

BASEMENT  
COMMANDMENT

Bahram Zaimi



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**Edited by Rowan Silva**

«Издательские решения»

**Zaimi B.**

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How twelve years have been wasted to inculcate her with a societal cliché identity. Entangled in the destiny of others, chained in strangers' dreams, the only way is a life and death fight in the basement where the men of solitude are gods.

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## **Edited by Rowan Silva**

**Bahram Zaimi**

*Editor* Rowan Silva

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# 1

## Seeds

She turned to face the window. The tomatoes were ripe and crimson. She had planted the seeds in a rectangular flowerpot, fitted wall to wall of her wide windowsill. The plant had overflowed the pot's edge, rolled down, and reached the deep ledge, free-falling all the way down to the old hardwood floor in green and red. Hundreds of tomatoes with gripping, thick green stems covered the wall below the sill. The shower did not stop on the floor, amplifying in number and depth to flood broadly through the living room.

*She thought, Wasn't it yesterday that these colorful invaders were still on the windowsill? They have stealthily night-crawled the hardwood, overcome the thick margin of the yellow carpet, flooding fast to my bare feet on the carpet as if aimed to sink me in waves of green and red. Three days! I planted the seeds just three days ago. Stranger than the rapid growth is the smell: not the type of a vegetable. It goes down into my lungs and reaches the soul, I succumb to a devilish temptation of the wild. The aroma floats in the air of my apartment, I see souls dancing around me, sometimes in flesh. I bite; the wild taste of fresh kill, the red juice fills my mouth, overflowing from the sides of my lips, running to my chin. I enjoy the dripping, red stains on the yellow carpet.*

She rubbed her feet against the sofa, the tickle went away. She leaned the nape of her neck on the back of the sofa and looked at the wall right across the living room. *Not all mysteries are pleasant. Who painted this wall white? As long as I can remember, five years ago, when I could afford to rent this miserable apartment, everything was yellow: the color that I hate. Walls, floor, doorframes, ceiling, even the old rug under my feet. I don't think the greedy landlady sneaked into my apartment to give the wall a fresh paint job as a surprise gift to me. I don't hate white, I fear it.*

She wanted to put her leg on the long sofa to stretch, and then lie down and rest. There was another smell mixed with the aroma of the tomatoes which didn't leave her free from thoughts. Normally, she was able to ignore her problems, to skip over them and forget her bad memories. This was a technique which her eight psychotherapists had taught her in over eleven years. The plausible technique did not solve the problem; nevertheless, she could waste her life without worry. She gave up on the idea of resting on the sofa, with so many thoughts whirling and wandering around in her mind it was not possible.

*She blamed, it was his fault, the ninth one, or I should say the first psychoanalyst because of the method he chose for me after the failure of treatment of the eight psychotherapists before. On the other hand, maybe not. Maybe I've mixed it up. He had to change the trend completely. I guess he was right because I remember none of what the eight before had said, but word for word the talk of the last.*

*'Consciousness was your enemy for the last twelve years; it removes the problems to allow the comfort of routine, because it cannot stay for long under the surge of inexplicable questions, let alone the benefits that it provides. That being the financial support of Victim Support Organization, and public pity for a presumed rape survivor, the common assumption.'*

*'But I have been suffering for twelve years. I cannot remember anything; all I remember is blankness. I have spent these years in fear of something hidden behind a white flash.'*

*'Nothing is behind white; it is in the white.'*

*'Why do you always speak in codes?'*

*'It is the language of the subconscious and we must communicate on its wavelength. Words are associated with rigid common sense notions, plausible but not genuine. On the other hand, signs and symbols can float in the mind until they shed light on a real thing.'*

*'I can never claim to understand psychology in theory, nor other scientific branches but you forced me to read, and I studied for five months until the last two months when you adopted a new method. Now I lean back on this comfortable sofa and describe my nightmares. I watch you scribble something in your notebook. You have never told me about your writing or your diagnosis. I was deadly curious to read the notebook, waiting for a moment of your distraction. It happened a few days ago. While you were busy on the phone in the waiting room, I took it and skimmed through. No words. Page after page was filled with strange signs and unfamiliar symbols. I looked through the whole thing, even the blank pages until the last. Not a single word.'*

*'I was waiting for your curiosity to overpass your ethics. Which symbol did you find the strangest in your mind?'*

*'The one on the last page of your notebook, the one that I found after I scanned through the blanks. I did not know what it was.'*

*'Words have no meaning; they just block our search for identity with a false satisfaction of understanding. Just look at them, each is a combination of meaningless letters. You put them in a row to make sentences and then narrate the combination aloud; they make a paradox in peoples' minds. People falsely believe they have found an answer to the question of the purpose of life. Then they follow the narrator stupidly like slaves. The invention of words changed the direction of progress in the wrong way. We should have found ourselves in a wordless world. Now we live in the illusion that we know something. I confess that I am master of words; my job requires transforming frightened people who catch a glimpse of the devils of society into obedient zombies who work quietly, pay endless mortgages, stay in, and accept the meaningless loop of social life. I have acquired quite a respectful career in that. There is something precious though dangerously wild within you. I would jeopardize my career to release this wild thing, to deal with society, to find its own way, which is inherent in your biology. The strange symbol on the last page was of a woman inside a wolf.'*

*'You have dragged me out of the darkness but left me at the border; one half in the darkness, the other in the light. What if someday I wake up with the savage desire of my biology to kill all the people in goddamn Milwaukee?'*

*'It would be good the next day when you woke up and remembered the last night's massacre. You would get out of bed and break the window from the frame. The fresh air would replace the dampness, you would inhale and enjoy listening to the chirping of free birds singing in the snowfall.'*

She wiggled on the sofa and leaned forward, saying to herself, 'and now the wall in front of me is all white.' She leaned forward, narrowing her eyes as if spotting something odd on the white wall. 'What are those two nails sticking out of my wall? Who hammered them down there?'

There were two nails aligned four feet apart, three feet below the ceiling. She stood up, stepped forward, fixed her eyes on the nails, and placed her hand on the wall close to one of the nails. She could smell the paint, it was fresh. Raising her other hand, she stretched her index finger to touch the nail but refrained, afraid that some frightening image might electrify her brain.

She turned on her heel and leaned her side to the white wall facing the opposite direction of the window. *A kitchen with some second or maybe third-hand appliances: an oven- broken, a refrigerator-noisy rather than cold. A bedroom, or shall I say a small windowless dog den in which hardly a single bed could fit. Who condemned and sentenced me to this twelve-year misery? I have become twenty-two and my only job qualification is how to get a support allowance for the next month. Thank god*

*I could afford to buy a long sofa a month ago. It is not as comfortable as the natural leather one at the psychoanalyst's office but at least my cheap artificial leather sofa fits me to sleep on at night.*

## 2

### The Window

Frustrated with the discovery of her misery, she turned her body to face the window and stared out the only window in her apartment. It had not been opened in the last five years. She walked toward the window, barefoot over the stems on the floor, careful not to smash the tomatoes. The sill was deep. There was a bunch of tomato plant in her way to reaching her hand to the brass handle. She leaned forward to the ledge, trying to avoid bursting any of the ripe tomatoes on her new dress, which she had bought specifically for the psychoanalysis sessions. Her fingers reached the handle and pressed it down; the lock was too stiff to yield. She pushed her body more, and a ripe tomato burst, the red juice flowing down her white skirt, penetrating through it onto her body. She felt the cold wetness.

“God damn window!” she cried out. “Why should I care? Today was my last session, I don’t need the dress.” She leaned fully toward the plant, grabbed the window handle tight in her hand, and pressed it down. It broke, but still the window was jammed into the frame. “God damn Milwaukee,” she pounded the frame of the window hard with her palms. The wooden side doors broke with a loud crack, and one of the doors tore out together with its frame. They fell down to the backyard of the building, she heard the sound of smashing glass. The other door was dangling half-connected to one hinge of the broken frame, swinging back and forth. “Wow,” she was amazed, she did not expect so much power. After a few swings, the other door and the frame attached to it fell down to the vacant backyard. A view of the landscape beyond appeared in the broken space.

*Why do I hate this city? Where did this hatred come from?* The wind of the suburb of the city brought in a damp cold air from Lake Michigan outside. She said, “Ugly green flatness, thank god I cannot see the lake; it would have been even uglier. Surely I don’t belong in this area; I should have been born somewhere else.” She looked up at the night sky, “Some clouds, I wish snowfall would hide all the land.”

She left the window and walked back over the plant to the carpet, rubbing her feet and smearing the red color onto the yellow. She took off her dress and threw it on the bed, went to the wall closet in the bedroom, and without attention took a dress hanger from the rack and came back to the living room. She looked at the dress on the hanger; it was a one piece, semi-transparent. She had recently bought it to start tennis training. “I will never wear it. How can I pay back the price with my credit card while my only income is a pitiful \$400 weekly victim support?” she said to herself while turning the hanger back and forth, staring at the dress.

*What should I do now that the sessions are over and his conclusion is that I am cured? I will not be eligible to receive any money. Now I am jobless and without any work experience. He did not exactly use the wording that I was cured,*

*‘You are subconsciously cured; all you need is to remove the blockage in your consciousness.’ He ended the sessions unexpectedly, left me alone after just seven months of his unique therapy, expecting me to solve the complication of the meaning of his words all by myself.*

She ended the dress observation. *Why not wear it? I am not going out now, surely not in this dress after that horrible thing that happened to me twelve years ago.* She pulled on the dress; it was light as a feather, putting it on felt as if there was nothing on her body.

*The shame I feel is a desire to see you. She stood facing a huge wrapped object, which had been placed between the sofa and the frame of the entrance door, leaning against the wall. It was a huge mirror she had bought a few days ago on the morning of her last session. I wonder why I bought such an expensive mirror, and so big that I had to pay the same amount to two strong men to carry it up the stairs. The guys carried it up and placed the mirror at the entrance door while struggling to carry it in.*

*Exhausted, one of them said, 'Ma'am, have you ever considered if the mirror would fit in the elevator?' There was an extra charge for carrying it up the stairs: five stories. I didn't have an answer to their next question when the overtired men asked me,*

*'Ma'am, are you sure the mirror can pass through the apartment door?'*

*I opened the door, the space was not enough. They had to remove the wooden frame from the wall. The mirror was carried into my living room. I could read their next question, Ma'am why the hell do you need such a big mirror for such a pitiful dwelling? Their politeness stopped them from asking.*

*I guess they felt sorry for me because they put the doorframe back and plastered it to the wall for free. They leaned the mirror to the wall and opened the thick cardboard, pulling it away except for the last thick paper covering the surface, due to my loud objection. It's strange; I was afraid that they would see me in the mirror. In the end, a hefty price for something that I am now standing in front of.*

*She took a step further and stood in front of the wrapped mirror. Why did I buy a mirror as big as a king-sized bed, and bigger than my tiny bedroom? Looking at the wrapping, she remembered her psychoanalyst's answer to the question.*

*'To see yourself in full, of course.'*

*'It's much bigger than me.'*

*'You feel it is not. That is the reason I am going to end our sessions, and inform the Victim Support Organization of your total recovery. I can read in your worried face that you feel you are not ready. Let me explain. Twelve years have passed; you have become a complete woman with no trace of a ten-year-old girl. You cannot hide this tall and strong body behind a child anymore. Two months ago, I noticed an odd phenomenon, which dared me to refrain from the routine of molding the zombie disposition into you. I noticed that your true biology has started to reveal itself, out of hiding.'*

*'Don't say I am a werewolf or an alien.'*

*'Those are stories that we fabricate in response to complicated phenomena. Two months ago, your smell changed. The tiny glands in some specific areas of your body emit a peculiar sort of odor. As a result, I concluded your nature is very different from normal people. I have exclusively adopted a new method for you, with emphasis on analysis rather than treatment. This was my hypothesis; no treatment of the so-called trauma was possible since there was no trauma at all. The tax money has been wasted on you, for you to waste your life.'*

*'And that is why you started to draw signs and symbols in your notebook, instead of writing.'*

*'Exactly, the two pathways of smell receptors end at an isolated, primitive part of the brain with no connection to language, as they evolved long before any speech abilities.'*

*'What is the purpose of my new smell?'*

*'Your biology has started to remind your consciousness of your identity which had been hidden there for a reason. Your consciousness, afraid of any unpredictable consequences suppresses the message.'*

*She raised her hand and grabbed the top corner of the paper, snatching it off the mirror. A tall woman with long black hair appeared. "This cannot be me," she exclaimed, staring at her unexpected image.*

Long, coarse black hair waved down in abundance, passing her shoulders and resting covering her chest. The tall mirror well matched the woman's height. Hazel-brown eyes surrounded by thick eyelashes were shining below naturally plucked eyebrows. Aquiline nose over well-formed lips and prominent cheeks, the true character of her origin. The twelve-year-old had not passed in vain; the dusky red color of her teenage skin had changed to a shade of light brown with the rosiness of circulating blood under her cheeks. A straight neck stood high over wide shoulders and a broad chest. She enjoyed for a moment the upright breasts. There was still a lot to see, if she could overcome the shame of looking down. She paused for a moment and lowered her face to see how rude the semi-transparent dress was.

The skirt's edge ended short, an inch below her white panty. She cast down her eyes, overlooking the area belonging to the white panty. She lowered her hand to touch her thick thighs, making sure they were real; so hard. She slid her hand upward along her arm, a pleasant surprise. Not of a very feminine type, but strong, well matched to the legs. She murmured, asking the image, "Who are you? Are you the same woman at the psychoanalysis sessions asking for help each time for seven months? How could the wise man see any notion of a victimized ten-year-old girl in this image?" She could not stop her eyes from going down past her belly button; just a glance was enough to pass through the thin dress. "Shame on you, woman," she told the image. She closed her eyes, just one glance was enough to find the true meaning of what the psychoanalyst advised. There was a message in the scent: "Remember your origin".

She recalled the last session with the psychoanalyst. *'But I need more sessions with you, I still feel my soul tormented.'*

*'Open the door and go out, spread your wings into a dangerous engagement. Your consciousness has created and preserved the image of a desperate ten-year-old girl in your mind, to make you afraid of any adventurous effort to decipher the message.'*

*'What is the message?'*

*'There is something wild in your nature. The interpretation is beyond the field of psychology.'*

*'Aren't I normal?'*

*'No, you are not. What if we don't have psychological terms to describe your behavior? What if there are some silent genes in you, belonging to a very long time ago, that now, due the torment of the event have started activating? You get your consciousness by mirroring the behavior of society. This works for the people who are evolved in the same trend. You can communicate through your smell; this is a very primitive ability in humans. Evolution of the language area of the brain has made this capacity weak and non-applicable. I cannot verify my analysis by your verbal responses, but I can feel its correctness by your change of smell, as has happened recently.'*

*'So I belong to the wild.'*

*'You must go out'*

She noticed the woman in the mirror was smiling; not a simple smile, there was some peculiarity to it. The lips were gestured in a smile formation more to show the whiteness of the teeth than the happiness of coming across a friend. An idea came to her mind: why not flirt with her image? Or do some oddity she wouldn't do normally. She took her underpants off and twisted them around her index finger. The scattered scent widened her nostrils, a strange feeling. A white flash blurred her eyes, frightening her. *This is not a woman you can have fun with*, she thought. The smile was gone. She was shocked to see that her eyes were not hazel-brown as they just were, but blue; two shining blue irises were glowing in the mirror. The shock made her threw the panty from her index finger. Swirling in the air, it flew behind the opening at the back of the mirror.

She turned back and walked to the kitchen. She needed some distraction from the mirror. The smell of tomatoes had filled the room. She found an appetite to eat meat, which was a strange desire for a dedicated vegetarian. She acquired the new desire from the time she had added those tomatoes to her food. Yesterday, when her downstairs neighbor was barbecuing, she could not resist the smell and opened the window, looking down to his balcony; the juicy steaks were sizzling on the rack. It was strange to her that after eating two juicy tomatoes, the meat-eating desire was quenched as if the tomatoes had fresh blood in them. It was not only the taste, but something peculiar in the scent, which had filled the whole apartment. The nostalgia of her past blurrily traveled into her memory, a reminiscence of wildness belonging to a time far before she had been born, like a dance of ghosts around her.

She looked into the dustbin at three empty silver bags of fertilizer. She took one of them out and read the information: ‘Miracle Fertilizer. Add this magic additive to the soil of your pot. The miracle of creation; you will be amazed that your plant grows 15 times faster with an unbelievable taste and strange aroma. Effective in 24 hours compared to the 15 days needed for competitor brands. *‘Certainly 15 times more expensive. It is odd that one would describe his fertilizer with the word, ‘miracle’.*

She had bought the additive and tomato seeds from a shop in a remote area out in the suburbs. She was seeking a new way to fill her free time, of which she was going to have plenty. She thought to go and look at different items in shops until she figured out a hobby. It was three days ago that as she was driving aimlessly and talking to herself that she lost recognition of the time and the road. Unknown streets started and ended with shops on both sides closed, until she found one in a place with the least possibility. In a large parking lot, a light on the other side attracted her attention. She drove closer across the lot. Strangely, it was a big store located in the middle of nowhere, in a deserted area at the end of a huge vacant parking lot. She parked her car by the store to ask for directions. It was a big botanical store, with no customer and one old botanist owner standing at the cash register.

She could remember her first encounter with the man vividly. As she was going to ask for the directions, he said smilingly,

“Hello, my beautiful vampire, what has brought you here? Unfortunately, we only have flowers, not human flesh or blood.”

“My mistake, I can’t catch the smell of anything here but dead flesh and rotten blood,” she retorted and amazingly, the brief offensive conversation changed her mood, making her relax and she thought to buy something.

She remembered the botanist got in the mood too; his smile grew wider and he started narrating his life story,

“My dear father saved his money all his life to buy this land, in the hope that someday the rich people would build a road, passing by this area. Then we would be among the rich people. As he was dying, he gave his savings to his only child, me, as well as his last and only unfulfilled hope in life. Unfortunately, the rich people were too rich; they built a highway instead of a road, and along that highway were stretched guardrails. The not so busy area became dead empty. However, I kept the promise, and could not spend his money otherwise. I purchased the land and built a store and a big parking lot, the same as he had always described for his beloved son. I am old now and have not saved much for myself. Nevertheless, I was able to save him in my memory.”

“Sorry, I was wrong. Your blood is not rotten.”

She did not feel lost anymore. She turned her head to look around, and walked down the aisles of the store browsing the items, sometimes taking an interesting piece to look at. At the end of one of the aisles, she entered a large open area; a simple advertisement on a sign caught her attention:

*'Many humans were engaged in the production of these fertilizers. They put soul into it.'* Below the banner, there was a cardboard box filled with silver bags of *Miracle Fertilizer*. She bought three bags, some tomato seeds, and a large rectangular flowerpot.

In her apartment, recalling the story she said to herself, "I've run out of the god damn good fertilizer; have to go see the botanist again," she was talking to herself in the kitchen, looking at the empty silver bag in her hand. She turned on her heels from the dustbin to the kitchen cabinets at her back, raised her hands up, and opened the cabinet door. There was a glass jar filled with crumpled bills and some coins. She took the jar, opened the lid, removed a ball of money, then placed the jar back. She snatched her car keys from the cabinet counter and rushed to the door, it was already late at night.

Upon one last glance into the mirror, "Oh, I am not wearing my panty," she said with a shameful laugh, noticing that the white underpants had fallen on the floor, in a gap between the back of the mirror and the wall. She crouched down and stretched her index finger while holding the ball of money in her palm. As her finger reached the underwear, she hooked the tip of her finger to the elastic band and pulled it toward herself. The elastic stretched but it was like something was holding it back. The panty was stuck to something at the back of the mirror. She dropped the money on the floor and moved her head toward the gap as close as possible to see what had been tangled in her panty. Her left eye saw in the darkness deep behind the mirror, a wooden frame. She stretched her arm into the gap, felt the wood, and grabbed the outer side of it, sliding it out. A small part of the wooden frame appeared from the back of the mirror. It had canvas stretched over it.

To get the whole of it free from the back of the mirror, she stood up and dragged it out until the frame reached and leaned onto the apartment door. She lifted and carried it to the wall in front of the sofa and placed it on the floor, its back leaning to the wall. She stepped back to figure out the painting. The canvas had been painted with a white paint, no drawing or figure on it.

*Whose is this painting and why it was hidden behind my mirror? At least now I know why the nails are on the wall.* She hung the painting on the two nails above. It fit perfectly stable on them. She went back and sat on her sofa, leaning back with a fearful thought in her mind, *I am living in the house of the wild beauty in the mirror, these things belong to her.* The new puzzle gave life to the idea that the woman in the mirror was responsible for all the unsolved cases. She had brought things which belonged to her into the apartment. On the other hand, even if the idea was an illusion, how she could trust her mind? Her fear was gradually escalating, she couldn't sit on her couch and seek peace of mind anymore. She felt trapped by the woman in the mirror. She had never felt surrender like this, like prey willingly embracing the hunter.

Troubled minds can better communicate with horror. She leaned back to the sofa, feeling the dampness of sweat on her back. She dug her fingers into the sofa fabric, twisting the leather, staring at the painting. *Have the courage; there is no session for help tomorrow.* She sensed something in the painting, in the whiteness.

There were various shades of white and grey: the landscape of a snowy day. The ground was covered with deep snow, thick fog in the air, and some movement. Grayish shapes were appearing very vaguely, in the mist, and before acquiring a clear shape they disappeared. Then there was plain

white again. Nostalgia. She turned her gaze to the window, wishing she could see the same scenery in reality outside the window. She said with a soft voice, “Oh tomatoes, I completely forgot the shop might close any minute.” She jumped off the sofa to her feet, grabbed the car keys, and rushed toward the door. Strangely, all fear had been removed; either the woman in the mirror had captured her, or they could share the room. She had a desire to smile like the woman with glowing blue eyes. She took one last glimpse in the mirror; the reflection of the mysterious shades of the painting appeared once again. This time they brought to her mind some reminiscence of the past; she had been there.

### 3

## The Book

She opened the door. The ball of money and her panty stayed behind on the floor. The elevator door was open and she entered. She looked at the buttons, waited, and thought, *how can I manage this time to deal with the landlady's scolding complaints; to calm her of my two month's overdue rent, given the money I spent on the mirror. She was there when the men were carrying the huge mirror up the stairs for me. I cleverly walked behind the moving mirror past her front desk. Last time she caught me, I had to listen to her nagging for more than half an hour. Her husband doesn't seem like a bad guy, though too obedient to her. I have never seen him look at women straight in the eyes, bashful and afraid of his wife's wrath. Apparently she is the real owner of the building, the business, and her husband. Fortunately, the couple is asleep at this time of night, I hope.* She pushed the first-floor button, and the elevator door closed.

The old landlady and her silent husband were working behind the counter at the side of the corridor, exceptionally late this night. She was declaring the apartment numbers of the tenants with overdue rent with her husband bent over the countertop, submissively as always, writing them down on the day's collection sheet paper. She used to stand at the elevator side of the counter with her husband in her shadow; by the time the elevator doors would slide back, she was there to corner the renters in arrears before they had time to escape. They would either pay with many apologies to lower her naggings as much as possible, or run away to save their eardrums from the nastiest insults, all the way through the long corridor while being followed by her and her mouth.

The elevator cabin was hot. Sometimes the heater did not work, and sometimes it overworked. The air conditioner was always broken. She had been sweaty before entering, and was now sweating further going down five stories in the heat; the perspiration had completely saturated her thin dress. It molded her body like a transparent wrapping. She tried to pull the dress out, to reshape and conceal her cleavage, but the displaced fabric reversed like a magnet to its sinful position. The confined space filled with a strange body odor.

The elevator doors slid back open to the corridor. The old husband was cleaning his eyeglasses to take a few moments away. Somebody went out the entrance doors at the same time, leaving them open. The cold air outside plunged headlong into the corridor, rubbing all the precious perfume from the elevator cabin, vacuuming it from the cabin into the corridor. The loaded air on its way out, in a hurry to steal all the loot gave a share to the old man's nose. The man dropped his eyeglasses on the countertop, his mouth open, his nostrils widened to inhale a good load of this scent. The stream of the strange aroma burnt his nostrils for milliseconds; his mind paused, then a powerful wave of electricity flowed through his nasal paths with the speed of light to all six million of his sensory cells. The incompletely evolved human sense of smell was unable to assess it in any of the primitive rankings between pleasant and unpleasant, therefore he succumbed under the influence, and was paralyzed.

Floating in the passing current, anchored to the countertop in greed for the source, his upper body passed the visual blockage of his fat wife, and he lay his chest on the countertop, securing his belly to the inside edge of the reception desk in an attempt to get more share of the running air. His head, overhanging the edge of the countertop, faced the woman shyly stepping out of the cabin. His eyes got a blurred vision of a white feather angel parading past him. As she passed the intruding head,

the man's head and two fully open pipes of his nose were detecting her movement like the turning of radars. The unclean eyeglasses were smashed under his chest.

As she was passing the counter, she remembered the ball of money that was missed on her apartment floor at the door. She decided to turn back, but the elevator doors had closed and she heard the screeching noise of the cabin moving up for another passenger. *I cannot go back and stand at the elevator with my sweaty back stuck to this dress in front of that man's widened eyes. Besides, the landlady's head is bent over a paper and I am fortunate that she has not raised it to see me. This is an exceptional opportunity to flee her nasty complaints.* She sweated more when she remembered the money was not the only thing she had forgotten to pick up. Her panty.

She walked toward the building door, her head up, looking straight. There was no sound except the provocative sound of flip-flops on the laminate floor. The movement was waving a flower pattern over the bulge at the junction of her thighs, on and off; fanning the mystifying scent from the source. The all-the-time nagging landlady was staying dead silent during the procession. The overdue resident passed her, no complaint. She was pretending to read the paper in her hands, but actually staring from the corner of her eye at the old man who was swimming over the countertop. The woman was not very ashamed of her situation under the synchronized twist of the man's head, but rather happy that her body solved, for now, her problem with the landlady. She rewarded the poor man a generous amount of her heavy aroma while passing him. He deserved a short vacation in paradise before going back to his life sentence, punishment being the everyday ration of his vinegar-smelling wife. The man's eyes escorted her until she passed the building's glass door and disappeared into the dark night.

"I am so ashamed of you," the landlady shouted at the man, burning as though fire had scorched her face. The man slowly straightened up. Looking calmly at the broken eyeglasses, he saw that one of the lenses smashed, and the other was taken out. The man's indifference raised the landlady's anger to fury; she added insult to her accent, "I see you don't recall your posture old man, a few inches further and, you would be outside the building now with your head between her wet thighs."

"I was reading."

"Reading?" the landlady's mood changed a bit, as she didn't expect such an excuse for his rudeness.

"I was reading a book together with my deceased father. A fairy tale for a four-year-old son. I was leaning to his chest, sitting on his lap, listening to his articulate storyline and repeating it while looking at the text as if I could read the book together with him. I had heard the story once and never again because during the same night my father died of heart attack while I was asleep on his chest. The same night the book was lost. For more than sixty years, I lived with the guilt that I was responsible for his death. I remember I was crouching under a table, hiding behind the overhang of the table cloth in fear, staring at his coffin in the room. I overheard a conversation between two of the guests at the funeral. They were saying in a low voice that my father had felt pain in the chest but didn't move, afraid of waking his son up," He paused, took the unbroken lens and placed it back. "I don't understand; you mean you could read at the age of four? Why do you say you were reading?" The landlady asked doubtfully, her fury replaced with amazement at the sudden change in the man's behavior. There was emotion in his expressions, imperiously glancing at her.

"I don't know. I could not recall father's voice, but I could see myself at that age, and could read word by word every page. It was a story about thirteen fallen angels who came to earth. As the story goes, if one wants his wish to come true he must be able to recognize his angel out of ordinary people. Unfortunately, her appearance is not different from normal people, as she is wingless. The

angels live among people but there is no way to find them unless you are blind. Their body smells different, inexplicable to humans' words. The blind shape the scent as an angel in their mind, they ask for a favor, their wish comes true," he paused for a second, facing the landlady he continued, "I can recall the whole story word for word except the ending. Supposedly, I got sleepy and he didn't continue. I have a strong urge to know the ending."

"But the book is lost."

"Tonight, the woman of heavenly scent, my angel, fulfilled my wish. The location of the book was always at the back of the mind of the four-year-old boy."

"Where is the book?"

"The boy waited until the guests left the coffin room, went out of the room to his bedroom, took the book out the father's chair. He then went back to the coffin room, opened a gap in the lid with all the power he had, and slid the book in. A harsh punishment, the boy sentenced me to deprivation for life," he inhaled and continued, "I am pardoned now, my freedom is granted; I am going to take back the book and read the ending."

"You are insane. It's in a coffin, under tons of soil," the landlady snapped.

"So I need a shovel." The man stood up and went to the tool room, grabbed a shovel and came back in front of the landlady who was staring at him, round-eyed in amazement.

"But you can't see."

"I can see enough," he took the one-lens frame.

"I am not going to give you the car keys."

"I don't need them."

"You cannot get to the graveyard at this time of the night."

"I do not need your help; now that I have the picture of the book, I feel strong. I will go on foot with the lens, with the shovel. I will dig up his grave, open the lid and take out my book. Then I will come back here with the book, the lens, and the shovel."

He turned to the glass doors and walked to it. The doors slid back and he stepped outside. He looked around, the woman was not there, and the greedy air left no trace of her scent. He didn't need the scent, he had the picture. He tightened his coat and put the handle of the shovel over his shoulder, a weak body but strong steps, holding onto the picture of his father with a child in his lap, taken from the mysterious box of lost-and-found in his mind. The man walked up to the Milwaukee graveyard.

## 4

# The Horse

Outside the building, the cold breeze of the end of fall swirling around her bare legs welcomed her. She raised her head to the night sky, the moon was going to hide behind some scattered clouds. She wished for snow and looked down at her car parked across the street: a red Mustang, old but the silver horse was still shining. The street was dead vacant. She remembered the psychoanalyst,

*How can you be afraid of the darkness? You belong to the wild nights. That is the time when you can communicate with your real identity in a survival struggle against the circumstances of the dark side of Milwaukee, if they surround you.* She entered the car, inserted the car key into the ignition and turned it; the engine cranked but didn't start. She looked at the gas tank gauge, it was full. "My old horse, I have not taken care of you well. I will wait, be calm."

She removed her hand from the key, "Don't rush my horse, and let the night get longer." She unfastened the safety belt, rotated back the car seat to a relaxing position then wiggled her back onto the seat's ridge to ridge to find a comfortable spot free of protruding springs. She lay back, reclining the seat, and crossed her hands at the back of her head. She watched the sky through the windshield. The clouds were getting thicker, no stars left; they were trying to hide the moon. *I hate the sun and the moon; make for me the darkest night.*

Outside the window, a man appeared when the building glass doors slid open. She leaned forward; *Can I believe my eyes, the old man with a shovel?* She smiled, *Freedom at last.* She straightened up her seat, opened the glove compartment, and took out a piece of paper and a pen. She drew something on the paper and put back the pen. The dress did not have a pocket, so she tucked the paper in the tight cleavage of her breasts.

"My faithful old horse, take off, even if it is going to be your last ride." She turned the ignition, and the horse whined aloud.

Soon for the second time, she passed the small area of the city that she had been living in for years. The area restricted to a walking distance between her building and the psychiatrist office from one side, and to the convenience store from the other side. Tonight's destination, the botanist's store, was about one hour or so driving distance. Although she had driven there in confusion only once, she could find her way with no problem. She rolled the window down an inch, the cold air guided her with the familiar scents of the streets leading to the store.

By the time she had reached an intersection, a combination of pictures and scents informed her of the right direction; she could sense to turn right, left, or go straight. She stopped the car at a stop sign, the last sign before reaching the dirt road in the outskirts of the city. She smelled a dustbin with rats around it before turning onto the last paved street.

She turned left five minutes later and saw the dustbin on the left side, pulled over and parked her car across from it. She let the engine continue revving. She looked through the window to the dustbin. The lid was wide open, suspended at the back of the bin, garbage overflowing, the liquid of the filth running down and stuck to the pavement of the sidewalk and the street. Smelly residues of dried liquid waste, oil and grease accented the permanent stains all around and the rats. They were devouring voraciously, licking the dried streams, their appetizer. They were all over the place, the smaller ones were searching on and into the bin; the big ones, too lazy to jump up had marked their

territory on the pavement, busy with the food until a bigger one would notice and invade to capture their territory. The gluttonous sound of their teeth chewing the dirt, and the squeaking of joy were the only sounds of the city of Milwaukee crossing the street, they together with the smell of the dirt and rats passed through the gap in the window, burning her nose and bothering her ears. *Thanks for more reasons to hate.*

She smiled while visualizing a scene in her mind: rats running and squeaking everywhere, a magnificent festival of glowing fires on the sidewalk and street. A huge fire in the dustbin, the jumping up and down of rats in the fire, the smell of burning dirty grease mixed with skin. The amazing show started by splashing gasoline on them, and then striking a match. The fire was burning them down, like a representation of the city people. The fat rat made a circle of fire, the mayor was burning. *All Milwaukee is on fire, the buildings, and the crowd. A gift of the squeaky night to me.* Her palm cupped the gear knob, moved the lever gently, and a few minutes later she was driving on the dirt road.

Feeling cold in the car she turned on the heater to full blast. The blow of hot air caressing her legs had a strange effect. It made her take notice again of the lack of her panty. The hot air was coming from the lower heater close to the pedals. The sweat of her feet in her Y-shaped slippers was accumulating, making her feet on the accelerator and clutch slip up and down. The combination of hot air and the dance of her feet on the pedals, and the friction between her massive thighs brought her a lust she had no memory of. The secreted lubricant found it easy to stream down her smooth sweating thighs to her knees, and then lower to her calves. She pushed her foot harder on the gas pedal, and the silver horse whined, throwing back pebbles and stones on the dirt road in the outskirts of the city.

Some piles of soil had been dumped unexpectedly at the end of the dirt road, blocking the entrance to the parking lot. She gradually added weight to her foot on the brake pedal to make a smooth stop before a mound. She stepped out of the car and climbed up the mound in the empty parking lot. At the end of vast concrete pavement, the botanist's store was still lit. With some urge to urinate on the top of the mound, streams of another wild scent slipped down her legs, and she watched the liquid as part of nature with no shame. The fluid reached her feet and the greedy soil with a hundred thirsty mouths queued along her toes, soles, and arches, guzzling every drop, perfuming its entity with the long-time hope of the wild. The unsatisfied softened soil dragged her feet down, and unable to hold, the thief stole her slippers.

She descended the mound. She found walking on the parking lot pleasant; she looked down and noted she was stepping on the harsh concrete and weeds barefooted. She looked back to the dirt mound, noticing her red slippers were stuck in the soil at the top of the mound. Rough and partly spalled concrete squares were weed-tufted in the gaps between the edges. She enjoyed the scratch of harsh weeds on her bare soles.

The heat in the car and the dance of her legs on the pedals had done the job perfectly. The entirety of her legs from thighs down to feet was soaked with a bizarre combination of sweat and lubricant. As she was walking, the cold breeze was twisting around her calves, circling around her thighs, and shamelessly going up and down before departing from the back with a heavy load of wild scents. The stream of cold breeze was dumping in progression its precious cargo along her way, leaving a tunnel of perfume behind, so intense that it could distract a starved wild beast in chasing its prey.

With a heavy look around, she twisted on her heels in a sudden move. At a distance, behind the mound where she had lost her slippers, were two glimmerings of blue, gazing at her. *A human, a beast, or something that I do not know. Should I have the courage to walk there and take back my slippers from it?* She turned in the direction of the store, and noticed a car was parked out front. As she was walking closer, she saw it was a pickup truck with a cabin at the back. She looked through the window shield; nobody was behind the wheel. She passed the truck, opened the door of the store, and entered.

## 5

### The Empty Room

The botanist was sitting at the cash register, head down and his index finger was playing with something on the counter top. She walked closer; it was a dead bee. She stood by him, waiting for his attention. The botanist sniffed and raised his head.

“It’s you again, I can call you my regular customer,” he said smilingly.

“This is only my second time,” she said.

“Well, look around at the store, it is vacant.”

“So I deserve a good discount.”

“Of course you do. Especially, since you are wearing a swimsuit, I guess you really deserve a reward. How was the water? I see you are still wet.”

“What can I say? Even to me it’s strange that I have sweated so much on this cold night.”

“The other strange thing is that you were not afraid to come here alone in this appearance. I should tell you something, people in solitude do strange things.”

“Like?”

“I can show you something, if you are not afraid of vaults.”

“It is just a room underground, isn’t it?”

“If I were an engineer, I would affirm this. Nevertheless, there is much more than that. It is where gods live. Have you ever thought of the original meaning of a vault: a chamber beneath a church, or in a graveyard? Vaults were the worship temples of some believers. Alas, the men of truth were chained and imprisoned in their worship place to death, in the vaults. God lives underground, placing him in the sky was the politics of masters, as religion became so popular that the myriads bowed in obedience. You may call it superstition, which means the religion of believers in the past, who were killed in the battle of truth against lies.”

“Within twelve years of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, I was never taught of this conception in the human mind,” she said.

“So you speak with a different language. In that case, the translation is ‘dogs from the cellar.’ Men stayed for long in the isolation underground, and cannot differ illusions from common sense. The only reality would be what they create in their mind. Down there, your deepest recollections of distressed childhood experiences find a way to funnel up and present themselves as current reality.”

“And then?”

“You follow the inexplicable; you don’t dare to think of upstairs.”

“Reveal your vault to me. I am not afraid of nightmares.”

The man stood up and walked through an aisle to the end of the hall where there was a huge freestanding storage shelf covering the hall as an end wall. He went to the right end of the shelf and squeezed himself sideways through a narrow gap between the wall and the shelf. She followed him in the same way. The shelf stretched to the ceiling, only a dim light through the gap could hardly defy the darkness at the back. He switched the light on; it was a large area, quiet and vacant without any windows or doors.

He went straight to the far end corner of the area, stooped to reach a trapdoor cleverly camouflaged on the floor, pulled up the handle’s ring, and opened it. He rotated the trapdoor about the hinges and gently put it on the floor on its back. She went to the opening and looked down; a metal staircase was going down. “Let’s proceed,” he said showing the way down with his hand.

“Should I be afraid?”

“Don’t worry. All you see are legitimate types of criminal horrors.”

He went down the stairs and turned the light on. She followed, him holding the handrail on the shaky metal staircase. There was a long corridor which ran under store hall, and a few doors were located along one side. He opened the first door and went in and she followed into a huge area. The floor was filled with large flowerpots in aisles. She could see the remnants of dried flowers and plants on the pots. The floor of the aisles and all the pots were hidden under a thick carpet of dead bees, in the millions. The empty artificial bee hives were suspended from the ceiling over the pots area, aligned in rows.

As he was looking at the empty hives, said, “Have you ever thought why flowers smell good? The land plants evolved to flowering plants somewhere between 140 and 250 million years ago. The biological function of flowers is reproduction, but it is not possible without the help of pollinators, the bees. The scent, a complex compound, emitted by flowers along with color is to attract pollinators. The problem is that bees had lived before flowers, and they didn’t need flowers. So my question was, and of which I could not free my mind, how flowers affected the evolution of bees to make them their slave workers. I posed a hypothesis: the volatile scent, which is a molecular compound, penetrates DNA and alters the biology of the bees. Down in their DNA had been a need for flowers in some hidden way, and when the scent activated, it deciphered the code. The translation in our language: the bees remembered.”

He pointed to the floor, “The yellow and black carpet of this room displays the practice of trial and error leading to the failure of my hypothesis. The vegetarian bees died of hunger, never changing to honey bees. At the end, tired of one year’s testing, I introduced the red-brown vulture bees for revenge; surely they didn’t care for flowers, they attacked the plant bees and took their flesh out from their eyes. I was watching their feast until they killed them all.”

“There is no horror in dead bees.”

“In a sense, you are right only if we are in a false belief that the notion of legality roots in human biology. What if does proof of a certain hypothesis necessitate human samples rather than bees? In that case, the horror starts as you go further to prove your hypothesis in practice. To avoid any debate, how about visiting the second room.”

He passed her while she was staring at the floor substituting dead insects with humans in her mind, thinking of hungry vulture bees. She imagined the large open area before Milwaukee County Courthouse; people running for their lives, climbing over closed fences, angry men following them with sharp blades in their hands. The people, terrified upon reaching the closed gates; streams of blood running down the stone stairs before the courthouse. At the end of the day, butchered bodies left for the night devourers’ feast. She imagined the sun going down, millions of tiny pink specks shining in the streets. Rivers of black charging through the area, squeaking. The rats would drag flesh out through eyes of corpses. The small ones would jump up the stairs licking the clogged blood as an appetizer, the big ones marking their territory so that none dared enter their area of corpses.

“I see sparkles in your eyes,” she noticed he was looking at her, waiting for her in the corridor. She smiled at him. He opened the second door, standing on the threshold. She looked into the darkness and could see nothing but could hear sounds.

He said with a low voice, “Before I turn the light on, listen carefully.” She listened, hearing a smooth rhythm with a relaxing melody, and the sound of a sad chorus.

“It is pleasant to the ears; I guess you have trained some exotic birds to sing.”

“Your guess of birds is correct, but what kind?”

With a smile on her face, she said, “I say you have trained some bluebirds to sing this tune.”

“Not even close.”

He turned on the light. She stepped inside. It was a room as large as the previous one with birdcages fixed all around to the walls. She walked in, looking at the cages with an open mouth, and stood in the middle of the room.

“Crows? Is it possible?” she asked.

“This time my brutal hypothesis has not failed, but been proved in practice.”

“It is beautiful; I don’t feel any horror in that.”

“For us, yes. In contrast, maybe for the birds. Look closer”

She stepped to get closer to one of the cages; the singing crow’s toes were glued down onto bamboo, the feathers of the tail were also glued down to more bamboos at its back so that the bird was fixed in the cage. A glass tube containing a yellow liquid penetrated its stomach. Staring at the bird, she said, “OK, I am seeing a hypothesis in practice. Yet how could you make a crow sing?” He enjoyed her curiosity, went close to the cage, and pointed to a bulge in the neck of the bird,

“All is here, but before I quench your curiosity, I have to present you a brief narration.”

“Since you are accompanied by an elegant soundtrack, I have no objection.”

“The carnage scenery of non-obedient bees relieved me of facing my failure for a few days. The relaxation lasted until some crows chose the remote location suitable to settle down. In contrast to my habit, their day began early in the morning, and with loud noises. Finally, they have paid the price for the early wake-up call,” he stepped to the middle of the room. She turned her body to him, his voice became articulated, and the narration continued in lecture mode. She seemed to be enjoying the performance.

He continued, “Well, another hypothesis was going to be created. The power of their sounds amazed me, I mean in terms of the decibels. Testing with an application in my cell phone, some crows could produce a ratio of 100 in decibel level, the same as a military helicopter. Note that the permissible noise level for an industrial area is 75 for a commercial 55. Annoyed at the error in God’s creation, I was going to fix it. Having visualized a crow as a 100-Watt speaker, I remembered an advertisement on TV. ‘This tiny gadget turns anything into music.’ I bought the gadget forty dollars plus tax; too expensive and too big, it did not work on a crow.

“I came up with a brilliant idea, when I threw a stone at a crow’s head, the whimpering crow did not sound bad. The second room door was opened. Waiting for evolution to do the right thing takes millions of years, for God to rectify his design forever. I bought 150 cages. Crows are cheap: you can find them everywhere and the stupid people in the Captive Animal Protection Society don’t have crows in their listing.”

“Nor bees,” she replied.

“Exactly, I am beginning to like you. Two unrelated evolutionary pitches developed the two-sided vocal cord, the syrinx, of the songbirds resulting in a pleasant performance. Believe it or not, crows are among the birds that can mimic the human voice, so a small fixation was required to enhance their syrinxes: a Gillette razor. I bought plenty, 30 cents each. I divided each one into small parts with the blade at on side. All that was needed then was perseverance.

“I installed the blade into the bird’s throat, piercing half into the syrinx and half out of it. I tried multiple strategies, among them the angle of installment, piercing depth, and then a source of continuous pain. Do not forget it should be a whimpering crow after all. Thanks to the latter factor,

the blind crows could sing better. Two hot needles in their eyes and the addition of a low voltage battery for constant burning pain did the job quite well. Voila, singing birds at your service.”

“I am amazed; and all legal. Sorry, but I am still not frightened.”

“A tough one, but I assure you the third room will terrify you.”

“Cannot wait.”

The botanist and the woman left for the third room, and as they came out of the room of crows, he closed the door and turned off the light switch of the room. They walked to the third door; he turned the light switch of the third room on and then opened the door. She stepped into the room and he followed. He stood by her, facing her to observe her reaction.

She looked around, “But nothing is here besides emptiness.”

“Are you sure?”

She turned around, this time carefully paying attention to the floor, ceiling, and white walls, in the end unable to figure out the significance of the room. “What is it?” she asked.

“My third project, this time a real horror,” he paused intentionally for a moment to enjoy of her questioning stare, then said, “You,” There was a long silence in the room, well conformed to the emptiness. He waited for her response.

“You have decided to imprison me here.”

“You are glaring; your sparkling eyes become glassy now,” he continued, “I am kidding, we can go upstairs. Well, that’s what you asked for, horror.”

“Yes, so if you please, leave me alone in the room. Close the door, and turn the light off. I am seeing something.”

The man went out the room, astonished at her unexpected response. As he was shutting the door, he saw her take a piece of paper out from between her breasts. He closed the door and flicked down the light switch, staring at the closed door quietly.

Finally, there was a knock at the door minutes later, which seemed much longer for the man. He opened the door and both departed the cellar in silence. As they were approaching the narrow gap between the hidden and bright sides of the hall, he dared to ask,

“You look sad, what did you see in the empty room?”

“Just an empty room; the twelve-year sorrow of an empty life.”

“There is sorrow in every horror,” he said.

“I am living in a chaotic world of secrets.”

“There is an order in all secrets. That quote comes from a story that I liked to read as a child.”

They passed the gap where the reign of dark subconscious ended. He couldn’t held the question in his mind.

“You’ve peaked my curiosity. If you tell me what you have seen in the emptiness, I will tell you about the ghost in the third room,” He said while they were walking back to the store counter. She noticed someone was dumping some goods at the end of the aisle but did not turn back to see the person.

“You first,” she suggested.

“You are putting me in narrative mode again. Nobody knows how the mind works, the third room is always a possibility, which human civilization has been unable to banish from the human

mind. The real horror is the possibility. We don't know how far a curious mind can go if an irregularity in normal life crawls day and night across the grey matter."

"What irregularity?" she asked while they were reaching the cashier.

"Your scent as an example. Now that I see your eyes have got their beautiful shine back, and you are in the secure part of the store, I may say so."

"What's wrong with my smell?"

"Something non-human which urges a man to trespass the boundaries. As a botanist, years of working with flowers has gifted me a keen sense of smell. Do you remember the last time you came to my store? It was three days ago and we had just a brief encounter. Tonight, before you came in, I felt you. I wasn't ignoring you as you silently entered. I had closed my eyes to detect each of your steps getting closer by your odorous intensity."

"So the third room was really meant for me."

"Well not precisely, as the scent is not of a flower type. I should confess this time your odor is a hundred times stronger."

"What do you feel?"

"Something strange burns the two bulbs of olfactory up to a part of the brain isolated from language, the emotional; therefore, very inexplicable in words. I say there is in it a vague message of remembering something lost, which like glue sticks to the mind, crawling across the brain back and forth in a quest. Now it is your turn."

"My psychoanalyst has advised me that the fear of whiteness is the bridge between consciousness and subconscious which holds hidden the secrets of my true identity. Stay on it and do not run from it until you get something. My subconscious has to infiltrate through the total blockage of consciousness. I cannot read the message in the whiteness as long as it is interpreted as blankness."

"There is a message in whiteness for you?"

"I still don't know. When you terrified me of imprisonment, your momentarily vicious silence and the notion of solitude in an empty room brought my whiteness anxiety back. You and the room blurred to white for a second. I had to remain in the moment more, therefore, I asked you to let me stay alone in the room in a hope to see again."

"And what have you seen in the darkness?" he asked with curious eyes as they reached the cashier station and stood in front of each other."

"I saw who stole the white painting off the wall of my psychoanalyst, hammered two nails into my wall, and hung the painting."

"Who?"

"I."

"And then?" he asked curiously.

"After hanging it on my wall, I guess, saw something which was too much at the moment for me to bear, therefore, I took it off the wall and hid it behind my big mirror. The painting at the back of the mirror created the woman in the mirror, an alien with blue eyes."

"Why did you steal it?"

"He had hung it on his wall so that I might remember a terrible mystery behind the whiteness from the back of my mind. The painting should have shown something. According to my subconscious I was not stealing it because I believed it was mine."

"A mystery? How can you differentiate illusion from the recollection of a fact?"

"If I were able to see myself at the right age in the dream. This is one of a few touchstones I have been equipped with by my psychoanalyst. I guess that is enough for today's psychiatry session."

"I also have a secret to show you."

He went to the cash register to grab something and came back. “Open your hand.” She opened her hand. He placed the gift in her hand.

“A dead bee?” she said while laughing.

“It is you. After you left the last time, for hours I could not fight my mind to forget you. I had an unbearable urge to imprison you in the third room, to fill the room with your exotic scent in order to decipher the evolutionary codes in your odor and discover the unique biology which emits it. I threw a live bee into the third room on that day. Today I found it dead, this is the bee.”

“Tonight, you wanted to see me in the third room.”

“Yes, the whole thing was just a show for that. You are lucky since no hypothesis came to my mind. Now you show me the secret that you are hiding in your hand.”

“You saw it.” She blushed, handing him the piece of paper. As he was opening the crumpled paper, said to himself,

“Watch out for the scent.”

She blushed again. *Still a ten-year-old girl in me.* He questioned while staring at the paper,

“A man with a shovel?” He gave the paper back to her.

“A good omen to start the night.”

She went to the end of the hall where the silver bags had been placed. There was a new sign, ‘The main ingredient of Miracle Fertilizer has been enhanced. The price of each silver bag is increased to \$25. It is not expensive; think of yourself as part of the process.’ *What a strange reasoning to justify a price increase.* She bent down to pick three bags from the basket while she felt somebody at her back was looking at her. She turned back suddenly; a shadow ran and hid at the end of the aisle. She remembered the pickup truck parked at the entrance door. *The shadow person could be the owner of the blue pickup.* She took the bags and walked to the end of the aisle. Nothing was there but the ammonium smell of the silver bags. She went to the botanist and put the bags on the counter.

He placed them into a plastic bag and said, “75 bucks.”

“Oh, I forgot to pick up the ball of money off the floor of my apartment.”

“In that case, a new deal. I will exchange the bags for something that you have.”

“What is that?”

“The piece of paper.”

“OK, if it is worth 75 dollars, I can draw many.”

“Not all at that moment. It is valuable.”

She gave him the paper, took the plastic bag, and left the store.

## 6

### The Wild

The weather got colder; mist was gradually taking over the parking lot. She could hear the sound of the pickup truck's engine but could not see it through the mist. She thought the pickup managed to overcome the dirt mound and passed it. As she was walking across the parking lot she raised her head to the sky and could still see the shape of the moon through the mist, thick clouds covering it.

The dirt mounds appeared to her as she was approaching the end of the parking lot, there was something blue at the back. Getting closer, she saw it was the roof of the pickup truck, the cabin. She got worried and looked back. Still the shop was lit, but she continued her approach, slower. She started to talk to herself, "Don't be afraid; remember what the psychoanalyst was telling you, you belong in the wild. The forgotten scenes come into light through the flashbulb of your fears. The frightful circumstance gives rise to a new association with the primitive one, though temporarily, ultimately the earliest always reassert themselves."

*The running shadow behind the aisle, what if it is too much; the dread of an unknown is very different from the fear of an empty room when the one who closes the door is the one you can trust. My house, another empty room. Why am I so desperate to reach the lousy apartment again, passing through the long corridor of humiliation? Even the old man found his course of action. Who might ever want a smelly woman? I am not that ten-year-old girl; the poor little girl, still her heart is beating hard like a sparrow.*

She climbed up the mound, passing the low-level mist. The thick cloud in the sky was attempting to swallow the whole of the full moon, not successful yet. She stood with her bare feet on the top, looking at the end of the dirt road. The blue pickup with its cabin back door wide open was there and nobody around.

There it was, the reality that one had anticipated but was hoping to evade, at last, was concrete and visible. She turned her body; still, the botanist was there. She could run toward the store, the entrance door would open; she would run to the end of the aisle, pass through the narrow gap and hide in the darkness.

She climbed down the mound and start walking fast, back to the store. She was halfway through the mist to the store when her nose caught the smell of fertilizer. She looked to her hands, they were empty. She must have dropped the bags somewhere. The intensity of the fertilizer smell was getting stronger, and at the same time she was catching another type of scent, something unfamiliar with a sweet taste. She turned around. A shadow was moving toward her fast; before she had time to react, a man pressed a piece of cloth to her nose, took her neck, and turned around her, standing at her back pushing the cloth hard to her mouth.

While pressing the cloth to her nose, he slid and wrapped his arm around her neck, gripping her neck into his elbow, locked by his forearm. Her sudden involuntary deep breath of the wet material from the cloth made her dizzy. The peculiar and intense scent was burning her windpipe as it went down, filling her lungs. He pressed his body to the back of her, bending her backward. His hands had the extra gravity of his weight to push her nose to the brink of breaking. She was going to yield to the situation, as a prey trapped in the claws of a determined hunter.

The confusion owing to the sedative, stronger than opium, blocked the conservative control of logic, and in return the blockage on savage emotions was removed; the survival force of nature took over. The powerful emotion of revenge rose, filled her with a desire for vengeance, and anger flowed into her veins, amplifying her heartbeat; she felt strength in her hands and fingers. She held the second inhale and raised her right hand which had been engaged in a vain attempt to free her neck, grabbed his hand with the cloth, clutched his fingers and twisted them with an impetuous force of her nature.

The prey transformed into a predator. Three snapping sounds and then a shout of pain broke the tension. As the piece of cloth dropped off his broken fingers, her nose refilled her lungs with fresh air. She did not waste time dealing with his arm around her neck; there was enough room for breathing through her narrowed windpipe. She drove out her left elbow, filled it with power, bent down her body down to get extra pressure from the ground, and then with a sudden move, struck her elbow into his ribs; there was a muffled sounds of snaps. The man backed up a few steps; she was free.

The fast circulation of her blood had consequences; it spread the malicious inhaled chemical deeper into her brain. With a malfunction in the gyroscopes of her ears, she lost her sense of orientation resulting in a free fall to the ground. First, her knees hit, the numbness of the drug made her brain overlook the pain reports of the nerves, then her hands hit the ground, then her head was down, and her eyes blurred.

All she needed was two solid inhales of the fresh air. She could detect the man's shadowy figure standing a few feet back; at the same time, a figure from another world was emerging in parallel into her mind. Something that had been suppressed was coming due to survival urgency. The man's shadow faded into a specter approaching her from a white mountain, the snow had covered the ground white. She called for help in a strange language not familiar to humans. The disorientation in location overwhelmed with perplexity in time. She was sinking in the sweet ocean of illusions where she had belonged before among the circle of intimates.

The delay was too much, the man was vigilant, and he was not going to leave without his precious prey. He prepared himself for the second attack; his physical pain was in no way comparable to the pain of losing a battle. He revised assessment of the kill. He went one-step sideways, stood right at the back of the crouching woman, minding her fatal claws and cautious of her long legs for kicking.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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