

Sunday School, July 1954

Sabbath mornings saw the pre-church preparations begin early. For some reason I did not want to go to church that day, so in the tried-and-true way of hooky players throughout the centuries, I pleaded sickness and did my best to sell this line to my mother.

Apparently Mom had been around awhile; she didn't believe a single word of my excuse. In point of fact, though, I had not been feeling all that well, having felt dizzy throughout the night. The hours had been difficult and I had had a headache for hours. It was the headache that had awakened me and once awake, the dizziness started.

My arrival at Sunday school class found me in some sort of altered state of consciousness, one that would not have fit into the spiritual rulebook of the Dallas Theological Seminary. I was studiously ignoring the highly ignorable teacher, who was prating on and on about who knows what. My attention was fastened to the white walls when, all of a sudden the walls began to part like the Red Sea, giving way to a cavernous blackness. I had heard of illustrated sermons, but if this somehow fit in with the lesson, it was a little ridiculous.

The teacher was enjoying the stories he was telling, which probably made him a minority of one. I was still focusing on the vast empty space behind him when out of the darkness emerged an arm, covered with reptilian scales and capped with a deformed looking hand in place of claws.

Somehow I realized the archetypal nature of the deformed hand as depicting my own inner reality. The less-than-human nature of it was the tip-off, for I had never really been able to bring myself to think of Myron Dyal as a complete person. I was more like a jumble of fragments that had somehow been thrown together and managed to affect enough cohesion to hang together. My days were as elusive as my identity, both always seeming to teeter on the edge of being lost. I never seemed able to extract joy from the crystallization of any moment of a day's activities.

No matter what I did, an air of unreality surrounded it. If I went to the local swimming pool, I could feel the refreshment of the water and the warmth of the sun, but always it seemed at one remove. Somewhere in the back of my mind lay a strange sense of unreality, a feeling that I didn't really exist.

Perhaps the best way to phrase it would be to label myself (or my perception of myself at that time) as a companion who was tagging along for the ride that was my life, as a hitchhiker riding in the passenger seat of my own existence. I had a way of referring to myself in the second person, "he did this" or "he said that," instead of the first person singular. I would even take upon myself the royal plural, a prerogative supposedly reserved only for Jehovah and English kings. My relationship with myself was comprised of the aforementioned fragments, particles of memories and sensory experiences.

Years of such unintended existentialism results in the mind creating its own imaginative reality as though such a one were trapped in a Fellini movie gone wild. The strongest beliefs are instantly challengeable on the flimsiest of grounds, nothing ever manifests stability. My home was vastness surrounded by dimensionless blankness. I considered myself the offspring of phantoms and they were my closest companions.

Among the phantasms was my greatest friend, Charon. A shape shifter, a specter who existed in the moment of the eternal now, he was my family, my angelic guardian, and my playmate. Many things to many people, as the changeling in *The Martian Chronicles*. With Charon I would create my own worlds, occupying the same space as the backyard or other locations but existing in other dimensions, spending there moments that stretched into eternity.

One day at school I was sliding down a metal railing outside one of the classrooms, strictly forbidden by school rules, of course, but it wouldn't have been fun if it had been allowed. So, everyone did it after class. Usually the trip down the metal tube went smoothly, but this day as I was sliding down I fell off and hit the ground.

From the moment I touched the pavement, I was in a different space of reality. In the distance I could make out the figure of Charon and three angels watching over me, laughing, enjoying the ridiculousness of the moment, which is always easier when the calamity has happened to someone other than yourself.

I picked myself up, dusted myself off, and we went away together. The schoolyard went away in a shimmer dissolve and we were wandering through the clear blue heavens, joined by wild birds sporting green wings and blue bodies. They came down and spoke to us, as naturally as the donkey did to Balaam. We laughed, ran across cloudy fields, flew through the air, and in general took immense joy in one another's company.

When I came back to myself, I was in the school nurse's office, with its stiff metal cots, aroma of alcohol, tongue depressors, the kind of place that cannot possibly exist anywhere away from school grounds. For a moment I didn't know who or where I was, as the room was filled with the blue sky and fluffy white clouds of my vision, but these faded away quickly enough and I was solidly back in the real world. It was then I realized there was no difference between the world of so-called reality, the physical plane, and the metaphysical worlds of my fantastic adventures. Both were equally valid, and neither ever offered a homecoming, a truly secure harbor. They were both as real or unreal as I needed them to be.

As my Sunday school teacher jabbered on, he placed himself near the corner where the reptilian hand had appeared. It was now reaching for him. It took hold of his head and broke it open, splattering blood everywhere, drenching him, anointing the walls, forming a thick puddle on the floor. Blood covered the students to the delight of the dark angels standing around him sharing a hearty guffaw. A shake of my head returned the scene before me to normal.

I left the classroom dizzy and somewhat confused, the horrific nature of the play that had been performed for me having been more than a little breathtaking, although I can't say I didn't enjoy the scene where the teacher met his gruesome end.

On the way home, my mother asked about the Sunday school lesson, if I had learned anything from it.

"What?" I replied to her repeated question, as I had ignored her the first time around.

"How was Sunday school?"

I told her I didn't remember, although I would have loved to have regaled her with the story of the teacher's death as I had watched it unfold

She didn't believe that I couldn't remember something that had only ended a few minutes previously, but I refused to be drawn into further discussion. Who really cared about a Sunday school lesson anyway? Certainly not the children forced to sit through it, any one of whom would have gladly joined me in the blood soaked private theatre I'd had all to myself.

I could feel the anger emanating from her but I didn't care about that either, wanting nothing more than to get home and get back into my own personal world.