

Summer 1951

I noticed my legs were painful and exhibiting an unusual color. I was unable to recall how I had hurt them neither did I have the slightest idea as to the source of the strange markings on my flesh. But lately everything in my small corner of reality had been permeated by a feeling of being somewhat out of kilter with sequential time and my memory always seemed to teeter on the edge of disappearance.

My life seemed to be hedged around with fear and I was unable to track down its ultimate source. The nagging feeling that there was something in my mind, something unknown and ungraspable, that I should be able to identify and pull into the circle of my conscious awareness, was continuous.

The heat of the day was made bearable by the presence of a soft breeze that rustled the dark leaves of the trees surrounding the far edge of the backyard. I made my brief but meaningful journey from what I called the inner backyard, which was carefully tended and well landscaped into the slightly sinister precincts of the outer yard where the trash was burned and where I would meet with my inner world companions. As my contact with these non-corporeal playmates began I could feel the release of tension and dread and a renewal of my spirit. I knew these elements of my psychic life were present for my protection and well-being and I always felt safe in their arms, literally and figuratively. When I was with them, there was no one to rail at me about my odd behaviors; I experienced naught but the gentleness and complete acceptance of these friends, who demonstrated far better manners and a much higher state of spirituality than any of the specimens of so-called humanity with whom I had interacted up to that time.

The ache in my legs was pronounced as I passed the white picket fence designating the point where the two yards met, but I paid it as little mind as possible. It was a day of black crows framed by blue skies. When I reached what I affectionately dubbed "the tree of magic" I settled down for a needed period of restful repose. Just as I set to rubbing my legs, the world began to recede from my vision and I felt my head hit the tree supporting my back.

The first thing I noticed was that the brightness of the summer day had been replaced with the darkness of my unconsciousness and I found myself treading an unseen road through the shadowed landscape of a very strange world.

I was alone and very much aware of it.

The aural impression translated itself to my understanding as demonic talons slicing through the darkness in an attempt to inflict harm upon me. My head snapped around, as my straining eyes attempted to penetrate the black sheets someone or something had hung all around me. The little I could see contained nothing familiar, nothing to which I could relate, and there looked to be no way out.

Judging by the sounds, whatever was making them seemed to be edging nearer, but their appearance remained elusive. Without warning, I saw red eyes piercing the black atmosphere, fixing themselves upon me. I was surrounded.

The sensation of terror was paralyzing; I was unable to run or even to move. Like dogs or horses, they were keenly aware of my emotional reaction and responded accordingly, leaping upon me, claws slashing my skin all over.

The frenzied attack ended with the same rapidity as it began and I found myself lying on the floor of my bedroom. How I had gotten into the house from the backyard I had no idea and, at the time, was the least of the mysteries attending the event. The red curtains blowing in the breeze and the presence of my dog, Sandy, sleeping peacefully beside me added an air of normality to the entire scene.

My foggy mind elongated to infinite distances my mother's voice calling out that dinner was ready. My green corduroy shorts and white tee-shirt were somewhat disheveled but my old dirty tennis shoes seemed no worse for the experience. My shorts were wet and my head throbbed steadily.

It had happened again, another seizure and the events of the afternoon were lost in a fog of jumbled confusion.

My family was awaiting my presence at the dinner table, so a change of clothes was imperative before my mother came to get me, in order to avoid major trouble. I changed my underwear, pulled on a pair of Levi's, and stumbled out of the room, straightening and steadying myself on the way to the table.

Mom wanted to know what I had been doing in my room. "Sleeping," I appeased her with the kind of answer I knew she wanted to hear. I really didn't know where I had been or exactly what had happened. I couldn't even be certain which was the reality, having been in the garden and somehow made my way into the house without being intercepted or having been in my bedroom the entire time.

Needless to say, my appetite was less than voracious. No amount of parental cajoling could get me to eat a bite. I excused myself, retired to my room, and was almost instantly asleep.

One Sunday, we made a post-church trip to the Forest Lawn cemetery in Glendale, California to see the Last Supper window and the Crucifixion painting. I actually enjoyed these visits to Forest Lawn; something about the place appealed to me. It wasn't a macabre attraction, but I did feel a definite comfort in the presence of the dead. Perhaps it was the deep quietude of the atmosphere, the tranquil, comforting feeling of eternity. Maybe I considered the dead lucky, as they had already passed through this world and left behind all of its uncertainties and pains. Their enjoyment of a better place was perpetual, unlike my brief sojourns with my special friends on their plane of existence.

My parents, of course, were always prattling about Jesus Christ, their version of him, his death and vicarious atonement for the sins of a wicked world, his resurrection and ascension into heaven where he sat at the right hand of the father. The standard Baptist spiel, nothing original or particularly exciting, certainly nothing that enticed my interest or allegiance to the cause. I preferred being among the dead to seeking the company of the dead-and-now-alive.

Somehow I was able to break away from the others and explore a long hallway near the Last Supper window. It was there I saw what looked like a caretaker strolling near a stained glass window in the great mausoleum. His eyes met mine. He winked at me then busied himself with his work. I decided to follow but my plans were thwarted by my mother, who appeared out of nowhere and pulled me back up the hall.

“I wanted to talk to the man,” I wailed plaintively as she guided me back towards the doors.

“What man?” she asked.

“The one near the window.”

I turned and saw he was still there. “The man standing right there!” I shouted, pointing directly at him.

In a loud and irritated tone she said there was no one there and demanded I stop all the nonsense. Her loud voice bounced between the marble walls of the mausoleum. It finally sunk in that she was unable to see the figure that was so clearly visible to my sight.

At home in the aftermath of the incident, I was subjected to as fine and relentless a cross-examination as anything ever played out in a court of law. To keep the peace and avoid delving into areas I did not want to discuss with my parents – and of which I had little enough understanding of my own – I lied and claimed I had made the whole thing up. It would be easier to admit to a fib than having my parents preach me another sermon about Satan and the dead and whatever else they used to tack on as codicils to such diatribes. Whatever they heard in church, I suppose.

As I closed out the tiring but eventful day by slipping into a very welcome sleep, the ache in my legs took second place in my thoughts to my newly found friend at Forest Lawn. I hoped we would meet again.