

## Abstract

This project pertains to the field of creative writing, and is comprised of two sections. The first section is a novella, *Eyes of Darkness*, (approx. 17,000 words). The second section is an exposition (approx. 3,400 words) detailing the writing process from the story's conception all the way to its completion.

*Eyes of Darkness* is the story of Dr. Ethan Abrams, a psychologist who has hit rock bottom after losing his job at a mental institution on account of his alcohol addiction. Having lost his wife years before, and being estranged from his daughter, he lives alone in a house he is about to lose to debt collectors. One day he is approached by William Azel, who is willing to pay handsomely for therapy. Intrigued by this man and his money Ethan agrees to the therapy, leading him to a journey of hope and redemption. William's mysterious condition, however, is worsening and neither doctor nor patient know just volatile their relationship truly is.

The exposition offers a detailed analysis of the various aspects associated to the writing process. It explains how the idea for the story was conceived and the transformation it went through to become *Eyes of Darkness*. Additionally, it provides insight into my sources of inspiration, the construction of the plot, and the development of the story. Furthermore, sources and methods of research, relating to psychology and creative theory, are listed, all of which are used to create characters that readers can sympathize with, setting that is easily envisioned, and atmosphere that is conveyed to the reader. In addition to these factors, the exposition presents information about why the characters do what they do and why the setting has an effective sway over their development. To top it all off, symbolism is discussed in connection to various themes and events within the story to explore its meaning.

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# Eyes of Darkness

By Daníel Martyn Knipe

**June 20, 1990**

My name is Ethan Abrams and I'm an alcoholic. I have been addicted for fifteen years, and it has cost me my career and the relationship with my daughter, the only family I have in the world. Psychology, with its chaotic nature and messy neuroses, has formed the center of my life for twenty-eight years. My endless curiosity about the adverse side of the human mind has fuelled my obsession to unlock the mysteries and give people their sanity back. The fruits of my labor have brought me success and respect among the psychologist community, yet also harmed me greatly.

As a man of practicality I have never paid any heed to myths and superstitions that tend to arise about psychologists. It is only natural as my work is based on what belongs to reality. There is one myth, however, that I heard when I first began practicing psychology. It holds that there is always that one case, one patient that will overpower your rationality. Never would I have thought that there could be truth in this myth.

**March 13, 1990**

A cold day marks the beginning of my tale; both because the weather had an unusual bite and also because I had just received a phone call from an associate at the Greenfield Institution where I used to work. He told me that he had just heard that Robert Hurley, a dear friend and colleague of mine had committed suicide the previous day.

“What?” I said.

“I’m sorry to be the bringer of bad news, but it’s being said all around Greenfield and I didn’t know if you had been contacted yet.”

After that phone call I felt a cold that had nothing to do with the weather but everything to do with the nature of Bob’s death. In all my years of being his friend I had never known him to be a melancholy person of any sort, but rather quite on the contrary. Robert was a very successful psychologist and family man. He had never shown any other sign to me than that of contentment. Perhaps that’s why I felt so cold. We had been such close friends and I hadn’t noticed the slightest sign that he needed help.

I wiped the tears from my face and breathed deeply, then picked up the receiver again to dial for Bob’s house. A hoarse voice answered.

“Hey Carla, its Ethan.” I didn’t hear much, only faint sobs, which brought fresh tears to my own eyes. “I’m... so sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you,” she said between sobs.

“I still can’t believe this happened.”

“Neither can I.”

“Have Kevin and Timothy been told?”

Carla sighed and cleared her throat. “Yes, Timothy left for Duke this morning to pick Kevin up. They’ll be back in a couple of days.”

“That’s good to know. Listen, you don’t sound too good, maybe you should try and get some rest.” I tried to sound gentle and calming. “And if there is anything you need, anything at all, don’t hesitate in calling.”

“Thank you Ethan, I appreciate it.”

I put the phone down and looked around the kitchen trying to think of what to do. Finally my eyes stopped on half full bottle of Jack Daniel’s sitting on the counter. The liquid comfort called to me, and who was I to ignore that call? I grabbed it firmly within my hand and almost finished it, my taste buds melding with the caramelized taste of the whiskey. It was now six months since my embarrassing and rather publicized departure from the

Greenfield Institution, and my sense of loss was heightened that much more upon hearing about the loss of dear Bob. So I thanked God that I had gone out to one of my four favorite liquor stores to stock up on booze, for I vigorously attacked as much of it as I could find before passing out.

The sun shone directly into my eyes through a small hole in the curtains of the window opposite the bed. I hated waking up. The hangover always managed to creep up on me while I slept, but I knew how to fix that inconvenience. All I had to do was down a couple of beers and then I was ready to start the day. I can't say that my schedule was cluttered with things to do but rather the opposite. Unemployment was not treating me well. My bills remained unopened in an increasingly larger stack in the mailbox for I already knew what was written within them. Soon the mailman wouldn't be able to close the damn thing. I had no means of paying the bills in any case, as my savings were just about dried up and the last of the money had gone into stacking up on booze, the very substance that brought about my current situation.

I did manage to drag myself out of the house and into the most reliable thing in my life, the 88' Honda Accord that sat in front of the garage and shone brightly in the afternoon sun. I was going to miss that car once it was repossessed, but in the meantime I was going to see if Clara needed any help with the funeral preparations. I thought it was the least I could do given all my spare time, and it was only a few miles away. The familiar ride through the outskirts of Kalispell had never found me in such a bleak mood. The cold from the snow that covered the ground around the city seemed to be seeping into my soul, and I desperately wanted to warm it with a sip from the bottle in my left pocket. I had to hold out until the drive was over. I would have to be sneaky once at the Hurleys though, as I didn't want Carla to see me drinking. It might even be better if she had some beer in the fridge to keep me hydrated. The way I saw it, my addiction would seemed more innocent to her if I only sipped a few beers rather than the spirit I had in my pocket.

I was surprised to find Carla alone in the big house the Hurleys had owned ever since I met them twenty years prior. She greeted me at the door, only opening it a fraction. She had obviously been crying. A lot. "You don't look too good," I said.

"Well, it's not every day that you lose the love of your life," she said, "but you would know better than most"

"Yes well, I wish I could spare you that pain."

"I can't for the life of me understand how you managed to cope with it, although seeing how you look now I can guess."

“It’s an endless process, and some come out of it better than others.”

How true her words rang in my ears. I must have looked frightful. Of course she had known about my drinking for a while. She and Robert had been there for me when I lost my position. They tried to encourage me to get help at first but I wouldn’t listen, so I guess they must have resigned to the fact that they could not help me if I did not want the help.

“I came over to see if you needed anything, anything at all.” I tried to give her a sympathetic smile but ended up grimacing as tears filled my eyes. The very same thing happened to Clara and we embraced each other. I truly wanted to take her pain and make it my own. It was much more fitting, as I was used to being alone.

I walked with Clara into the house where she told me that she had some of Robert’s books and journals she thought I might want to have as they were all on psychology and would just waste away in boxes if I wouldn’t take them. She led me up the stairs into his small study. The little room was the classic reference to my old friend. The faint odor of cigar smoke hung in the air and an image popped into my mind of Bob hunched over papers with a fat Cuban in his mouth. Not a single thing looked to be in its right place; books and papers lay everywhere except the in bookshelves and paper trays where they should be. My friend had always been prolific in journal writing. Bob believed in capturing every moment he spent with patients so that his diagnosis could be as accurate as possible, and he had told me many times that he could spot valuable information within his notes that he had missed in a session. After hearing from him for the third time about how handy the journals were I decided to follow suit and have since then discovered numerous times just how useful it can be.

It turned out that the only thing Clara needed help with was Robert’s study so I spent the day in there separating the trash from the treasure, so to say, and packing everything into boxes, a few of which I thought about taking with me, but I was still bitter about the loss of my job at Greenfield. Instead, I settled for only one worn journal full of his almost cryptic writing, which looked more intimate than that of his other journals.

The flask in my pocket sustained me through the packing and at the end of the day, Bob’s office was tidy and my bottle empty. I saw that Clara was grateful for the help and we said our goodbyes after a cup of coffee and another bout of shared tears.

**March 31, 1990**

The days melded into each other in pretty much the same fashion. I was drinking everything that contained alcohol, stressing about the bills, stressing about unemployment, and basically giving up. It was a vicious cycle. I no longer wanted to go back to work; the very notion of it brought a bad taste to my mouth. I knew that if I were to go back, and had to spend another day listening to middle-aged men who thought Ronald McDonald was climbing in through the power sockets in their rooms to harass them, or nuts who had to be restrained because they needed to expel devils out of the nurses with knives, I might just go crazy myself. Not even the thought of reading Bob's journal could ignite the psychology spark within me, so I set it aside for the time being and lost myself in the sweet emptiness of intoxication.

One morning I was disturbed from my drunken slumber by the ringing of a phone. The sharp sound travelled from the kitchen to attack my ears as I lay on the sofa in the living room. I let it ring out, not in the mood for another warning about my mortgage or any of the other debts that were cascading around me. Again the phone rang, and then again. What a persistent bastard. The fifth time it rang I got up and wobbled over to the phone. "Who the hell is it? Don't you get that nobody is home?" I said, "And this early I might add."

The line was silent for a few seconds, and then a soft male voice answered, "I am terribly sorry for being so bothersome. I didn't realize the afternoon was an inconvenient time to reach you. Would you like me to call after supper instead," he said.

"It's afternoon already?" I managed to croak, "I apologize. My watch must be broken."

"I am trying to reach Doctor Abrams." The man said with a shaky voice. Perhaps I had startled him.

"Yes, this is Doctor Abrams. What can I do for you?"

"My name is William Azel and I'm in great need for a therapist. I heard you were a notable one."

"I no longer work in that field. I'm retired."

"Would you be willing to make an exception? I can pay you good money."

The thought of money made me pause for a moment, but it was a fleeting thought. I still had that bad taste in my mouth when thinking of work, "I'm sorry but I'm afraid you will have to look else—"

"Please Doctor Abrams I am willing to pay you six months in advance, name your rate."



My resistance to this man's request for treatment started to diminish. Half a year in advance, weekly sessions and with the rate of my choosing would certainly keep me in formaldehyde for a while longer. This was an opportunity I was not going to let slip through my fingers. I asked myself how this man had managed to find my number, seeing as I was no longer registered as a psychologist in the phonebook. But I needed the cash and this was a great way to get it, so I put the thought aside.

"Alright Mr. Azel," I said, "We will have weekly sessions, at my home office. My rate is two hundred and fifty dollars per session." To my surprise he accepted without hesitation. How peculiar. The very next thing on my to-do list after hanging up the phone was to wash away the bad taste with some Jack Daniel's.

**April 2, 1990**

I woke up in a panic. This was the day me and William had scheduled the first session. It was scheduled at eleven in the morning. I couldn't let him see the horrible state I was in. One look told me I had to take the fastest shower I had ever taken. I desperately hoped there was mouthwash and cologne in the bathroom, both of which I had not given any thoughts to for the last several months. The only upside to my situation was the fact that the sessions were in my study. I had changed the garage into my study years before so I could focus more intently on work. In the old days, I often brought case files home with me from Greenfield to get a firmer grip on my patients.

I had barely managed to dry off, comb through my thinning hair and brush the whiskey smell out of my mouth before I heard someone knock. I scrambled to the door and put a smile on my face before opening. There stood William. He looked frail, as if he had never managed to eat food that was healthy enough, or get a good night's sleep. His clothes were kept, though, and his dark hair was combed back. His most notable feature, however, was his eyes. They had an exhausted and haunted look about them. I had seen a similar look on patients who had witnessed horrific things, murders, war, or abuse. It was a look that such a young person should not have to bear.

"Hello William, please step inside." I gestured to my right. "It's in through there."

William thanked me and walked in. When we got into the study he had to walk around my chair to get to his. As he sat down opposite me I noticed his eyes darting around the room before they fixed on me ever so briefly. Then he dropped his gaze to the oaken coffee table between us.

"Thank you for seeing me Doctor Abrams."

"Please, call me Ethan. There's no need for all that doctor business." I leaned back into my couch and asked him if he wanted some water, which he declined, so I placed it on the coffee table just in case he'd change his mind. "So, what are you hoping to gain from the therapy?"

"Well, I get nightmares every night. And because of them I don't really sleep much." He shifted in his seat, trying to get more comfortable. "A sleep expert told me a few years ago that this was very similar to sleep paralysis yet too inconsistent with that condition."

"How is your condition similar to sleep paralysis?" I said.

"I have the same symptoms, but I also have much more that isn't associated with sleep paralysis, like the chronic and severe nightmares."

“Alright,” I said. “Let’s start from the beginning. Tell me how and when it began.”

William crossed his arms, his eyes turning reflective for a few seconds before regaining focus and fixing on the coffee table. “I must have been eleven or twelve. My episodes were not so severe in the beginning. Usually it would just be a regular nightmare, nothing to worry about really. Of course, some were worse than others and pretty soon I began thinking that most of my dreams weren’t dreams at all but rather nightmares.” I noticed his lips twitch, almost forming a nervous smile, which made him look as if he were remembering an uncomfortable or embarrassing event. “I think it was about a year from when they first began that I started thinking something was wrong.”

“Were you experiencing any form of sleep paralysis at that time?”

“No that happened later. These were just bad nightmares which I started getting every single night. I was always waking up covered in sweat or shouting, or even crying.”

“Were you alone in your struggle?”

“What do you mean?” A flash of confusion crossed his face.

“Was there anyone who knew about the nightmares, such as friends, or your parents?”

He frowned. “No I didn’t really have many friends as a kid. Still don’t as a matter of fact.” His frown deepened as he continued. “My parents were worried for a time I suppose.”

I got the feeling that his last words had a sarcastic undertone. Something about his parents bothered him. “You said for a time you suppose. What exactly are you referring to?”

“Well, when I first told them about it they brushed it off as if I was just having a childhood phase of being afraid of the dark. Then after a year they noticed that I wasn’t sleeping and finally took me to the doctor. But it was useless. The guy didn’t even perform any tests. He barely talked to me and then fed my parents some bullshit about it possibly being the result of hormones and puberty or some crap like that.” He shook his head. “And of course they drank it all in and gave it no more thought, which just made everything worse for me. I even remember when the nightmares first intensified.”

“Hold on a sec,” I said.

In my completely unprepared state for the session I had forgotten to bring out my pen and notebook so I had to stop William while I fetched them. It even took me several minutes just to try and find the damn things, for which I apologized profusely. Here this man had come expecting to find a professional and what he got was a shower-wet drunk of a psychologist who didn’t even have his tools prepared. William just nodded and started biting his fingernails. I actually thought I could glimpse a slight hint of mirth in him while I was

frantically searching for my tools of the trade. After giving up on finding the notebook I settled for a pen and legal pad and told him to resume.

“I had been arguing with my dad that day, trying to get him to listen for me just once instead of clinging to the doctor’s shit of a diagnosis. It got pretty heated, which almost never happened because he was not a hotheaded man. By the end of it though he stormed up to me and slapped me right across the face.” He touched his left cheek with his fingers, as if to indicate where his father had slapped him. “Then he told me to get out of his sight, which I was happy to comply with. It was the same that night as usually by this point, hard to fall asleep, but I got there eventually.”

William’s eyes widened just a fraction as he moved into telling the dream. “The nightmares usually started the same way back then. I was in a dark and musty room with damp air. Every time I breathed in could smell mold, like when you are in a cave. You know what I mean?”

I nodded as if I understood completely even though I had never in my life been inside a cave. But if the woods near Kalispell, where you could smell the moss and the undergrowth, were in any way similar I could at least relate somewhat to the experience my patient was describing.

“Anyway,” William said, “I could just see the outline of a passage and I put my hand against the rough stone wall to feel my way along it. Now, when I had dreamt this dream before, that passage would usually lead me to a large chamber filled with strange twisting metal, or on a path to a ledge where I would realize that I was standing in an opening from a huge cliff with no way down.”

He stopped and looked at the water, and then up at me.

“Go ahead.” I said with a smile.

After pouring himself a glass and wetting his throat he continued. “This time I dreamt the dream though I had been walking for long time without finding any chamber or ledge. Then somewhere behind me there came a clinking sound, as if a metal chain were being dragged on the floor. I looked back of course to see nothing, it was still so dark. But that chain kept clinking in the distance. I didn’t realize until a few moments later that the sound was getting louder and nearer, and that’s when I got scared.”

He took another sip and looked at me inquisitively for a few seconds, as if he was expecting some reaction. When I offered none he kept on.

“I started running in the other direction. It was endless, and all the while the sound was getting closer. It didn’t matter how hard I ran there was no end to the corridor. Then it always

happens when you least expect it, or at least that's how it works with my dreams. After running for what seemed like an eternity I tripped on something, and then light sprang up all around me. I had fallen into a round chamber with flame lit torches hanging on the walls. I looked up at the walls, they were covered in blood."

As he said it William made a sweeping motion with his arms.

"Everywhere I looked there was blood and scratches, as if people had tried to claw at the stone wall with their bare hands. I couldn't move. When I thought the chains and whatever was dragging them would finally come into the light they just stopped, and I got this overwhelming feeling as if something was watching me. That's when I woke up."

The casual manner in which he told me about his dream surprised me. It was as though he was telling me how he would brew his coffee, completely laid-back. Such a vivid and brutal dream would have terrified me to the core. I fixed my gaze upon him. "It sounds like a truly terrible thing to go through."

"Not really," he said, "I'd do anything to get those kinds of dreams back instead of what I've been dealing with since then."

"So the dreams you're experiencing now are worse?"

"Absolutely."

"And they bear the elements of sleep paralysis?"

William licked his lips and sat forward into his seat. "The sleep paralysis began about a year after this dream. I woke up one night, or thought I did, and tried to sit up in my bed. But I couldn't move. It didn't matter how much I tried to thrash about I just couldn't move. I was like a fallen log."

He reached out for a glass again, and after taking a sip he said, "And then it washed over me, a wave of terror more intense than I had ever felt before. I knew with every fiber of my being that there was someone in the bedroom, staring at me with a hateful gaze as hot as the sun itself."

He stopped and we stared at each other. His account was similar to the experience I had read about from other sufferers of sleep paralysis. It was a curious condition, as was its cause. For a period of time the sufferer of the sleep disorder is unable to move, during which the individual would feel a heightened state of fear and sometimes a presence of someone. This usually lasts only a few minutes or even less, and when the subject finally regains control, all sense of a malevolent presence has disappeared.

"Tell me William; did this other presence take any physical form?"

"Yes." he said without any hesitation.

“And was it in the form of an old woman or witch?”

“Oh yes at first. Then it became something else.”

There it was again, a flickering of his eyes towards the corner of the room. I knew there was something he wasn't telling me, which was completely normal. This was only our very first session together, and therapy is largely a relationship between patient and therapist. A relationship that requires hard earned trust. I thought that if what he said was true then he deserved praise for coping so well.

“I would like to talk about that in our next session as our time is up for today.” I stood up and opened the door behind my chair. William looked somewhat content albeit a little puzzled by the abrupt ending of the session.

As soon as I closed the door on his heels I took off at a dead run for the upstairs bathroom where I kept a flask of Jack in the pocket of my blue and black striped bathrobe. I was in such a hurry that fully half of the whiskey spilled down my chin and into my shirt as it splashed into my mouth. When the flask was empty I stumbled back into the bedroom. I was gasping both from running up the stairs and from the alcohol burn in my throat. Satiated, and feeling the warm glow in my gut, I ambled the ten or so steps to the bedroom and threw myself onto the bed. As a euphoric tingling of intoxication started dancing across my skin I drifted off into sleep.

**April 20, 1990**

Despite all the drinking it was a comfort having some psychology back in my life, and my weekly sessions with William were a welcome respite from the all the moping around. We were seeing immediate progress after the first three sessions. His mood seemed a bit lighter and I was getting acquainted with his medical history. His was indeed a strange case. It was clear that he was quite sane despite his sleep disorder and the quirks he had developed from it, like the flickering of his eyes. I could not detect within him any psychological issues other than stress induced depression. I got the sense that he was seeking therapy to have someone to talk to and get some stress relief rather than treatment for a mental disorder. It was not the kind of therapy I usually took part in but I found it pleasant nonetheless.

I sat at my desk in the study, waiting for William to arrive for our fourth session. After hearing what he was forced to endure every night while still managing to keep his life in order I could not help but admire him. He had a surprisingly positive outlook on life despite witnessing unspeakable horrors so often, and I have to admit that it was prompting a change in the way I saw things myself. How could I justify all my drinking and the ruination of my life when William carried his weight on his shoulders so bravely? It was illogical when I thought about it. So I started with little changes. I started reading more books, rekindling an old hobby of mine from college when I avidly read books like *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, one of my favorite novels. For ten days I had woken up and I tidied up the house while drinking at least three cans of Budweiser. I had always been tidy, so reverting back to that routine was yet another reminder of my former happier life before Jack Daniel's took over.

I was in the middle of stuffing a plastic bag on the kitchen counter with empty bottles when I heard my young patient knock. I laid the bag into the bin as silently as I could before rushing to the door, brushing my gray jacket and testing my breath.

"Come on in," I said after opening the door, "I'll be right with you." William took off for the study while I scurried over to the kitchen and brewed a pot of coffee for us. I still hadn't made some for myself that day so I thought I'd share a cup with him.

Two minutes later I entered the study and put the coffee on the little table between our opposite facing chairs. "I want to start our session today with talking briefly about your medical history and how your condition is affecting your daily life."

William watched me with his tired eyes and nodded. "Well since I started looking for answers on my own about seven years ago I've been to countless shrinks, doctors and sleep

experts. None of them have been able to give me straight answers. And one even went so far as to institutionalize me without any results.”

I frowned slightly. Had he possibly been in Greenfield? It was possible, although there were two other institutions in the general area.

He continued on saying, “I’ve had CT scans, x-rays and several types of medications and all of them tell the same story. Nothing is wrong with me.”

“It must be hard facing all the uncertainty. I can imagine that it might feel like rejection.” His words made me think hard and this confirmed my previous suspicion.

William’s condition was, as far as I knew, one of a kind.

“It is what it is,” said my patient. “There’s no point in crying about it, so I just try and live with it as well as possible.”

“And how is that going?”

“It’s okay I guess. I had a job at one of the mint farms until half a year ago when I had to quit because of the dreams. I was actually pretty lucky and won a good sum of money of a scratchy ticket three days after quitting, so I was able to pay all the medical bills of and make sure I can survive for a few years while I sort myself out.”

He finally poured himself some of the coffee.

“And is that what you’ve been doing since?” I said. “Sorting yourself out I mean.”

“I’ve been trying to, but it just isn’t working as well as I thought it would. You’re the fifth therapist I’ve been to since I quit my job.”

That was surprising. Why were there so many in such a short amount of time? It was known that patients often switched to another therapist, which rarely happened twice, because they didn’t feel comfortable enough with the first one. But the process took time. Psychologists usually want time to get to know their patients, diagnose the symptoms and establish a treatment.

“Why so many?”

“It’s because they don’t believe anything is wrong. My scans don’t show anything abnormal, I’m not irrational or criminal. They either think it’s insomnia, or just made up for attention.”

“So you just quit and moved to the next one?”

“Yes,” he said, “I just didn’t feel the vibe with any of them.”

“And do you feel the vibe here?” I certainly hoped he did. If he left, so did his sizeable advance payment.



“Well, I feel more comfortable here.” He looked at me with his tired eyes. It felt to me as if they were full of sincerity, and my sympathy for him only magnified. I wanted to help this man and I was determined to find the cause of his illness and produce a proper treatment for him.

“I’m happy to hear that you feel comfortable here.” I gave him a reassuring smile as I said it. “It will definitely aid in your treatment.”

“So what are we going to talk about today?”

“What do you want to talk about?” I grabbed my session journal off the table. “I think it would be a good idea to talk about why you had to quit your job. I assume that your dreams took a turn for the worse.”

William breathed deeply and looked down at his coffee cup on the table. I observed him while he sat there staring at the cup. It was as if he were mesmerized by the gentle, flowing steam that rose up from the hot drink, and thinking of past demons and fears. It was so evident on his face that I wondered how all his previous therapists could have been so blind towards it.

“My dreams didn’t just get worse,” he finally said. “They started talking to me.”

“What do you mean?”

“A month before I left my job I had a nightmare where I sat in a dark room. It felt as real as this session.” He was still staring at the coffee cup. “Then voices started talking around me. Horrible guttural voices that echoed everywhere I turned.”

“Did they say anything specific?”

“Not much, except for occasional words like kill or hurt. It felt like I sat there for hours, unable to move or use my own voice.” He reached for the cup but didn’t take a sip. He just held it in one of his hands while rubbing his eyes with the other. Looking straight into my eyes he then said, “That’s when He came.”

“Who came?”

“The scariest man I have ever seen in my life. He was unnaturally thin and he had disgusting bloody, dirty black clothes on. His face was the worst though.”

“Can you describe it?”

“I wish I couldn’t. He visits me whenever I fall asleep these days. He has no hair, just half rotten and bloody skin. It looks like someone, or something has torn the skin off of his mouth and cheeks all the way to his ears so that only his teeth are visible. It makes him look like he’s always grinning horribly at me.”

I gave a start as he gulped the steaming hot coffee without hesitation, and it didn't affect him at all. I grabbed my own cup and took a sip to test its heat. It was still so hot that I could only brush the liquid with my lips. Yet William had drained his cup as easily as I downed a glass of Jack. It was uncanny. I tried to find the right words to respond but none came to mind. The hideous image he had just described to me left an uncomfortable impression on my mind. I felt doubly sorry for this man if only for having to see this creature every night.

"So does this grinning man talk like the other voices?"

"Oh yes, he talks alright." His eyes flickered to the corner of the office like they had in our first session. "He tells me to do things, horrible things, and then he tells me what he will do to me."

"Can you give me an example of what he says to you?" I had an inkling of where this was heading. Many of my former patients had heard voices that encouraged them to do things. I could tell on William's face that he was not so keen on reliving this particular part of his dreams, but he told me.

"Most nights he wants me to go out and murder the first person I see. Sometimes he also wants me to torture them first, or eat them. He usually goes into detail about it, trying to order me around for the entire time I sleep. Sometimes I go to sleep determined to fight him, and it's like he can sense it, because he will be there waiting to tell me that he's going to feast on my flesh, or set me on fire, or... well you know what I mean, this guy has a vivid imagination."

So did my patient apparently. This was a very unlikely story and I was starting to think that maybe William's previous therapists had been correct in their assessment. Still, I wasn't going to write him off just yet, he was still suffering from something even if his experiences sounded exaggerated.

"Does he ever deviate from his typical behavior, such as telling you not to trust others, or to harm yourself even?"

"No never, but it wouldn't matter."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I have no intention of letting him get to me. I want a normal life, and therapy has helped me in keeping it relatively normal."

Yet again this young man surprised me. After all these years of oppressing dreams he had incredible spirit. How many people had I seen who had suffered far less while exhibiting

more severe madness? I couldn't help but smile at his tenacity, and actually felt a bit inspired by it.

"I'm happy to hear that William, and I admire you for it, as it is the key to success in this therapy."

"You can thank my dog Scruffy, he's been my rock for a long time."

"That's good. You should keep looking to him for strength." I smiled. "And I think we should call it a day on that positive note."

"Yeah I think you're right."

"Oh wait, before you go I want to give you a small book I have on meditation and relaxation techniques." I got up and searched one of the bookshelves, ironically in the corner William kept staring at. After a minute of rummaging around, I finally found the little book and handed it to the now standing William. "It might help you with sleeping."

"Thank you," he said and made for the door. He waited there while I scribbled some final notes in my journal and when I joined him at the door I saw his eyes flicker towards something behind me. I looked back into the hallway to see if anything was there, and wasn't exactly surprised to find it empty. When I looked back at him he looked ashamed. "See you next week," he said as he hurried out.

The end of this session was different from the last times we had met. I didn't do the usual sprint for the nearest bottle as I had done after each of our sessions, but rather strolled there absentminded, and on my way up the stairs I did something I hadn't done in a long time. I stopped in front of the small counter by my bedroom and looked at the photograph that sat there. It was a picture of my lovely Amelia I didn't realize it then but I had hit rock bottom at the time William first called me, and this session we just had was my first step to getting back on my feet.

**April 27, 1990**

The past week was the stage of a major revolution in my life. Witnessing my patient face his demons and fighting them head on had a profound effect on me, and over the first days after seeing it I came to a conclusion. If he could put up such a brave fight against his demons, then so could I. It was time for me to get my own life back to normal. The drink had been in control for far too long, so I spent the week between sessions to formulate a plan for my journey back into sobriety. I had nowhere near enough money for detoxification at a clinic which meant I had to do it at home. I had called Carla and asked her if she could possibly stay with me while I detoxified as it could get pretty dangerous doing it alone, and she was kind enough to do it.

All I had to do was get this day's session with William out of the way.

I stood by the door waiting for my young patient to show up. I was both excited and scared at the same time, because after the session I planned on doing a thorough sweep of the house and clean out all the bottles, the full ones as well as the empty. But for now I had to stay in the mindset of the therapist. I had managed to keep the sessions and the drinking separate and that was the way it was going to stay. The last thing I needed was for William to notice my alcoholism and take up therapy somewhere else, leaving me once again alone with the bottles and the debts.

Finally I saw his Ford pickup roll into the driveway. I decided to leave the front door open and wait for him inside the study. It didn't take long for him to brush past my chair on his way to the one he used. He startled me as I didn't even hear him enter the house, not even the faintest whisper. How had he done that?

"It's good to see you again William. How has your week been?" As I talked I noticed that his face showed slightly more weariness than it had the last time I saw him. Maybe he hadn't read the book I gave him. "Did you try any of the techniques in the meditation book?"

"Yes, I read the whole thing," he said and scratched his head, then shook it as if he was refusing something. "It didn't do much good."

"You look more tired if anything."

"I am." Now he deliberately turned his head to the window. Was he trying to block something out?

"Has something happened?"

He looked at me, the first time since coming in, and I saw worry in his eyes, which was unusual.

“Yes.” He said this with a certain finality, and he offered no further explanation.

The study went silent. I wanted him to tell me what was going on without prodding, so I tried to busy myself with writing some notes into my journal. This kind of game could extend into minutes, but it is a tactic often used by therapists.

I had counted five minutes on the clock when he finally gave in. “I uh... see things,” he said. “I mean, not just when I’m asleep.”

“Do you mean the things from your nightmares?”

“See I knew you wouldn’t believe me. None of the therapists have.”

“Hold on. I didn’t say that I didn’t believe you.” I used a calm tone so as not to agitate him. He was definitely on edge and expecting some kind of scorn. “I don’t find it impossible that you could see things while awake. Stress and lack of sleep can have that effect on a person.”

“But that’s the thing. It’s not induced by fatigue. It’s real.”

I was surprised by that statement. It was out of character for William, who had not shown any irrational traits up to this point. But that was the unpredictability of psychology, and the reason I had made it my life.

“What makes you think it’s real, William?”

I had been wrong in thinking he was agitated before because now alarm shone outright on his face. Then he sighed and stood up. For a moment I thought he was going to leave, but then he reached down and lifted up his shirt to reveal four hideous gashes that ran side by side from his chest and down onto his lower back. They looked to be no more than four or five days old.

“Jesus Christ!”

“You see,” he said, “if it wasn’t real then how did I get this?”

I had no words for the man. At first I thought he might have done it himself, but after looking at them more closely I saw that they were angled in such a way that he couldn’t possibly have made them himself.

“Have you been to a doctor?”

“I don’t want any doctor seeing this. And you can’t tell anyone either, right?”

“Yes, everything we say in these sessions is confidential. But you have to understand that if I think you did this to yourself, and that act poses a threat to your own safety I must notify someone.”

He looked at me with worried and innocent eyes. “Do you think I did this to myself, that I’m so mad that reality has become another dream of mine?”

I looked hard at him. “I... don’t know.”

He tucked his shirt back in and sat down, looking into the corner. Perhaps there was something there only my patient could see.

“I want you to be honest,” I said. “Is there something behind me?”

I couldn’t tell what was going through William’s mind. He was locked in some internal struggle. Then I heard him whisper to himself, “I’ve told him this much, might as well tell him all of it.”

“The Grinning man is standing there, watching us.”

“And is he the one who did that to you?” I said, pointing straight at his chest.

“Yes. Two days after the last session.”

“Has he done it before?”

“No. This was a first for him. It’s always been threats, but then I woke up that morning and the sheets were covered in blood.”

“Are you afraid he’ll do it again?”

“Not so much. If I were, that would mean he had control, and I’m not giving him any power over me.”

There it was, the fighting mentality I so admired him for. Yet the fact that William himself was getting better while his symptoms appeared to be worsening was cause for concern. This was turning out to be the strangest therapy I had been involved in.

“It’s good to see you so focused, although I am a bit worried that your symptoms getting worse and we want to contain that as well as possible. I want you to consider buying tea that’s called Kava.” I wrote the name on a piece of paper and handed it to him. “It’s a natural tea that has anti-anxiety properties, so it might help you sleep or relax if you get any unwanted visions.”

William looked at the clock as he took the piece of paper and we both realized that our time was up, so we walked together for the front door.

“I really appreciate you doing this for me, and for not calling me a lunatic.” William’s words were sincere as he said them.

“Nonsense, I wouldn’t be much of a therapist if I didn’t do all I could for you.”

“You’d be surprised to know just how many therapists are incompetent.”

I was partly aware of what he meant, but at the same time I thought that he must have been extremely unlucky in his search for good therapists.

He said his goodbyes, got into his car and drove out of the driveway, and out of my thoughts.

I immediately made for the kitchen and grabbed some plastic bags. It was time to clean up this house, and the owner with it. It was easier going for the empty bottles first, as they had served their purpose and were nothing but the ashes of my addiction. The full and partially empty bottles were harder to throw into bags, for they were to me like fire to a freezing man, the magnetic attraction constantly drawing us together. I diligently swept the house and parted the bottles from their hiding places. The one from the bathrobe, the one in the small closet, the one under my mattress, all of them. At the end of my mission, two bags of empty bottles lay on the floor next to one bag of full ones, plus two extra that didn't fit into the bag. I don't know how long I stood there, watching the two extra bottles. I felt sweat running down my face. Then I reached for one of the bottles, opened it and took a long sip. It felt so maddeningly good, the spirit forming a small sun in my belly that spread warmth to every one of my limbs. I got ready to empty the bottle when I realized the severity of what I was doing.

Just then, I was caught in a moment of clarity. An opportunity was presenting itself to me, one that I had to grab while I was so determined to get sober. I took the bags and almost ran for the trash cans by the far side of the garage. Then I made my way back inside and reached for the telephone. A few minutes of sorting through my address book brought me the number I was looking for. I had to calm myself so I took a few deep breaths then dialed the number.

"Hello," said a soft woman's voice. A voice I had not heard in eight years.

"Amelia?" It came out as a whisper.

"Yes, who's this?"

"It's me, your father." There was a long pause.

"How did you get this number?" She sounded cold, emotionless.

"Barry gave it to me just after you moved to Arizona."

"Well, Barry should have known better."

"Please don't hang up." I heard the desperation in my own voice, but talking to my daughter again after all this time was almost as intoxicating as Jack Daniel's was.

"What do you want?"

"I uh, decided to stop drinking."

"And you called me to get a pat on the back?"

"No, not at all." I still sounded desperate. "I was hoping you would be willing to see me."

"Why would I want that?" She was still so cold.

“Because I have changed, and I want to get to know my little girl again.”

There was another long pause.

“I don’t know.” The cold tone was receding, replaced with uncertainty.

“I’ll tell you what. I was thinking of catching a flight out to Arizona in four days and you don’t have to decide anything until I get there.” It was my turn to pause for a few moments, before adding, “And if you won’t be there, well... then at least I tried.”

“Okay,” she said and hung up the phone.



**April 28, 1990**

For the first time since being fired I woke up with a sense of real purpose. I couldn't help but smile into the morning. I'm not saying that getting up was easy, or that I didn't want to get my hands on an ice cold Budweiser and down the whole thing in one gulp. On this day, however, I felt a tiny sliver of strength to fight the urge, and a strong reason to bear the pain. My mind was made up. I was going to visit Amelia and repair the damage done between us when her mother died. I knew well that she wouldn't even consider sparing me a glance if she thought I was drinking. Therefore, I had absolutely no other choice than to sober up and fight against the addiction.

I was extremely happy when Clara arrived at about eight in the morning to aid me in the first step on my road to recovery. At least I thought it was eight; my sense of timing was nonexistent at that moment in my life. Her timing could actually not have been better because the first serious withdrawal symptoms began just a few minutes after she walked in through the door.

It was not long before the smile I wore when I woke up faded, replaced by a painful grimace, and the little strength I had felt drained out of with all the sweat as I lay on the floor in throes of withdrawal. I was a tiny speck floating around in a dark abyss where no joy or hope could ever exist. I was trapped in a swirling pool of feverish delirium and pain. I threw up until there was nothing in my stomach, and then I started vomiting the yellowish bile. Nothing could keep me from shaking. I was either too warm or too cold. My body was in such desperate need of alcohol that I would have done anything to get my hands on it.

At noon I tried raiding the places where I usually kept a bottle, and Clara gently encouraged me at first to stay in bed and rest, but I wouldn't listen and eventually she stopped restraining me and let me find out for myself that all the booze had been disposed of. Of course I knew the places were empty as I had thrown the bottles out myself, but in my state of mind I was desperately hoping that just one of the bottles had been forgotten.

The knowing, sympathetic smile on Clara's face made me feel like a fool as I stumbled, exhausted, back to my bed. She made sure I drank some water and had a few bites of her delicious lasagna before I tried to get some more rest. If you call tossing around for hours on end resting. Clara sat diligently by the side of my bed and kept me hydrated and fed despite my spewing half of it up again.

By midnight I was still deep in the midst of withdrawal and appeared worse if anything.

“You don’t have to stay Clara. I’ve been too much of a burden already.”

“Nonsense,” she replied. “If you think I’m going to leave you here alone in this condition you can keep dreaming. People have died from alcohol withdrawal if not cared for correctly.”

I gave a weak laugh. “Ever the nurse. I see your retirement hasn’t diminished your passion for taking care of people.”

“There’s no retiring from wanting to help others, Ethan.” She leaned back into her chair scribbling at a crossword puzzle in the paper. And there she kept watch while I wriggled and squirmed. It was a comfort knowing she would take care of me while I was incapacitated. I knew well that if she had not been there I would have either found a way to acquire some booze or I would have died while stubbornly trying to resist the withdrawals on my own.

**May 4, 1990**

As I approached Sky Harbor airport in Phoenix my stomach was twisting itself into a knot, and not just because of the last remaining vestiges of withdrawal. I hadn't seen Amelia since she was twenty years old and I was dreading our meeting as if I were going to the dentist. I hadn't even heard from her again after that one phone call, only prayed that she was waiting for me at the airport. I also silently thanked God that my tight funds had been enough for me to travel to Arizona. However uncomfortable the anticipation felt though, this was a huge first step in getting back my daughter.

After landing I hurried through the terminal. The wait had gotten to me and I had to know if my little girl was waiting for me, willing to accept me back into her life. So as I stepped through the final gate I scanned the crowd. After a while it became clear: there was no sign of Amelia. I felt foolish standing there in the way of arriving passengers so I moved to a small coffee shop near the entrance of the terminal to think about my next move.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I see your eyesight has taken a turn for the worse."

I turned around to see a woman standing there, as perfect as she had been the day I last saw her, only more mature. "I... I thought you had decided not to come."

"I had to know if you were telling the truth about having changed."

"I have, and I am so happy to get this chance to prove it to you."

"We'll see how it goes," she said, the coldness creeping back into her voice. She motioned for me to follow her and we walked out into the parking lot all the way to her car. It was a brand new beautiful Mercedes. Amelia was obviously doing well for herself. I was happy for her, as it was the least she deserved for having such a failure as a father.

The ride home was spent in silence. Eight years apart had obviously created a gap between us that would be hard to fill. I was bursting with things to tell my daughter, the first of which being how sorry I was for having let the drink take control of my life, but uttering them was so hard. I hoped she was going through a similar experience rather than residing in her coldness.

I was doubly happy for my daughter when we arrived at her house. It was a beautiful, large, light brown house with a water fountain at the front and a massive back yard.

As we entered the house, Barry greeted us, and trailing him were a boy and a girl, about the ages five and three. I could only assume from their looks that they were my grandchildren.

“Welcome Ethan,” said Barry, “It’s been a long time.”

I shook his extended hand. “It sure has.”

“Adam, Sofia, see here, this man is your grandfather.” Barry gently nudged the shy little youths towards me, and they edged back behind their smiling father.

“That hasn’t been decided yet,” Amelia said and walked into the kitchen. She was angry, and I understood why, so I resolved to give her as much space as she needed. She would hopefully approach me when she was ready.

I turned back to Barry and said: “May I use your phone for a quick call?”

“Sure, there’s a phone in the sitting area at the end of this hall,” he said and pointed me to the hall on the left hand side.

I sat down on one of the elaborate chairs in the sitting area and dialed William’s number.

“Hello.”

“William? It’s Ethan.”

“Yes, is something wrong?”

“No nothing major, although I’m afraid I have to cancel our next two sessions. There is a family matter to which I must attend.”

“You what?” I was slightly taken aback by how sharp his tone was. “You say it’s nothing major then tell me that we can’t meet for two weeks?”

“I’m truly sorry, I didn’t mean for this to happen this way.”

“Can’t you finish whatever it is you have to do sooner? I really need these sessions.”

“I wish I could, but even if I were able to cut it short I still don’t think we’d make these two sessions.”

“But I need them.” His tone had taken on a hint of panic. “I paid you in advance so I would get weekly therapy appointments.”

“Listen, I understand that this is unexpected, I will happily give you the first couple of sessions for free after the advance payment has run out. If the therapy is successful before then I will reimburse you these two sessions along with whatever is left of the payment.” I was using the calm voice again, trying to keep him from agitation at all costs. “I know this might seem scary but you can get through this. The book and tea might help in that regard. I’ll call you tomorrow and give you a number to reach me.”

“This isn’t right, Ethan.” I heard him sigh. “I’ll talk to you later.”

I put down the receiver. The conversation had played out way worse than I thought it would. I felt bad for having sprung the situation on him like I did, but he was showing

progress and I had given him some means of combating his symptoms. At least I was going to give him the number at the house while I was staying there. Well, if Amelia was okay with it.

**May 12, 1990**

It took me a few days to adjust to the climate in Phoenix, but once that was done I found that the heat had a relaxing effect on me. Yet relaxation didn't last long, as William would call me at least two times a day in a similar state he had been when I cancelled the sessions. On the fifth day though he stopped calling, and that actually worried me more than the calls did. But I had a family to piece back together, so William had to wait for the time being.

The tension in the air had lessened in the eight days since I arrived. So far my visit had yielded only small talk around the dinner table and short conversations with Barry. Amelia had mostly given me the cold shoulder, and I had no intention of forcing the issue with her. The best part of my stay, though, was getting to know my grandchildren. Adam and Sofia both reminded me of their mother when she was young. Both of them were curious and talkative once the initial shyness had dissipated. I had not known I was a grandfather, and when it had fully sunk in I was overcome with pride and joy. So I spend a lot of time with them, telling them stories and getting to know them.

We were all eating breakfast in the kitchen when Amelia put down her glass of orange juice and said to me, "We need to talk." Then she motioned for me to follow her into the living room, where we sat down on the sofa. Amelia took a deep breath.

"I can see you've made a change. You weren't drunk at the airport and there's no alcohol here, so you don't seem be to drinking."

I smiled, feeling proud of myself. "I knew the only way to prove it to you was to come here."

"You know this will take time. It's not like you can just appear after eight years and think everything will be as it was."

"That's not what I came here for. I want to rebuild our relationship, regardless of how long it takes."

She looked me in the eyes.

"I couldn't stay near you after mom died."

"I know honey. I lost myself, and you didn't deserve that. I failed you... miserably."

Amelia's eyes filled with tears, her lips trembled, and all the tension that was between us evaporated as we embraced each other.

"I've missed you so much," she said, sobbing into my shoulder.

"And I you." Tears were streaming down my own face.

We held each other for a long time, not saying anything, just enjoying our small reunion. At that moment nothing else mattered to me. I felt whole again, like my existence finally meant something again. And I smiled at the thought of what the future could hold for me.

“Listen,” I said. “I want to be closer to you. I want to get to know my grandchildren and watch them grow.”

Amelia gave me a doubtful look.

“I’m not suggesting you move back to Montana.”

“Good.”

“I was actually thinking of moving to Phoenix.”

She looked surprised, much the same way I felt. I had said that purely on impulse, but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense.

“You can afford to move away from the institute?”

Of course, she didn’t know that I got fired, which didn’t really matter. All that held me in Montana was the house, and I wouldn’t really mind being rid of it. It reminded me so much of Natalie, and years of drinking Jack.

“You know, I think I can move from the institute.” I gave her a hint of a smile. “I’ve had enough of it, and I’ve had enough of treating people as well.”

I could tell that I had shocked her.

“But what would you do here?”

“I’m not sure yet. Maybe I could teach.”

Amelia’s eyes lit up with interest. “Barry’s uncle is dean of the University of Phoenix. Maybe we can talk to him if you decide to move.”

“So you’d be okay with that? Me moving here I mean?”

My daughter looked at me and smiled for the first time since I came to stay at her house. Perhaps this change was exactly what I needed, to go home and finish William’s therapy, sell the house and part ways with the emptiness.

**May 20, 1990**

I closed the door of my trusty Honda and strode up to the house. Being home again felt bittersweet. This had been my home for such a long time, yet there was also so much sorrow and decadence within it. After everything I had been through it became clear to me that I had to leave this house. Only then would I truly be able to rid myself of the sweet influence of Jack Daniel's, of the memory of Natalie's death, and of Greenfield.

With William making progress I could at least start planning my transition. Leaving a patient mid-therapy was unthinkable to me. My first duty was to my patients, even if I had only the one. We were making good progress so I hoped the treatment would not have to extend into a long term therapy, although only the coming sessions could determine that conclusively. My hopes had faltered slightly with those phone calls from William. I couldn't imagine what prompted the urgency in his tone, other than an especially bad episode, which he was used to dealing with.

As soon as I had walked through the front door I dropped my travel case, and my eyes almost instinctively darted to the various places I would hide bottles of whiskey. I even walked over to the small cabinet under the stairs and snuck a peek inside before I realized what I was doing. Thankfully there wasn't a bottle on the small shelf above the light switch as Clara and I had done a thorough sweep of the house the day before I left for Arizona. I honestly don't know if I would have been able to resist. Closing the cabinet door I looked at my watch. Half an hour until William was supposed to arrive. I had made it home with minutes to spare, and although I would have preferred to relax for a day or two before seeing him, the urgency in his voice during our last conversation over the phone had compelled me to meet with him as soon as I was back in Kalispell. I strode to the therapy room, intending to tidy up the room before William showed up. I was stacking some books on the desk when I came across Bob's journal. I had forgotten all about little leather bound book since taking it home with me from Carla's house. I decided to take a quick look inside seeing as I had a few minutes.

*The treatment is yielding results. It is too soon to know if they are positive or negative, but this is definitely a cause for continued treatment. The patient is showing mild changes in mood and temperament, which is essential for further testing. As these methods are new to me I must move at a slow pace and insure that no unwanted damage is caused to the patient. Reading Dr. Cameron's study has really opened my eyes to the possibilities of the treatment.*



What was this treatment and why didn't it have a name? I also wondered whether this Dr. Cameron was a fellow colleague or a medical doctor presenting a new study that had an impact on the field of psychology. It was entirely possible that Bob was trying to contribute to a promising theory. Nevertheless, I made a mental note of researching prominent doctors by the name of Cameron and leaned back over the journal. Just then, the door bell rang and I hurried to the door to find William standing outside. That was odd: he was twenty minutes early.

There was something off about my young patient, not so much an outward change but a fundamental one. He didn't greet me at the door, or look at me for that matter. As he marched past me into the study I became aware of a difference in the way he walked and carried himself. It was the most peculiar thing. I observed him further when we sat down in the study. He still hadn't said a single word, still hadn't looked at me. The very air around him appeared changed somehow. Then he looked at me with those terrible eyes. There was no innocence left in them, no life. Something had definitely gone wrong here. The William who walked out of my study three weeks earlier and the William who walked in this day were simply not the same person.

"You sounded quite distressed on the phone," I said, ready to engage in whatever conversation the session would present us with.

"Did I?" His response was dripping with indignation. That was new, for never before had I experienced anything but politeness from him.

"Yes, I thought maybe something bad had happened. I'm sorry that I couldn't be here."

"It doesn't matter. None of it matters anymore." He said the last bit in a hushed tone, but I heard it.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh you know. It's just a saying." He was not looking at me anymore. His eyes turned to the left and fixated on something unseen. William put on a chilling smile as he stared at the spot. I must admit that a shiver went down my spine upon witnessing that smile.

"Are you sure?" I said. "I've never heard of such a saying." I wondered if what he was looking at was the Grinning man. I was certain there was nothing there and William was just experiencing a heightened state of paranoia, yet I couldn't shake off the eerie feeling in the room.

William hadn't answered me so I said, "Is the Grinning man in here with us?" That got his attention. He looked at me, still smiling.

“What makes you say that Doctor Abrams? I don’t even think you believe he exists.” He still wore that bone chilling smile, and I got the sense he was toying with me.

“I believe that you believe he exists,” I said.

“That doesn’t make it any better. If anything it tells me you think I’m out of my mind. Tell me Doctor, have you ever had darkness pierce your eyes and pour into them, filling you up with bad smells, loud noises, fear and nightmares?” His smile was gone, replaced by a grimace as he spoke.

“No, I have never had such an experience.”

William kept on as if I hadn’t said anything. “There is something evil going on when the food you try to eat tastes rotten, when you smell a rose the stench makes you gag. Everyone you look at is covered in blood or fire.” William’s eyes widened and he sat up straighter. “How can it be madness if you feel the heat from that fire? Or if the metallic smell of blood clings to the people who are so brutally covered in it?”

I was taken aback, not able to bring up any response. I had treated patients who spoke in such a manner but never had they been as sane as William. This kind of talk would typically stem from a severe case of psychosis and dementia, and William was nowhere near as mentally unstable as that. His symptoms were the result of stress and lack of sleep. This was a deeply disturbing development. All I managed to say was, “What happened here while I was gone William?”

“You left, that’s what happened. Only three days after our last session Scruffy got run over by some jackass speeding on the country road by my house.”

“I’m truly sorry that happened”

“Of course you are.” His face had a menacing hue. “You should be.”

“William, your dog would have died whether I was here or not. You know that.”

“I’m not stupid. Of course I know that, but when I sought you out I found what the night brought me. More darkness.”

I composed myself and regained some self control. I was the therapist and I had to ensure a therapeutic environment for both me and the patient.

“I’m back now, so we can work together and bring light to this darkness.”

He didn’t give me a response, so we sat there for several minutes in silence. I wanted him to speak first, to reveal a topic on which we could work on, but he said nothing. In my stubbornness I started writing down the events of the session while William sat still, his only movement being his eyes following the unseen roaming entity. A flickering thought entered my mind. I hoped to God that the Grinning man was not really behind me.

**May 27, 1990**

While working at the institution I was always confident and not easily shaken by a patient's condition. Yet William had riled me when we last met. I was really hopeful that this session would be smoother than the last one. I was still a bit confused about it actually. William had showed a completely different side of himself, a much darker side. I had tried to convince myself that it was just a particularly bad day for him.

Ten minutes before the session I stood by the door, thinking William would be early again. When he finally did arrive I had been standing by the door for over half an hour. As I saw him though, my fears were confirmed. William looked nothing like himself. There was little trace left of the kind, well mannered young man I had met only three months before. He had somehow managed to lose weight in the week since our last meeting. His cheeks were gaunt and a little discolored. This man was quite obviously withering away. Either he had done an exceptional job of hiding the severity of his condition at the start of the therapy and was losing control, or something unexplained and unprecedented was taking place right in front of my eyes. I was tempted to believe the latter.

"I'm starting to think you have forgotten the scheduled time we were supposed to meet. You're too early for one session and too late for the next." I kept my tone light so as to brighten the mood. It had no effect, and William walked past me without appearing to notice I was there. Even when we had both sat down in the study it was as if we were not in the same room together. William was distant, eyes darting this way and that. His expression changed with great frequency. Within ten minutes of sitting in the study he had born an expression of fear, ecstasy, terror, contentment, confusion, and even wildness. I studied this closely, as I had not seen a person in this kind of state in all my years as a psychologist. I must admit that it was frightening, and I wondered whether I would make it to the baseball bat I kept in an umbrella stand by the foot of the stairs if things got ugly. Man always fears that which he cannot define: a saying doubly true in the field of psychology.

"William, are you well?" I was genuinely concerned for his wellbeing.

He flinched, looked up, and then flinched again as if he were avoiding something that had been thrown at him.

"They are everywhere," he said, eyes still darting all around the study. His arms and legs twitched regularly, and his breathing was sometimes fast and sometimes slow, his body was seemingly going through immense physical exertion.

“Who are you talking about?” I was apprehensive for I knew where this session was heading.

A few minutes later, when William finally gained some clarity and calmed down, he said, “All of them, the demons, the faceless ones... the Grinning man.”

“When did the demons and faceless ones appear?”

“Six days ago.”

“Did anything unusual happen the day they appeared?”

“No although I slept on the sofa instead of my bed. I don’t normally do that.”

He sat slumped in the chair opposite me, face half buried in his hands and he still wouldn’t look me in the eye for some reason.

“I get the feeling you’re not being straight with me. If we are to make any progress we need to put everything on the table.” My words prompted no reaction from William except for sneering.

“And what exactly is it you want me to put on the table?” he said. His tone was low and menacing. “Do you want me to tell you that everywhere I look I see creatures eating people and ripping them apart? I see them silently watching me while I do whatever it is that I’m doing. I hear them, whispering horrors into my ear.”

I was filled with terror, not because of what he was saying, but rather how he said it. He spoke with exultation, as if the things he spoke of were a pleasure for him to witness. I think he saw the fear in my face, for at that moment he looked me dead in the eye and smiled the cruelest smile I have ever seen. His eyes gave me yet another shock. The only way I could describe them was as bearing a malevolent hunger. I somehow got the feeling that he wanted to harm me.

I had to say something, so I asked, “Do you see anything unusual about me?”

His smile deepened. “Well, don’t suppose you have blood leaking from your nose, mouth and ears, do you?” I only managed to shake my head, and he continued, “Or if you do we need to call an ambulance right now.”

I didn’t share his mirth. The psychologist in me, however, sought a more rational answer to William’s attitude than what had instilled so much fear in me, and I kept firm hold on that small pillar of strength.

“I think you are under tremendous stress from lack of sleep. And I think that stress is making you lash out.” I used a neutral, therapeutic tone as I spoke. I wanted to keep him as calm as possible. “Could it be that you are feeling resentment towards me as an outlet for your frustration?”

William was already shaking his head and rolling his eyes by the time I finished. “No I don’t feel any resentment. I feel hate. For everything.”

“Why?”

“He has opened my eyes, revealed the world to me as it truly is.”

“Who?” I noticed him twitching slightly again. He still hadn’t dropped that dreadful smile.

“Why, my grinning friend of course. All this time he was just helping me, guiding me to the truth of the world, and to the comfort of darkness.”

I was running out of things to say in response. This was nothing like any therapy I had ever given before and there was no longer any rationality to our conversations. Every time each of us said anything there was a long pause afterwards. It got increasingly uncomfortable, especially having to suffer under his lifeless gaze and bone chilling smile.

Doubt washed over me like rain from the sky. I was suddenly not so sure of myself anymore, and the bad taste I had in my mouth before seeing William for the first time was back. It was an effort not to contort my face as we stared at each other in the little study. It got to the point where I just couldn’t stand the thought of being there for one more minute.

“Maybe we should call it for today, William,” I said as I looked at my watch. “We could start early next week if you want.”

William stood up and looked at the bookshelf by the side of his chair, “Are you in a hurry to get me out so you can get back to slugging down some Jack?”

I gave a visible jerk, “How did you...”

“I told you the demons whisper to me, didn’t I?”

I stood with my mouth open, trying to figure out what to say to him. I asked myself how the hell he knew about my drinking several times before saying, “I don’t know how you really found out but it doesn’t matter now. I quit before leaving for Arizona.” William didn’t say anything. He just smiled, walked right past me and left. I was still so shocked by what he said that I didn’t even see him to the door.

I am ashamed to admit that for hours after that session I had an overwhelming hankering for a drink, and if there had been a bottle in the house I’m positive I would have drained the whole thing. I wanted to hide from my reeling thoughts. William awoke terror within me, and how he knew those things about me had no rational explanation.

That night in my bedroom I decided to take a look in Bob’s journal. I sought comfort in reading his familiar handwriting. The other day, when I had read from the little book I could hear his voice, and for a few moments I would forget that he had killed himself.

*I am still mapping progress with the treatment. The patient has exhibited reduced symptoms and more positive state of mind. I understand why Cameron's work is not more widespread, but in the right hands it can be a tremendous asset.*

Something clicked, like a puzzle falling into place. Dr. Cameron, Donald Ewen Cameron, the man behind psychic driving, a mind control procedure developed by Dr. Cameron for the CIA. In any case it was an extremely unethical treatment, and Bob was implementing it on a patient of his.

I was disgusted. This was my best friend, the most ethical psychologist I had ever known. A sense of betrayal welled up within me, so much so that I threw the journal across the room and didn't stop to look where it landed.

**June 3, 1990**

The week passed by in a haze. I lost all sense of time, laying around the house and eating only when I couldn't stand the hunger pains in my stomach any longer. I was often close to driving to the liquor store and stocking up for heavy drinking. It would have been so easy to slip into intoxication once again, not having to think about all that had passed between me and my patient. There was also my promise to Amelia and the plan to move to Arizona. So instead of drinking I lost myself in contemplation about the therapy. I seriously questioned whether it should continue. William's attitude since I came back from Arizona had me worried not only about the success of the therapy, but also for my own safety. He had changed so suddenly and so significantly. The things he talked about were enough to frighten anyone.

It dawned on me during those days after the last session that this therapy was doing more harm than good. It wasn't a conclusion that I came to lightly, and I had never discontinued therapy with any patient in the past, but this case was beyond anything that I had experienced or even studied for that matter, especially in light of William's knowledge of my personal life. He even knew about my preference to Jack Daniel's, something only a very few people knew about.

The thought of the past weeks were still rolling around in my mind. I felt very apprehensive about the session that afternoon. As soon as I woke up at eight in the morning I made my way into the kitchen to get some coffee and wait for William, although the session wasn't until one o'clock. The time passed fast, though, for I was still so deep in contemplation. I had decided to end this therapy and refer him to another psychologist in Kalispell. I knew I would be relieved, but I was also afraid. I knew it in my heart that if we continued I would either start drinking again, be trapped in Montana for at least two more years, or suffer some form of attack from my increasingly unstable patient.

The clock struck one on my watch and I felt my heartbeat hasten. That normally shouldn't have happened. I have treated violent people before and didn't even flinch. But there was a difference here, for even though those people were violent and unbalanced it was mostly involuntary: a result of a mental illness. William's symptoms could not conclusively suggest that he had a mental disorder, as his lack of sleep and the stress of sleep paralysis could easily be the reasons for his symptoms. He still kept to his normal daily routine and was not harming himself or others... yet. That's why I was confused about his behavior. If I had to define what was wrong with him with a word I would have to say *evil*. It resonated from him.

A knock sounded at the door and I stood up. For some reason walking from the kitchen through the living room and to the front door felt like walking on death row. The bitter taste blossomed on my tongue and my heart beat faster. When I opened the door William pushed past me once again without uttering a word.

“Good afternoon to you too,” I said after him as he walked into the study and sat down.

I had no interest in joining him but this had to be taken care of. I wanted to close this chapter in my life.

“How have you been?”

“Oh, you know. The usual. Blood everywhere, fire raining from the sky, creatures trying to eat me while I sleep.” Judging from his disposition, he might have been telling his grandmother that he had been on the most wonderful vacation of his life.

“How nice. Have you been trying the meditation methods I recommended?”

William responded with cold laughter. “Do you really think that the Grinning man and his friends will vanish if I sit down and lose myself in thought?”

“Actually, meditation is supposed to clear your mind along with calming it, which could perhaps clear the Grinning man from it. For short periods of time at least.”

“What if I just settle for listening to his whispers and eat people?” There was that damned smile again.

“As your therapist I definitely wouldn’t recommend that.” I smiled as I spoke so as to imply that I thought he was joking, while in fact I wasn’t completely sure he was. “Speaking of the therapy, I have something to tell you.”

I composed myself and got ready to speak to words I had so often rehearsed before this session. “I think it would in the best interest for both of us if we were to discontinue this therapy. We should be seeing some kind of progress after all this time, but it appears that my treatment has had a negative effect instead.”

My soon-to-be ex patient’s expression darkened further, a thing I had not thought possible. “Are you trying to tell me that you want to end the therapy?”

“It’s not that what you have is untreatable,” I really hoped I sounded believable. “It might be that the chemistry between us is not right or that my psychological expertise isn’t suited for your condition.” William’s stare pierced right through me. I wondered whether he knew the reason behind my backing out, if my agitation was visible to him. “I will refund the remainder of your advance payment, of course.”



William exploded. "I don't care about the fucking money! I came here for treatment and I will have it, as was our deal." He must have seen fear in my eyes for his rage reverted back to the ominous darkness. I didn't know which one was worse; at least he exhibited some humanity when he was enraged like that.

"The terms of the deal have changed, William. You came to me because of depression and paranoia from something akin to sleep paralysis. What you have been displaying here for the last two sessions is more similar to severe psychosis." I felt a bit of anger rising within me. Maybe it was because I felt betrayed. I had expected an easy case with a quick buck and instead I was faced with the most abnormal mental distortion I had known to exist. "I don't think I can treat you anymore."

"You're pathetic. No wonder you lost your job. I bet you just couldn't handle your patients being a little tired, so you drowned yourself in old number seven."

"I know you find it inconvenient or even difficult to accept the change, and lashing out at me isn't going to make it any better. There are other capable therapists in Kalispell and I would be happy to refer you to one of them. It might even work out better for you."

"Oh, so you're interested in what works out for me?"

"Do you really think your wellbeing has not been a priority of mine?"

"It's hard to think otherwise when your therapist is an alcoholic who abandons his patient for weeks in the middle of therapy."

"Well perhaps it won't be so hard for you to find a new therapist, one who can faithfully treat whatever it is you've got." There was no reason in putting this off any longer. "I'll send you a check for the unused part of your advance payment along with a list of highly competent therapists in the area." I stood up and walked to the door of the little study. I turned back towards William as I opened the it and waited for him to leave.

My now ex-patient was in no hurry to get up. He sat there for at least two minutes and stared at me. Finally he smiled, rolled his eyes and looked out of the window to his right before setting his gaze on me again.

"Alright, Doctor. I guess I should thank you for wasting my time and taking my money. I won't bother you again after today." He stood up and walked slowly towards the door. Then, just as he was walking past me his head jerked insanely fast towards my head and he sank his teeth deep into my neck. I let out a throat-wrenching scream and pushed him off me. As he fell back it felt as if something was torn free of my neck. I stumbled backwards into the hall, clutching the wound to try and stem the bleeding.

“Jesus Christ William! Have you lost whatever was left of your mind?” William stalked up to where I stood and spat blood and the chunk of skin he had bitten off back into my face. I backed away from him and he laughed wholeheartedly. It was the only time I have ever seen mirth on his face.

“Now you have something to remember me by,” he said and strode out the front door.

He had managed to bite a full mouthful out of my flesh and I was bleeding profusely. The only thing I could think of was calling Clara once again for help. I couldn’t afford going to the hospital, especially after losing my insurance. I got up and lumbered over to the phone where I dialed the number for Bob and Clara’s house.

I could hear the worry in Clara’s voice as I told her about the attack. We had always been close friends, ever since she had met Bob and later introduced me to Natalie. She told me to slow the bleeding, get some hydrogen peroxide ready and remain calm, the first two of which I had every intention of doing, and the latter was in no way possible. William’s violent departure transformed me into a trembling, sweating mess.

It didn’t take long for Clara to get to my house. She must have been pushing the speed limit to make it over in only fifteen minutes. She barged in through the door and went straight to examining the wound.

“Where is the skin chunk?” she said.

“In the hall leading to my study,” I answered a bit confused.

Carla hopped off to collect the skin that William had bitten out of me. When she found it, I realized to my shock that she intended to put it back in place before bandaging the wound. “You’re not going to put that back on me are you?”

“Of course I am,” she retorted, “it’s the best thing for your recovery, and that way there will be minimal scarring.”

“But that was in his mouth,” I said disgusted, while Carla laughed.

“Don’t be silly Ethan, I’ve washed it with saline solution. It’s cleaner than your hands.”

I saw no point in arguing with the woman. She would resort to more violence than William in order to make me better. So there I sat wincing while Clara cleansed the wound, put the piece of flesh back into its place and bandaged my neck tightly.

“You’ll have to wash this at least once a day to avoid infection, and don’t forget to use the hydrogen peroxide. This type of wound is easily infected.”

“I’ll do my best to keep it clean,” I said and smiled.

“Have you called the police?” she said as she repacked her first aid-bag.

“No,” I replied, knowing that she would not understand what I said next. “Nor do I intend to.”

A look of angry confusion crossed her face “Why the hell not? This man attacked you in your own home.”

“Carla, please. When I was fired, half of Kalispell knew about it. If this also gets out it will only reawaken all that I went through,” That was partly true. The very thought of William sent a chill down my spine, and I hoped never to see his face again “I don’t think I’ll be able to handle it. I’ve finally quit drinking. I’m on speaking terms with Amelia again and I have to move on from this.”

“So you’re not seeing this patient again?”

“No, and I think that is the reason he lashed out at me so harshly. I sprang it on him I suppose, and that’s never a good thing to do to patients in therapy.”

Carla sighed. “Well, I hope he gets the help he needs.”

“So do I.”

I offered her a cup of coffee and we sat down in the living room. After taking some aspirin I told her about my trip to Arizona and my reunion with Amelia. She was very happy for me, and excited about the teaching opportunity. I couldn’t bring myself to tell her what Bob had done. She deserved to know, but she also deserved to remember her husband as we had known him, not the corrupt psychologist who was subjecting his patients to a questionable and possibly harmful procedure. So I decided to shield Carla from the truth.

“I think relocating is just what you need,” she said, smiling. “Bob and I always wondered why you stayed here all alone after Natalie’s death.”

“I think I was too deeply invested in my work. Then it just became a boring routine.”

We lost track of time in while talking of the future and the past, and about two hours later I offered her another cup of coffee. On my way into the kitchen I turned on the television to get some background noise. I had only filled one cup when Carla called my name. She sounded worried so I hurried back into the living room thinking that maybe William was back. The cause of her worry, however, was the television, or rather the news.

I looked at the screen where a reporter was on the scene of a multiple homicide.  
*“...this shopping mall where the suspect burst in with an axe and started hacking into the guests, killing seven people and wounding another six. The suspect, who was shot on sight by the police only an hour ago, has yet to be identified and police are now launching an investigation. Witnesses state that the man’s cheeks had been cut all the way up to his ears,*

*and that he was laughing while he committed the murders. People are already describing this as the most horrific murder spree in the history of Montana...*”

I stared at the television in shocked silence. A thousand fears blazed within me. Was it William? And if it was, then what would the repercussions be for me? Were all my plans evaporating before my eyes? Carla must have read into my ashen face for she leaned forward on the sofa and said, “This can’t be your patient, can it?”

It took me a few seconds for the question to sink in. “I... I can’t be sure”

**June 13, 1990**

The week after the incident with William was the longest and worst week of my life. For every single day of that week I feared waking up to the sight of police cars outside my house. I dreaded going to sleep for fear of the next day. I don't rightly know why I was so afraid as I hadn't done anything criminal. Yet having been a therapist for a mass murderer after being fired and ousted from the psychological community in Kalispell, I knew that the blowback from that kind of scandal would ruin the future I had placed all my bets on. Word could spread fast amongst those who shared my profession, and if I approached The University of Phoenix for a position, they would look into my history and find the festering mess I had left there. My role in William's life just looked so overwhelmingly suspicious.

The true source of my anguish, though, was the feelings I had towards William. I thought long and hard every day if this would have happened if I had done things differently. Had I inadvertently been the reason for his downfall and subsequent rampage? The thought that I was possibly responsible for the death of seven innocent people gnawed at the back of my mind every waking moment. The most terrifying thing of all was that the media had named William's rampage the Grinning Man Massacre. What kind of twisted coincidence was that?

As the days slipped by and nobody came to inquire about William I started to calm down. Maybe no one knew that William had been seeing me for therapy. I certainly hadn't told anyone except for Clara, who had promised she would not reveal it to anyone. I owed so much to that woman and I was truly blessed to have had her support at my weakest moments. There would hopefully not be any more of those moments from now on.

Ten days after the incident I started planning my transition to Arizona. The wound was healing nicely and I had not had any infection. In between packing my things into boxes I tried to take my mind off the aftermath of William's rampage. While I was packing up the study I came across Bob's journal again and decided to read from it.

*The treatment has come to a dead stop. I have failed in producing positive results. In fact, the opposite has happened. After weeks of apparent progress the patient exploded into a momentary violent episode. There was an altercation between us and I received a bite wound upon my chest. I've managed to hide it from Carla, there's no need to worry her.*

"What the hell?" My voice echoed in the empty room. I read the passage again. This was so frightfully similar to what had happened between me and William. Could it be

possible be that Bob had been treating him? And using psychic driving on him on top of it all? A cold knot formed in my stomach and I decided to read further.

*I have not seen the patient since our clash although it has been three weeks since. I must assume that he will not come back so I will have to find another patient in order to continue my contribution to Dr. Cameron's research.*

*For the last five nights, I have been experiencing strange and terrible nightmares. I would not find it mentionable except for how consistent and specific my dreams are. I cannot help but speculate whether this is in some way connected to my patient and his illness. This is having a severe effect on my sleep, my work, and my daily life in general.*

I had difficulty coming to terms with what was written on these pages. I saw there was only one page left so I turned it. The writing was rough, as if Bob had been in a hurry. I noticed two small, round impressions on the page. Maybe my friend had splashed water on the page. Or perhaps the impressions were made by teardrops.

*This will be my last entry. I have lost the struggle against the nightmares and I simply can't go on living in this hell. I am not strong enough. I have managed to keep this from Carla and the boys. I don't think they would understand that I killed myself just because of a few bad dreams. The truth of those dreams, however, is so much worse than I could ever explain. It's too much, way too much. I do hope my family finds a way cope without me. I wish things would have turned out differently. I know he is waiting for me, that terrifying man with the twisted smile on his face. He beckons me and I am powerless to resist. There is no other way. God help me.*

**June 20, 1990**

Now I know that I will not be moving to Arizona to rebuild my life with Amelia and my grandchildren. I don't even have the heart to tell her I'll be failing her again. I won't be selling my house. I hope Carla never finds out what Bob did. I still cannot understand William, the man who had nightmares for no reason, nightmares that got worse every time he suffered injustice. It was a chain of events that began when his father slapped him, and it continued on through Bob's implementation of psychic driving on him, and climaxed at the death of his dog. What was my part in his downfall then? Did I push him over the edge? Would William have survived if I had never taken him on as a patient?

Nothing of it matters anymore, for last night I saw the Grinning Man.

On Writing *Eyes of Darkness*

By Daniel Martyn Knipe



## Introduction

Despite a deep fascination with writing that began at an early age, I have always found it hard to complete the stories I started to write, which resulted in the creation of a folder on my computer desktop called Projects. Ever so slowly, I filled that folder with documents, containing rough plots, screenplay ideas or the first page of some untold tale. Therefore, I think it is safe to say that this novella is at the very least a great personal accomplishment, one that I would not have achieved without the guidance of my instructor, Dr. Anna Heiða Pálsdóttir. All her insightful knowledge proved both a source of inspiration and a driving force for this B.A. project, for which I will always be grateful.

When I was eleven years old my English father offered me one of his books to read as he knew my love of adventures and magic. When he handed me the book I was immediately intimidated, as it was just shy of six hundred pages in length. Yet I was also intrigued as the title on the cover said *Magician* by Raymond E. Feist. Then I started reading it, the magnificent adventures of Pug in the captivating world of Midkemia, and there was no turning back: the world of stories and storytelling had me hooked. I read *Magician* and every other book by Feist. Then I asked my father for more and he handed me the first book in the *Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan. Soon I started getting my own ideas for stories, not necessarily fantasy stories as the ones I had read so avidly, but also stories about human relationships, supernatural elements and the complexities of the human mind. That is why this novella is a culmination of each of those aspects, the ultimate expression of everything I have wanted to write since the spark first ignited within me.

## Concept

A few years ago I had a dream in which I kept seeing strange things and creatures where others could see nothing. I remember having a distinct feeling that these creatures were out to get me. There was no apparent reason for these visions as I had not suffered any kind of trauma to elicit them. When I woke up I vividly remembered every detail of my strange dream, and it didn't take long for an idea to formulate in my head. I simply had to craft a story out of this experience.

The original concept was to write about a respectable character who suffered from these visions that gradually worsened, until they compelled him to do unspeakable things. But I quickly realized that that kind of story would be short, linear and dull. It needed conflict and depth, a well constructed plot. However, I got distracted with life at the time and didn't pursue this story. That is until I walked into Dr. Pálsdóttir's class on creative writing. When I saw what the class was about, ideas started buzzing in my head, and I knew this was the right story for my project.

In order to generate a story with all the right elements I had to do an overhaul of the original concept. As a result, the main character was turned into a therapist with big demons to face. I needed a reason for him to be only seeing one patient, so I fashioned a web of both unfortunate and self-inflicted circumstances that he finds himself in the center of.

The second main character, the one created from my dream, was then to be the patient. From the very start I wanted his illness to be different, bordering on the supernatural even, so that the reader would come to his or her own conclusion about the patient at the end of the story. The reason I did this is partly because the dream that inspired the character is equally mysterious to me. Staying true to the initial characterization of the patient, I kept his condition mild in the beginning and increased its severity. This worked well for the journey towards the climax of the story, and the unspeakable acts still take place.

My ultimate goal was to have the story present struggle, false hope and downfall, and so I tried to create scenes where each of these themes were displayed. Ethan struggles both with addiction and his patient William, who in turn struggles with his dreams and the Grinning man. The false hope is presented in the fact that in reconciling with his daughter and finding himself again, Ethan has also ensured his downfall by disrupting William's therapy, with resulting consequences. Ethan is not alone in the downfall theme, we also see William's

demise in the sudden shift within him after his dog's death. Bob, Ethan's former colleague, is also revealed to have a downfall of his own as his unethical practice is revealed.

## Plot

Approach to the plot has numerous forms. While some writers craft an intricate plot where almost every detail is planned to its full extent, others simply start writing with a rough outline and see where the story takes them. Of course there is a whole range of methods in between the two. Furthermore, using point of view, tense and narrative technique among other factors, allows for further sculpting of an interesting plot.

My intentions for the plot were heavily influenced by Sol Stein's words in *How to Grow a Novel*, where he stresses the importance of making each scene in the plot move the essential story forward (89). I had started writing the first page of project without having put down any kind of plot, thinking that my initial idea for the story was enough to guide me through the writing process. It wasn't long before I hit a wall. There was simply a point from which I couldn't keep writing, and my head was completely devoid of ideas. So I came to the realization that I had to put something down, a rough outline that would give me a framework for the beginning and resolution of each major event within the story rather than writing only with the final chapter in mind. That is where Stein's advice helped me. It only took me a few minutes to make a timeline with a beginning, build-up, climax and a resolution, which contained all the major events, or focal points of the story. By doing it this way I could let the characters grow on their own terms rather than being bound by a pre-written recipe of ingredients that didn't necessarily blend well together. It turned out that this was just what I needed to keep on writing because now I could look at the timeline and ask myself what needed to be said between the beginning of the story and the first therapy session, and so on. I wanted the plot to take off at a steady pace which it would retain throughout the story, and so I presented Ethan Abrams with his massive burden.

Another factor in planning the story was my interest in using plot twists and having characters appear to be on the rise, doing good, only to have it ripped from their grasp. And that is exactly what happens to Ethan and William: the protagonist and the antagonist of the story.

## Characters

Crafting characters is always fun, but reading about them may not always be entertaining, especially if they lack inner conflict, depth and personality. Therefore, the job of the writer is to give the characters that depth by using their back story, personal attributes and reactions to influences around them to breathe life into their personalities.

The picture I originally had in my mind of Ethan Abrams was very similar to (and partly based on) Paul Weston, a therapist in the television show *In Treatment*. They are similar in age and passion for their profession, and both maintain an office at home. Most importantly, they both have doubts about how effective they are at treating their patients. But on top of all that Ethan has very severe and immediate problems; he has lost his wife, his job and his daughter by way of estrangement. Additionally, he is heavily addicted to alcohol, and having been without a job for a while, he is about to lose his house. All of these factors have made him bitter and hopeless, and that's what we see when he is introduced. When I created this character I came to the realization that his pride had taken a beating from his publicized ousting from Greenfield. It wasn't an avenue I had initially intended to explore. Ethan additionally tends to get more emotionally invested with his patients than his colleagues allow themselves to do. I tried to show this by making William's determination to fight his condition a source of inspiration for Ethan. He also worries about William while he is in Phoenix and ultimately wonders whether he contributed to William's outburst and subsequent death.

William acts as a foil to Ethan. While Ethan is in his worst place William is doing well. Then, in the middle of the story their roles switch. William, who had been so positive, transforms into a dark and scary figure, while Ethan has turned his own life around. From the very start I wanted William to be a timid and polite person who would gain the reader's sympathy, and then turn into the antagonist of the story. At first I wanted to focus on the sleep paralysis element with William, but through the writing process I just didn't feel right with it and decided to change it so that he would still relate to the condition while dealing with something more sinister and mysterious. I found it important to present William as an innocent victim, who is tragically forced to succumb to events that are out of his control.

After penning this character down I could not help but notice that he vaguely reminded me of the memorable Travis Bickle from *Taxi Driver*, with all the increasingly violent

thoughts and general darkness that surrounds him. It is even possible that I unconsciously sought inspiration from Travis.

Carla grew into her role rather than being planned. This supporting character got more coverage in the story than I intended, yet it felt so right that I couldn't keep her out. She is Ethan's crutch, the only person in his life that he can lean on for support. Her former career as a nurse makes her well equipped to aid Ethan, firstly in detoxifying his body, and secondly in patching him up after the confrontation with William. Her ultimate conflict is one she herself does not know of, and it lies in not knowing about her late husband's dark secret while Ethan discovers and keeps it from her. The question to whether she finds out about it is left somewhat open, as Ethan mentions that he hopes she will never find out her husband's secret.

Amelia has a small role to play in the story, mainly in providing Ethan a cliff from which to fall after having hope back in his life.

## Setting

Creating a strong setting is very important as it can do so much more than simply present a location in which to place your character. In his, article “Creating the Perfect Setting” Alex Keegan states: “If the setting matches his character – he’s in his natural place – then one set of possibilities arise, but if he is displaced from a natural setting to an incongruous one, his interaction with that setting offers us ways of highlighting his basic personality” (Keegan). These two ways of creating setting got me thinking, and I realized that the setting I had in mind was a combination of the two.

Ethan’s house is very much a setting that matches his character. It is a relic tired of his former, happier life, a life that included his wife, his daughter and the flourishing of his career. The house was always a part of the original idea as I wanted a place where Ethan would be isolated, and that is also where the larger setting has a role, as Montana is one of the largest states of the U.S. Still the state it has the third lowest population density, with about six people per square mile, making it a potentially isolated place to live in within the States. The image that first popped into my mind when planning the setting was that of the hotel in *The Shining*, and although Ethan’s house is not quite so secluded I looked to the film’s atmosphere for inspiration, finding the setting of Montana appropriate for the task.

I find that Ethan’s study is the incongruous setting within the story because the events in there enable us to explore his basic personality. Every major decision he makes is a result of his interaction with William, who never sees any other parts of the house.

By placing Amelia in Phoenix, I wanted to provide a contrast between the cool, crisp climate of Montana and the hot weather in Arizona. To me, Phoenix was a symbolic representation of the change that Ethan had to go through in order to move on from the drinking, Greenfield and the death of Natalie

Another aspect in creating a good setting is the effort of placing the reader into the world in which the story takes place. Therefore, I tried to include characteristics and landmarks that established connections, such as placing Ethan in Kalispell and having William mention that he worked on a mint farm, which through my research I found out was close to the town. When Ethan travels to Phoenix I made sure to have him land in Sky Harbor airport, and then later on I mention the University of Phoenix. These are relatively small dosages of reality but I felt that they could at least confirm to the reader that the story actually takes place in Montana on one hand, and Arizona on the other.

## Research

The research required for this project was more focused on one specific factor rather than a broad spectrum of topics. In *Stein on Writing* author Sol Stein states that: “When talk is tough, combative, or adversarial it can be as exciting as physical action” (87). Dialogue makes up more than half of the story, so in that aspect I needed to use my imagination and personal memories to try and craft dialogue that caught the essence of what Stein is saying.

Furthermore, as psychology plays a significant role in the story it was vital to research most of the psychological terms used by Ethan, along with how he regarded his patient.

The main aspect I had to research was psychology, that is, how and why it is used. If I wanted Ethan to be believable at all I had to learn some psychology terms, but also present that information in a way that didn’t make the reader feel like he was reading a report. One of the main sources I researched in that aspect was the television show *In Treatment*. The setting of the show is similar to the study in the story, that is, the episodes, which consist only of dialogue, almost exclusively take place in Weston’s office, providing a detailed account of how a therapist interacts with his patients. I found this immensely helpful and it had a huge part in developing Ethan’s character. The other side of researching psychology was to establish William’s mental state. I actually happened to see an interesting book in the student bookstore titled *Psychology: A Very Short Introduction*, and I bought it. This book gave me insight into abnormal behavior without having to put a label or a specific mental illness on William. I wanted his condition to bear similar symptoms of various illnesses such as schizophrenia or multiple personality disorder, but it was ultimately to remain mysterious.

Symptoms of sleep paralysis were displayed and connected to William’s condition. He and Ethan mention the experience of waking up, yet being unable to move. This would be followed by fear and hallucinations. I collected this information from an article called “Terror in the Night” from an issue of *the psychologist*, in which the condition is described as a conscious paralytic episode that occurs either when the person is falling asleep, or waking up, with a possibility of hallucinations and intense feelings (672 -675). The article provided in-depth details about the condition that enabled me to construct a valid discussion about it within the story.

In order to give Bob his unethical trait I researched questionable psychological treatments, and came upon the term “psychic driving.” I discovered that this controversial method, created by Dr. Donald Ewen Cameron, was funded by the CIA just after World War



II and was developed as a form of mind control. The reason for Bob implementing this method on William, in addition to researching the method itself, would have been to make William stop believing in his dreams in the hope that the young man would be able to sleep properly.

I researched alcohol withdrawal to effectively portray Ethan's anguish as his body is detoxifying. I found on WebMD a ton of information regarding how withdrawals are unpredictable, with various symptoms, and subject to sudden change, therefore making it dangerous and possibly life threatening (Alcohol Withdrawal). It then felt more natural and plausible to have Carla there with him to ensure his safety while he is in withdrawals.

Further research included searching for information about Montana and Kalispell. In my search I learned that Kalispell is a relatively small town with about fourteen thousand people, which was perfect for the setting I used (Kalispell, Montana). Learning about mint farms in Montana gave me an opportunity to provide William with some back story (Priddy). Furthermore, the most reliable thing in Ethan's life, the Honda Accord was placed in story on account of me searching for the most popular car in the U.S. in 1988, and there, on the list of top ten cars, was the Honda (Sherman).

## Conclusion

The fascination I had with writing has been amplified and focused. All the things that hindered me when I wanted to write something are miniscule speed bumps compared to the huge obstacles they were before the start of this project. I now have a toolbox, similar to Stephen King's four leveled tool box of story-telling (King), which is at my disposal when writing the stories that I have put on hold for so long. I can now look at my idea folder with renewed vigor and excitement, along with looking at this project with immense pride. It stands as a testament to the obstacles I as a writer have overcome in order to complete it.

*Eyes of Darkness* was hard to write and I found myself questioning the success of the project. I had to stop writing several times and start again with a new scene, which, thanks to the use of my trusty toolbox, kept me going when I needed to write and allowed my creativity to flourish. Seeing your own character come to life at the whim of your imagination is a spectacular thing to witness, as are the worlds and stories within them. And although the process was hard it gave me a sense of accomplishment. I would not give this opportunity, this experience up for anything, as it has opened my eyes towards my own ability, yet also to what excellent an instructor's teaching and guidance can accomplish, for without those two components I would still be stuck on the first page, pulling my thinning hair out by the roots. Therefore I would once more like to thank Dr. Anna Heiða Pálsdóttir and the University of Iceland for allowing me this great journey that led not only to more knowledge, but also self discovery.

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