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“What a caterpillar calls death, we call a butterfly”

Unknown

“That is one of the privileges here at the clinic: We provide a remedy for death.”

Hubert Langwein, M.D., Ph.D.

“You’re opening very dangerous doorways! Once they’re open, there’s no stopping what may come through from the other side!”

Katherine Remington, Ph.D.

THE HAUENFELDER CLINIC

THE CHOSEN ONES

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME that either of them had been in the Clinic's formal dining area: a long room decorated like the baronial hall of a Bavarian hunting lodge.

Other than Parsons Couldsen, in whose honor the dinner was being held, they were the only Americans. The other staff members mostly ignored them, only partly because of language.

Doug Dalby had been a medical professor, specializing in neurosurgery and brain research. That was before the scandal broke, and before the murder of his wife and daughter. In the months since, he'd lost 30 pounds and his hair had gone fully white.

Kate Remington, tall, lean, dark-haired, was a psychologist specializing in Multiple Personality Disorder, also termed Dissociative Identity Disorder. It was a topic that made other researchers uneasy, and she had lost her grants. Coming to Hauenfelder Clinic in the Austrian Alps seemed her best choice . . . until she arrived to find she had been lied to: it was not in the Alps and not in Austria, but rather in a scenic but impoverished dictatorship forgotten since the collapse of the Soviet empire.

She had been here more than two months, while he had arrived only a couple of days ago, still trying to find his way around.

The dinner was unusually spartan for Hauenfelder, where the food, and especially the liquor and wine, were plentiful, though on the heavy side. Tonight they were served fish, rice,

and steamed vegetables. There had been no cocktail hour, and they toasted with mineral water.

The menu confirmed Daulby's earlier guess: Couldsen had serious heart problems.

Parsons Couldsen, in whose honor the dinner was being held, sat at the head table along with Dr. Rausch.

The five visitors who had flown in that afternoon in Couldsen's helicopter—the American Senator, the British Opposition Leader, and the three mystery men—also sat at the head table, but were not introduced.

At the end of the meal, Rausch tapped his fork on a water glass and called for attention. "We now come to a special moment. We are all very grateful to Mr. Couldsen for the tremendous encouragement and support he has given our work from the start. Without his contribution, the Hauenfelder Clinic would literally not exist."

COULDSEN PULLED HIMSELF TO HIS FEET AND took the microphone. They had seen him when he arrived in his helicopter, and then he looked as he did in the news stories on him as the Billionaire Media Baron—tanned, seemingly fit, a commanding presence. Now he seemed shrunken, his color worse.

After a pause to command attention, he began: "Most of you know how I came to support the research here. I had my first bad heart attack a few years ago, when I was way too damned young to die. What you may not know is just how close I came to not making it. I had what they call a Near-Death Experience, and found myself up at the Pearly Gates. There was an old guy with a beard there, smelling of week-old fish. 'I'm St. Peter,' he said. 'What's that in your briefcase?'

"My money,' I told him. 'I'm having the rest sent up later.'"

“Didn’t anyone ever tell you that you can’t take it with you when you come here?”

“Can’t take it with me? The *hell* with that!” I told him. “If I can’t take it with me, then I’ll stay with it! *Hell no, I won’t go!* That’s when I woke up in the hospital.”

He paused for the laugh, then went on. “Seriously, I started doing some serious thinking, lying in that cardiac ward realizing what a damned close call I’d had. It struck home how final death really is. I made up my mind that I wasn’t ready to go, and damned well never *would* be ready. That’s when I decided to do something about it—especially when they told me I wasn’t a good candidate for a heart transplant.”

He sipped some water, then went on. “We are gathered here at the Hauenfelder Clinic, this magnificent laboratory of the future, because we are the chosen ones. Self-chosen by our achievements in the course of this first lifetime.”

He paused for effect, then went on: “We of this elite cohort are here because of our accomplishments, because we are the innovators, the leaders, the ones who *deserve* to live on.

“But there is only so much we can do in this one all-too-short lifetime we’ve been given, the proverbial ‘three score and ten.’ Three score and ten, or five score and whatever is not right for the people who are bringing about the better reality.

Couldsen paused for a sip of water. His face was noticeably more pale; his voice was weakening.

“We are the ones who *need* to live on, who *deserve* the remedy for death that is being manifested here. We are the trailblazers, the ones with intelligence, intellect, and creativity, the ones who *can* and *are* creating the world of the future, and we *should*, we *must* live on, for decades upon decades, for lifetime after lifetime!”

ATTACK

RAUSCH TOOK THE MICROPHONE as Couldsen sat, visibly drained.

“Mr. Couldsen,” Rausch continued, “is unique in all the world. Rather, *was* unique. Until recently, there wasn’t another like him, anywhere in the universe.”

He paused, and the crowd clapped on cue.

“Then we began to think that if *one* Parsons Couldsen was such a good thing, why stop there? Why not *two* Parsons Couldsens? Better yet, why not *three*?”

Rausch’s wooden delivery made it obvious that he was reciting lines prepared for him by someone else.

A door at the end of the room opened, and five young men rode bicycles into the dining room. Daulby recognized the lead rider, who wore medical whites: Hans-Georg, the medical technician who had set him up in the flotation tank yesterday.

The other four wore tuxedos, looking strangely out of place on bicycles. Their faces were expressionless, and they seemed to focus only on the back of the rider ahead of them. The chain of bicyclists circled the long dining table once, twice, three times.

Daulby wondered why this sideshow, until he looked more closely at the faces of the four in tuxedos: all were identical. Quadruplets? He asked himself. Then the reality struck.

“It’s incredible! It’s ghastly!” Kate exclaimed at that moment. “They’re *all* Couldsen! *Four more Couldsens! Young versions of him!*”

The room erupted into applause, and Couldsen took back the mike. “Looks like them boys come from good stock. Great work, folks.”

THE LIGHTS DIED abruptly, leaving the room lit only by the table candles. As they watched, bewildered, a gust of air moved up the table, blowing out most of the candles.

“Was it something I said?” Couldsen chortled.

“This is an old building,” Von Schwalbenbach said. “Perhaps the wiring needs to be repaired.”

“Goddam it, you already *had* it rewired! I saw the damned bills. For what it cost, seems you wired the place with gold.”

If the power is off, Daulby wondered, then why is the public address system still working?

The room was pitch-black. A sudden metallic wail filled the darkness. Daulby covered his ears against it but the shriek cut through, now breaking into a sound that seemed like shrill metallic laughter.

A heavy thump by the front table, the sound of someone falling. A terrified scream, “*Hilfe! Hilfe!* Help me!” cut off by the sounds of gurgling, gasping.

The electricity flashed back on, as startling as lightning, revealing a clump of men struggling to pull one of the tuxedo-clad bicyclists away from a body on the floor by the head table.

The three other bicyclists stood by the wall, stationary, mute, faces impassive.

Hans-Georg, helped by Von Schwalbenbach and a couple of the other staff, yanked the attacker to his feet. His expression shifted from wild passion back to the expressionless mask he had worn earlier. His tuxedo was torn and rumpled. His bloodied hands gripped a leather belt. They used the belt to strap his hands behind his back, then frog-marched him to another room.

Others helped Dr. Rausch back to his face. Blood gushed from his nose, and red marks were forming around his neck where the belt had been strangling him.

Couldsen sat frozen at the head of the table, his eyes locked wide open, all color drained from his face. Daulby wondered if he was dead.

“WHAT IN HELL possessed him—the Vehicle—to do that?” Daulby asked.

“Yes, exactly. *Possessed*—the perfect word.”

ARTIFICIAL TEENAGERS

THE LIGHTS FLICKERED off again once, twice, then came on to stay. Some of the staff ran from the room; others sat, visibly stunned by what had happened.

Von Schwalbenbach came back and called out an invitation to a party in the swimming pool.

“Feel like a walk?” Daulby asked.

“I feel like getting as far away from here as possible,” Kate replied.

They headed for the lake. It was a warm evening; the air was still, and the lake was smooth and clear as glass. The lights of the village across the lake shimmered across the water like colored party lights.

They settled at a small gazebo on the end of a dock. They more sensed than saw the dark mountains that ringed the lake, great brooding presences in the night.

Daulby knelt on the dock and dipped his hand into the water. It was icy.

“Forget about swimming away from here,” Kate said. “It’s fed by glaciers, and never gets warm enough.”

“How did you know I was thinking that?” he whispered, settling back on the bench.

“Because I’ve been looking for a way out of here, from my first days. Not that I’d swim away, even if it were possible. I couldn’t leave Karen here with them.”

“Even if we could, there’s no safe place to swim to—we don’t even know where in hell we are—not even what *country* we’re in. is.”

“Where in hell’—you got it right first time. I think we *are* in hell, *trapped* in hell, with no way out.”

THE FULL MOON emerged from behind a cloud, throwing an eerie blue light on the dark mountains that surrounded them. The lights of the village across the water seemed tinier and more insignificant than before. And even farther away.

They sat quietly for a while, each lost in thought. Then Kate turned to him and asked, “What do you think about that incident at the end—the Vehicle going berserk and attacking?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know what to think. You tell me.”

“There are a number of possible explanations. First, of course, was the possible coincidence with the lights going out, and so forth, leading to some kind of mass hysteria. It *could* be that, but I don’t think so. You and I weren’t the only ones who felt it. Everyone experienced something— that was obvious from the faces.”

“People couldn’t wait to get away—away from that.”

“It seems that something tangible *did* happen, the question is just *what* it was. You comment then still seems totally on target. Remember what you said? ‘What in hell possessed the Vehicle to do what he—it—did?’ Underline the word ‘possessed’”

“I’m not . . . what is it you’re you suggesting? That he—the Vehicle—was possessed by some kind of . . . of malevolent spirit?”

“Isn’t that what the work here is all about? Facilitating just that kind of move—so people like Couldsen can move over and come back into fresh young bodies complete with all of this lifetime’s smarts already waiting there.”

SHE WAS SILENT for a while, then said, “That first day, when I arrived at Hauenfelder, I was enchanted by the place. With the mountains, the lake, the clear air, it seemed like I was living in a postcard fantasy. But then,” she shook her head and her voice dropped, “then I began to get very different feelings. As beautiful as it is here, I think there’s also a dark side.”

“Dark side?”

“The work being done at Hauenfelder is unnatural, and I think very dangerous. We saw that tonight. But even apart from that, I find there are strange, troubling . . . Let’s just say I feel strange *energies* operating here. *Malevolent* energies. *Angry* energies. Haven’t you felt things?”

“Neurosurgeons aren’t trained to recognize ghostly energies.” He didn’t want to talk about the strange sounds he’d heard, the strange sense of intruders in the night.

“The electrical effects, the lights flicking on and off, the noises on the sound system—those resemble the hallmarks of classic poltergeist activity.” She turned to him. “And certainly that bizarre episode with the Vehicle we all saw. You *are* familiar with the term poltergeist?”

He shrugged. “I half-watched a TV show on that stuff when I was wandering around after . . . after I lost my family. It got into poltergeists— phenomena like knocking in the walls, things flying through the air, strange malfunctions with electrical and electronic equipment. I remember a case that occurred in a law office in Germany. Among other things, the office phone supposedly dialed numbers on its own doing, hundreds of calls in an hour to the phone company’s automatic time clock. They were dialed much faster than any individual could punch in the numbers. Most of the time, the calls were made when no one was near the phone.”

She nodded. “That was probably the Rosenheim case, back in the late 1960’s. It’s a classic poltergeist effect, carefully

researched by a university team. Even the skeptics agree that something extraordinary happened. But nobody is sure what really was going on. I could talk your ear off with other cases like that, investigated by competent scientists, most of whom arrived as skeptics.”

A cloud passed over the moon, and it suddenly seemed chilly. Kate continued: “In the majority of cases, poltergeist manifestations take place around early teen-agers.”

“Why teenagers?”

“There are no definitive answers, only theories. According to one theory, the material force to achieve these effects is gained from tapping the frustrated sexual energies of adolescents.”

He shook his head. “But there aren’t any teenagers here.”

“There *are* the Vehicles, which, in a sense, are *artificial* teenagers. They could be providing the energy. Or they might simply provide the *doorway* for other entities to come through.”

Daulby felt a chill in the still night as a ripple of wind moved across the lake. Another cloud moved across the moon, and it became very dark.

End of the sample of *A REMEDY FOR DEATH*

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