town. It was your usual melting pot of Italians, Irish, Poles, and you name it.

That was before. Cotton fell out of fashion and was replaced by synthetic blends and became more or less a novelty and thus went the fortunes of tiny Rumont. The rusting hulk of the former mill stills stands next to the Chipwa River. It is almost entirely overgrown with weeds. As a child, I used to play there, despite the repeated admonitions from my parents. The town, as a whole, was a wonderful place to grow up.

The rebirth of the town came with the founding of a small Liberal Arts college at the turn of the century: Cabiness College; or, as we townies like to call it, CC for short. The college was named after a Protestant minister. The school ostensibly was established for the express purpose of training young minds in the Word of God. In time, it became a school for rich kids with rich parents who were willing to pay exorbitant amounts of tuition to have their children study the classics. Year in and year out, somehow it worked. The college was adequately funded by the well heeled alumni, which kept the endowment high so it could continue to flourish. Over the years it even gained a grudging amount of respect from some of the larger, more established colleges in the region.

Enter my father, the professor of History. He landed a job at the college and went on to get tenure, thereby establishing a stable lifetime of living in a small town tucked away in the farmlands. He was a member of what Dr. Rey Flowers would have called “the warm and fuzzy end of academia.” Undoubtedly my dad would have been the recipient of Rey’s devious and ingenious practical jokes.

I never regret having lived my childhood there. It was cold in the winter and delightfully cool in the summer. There was a small town community atmosphere that fostered trust and just plain old friendliness, something grossly absent in most large cities.

We had fresh grown, vine ripe tomatoes in the warmer months, along with fresh picked apples in the early Fall, and Halloween came with big, plump just carved pumpkins. If you drove in any direction more than ten minutes you were immersed in crops of every description. The farmbelt surrounded us and nourished us, while in our little town we strived to perfect our intellects. That's how I remember it.

My mother worked part-time at the college library and the rest of the time as a mother. She baked. She did household projects. She even darned our socks, if memory serves me right. My parents were products of the Sixties and so they could never have been confused as disciplinarians when it came time to implement their parental duties.

We lived in a small house just off the main street, maybe a five minute walk from the campus. I was an only child and had a large bedroom with a window that looked out over the Chipwa River. It was an old house that was perpetually in need of repair. I can still remember my father cursing while he attempted to complete some household project that my mother had insisted he finish. As a professor of history, my father was a superb academician, but as a handyman, he was sorely lacking.

My parents entertained a great deal. I don't think a weekend didn't go by that some colleague or friend from their past wasn't visiting us. Their parties invariably stretched on into the night. On several occasions I can remember coming downstairs in the morning and finding someone asleep on the couch. Clusters of glasses and ash trays full to the brim would be scattered everywhere. Dirty dishes would be stacked in the kitchen sink, the extent of my mother's attempt to clean-up before she went to bed.

The seasons defined our life as much as the academic calendar did. In the winter, we

went ice skating and took the old wooden toboggan down Lumski's Hill, which was across town on the back side of the campus. Usually by Christmas break there was enough snow on the ground for sledding and other activities. Lumski's would generally always be full of college students and townies going down the hill.

My mother took me to Jugar's farm to ice skate on the pond behind his farm house. He was an old man with three sons. All of them had gone to Cabiness, graduated, then left New York. We would always wait until January to go skating because my mother wanted to make sure it was cold enough and the pond had frozen over completely. She would call old man Jugar and ask him how the pond was doing. When he would give us the okay, my mom would bake a pie and we would take it with us to the pond. Coconut custard pie. My mother always made him that. It was his favorite.

In the Spring, we would go horse back riding at one of my father's former student's farm. The student had inherited tons of money and was in the process of making tons more on Wall Street. He seldom visited the farm and gave my father full run of the place. The caretaker for the farm was a man named Charlie, who lived there with four dogs, three cats, and a pig that he let roam throughout the house.

For a month each summer we went to a small beach in Mass. My father's brother lived there year round. He owned a small art gallery. His clientele was comprised of summer vacationers that came there from all over New England.

My parents rented a cottage right on the beach. It was our home away from home. My mother would load the car up with every imaginable appliance and stuff the trunk with food and cooking condiments. The entire month she baked bread, muffins, cakes, and, if my father allowed her to, French pastry. He would complain about his waistline continually while we were there. By the second week he could be seen jogging down the beach, huffing and puffing.

Autumn ushered in the new school year, for me, and at the college. A general sense of

excitement would settle over the town because the students were returning. Soon the cold air would arrive, followed by the first snow fall. Then, of course, there would be Thanksgiving to contend with. My mother would be like a whirling dervish in the kitchen, baking pumpkin pie and cooking the turkey.

“You navigate and I’ll drive,” Jason announced, climbing behind the wheel.

“You aren’t going to believe this but I can’t read a map,” I confessed, forcing a laugh. “It’s true.”

We were in his pickup truck parked in front of my apartment building. Our overnight bags were stashed in the backseat. I had made us a picnic lunch to eat along the way. Both of us were trying not to think about the seven hour drive that lay ahead.

“I know how to get to New York--you guide me from there,” Jason told me, grinning.

“Will we still be friends when this trip is over?” I asked flippantly, smiling at him.

“This will be the real test,” he intoned, raising his eyebrows.

“A weekend trip, now that is a milestone event,” Pete had said just the day before when we were sitting in my office. “Now we’ll see what Jason Finley is made of.”

“It’s going to go all right. Believe me,” I told him, trying to sound convincing.

“If you say so,” he shot back, chuckling.

Damn that Pete, I thought now, as I got in the truck and held the map in my hand. I didn’t need a map. I knew the roads. I had driven them countless times before. When I was in college I had driven home on numerous occasions. No problem.

By the time we got to 95 North I was wishing we had taken my car instead of Jason’s pickup truck. The large truck tires seemed to hum too loudly on the road and the seat had suddenly become uncomfortable. He had put in a Collective Soul CD and I was trying to enjoy it. Even though I tried to stop myself, I was continually glancing over and trying to monitor the speed he was doing. Ten miles over the speed limit, I thought. Okay.

I didn't want to think this was a trial run to our relationship, a harbinger for the future, our future. I think it was obvious both of us were placing too much emphasis on this trip. Traveling together. Meeting parents. Spending time in what might be considered a charged atmosphere. I pushed back the first waves of dread that were creeping up on me.

"I got my partner to tell me some things about the trial," Jason stated, nodding at me. "Crazy stuff."

I could barely hear him over the music, so I leaned forward and turned it down a notch. "What trial?"

"The Flowers case," he replied, tapping on the steering wheel to the beat of the music.

"You did!" I said excitedly. "How did you accomplish that?"

"I don't know. He just sat down the other day and started talking about it. Right out of the blue. He never does anything like that, believe me."

"So, what did he say?" I asked eagerly. "I can't believe he opened up to you."

"I wouldn't exactly call it that but he did talk more than he usually does. He said this Flowers nut represented himself. Murder one and he's playing the lawyer. What a stupid ass," Jason declared, laughing.

"Doesn't surprise me he'd do that," I said in his defense, knowing just how Rey might think in a situation like that.

"The judge told him he was being...what was it? He was being ignorant. No, it wasn't that. You are being obtuse. Yeah, that was it. The judge told him he was being obtuse and that he must have counsel, or, at least, somebody there to advise him somehow. They appointed him some Public Defender that probably didn't know his ass from a hole in the ground. Didn't matter anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? He convicted himself, that's what I mean. He confessed," Jason

exclaimed, giving me a pitying expression. “In his opening statement to the jury, he told everyone in the courtroom about society’s inability to judge him. He then told the jury they were superfluous because he had acted on his own accord which thereby obliterated all connections to any covenant with the collective societal order. It was the individual taking precedence over the many. Quote unquote. You just got to love this guy.”

“That sounds like Dr. Flowers,” I muttered, looking out the window at Baltimore coming into view.

“We’re making good time,” Jason stated, whistling for emphasis.

“I guess we are as fast as you’re going,” I said before I could stop myself.

“Grin and bare it,” he told me, sticking out his tongue. “And you are definitely not going to be driving my truck.”

“I’m not going to let you drive the whole way. Don’t be silly,” I chided him.

“You heard what I said. I’ve laid down the law,” he exclaimed, smacking the dashboard with his open palm. “Finley’s law.”

“Can we at least change the CD?” I whined.

“Finley’s Second Law: No chick music,” he said, grinning at me.

“I can see I have my work cut out for me,” I told him, frowning.

It never failed. Whenever I got near the Brittany Valley and saw all of the familiar landmarks I always had a rush of memories. Picking apples there. Dad teaching me to drive over there. If it was the right time of year, I would see Tucker’s Cider stand, with the withering ears of corn nailed to the sign. Mrs. Tucker wore a vintage Revolutionary War outfit and sold apple cider by the gallon.

“Got that nostalgia ache yet?” Jason suddenly asked me, as if were reading my mind.

I looked at him for a moment then said, “I was just thinking about all the old times.”

“I figured that,” he said, smiling at me. “Every time I go home I get it. Memory overload

is what I call it. I'm never sure if I like it or not."

On Memorial Day weekend Rumont had its annual Girelli Day Festival. I couldn't believe it had slipped my mind. As we drove down Wilson Avenue, which was the main street in town, there were hundreds of people milling around the sidewalks. Girelli had been a Rumont resident, born and raised. He had been a World War II war hero, receiving numerous medals. Upon Girelli's return from the war the mayor had instituted a festival in his honor. It had almost instantly become a mainstay in the Springtime festivities in the valley area.

"What's going on?" Jason asked, slowing to a crawl in the congested traffic.

"I forgot. I should have told you to go down Lister Street instead. It's the damn Girelli Festival Day," I explained, looking out the window at Renshaw's Hardware Store, which had been there ever since I was a little girl. It had changed owners numerous times but the current owner always kept the same name. "They have a parade in the morning followed by a giant sidewalk sale, and then in the afternoon they have a ceremony for the soldiers. Small town America, you know."

"I love parades," Jason joked, rolling down his window. "Hey, I like this place," he exclaimed. "Who in the hell is this Girelli anyway?"

"It's a long story. Turn right at the next stoplight," I ordered, waving at my parent's next door neighbor. She squealed out my name and shouted out that it was nice to see me again.

"I bet you were Miss Rumont when you were in High School," Jason chortled, laughing. "Don't lie."

I ignored him. There was something more pressing on my mind. On the ride up there I had been trying not to think about a weekend with my parents. Was my mother going to fawn all over Jason? Would my father pepper him with questions about his political leanings? Were they going to insist we sleep in the same room to show just how liberal they still were? Control yourself, don't be nervous, I told myself.

“That’s it,” I told Jason, pointing to my house at the end of the street. “It’s not too late to turn around,” I said only half jokingly.

“Great place,” he said, pulling the truck up in front. “Should I park on the street?”

“Look, Jason, you are going to have to prepare yourself. My parents can be...you know, overwhelming,” I told him, as I grabbed a hold of his arm. “If it gets to be too much just let me know and we’ll make an excuse and run for our lives.”

“You’re nervous,” he cracked, laughing. “I didn’t know Dr. Greene could get like this. Well what do you know about that.”

“You’re not helping here,” I chided him.

“Okay. If it gets unbearable I’ll give you a signal...a sign of some sort,” he whispered, grinning at me. “I’ll pick my nose. That’ll be the signal for us to make a run for it. All right?”

“Once again, Detective Funly, you’re not helping,” I said, climbing out of his truck.

“Sarah Jane, come here!” my mother sang out, opening the screen door and rushing out onto the porch.

“Hello, mother,” I said, as she hugged me. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Jason mouthing the words: Jane. I felt like slapping the smirk off his face.

“And this must be Jason!” she called out, reaching out to hug him too. “You are just as handsome as Sarah Jane said you were.”

“Mother,” I said, already exasperated.

“Well you two come on in. Come in. Are you hungry? I baked a pie...with fresh blackberries. Picked them myself. They are kind of sour because its early in the season but it should be tasty. Let me look at you, honey. You look too skinny,” my mother said, barely pausing to take a breath.

“Where’s dad?” I asked, walking into the kitchen. The aroma of baking was almost intoxicating. “Don’t tell me he’s in town for the--”

“Mr. Riley wanted him to help out with something or other. He’s been gone all day...since early this morning. When I woke up he was already gone. Left his breakfast dishes right on the table. Of course the maid will clean up his mess,” she said, laughing. “Want something to drink? I have juice. Beer?”

“Take a breath, mom,” I ordered, latching onto her arm and hugging her again. “We are going to be here for a couple days, you know.”

“Right. It’s just been so long since I last saw you, honey,” my mother declared, wiping her hands on her apron. A bell went off and she scurried over to the stove. “Don’t want to forget the seasoning,” she said over her shoulder, as she opened the oven.

Time warp fusion, I thought, while I sat at the kitchen table and watched my mother putter around the kitchen. She kept up a running conversation, stopping every so often to once again ask Jason if he wanted anything. At one point she even pinched his cheek and told him he was cute.

An hour later my dad came home. He was wearing overalls and looked like the neighborhood handyman. I made quick introductions and he excused himself to go change. Jason and I exchanged knowing smiles.

“Okay, now I’m ready to play the father role,” my dad announced, standing in the doorway to the kitchen. He had changed into jeans and a sweatshirt. Cabiness College was emblazoned on the front, along with the school’s seal. “How about a beer, Jason?”

“Sure,” Jason replied, glancing at me for a second.

We made small talk for about an hour, touching on all of the relics from my childhood, including the time I wet my pants in kindergarten. I withstood the onslaught of reminiscing and tried to smile. Jason encouraged my parents to tell him more, while I shot him looks of disapproval.

“So, you’re a detective,” my father intoned, rubbing his chin. “Must be dangerous work.”

“Not really,” Jason said, looking at me. “Mostly a lot of paper work. Boring stuff.”

“I hear Washington is a like a no-man’s land,” my father continued, eyeing Jason for his response.

“Can be,” Jason replied evasively, taking another sip of his beer.

“Honey, why don’t you leave Jason alone about his work,” my mother chided. “They are on a mini-vacation, I’m sure neither one of them wants to talk about their work.”

“Got any good patient stories?” my dad asked me, disregarding what my mother had said.

“Confidentiality, dad,” I scolded him, trying to sound serious.

“Can the insane be any more compromised by you telling me some juicy details?” my dad joked. “I doubt it.”

I knew my father. He was being playful, even if he did come off as sounding disagreeable. Despite all of the family machinations going on, I still wondered what he thought of Jason. It wasn’t exactly his approval that I was after. Of course any psychologist would probably tell you that just such a dynamic often comes into play. With my mother it was different. I could bring home an ex-convict and she would approve of him. My dad, in all probability, was at the other end of the spectrum. He might never approve of anyone I was interested in.

Jason didn’t seem to mind being on display. Several of my parent’s friends dropped by; just to say hello, so my mother assured me. I was sure my mother would get together with them later and discuss my choice. I added to the zoo-like atmosphere by introducing him to a few of my childhood friends who still lived in the area.

The weather was perfect. It was warm and sunny. At night, a pleasant coolness settled in. As predicted, my mother had set up the guest room for us. She placed clean towels on the bed and wanted to know what time we wanted breakfast. I told her she wasn’t running a Bed and

Breakfast and she put on a scowl and pretended to be upset.

Sunday night there we were sitting in the living room watching TV. My mother was in the kitchen preparing dinner. I was standing in the doorway to the kitchen conducting a crossroom conversation between my parents when Jason told me to hurry into the living room. There, on the evening news, was a story about Beekers Hospital.

“You’re kidding,” I said, rushing back into the living room. “What’d they say?”

Jason stared at me for a moment, then looked back at the TV and said, “You are not going to believe it.”

“What’s going on?” my dad wanted to know, confused. “Who is this Flowers guy anyway?”

The unexpected, and the impossible, had happened. Dr. Rey Flowers had escaped from the infamous Beekers. I collapsed into a chair. My mother called from the kitchen, wanting to know what all the fuss was about. My dad stared at me.

“Flowers is a patient I have been interviewing,” I told my dad, staring at the TV screen.

“Interviewing? Really,” he said, looking at Jason, trying to gauge his reaction to the news.

“Talk about your sickos,” Jason muttered.

“Jason,” I snapped, avoiding my father’s eyes.

“Are either of you going to tell me what’s going on here?” my dad demanded.

Jason looked at me then at my father and said, “The man’s a two, no make that three, time murderer.”

“Sarah,” my father uttered, then looked back at the TV.

I then dashed around the channels in search of more news. On CNN, I heard more details of the breakout. A woman reporter standing in front of the Beekers Hospital sign was talking about the crime. She motioned to the sign several times. The cameraman panned the camera

over and back. Her words tumbled through my mind: Tied...Bound...Hose...Naked...Dead.

“I think I had better get back,” I stated, standing up and reaching for the top of the chair to steady myself.

“What are you talking about?” my father asked, jumping from his chair. “You can wait until morning, can’t you?”

“Dad, I can’t go into it, but I have to get back,” I told him, then rushed into the hallway. “I have to call Pete. See what’s going on.”

“Your dad’s right, Sarah. If we leave now we won’t get back until late at night. What good will that do?” Jason said, watching me closely for my reaction. “We can get up real early in the morning and make the drive back. How about that?”

“Is somebody going to tell me what this is all about?” my father asked the ceiling, throwing up his hands.

“Dinner’s ready!” my mother called from the kitchen.

I had to get back. Jason set his watch alarm and we got up before five. We had packed before going to bed. Reluctantly, I had filled my parents in on the particulars. “Oh, honey,” my mother kept repeating. My dad shook his head and muttered, “Why did you have to become a therapist?”

We were on the road before the sun came up. My mother, bless her heart, got up to make us breakfast. I didn’t know what I expected I could do. Jason had checked in with his precinct, trying to dredge up the latest developments. His partner told him the details as they knew them. I badgered Jason until he relayed the information over to me.

“The man knows how to do gory,” Jason exclaimed, leaning forward to check on the overhead road signs that were whizzing by. “Don’t let me miss the exit,” he warned, squinting as

he studied the traffic up ahead.

From what Pete and Jason had told me, as well as the preliminary news reports, Rey had escaped and attacked Dr. Helms. The sequence of events were hazy but would be reported in full detail in the coming weeks. I would have my fifteen minutes of fame when one of the trash shows interviewed me as a prime source of information about the infamous Rey Flowers.

It was never determined just how Flowers escaped from Beekers Hospital. There were several theories but none were substantiated. Pete theorized that Rey had literally gone out with the laundry, concealed in one of the industrial sized hampers. “It’d be easy to do,” he insisted to me, going on to spell out the laundry routine and its security shortcomings. The investigative board convened by the State of Maryland settled on staff error and left it at that. Two orderlies were reprimanded, suspended, and docked. One nurse was fired.

The escape was good fodder for the trash shows on TV, but it was the crime that, for lack of a better word, stimulated the public. Shocking the American people wasn’t easily done in this age of violent video games, slasher films, and televised regional wars from around the world. As the Dr. Rey Flowers saga unfolded, there was a groundswell of horror. The man and his previous crimes had long ago been forgotten. The murder of Dr. Helms brought it all into the spotlight, “more carrion for the citizenry to gorge themselves on,” as my father was to write in one of the Albany newspapers, an essay shaped into an article and elicited from the editor of the paper wanting a semi-personal connection to the murder.

In a very short time there was almost a cottage industry thriving in evaluating the effects of Rey Flowers on our society. No less than a dozen books were written. Talking heads, the television pundits, all had something to say about what it meant to us, his partners in a society gone astray. Some complained about morals decaying. Others placed blame on the “military machine.” It would seem that they all had subjective answers.

“You were ground zero,” one of the hosts of a popular talk show told me, knitting his

brow, as he leaned in to get my response. What could I tell him? Rey Flowers had a revenge complex, how's that? Sound good? He killed people, inflicting horrible pain when he was in the mood. Lucifer was more forgiving, merciful.

Pete was waiting in front of my apartment when we pulled up. He was pacing back and forth. Jason double parked his pick-up and told me he'd let me off then go find a parking space.

"Don't think the world's not coming to an end," Pete shouted to me as I was getting out of the truck.

"I'll be back in a minute, as soon as I find a spot to park," Jason called through the window.

"Don't bother," I told him. "Go on and do what you have to do. Don't worry about me."

"The lunatic is still loose," Pete exclaimed, pulling on my sleeve.

"I'm not going to let you stay alone, Sarah," Jason stated, stepping out of his truck, with the motor still running. "We have to think about your security, you know."

"That's right," Pete agreed. "Who knows what Flowers has in mind."

"Look you two, first of all he doesn't know where I live and, second, what makes you think he's got it in for me?" I asked, throwing up my hands. "I really don't think he wants revenge against me. What did I ever do to him?"

"Like we can really be logical when it comes to Flowers," Pete almost shouted. "The man is running around just waiting to snuff out somebody else."

"I'm going to call the Precinct and get a uniform over here right now," Jason declared. He reached in the cab and pulled out his cell phone.

"Don't you dare," I chided. "I think having you around will be enough, don't you?"

"Flowers never actually mentioned me, did he?" Pete asked, stepping in front of me to make eye contact. "Tell me. I think I might need to know that."

"Pete...are you serious?" I shot back. "Both of you are losing it a little bit I think."

“Pete, can you stay with her for a little while?” Jason asked him. “I’ve got to run over to-
-”

“No problem,” Pete said, then held his hand up to his head, pantomiming a phone call. In a staged whisper, he added, “Call for backup.”

I grabbed my bag and trudged up the stairs. The driving and the mounting chaos had left me exhausted. Pete hustled up the steps behind me.

He stopped me at the door and put his ear against it. He listened for a moment. I tapped my foot impatiently.

“Anytime today,” I said, nudging him aside so I could put my key in.

“We should have had Jason check it out first,” Pete whined. “What if Flowers is lurking in there? Then what?”

“We’ll have a chat,” I said cavalierly. “I’ll offer him some herbal tea.”

Pete held my arm and then swung the door open. He peered in the apartment. He shushed me then leaned his head in and craned his neck to look behind the door. Tip-toeing, Pete pranced into the apartment and stopped in the middle of the living room. Then he pointed to the bedroom and held his index finger up to his mouth.

“Rey! Hello Dr. Flowers, are you there?” I called out and Pete almost fainted.

“Damn, Sarah, this is serious,” Pete chastised me, bending down to pick up a tennis racquet propped against the couch. He brandished it over his head and slinked into the bedroom.

“Could you check the bathroom, I have to go,” I told him, laughing.

Pete danced across the floor and peeked into the bathroom, using the tennis racquet to swing the door open. “All clear,” he announced, taking a few practice swings with the tennis racquet. “I should have been a cop, huh?”

“You should have been something,” I said, smirking.

Pete was in the kitchen when I came out of the bathroom. He was making himself a

sandwich. The TV was on and a woman in a breathless voice was recapping the day's news stories.

"You've stepped in it now," Pete told me, shaking his head. "Got any different kind of mustard besides this lame American stuff?"

"What are you talking about?" I asked him, glancing at the TV.

"They just mentioned your name on TV. They are onto your scent already," he explained, holding up the mustard jar and shaking it at me.

"That's all I have," I said, picking up the remote and going through the channels. "What did they say about me?"

"That you were treating Flowers," he replied, wrinkling up his nose at some pickle jar. "How long has this been in here?"

"I wasn't treating him--those idiots," I exclaimed, waving the remote around. "This is going to be a nightmare."

"Yeah, Dr. Helms is the lucky one. She's dead," Pete said derisively.

"You know what I mean," I shot back, frowning at him.

"So do you know what he did to her?" Pete asked, fumbling in the cabinets for something. "No potato chips?"

"I'll eventually get the police report, if you know what I mean," I said sarcastically.

"Oh yeah, right," Pete said, laughing. "All I can tell you is that he left her tied up naked and stuck a garden hose in her mouth. She literally drowned. Very imaginative. You have to give the man points for being a thinking man's killer."

"Pete, please," I muttered, as I searched the channels for anything about the case.

"I know, but come on. The man deserves some credit for not being mundane, don't you think?" Pete asked, snickering. "Of all the people you'd want killed if you could have them killed, you know damn well Helms would be at the top of the list. Am I right or am I right?" he

chortled, grinning.

“No one deserves that,” I said over my shoulder. “Even her.”

“I wonder how he did it. How did he get at her? I don’t know but tying her to the Beekers sign, naked, with the hose stuck in her mouth, that was...was pretty inventive. You don’t think he, you know, sexually assaulted her first do you? Now that is a disgusting thought.”

“Pete, do me a favor and eat your sandwich and shut up,” I pleaded, stopping on a channel that had, to my immediate surprise, a photograph of me when I was in college splashed across the screen.

“When was that taken?” Pete asked, hooting behind me. “You look like a twelve year old.”

“My god, what next?” I shouted at the TV screen.

“Girl genius therapist, Dr. Sarah Greene, was treating killer Rey Flowers before he escaped and murdered again,” Pete stated in a baritone voice. “Next hour we will interview the girl therapist when she finishes her homework.”

“Do you see me laughing?” I asked him, stomping my foot. “Is this a national show? God, don’t tell me that it is!”

“Beamed by satellite to all parts of the globe,” Pete called out, snickering.

Then the phone rang. I hesitated for a moment. I hadn’t even taken the time to check the messages on my machine. Pete and I exchanged glances. A whiny voice came on and inquired about a future interview with a local TV show and left a number to call. I didn’t pick up. There were a dozen messages on my machine, each one asking about making a comment, or inquiring about an interview.

“This isn’t happening,” I mumbled, collapsing on my couch, while on the TV another channel’s commentator was talking about the VA doctor involved in the case.

12 AT THE WALL

“How long do you think Jason is going to be?” Pete asked with his head stuck in the freezer. “Can I have the last of this Ben and Jerry’s? You don’t mind, do you?” he wanted to know, as he held up the ice cream container.

“I don’t know how long he’s going to be and you can have the ice cream,” I answered, flipping to another channel. “Has the VA contacted you about this?”

“Nope,” Pete replied, slurping up some ice cream. “Are you kidding me? Their attitude is: Rey Flowers, who’s he?”

“They are going to grill me good,” I muttered, stopping at a local channel. “They are using the same photo!” I wailed, throwing up my hands.

“All of the junior high boys are going to have such a crush on you,” Pete announced, laughing. “Look, honestly, can you call Jason and find out about what he has in mind for the rest of the day? I’ve got to be going real soon, like ten minutes ago.”

“Go,” I said over my shoulder, flipping the channel again.

“Sarah,” he whined, “you know I can’t just leave you here. Jason would kill me.”

“I’ll be all right--don’t worry about it,” I told him, waving the thought away with my hand. “I’m going to call him in a minute. Knowing Jason like I do, I’m sure he already sent a patrol car around anyway.”

“Okay. Here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to go outside for a minute and see if there’s a cop car there. I’ll be right back,” Pete said, tapping me on the shoulder as he walked by. “Lock the door after me.”

“Maybe we should have a signal for when you come back,” I suggested, snickering. “Knock three times, then sing the National Anthem, so I’ll know it’s you.”

“Your sense of humor shows definite signs of dementia,” he exclaimed, shutting the door behind him.

The phone rang again. This time it was my cellular. I answered it and was relieved that it was Jason calling. As expected, he had sent a patrol car over to my apartment. Then he said the media was off and running and would probably be on my doorstep very soon. The patrolman had been ordered to keep them out of the building. He told me he would swing by in about an hour. His partner had already established a few leads and they were tracking them down.

Pete knocked on the door, three times, and I could hear him singing in the hallway. I told Jason good-bye and opened the door. Pete glanced up and down the hall and hurried inside.

“Nice voice,” I said, smiling at him.

“I took choir in High School,” he explained, smiling back at me. “You were right, Jason sent a cop car over. They are parked right in front of your building.”

“I know, Jason just called. He’s going to come over in a little while, so you can go,” I informed him, opening the door again.

“Are you sure?” he asked, glancing up and down the hallway. “I can stay. A quick phone call to cancel and I--”

“Go,” I ordered, pushing him out the door. “Call me later, okay?”

“I will, no doubt,” he stated, suddenly hugging me.

“What was that for?” I asked, laughing.

“Brother...sister, that kind of thing,” he explained, forcing a laugh. “Whatever, I got to get moving. See you later.”

I closed the door and locked it. Then I remembered I wanted to tell Pete not to speak with the VA unless I was there with him. I ran out into the hall and caught up with him on the second landing.

“Let’s not divulge anything until we know how this unfolds,” I told him in a whisper.

Pete laughed and asked, “Why are you whispering?”

“The walls have ears,” I joked, smiling.

“I’m not going to tell them anything,” he boasted, thumping his chest. “They can even torture me and I won’t talk. You can count on me, Dr. Greene.”

“God, you’re full of it,” I told him, motioning for him to be on his way. “Thanks, Pete,” I called down the stairs after him.

After Pete was gone, I sat back on the couch and tried to watch TV. I kept whirling through the channels, trying to find some new story on myself. “I’m getting just the least bit narcissistic about this whole thing,” I said aloud, looking around my living room self-consciously.

His voice seemed to reach into my very soul. That’s how I remember it. People speak of losing years off their life because of certain events they experience. My life expectancy dropped considerably.

“Dr. Sarah Greene, I presume,” Flowers said, as I heard that familiar giggle.

I bolted from the couch and whirled around. He was standing in the doorway, by the hall. He was dressed in a suit and tie and looked, for all the world, like an insurance salesman.

“How did--”

“Like it?” he asked unexpectedly, posing. “I got it at a thrift store. It’s kind of dated but I think I can pull it off. Don’t you?”

“Rey, how did you get in here?” I stammered, backing up until I bumped against my desk.

“You left the door open when you walked down to say something to your colleague. Very careless. You know this city has all kinds of dangerous types circulating,” he explained, laughing. “I slipped in uninvited. I hope you don’t mind.”

“How did you find out where I lived?” I asked him, trying to remain calm.

“Dr. Helms was kind enough to lend me her Palm Pilot gadget,” he explained, smirking,

as he calmly examined the contents of my living room, stopping by the drafting desk. “I just couldn’t imagine all of the info one of those things can hold. Technology has come a long, long way since I was interned. It’s like a whole different universe out there.” He bent over to peer out the window. “Nice view.”

“Dr. Flowers, listen...maybe we should talk about--”

“My, my, Sarah, you don’t need to be so formal, now do you?” he said, grinning at me. “You and I have such a symbiotic relationship that it just doesn’t seem right to be so official all the time. Loosen up. Have a seat on the couch. Relax. Watch TV. Enjoy Philo Farnsworth’s labors,” he said in that tone of voice I recognized from our interviews, the one he used when he wanted to tweak my sensibilities. “You know, old Philo probably made the greatest impact on living history since Karl Marx, maybe even Jesus. Unfortunately the man died in absolute obscurity, suffering from severe depression.”

I sat down on the opposite end of the couch from where he was standing. He was gesticulating wildly as he talked, laughing, and pacing. All the outward signs of being manic were present. How had this happened? screamed in my brain. I was at the mercy of a brutal killer.

“Do you want to discuss your situation?” I asked in a timid voice, as I tried to control my fear, hoping anything I said wouldn’t trigger a violent reaction in him.

He turned and stared at me for a full minute then continued, “Society kicked the man in the teeth. Farnsworth only gave us the single most delightful invention in all of history. Oh sure, the wheel saved labor and the printing press was good for the advancement of knowledge, but TV, now that changed everything. Where would we be without it? Nowhere. Look what’s it has brought us,” he declared, counting on his fingers. “Let’s see, Uncle Miltie...Red Skelton...Ed Sullivan; oh, sorry, Sarah, they were before your time. You had Lucy. What about Bonanza? Ersatz Wild West with a wholesome theme, perfect for the whole family. Walter, can’t leave

him out,” he stated, pointing to the TV screen, where a commercial for dish detergent filled the screen. Rey paused for a moment to study the screen, then he snorted and said, “Thank you, Philo!”

I didn’t know how to gauge his mannerisms. This was his first taste of freedom in over a decade. He had just killed again. Any minute I knew there was going to be a bulletin about his escape and murderous act on the TV. Slowly, I slid my hand over to where the remote was sitting so I could turn the set off.

“I’m going to turn off the TV now, Rey, so we can talk,” I said gently, grabbing the remote and aiming it at the screen. I turned it off just as the news was coming out of a commercial.

“You know, Sarah, you have the sexiest philtrum I think I’ve ever seen,” Flowers said, walking over and standing over me. “I just love it when you purse your lips then frown. Very sensuous. One of the Expressionistic artists would have loved to have you as their model. You are like a spiritual body. Now that is such a nice contradiction.”

This was vintage Flowers. In our interviews he had persisted in demonstrating an almost adolescent libidinal tendency. There seemed to always be a hint of harmless flirting. I tried to tell myself to not get any more alarmed. I didn’t think I fit into any of his revenge models, but I wasn’t sure about any sexual displays.

“Are you seeing me different now because you are outside the confines of your former situation?” I asked him, trying to hold his eye contact.

“You just have to play the therapist until the end,” he said in an exaggerated whisper.

“Habit,” I muttered, looking away for a moment.

“Forgive me fair doctor if I have bruised your soul,” he suddenly announced, bowing in front of me. Then the photos of him with his sister and ex-girl friend I had tacked on the design table caught his eye. “Where did you get these?” he asked rhetorically, hurrying over to look at

them more closely. “God, I look so young.”

I knew Jason would be coming over soon. It was touch and go at this point. There didn't seem to be any indication that he wanted to harm me, nothing overt. I wasn't sure if he was mercurial by nature in his actions. Would murdering me be something by design, a premeditated act he had mentally constructed during all of our meetings? All of the research I had done into Rey Flowers and I still didn't know him.

“Did you think those memories had been lost to you?” I asked in a quiet voice.

Rey turned back towards me and I could see he had tears in his eyes. He plucked a photo off the board of Helen and held it out in front of him. He traced her face with his finger.

“We are all ephemera here on earth. Nothing lasts. Not the inanimate. Not life forms. Not a thing. Perhaps the only true thing of value out there is entertainment, that momentary reduction of life's mundane grasp,” he declared, snickering. “But I wax poetical if not philosophical. What would Nivlac say?” he asked, winking at me. He then tossed the photo on the floor.

“Rey...let me help you,” I pleaded.

He snorted and asked, “Is death the only absolute going? I'd have to say that creating death is an absolute. Wouldn't you? Man has been doing it for a long, long time. We were preprogrammed for it.”

“A part of you was lost back in Viet Nam,” I offered, standing up to face him. “Somewhere along the way it changed you and your mind.”

“Oh yeah, napalm...Agent Orange...white phosphorus, it was quite the chemical stew over there, doc. Maybe it boiled my brain. I should have sued the corporations, make them pay for their avarice. Know any good lawyers?” he asked mockingly.

“You have brutally killed three people, Rey,” I almost screamed out. “What is there to

say that can change that fact? Tell me.”

“I got it,” he said in an ironic tone of voice, tapping the side of his head like he just got an idea. “Has to be. The tried and true. Bi-polar disorder, that’s what they are labeling it this week, right? That would explain a lot of things. I have another identity that’s wreaking havoc. Case solved. Phone the media. Damn your good, Doctor Greene.”

We both laughed at the absurdity of it. It all was beginning to seem surreal to me. I was standing in my apartment with a man wanted for murder, with the entire Metropolitan area on the alert for his whereabouts. My boy friend was a cop. I was the therapist. Dr. Rey Flowers had once again dropped me into Alice’s shoes and I was lost in a warren of dark and forbidden passageways.

Then the phone rang. Rey walked over to the where the phone was and listened as my message came on. It was Jason calling to tell me he was on his way over to my apartment.

“I better get that or he’ll know something’s up,” I said to Flowers, edging my way towards the phone. He picked up the receiver and handed it to me. “Hello, Jason,” I managed to say, trying to control my voice.

“I just called to let you know I’m on my way there now. Everything okay?” Jason wanted to know. I could hear traffic in the background so I knew he was in the car.

“Nice and quiet,” I said in as placid a tone as I could muster. “See you when you get here.”

He said good-bye and hung up. Rey smiled at me and patted me on the shoulder. It didn’t seem possible that he could have killed those people.

“Sarah,” he stated, straightening his tie, “I just can’t tell you how good it feels to check back into reality. It is so good to be out,” he said excitedly, glancing out the window. Then he noticed a book on my desk and walked over to look at it. He held it up and then leafed through it for a moment, before tossing it back on the desk.

“Research,” I muttered, knowing he would find the book objectionable.

“Let me guess, he’s probably a REMF, rear echelon mother fucker who wrote a book about the quintessential Nam experience,” Rey spat out, jerking his thumb in the direction of the book. “How can you get any insight from that kind of garbage?”

The book was written by a retired Colonel in the Army. The titled summed up the book’s contents accurately: Teaching The Art Of Killing Without Ethics. I had found it alarmingly facile, as well as frightening. The author had been responsible for many of the Army’s training methods in preparing soldiers for combat missions.

“It spells out how the soldiers are indoctrinated,” I explained. “Young minds can be molded to do things that are--”

“Sarah,” Flowers yelled out, picking up the book and hurling it across the room, where it glanced off the front door with a loud thud, “this moron doesn’t know a damn thing about any of it!”

“Rey,” I said firmly, holding up my hands in front of me in a defensive posture, “calm down.”

“Sarah, I sat in that hellhole waiting for time to advance, just me and my thoughts. I was imprisoned in my head,” he exclaimed, smacking his fist into his open palm. Then he laughed and said, “I guess you could say I was rescued by you.”

“Rey, you have to turn yourself in,” I said in almost a whisper. “They will kill you if you don’t. You must believe me.”

“You know what they are going to say about you? Do you, doc?” he asked, smirking again. “They are going to say you brought that lunatic Flowers out of his shell. Oh yes, that’s what they will say for sure. It just might mess up your resume a little bit, I’m afraid.”

“Jason is on his way here,” I said in a calm voice. “You should surrender to him--for your own good.”

“Doing the old flagrante delicto with him are you,” Flowers sang out, grinning at me. “And here I thought all along you were married to your work. My disappointment knows no bounds. I guess I am going to have to report you to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. Shoddy therapy habits. Needs to improve on follow through implementation. Would benefit from close contact with crazy people.”

Flowers mental instability was becoming increasingly more pronounced. At this point my therapist’s instincts had taken over. My heart had finally stopped pounding in my ears. I knew I needed to hang on a little bit longer.

“My reputation can take a hit,” I joked, smiling at him. “Remember, I’m your biographer.”

“Ah yes, so you are,” he declared, holding up his hand in salute. “I once had a professor in college, he taught Physics. One of his favorite maxims was: Infinity extends inward as well as outward. Damn if I know what it’s supposed to mean,” he exclaimed, laughing. “Write it down, doc. Maybe you can use it as the title.”

Standing there in his suit, having shaven, Rey Flowers looked the picture of ordinary. Seldom had I ever seen a patient display such outward deception in the past. Twenty-four hours before he had bound and gagged a woman, then tied her to a sign and taped a hose down her throat, leaving her to die. And now, he stood in my living room nervously clutching at his tie and talking about one of his college professors.

Time was closing in on us. I wasn’t sure whether or not he was armed. When Jason eventually did arrive would he have to shoot Flowers? There was a chance, albeit a slight one, that Rey would go peacefully, quietly shut down his obsession to kill and return to a life of incarceration. I suspected, however, that Dr. Rey Flowers was committed to what was in his mind as a final mission. “Flame out” was how Pete labeled it, the time when a patient takes their concluding bow because there can be no more encores.

“Can we talk about what you are going to do when Jason gets here?” I asked gently, hoping the very question wouldn’t launch him into a more manic state.

“Oh sure,” he said sarcastically, chuckling, as he walked into the kitchen. “Got anything to drink, Sarah? I would really like to have a beer. Nothing fancy. Just a good old gassy American beer.” He opened the refrigerator door and stood there examining the inside. “You need to go grocery shopping,” he declared, sliding items around.

“Rey,” I said firmly, walking over to the other side of the kitchen counter, “are you going to answer me?”

“You are being petulant now, doc,” he said over his shoulder. “You were an only child, right? You must have been. Always got all of the attention. Little Sarah, the princess.”

“I don’t want Jason to have to shoot you,” I blurted out.

He turned to face me and smiled, then said, “That’s touching.”

“I can work with you...I can,” I insisted. “Turn yourself in and we can...we can develop a specific therapy for you. I know we can work together.”

“Uh huh,” he said, grinning at me. “Look here, you have one Miller Lite left. Can I have it? You don’t mind do you? I hate to take your last beer and all. Listen, I can pay you back,” he said, reaching in his pocket and pulling out a roll of bills. “Dr. Helms must have just gone to the bank or something,” he said gleefully. “I hit the jackpot. Her purse was stuffed with cash!”

“Oh Rey,” I uttered, shaking my head in dismay. “Did you have to kill her?”

“Let me think about that for a nano-second...yes I did,” he chortled, giggling. “I took her life so others could live,” he intoned, holding up his hands and reaching for the ceiling. “Oh, it wasn’t as dramatic as all that. The heavens certainly didn’t open up or anything. Although it did rain, but it was only a Spring shower. It just made her naked body glow a little bit. I wish you could have seen her face when I nabbed her getting into her car. Now that was a look of complete horror. Her worst nightmare had just come to pass. Such a delicious moment! Too

bad you weren't there to see it, Sarah."

"Rey, you killed an innocent woman," I protested.

"Innocent, I think not," he corrected, taking a sip of beer and then belching. "What did I say? Gassy. How come people buy this swill?" he asked matter-of-factly, pointing to the can.

"And in cans at that."

"Are you going to kill me too?" I asked him, staring into his eyes. "Am I on your agenda?"

"You know, Sarah, I like you and all but damn if you aren't just a little bit self-centered," he joked, laughing. "Such an ego."

"Rey, I--"

"No, silly, I'm not going to kill you," he replied. "Why would I do that? Why would I want to do that? I got to tell you though, if you keep on being difficult, and whiny, I might have to make a reassessment," he warned, wagging his finger at me. "Where was I before? Oh yeah, that bitch put up quite a fight. She tried to kick me in the balls. I have to tell you doc, when I punched her--right in the face--it might have been one of the best feelings I've ever experienced in my entire, miserable life. Bam! right in the nose. I think I broke my knuckle though," he said, rubbing his hand.

"Okay, Dr. Helms was a despicable person, I agree," I said, trying to grasp at anything that might help me verbally subdue him. "She wasn't the most sympathetic type of person, that's for sure, and I had plenty of run-ins with her, but she was--"

"I just love it when I get these flashes of creativity, Sarah," he interjected, smiling at me. "I really didn't have a plan or anything. I kind of seized the moment when I saw her getting into her car. My immediate plans were to disappear, like real quick once I got out. Duty calls though. I saw her and it all fell nicely into place.

"I sneaked up on her got her into a firm neck hold and said: Good-morning, Dr. Helms.

No need not to be polite, for heaven's sake. I thought she was going to shit her pants right there. After I punched her I caught a glimpse of the front sign to Beekers and it seemed like the right thing to do. And when I saw the garden hose stretched out on the lawn, well then I thought gallons of water just might wash away her sins.

"The naked part was direct pay back, I admit that. Hell, the woman had seen me naked plenty of times before. Why shouldn't I take a peek at the old bag myself? Not a bad body for an old broad!

"I applied a few more well placed punches, for all of the other patients at Beekers, you know, then took that hose and tied her up in it, lashed her to the sign, stuck the nozzle down her throat, and turned it on. Beautiful. Death had never been orchestrated so nicely before. They should give me a medal," he said, taking a bow.

At that moment there was a knock on the door. Rey held up his hand and then walked to the door. Jason called out my name from the hallway. A sly smile crept to the corners of Rey's mouth. Then he reached in his pocket and pulled out a small hand gun. A wave of nausea swept over me. He's going to shoot Jason, I thought.

"Rey, put that gun away," I hissed, stepping closer to him. "There's no need to use it. I can tell him to go away. I will. I'll make up some excuse. Please, Rey."

"Do you like it?" he asked childishly, holding up the gun. "Dr. Helms kind of bequeathed it to me. It was in her purse. I guess if you had her personality it was a good idea to have a concealed weapons permit. You don't think it's too feminine for me? It is sort of small and all," he said, striking a model's pose.

Jason knocked again and called out, "Sarah, it's me. Open up."

"Open the door and let him in," Rey ordered, stepping behind the door. "Don't get cute."

I opened the door and Jason almost rushed in, saying, "What took you so long?"

Rey closed the door behind him. Jason whirled around but it was too late. Rey held the

gun close against Jason's face and said, "You must be Jason. Glad to meet you."

"What in the hell," Jason sputtered, taking a few, hesitant steps back.

"Now-now, Detective, why don't you hand over your gun," Rey ordered, smiling incongruously. "We're all friends here."

Jason reached in his coat and pulled out his hand gun. Rey snatched it out of his hand. Then he snapped his fingers and pointed at his pant legs.

"That's it," Jason said, tight lipped.

"Come on, no games," Rey said in a sing-song tone of voice.

"I swear, I only carry the one," Jason stated, holding up his pant legs.

Rey snorted and said, "Have a seat on the couch. I think there's a little time for a chit-chat. Maybe we can get to know each other some. Talk football. Basketball. How about those Wizards? Think they'll make the playoffs?"

Jason and I sat on the couch, while Rey stood across from us. He was waving the gun around and suddenly expounding on politics. I could see he was slipping into a manic mode again. The phone rang and a syrupy women's voice came on the answering machine asking whether or not I would consent to an interview with the New York Times. Rey laughed.

"What do you have in mind?" Jason asked bluntly, still holding his hands up.

"Put your hands down, silly," Rey commanded, motioning with the gun to put his hands down. He was holding a gun in each hand. "Hey, Sarah, I think you might have to get an agent, someone to field all of these calls. Do you think you'll be on Larry King?" he joked, giggling.

"You are making me nervous waving those guns around," I told him in a serious tone. "Can't you put them down or something?"

"Oh sure," he said, mimicking my voice. "The doctor doesn't like violence, Jason. If you two are to progress in your relationship you are going to have to resign from the police department and change your career to something more suitable, say social worker maybe. Can

you do that, Jason? Can you spend your days caring about other people's problems? You don't have to answer right now. Think about it for awhile."

In most respects, Rey Flowers was simply having fun. For the first time in a very long time he was in control of his actions. There was no power structure overseeing his every move. "Contained," was how he termed it to me on several occasions, as he referred to his continuing imprisonment. "Each day they subtract something more, making it a devolving equation that defines my life." I could see right then that he would never return to the old order, the previous lifetime of living in "a dwindling box."

"You are going to construct a design for suicide," I declared, standing up to face him. "It's obvious now. You will never go back."

"Wise beyond her years," he intoned, grinning at me. "Let's watch some TV, shall we?" he announced, changing his attitude again. "Perhaps we can see how the dragnet is progressing. Will they catch the evil Dr. Flowers? Film at eleven."

There were updates on every channel. Flowers had been sighted a half dozen times. The tips line was flooded with calls.

Jason brooded in silence. I could see him clenching his fists. I hoped he wasn't going to try to disarm Rey.

"You won't be able to escape," I said to Rey. "Everyone in the city is looking for you. Please, Rey, give yourself up. Here, right now."

"Shush now, Sarah, I want to hear the news bulletin," he chastised me, waving a gun at me to sit back down. "Look at that mug shot!" he almost shouted, laughing uproariously. "I look like a mental patient in that one." He laughed again at his own sense of irony. "Fear stalks the Nation's Capital. Who will he kill next?"

He switched the channel when he got bored with the next story the Network had moved on to. This channel had a live shot from a reporter at the Viet Nam Memorial site. Rey turned

up the sound. The reporter was talking about the ceremony honoring the soldiers who served in the Viet Nam War. He mentioned a General Sutter would be giving a speech. Rey instantly became agitated again.

“What is it?” I asked, leaning forward, trying to connect with him. “Tell me, Rey.”

“Sutter!” he yelled out, “that incompetent asshole.”

“Who is he, Rey?” I wanted to know. “Is that somebody you knew from Nam?”

Rey ignored me and sneered, “General Andrew P. Sutter, you’ve got to be kidding me. Is this a cosmic joke? Nutter Sutter, that’s what we called him, that moron. He made General.”

I had seen similar reactions from other vets when certain names would be mentioned. There could be a visceral hatred that they harbored for some of the officers they served under in Nam. Many times it was a classic example of displacing their anger in the direction of the one person they believed was responsible for their plight. One of my patient’s had repeatedly threatened to kill this officer who he knew to be stationed at Fort Meyers. After a serious discussion with Pete, I had taken the unusual step to actually warn the officer.

“Friend of yours,” Jason said sarcastically.

Flowers turned to him and snarled, “The man was a total idiot. He was responsible for probably killing half of my Company at one time or another. The fucking fool didn’t know jack-shit about combat and now he’s a General! That’s the god-damn Army for you, they promote the best,” he stated derisively. “And now he’s giving a speech for Memorial Day at the Wall. Well maybe a few dead spirits will come right out of that fucking wall and wring his neck. Put that on the six o’clock news.”

The phone rang again, startling all of us. It was another producer calling wanting to set up an interview. He left a phone number to get back to him. Rey gave me a smile and laughed.

“Rey, let me and Jason help you,” I pleaded, hoping that he would accept my offer. “I promise you I will get you removed from Beekers. I’ll do everything I can to--”

“Dear Sarah,” he said in a soft voice, “by now you must realize that I’m never going back, not to any institution. And Detective, I’m not going to jail either. So the both of you can relax. You might just say that Free Will is mine,” he exclaimed, laughing.

“To each his own,” Jason muttered, glancing at me.

“Sarah, your love interest here is quite the surly one, now isn’t he?” Rey spat out, aiming the gun in his right hand directly at Jason. “He is quite handsome though. You two make such a lovely couple. The therapist and the detective, now that just might make a good movie. Pretty therapist...good-looking detective, they are out to protect the world from itself. Who would be a good actor to play Jason here?”

“Rey,” I said, trying to steer him into a conversation about his plans and their motives, “I think it’s time we talked about you and what lies ahead.”

“Me?” he said, raising his eyebrows. “Just how egocentric do you think I am?” he sang out, giggling. “Does it always have to be about me?”

“Can we be serious for a moment?” I asked him, standing up again. “You are holding us at gun point, in my apartment, and the whole city is out looking for Dr. Rey Flowers, the murderer. I want you to talk to me,” I stated, struggling to keep my voice from cracking.

“Jason, don’t you just love it when she gets so emotional?” Rey said, winking at Jason. “You better marry this girl, don’t let her get away.”

“Rey, stop it,” I ordered, stepping in front of him.

He placed the gun in his left hand against my temple and said in a detached voice, “Dr. Greene, let’s not forget your professional manner.”

“Flowers,” Jason uttered, standing up.

“It’s time to go for a ride,” Flowers announced, removing the gun from my head. “I sure hope you guys don’t mind having a third wheel along. Come on, it’ll be fun to ride in a police car.”

“Look, Flowers, you aren’t going to be able to get very far. There’s a uniform right out front. Why don’t you let me take you in,” Jason proposed, holding out his hand to accept the guns. “Come on, you can trust me.”

Rey looked at Jason then at me and said, “I can,” then he laughed. “I like you Jason. You remind me of some of the guys in my platoon. They were all full of shit too. Now let’s go.”

Flowers marched us out into the hall and then down the stairs to the first floor. You could see the patrol car through the window in the door. I could feel the barrel of a gun pressed against the small of my back.

“What did I tell you?” Jason said, staring at Rey.

“Here’s what’s going to happen,” Rey said in a bland voice, as if he might be telling someone what to get at the grocery store. “Jason is going to go out there and tell that cop to take a spin around the block to check out the neighborhood. When he’s gone, we are going to go and get in Jason’s car and take a ride. Got that?”

Jason nodded yes and asked, “Where are we going?”

“Let’s see, I was thinking of going to Duke Zeibert’s for a late lunch,” Rey replied sarcastically, jerking one of the gun’s in Jason’s direction. “I’ll let you know when I decide the time is right. Now go on, move. And don’t give the cop any hints or I’m going to forget how fond I am of Sarah and put a few holes in her kidneys. Understood?”

Jason bit his lip then looked at me. I nodded at him, telling him to do what Flowers wanted. Reluctantly, he went out the door, pausing on the front steps to look up and down the street. Being as casual as he could, he stepped up to the patrol car and leaned in the window. There was a short exchange between him and the patrolman, then the patrol car drove away.

Rey opened the door a crack and watched the patrol car make a right turn at the stop sign. He grabbed my arm and lead me down the steps in front of him. For the first time in recent memory my street was deserted. There was usually some activity going on, from kids skating to

people just sitting on their stoops. This was fortunate, because I didn't want Rey to have to shoot at anyone if they recognized him.

"The car's across the street," Jason told him, walking between two parked cars.

"You drive. We'll ride in the back," Rey ordered, pushing me into the seat. "And don't be a hero, Jason. Believe me, it's not all it's cracked up to be."

Jason drove and Rey directed him. We went towards Washington Circle. A horrible thought entered my mind. We were getting closer to Pennsylvania Avenue. I had visions of Flowers trying to assassinate the President, using Jason and his car as a battering ram to get on the White House grounds. Of course Jason had the same thoughts. I could see him sitting in front, with his shoulders stiff and his jaw clinched. If we got near the White House I knew he was going to do something drastic.

Then Flowers suddenly told Jason to pull over. We were just off K Street. Rey reached over and affectionately squeezed my hand. It was an odd gesture, tender and unexpected. He smiled at me.

"What now?" Jason asked, looking in the rear view mirror at Rey.

"End of the line, as they say," Rey told him, opening the door. "I'm going to have to borrow your car, Jason. I hope you don't mind. You do have insurance, don't you?"

"I don't think that would be a good idea," Jason said, turning half around in the seat to look at me.

"Oh yeah it would," Rey snapped, pointing a gun at Jason's head. "I really don't want to get blood stains on the upholstery, Jason. Get out."

"The car is all yours," Jason said, forcing a laugh. "I'm not that attached to it."

Flowers got behind the wheel. Jason lead me over to the curb. Rey stepped on the gas a few times, revving up the engine. A few pedestrians gave us curious looks.

"I sure hope I remember how to drive," Rey called out, grinning, then he was gone,

speeding down the street. He honked the horn and actually waved out the window.

“Nutcase,” Jason spat out, before sprinting to a pay phone at the corner. A woman was talking on the phone and he ripped the receiver out of her hand and placed a call to his precinct. The woman cursed him and he told her he was a cop. She wasn’t impressed and it didn’t discourage her from yelling at him.

I ran up to the phone in time to hear Jason tell someone at the precinct that the White House needed to be alerted. Jason rambled through his story, almost screaming into the phone. Suddenly it occurred to me that Flowers had something else in mind. I don’t why it came to me. I had a crystal clear image of the TV screen and seeing General Sutter’s face. That was the target.

“Jason, listen, I think Flowers is going after the General, General Sutter,” I shouted, grabbing his arm.

Jason told the person on the phone to hold on, then said, “Are you sure? What makes you think that?”

“I got a feeling about it,” I explained. “You saw how he reacted when the General’s name came on the TV. Rey almost had an episode right then and there.”

“Sounds kind of shaky, but who knows?” Jason said, shrugging. He spoke to the person on the phone again, telling them to warn the White House then hung up. “Come on, we’re going to the Wall.”

Jason looked around then ran out into the street and hailed a passing cab. He pushed the driver over and got in behind the wheel. The taxi driver protested and Jason told him it was police business. I got in the back and Jason squealed away from the curb.

“Jason,” I shouted from the back, “I remembered that Flowers said he had never been to the Wall. I think the two things clicked in his brain--the General and never having been to the memorial.”

“You think he’s going to actually try and kill the General?” Jason yelled over his shoulder, as he maneuvered between two limousines heading towards the Hill.

“It’s his revenge mechanism kicking in,” I exclaimed, trying to hang onto the arm rest. “I think it fits right in with his warped methodology and everything.”

“I called it in but he’s got a head start,” Jason said grimly, laying on his horn, sending pedestrians scattering.

“You’re going too fast, man,” the taxi driver shouted, fumbling for the seat belt. “If you wreck this cab you’re paying for it.”

We were hurling down Constitution Avenue. Jason was running red lights, leaving behind him a cacophony of blaring horns and cursing drivers. A mounted Park policeman struggled to get his horse under control as we sped past him. I caught a glimpse of him barking into his radio, reporting on an out of control taxi cab heading towards the Lincoln Memorial.

“Scared the shit out of him,” Jason shouted over his shoulder, laughing. “Park police, what weanies.”

“Watch the road,” I yelled back, bracing my feet against the seat in front of me.

“You’re crazy,” the cab driver mumbled, sliding down in the seat.

Jason found a break in the park cars and drove right over the curb and steered his way across the sidewalk. Pedestrians scattered like squirrels. An ice cream cone a lady had been eating splattered across the windshield. I could see two mounted policemen galloping across the monument grounds, converging on us.

“The cavalry is on its way,” I yelled out, letting out a yelp when we bounced over a bump in the ground.

In the distance we could see a large group of people mulling around. The ceremony was due to start in a few minutes. Jason now had the cab going flat out over the grounds. A traffic cop on a scooter had joined in the chase and was closing in on us from the right.

“I hope you are right about this, Sarah,” Jason announced, grinning at me. “If not, well, then I guess I’ll have to put in for early retirement--right?”

“If you don’t kill us first,” I exclaimed, taking a peek over the seat back.

The taxi swerved to the right then came to a skidding stop. Jason jumped out and whisked his badge out of his coat pocket, flashing it in all directions. The mounted policemen’s horses snorted to a halt. A lather had been worked up on their necks where the reigns were straining to control them.

“I’m on the job. I’m a cop...Detective Finley!” Jason declared, holding his badge out in front of him. “Listen up, I think Flowers might be in the area and the General is his target. Got that?”

The mounted cops exchanged glances and then one of them lead his horse over closer to Jason. He leaned down in his saddle and examined the badge. The traffic cop on the scooter screeched to a stop on the other side of Jason. A few sirens were blaring in the distance, coming our way.

“Did you say Flowers?” one of the mounted police asked skeptically.

“Yeah, he’s armed,” Jason replied, scanning the crowd. “I need to get to the General, the one who is giving the speech today. I think Flowers is going to try and take him out.”

“Are you sure about this?” the other mounted cop wanted to know. He exchanged a wry smile with his partner.

“Look, Roy Rogers, I don’t have the time to discuss this with you,” Jason snapped. “Radio it in--now!”

“Jason,” I called out from the cab, “we got to get moving.”

“Oh no,” he stated, holding the door closed so I couldn’t get out of the taxi. “You’re not going any further. I can handle it from here.”

“Jason, don’t be ridiculous,” I shouted, banging the door with my fists.

“Do me a big favor and keep her here,” he ordered the traffic cop, who shrugged his shoulders and got off of his scooter.

Then Jason took off running in the direction of the stage. He disappeared into the crowd. I opened the door and started to get out of the taxi. The traffic cop stepped forward and held the door. I looked at him through the window and laughed.

“Sorry,” he mumbled.

“Get out of the way,” I commanded.

“Nope,” he said, turning away.

“Idiot,” I muttered, laughing, as I slid to the other door and jumped out. The traffic cop shouted at me but I kept going.

All of the commotion we had made didn't stop the ceremony from starting. Up on the stage there were a few Viet Nam vets seated behind the podium, to the right. Next to them there were a few local politicians. To their right were several men in uniform from various branches of the Service.

Folding chairs had been lined up adjacent to the Wall. There were knots of people here and there examining the names on the memorial. Bouquets of flowers were lying in front of the wall, along with numerous tokens of remembrance placed next to the spot corresponding to a name inscribed on the front panel. I skirted the seating area and ran around to the right side of the stage. Jason was nowhere to be seen.

The microphone squawked from some feedback for a moment, then a man in civilian clothes began a short speech on the import of the day's ceremony. I could see a group of cops standing guard next to the stage. I wasn't sure if they had been alerted already or were there in a routine capacity. It didn't seem like Rey would be able to penetrate their perimeter if he wanted to.

Then I caught a glimpse of Jason on the opposite side of the stage. He was talking to a

uniformed policeman. The cop was speaking into his radio and Jason was gesturing towards a man on the stage dressed in a uniform. I stepped back to see where he was pointing. The man was leaning over to hear what a soldier was whispering into his ear. He nodded and then looked out over the crowd.

The man at the microphone introduced General Sutter and there was a smattering of applause. The man that Jason had been pointing to stepped up to the podium. He quickly launched into his speech, thanking the previous speaker for his introduction.

I turned back to the audience and tried to make out faces in the crowd. The General outlined the meaning of the holiday, touching peripherally on the war in Southeast Asia. He spoke in a dull monotone, matched by the content of his speech. The steady wail of police sirens grew closer and closer.

Five minutes into the speech a man suddenly stood up towards the back and purposely strode forward towards the stage. About half way there he raised both of his arms and began shooting. Bullets splintered the podium. A few stray shots wounded a politician on the dais.

There was a scramble to get off the stage, as the group of cops sprung into action. I heard several popping sounds beside me and saw Rey collapse to one knee. Still he kept firing until both guns were empty. A shot from the opposite side knocked Flowers to his side, where he finally lay still.

On stage, the General had slumped over the podium before slinking to the floor. He would die an hour later at the hospital from at least three mortal wounds. The politician would survive after surgery on his arm.

I ran up to where Rey was lying on the ground but was held back by a ring of cops around him. Jason pushed his way over to me and grabbed a hold of my arm and lead me away. It was my first brush with insidious shock. All of those interviews about war and its peculiar mayhem and I had never experienced the real thing.

“He shot him,” I repeated again and again, as the pervasive smell of discharged gun powder hung in the air.

“It’s over now,” Jason reassured me, leading me away.

13. Afterwards

“Like an orgy of sleaze,” Pete told me over the phone, chuckling. “Where’s Sarah? Can I speak to Dr. Greene. Is Sarah Greene there?” he intoned, laughing. “I can’t get a damn thing done here.”

“Sorry about that,” I offered meekly, sighing.

My work at the VA was finished, or, more accurately, I was finished at the VA. Terminated. It wasn’t called that exactly, but that is what it amounted to. For a program that wanted to remain anonymous, I wasn’t the best one to have running it. My face was splashed all over the media, from magazines to TV talk shows. My relationship with Dr. Rey Flowers was examined from A to Z, leaving no stones unturned. I refused all interviews, which, in its way, made the story more compelling.

“Maybe you should take your fifteen minutes and get on with your life,” Jason had suggested, as if his life hadn’t been permanently altered as well.

“Maybe we should both just jump on a plane and fly somewhere far, far away from it all,” I said, smirking.

After an in-house investigation, and Internal Affairs got hold of it, Jason’s career was teetering on the edge too. His immediate superior made it known that he would never advance. “A prominent General’s been killed with your gun, what do you think?” his superior had

commented, shaking his head.

It didn't take long for us to retreat. At Jason's suggestion, we pulled up stakes and relocated in, of all places, back in Rumont, NY. Coming full circle had an awful ring of truth to it. Of course my mother was delighted. My father, well, he never thought much of my therapist job anyway.

In a bit of nepotism gone wild, I landed a job as a professor at Cabiness College, while Jason got a job as the Captain of campus security. If the college was to ever go under we would all be out of work. We were small town fixtures now.

The furor about the whole Flowers ordeal lasted almost six months or longer. I was sure it might never die down. It was an emotional undertaking leaving DC after a good many years. Even though I tried I couldn't beat back the tears as Jason was helping me move my belongings out of the apartment that had served as my home and supplied me with so many memories.

"And you call yourself a therapist," Jason mocked, handing me another tissue from a box on my desk.

"I am such a wimp," I mumbled, looking over my desk, now empty except for several boxes stacked on top. "I really have to mail these, don't let me forget," I said, picking up the envelopes with all of the photographs from Flowers' past. "I really should call them," I muttered, looking out the window at the park.

"And say what?" Jason asked, looking at me with his hands on his hips. "Oh, hello, sorry about old Rey buddy. Maybe they should have stuck his ass in the electric chair before."

"Jason," I scolded, frowning at him.

"Well, what good would it do now?" he asked me, picking up another box. "I'm taking this down to the truck."

"The mother of all ironies," Pete had said to me, grinning. He had been there helping me in the post mortem of my career as I cleaned out my office.

“Maybe I can pick up my interviews where I left off,” I joked, forcing a laugh.

It was the irony of it all that made it all the more dramatic. Dr. Rey Flowers had survived, albeit he was now confined to a wheel chair. Three different policemen had wounded him, with one bullet hitting his spine. He was now incarcerated in a maximum security prison, locked away until he wasted away in his paralysis.

I guess it was a minor miracle our interlocking story had any legs because neither one of us was talking. By reported accounts, Flowers hadn't uttered a single word since the attack on the General. The silent void had been filled by plenty of pundits and self-appointed experts though. Newsweek, Time, you name it had devoted entire sections of their magazines to the story. Hollywood, including a Viet Nam vet with clout in the movie industry, were backstabbing each other to get a piece of the action.

It wasn't three months before a video game called Flowers Power hit the market. More fodder. Kids were treated to a virtual world of Rey beheading, raping, and shooting any number of victims, complete with audio enhancement of screams and vulgar comments. The designers of the game were in turn sued by the relatives of the victims, as well as Rey's sister. And the saga continued on.

Back in the Brittany Valley, I kept my low profile, hoping that my future students wouldn't expect me to expound on the madness of Rey Flowers. For the most part I avoided reading about the entire matter, choosing to ignore my vanity and not be seduced by the glare of fame. Jason followed suit and refused to allow any materials to infiltrate our new lives.

Rumontians were divided it seemed. Some were intent on enjoying the fact that one of their own had become a celebrity, however scurrilous. The other half wanted to burn me as a witch or so it seemed some times when I was at the market or in any public place they could humiliate me with withering stares or muttered comments.

“You will persevere, dear,” my mother would say, as she went about her baking, assured

that all would indeed be okay.

I do recall a headline I read in passing, as I let my guard down one day and spied a newspaper at a newsstand. Booker died in order that all of us could act like hyenas, the caption read. It had been attributed to Rey, even though it was widely reported that Flowers had refused to speak to anyone. To me, it sounded precisely like what Rey would say so perhaps he had said it.

Six months had passed when I received a letter post marked from some State in the Midwest. Fortunately my mail had slowed to a trickle finally, after bags and bags of it had threatened to swamp me and my family at first. The mail had been running evenly divided between vitriolic hatred on the one hand and saintly understanding on the other. It had taken me a few weeks to entirely stop reading any of it.

The letter was comprised of just one verse and was simply signed Nivlac.

It read:

We hear all of nothing and most of anything,
so comes the looming darkness.

And it will be sweet pain again as the four corners draw closer.

Listen.

There it is.

It made me laugh but this time around I didn't have to take the bait. Alice had moved on. Dr. Rey Flowers would have to reside in his own dimension alone.

SURROUNDED BY MYTHOLOGY is the first installment of the Dr. Sarah Greene mystery trilogy.