

## A Divine Light

Pain. Sensitive flesh smashed against cold glass. The smell of the old peeling paint, the taste of the metal of the door. It wasn't enough. George slammed his forehead into the reinforced wire messed glass window. The window wasn't much larger than his face, so bits of skin came off the side of his face. Sharp tearing pain, the warm sticky feeling of blood running down his cheeks, but it was not enough. George screamed, filling his ears inside and out with noise, loud meaningless noise. It wasn't enough, he could still hear. He banged his head uselessly against the door to his room. He couldn't afford to knock himself out, he knew what dreams awaited for him, but he had to drive them out. He had to drown them out. To make them be silent. To pretend that they weren't there, even if his every waking and even sleeping moment, was filled with the knowledge that they were.

If his hands weren't restrained by the damned jacket, he would claw himself. THAT could have distracted him. But he couldn't do that. All he could do was scream, and bang his head uselessly.

He was in tears when the door open and the orderlies, dragged him back to his bed. He kicked, he fought, he tried to bite them, but years of dealing with disturbed people had taught them combat skills that would be the envy of any marine.

It was the needle that caused terror to tear through what was left of George's mind. The orderlies were long practiced in ignoring the screams and terrors as

they gave the required sedatives. It was impossible for them to totally understand what sort of hell they were consigning George to for the next several hours.

All of George's life he had hated the sound of people eating. He never knew why, it didn't seem to bug anyone else the way it drove him crazy. The slurping, the chewing, the crunching, it all added together into a horrible melody that seemed to echo inside George's head. Now, as George slipped into his drug induced coma, he longed for the simple agony of that sound. He longed for anything except what was about to come.

But the terrors that waited for him, never came. Instead of horrifying truth and unvarnished brutality, George fell into a deep dark void, blissfully empty of all sensation.

"How are we feeling?" The face leaning over George was framed by short blonde hair that exploded into a cascade of curls. Despite her youth and sensuality, the young woman had the air of a practiced doctor. The concern, though genuine, was after all only superficial.

"I feel numb, disconnected. You? You feel fine but a bit tired from a long night of chatting on the phone." George didn't have to go deep to see that in her mind. Even through this blissful haze, her thoughts were like a lighthouse cutting through fog.

"You're very perceptive."

“No I read minds, Dr LeVitus.” Dr Cheryl LeVitus moved back as George sat up on his bed. The padded room seemed so less threatening than it had the night before.

“What have you done to me?”

“Your brain chemistry indicated you were firing like a entire army of photographers. We introduced a drug to block some of your neural receptors. It seems to have worked.” Cheryl signaled the orderlies with a nod of her head. Soon George was free of the jacket.

“There’s no need to work out your approach Dr. Levitus. If you’re going to humor me or confront me. I can read your mind, and it doesn’t matter to me if you believe it or not.” George got up and started pacing the small confines of his padded room. The orderlies, watching close at hand from the doorway.

“There has never...” Cheryl started.

“Been any statistical data supporting the telepathy.” George finished with her in unison.

“Should I just shut up and think at you?” Despite years of practice, Cheryl was unable to hide the edge from her voice.

“No. I don’t want to read your mind, I don't want to do any of it.”

“What do you want?” Cheryl’s very real concern for a patient, for a fellow human being, washed over and thru George.

“I want to go back to being blind and ignorant.” Tears welled up in George’s eyes. Truth, pain, and despair rose up to engulf and destroy him. Cheryl moved a step forward, breaking some unknown and unseen barrier.

Suddenly she flooded into his mind, her was lost in her personality, her mind, and he loved it all. She was exactly what he had spend decades searching for. He longing flashed to anger. NOW! Of all times NOW he finds her. Without having truly willed, His hand flew up and struck Cheryl. Before she can finish bouncing off the softened floor, the orderlies George pinned, wrestling his arms back into the jacket.

“Stop!” Cheryl’s voice hinted at steel. “Let him up.” The orderlies did as they were told, but slowly and filled with caution.

“Get out bitch!” George snapped, “Get out and leave me alone.” With a jerk of her head, Cheryl ordered the orderlies out of the room, then she backed out leaving George alone.

The door closed, and with a terrible finality the lock engaged. George dropped to his knees and cried. Being hit by a train wasn’t bad enough, to watch the train bear down and be helpless to do anything was the height of cruelty. On another day George would have blamed god for this, but now he knew god. God didn’t care about trivialities like love, all god knew was hunger.

She didn’t go away. She stood there at the door, staring at his back as thou he couldn’t tell that she was there. George couldn’t really blame her no believing, she was a scientist, someone who only believed in what she could prove.

“Don’t ask.” George choked between tears.

“Which question shouldn’t I ask? I have so many.”

“Any of them. If you ever want to be happy again, walk away and never look back.”

“I can’t do that.”

George’s voice was graveyard soft, “I know.”

“I’m going to find you some food. We think you haven’t had anything solid for at least a week.” Cheryl dallied long enough to see if George would surrender any information, but he didn’t.

He could hear her heels clicking as she walked away from his room, but he was aware of her mind drifting further away. He stayed with her until she was lost in the fog and mists created by the drugs they had pumped into him. Then he was alone with his thoughts and his memories.

He wasn’t aware of how much time between her departure and return. He had spent all of it curled in a fetal position, wondering how much he could take.

Praying that his mind would snap and he could forget all of it.

“It’s not tasty, but its not lethal either.” Cheryl joked holding the tray of hospital food. Her keens observation skills noted the termor that ran thru George’s body. He felt her note not to discuss death directly with him.

“Or even indirectly.” He added. “It’s a subject you don’t want the answers to.”

“Stop that, or you’ll have me believing you.” Cheryl moved back from tray for food, making herself comfortable on the edge of the small bed in the room.

“I’m sorry.” George said as he uncurled, “I can’t get close to anyone. I’m sorry I hit you.”

“I’ve gotten worse working here. Perhaps we should start with something a little more basic...”

“George Hayes, No criminal record, No history of Mental illness, no local family.” George desperately wanted to drive Cheryl away, while drawing her closer. Trust his luck to remain true, right to the very end.

“And a telepath.” Cheryl stated flatly.

“Only recently. Until just two weeks ago I was simply another blind sheep, lost among uncounted billions.”

“Actually the last count was just over six billion.”

“On this planet.” George listen to the turmoil in her mind as she accepted telepathy, but not alien life. For George it was not an abstract concept. He had heard the background noise of nearly endless civilizations before the drug induced mists had cut them off. For the moment, George’s mind was quite except for his thoughts and Cheryl’s.

“And how did that happen? Just wake up one morning and everyone's secrets were laid open for you?”

“Not now, not yet.” George found his appetite suddenly gone with thoughts of Brent under the Volvo.

“Okay,” Cheryl said with long hours of practice at rolling with the whims of patients. “How about your early years? Happy ones?”

George’s desire to separate himself from all human contact, and Cheryl’s in particular fell into ruins as he found himself talking about his life.

It was true that it was her job to listen with compassion and concern to each of her patients, but George knew that her concern was growing faster than even she herself knew. Here was a road to disaster and all he do was drive along.

His life story would never have made a feature film, or even a movie of the week. How was always the outsider, always the loner. He never knew exactly what quirk of personality made him this way. He wasn't actively disliked, and he did a few close friends. But somehow he always felt that he was just pretending, that everyone else knew what needed to be said or what to do. He just stayed quite, always in the background uncertain of everything.

George became lost in Cheryl's eyes, and her sweet self as he told the not terribly happy, nor terribly sad tale of his life. He answered her question before she asked them, being more honest with her than he had with himself for most of his life. He was so intent on Cheryl, that he didn't notice the minds creeping in at the very edge of his new perceptions.

It started soft, like the ocean heard long before the beach is in sight. The soft background noise of people thinking. The chaos, unfiltered and uncensored by taste, mores, and consideration. It was soft and caused little concern for George. It bothered him no more that the buzz of conversation would have bothered anyone else at a party. But, lurking beyond other sensations were drawing closer.

### ARC

It flashed into George's mind hot, white, like an electric bolt plugged straight into his brain. Hunger, pain, soul destroying despair, soundless cries for help, a universe deep. The tiny padded room didn't exist for George anymore. Cheryl didn't exist, he didn't taste, see, hear, smell, or feel anything. The only sensa-

tion left to him was the cursed one, stronger than before. Then, quickly, nothing. Void.

George returned to the terror of the real world, constrained once again by the tight straight jack. He was aware that his right eye would not open, and he seemed to be very sore in every muscle of his body.

“That was quite an episode.” Cheryl commented dryly from across the room. She crossed the room with waiting for a reply. “Do you remember anything about it?”

“Too much.” He didn’t elaborate.

“How can I help you, if you don’t tell me what’s really going on?” Cheryl swept a swath of hair from George’s eyes. George was instantly aware of her desire for him. Her shame at such unprofessional feelings, and her unsuccessful attempts to shove such things from her mind.

“There isn’t anything you can do.”

“I can listen.”

George knew he shouldn’t tell her the truth. There would be wisdom and mercy in keeping it all to himself. But he had that human need to talk, to share a burden in hopes, even in vain, of lessening it. Even as he started to tell Cheryl the tale, he cursed himself as weak for telling it.

He skimmed past meeting Brent in college and the tight friendship that they had formed. He knew that was not what she was really interested in. It was important to him, and eventually it would become important to Cheryl as well.

As to Brent's theories on telepathy, and how it could be awakened. Well George knew only the vaguest generalities. George was no scientist, and most of what Brent had explained to him was forgotten, or never understood to begin with. It took very little time for George to begin telling Cheryl of how he came to volunteer for Brent's experiments.

"Why did you do it?" she asked as an orderly came in with lunch for George. Cheryl took the platter and began feeding George.

"Money." He managed to answer between bite of food, "I was unemployed, broke, and looking at living on the street. Brent had enough funding that he could pay for volunteers."

So it was that George endured needles, deprivation tanks, and tests devised solely by Brent. In the end, it worked. With only the concentration required to hear soft noises at night, George could hear the thoughts of those near him.

"It seems to have gotten easier." Cheryl commented.

"Each day it was stronger, within in a week I could hear the constant babble of the crowd. Even when I was alone." George felt the doubt bubble up to her surface mind like air from a deep dive. "No, the constant babble didn't drive me over the edge."

"How can you be sure?" Her question was barbed, "When you have an episode you are obsessed on driving out your new senses."

"If you heard what I do, you would be the same."

"What do you hear?"

“God.” The words hung out there, bringing a silence that seemed to spread throughout the entire floor. George felt the effect that single word had on Cheryl. It was too ingrained in her training. Anyone who heard god, was disturbed. Here was the proof of his delusions.

“What does he say to you?” To anyone else, her voice would have carried the perfect modulation of compassion and acceptance. But George knew she believed nothing of the truth.

George flipped his body and stared into the padding on the wall. Cheryl tried several more times to get him to talk, but resigned herself to waiting until he was ready.

George listened to her mind as she left the lock-down unit. He stayed with her until she was lost in the blissful drug induced fog that dulled his senses.

George then turned his mind inward, ignored the verbal and silent rantings of the poor souls surrounding him.

How could he explain it to her? He lived the horrible nightmare, there was no possibility that should would believe him. The truth, would simply confirm to her, his disturbed state. Of course, if it were a delusion, how could he tell? The possibility had not occurred to him before. George squeezed his eyes tightly shut and wished upon wish that he were insane. But even as he clung to his desperate dream of insanity, somewhere far above him a man died.

It is not an unusual occurrence for a person to die in a hospital. In fact it had been a blessing for George that no one had died in the short time he had been there. His blessing was at an end.

The drug induced fog burned away like a morning fog before an atomic explosion. It was not burned away by the dying man's psyche, death itself was not the source of this burning light. God had arrived, and all minds before it faded to George like the stars before the sun. George was aware of himself, God, and god's feast. Unable to block out his special sense, George felt and shared the dying man's torment and horror as he was consumed.

Had there been a disinterested observer, the entire incident would have taken but a moment, but for George it was several life times. Lifetimes that he had traveled before, and he knew he would travel again. Before the feeding was done, George's mind mercifully retreated away into some dark corner. Trying, vainly, to be alone in the void.

An eternity later the five normal senses returned to George. He was still wrapped in the protective confines of the straight jacket.

"I don't dare give you any more than I have." Cheryl was saying. It was several more moments before George realized that he was alone in his head. There were no other thoughts. He never knew that being alone could be so joyous.

"I think we have identified which receptors are required for your, talent, so you should be seeing greatly diminished capability."

"I can't hear anything but sound." A tear welled up in George's eye. He started to speak again, but Cheryl cut him off.

"It won't last thou." George's heart was gripped with icy fear, "Already you are developing a tolerance."

George closed eyes. For a time he would be free. He would not hear the feeding, but it would return.

“Does god come to you when there is death?” George opened his eyes and cast a look over at Cheryl. “The timing of your most severe episode had a curious synchronicity with other events in the hospital.”

“All god cares about is death.”

“Care to explain that?” George noted that even with his telepathy dulled, he could tell that Cheryl’s cold detachment was not as detached as she would have liked it to be.

“The universe was made for us, and aliens so like us in spirit as to be us.”

George started.

“Doesn’t sound like a god of death to me.”

“Everything about our universe, every physical constant is here to make life possible. Life is not a colossal accident of chance. Given the universe it was inevitable. And everything about life, is built not of the principle of natural selection, but the feature of nature selection. It is as constant and unyielding throughout the universe as any physical law.” He was rolling now, he knew that he could not stop if he wanted to. “It all leads to us, intelligent life. Self aware life, life possessing a spirit, a soul that evolved somewhere along the way.” He stopped for a breath, then dove ahead. “That is the purpose of the universe, to create that special form of life. To grow it, cultivate it, and in the end kill it.”

“Why?”

“Why do we care for, raise, and kill cattle? We are god’s food.”

“That I don’t believe.” Cheryl stated flatly.

“I didn’t expect you to. I don’t have the luxury of not believing. I’ve been there. I seen it, damn I have felt it happen!” Tears flowed from George’s eyes as the memory of that night came rushing back. “I was in Brent’s mind when he died. I was with him when it came to feed! Oh for one second I was it!” Cheryl took a halting step forward, but George threw himself into the corner of the padded room. “Stay back!” He screamed, his voice edged with hysteria.

“You have no friggin’ idea what I have been thru!”

“George, I want...” she started. George’s head snapped around like he had been struck.

“You do NOT want to know. You want to deny it, don’t you think if I could I would!” The last of his control slipped away, and George fell to the floor sobbing. Cheryl moved in close, much closer than a doctor and a patient. With George’s wails, the last of her control had broken as well. Cradling his head in her lap, Cheryl held George until he had cried himself to sleep.

George awoke alone in the dark. The lock down unit was quiet. He was pleased to find that the straight jacket had once again been removed, giving his cramped arms freedom to work out all the tightness they had generated. Already he could feel the pressure of countless other minds, at the very edge of his perception. Like something moving very far away on a dark night.

As the hours passed, the perceptions came closer to his mind, like a curtain of rain moving slowly across a plain. George could see it, he knew its taste, and there was nothing he could do to avoid it.

When the curtain engulfed him, George was aware that his perceptions were vastly more sensitive than they had been before. The wash of human minds and emotion was almost bearable. Under different conditions George would have actually enjoyed it. He truly knew the human condition and not just an isolated bit of it. But beyond the hunger was waiting, and George was aware of it in detail almost as exact as the night Brent had died. Evil would not have described it. To be evil a being must care, the god that George knew so well cared no more for any of the life within its creation than a gardener does for a batch of ripe tomatoes. No the old one was not evil in any sense the man could understand, it simply hungered.

One mind, one spirit, detached from the great mumbling crowd in George's mind and came closer. Cheryl's spirit filled George's she came closer in space to him. When she was in the same room, her mind was one with his. For the first time, there was absolutely nothing between them. George was Cheryl and Cheryl was George, for one perfect moment they tasted a union untold in all the ages. Then she knew the horror that he knew. She tasted the feeding as he had, and she was gone. From somewhere very far away George was aware of her silent screams.

It wasn't long before there was another deep dark drug induced coma.

The room refused to stay still when George again opened his eyes. At first the room would tilt in one direction, and then with a rolling slowness tilt completely around a circle. The sunlight streaming through the small, reinforced window spoiled the illusion. Whatever drugs she had given him this time had quite potent after effects.

“Damn, I had hoped to do this before you awoke.” George forced his head to flop to his left. Cheryl was standing by a set of controls. Her eyes were red and inflamed. She had not slept well, George knew she would never sleep well again. Even thru the drugs her thoughts were as sharp as daggers.

“I didn’t know they even had the electroshock equipment anymore.” George’s attempt at humor fell very flat.

“I don’t want to do this.” Cheryl pleaded.

“You’re right. This is the only answer.” George brought his head around and looked straight into the lights above him. “But if you are going to err, do it on the side of too much.”

“I...” Cheryl choked on the emotions the were rising up inside her.

“I love you too.” George said simply. Her hand moved to the dial.