

Chapter 13

Ludis Mentalis

"Near the end of his sophomore year, Mr. Cantor suffered a nervous breakdown and took a leave of absence which lasted two years...."

*-Dean Hardball , College Transcript of Aleph Randal
McNaughton Cantor*

This overview of life on the wards of Marigold Meadows will not dwell on details. Anything that happens inside a mental hospital can be found in the outside world. The converse is likewise true: persons in the outside world found their analogue in the inmates at the Meadows: cranks, prophets of divine revelation, tedious visionaries, worthless experts, hopeless bores, nudniks, frustrated Hitlers, every sort of monster. Only a small percentage believed they'd been put there because they were mad. Such people were considered hopeless by the rest of us.

One afternoon while sitting in the patients' coffee shop I struck up a conversation with a shabbily dressed individual, somewhere in his 50's, who gave the impression of having lived at the Meadows for more than a decade. Casting furtive glances over his shoulders he warned me against talking too freely with the attendants: the truth of the matter was that we were all political prisoners. Every one of the attendants, he assured me lowering his voice, was an FBI agent.

I found his theory intriguing: could he elaborate? Whereupon his thoughts became confused and he began to ramble: He contradicted himself frequently; apparently he believed that the attendants were also in the pay of the Soviets. I breathed a sigh of relief: at least he didn't think we were all locked up here because we were mad!

The dozen or so buildings that constituted Marigold Meadows sprawl out over a large acreage in open countryside. Some of the outbuildings are of modern construction. Its residence areas are in 4 Victorian Gothic buildings atop a hill connected through long foul-smelling corridors. At the bottom of the hill stands a laundry house and reception area for visitors. They aren't allowed into the hospital. Their relatives are brought down to visit them in small monitored cubicles on the ground and second floors. A woods begins at this point and continues on around to the left. There one finds the blockhouse equipped for the administration of ECT. The autonomous generator plant located close by is used in case of a power blackout. In this way Marigold Meadows can continue charging its charges at no extra charge.

Institutionally Marigold Meadows is part private, part public. It depends on state and federal funding, yet finds reasons to price its services almost out of existence. It's located near the village of Marigold in Bucks County, once a lively market town, now reduced to a watering hole for alcoholics, with half-way houses for the asylum out-patients and motels scattered around the nearby roads for their relatives.

I checked in at the Meadows on June 6, 1950. As I'd signed the consent forms voluntarily no-one had to accompany me on the train from Philadelphia to Lancaster. When I got off the train two attendants were there to meet me. Their manner wasn't friendly but we shook hands. Their appearance also was somewhat disconcerting, though not so much as to put me on my guard. They were rough customers, certainly, but well disciplined and with a measure of education.

Most upsetting about their conduct towards me was their obvious resentment of all my attempts to engage them in conversation. I concluded from this that they'd come to believe that mad people never said anything worth saying. Later I learned that they were under strict instructions never to talk with the inmates beyond the minimum. The ambulance in which they drove me to Marigold Meadows was equipped with a host of restraining devices, but none of them were applied to me.

When we arrived it was pouring rain with thunder coming over the mountains. We had to walk to a large parking lot to get to the main lobby of the admissions ward. I sat in the lobby soaked to the skin for over an hour before someone came to fetch me. All of my clothing was taken from me, as well as all personal items such as watch, wallet, spare change and the like. Replacing these was a pair of regulation pyjamas and a set of luminescent green polystyrene sandals. I never did get my things back. In any case, money wasn't used on the ward. Instead we were issued punch cards to use in the commissary against money deposited for us at the main office.

From the lobby we took an elevator up to the ward. I was served a makeshift dinner, after which I was led to my bed in the dorms. Groups of inmates came out to stare at me as attendants led me through the darkened corridors from building to building. The curiosity of their gawking issued forth from faces too blank or vapid to be considered either friendly or intelligent. Clearly they regarded me as simply another distraction in an unvarying routine. My lively imagination conjured up images of monsters and demented ghouls; however my worries were groundless. Albeit strange, I would classify very few of them as being really dangerous.

Marigold Meadows was a depressing place. Why should it have been otherwise? Yet above and beyond the run-of-the-mill gloom, the lunatic howling, the extravagant antics of the exhibitionists, the tedious patter of the schizophrenics, the administrative stupidity, the long dirty corridors illuminated by 25-watt bulbs, there was something in its atmosphere that made me profoundly uneasy, something above and beyond the internal turmoil which was the result of my nervous breakdown. The premonition that something wasn't right began from the moment that the forms for admitting me were being typed up in the Reception Area. Aimless fears would sometimes assail me without warning like sudden breezes. Indeed I was never entirely free from the sense of immanent dread.

The first chance to meet the people who would define the limits of my social life for the coming year came over dinner the next evening. They exhibited a kind of belligerent sociability, as if

eager to take possession of me at once. Few of them bothered to hide what had brought them to the hospital, making it relatively easy to classify them by the primitive lexicon of folk psychology we all imbibe from the ambient public ignorance: paranoid, schizophrenic, autistic, manic and so on. In the beginning however some of them did make attempts to scare me just for the fun of it.

I was also given serious warnings of the potential dangers one had to face through being incarcerated at Marigold Meadows. After dinner an inmate took me aside to warn me away from walking too close to certain installations and other places on the grounds. Others counseled me that Marigold Meadows was a bad place, much worse than those mental hospitals, which supply all the horror stories filling up the pages of the newspapers. Certain individuals were indicated as best avoided. This information was not sufficiently specific, being shrouded in a general lack of communicativeness that may have had its origins in reserve, or fear, or perhaps distrust of my own person. From all my attempts to draw my informants out as to specific incidents, I received nothing more than vague references to unspeakable deeds, over which a veil of silence then quickly descended. My initial tendency was to skepticism. How could one hope to filter out what was true from the inventions of their over-active imaginations? My apprehensiveness encouraged me to deny the presence of any real dangers in a universe that already filled me with considerable anxiety.

Yet I could not deny that there was a disquieting consistency in the warnings I was receiving from all sides. From the teen-age

boy whose elongated head was shaped like a broken carrot-stump, to the slovenly old wretch who was in the habit of defecating in the corners of the inmate lounge, to the saintly divinity student George, or the garrulous loud-mouthed and foul-mouthed farm laborer (whose name I don't recall but who was more often in restraints than not), I was warned against associating with more or less the same collection of people. Everyone warned me away from the frame buildings in the woods in the vicinity of the asylum farm.¹

Warnings against walking too close to the ECT shack were superfluous. The staff psychiatrist at the University Hospital had stated on my admission forms in unequivocal language that I was not to receive any form of heroic therapy, such as ECT, Insulin shock or lobotomy, but I had no intention of trusting my fate to a scrap of paper: I avoided the blockhouse as I would a kennel of rabid dogs.

Into the second week of my stay I was introduced to the director and chief psychiatrist of Marigold Meadows: Dr. Jan van Clees. We conversed as between professional scientists, something I'd come to sorely miss from the general population. And, as befits a member of the educated elite, van Clees lost no time in flashing his credentials. What I didn't learn from him during our

¹I visited the farm a few times, though I was never given a work assignment there. It was never clear to me whether farming was considered therapeutic or whether Marigold Meadows, strapped for cash though charging the families of its inmates astronomical fees, merely wanted to save on the cost of vegetables. In a short time the question itself became irrelevant.

conversations was later gleaned from articles in psychiatric magazines, and a long profile of him in *Psychology Today*.

van Clees had taken his medical degree at Leiden University in the 20's. He boasted to me that modern medicine had originated in Leiden in the 18th century when it was under the direction of Boorhaeve. One would surmise that Boorhaeve had taught him personally and considered him one of his prize disciples. This inspired little confidence in me: it was difficult know when van Clees was living in past, present or future.

In 1926 he'd gone to Vienna and Zurich for a concentrated bout of indoctrination by the Freudians and Jungians. But the most decisive influence on him had been Watson, the father of Behaviorism, with whom he'd studied for a few years in England.

Despite his formative influences van Clees' brand of Alienism was distinctly his own. He revealed to me that he'd developed a taste for mental asylum work through his private practice. That was where he'd discovered his aptitude for tackling the really tough cases, that is to say, psychotics. Strangely, he openly boasted of the high percentage of suicides among his early patients. Rather than interpreting this an indicator of his incompetence he took this to mean that they came to him as a last resort, when they were almost beyond hope anyway. This he somehow considered a compliment.

van Clees kept up his practice in Holland all through the German Occupation. No one would deny after meeting him that he'd figured among the many psychiatrists in Germany and the occupied countries who experienced no existential Angst from their

participation with the Nazi program of extermination of the mentally ill. On the other hand, he didn't impress me as being notably anti-Semitic. Knowing that I was Jewish he was quick to assure me that he greatly admired a race that, though imbibing neurosis with its mother's milk, still managed to thrive.

I've learned from acquaintances in psychiatric circles that Jan van Clees can never return to Holland. A dense cloud of obscurity covers his activities under the Third Reich. In 1947, after knocking about Europe for a few years, he came to the United States. At the time of my stay at the Meadows the details of his naturalization were still being hammered out. In 1953 he rendered valuable services to Sidney Gottlieb during the MKULTRA program of the C.I.A, as well as working for several years with Ewen Cameron at his Allen Memorial Institute at McGill University in Montreal. ² He became a full citizen in 1965.

From our initial conversation I received the distinct impression that van Clees held fixed ideas about the causes of mental illness. One of them was that all psychosis is caused by deeply repressed latent homosexuality. Within 15 minutes he'd begun closely interrogating me about my sexual habits. Then I was administered a battery of tests designed to measure my attraction

²Throughout the decade (1953-63), while D. Ewen Cameron was president of the American and Canadian Psychiatric Associations, president of the World Association of Psychiatrists, director of the Allen Memorial Institute in Montreal, chairman of the department of psychiatry at McGill University and professor of psychiatry at Albany Medical College, he was receiving funds from the CIA to run torture chambers at the Allen Institute, set up to study brain-washing and memory destroying experiments on his patients while charging their families exorbitant fees. (John Marks: *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate* , W.W. Norton, 1991)

or aversion to different kinds of males. I was very afraid of him and didn't try to act the smart Alec. It wasn't that he presented any physical threat; his interest in me appeared to be purely clinical. But when you find out that the theories of madness maintained by the chief psychiatrist at your madhouse are crazier than the delusions of its inmates, you really begin to tremble.

It hardly surprised me that he affected to disparage any of the observations I made concerning myself. van Clees was very much the modern psychiatrist and he relied only on tests. He also manipulated me into certain situations in which he could be very rude simply to test my reactions. One of the first things he did in our interview was to take a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket. After making an ostentatious show of lighting one for himself, he put the pack away again without offering me one. This had little effect on me (Smoking was to become a plague on my existence for decades afterwards) but his eyes immediately narrowed into little microscope objectives like a 2-slit quantum experiment as he watched closely for my reactions.

Still, when I left his office he made a sincere attempt to be cordial, shaking hands with me and patting me on the shoulder: "You're uh goud kid." he said, "You got left lots ouf life to you."

A few days later I was called back to his office for more tests. On his desk stood a slide projector. First came a series of slides depicting naked bearded men with similar physiques but different kinds of beards. I was instructed to rate them for attractiveness on a scale from 1 to 20. The next series showed beardless men, again all

naked, of different ages and body builds. These were rated on the same scale.

The final series paired images of conventionally masculine men beside conventionally effeminate ones. As each slide flashed onto the screen I had to write down my preference between the two. Though the point of this exercise was beyond me, I did remark to myself that none of the bodies he was showing me bore any resemblance to Van Clees himself: grotesquely fat, let us say bullish with meaty fists and cheeks, cheerless eyes liked hard marbles swimming in mushy slime, forehead high as a cliff-face over a hard unsentimental grimace suggesting latent capacities for cruelty. Obviously he didn't want to hear that any inmate was attracted to *his* body!

Towards the end of the second session, van Clees, without noticeably relaxing his normal state of tension, made an attempt to introduce a tone of professional camaraderie. My reputation for wizardry in mathematics had preceded me: Marigold Meadows needed a statistician. In addition to giving me a sense of purpose, I would be receiving important privileges not accorded to the other patients. His offer was accepted. It was a wise decision: I am alive today because of it.

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Daily life at Marigold Meadows was conducted at a high level of regimentation. In my preconceptions I'd pictured a mental hospital as a kind of warehouse for lunatics. Nothing was expected of them and they simply rotted away for 20 to 40 years. In 1951 the Thorazine revolution, which emptied the mental hospitals (and

which appears to have produced both benefit and harm in equal proportion) was just getting under way. I'd anticipated that the inmates, being out of their minds with boredom (as well as being simply out of their minds) would keep up an unholy din from dawn to dusk, devising modes of crazy behavior for the diversion of family, doctors and friends.

Marigold Meadows was nothing like this; Marigold Meadows was no Bedlam. The chaos one associates with the metaphorical Bedlam was as far removed from the ambiance of Marigold Meadows as a traffic jam is from a hospice, its operant philosophy as modern as the steel, glass and concrete squat box of modern architecture. Alienation was the dominant key; those inmates who'd imagined they'd be allowed to raise hell should have found some way to have gotten themselves incarcerated elsewhere.

A breaking-in period of a week to 10 days was allowed in which a newcomer was oriented and given a chance to familiarize himself with the rules and regulations. Real therapy at Marigold Meadows began with a stay in the Spartan Observation Tank, a plain, sealed-off parallelepiped room located on the second floor. Not a scrap of reading matter was provided, not so much as a pencil stub, but there was a television set. Ten windows were placed around the room's walls at eye level height. Any time of the day or night doctors, nurses and attendants could look in through them at the patient within. He on the other hand could neither look out through them, nor know if and when he was under observation, nor by whom. What this meant was that every private function,

sleeping, eating, defecating, etc. had to be performed under the continual impression that somebody on the outside might be watching in.

One's flimsy pyjamas and Styrofoam sandals were changed every other day after a visit to the showers at which either a doctor or nurse were always in attendance snapping photographs. The color television fixed to the wall was set on a single channel, that couldn't be turned off or changed, and broadcast nothing but the most ignorant drivel. After only a few days in OT one's sense of identity totally evaporated. Under the pressure of being surrounded by an invisible world of beings one began to feel invisible oneself. As the TV only accelerated the process, I am forced to the conclusion that its presence was intended for that purpose.

A patient wasn't released from OT and returned to the open ward until the doctors had confirmed that his state of abjection was sufficiently advanced to make him ripe for conditioning. He was then allowed to rest up for a week or so before beginning the next stage in the regime of zombification. My stay of only 3 days in the Observation Tank was relatively short. Patients at the extremes, either belligerent and violent or pathologically withdrawn, might be locked up in it for months at a time. van Clees, or members of his staff may have decided that longer exposure to the TV for someone at my intellectual level could have the effect of sending me into genuine insanity. The diagnosis at the time of my admission to Marigold Meadows was acute nervous exhaustion,

without any of the customary labels of schizophrenic, paranoid, manic-depressive and the like.

Following the Observation Tank inmates moved along to the Training Module. As a difficult subject, deemed all but untrainable, I was kept in TM for two and a half months. Training consisted of fairly crude yet relentless stimulus-response conditioning; in fact a kind of simple-minded textbook Pavlov underlined all forms of therapy at the Meadows. We resided in a universe run by bells, whistles and sirens. A siren woke up entire wards every morning at 5 AM. In the absence of this noise the inmates might continue to sleep on for days, even weeks. I know this because this side benefit of the conditioning was employed on obstreperous patients in a special ward at the other end of the Meadows as a disciplinary measure.

Bells signaled the beginning and the end of meals, and structured the working day, (All of us had part-time jobs and chores connected with the running of the hospital). Every inmate at the Meadows took his afternoon nap at 3 PM in response to a whistle going off at that time. Playing games, writing letters, dressing and undressing were inaugurated or terminated by high-pitched whistles. Shrill sirens stimulated us to elimination and excretion. We waxed docile or violent, jovial or terrified from the transmission of certain melodies through the speaker systems. Because of a certain combination of sounds, one could find an entire ward in a state of extreme depression, talking only about wars, calamities, dreadful accidents or sudden death. Likewise a complementary set of signals could have us leaping and yelling all

over the inmates' lounge, kissing one another, exhibiting our privates, picking our noses and things of a similar nature.

Even conversation and, to a certain extent, the very content of our thoughts was suggested and enhanced by carillons of bells. A brief experiment to see if my mathematical abilities could be enhanced by appropriate conditioning was abandoned once it was discovered that they actually deteriorated under such a regimen. Natural talents productive under their own necessity will be drastically inhibited when forced.

10 weeks in the Training Module were required to get me to wear my conditioning like a strait-jacket. A buzzer would start up: I would immediately begin jabbering away, with or without an audience. With the cessation of the buzzing my monologue came to a complete stop. I wouldn't know I was hungry without being so informed by a certain siren. A certain vulgar, insidious noise would have me doubled up with hunger pains.

Sexual appetites were similarly regulated. I leave it to the reader's imagination to conjure up the methods employed by Marigold Meadows to inculcate in us a psychological condition whereby a certain soft tinkle got us drooling like lechers, while loud clangs could freeze all our vital spirits, converting every one of us, instantly, to vengeful and frigid prudes. That part of my soul which continued to resist this methodical rape wondered what all this was leading up to. It could not be denied that the psychotics, (real or alleged), in our midst desperately needed some well-regulated routine. The system of bells provided at least that much. It got so that one could predict to the minute when a certain bell

was likely to go off. Most of the time in fact the signals were almost superfluous: one imagined them sounding off at the right moment, and one's body responded on cue.

As one might expect, the period in training was not without its casualties. Some of the patients, particularly ones with some form of incipient Parkinson's Disease, developed epilepsy. The signals triggered seizures rather than conditioned responses, or else they might drool at the mouth and go into catatonia. Some inmates turned violent and began attacking the others. I witnessed one suicide during my stay in TM. Coming from a scientific background I knew that progress couldn't be made in any field without a large amount of experimental error: little matter that the majority of us were paying the costs to be used as guinea pigs.

Life on the wards was entirely regulated by the noises to which we'd been conditioned. Marigold Meadows held 10 wards, segregated by gender, with a maximum capacity of 50 inmates on each of them. On our ward were 3 attendants who had almost no work to do except take notes and fill out daily progress reports. A medical doctor came onto the ward once a week for an hour or so, and each of us received a private interview of about half an hour with a staff psychiatrist once a month.

It took me about 2 months on the ward to regain a semblance of awareness of my surroundings. Much of what I saw going on around me was incomprehensible at first: the sufferings of my nervous breakdown combined with the 10 weeks in TM had grievously handicapped my capacity for independent thought. The first real break in my illness, my cure if one can call it that, came

with the dawning realization that something was wrong, terribly wrong, with the way things were being run at the Meadows.

Among other things, the system of commands kept breaking down; sometimes they went haywire. The normal time for "light's out" was 9 PM. Once every 5 days or so the breakfast bell would ring instead of the bedtime bell. In a flash the ward became charged with frenetic activity as the inmates threw off their covers and raced down the corridor to join the line-up waiting to enter the dining area. With everyone lined up and waiting (this happened about once a month) the pissing gong would spontaneously activate. What had been an orderly queue degenerated into a riot with everyone attacking his neighbor to make it first to the lavatories.

On a day in March of 1952 the pissing gong went off ten times in a row. Driven by our insistent compulsion to urinate, the supply of urine dwindled to naught. Rather than coming to our aid, the attendants, like so many blocks of stone, sat in their office in the ward behind a screen of shatterproof glass, impassively taking notes.

Then on an afternoon in June of 1952 all the signals of our conditioning went off at once.

A Pandemonium worthy of Paradise Lost descended upon the ward: It would have broken Hogarth's pen: urgent pulsations to eat, piss, shit, talk, sleep, write, screw, meditate, exercise, labor or study penetrated our enfeebled brains without pity. Chairs flew like cannon balls through the afflicted room. Epileptics rictused about the filthy linoleum, their legs kicking in vicious spasms.

Insensible to pain, shards of broken glass lacerated their bodies, leaving tracks of blood all the way down the corridors. A maniac slit his own throat with a sliver from the shattered window-panes. Another was electrocuted when he jammed his fingers into an exposed electric socket. Instant death came to one catatonic from the congealing of his whole metabolism. Heads butted against cinderblock walls; one's mind reeled from the sound of cracking skulls.

An athletic teen-ager with very little wrong with him, who should never have been committed to the Meadows except that his parents wanted to get rid of him, climbed along the water pipes and onto the ranks of shielded neon lights. From there he began hurtling in wide arcs, shouting obscenities and dropping shit on everyone. My face and clothing were covered with it. I slid out of my Styrofoam sandals; they were saturated with blood. An autistic inmate was mauled by a much feared bully who'd terrorized the ward for several months, his body stomped into a mass of viscera and bones. One of the sex maniacs broke all his teeth with a hammer, crying "Mother! Mother!" At the far end of the lounge, someone was breaking his bones with staves torn from tables and chairs.

I shriveled up in a corner of the ward, yelping like a lost puppy.

Someone grabbed my legs from behind. Lifted high off the ground I was spun about a number of times before being flung down the length of the corridor. Just before smashing up against the far wall

I caught a glimpse of the 3 attendants, safe and unruffled behind their shield of shatterproof glass, assiduously taking notes.

The final reckoning for this engineered catastrophe - for it could have been nothing else - tallied 10 deaths, 18 mutilations, 30 hospitalizations, and 8 incurable insanities. The comforting delusion that these unfortunate coincidences were all due to malfunctioning electronics was tenable no longer.

10 days later I was called back to the main office to resume my duties as a statistician. Until then these dull, routine calculations had, like every other activity at the Meadows, been done unthinkingly, the data stretched across the pages nothing more than a jumble of meaningless numbers. Now I began setting facts and figures within a meaningful context. As a coherent picture gradually emerged over two hours of patient study, my blood froze. One correlation after another supplied the irrefutable proof to my ugliest suspicions: *Marigold Meadows was nothing other than a gigantic psychology research laboratory directed by a team of behaviorists without conscience, scientists cynically inured to all human sensibilities, who played with us as children play with toys, who for months, perhaps years, had been subjecting its inmates to cruel collective experiments that had nothing to do with making them well!*

Now something I'd seen in the face of van Clees in our initial conversation came back to me. Stored in my subconscious mind all these months it suddenly erupted into the light of day.... those cold, piercing eyes, hard as agates, filthy with septic ooze, opaque, impenetrable in their resolute inhumanity, seething with animal

rage. Nothing lived in the mind that stood in back of them, nothing beyond manipulation and calculation: data, distributions, trends, stripped of all human reference, a mind equally contemptuous of affection or pain, whether of others or its own.

A sudden apprehension of the full horror of the situation swept over me like the delayed shock wave from a nuclear detonation: *even the so-called tests for latent homosexuality had been a ruse*, the first rung on the ladder of deception, a way to misdirect my suspicions. Indeed I little more than a lab rat, Marigold Meadows a gigantic maze, the latent homosexuality tests the doorway by which I'd been inducted into its endlessly meandering corridors. Van Clees' purpose in administering those tests had been only to observe my resistance to being forced to submit to such rubbish!

Trapped! Trapped and slated for extermination! Trapped before knowing how, when, or most dreadfully, why I 'd been among those selected for the trap!

Restoring order and calm - the experiment had been restricted to this ward, the rest of the hospital serving as control - took all of the month of June. Then it was announced that, because recent events had undone our conditioning, we would all be obliged to undergo recycling through the Training Module. On my numbed fingers I counted off the weeks, which ran into months until my turn to be sent to the Observation Tank before being handed over to the ghouls in TM. For a certainty nothing one might designate as my soul could hope to survive this new ordeal. My fate, granted

that I survived, would be as a being unfit for anything but to serve as a behaviorist's rat for the rest of my days.

Every week now two or three inmates were disappearing off the common ward. With the same frequency they were replaced by persons newly released from TM. They sat around uselessly, slumped over the card tables in the Rec Center, unless reactivated by the ringing of bells and other signals. Those of us who had survived the slaughter were temporarily freed from the effects of the conditioning. We made desperate efforts to awaken these pitiful victims; but we were no match for the psychiatrists of Marigold Meadows. At the first sign that our attempts to reach out to these darkened souls were beginning to get somewhere, an attendant would sound an alarm. We found ourselves being manhandled down the corridors and locked up overnight in the dormitories. Eventually those of us with a remnant of sanity avoided all contact with these new releases and, like the attendants and doctors themselves, regarded them at a discrete distance merely as objects of curiosity.

But with the passage of weeks we began noticing dramatic changes in the caliber of zombie being sent back to live with us. Human only in their outward appearance, their eyes turned inwards, one had the impression that all connections between their sense organs and their brains had been severed. Scars on the scalp, temples and forehead told the rest of the story: *they'd been conditioned for life!* No amount of rehabilitation could ever restore what had been cut out of their brains. Broken as we were by our mental illness, the recent catastrophe and the lingering effects of

our previous conditioning, we shrank from speculating as to what was going on in that sinister building in the woods at the bottom of the hill. Yet we had to do so, else we would not survive.

Heads bowed low almost to the ground, arms hanging heavily at their sides, they walked aimlessly, either in endless circles, or up and down the corridors, shuffling their feet as if driven by programmed instructions penetrating the sludge of their consciousness through endless repetition. When not so occupied they slumped in chairs or leaned against the walls, their heads rolled over to one side. As their spittle descended, unimpeded over their chins and onto their clothing, their tongues, split by the surgeon's knife, dangled freely in the void.

Yet: they spoke! They spoke indeed, though only when activated by the conversation bell. They babbled uncontrollably, with a terrifying silliness, recounting the strangest things: garbled childhood memories, dirty jokes in which the punch line was always getting lost, old baseball scores, weird reincarnations of news headlines two decades past, popular songs and advertising jingles monotonously rattled off in a terrifying monotone, worn out political slogans; something like a television whose channels are being switched back and forth at random. Nothing in their thinking was able to rise above the chaos of free associations so dear to Freud and his disciples.

Those who were taken off the ward a second time never returned, their hideous fate forever hidden from us. By the beginning of August, among the 15 inmates still waiting to be

remitted through TM, only 6 retained the use of their intellectual faculties:

There was 19-year old Pauline, the ward transvestite. Apart from her feeling more like a woman than a man, there was nothing wrong with her. Putting her into a mental hospital was utter folly. She'd been picked up for prostitution in the town of West Chester, 20 miles east of Philadelphia. The local authorities had felt uneasy about locking her up in the county jail and all the state hospitals were filled. After awhile, for reasons of his own, van Clees had seen to it that she would never be able to leave.

Bill, retired seaman and merchant marine, was in his 60's. An alcoholic for most of his life, he'd stayed on the wagon throughout much of the 30's and 40's, but the strain of active service in World War II had broken his resolve. In 1949 a failed attempt at suicide had led to his commitment at the Meadows.

Twenty-two and a brain-damaged epileptic, Jack was the complete opposite to Bill. He'd been in and out of mental hospitals since his early teens. Tough, hardened and cynical, he was prepared to die rather than allow the further mutilation of his brain.

George, to whom we've alluded in previous chapters, was a particularly sad case. In 1947 he'd been dumped in Marigold Meadows by Villanova University. His hometown parish had raised the money to maintain him at the Meadows for three years. Then a new priest replaced the one who'd befriended him, and he was left to fend for himself. By that time the doctors had concluded that he might be a particularly valuable experimental

subject and kept him on free of charge. George never fully understood what was going on around him. His trust in mankind, touching, even admirable though painfully naive, made it impossible for him to fully grasp the fact that we were in the clutches of monsters.

Then there was a middle-aged individual known to us only by the nickname of "Q". He was little more than a brute and everyone on the ward avoided him. He loved to boast of his exploits, claiming to have pursued a dozen professions on the outside, Marine, bartender, butcher, prison guard, security guard, cop. True or not, his stories could alternately chill or disgust, depending on his mood. Rumors circulated around the institution that he'd murdered his wife and children. These were only ugly, though probable suspicions; but this much was known for a certainty: he'd been transferred to the Meadows after 15 years in the state's Forensic Institute, euphemism for the Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Undeniably, his skills were essential to the success of our project. In all other respects we gave him a wide berth.

Finally there was myself. Young, inexperienced, not used to dealing with people or emergencies I was, being intelligent and better educated, put in charge of operations. Everyone else on the ward was functionally disabled, retarded, catatonic, lost in delusions and hallucinations, or permanently incapacitated in some other way. We had only ourselves to depend on, and only ourselves to save.



Things came to a head sooner than expected. Jack had been assigned janitorial duties in the administrative wing, where he had learned through the grapevine that Bill was slated to be returned to the Observation Tank the day after next. Any plan for our escape had to begin with the immobilization of the 3 ward attendants. One could hardly call them attendants in the ordinary sense, given that they were rarely called upon to maintain order. It is more than likely that they were doctoral candidates in behavioral psychology with van Clees as their thesis advisor. Whatever the case, all three were similarly distinguished for callousness, and singularly devoid of affect.

Involved in the decision that led to my appointment as leader, was the hope that there should be no loss of life. Accordingly Q. and Jack were relegated to the latter phase of the operation. Pauline had learned, through that instinct which is always blind yet never errs, that one of the attendants was homosexual; it was he in fact who'd been assigned to that night's shift.

9 PM and Lights Out. By 10 the ward was hushed; one might have heard a feather floating through the air. The unwholesome atmosphere, dark and sinister, lay in thick blankets over the lines of the recumbent bodies of peacefully breathing zombies, Pavloved psyches, devastated souls and assorted villainy. Behind the thick pane of glass separating his office from the ward, the night attendant sat collating figures under the dim light of a table lamp. Around 11:30 he stood up and left the office to get a bottle of beer from the staff kitchen.

A corridor, dark even in daylight, lugubrious at night, connected the patient lounge, offices, linen closet and showers to the locked dorms. At its far end was located the Rec Center and the staff kitchen. Walking through the corridor with the assistance of a pocket flashlight and cautiously tapping the walls, the night attendant found his eyes come to rest on an astounding spectacle: it was Pauline, standing in the corridor. She was costumed and perfumed. The provocative posture in which she leaned her left arm against the wall was probably that which she'd affected on the streets of West Chester. All of us had contributed time to manufacturing her dress from purloined sheets. From a slit on its left side one could see protruding an ungainly knee cap and hairy leg. Her eyes literally swam in pools of mascara. The well-crafted illusion of a fabulous wig heightened her persona of 19th century Southern belle. On each side of a mouth made lurid by a bloody lipstick fat cheeks dripped powder and rouge.

The attendant, petrified and fascinated gazed, unable to respond. Pauline sidled up to him. Her breathing was husky as she stroked his neck and whispered into his ear:

" Yuh goin' anywhah' tuhnight, huhney? "

All his features became inflamed. He could have ordered Pauline back into the dorm had not anticipation and excitement rendered him speechless. Tearing himself away the attendant staggered down the hall. Twenty minutes later he emerged from the Rec Center with a bottle of beer. Pauline was still there waiting for him. Livid with fear the attendant flattened himself against the wall.

" C'mon honey! ", she cajoled.

"Gimme a litt'bit of yo beer. " Thoroughly aroused and beside himself he passed over the bottle, as his free hand rose in readiness to make a pass at her.

.... After delivering the blow to the back of the head, we tied up the body up in the bedsheets. Q. had the same build as the attendant. Once the attendant's body had been rolled into his bed and covered over with the sheets, Q. stepped into his clothing and replaced him at the desk of the night office. Bill finished the bottle of beer. As it wasn't clear to George whether the attendant was living or dead, he recited enough prayers over the body to cover both contingencies. Then we all went back to our beds. Sleep was scarcely to be thought of as we all waited in terrified anticipation for the advent of dawn.

Normal wake-up time was 5 AM. Luck for once was on our side, and the doctors were pulling some funny business by ringing the sleep bell. No one stirred; the dorms might have been taking for the lying-in rooms of a morgue. Shortly afterwards the two other attendants showed up for work. Q. had left the office before their arrival and hidden himself in the linen closet. Their assignment for that morning was to observe and estimate the depth of our slumber. Methodically they began making their rounds, unlocking the dorm rooms and examining each bed in turn.

Following through in accordance with our plan Jack launched into the simulation of an epileptic fit. The attendants unlocked the door to his room and ran inside. One of them put a pillow over Jack's head (which shows how much these "attendants" knew

about epilepsy) while the other held him by his feet. Preoccupied as they were with this sudden emergency, neither of them noticed Q. (*in complete disobedience to my instructions*) creeping up on them from behind. With his strong arms he lifted them high in the air and cracked their skulls together; they died instantly. George, close behind him, had already begun delivering extreme unction.

Pauline hurried over to my bed; there was no sign of Bill anywhere. We set out to look for him. Twenty minutes later we discovered him in the staff kitchen slugging bottle after bottle of beer into himself like a dehydrated survivor from Death Valley. Already he could no longer be counted on.

Even worse awaited us on our return to the dorms. Jack's simulated seizure had suggested to his over-burdened psyche the possibility of a genuine one. The spectacle had driven Q mad; he'd placed a pillow over Jack's head and was sitting on it. Then Q. saw us walking into the room and went berserk. With the fierce instinct for murder pounding the veins of his temples, he sprang off Jack's corpse to catch Pauline with a lunge. It took him about 15 minutes of concentrated labor to "strangle the dirty queer" - time enough for me to run down the hall and activate the emergency alarm bell. Between a fate worse than death and death itself, one does not hesitate to choose the former in the immediate presence of the latter. The alarm was wired to simultaneously alert the hospital and the local headquarters of the state police. They arrived in less than half an hour. By 7 AM the rebellion was crushed.

The mortality was staggering: Jack suffocated. Paul strangled. All the attendants dead. Then Q. had roamed freely through the rooms, killing 5 of the inmates. Q himself killed in the struggle. Because Bill was deemed the sanest among us, he was taken down to the police station and lodged in the County Jail. Only George and I remained alive, in anticipation of what unknown horrors awaiting us before the end of the day.

They came for George at 2. His body was dragged across the floor, scraping along on the tiles like a disabled refrigerator being hauled out to the street, the froth dribbling from his mouth bathing his anemic face, scraping blood across the tiles, his head banging into furniture. The attendants had their work cut out for them, peeling his hands away from the legs of tables and chairs he grasped in a vain effort to save himself. His wretched, piercing screams ring in my ears at this very moment of writing. Intense pain accompanies even the recollection of them.

His low voice raw with terror, George cried out to Christ, to the Virgin Mary, to all the saints. We all knew that his mind had collapsed when he began hallucinating. From his babbling one gathered that he imagined that the Inquisition was taking him away to interrogate him in its secret dungeons. In a kind of frenzy his list of nameless heresies was shouted out in their Latin names that meant nothing to us.

Much as I felt for him, I had to worry about myself. My turn would be next. It came at 4 o'clock. The spectacle of George's removal had had a sobering effect on me, and I was determined to remain calm in the face of the inevitable. Yet when the two stocky

attendants presented themselves on the ward demanding that I come with them, I broke down and wept like a baby. All my muscles went limp; they dragged me off the ward as they would a bag of trash, my shoes trailing along the floor. All my forces failed me in a total surrender to paralysis of body and mind.

As I was pushed out the main door of Marigold Meadows, the summer sunlight hit me full in the face like the crest of a tidal wave. It had been several months since I'd been permitted to walk around on the outside. Fertile breezes tenderly caressed my fevered cheeks. The flower gardens bordering the walkways were in full bloom; yet there was no joy in my heart. It seemed to me as if all natural things, from the dark elms overtaxed by their rich mantles of leaves, to the hovering birds in their innocence and curiosity, were banded together as mute witnesses to the nameless atrocities about to be inflicted on my helpless person.

I was wrenched into a strait jacket. The attendants would not have hesitated to break my arms in doing so, and my right shoulder was badly dislocated. Even with physical therapy the pain did not subside for another 4 months. I was strapped onto a portable metal-framed Army cot and hoisted through the back door of an awaiting ambulance. An attendant climbed in with me, secured the door and injected me with a drug. It induced a deep stupor without putting me to sleep altogether. The other attendant jumped up behind the steering wheel and we drove off. We bounced along for several miles via a roundabout route that entered the woods from some distant location.

Finally the ambulance pulled up before the door of a small two-story frame building. Neither within nor without was there anyone visible from the grounds. The back door of the ambulance was opened; the driver descended and walked around to the back. Together they lowered the wheels underneath the cot and placed it on the ground. I was wheeled through the front door of the building to an empty vestibule. After hoisting me up a winding staircase to the next floor, they wheeled me down a narrow corridor to the far end. An attendant unlocked a door with a key from a chain of 50 or so on his belt and we entered a small room. The scant illumination shining through dirt-encrusted windows cast a nightmarish glow in which few things could be distinguished clearly. However I was able to see that it was totally devoid of furniture save for a long hardwood table. They placed the cot with me in it on the table. Then they pulled down all the shades and left me alone, locking the door behind them.

Had I not managed to free myself after several hours of fiddling with the ligatures and cords that bound me, this account would unavoidably have to end here- even earlier, for how could I have written it? ³ It must have been around 8 PM when I succeeded in untying the final restraint and alighted, very slowly so as not to make a sound, off the table and crouched down to the floor. Voices, some of them recognizable, were coming from a room on the floor below, including those of the two attendants' and van Clees

³As there is clearly more coming , I invite the reader to exercise his imagination in reconstructing the way it was done.

himself. Others were familiar though I couldn't place them. By my rough estimate there were more than a dozen persons in the room.

Feeling my way silently along the walls I discovered about half a dozen doors around the room. Most of them opened up to closets, but one led to a staircase. It was my good luck that, mental hospital attendants and prison guards being no smarter than they should be, my guardians had neglected to lock this door. The staircase led down to another room on the ground floor. Little as I wished to go there it was my only option. Here the voices were more distinct. Soon it was possible to make out what they were saying. Van Clees was embroiled in a heated argument with the rest of the psychiatric staff:

" I vill not allow dot! Dot I vill not allow! Vee need hiz Bbrrraainnn! "

A confused babble of heated voices mounting in wave after wave of unintelligibility roared its unanimous disagreement:

*..... Take it off the scalp ... What's that...?! ... NO!!!! ... Why, if ... NEVER!! ... I say he should be... **Outrageous!** Absolutely ... **Ha! Ha! Ha!!!** ...NO!!!! ... I can't see how ... *That's ridiculous!* ... (If you're going there tonight I advise the filet mignon. **Between you and me, don't order the vichyssoise**) ... *Look man, fuck this shit, that's no answer!* ... **NO!!NO!!** Why of course not!! Absolutely **NO!!** ... *What is this, a kindergarten?? I thought this was supposed to be a research institute!* ... *Twenty years?* I remember reading somewhere that... (The small knife is better)... What time is it? ... *I warned everyone that the sleep bell wouldn't* ... **What's that you***

say? Anomalous? In my opinion.... *Tranquilizer chair?*
...Ethics? Our Lives Are At Stake!! (It's the old story,
divorce takes ages in this state).... What? ... *So what if he is smart,*
that doesn't ... A use for what? ... I Wont Stand For It!! ... I don't
understand, but ... *Look, if you start digging in from the other end ...*
Well, what about a graft? I've done the
operation before.... You think? ... Injections? But that's
not..... **ARE YOU CRAZY??** ... So, what's new about that? **NO!!**
NO!! NO!! Absolutely NOT!! What he doesn't realize is that
... (*It's been known to slip*)

**" Shad Oup! Evrybody Shad oup!
Hootverdamt !! "**

Van Clees shouted above the multitude, both his fists
slamming on the table like iron mallets. The commotion died away.

*" I say vee need zat bbrraainnn! En vee need it alltotedder. In
von piece! De b-b-b-bb-rrainn ouf zat boy ist gold for ous! Von ken
not buy a compyooter machine like dot for a million bucks! I vill not
allow no one to cut outs noting vrom dot bbrraainn. I vill allow
noting cut out!! Vot does vee risk against de bbrraainn of de boy! You
tinks vee get million dollars vrom zee I.B.M.? "*

They were caught in a deadlock; this alone had spared me up
to that moment. After two hours of debate nothing had been
resolved. One of the doctors was trying to negotiate a compromise
solution. He suggested that I be given the option of joining the
research team in exchange for the preservation of my soul.

Horrified cries of protest arose about the room:

" I say if we don't lobotomize him immediately he should be killed! "

" Hootverdamt! Dis ist my laboratory, an if...! "

All but unhinged by terror I stared frantically about the room. To my left was a door. Bold through desperation I pushed through it into an amphitheatre lit by glaring klieg lights.

The operating table stood near the center of the room towards the back wall. Wires and cables branched off from thirty sockets built around the borders of the table. Several were divided into pairs, one lead going to an instrument panel up against the wall, the other being inserted into some kind of manacle, chain or metal plate.

Turning to my left I recognized the form of a van de Graff electrostatic generator surrounded by lead shields. Brain probes with foot-long antennae; sharp edges and exquisitely gleaming points were hung up in rows on hooks about the walls. Around the table, heaped up like animal guts after slaughter, lay assortments of cruelly shaped knives, scissors, mallets, forceps ...

With an immense effort I tore my eyes away from these abominations and turned to the right. An injection of ice water directly into the heart could not have filled me more with horror:

The open space before the far wall was taken up from one end to the other with a treadmill. In it stood George the ex-divinity student, or what remained of him. He'd collapsed on the wet floor of this infernal engine, his body, (naked save for a ripped G-string), immersed in a pool of blood, his hair grazing the laboratory floor, his mouth hanging open in imbecile terror, his tongue buried in drool. A wide, irregular wound was slashed across his forehead from the

upper right line of the scalp to his left eye socket. Through the forehead protruded a white patch of skull.

Staggering across the room to the treadmill I shook his body, timidly confirming what I already knew: George was dead. Then some glinting object up close to the ceiling caught my eye. I looked up to encounter:

... An outsized ceramic crucifix dangling over the treadmill. Embedded all over it, like jimmies on a scoop of cherry-vanilla ice-cream, shone many blinking Christmas tree lightbulbs...

Like a programmed robot, George had run the treadmill without pause, grasping at this object, until released by death! Perhaps the refuse tissue created by his operation had poisoned his brain. Or his heart may have given out. Or his entire system collapsed.

George! The gentle divinity student, who had never been heard to utter an unkind word, who had never, in his short span of life, done the least harm to another living creature, now destroyed in the service of a failed experiment, offered up in this fashion for sacrifice to the Moloch of Behaviorism!

There could be no delay; I had to escape - and quickly! One of the psychiatrists had already gone upstairs to discover that I was missing.

I heard him running back down and opening the door of the conference room. Chaos broke out virtually on the instant. There was barely time for me to throw open a window and leap onto the grounds before van Clees stepped into the operating room. He fired a pistol; the bullet shattered the windowpane. I dropped to

the ground, No matter that my body was weakened, bones brittle and muscles frail from a year's confinement: I took off as someone who flees a burning building.

It was touch and go, hiding in the woods two days and nights while they searched for me. On the morning of the third day I escaped off the grounds and walked 6 miles to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. There I hitched a ride that took me out of the state. For a year I traveled back and forth across the country, having numerous adventures. By that time the limits of its authority over escaped mental patients was expired, making it illegal for Marigold Meadows to re-incarcerate me by force.

I returned to Philadelphia in the summer of 1953 in time to enroll for my junior year at Zelosophic U.. For once my parents were on my side, and the ordeal of Marigold Meadows was never referred to again by any of us.

