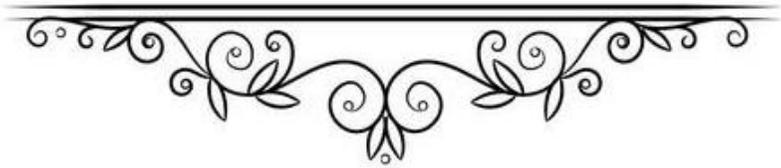


Cobwebs in My Mind

The Diary of a Schizophrenic Janitor



A Novel By:
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Chapter One

Salvation



It is not easy being the Savior of the world especially when you do not want the job. The expectations are immense as I am sure you might imagine.

For example, a candidate of such a calling, must have the common knowledge that slightly below our feet in the sacred tundra of Mother Earth are layers of countless bones of deceased relatives.

You must be able to share with verve and conviction the story of the man from Switzerland who wanted to carve a beautiful rocking chair for his expectant wife to nurse their child in. But he had been called to the front lines of military service and died from an enemy bullet that hit him directly in the forehead.

And of the sacred story of a beautiful boy child born in a tin shack somewhere in the ghettos of Brazil whose life was mercilessly short lived. Coerced into a child street gang by the age of seven and by the age of nine was machine gunned to death by a paramilitary squad.

His body was taken to the city refuse plant and he, with the other child corpses in their bullet ridden shirts and pants, were shoved into a trash heap of cans, hewn down ferns and shrubs and, newspapers that tallied the previous days racing results.

To remember we stand not far from and upon grass nourished by the long since corroded, decomposed bodies of sixty million persons from the land of China who perished in the years of the Cultural Revolution.

But these were not my people. I am not a People. I am from the Blue Planet and I am on this earth to teach. And you see all one hundred something pounds of me and you wonder how I can be so delusional that I am able to save anything but a ticket stub from a blues concert.

Again, to remember: Great things have small Beginnings.

Mountains begin with a few puffs of smoke that crop up from a singular hole in the ground. The magnificent pyramids of Egypt were but a design in ink on a papyrus scroll.

And the first time my father showed me planet earth from his telescope it looked no larger than a seed. I was instructed that your planet is referred to as blue as well.

I arrived on earth in the year nineteen sixty, English speaking time. I entered the body of the person Mike who was living in a farm town in a province called California. Mike's mother had given birth to him in the year 1953. Mike was an angry child. All photos and video recordings of those early days he is pictured crying or in moving images smashing all his toys on brick walls.

It was not until he contracted the so called Asian flu and while his parents poured cold water on him to cool his fevers, that Mike's body chemistry was so disrupted with anguish that I was able to simply meld into his anatomical structure.

This entering into someone else's body is called 'translation', The scientists of your planet call this integration 'quantum leap', the act of skipping interdimensional. I was unobtrusive. Mike's physical appearance did not alter.

Part Two

I was calling myself Michael by the time I was forty-nine years of age when I walked into a psychiatrist office. And it would be an entire year before the doctor convinced me to take medication for the said disease of bipolar.

Bipolar is a state of mind where you are completely depressed one minute feeling as if you are standing in a subterranean bunker with cement walls and a steel ceiling and, then, without doing or thinking another thought you find yourself suddenly, and ecstatically on a scaffold

sitting side to side with Michelangelo the artisan painting frescos for the pope of Rome in the fourteenth century. But alas, this co-muraling with the greatest artist of all time, lasts only moments before you trip over one of the master's paint cans and fall headlong to the ground.

You also in the bipolar state are often delusional. You can imagine yourself to be an extraterrestrial walk-in-being from a planet with similar coloration as your own.

And by the time the visits to the psychiatrist had convinced me that I was in total insane, that I felt I was qualified enough to heal the world. A big job order for one person to fill and yet was it not that the world was and is a hotbed of insanity already?

It is your world's persons, and not my planet's beings who watch soap operas and believe so much in the characters presented on the television screen that they become as much a household name that even the family dog becomes jealous of it having heretofore received the bulk of affection?

And lets us not get all fussy about this Savior business. Heavens! Your planet has had its share of saviors; they have come into all cultures and they went quietly about doing good works up and until the time they were "outed" and then you killed them.

But you cannot kill me. I have residence in the Blue Planet. You can kill Mike; for myself I will just find another body to enter. And in quietness I do perform the daily tasks of a profession of janitor. I am pretty much invisible in my job as people normally do not frequent their offices at three am in the morning. So, I pretty much do not attract attention to myself. I do, per my specified duties, kick up a lot of dust but of its basic properties, that dust not inhaled by my vacuum just sort of settles down where it will lie until the resident cubicle worker returns again.

Chapter Two

Let the Teaching Begin



Who is calling them insane? There is no use going over the family dog thing again; after all you sleep with a puppy under your bed sheets, talk ‘man’s best friend’ as if your dog understands what you are saying in an elongated conversation about your long day and how good it is to be home. And you really do believe there is a “doggie heaven’ of eternal rest. Yes, I guess the old pup is sitting at your dead relatives feet as the fire is blazing in the hearth and they are all watching you here on earth relieving yourself while you sit on your toilet. Yes: Absolutely- Positively!

One does wonder why The Eternal Mind, The Over Soul, The Great Architect, God, has not put an end to this dry run of what was hoped for to be a grand experiment.

Word around the galaxy is that a convocation of ruling entities from different principalities was held some four millennium ago and that the subject was should there be sent particle beams to vaporize planet earth or not to vaporize. It would have been so less messy than if this task were carried out today. Far less populace, and no plastics to gum up space.

The vote was a close one, but it came down to more of our elders believing that more time should be given humans and, in the meanwhile, Walkins should be sent to advise and teach.

One experiment was tried when we rescued a group of women from a Bangladesh sex slave camp. With their permission we reprogrammed their minds to forget the past and settled them in an undisclosed colony where they morph prayers for planetary harmony.

And what became of these regenerated Sisters is that even under torture and physical humiliation some grew to a strength where they could pray for the forgiveness of their rapists and wish for them a better future. This very act of forgiveness cast the Galactic vote in your favor.

And yet the elders of the universe knew that if humans were ever going to regenerate are best themselves to greater calling than to the refrigerator for another slice of apple pie and ice cream, and the relinquishing of desires to follow mad men into war, then they would first have to face the two most primal fears: Truth and Freedom.

For example, one of your humans who rather led the way to healing was poor Vincent Van Gough from Holland. He spent his time painting landscapes with oil onto canvas trying very hard to catch the best of this world's beauty. And look what you did to him!

You laughed at him, called him a weirdo. Do you think of yourself as suspect his act of killing himself? Paradoxically, do you not see how in his own broken way he was hated for his existence but now loved that he is dead? (Heat up the lazers, I say!)

But of course, I jest. For I shall always follow the deem of the Elders.

Part II

Two Shirts, Three Shirts

I like a joke that wends its way down crooked roads where you end up at a destination you could never have guessed.

And so, the story of the janitor with the out-of-body identity encountered Wendell, a sales representative for the Triple A insurance company, played to a striking end.

The former AAA building on Chippendale Drive in Sacramento was the first large contract I was commissioned for, myself having only started my commercial cleaning business less than a year earlier.

I had worked for numerous restaurants in every capacity but owner several years in the past, but a friend suggested that there was good money in cleaning, and I began cleaning apartment move outs and family residences.

I began going door to door with a nicely crafted business card to drop off with front desk operators at commercial buildings and so happened that the janitor man who was cleaning the AAA building had just retired. I interviewed that day and the following day I began cleaning.

There were approximately one hundred and fifty employees and one manager, and assistant manager and a stern head secretary, Sarah.

Five nights a week I emptied approximately two hundred trash cans positioned in and around the common areas and within each desk cubicle. And one of these cubicles was Wendell's. In fact, Wendell had two cubicles; one downstairs where he met clients and one on the second floor where his personal desk and work utensils were.

Wendell and I met the very first night as he were sitting awaiting a new client. Our history working in the same office was to be for twenty-one years. Wendell was overly conscious about his weight, homely as a mud fence, and married to a wife who protected him with the ferocity of a she bears shot in the butt by the quill of a porcupine. Wendell and his wife had produced three children.

Wendell took a smoking and coffee break at four each day in the upstairs cafeteria. I arrived at the building to clean at approximately three thirty and always began with cleaning the kitchen in that the room was mostly vacant after the mad-dash lunch hours from eleven AM to two Pm.

Weather permitting, I would join Wendell out on the patio and eat cookies I had brought from home and drank coffee as well. Because Wendell's schedule as a sales representative would often have him out of the office servicing his clients we would see each other sporadically and in the first weeks I decided I could play a trick on Wendell that I was sure he would find entertaining. He did not.

So, the person Mike Wendell was introduced to the first several weeks was only one of two brothers cleaning the office. At coffee I told Wendell that I had a twin brother who filled in for me cleaning. I warned Wendell that this brother, Bert was not a kind person at all, and that he was rude and sometimes very nasty even to our mother, that he had taken several

trips to jail for minor violent infractions and altogether he is safe to be around but watch out.

I constructed the ruse in that the Mike who worked primarily on the ground floor always had his hair combed to the left side, always wore a blue shirt and was always polite and jovial.

I presented Bert always wearing a red shirt upstairs and with his hair plastered down with goop and combed to the right side.

The building was so large with so many rooms and cubicles and as I said Wendell had a sporadic schedule that when he was upstairs in his own cubicle, sometimes the only person working after hours there would appear Bert with a red shirt, metallic hair combed to the right and a scowl on his face.

As Bert dragged the rolling garbage can around from cubicle to cubicle, I could see Wendell looking over his shoulder with a hesitant look on his face. And when Bert came to Wendell's cubicle, I could see he was rigid with fear as Bert reached overtook Wendell's garbage can, not saying a word of greeting only grunting.

One day at coffee Wendell said to me "I saw your brother in here last night cleaning upstairs: you were right, he didn't even say hello or any greeting whatsoever. Really rude."

I agreed with Wendell even apologized but reasoned I really needed Bert's help as the workload was intense. And I added "Yea, he can kind of be a little scary sometimes."

This dual janitor routine went on for about two months and I had the feeling that I should tell Wendell what I was about because he would find out just the same in relative time.

So, I said at coffee one day "Hey Wendell, Bert and I are the same person."

Wendell's reaction, as I told him about my little prank, set him in both a body and facial reaction as if he were being held in animated space. When I had finished my explanation, poor old Wendell just put his head down

and stared into his coffee. He had been quite embarrassed and had no words to speak.

I excused myself from the table both inwardly weeping for Wendell on his behalf due to the speck of humiliation I had given him but also laughing at my ability to render such a wonderful, creative, and fun prank.

Chapter Three

A Beginning



As Ernest Hemingway, a person's books I never enjoyed reading as they all seemed to me to be as cold as an iceberg, gave this pointed advice to writers who were having writer's block: "Write one true thing." And though I rarely have writer's block I will engage this story with writing that as I have written I am bipolar.

And yet I know when first meeting someone if I even hint at this medical prognosis it will open a bulging gate of wanton comradery in that 'they too, have....!'"

And so when meeting people I say "Hello, my name is Michael and let me guess: you are asthmatic, have bouts of dyslexia, you are having a bowel movement problem, your father molested you as a child, your mother starved you and put you in a closet, you have the latest in All American Disease: bipolar disposition with a touch of ADD, thrown on top of a percentage of autism diagnosed by the State psychiatric board which charges you, no, I mean the State, no, in the end it is me the taxpayer, for services rendered, charging double the fair market price for evaluating your penchant for laziness.

And because you are among 'the stricken' with this 'something syndrome' your community will be supporting you for the next forty years. Sounds fair to me.

Go ahead reader (you jolly good person you) just go up to any person on the street and recite the above paragraph.

For believe it or not, a high proportion of the people you talk to will think that you are some kind of psychic and wonder how you know so much about them and most especially the story of them having been locked in a closet by a wicked stepmother.

Part II

If life were perfect in every way what would it look like for you? Asking this question of any young adult is a good way to segue them from thinking about their fictional problems and truly helping them to focus on something that you hope would bring them to a healthy, beautiful 'They'.

So, allow us to do this exercise together!

Quick! I will go first. For myself I would feed all persons of the planet, set them to a wonderful and most healthy diet agreed upon by the elders of earth to be that of the proper mixture of foods, liquids and vitamins of optimal qualities.

Second: Education. I would personally oversee and implement the proper other dieting of the most nutritional information, history to be used in current application. What this extensive list of items to be consumed would be you can take a crash course on mind reading and, then, when I am not looking you can have a look-see as to what the curriculum would be.

Three: Of society and the internal structuring of social mores I can think of all the great philosophers and sages, and humanitarian social engineers who have contributed greatly to the human cause. I know you know who these international persons are so I will not beleaguer the issue herein.

Of crime and punishment, I can only say in brief that I would not order disarmament of our military. No matter how well you set society there are always those rogue persons who wish your demise. Idiots disarm but if you do insist then please do not join my political party.

Of this perfect society all persons and life as we know it is given the comfort, dignity, and safety available. I have much more to speak and yet we will go onward with what you would do if you were, say, King for the Day.

But then again you do not really have to share your thoughts for I do know your mind. If you were ruler overall, you would execute every person on the planet who does not follow your treasured belief systems whether they be religious, political, or sociological.

And you would have a harem of the most beautiful bodies unearthed in a worldwide search by your eunuch slaves who knew precisely that which would gratify your prurient lusts. Cars too; houses, castles, land. You would have it all. Sounds good to you I know but, sorry, someone will be winning the lotto...just not you. (Looser.)

Chapter Four

The Lioness in Summer



I was cleaning a large bathroom at Daniel's house.

The bathroom had recently been remodeled and there was much construction dust embedded in the tile and on every surface including the ceiling and walls. And just outside a group of contractors were constructing a wood deck.

Daniel's house was also John's house, her husbands. I began cleaning early in the day and John and Daniel had just dressed for their day jobs and left the house in their separate cars.

As the morning grew into the middle day the heat was amped up and I had taken off my shoes and shirt and opened the bathroom window and unbolted the shutters where the contractors were within arm reach. I was on my hands and knees scrubbing the shower floor tile when who should appear, none other than Daniel herself.

Daniel had changed from her business suit and was now standing barefoot in painted on Levi's, a short blouse exposing her navel; her hair which was mahogany in color and quite lengthy was displayed wide across her shoulders and she was just standing there motionless.

As I said the day was getting hot and about to get much hotter. I stood up from my kneeling position, dropped the sponge I was holding into the water bucket and walked slowly up to Daniel who was stiff as a sentinel and kissed her shoulder lightly. I said "Oh, I am sorry it appears as if my lips have touched your arm.

Daniel spun round until our eyes locked, hers, two amazing dark seductive balls of fire which all but hypnotized me until we started kissing and she began loosening my belt. Conveniently for me I had forgotten that she was married and less than two hours earlier I had wished John a profitable day and yet I did at that moment remember on my business card

the statement that 'I do go the extra length' which of course referred to cleaning. Obviously, Daniel had interpreted this tag line to mean something other.

Daniel led us to the core of the shower and by that time we were totally naked. Daniel enacted the faucet and a full stream of water cascaded upon the two of us. Coincidentally, the building contractors had turned on their power machine and the loud sawing noise made for good cover once Daniel and I began our elongated moans.

Daniel had wrapped one of her legs around my waist and we were fully interlocked, she began with perfect acrobatics moving up and down upon my erect penis. And we really did moan, the warm droplets from the overhead faucet seemed to encase us as a mutual life force and helped loosen our normally cautious emotions which were usually on guard when you are intimate with a person the first time.

My right arm was around Daniel's back and with my left arm and hand I gripped a balancing tight hold onto the soap dish.

And as if it had all been pre orchestrated when we had simultaneously climaxed and slowly began sinking to the floor the buzz saw had stopped and all that I remember of that afternoon was how perfectly still we had become, the water continuing its reign down upon us washing clean of sweat and perhaps adulterous guilts.

And this is how I did remember the day of my made-up mixed-up history and yet, it was not true.

What is true is that Daniel did return home and did walk into the shower area with painted on pants etc. and yet I did nothing except stare. I was caught in between lust and reason. It had been less than a month that Tara and I had broken up as a couple. We had dated for three years. It was a bitter and hurtful break up and I was in the hospital of healing mode.

And I know you think that jumping immediately back into the lake where you almost drown is a shocking cure for fright for if you did think too long about how you almost perished you might never ever go back into the water.

But Daniel was not in any way a soft solution. I had gotten to know her as I was working in an insurance office. She was nothing short of intimidating. And in that she and her husband had a large, very well furnished home and they both drove expensive cars, my subconscious told me that I would be nothing more than a dalliance, a tasty treat that she could devour that afternoon. I might have been physically satisfied for those few moments but the experience I was sure would have hurt not helped my chance of healing.

And so, I stood there, smiling, pretending not to understand the seduction of it all and simply continued rubbing her tile and then she walked out of the room. A few moments later I saw Daniel out on the porch basking in the understanding that the contractor and his assistants she was politely chatting with standing with bare feet and a tight shirt with nipples protruding was no doubt causing each man's timber to stiffen.

And so, for these many years I would replay this story, Michael in the den of Daniel the Lioness to great satisfying musing.

Chapter Five

Dr. Jekyll Had Better Hyde



Was it the twenty years of being hounded by the Internal Revenue Service that I believe I contracted the disease of a paranoid schizophrenic?

If you live the life of a contractor your income does ebb and flow like the oceans below a small ship casting it high in altitude and then recedes to an awful depth. Oftentimes you find yourself barely able to pay the basics for your daily living. You have every intention of keeping current with your tax monies and yet it is easy to pay the urgent invoices and set the IRS debt onto the next month where you will double your payment and be even.

And yet this story of offsetting can hurriedly become a pattern that piles a high unpaid bill, and this is when you can expect a call from a collection's agent.

If you have any conscience at all about what you owe, and to whom, and how fast you can pay down your debt then it is not uncommon for you to have nightmares that recall Franz Kafka's story *The Trial*.

You find yourself in your best suit so as not to insult the jury and judge by a slovenly dress and you find yourself standing in a courtroom docket not knowing where this courtroom is. And because this is a nightmare, you are standing alone with not one person to represent you in the legal speak of this drama.

You are being accused of your misdemeanor by a room of unforgiving persons and yet when it is your turn to give testimony it sounds as if you are a child pleading for more milk in its bottle.

"Please your honor, let me explain. For you see I am an interplanetary visitor and I have difficulties translating our planet's currencies with planet earths. I was never very good with math in the first place even as I

used a calculator and a comprehensible balance sheet thing just seem never to quite balance.”

I look to the jury for a little support but the man in the first row and first seat leans over the retaining wall and while pointing emphatically at me says “Your honor, it’s him; I’d know that cheaters face anywhere!”

I turn again to the judge and to tell her that I am not a bad person. In fact, I am the model of virtue. I do not steal, I do not lie, I show up to work clean, neat and I give a good day's work for honest pay. I do not gamble, and yet I do swear on occasion and “Yes,” I do admit that I have far out fantasy sexual perverted thoughts and not just a few.” And to gender a mutual friend I say “Just like yourself your honor.”

Whoopsie.

But then there was that real-life drama when I received a phone call from Mr. Grimm a resident of Texas, or so he said. Mr. Grimm spoke in a low sinister voice threatening me that dire consequences would follow if I did not pay my tax debt in full. In fact, he said, the IRS might see fit to send someone out to my location to “have a look”.

Perhaps it was the fact that Mr. Grimm whom might or might not be calling from Texas a land still associated with a wild, wild west reputation that I thought even with a name such as his Mr. Grimm might appreciate a bit of edgy humor so I said “I am fine with you sending someone out; can you make it a hot blonde with big boobs?”

There was a silence. The same silence you experience when you are in a twelfth storied building with other people and the room begins to move with an aftershock of an earthquake.

But something else happened that turned out not to be destructive. Our Mr. Grimm let out a small chuckle. Mr. Grimm did take a small breath and continued by ending our conversation by saying to please take haste about paying my balance and then hung up the phone.

Chapter Six

Not Enough Love to Go Around



Let us get back to the part about humans which has been observed and talked about the last one hundred years of human psychology, this being that all humans are seeking love and will do just about anything to compensate for not having and or hardly much at all.

Love, and not to get too scientific can, perhaps, best be stated about an individual like the one you see in the mirror in the morning, is the person wants comfort both emotional and sexual and wants an abundance of both. Yes, this subject is infinitely dissectible but term it in any way you wish and if questioned you would simply agree you do not have enough love in your life or at least not much.

There was a book written which took five years of research and this book was entitled: Inside Scientology. When I began listening to this book on tape, I had no concrete information about this religion or its founder or its participants.

The author was allowed multiple interviews with Scientologists and allowed almost complete access to the institution's grounds and archives.

I did learn that during one exercise for Scientologist initiates that they were, due to bad behavior and as recompense for their sins, were made to roll pencils across the floor with their noses.

I also remember the author illuminating the listener that inside the main office of SCI and upon their main entrance walls were large, multiple pictures of Tom Cruise the actor. I also remember that as the IRS of America did an intensive investigation into the SCI religion that the SCI officers did intensive investigation into IRS members lives and, at one of their homes turned on that person's garden hoses in the middle of the night making sure it was known it was they, the SCI members, were the ones whom had done the 'turning' onto the IRS. In the end the IRS did sue for

peace in that the SCI was so relentless with pranks and legal threats and the IRS simply stopped the investigations.

And fourth: Tom Cruise got so involved with the doctrines of SCI and could penetrate the secret of secrets of this religion and that he, freaked-out! and left the faith.

And yet at one time good ol' famous Tom did come back to the church acting the role of The Prodigal Son and resumed his membership. For you see that he as well as all of us truly desired to be loved; fame/ fortune aside, we are absolutely desperate.

Chapter Seven

So You Want to Write a Novel?



Here is a primer for writing in that someday you may wish to write your own.

I always began my writing lectures with students, many I wondered if any ever were listening or taking notes, when writing a book never tell another person the story you are writing.

It is fine to tell someone that you are writing a novel but if you tell a person what the story line is then why go to the exhaustive trouble of writing it?

If a person whom is not consumed by your excitement that you are writing and is looking into his sandwich to see if there are enough layers of baloney and if they look up from their lunch plate and as you begin to tell them what it is you are writing you may say: I am writing a story about my forty years of cleaning toilets in Sacramento, California.

If this information grips your lunch partner and they comment and ask for details, simply say: Yes, there are so many, many stories and I am afraid if I got onto one of them now your baloney sandwich might go stale.

Or, just for fun and to get attention you might say “The Ford Foundation has commissioned me to retranslate the bible into the Swahili language.” But then, if you are living in Sacramento, the city that does not support my art, with the possible number of questions you could subsume from such a purported commission, you most likely will get what we could politely call ‘the Sacramento stare’ which is a cross between a deer caught in the headlights and an oxen caught in the headlights and know that the person you told this will most assuredly go back to counting slices of prefab meat.

The above was my first rule of kindly advice. My second is that once you begin a story you do make sure you complete it. And you do not edit! And you do not edit!! And you do not edit!!!

The author who edits their story is a person who will never be an author. You will never complete a book if you edit. You will be so caught up on editing to get the paragraphs perfect aligned that you will run out of energy.

Look Kids...the reason you are writing is that you do no other. Writers have to write. Yes, you want to be an international best seller; New York Times favorable reviews, traveling first class to give lectures to pie-eyed wanna-be authors and you want to bask in the spotlight of being an expert storyteller talking to radio personalities and podcasts as well.

Whether fame or fortune has been in the tea leaves read of you, you will be writing all the same.

And my third piece of advice is to edit. We will talk of this later.

Number four advice post, as all every person who has written an original novel will tell you is to write what you know.

I was twenty one standing in the parking lot of Southside Chapel, a foursquare church dirt parking lot talking to Wayne my brilliant, ah yes cocky, Japanese friend who was a bit older and much wiser, my bible study mentor, and asked him if he would read my first publication typed on an underwood typewriter and sitting on the front seat of my car ready to hand off.

He was agreeable on any and all subjects I put forth before him but for my writing he said a most definite “No”. And of course, I asked: why not?

“You don’t have anything to say Michael. Come back and see me in twenty years with something you have written, and I will take a look”.

I soured away at this rebuke and as I drove home in my rickety truck I cried and swore I would never write anything again. (We writers are a touch too sensitive; you know.)

And if you do have an interest in a particular subject, even if you are not that familiar with the topic then by all ways do research. Visit locations. Go to museums and do not forget your friend Mr. Google.

And lastly, yes do edit. Sparingly. Especially on your first few efforts. I do edit my work every day while writing but only to clean up sentences, so I do not have to labor over each one the following day.

Your story will have the final big edit once you have completed the work absolutely. By this time the story will have become so much a part of your life that your subconscious pretty much knows what parts you read of your own work really do belong or justifiably need to be taken out.

Oh, I could write a book about writing!

Chapter Eight

Cadavers and Such Things



I really wanted to be Michelangelo the artist when I was in my early twenties. I was quite certain I could catch the greatest artist who will ever live on planet earth and so I did what fanatics do. I drew continuously. I looked at artwork and I drew. I drew from anatomy books and I was never not in the life drawing class using reams of pages and arsenals of pencils.

And then, to follow in the footsteps of my master mentor I went to the graveyard and dug up cadavers. Well, actually I just went across the plaza at university and asked Dr. Love if I could go into the dissection room with the premed students and sketch.

Dr. Love was quite senior, with white hair and towered over people with his grand physique. He rather chuckled when I first went into his class and made my request. I would guess the passion in my eyes, body stance and overt anxiousness convinced him that I was seriously pursuing my passion and he allowed me access as long as I did not interrupt the students.

One day, nearing Thanksgiving recess I went into the dissection lab and the only person there was Dr. Love. He informed me that all the students had gone home for the holiday. He most assuredly saw that I was there on business, with my ever-drawing pad and handful of pencils. Dr. Love told me that I could go into the dissection lab alone and to not tell anyone that he had told me that the key to the door was up high on the third column in the lecture room.

Once in the room I immediately opened my pad and began to sketch the partially decomposed corpse next to the door. There were seven corpses in the dimly lit room who were arranged in two rows all on their backs, all splayed open at different intervals of decapitation.

I was Michelangelo after all came back to life in the 20th century and so I picked up a scalpel and began prying around on the inside of one of the

corpses. The bodies were thoroughly washed with formaldehyde and had been lying there for who knows how many weeks and the stench or more politely called the 'aroma' of the embalming mixture is one I have no trouble conjuring today.

I picked around, sliced around and then as the afternoon worked on, I had the feeling to look up from my work and saw the corps on the adjoining table lift its arm. And then a corpse lying several tables away lifted its head and turned to look at me. I was out of the room as soon as I could gather my supplies.

By this time Dr. Love had gone home for his Thanksgiving dinner and I felt the urgent need to leave the building altogether thinking that one or more of the corpses would be after me. I dutifully hung the key up on the post and left never to return.

From that time forward I would satisfy my quest of becoming Michelangelo II drawing from the realistic illustration books of artisans from antiquity who obviously had no issues being alone with cut up bodies and apparently far less a macabre imagination than myself.

Chapter Nine

Martha's Boy



To my young janitorial friends: The secret to being a topflight janitor is simply to show up for work on time. Have clean clothes you are wearing, combed hair, clean fingernails, and smile.

It does not get any simpler than this. Just show up. Be on time by being a few minutes early. Keep a neat/clean janitorial closet and always be UP! Bubbly in and of personality is good. Be a happy janitor.

I showed up early to clean the kitchen at the Auto Club upstairs break room. It was four thirty in the afternoon. Wendel was not in his usual seat drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. I was alone and began to wash off each table and each chair. I straightened the chairs and tables, swept, and washed the floor.

Martha was the office secretary second only in terms of power to the manager. And she was rigid. I had taken over the janitorial contract for this building as destiny would have it the very day the company needed to have a new service provider as their long time person had just quit due to health problems. I had only been cleaning one year as subcontractor for a friend, and I had just that week gotten my own business cards back from the printer that week and was diligent to hand them out.

The former janitor was much loved by the Auto Club and especially Martha who by default had to entrust her janitorial contractor with keys and overall security for the building including setting the alarm and trust for not having hired a thief.

Martha was stern, almost to the point of being terrifying using as few words necessary to direct me to my everyday tasks.

I had been cleaning the Auto Club for approximately two years and wondered just how much longer I would be allowed to clean until Martha opted out for another company. And then, a miracle happened!

As I was cleaning the kitchen that one day and up on the counter near the water faucet lay a full female engagement and wedding ring set.

I hurriedly took the ring set to Martha's desk where she sat stiff as always as a cardboard cut-out typing and or talking on the phone. "Martha," I said "I found these up in the kitchen by the faucet," and handed her the rings.

The earth shook and so did Martha. She smiled. She smiled brightly, her eyes shone brightly, and she said "Thank you, these are Stella's I am sure she is frantically looking for them."

For it was Stella who often met with Martha up in the break room and it was Stella who had taken off her ring set to wash her hands before the two women ate a dessert and talked on the subjects at hand.

From that moment onward I was by all measure the 'fair haired boy'. I was Martha's guy. I was hands off. No complaint by any other employee of that two-hundred-person Auto Club reaching Martha's desk about me or my duties came of any consequence to me in the negative. You were messing with Martha's boy and you were in the wrong if you dare attack him. Indeed, Martha had herself and husband three boys of their own all of whom were approximately my age. I am certain that I represented Martha's fourth son while Martha was at the office.

For the next eighteen years I was untouchable. True, there were always conflicts or issues in the office with so many people working to feed themselves and pay their monthly rent. Lots of tension; lots of undercurrent. I was often in the middle of these conflicts as I worked there many hours and I cleaned all the office and knew all the employees on a name basis. We were rather like a family you might say, and I was Martha's boy.

Chapter Ten

Wasps on Wasps



It was a full-on winters day and I had on my wool cap and my thick wool work coat. Janice, my property manager for a building I was cleaning on J Street, had called me and the owner requested that someone went up on the roof to see if there were any leaks or potential leaks from the transformers, valves and other building stationeries which might be in need of servicing.

I was that someone to go dutifully up on the roof to make my observations. I met Janice in the foyer of a three-story building which had a respectably attractive atrium with scattered around furnishings and towering palm plants extending up from their pottage to the sky lights above.

There was a shaft at the back of the building which was accessible through a small door. This is where I met Janice who was of the age forty, attractive, married and a thorough business minded person. We had worked the building from the time it was purchased several years earlier and due to the size of the building there was always something that needed attention not to mention my six days per week of cleaning the separate offices it held.

Janice opened the door to the shaft which was a small rectangle which clambered to the roof. There was a metal ladder attached to the wall and no light except that which was illuminated from the open door.

At the top of the shaft was a metal door with a broad hinge and a lock. I felt my way around the metal door as I had doon several times before and found the lock with which I inserted a key. After unlatching the key, I had to put my shoulder, head and full arm on the metal door and power it open with my full weight.

The visit this winter day to the roof was that the entire sky opened up its light upon myself who was ready to step out and begin my investigation. And yet this day I would not be stepping out and instead I jumped. Between my head, my shoulder and arm, stuck to the metal door was a wasp nest.

You could say I was lucky in that the wasps were in hibernation. That is, and until they were struck by the movement of their surface swinging up with the door itself and the brightness of the day. I pulled myself away from the metal door first seeing the wasp nest and then seeing the wasps beginning to awake and they were trembling with stiff joints as if they were drunken sailors emerging from a bar.

I should have just slid down the three-story ladder, but I panicked and jumped from the rungs of the ladder onto the roof. The wasps did not take long to straighten out their bodies and they achieved full flying mode within seconds. In a panic I began to run across the roof jumping over air conditioners, valves, hoses, and wires.

The wasps were on me like bees on honey and as I ran, they dive bombed me aiming for my face and head which were openly exposed. My inert muscle flexibility coupled with my panicked mind thought I could run fast and far enough that the wasps would relent.

I ran as far as the retaining wall looked down and decided that I had to take a stand. I took off my coat and began slashing at my evil demons while they made numerous strikes on all my body, again, mostly towards my eyes. In afterthought the entire scene of me swiping away at the avengers reminds me of those early black and white movies where the hero is up on a mountain precipice and up against the enemy who has to sword fight his way out of trouble.

The possibility of me losing my footing was real and I could easily have gone over the wall and died on the cement below. The stings were sharp and unrelenting, and I knew I had only one way of escape.

I ran back across the jagged landscape and to the shaft, kicked the wasp nest, jumped onto the ladder, and climbed and slid my way down back to the atrium all the while yelling “Janice wasps!”

I rolled out onto the floor and saw that several of the wasps had followed me. And yet when they came out of the shaft they became immediately disoriented and left off on the attack scattering up to the skylights and the overhanging palm branches.

Janice took me into the bathroom where the lighting was most intense and we spent the next twenty minutes pulling needles out of my hair, my scalp, off my eyebrows and my ears.

Janice asked me if I thought I needed a doctor and I said no. And I also asked her not to ask me to go back up on the roof. We parted company and Janice stayed in the building calling another contractor.

Later that night when I arrived home, I did a more thorough examination into the seams and undercoat of my jacket where I found several other stinger needles.

The following morning I wanted to tell my ever attentive baristas at the coffee house that I had been in a brawl with a wild man and although I had suffered a few blows as was evidence with the swelling of my face I had scored a knock-out. And yet the story of the wasp encounter seemed more of a unique adventure although very nightmarish to recall.

Chapter Eleven

Time's Up



My child died in the year 2007. No parent will say this in public, but their worst fear is that their own child would die while they themselves are living.

And in the recovery group which fortunately every hospital seems to have understood the need to provide for the public, the newcomers to the ‘family’ of suffering are in such shock and are so disoriented that often they just sit in their chairs weeping.

But the one thing you do not want to do is brag about the death of your loved one. For example, if someone should ask you how your child is getting along you must already have a pat answer, so the question does not devastate you on the spot.

Simply say “Oh, she/he is really out there flying high.”

This is rather funny actually and I when I tell the persons in one of my recovery groups or another, they really get a good laugh. And yet if the person is asking, and this person is a close friend then you must tell them the truth. I always say: (this happened...) and then I say “I am sorry” and invariably put my hand on one of their shoulders to balance them. For indeed they probably knew your child, or husband or wife and it is rather a shock to immediately understand again, that life is terminal.

And I did say not to brag. There is a person I know who lost his/her spouse. And I am not exaggerating to write that whenever you are talking to this person or no matter what subject you are speaking upon, he/she manages to work into the conversation some reference to their spouse dying. And the spouse died ten years earlier.

So I get the idea that you are using this incident of death to let people know that you're a feeling member of the human race and that by relating you passed through the tragedy of losing a loved one you want compassion

sent your way. But ten years? I have to relate in the last ten years I have probably known ten people who have died, and they were all ten or more significant losses to me and those who loved them.

So be discrete. You will find your information on this particular subject is probably no more of interest to many of those listening as what you had to eat for breakfast. Why cast your pearls of love on the ground so that someone can just grind them with indifference? Save your jewels of insight and suffering and the wisdom you have gained by passing through this time for times more suitable; more appropriate and sacred.

Chapter Twelve

Do Not Give Up Your Night Job



To my young janitor friends, the secret to my success as a janitorial is that I simply show up for work. I do this showing up every day, same time in the same buildings in clean clothing, combed hair, and trimmed fingernails.

Once you have applied yourself to play the role of janitor everything will fall into its exact space. There will be for your employment endless cans of trash stuffed into mostly circular aluminum or plastic, round cans at the foot of every desk but not in the same positions. And I know guessing where the can is in each cubicle sounds so very exciting that is until you have memorized their positions. Then are you really stuck with a load of monotony that gules on every night into the early morning. That is, unless you put stickers on the bottom of each can.

Only you will know the sticker is pasted there. Can you believe it, the person whose cubicle you are cleaning has not a clue that you have put the equivalent of an invasive ‘bug’ in their working space! Think of the possibilities; if you consider yourself a religious, spiritual person you could have a portion of a verse handwritten from the Gospels of Rumi. And if the sage himself is true of his word then the very placement of his wonderful words like an icon could raise the value of the person who sits at that table eight hours a day. The person would never know that his overall wellbeing was due to just a few words scribbled on a tag of paper.

But then what if the guy in the cubicle was someone everyone who worked in the office hated? You could just as easily write a few lines from a juicy horror part of a Stephen King novel and it would just sit there, upside down stuck to the bottom of the can, emanating bad vibrations. And then, early morning while all the employees were in the break room getting coffee and doughnuts someone would say “Hey, did you hear what happened to Mr. Hollister, head on crash, died instantaneously?” And no one would really shout it out loud but there would be this cosmic conscious

shout of joy and jubilation inside each person and just think what a grand day they would have once sat at their desks!

A janitor's life can be quite mellow as when you work late evenings there is often times not one other person in the building. You have your duties, your music, you can take a break whenever you want to just sit in the boss's chair and put your feet up on their desk. Or you can let your girlfriend go with you and choose which office officer's couch you are going to have sex on that night.

But I was never quite so lucky as to have a mellow time. Being from another planet is the same as being a person in another dimension. This is an existence of living in a parallel universe. And a parallel universe is like looking in a mirror. There you are. You and the guy mirrored back to you; another janitor named Mike who is also in the cleaning business.

I was introduced to the parallel universe concept by an older woman who was really into time and space travel. And she gave me a book to read about parallel universes. But I had no idea really what the book was trying to explain. And yet, because on occasion she did give me sex I told her that I was most probably Joe Namath a quarterback football player for the New York Jets and that I had taken the Jets to the Super Bowl games and won.

It was not long after telling her this that she cut off communication with me which left me with that great dilemma as to how I was going to get more sex. And yet alone, I do dream of having sex with a super model. The same supermodel every night whose name I did not know because she was walking a runway show and did not have a name tag on.

Nonetheless she seemed to care for me very much as she never turned down my advances of sexual gratification. But being more of a romantic than a perve I thought perhaps it would be better to move onto another person. I mean, being so beautiful she probably dated some really rich and famous guys. But what if one of those guys was Joe Namath and he somehow found out that I was having parallel sex with his girlfriend. It is like I would be so busted. Imagine Joe walking through the thin bubble that divides one universe from the other and he is coming up to me would

say “You are so stupid, you could never keep a supermodel satisfied in bed.”

God, I hate myself.

Chapter Thirteen

To Expectorate or Not to Expectorate?



Where were you when your phone was spit upon? Myself I was holding your desk phone receiver in my hand and contemplating if I should spit upon it.

And I also conjured a thought that at this very moment there might be thousands of janitors worldwide who were thinking the same thought.

All over the world China, Japan, Russia janitors were contemplating an action of revenge in the office they were cleaning. But not in the Congo where war has ravaged every piece of human property with bombings that make the idea of cleaning an office suite an out of bounds joke is ever there was one.

But in Brazil there in the city of Sao Paulo for example they have built for themselves extreme skyscrapers which house during working hours entire populaces. And if you think about this there can be no doubt that one of these janitorial persons would most definitely be Maria. And Maria would be dutifully cleaning Mr. Ramirez's penthouse office suite.

And as Maria had picked up Mr. Ramirez's phone to wipe it free of germs, there, as she looked out the grand expanse of penthouse window, far below to the ghetto there her man Diego was sound asleep, having intoxicated himself with whisky he had purchased with her money.

Diego had moved in as the economy was tight in the city and Diego had lost his job. But what could she say Diego was her man? Crazy she knew, Diego a good-for-nothing drunkard, fun yes, handsome, when his eyes were not red and cracked, his hair combed, an ironed shirt and cologne when he could afford it, her love for him total insanity.

And there Maria stood, the silent skies of her land keeping watch over her beloved city of birth. And fortunate she was indeed to have a job that earns real money; money for rent, money to take care of her Diego.

But Mr. Ramirez, who claimed to care for her; Maria could not remember when she last had a raise and he conveniently even forgot her Christmas bonus last year. Why him, she mused and not Maria? True, she was wearing the bright red smock allowed for the lead shift janitors while all the others had to wear those boring brown shitty looking shirts. And this promotion to the position of supervisor came only because she had walked in on Mr. Ramirez balancing on his knees, kissing his mistress who lay back upon his expensive leather couch, her dress up her panties down, Mr. Ramirez betrays his wife once again.

And in some distant hour as the sun of the east rose upon the populace Maria was in the arms of Diego, he still asleep and snoring but having woken for intimate embrace, that perfect time of the month when Diego did not have to wear a condom of which he complained hindered his enjoyment, this early morning he squirted with not effort, too early for Maria to come to a suitable climax and yet Maria felt safe and loved.

And of Mr. Ramirez whom that morning ran into his office to commandeer his phone to contact his stockbroker or threaten a contractor with legal action about a late payment talked directly into the receiver. Maria smiled as she melted into her man's arms knowing that in some macrobiotic way, she and Mr. Ramirez were exchanging bits of micro saliva.

Chapter Fourteen

Jessie's Delivery Service



Jessie and I met the same year we had both begun our janitorial services. I worked alone as a private contractor and he had his two cousins helping him and on large floor cleaning jobs he could hire as many as ten people.

We were shopping at a janitorial supply shop and asked about each other's business and exchanged business cards in the event he needed my specialty of window cleaning and I needed floor care for my buildings.

Jessie and I became quite close as we continued to call upon each other's services and in the big jobs that lasted several days we had plenty of time to talk, take breaks and go to lunch or have a beer after work.

Jessie was just then going through a divorce as was I and we cried on each other's shoulder about the burden of break up and the financial cost we encountered supporting our own house and that of our ex-wives.

It was Jessie's fortieth birthday party and his girlfriend set up a big birthday celebration using her parent's backyard to set up tents, chairs, tables, and portable barbeques.

A band was there with guitars and horns and an electric violin. Jessie and his entire family which included cousins and brothers and assorted children wives and uncles, and aunts had moved up to California from Peru many years ago. As groups go, the same race usually moves in its own dynamic and this includes friends as well which meant that I was the only Caucasian in the group by default.

Jessie loves telling stories which after a long verse about an adventure he had lived to survive and, when coming to the conclusion of such a story, I realized that each and every time he had cleverly lured me into a story that was in some way a simple fantasy tale.

And so, this fiftieth birthday celebration presented me with an opportunity to catch him in a twisted way of his own humor for which I had long dreamed of catching him in.

As always, I arrive early at parties where there is ample time to become acquainted with as many persons as possible and lend a helping hand to setting up the food or placing furniture in their respective places.

At some point in the evening all the guests lined up to get the food and find a suitable table to sit at. There was a chair at the end of a table with ten settings and so I sat down and began eating and continuing conversations with those around me.

About the time the desert was to be served one of the women asked “How did I become acquainted with Jessie?” As she asked this, I happened to catch Jessie’s eye who was sitting at an adjacent table and looking over to me to see if I was enjoying myself. I smiled broadly as he nodded his head in my direction, happy to see the outsider was having fun.

Not only was enjoying the food and the friendship I was on track to enjoy the telling of the tale of how Jessie the family man with children and a respectable job and home, and social status had come into contact.

This contact if you did not know yourself was that Jessie and met in prison in Columbia as we had both been incarcerated for drug running. As he spoke little English and I speaking little Spanish it was difficult to communicate with my cell mate at first but then as the months lingered on in our incarceration we developed a by language that included body movements, grunts, hand and arm gestures or drawings which we drew with our one and only food utensil, a spoon, on the dirt floor rife with fleas that jumped up when you lined out the figure of a man and mule and a pack of cocaine on its back.

I was surprising myself at how matter of fact and how smoothly I was making this story sound as real as true as I rarely can tell even the simplest one line joke without laughing out the punch line.

It was absolutely the best performance of my life. The entire nine other persons seated eyes were round with shock and their mouths had quit munching on their food and were agape with incredulousness. And as I

carried on my little tale of prison, escape and eventual entering into America, having snuck Jessie in the back of my pickup truck hidden among my furniture Jesse's friends kept looking around at Jessie who was reveling with his friends to distant to hear my night time bed story.

I left the party knowing I would hear from my friend Jessie about our faux adventures and exactly at eight o'clock the next morning I heard a stressed out voice I well recognized saying "What did you do to me?!"

Hell. it was a party. C'mon, loosen up.

Part II

Baby Cakes

It was a warm summer day in Sacramento, and I was the night manager of a fine apartment complex directly across from the state capitol where it is rumored there are many occult practitioners.

I was lying on my bed in my short pants, T-shirt, barefoot and feeling very sorry for myself. I had no girlfriend; I had just had my birthday day celebrated with a fourteen-hour workday and no birthday cards or cakes; no gifts and I came to the realization that no one cared about me.

But just then, the phone rang, and it was Jessie, and he was in the area of my apartment giving a floor cleaning bid and wanted to stop by and talk.

I left my room and came down the grand stairs of the apartment and there was Jessi, one of his helper boys and a Latina woman whose mind would give any horny guy a double take. Jessi gave me a hug and said "Happy Birthday Michael, I am a bit late but I wanted to give you this gift," he said while whirling his arm around and drawing to him this Latina woman, young, with bulging breasts, an adorable baby face and black eyes emphasized by a luscious smile. She was young but not underage and she just stood staring at me, longingly.

The apartment which I no longer manage, housed several state senatorial offices converted from apartments, and a very tense security system with

swivel cameras which some of them were trained at that moment on Jessie, myself, and friends.

I was speechless and I understood that this young woman was a prostitute and now a birthday gift for me.

So we all just stood there for a moment and Jessie not quite understanding my unresponsive attitude came over to me and took me off to the side saying “Michael, she doesn't speak a word of English but you are an artist, just draw her pictures of what you want her to do for you.”

But I shook my head ‘no’, It was too strange. The next morning Dalia the day secretary would be gleaning the backup footage of the building from the security cameras for the past twenty-four hours.

So, there was more silent standing and Jessie just shook his head and all three turned and walked back down the stairs, back to the van.

Days later I was at Jesse's house in the backyard throwing the ball for the dogs to chase and drinking beer. “Look Michael, I did not want to embarrass you. I had no idea....”

“No idea about what?” I inquired.

Jessie just laughed. “Next time I will bring you a boy.”

“Ugh.... noooooooooo.”

Chapter Fifteen

The Ghost and Mr. Bookout



...Sacramento, the city that does not support my art, has a rich history. And if you are talking dollars and cents you could be referring to a gentleman named John Augustus Sutter. You know, the gentleman who discovered gold in his small mining camp in the foothills at Coloma near to Sacramento, the city that does not support my art. This singular event of finding gold in an area virtually unknown to the world started a mass migration of wannabe Jeff Bezos from around the world. Literally as soon as the news leaked out that digging in the ground a few feet you as a prospector could become an instant millionaire just by harvesting a few nuggets of golden easter eggs. And if you were lucky, in some places the gold is simply lying there in the grass to be gobbled up like worms for the birds; or so the advertisers of shipping and excavating equipment advertised.

Imagine your brother is ignorant. And you are ignorant also, but you have the capacity for reading, read the above claims, and read out loud to your ignorant brother that by simply going to America, and the California foothills you could achieve wealth beyond your wildest dreams!

And so, you cashed in your farm in Europe, sold your house and all your farm equipment and bought passage to San Francisco, the city that was the stepping off point for endless fortune.

Imagine! Had you been in the second wave of prospectors, your boat would land in the San Francisco harbor. You would see literally thousands of boats of any and every size docked side by side. And from your boat you and your hapless brother would not even be able to see the wharf. And to get to land, the captain of your ship would tell you, that you and hapless would have to climb from boat deck to boat deck of all the prospectors who had got there before you to get to land.

This very real history would in time be referred to as: Gold Fever. A Hollywood movie script was drafted about this synchronicity of lust phenomenon and the Germanic actor had been selected to play the Germanic born John Sutter whose name was Gert Fröbe. But alas, as so many Hollywood projects are left to the wayside, this movie which had the working title of Gold Fingers was abandoned. (This is a joke.)

In that I often tell people that I was born in a small western Californian mining town, “Perhaps you have heard of it: San Francisco?” I relate. It has done a bit of growing since then. This is my attempt at humor.

But alas, encountering ghosts in your nightly cleaning schedule is not necessarily a comforting feeling.

It seems to be all normal and good when I contract out to clean buildings in downtown Sacramento that the building owners and some of the many year insider building employees inform me that I should not be alarmed when I encounter “The Ghost”.

This information they very much want to keep secret as they surely do not want the general public, and most especially the professional ghost seekers to be pestering them about coming in to their private building and filming or just sort of ‘haunting around’ to see if they can feel, hear or photograph an invisible former person.

And then there was Mike. Oh, my, your everyday typical telepathic janitor guy who on occasion has gone out of body just for fun is given the keys to your haunted building, the alarm codes, and the person who works late nights when not another soul is around (lots of spirits, though.).

I started my own ghost hunting mini documentary when I worked at AAA auto club. I would work some of my shifts late night and when I did, except for the upstairs 24 hour phone people, I would go about my duties on the first floor which had approximately sixty cubicles, foyer, eight small offices, restrooms, storage rooms and conference rooms. During a business day there would be employees, visitors and janitors and this number of persons totaled in the several hundreds.

I would sometimes not begin my shift until 11 o’clock and I would be weaving in and out of the cubicles of the office picking up trash and

dusting when I would encounter the day's crowd of people that had been there and were now gone to their homes. Their earlier presence was known to me by a clicking sound and as best as I can describe: shadows of light moving upright in the size and shape of people. The clicking sound was conversations these ghost personnel were engaged in. I could almost hear what the ghosts were saying but it was as if they were interdimensional and it was as if they were in another room, or a bubble, and I could almost see them and hear them through a semi fogged over glass wall.

Yes, this was a bit weird and I would tell the upstairs employees when we took a cigarette, coffee break together and they would sometimes come downstairs to witness what it was I was so certain of and yet none of them in that first year I was working there at the building did see or hear anything. And so, in time I just kept quiet about the often occurrences and encounters.

It was not until I began cleaning Victorian homes in the downtown area of Sacramento, that I began to have one on one encounters with ghosts. The downtown area's one-time central point was Sutter's Fort, a landmark where guided tours are given this day and you can observe John Sutter's offices and sleeping quarters as well as many other rooms such as a blacksmith shop and fortifications.

The fort was rather the cog of the sprouting city wheel and once gold fever had calmed down homes and offices were built around it and moved in all directions outward. Near the fort I estimate several hundred Victorian homes had been built including the grand Stanford and Crocker mansions.

And as the humans-built homes and moved in with their families they also brought with them the human condition. In other words, there would be instances of murders and suicides and children who had died by illness or accident and not lived out their expected life's longevity.

Why ghosts remain in locations they once lived lives as humans I have been told is that they have unfinished business. But the particulars of the spirit world could fill many volumes, and this is not the purpose of this chapter other than to report upon the meetings of the Ghosts and Mr. Bookout.

Part II

“Now don’t be afraid of the ghost if you happen to see or hear him,” said Michele the head secretary of a small insurance firm within walking distance of Sutter’s Fort.

I of course thought she was making jest (i.e. telling a funny). But Michele though lovely, was also stern and the level, implacable look upon her face informed me that this was not the beginning of the comedy hour.

After leaving her office that day, having picked up the keys to the building and the alarm code, and having signed a contract which included all the duties expected of me I wondered at the casualness that I was informed about the ghost. For up and into this time, yes, I had had encounters such as the ones written above but it seemed to me having watched the television series of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, that ghosts were special. A treat. Nothing to be feared, something worth writing a novel about and having at length the story formed into a television show.

But then I came to the curtain call and this would be the very first night I would clean this three storied, basement and attic handsome, haunted house. There is almost always the moment of truth when you drive up to the building you will clean in the night and you unload your vacuum and cleaning supplies and approach a darkened building and you fit in the key to the door and as you enter an alarm goes off and you have approximately forty five seconds to put in your alarm code and hope in retrospect that you know where the light switch is.

Well, now you lock yourself in the building and there you are a soldier ready to attack all forms of trash and grime and an opposing army of dust bunnies. But what of the ghost? In this house, as Michelle noted, the ghost is male. So, are you supposed to greet the ghost in any way? Should you have brought it a bag of candy and said ‘trick or treat?’ Really, what would you do? Would you shout out “Hello Mr. Ghost, I am Mike, just the lowly janitor, friend of Michelle the secretary and I am not here looking for any trouble.”

After a while of cleaning this Victorian mansion with creaky stairs and unique architecture and comfortable furnishings I had in my mind that the Ghost-dude was ok with me being there and he would be polite and keep his distance and not try to scare me jumping out of a closet or anything to frighten my psyche.

But then, I suppose, like any good spirit, Mr. Ghost just could not hold back. And after cleaning the mansion for several years, there was that night I was walking up the stairs from the first floor to the second when I reached the top of the stairs I saw down a dimly lit hallway a movement of what certainly was a body shape approximately five foot seven inches, it being very light and vibrating, hesitating in mid movement just long enough for me to see him and then he moved through a door, out of sight.

I am sure you can see he was hesitant about exposing himself to me by the way he waited years to reveal himself. And it is not as if he wanted to talk and chat, I mean, what do ghosts say, ya know? “Hi, my name's Chet, I am eternally tortured because I was murdered in the backyard of this house. It is my belief that I did not finish my life's course on earth. I wanted to go see god eventually but in the old fashion way, ya know, a sermon from the priest, people crying and saying nice things about you when you were living. So, look at me now will you, it is not like the neighbor who shot me needed to kill me. I mean, I only kissed his wife, we didn't actually do, you know what.”

“Man!” you might be thinking, this is more information than I really wanted. Shucks, I am just here to get the trash, ya know?”

But I was spared this subtle confrontation and for the next several more years, played my stereo loudly as I cleaned the office/home. I did see several more flashes of light, exclusively on the second floor, but I know Ghost resided in the third floor and attic and these were two places I did not clean, nor in over twenty five years of cleaning this mansion did I ever go up to those levels.

And then, it did happen that Mr. Ghost dude decided to rattle my nerves perhaps to see what I was willing to accept about him. And it was a rainy Sunday afternoon and I had finished cleaning the offices and due

to a back-muscle stress, I lay down on the first-floor carpet to let the spasms pass. When, lying there and looking at the ceiling while Bach played from my I-phone I heard the very distinctive sounds of someone walking directly overhead of where I was lying. And the person-ghost was not just passing through. He was walking in circles and back and forth knowing for certainty I was listening.

I popped up from my lying down position, pecked in my alarm code, took my cleaning equipment, and moved with grand rapidity out the front door.

That night at the beer garden I told My Guys what had happened. They scoffed. No, they said, it was some type of rodent or a cat. I assured them, no, it was most definitely the sound of shoes walking on the floor above me.

In the morning, as I lay in bed waking from my sleep I thought, “I have to go to that building again tonight. And it was winter, and cold and still raining hard for the season. Alas, dark building, no lights on when I arrive, turn the lights on, find the alarm, turn on the speaker of your I-phone, play Zeppelin or something.

And this is what I did, and then as I had proposed I ran up the stairs to the second-floor yelling “Ok, Ghost, come and get me!” It sounds silly now as I write this and yet this is exactly what I did. And for months I had no other encounter with Heri Ghost. But then, there are other buildings in Sacramento, and of the ones I clean, the Victorians, they mostly are haunted too.

Part III

The spirit world is fairly content not to involve itself with the living. That is, unless you do disturb them first.

Another secretary at another uptown Sacramento address, let us call her Teri, told me about the ghost in suite three. This Victorian I was contracted to clean had also been converted into offices and this time the ghost, yes, another formerly male person, now morphed into a wandering

spirit, had decided that he would stay put, in his former apartment, suite three.

I learned that this gentleman of thin air, had as many ghosts done, a sense of humor. He like others, moves things from one place to another just to let you know you are never alone. And this ghost had died at age 70 of natural causes and so challenged the idea that ghosts wait around in locations because they had unfinished business. The wonderment was, why would he just Hoover around on earth instead of flying off for something spectacular and watch the birth of a new galaxy or some other space phenomenon?

But there he resided in suite three as he had for over forty years while walking among the livings. “And most especially,” Teri added, do not move the soap dish or sponge on the right side of the kitchen sink; the people leasing the apartment are attorneys and they will share this with you as well. The ghost is quite particular.”

And well the attorneys did share this and also informed me that other objects in the kitchen would be moved when they came into the kitchen in the morning as drawers and cabinet doors would be opened and cups would be moved from the table to the sink or (Gary’s) watch when he that one time left it on the dining table had mysteriously moved to itself (Gary’s desk.”

Well there you go. Ghost hostess, Mike. Yes, in suite three, I would see things moved and cupboard doors ajar. And one day, one Saturday, as I cleaned the suite, I decided to have fun with the Ghost and I did move the soap and sponge from the right side of the sink to the left and left them there to see what would happen.

I finished cleaning that night at approximately five o’clock and made the excuse to return Sunday morning to retrieve a personal article that I had inadvertently left there Saturday. It was early morning and I knew that no person living would have been in the apartment since early Friday day as the senior attorney couple would always be there by themselves on Friday and mid-day travel to their home on the coast for the weekend.

And to my delight: ta-dah! Yes, El Ghost-o had moved the sponge and soap that lay naked in the soap tray back to the right side of the counter. Oh, the games people play!

Scary things happen in threes...

In the janitorial world you are blessed to meet many persons who are kind of in the back row of recognition. Like Jessie and I and the presenter of our third ghost encounter, David the nightwatchman.

Not all ghosts move through the walls of Victorian mansions. David was assigned to a mostly vacant large two-story shell of an office building which was partially furnished due to the company that occupied it was moving to a new location.

Poor David, skinny little, frail man in his seventies sitting alone in an empty cave that night when overhead in the room above where he was sitting, reading and drinking coffee something or someone was moving at top speed, like a dog he said, running from one end of the room to the other and back.

Well, being the watchman at hand, and with a flashlight for a weapon, skinny David crept up the stairs to see about the noise. The room above he saw was a large kitchen when he turned on the lights. There was the regular kitchen counter, sinks and refrigerator and several tables. There was also several chairs of varying size and he noticed one was on its side and the four wheeled supports were spinning.

Poor Dave, had only someone told him in advance that a woman had been murdered in that building only a few months before he might have taken a dog with him, or armed himself with an Ouija board in case the Dear wanted to come down for a quick session.

Well, poor skinny Dave put on his coat and grabbed his coffee thermos and mug and left the building. Later he called the home office to tell them he had to go to the emergency room for what he thought was his gallbladder. The person taking the call simply said "Did you see the ghost?" David was stunned when he was told he was the third person in three nights to leave his shift for an emergency run to the hospital.

Boo! To you, poor skinny Dave.

Chapter Sixteen

Supreme Beauty



There are many forms of beauty, many words which do describe that which is beautiful and then there is a beauty that defies narrative. Of course, you are thinking that I am referring to a lanky, strutting supermodel wearing the latest Lagerfeld designer costume. And yet, we will be referring to another type of exquisite and that would be raw trust the equal to a wife and a husband parting company assures they either would not be running into another person's arms.

I began volunteer reading in Billy's class via the Rotary clubs' charitable outreach. This was at Jonas Salk middle school which to date has taken on a more politically correct name.

My routine would be to sign in at the office, get my identity badge and my clipboard and arrive one half hour early to Billy's class, greet Billy and the assistant teachers and choose a large portfolio book with bright intriguing pictures featuring different countries and or historical events.

I would choose one of two couches (usually the one facing the front door) and plop down so that my students could immediately see I was there, their, sometimes, only father image ' Ah, I would think, how blessed I am!'

And when bells would stop ringing the children would have come in, put down their backpacks and come sit either side of me and I would read out loud in my native tongue, with great expression, body gestations, and modulate my voice for entertainment's sake.

At first, only the two children whom I was helping learn to read, usually two brothers, they would sit as I said on either side of me and listen intently. And then, the strange prayer answered from deep in your own conscious one that I could never have conjured in my own imagination, other children came to sit until the couch was full and even overflowed

with children sitting on the arms of the couch and lying on the top of the couch behind my back.

And the children, that one first day, the ones on either side of me lay their head on 'daddy's' shoulder, when by mystical grace, each other child lay their head on the child's shoulder next to them until it looked as though they were cascading dominos.

Billy allowed this story time to go on longer than was the regular class tempo, but then she indeed knew. All the assistants knew as well. None of them disturbed us and they kept in the other part of the class busing themselves taking furtive glances and smiling.

Daddy was in session with his children and we were not to be disturbed.