

Winter 1951

The cold, wet winter was painting upon the world around me a perfect representation of my attitude toward life. I was still at a loss to capture and name the mysterious quality of my life embodied in the seizures, the visions, the clairvoyant experiences. If I had had the good fortune to have been born into a family with truly spiritual tendencies, it would have greatly eased my burden and perhaps opened up avenues of understanding that might not have eased the effects of the episodes but would have put them into some sort of reasonable context. Placed against the backdrop of my parents' religious fundamentalism, there wasn't the slightest semblance of a chance really to come to terms with it all nor even of loving support.

The overcast sky heralded rain, and as I headed out to play in the backyard I watched the gray and white clouds jockeying for position in the leaden sky. Like many people, I have always loved rain and the psychological states it induces. Soft drops of rain began to hit my forehead and I leaned back and allowed their gentle, refreshing touch to work their blessing.

It was something I needed to relieve the anxiety of the last few weeks. There had been a disjointed fragment of memory swimming around my consciousness and, again, I was unable to stop it in its tracks long enough to identify it, much less to deal with it. My hands had also been shaking nearly continuously and my entire body was gripped by tension. My world was once again girdled by fear and as per usual, I couldn't discern its origin.

The wind suddenly picked up and whipped the boughs of the trees into a *danse macabre* that fit in perfectly with the inner and outer atmospheres I was experiencing. Seated as I was in the far back yard, I was assailed by the flying ashes of burnt trash. While I was attempting to extricate from my right eye a few stray specks of old embers that had found their way in there, I became aware of someone or something standing next to the peach tree at the rear fence of our property. My blurred vision was unable to focus on the figure, but my interest was cut short by a terrific blast of wind that subjected me to quite a battering, nearly knocking me over and forcing me to find balance by grabbing the white picket fence forming the familiar border between the primeval rear of the yard and the more civilized front section.

The uninvited guest had disappeared by the time my vision cleared. "It must have been my imagination," I assured myself as I continued my bodily jousting with the wind, twisting this way and that to keep myself positioned properly. Then the pace of the rain increased and I knew that in its wake would come my mother to rescue me from the moist wilds of the backyard. My stomachs cramped with the thought of having to leave my version of the enchanted forest. Fences, garbage cans and all, it was still more pleasant to me than the house.

For some reason, I feared to go inside. The prospect of remaining in the yard, no matter what the weather, was preferable to facing my fear and going indoors. I didn't know why I felt afraid of the house but I was and rationalization brought no alleviation of the feeling.

While I was pondering this and waiting for my mother's call into the dry safety of the family domicile, the sky was brutally broken to pieces by thunder and lightning. As the first clap of thunder faded, it was followed by another disturbing sound, that of my mother's voice playing her pre-anticipated role of spoiler-of-the-moment. I dreaded the consequences of obeying her as much as those of disobeying her. Still, I was keenly attuned to the fact that failure to comply with her wishes would more than likely be termed an odd behavior and I was not up to dealing with that, so I had no choice but to face the fear and head for the house.

It required only the time it took to traverse the backyard to the back porch to get soaked to the skin. My mother demanded to know what was wrong with me, as she began to remove the drenched top layer of my clothing. What was wrong with me? I was the very last person to be expected to answer that interrogative!

"Nothing," I mumbled.

As every link of the infinite chain of mothers from the first Neanderthal female parent through June Cleaver and beyond, she admonished me about the dangers of catching my death of cold, whatever that was, and insisted I tell her what I had been doing out there. I answered rather meekly that I had been doing nothing in particular. I didn't want to discuss it with anyone, much less anyone who shared the surname Dyal. All I wanted was to get into the relative safety of my room and hide away in myself. Fortunately she let me go and I found a certain comfort in the steady tapping of the rain against the shingles as I set course for my bedroom.

I was encompassed by a strange aura of things forgotten, or dim remembrances of things past. As always, the periphery of my awareness was a playground for thoughts and feelings just out the range of real cognition. They remained unspoken as I went into my room and sort of hurled myself down onto my half of the bunk beds, sinking into the brown blanket. I switched on the radio and let my head make the dent of its choice in the pillow, settling down to savor the silky sounds of violin music, finding comfort in the soothing notes that wove their way in and out of the intensifying impacts of the rain on the roof.

Just as I closed my eyes and began to greet the encircling arms of approaching sleep, the room was lit by an extremely bright flash of lightning accompanied by a clap of thunder that seemed to have it personally in for the city of Inglewood. My reverie rudely interrupted, I once again thought I saw someone standing in close proximity, but a glance around the room proved me wrong.

Suddenly I felt as though the blanket beneath me had changed its nature into pure fear and wrapped itself around me. Of what I was afraid I had not the slightest idea. Then I noticed the black marks on my arms and legs, dark splotches shot through with red, orange, and yellow. They were painful to the touch, and I became absorbed in the rhythmic expression of the pain as I pressed each bruise again and again, trying to figure out where they had come from. My right hand was shaking, the tremors more than a match for my willpower. I couldn't control them. I felt a tear roll down my cheek, threatening to bring on an emotional storm as intense as the meteorological disturbance hammering the outer world.

The tempo of the rain had increased to the point of drowning out the radio. The blackness of the sky was a perfect externalization of my inner trepidation. The fusion of rain, music, and the rhythm of my heartbeat coalesced into a discordant symphony that found its eerie way into my psyche.

I turned my attention back to the mystery bruises, pressing them several times and permitting the resultant pain to convince me they were more than products of my imagination, which had already had quite a workout that miserable day.

A slight movement registered by my peripheral vision led me to glance up and see, right next to my bed, a being of light, so beautiful and perfect in appearance that its mere presence drained me of all fear and pain. Every movement of its glowing form somehow affected the reality of my bedroom, or at least my perception of it. Although the intensity of the brightness emanating from this creature prevented me from obtaining a clear view of its features, I intuitively knew this was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

In his presence, nothing mattered but the love divine filling the room and my being. Where before there had been physical and emotional pain, now all was well. I was never aware of any words spoken, but there was a sharing of consciousness that filled me with an understanding beyond anything that could be conveyed by speech, mortal or otherwise. His departure was perfectly synchronized with the blaze of lightning pouring through the windows. The sadness at the loss of the sight of him was somewhat compensated for by the sweetness of the fragrance that lingered in the room for several minutes before dissipating. Alone once more, without fear and enjoying the sound of the now distant thunder, I drifted off to sleep.

The rain was still falling when I awakened later that evening. The pitch black of the room was disturbed only by the faint light shining underneath the door. The sound of a car in the driveway somehow brought back the full force of the day's earlier fear. I could feel my palms becoming drenched as the fear washed over me. Terror seemed to rule the night and I tried to correlate its sudden manifestation with the sound of my father's footsteps going from the front door into the kitchen, but nothing added up to a reasonable explanation.

I went into the bathroom and ordered myself to calm down while I splashed water on my face. What on earth was I afraid of now? I hadn't the slightest idea. I turned off the light and went into the living room. Just then I found myself in the grip of a small seizure.

Dizzy and disoriented, I aimed myself in the general direction of the kitchen. I made it and settled into a dining chair, something flashing across the screen of memory just as I seated myself at the table.

I was struck as though by a bolt of lightning left over from the storm. The image forced its way into my mind and would not allow me to break free of it until I had seen it in full. As my father passed by me on his way into my parents' bedroom, my hand began to shake violently and I saw what looked very much like a belt slashing through the blackness of night.

Although not entirely certain what I was seeing, as I watched my father walk into the back of the house I knew, deeply and certainly, that he and the belt had caused the discolored welts on my arms and legs. Again I felt hot tears stinging my cheeks. I squeezed my eyes shut attempting to block out the emotional upsurge as I began to comprehend what had happened, what my conscious mind had blocked out, but the meaning of which had to register itself upon my consciousness.

I made no response to my mother's request to set the table for dinner. "Myron, get up and set the table," she said again. But it was impossible; I couldn't move. I was felt fossilized, absolutely immobilized by fear.

"Myron, I'm talking to you!' Mother might just as soon have been talking to the proverbial brick wall for all the effect it had on me. I remained quiet.

Then as she approached me, I fell from the chair and hit the floor, sinking into the darkness of my mind.