

Prologue

North Shore State Hospital
for the Criminally Insane
Havenwood, Long Island, New York
1969

The eighteen-year-old boy lay semiconscious, badly beaten and bleeding, strapped to a hospital bed. A river of red spilled freely from his mouth as four male attendants entered the room. Coal-black faces contrasted sharply against bloodied white sheets and walls as the patient's sea-green eyes danced insanely in his head. Suddenly, the duty nurse burst into the room and over to the patient's bed.

"My God! He's bitten off his tongue," Nurse Crayford exclaimed, exploring the rictus wide.

Richard Geist shook his head of clay-red curls, baying, gurgling, and choking on his blood as she pushed his face back down and to the side.

"Get these restraints off fast before he drowns in his own blood," the nurse ordered, struggling to hold the young man still, reaching across the patient's plaster cast. But no one moved an inch. Black faces stared back at her defiantly, resolute and unanimous in their intent. "Oh, no. We're not murderers," she stated firmly. "I'll not burn in hell for this. Now, we'll move him into Emergency, and I mean now," she added flatly, challenging each and every glare.

Finally, one of the orderlies stepped forward. Then another, reluctantly. A third flatly refused, storming out of the room angrily. A fourth remained standing in the corner, quite distraught.

"Now!" she repeated.

The orderly, shaking his head firmly from side to side as if against better judgement, approached the edge of the bed cautiously, staring down at the grotesque figure who appeared to be leering up at him in hideous triumph. Carefully, the man removed one of the restraints when suddenly Richard screamed and smashed his cast into the black face with a force that sent the orderly back into the corner from where he came.

Bottles of IV toppled then crashed against the floor as the patient tore the plastic tubing from the stand, single-handedly coiling and stretching the lengths of clear elastic line around the nurse's neck, trying to rope her in, trying to enunciate but a single word. But she would not hear of it and broke away. So he plunged a finger into his bloody bottle of a mouth before withdrawing it, managing to scrawl a cryptic word upon the shadowy wall--before they were upon him.

The following week came patient Geist's handwritten letter of request to North Shore State's director.

North Shore State Hospital
Psychiatric Unit
Room 743
Oct. 7, 1969

Dr. Thomas Kirby
Director, North Shore State Hospital
Havenwood, N.Y. 11768

Dear Dr. Kirby:

The hospital administration has confined me to this institution, insisting that I am not, in so many words, of sound mind. It would, I am sure, prove fruitless for me to suggest otherwise. Therefore, I wish only to give an accurate account of all events from start to finish so that I might set the record straight.

As I am labeled 'multiple,' not unlike an array of Campbell's cans wrapped in red and white--Chicken Noodle, Cream of Celery, or Consommé--so, too, am I distinct. Not being able to see that we are all in the same soup is certainly madness in itself.

They tried to kill me, but as you can see, I am still here. By the end of this tale, I ask only that you look deep into my soul, and ask, "What power or providence sustains thee?" If the answer conjures up pure evil, then, perhaps, you will want to kill me, too! But as I set forth a moment ago, they tried.

Hereupon, I humbly petition North Shore State Hospital for its consent to proceed with this document in order that certain dark truths be established concerning the matter of Dicky, Richard, and Victoria Geist vs. the State of New York and its enemies within. I request one (1) typewriter; one (1) package bond typing paper; one (1) unabridged dictionary; one(1) package legal size pads (8½ x 14); ball-point pen, pencils and soft eraser.

Respectfully submitted,

Patient 2751

The psychiatrist set aside the letter for a second time that morning, staring at the middle-aged nurse sitting across the desk from him. “And why is this so important, Nurse Crayford?”

“Catharsis, perhaps. The patient’s wanting to write his story is probably his own best medicine.”

“Is it now?”

“I used qualifiers, Doctor.”

“Yes, so you did,” he smiled.

“Also, I feel it might tell us things about him that they didn’t have time to learn at the King Foundation. Dr. Bianco said that Richard only recently emerged another personality.”

“Yes, his mother. I know all about that. I spoke with the new director at length. Very strange case, indeed.”

“Doctor, Richard’s story may hold the key to what we’re looking for,” she stated matter-of-factly. “It may shed some light on his other personalities. Besides, writing is the only way he can communicate now.”

“No argument there. By the way. What was the word he finger painted for us on the wall?”

“Lark.”

“Lark?”

“Yes. It’s the name of the detective who was on the case.”

“I see. What do you suppose it all means?”

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. “Why don’t we let him write his story?”

The psychiatrist hesitated a moment before leaning back uneasily in his chair. “Just so long as you keep a close eye on him,” he cautioned. “And take care of that eye,” he added, gesturing toward the bruise above her brow.

“Aye, aye, Doctor,” she smiled wearily, standing up and heading toward the door.

“Oh, just one more thing.”

The nurse paused, “Yes?”

“Please. No more Shakespeares. We’ve already got several on the second floor.”

“Good day, Doctor. ‘Parting is such sweet sorrow.’”

“That I shall say good day till it be morrow,” the psychiatrist spirited back playfully.