

The day was May 27, 2009, when Marcus Ryser was officially “around the bend.” He called me that day in a state of unmitigated panic and despair. It appeared that some sort of obscure mania was prickling at his mind, and while we communicated – a brief yet illuminating conversation – he disclosed to me his troubles through a mixture of stifled groans and uninterrupted dialogue, a contrast that had me severely perturbed.

When I answered his phone call, the first thing he said to was this: “I’ve got bad business going on in the brain. I can’t decipher whether the entity that I’m in contact with is benign or evil. They’ve been forwarding me cryptic information for *12 consecutive hours*. The transmissions are causing me great fatigue, yet I can’t tune it out. And my fear of all fears is that I may succumb to an eternal torpor.”

“Did you talk to God?” I asked him.

“I don’t know... Could be an oracle. Could be epilepsy.”

“Stay calm – I’ll be right over.”

It was cold that night, and the breeze was invasive. But the brisk air was the least of my worries. Marcus was withdrawing from reality: and soon he would be gone for good.

My mind was paralyzed by the revelation of Marcus going mad. He was a close friend – a friend that I would regret to lose. And despite the obvious symptoms that a man of a feeble and convivial nature could produce, I would’ve never suspected Marcus to suffer such a breakdown. Moreover, I couldn’t bear thought that his sanity had begun to debilitate, so instead I fancied Marcus as a “conductor of the séance”: an acceptable psychotic.

I had arrived at Marcus’ home. While until then my every action was carried out with the utmost prudence, I decided to bypass the formalities of front-door-knocking and doorbell-ringing. I became an intruder, committing a home invasion.

The front door was unlocked. I searched for him frantically. Where is he? I thought with despair. Shadows loomed; the rooms were ominous. Stillness. Seclusion.

This was unnatural.

“Marcus!” I hollered.

“Who goes there?” rasped a familiar voice.

I turned around and saw Marcus lying on the floor in a heap. Going over to him, I gingerly raised him up from the floor, placing him down on a nearby leather chair. Scrutinizing him, I noticed that his hair was matted down from having his head pressed against the floor. What was also glaringly unhealthy about his demeanor was the pallid skin and a pair of eyes that were as vacant as the eternal void. Not another moment later I understood what was going on-

Marcus was undergoing “religiosity.”

“What’s the first thing,” I said, “that pops into your mind, Marcus?”

And he answered back in a rapid sequence of words, like a machine spitting out a transcript: “Delphic Mysteries. Dancing Heretics. Draconian Nightmares. Symbolical Ceremonies. Before me now is the definitive heralding of Palestine and the Kingdom of Modernism. Judeo-Christian parables cross-referenced with monotheistic scriptures. The Gnostics; the material creator. But what

intrigues me the most is the Eye in the Sky; he can be quite evasive..."

Marcus concluded his verbal musings, and thereupon I gazed at him quizzically, a faint skepticism emerging from my inner conscience. Warily, I said to him, "Can you, humble Marcus, confirm your connection with what is, ostensibly, the divine providence? Was there an apparatus or spirit involved, such as a 'time machine,' or even, perhaps, the 'Paraclete'? Are you oscillating between separate matrices? Have you taken any narcotics in the past 24 hours?"

"I've been administered phenobarbital."

"Was it a potent dosage?"

"Yes; an ample quantity which was described as 'adequate' by my examiner. But the effects have been nullified by *you know who*." He twitched faintly, then added, "What's more troubling is the fact that the nixing of such a powerful sedative by an otherworldly potentiality is hardly the apotheosis of my experience."

It dawned on me then that, even if it were feasible to placate Marcus, it would require the taxing labors of blind indulgence and excruciating patience. But I wasn't intent on such a dangerous course. Marcus was in peril, and I to had treat it that way. However, it's never easy to tell someone they're crazy. I suddenly became nervous, engulfed by angst. Then I decided that perhaps I should keep on improvising:

"Who or whom," I said, "has been transmitting the information?"

This seemed to have caught Marcus off guard. "His surname eludes me. Allow me an interval of cogitation." Marcus bent his head, furrowed his brow. Tiny dots of perspiration were manifested on his neck and cheeks. A desolate expression took shape in his features: there were traces of frankness, disillusion, and mild discomfort, much like a man who's been jilted at the altar on the day of his wedding. His face was already tattered, which could be attributed to the lethargy he was experiencing; but those droopy eyes alone were perhaps the most convincing indicator of his haggard image. After more than enough time passed, Marcus finally said, "The man responsible for the transmissions is known by a title known as 'The Master of Enigma.'"

"What does he look like?" I asked gravely.

"He's a foppish man - very presentable."

"Go on."

"Well...his delivery of the content was performed in a rather - bawdy vein. It was quite perverse, appalling."

"Give me an example."

"Er... Ok." Marcus thought for a moment, then said, "At one point, he may have compared the descending of the Shekinah Glory to that of a 'sexual awakening,' as if Christ himself was aroused - in an erotic manner - by his own spiritual prestige and the abode of God."

"Goodness!" I blurted out in a display of contempt, committing a rare faux pas. But Marcus was heedless of my tactless conduct.

"Furthermore," Marcus went on, "the foppish man made it abundantly known that he expatiates his

sins at the 'Purgatory Palace'; he calls it a 'stable gig.' I suppose that, from what I can interpret, the confessing of his depravity is part of a comedy routine." He suddenly looked at me severely and, somewhat abruptly, said, "What do you make of this, Nicholas?"

An acute sense of dread poured over me. What was Marcus talking about? It all chalked up to nonsense, . It only strengthened my conviction .

Yet I continued to dither between alternatives. My instincts betrayed me. What would it take to make Marcus aware of his illness?

But then, quite unexpectedly, Marcus sprang up from and upended the leather chair, a spell of renegade terror having beset him for the moment. He ran into the next room, which served as a sanctuary for his philosophical dissections. I made chase for him - I couldn't let the madman out of my sight.

I entered the room, and before me was an arrangement of textbooks and literature of manifold persuasions. Marcus was retrieving a volume from a shelf on the far side of the room-

"What you got there?" I asked him uneasily.

"My exegesis," he responded. "Give it a once over" - and he handed it to me.

I opened the exegesis to a random page. Then I turned the page over. I repeated this process. Soon I was leafing through the exegesis. And it occurred to me right then: contents of the exegesis were all esoteric hyperbole. Not a single word could I understand. There was a plethora of sophisticated and theological terms, such as: vouchsafe, chthonic, reprobate, penultimate, rectitude, sapient, messianic, etc. It was all beyond my wits.

"I can't discern any of this," I said drearily.

"Why not?" Marcus was thoroughly disgruntled.

"It's pure prolix, Marcus."

"Pshaw," said Marcus as he snatched the exegesis from me. "You need more spiritual training." He consulted the exegesis, determined to sway my sympathy in his favor. A diminutive yet luminescent twinkle could be observed in his eyes, uncompromising in its quasi-shimmer. He glanced at me wretchedly, then said, "Answer me this, Nicholas: are you an authority of the Humbug Regime? It would break my heart if I were to uncover your dastardly motives."

"I'm on your side, Marcus." But I sensed that I was beginning to lose him.

Marcus grunted, evidently dissatisfied with me. But at least he was rational enough to grasp my deception. That was an encouraging sign. However, I wasn't sure what my next move would be. I felt like an impostor. There simply wasn't a healthy way to break the news of his condition.

"Marcus," I intoned, "What other unusual, autonomous phenomena have you been experiencing?"

"What do you mean by 'phenomena'?"

"Well, suppose that - and I'm just throwing this out there - there are things happening outside of your own awareness, such as catatonia. Or somnambulism, perhaps."

"*Somnambulism?*" Marcus found the implication of sleepwalking to be preposterous. "What are you

getting at, Nicholas?"

"There's no cause to be disconcerted, Marcus," I said to him coolly. "This is an informal inquiry. Think of me as a scientist: I'm merely extrapolating."

"I'm not making this stuff up, Nicholas. I've been inaugurated into a higher divinity via Infinite Wisdom." He pointed at my face, as if I had committed a heinous crime. "I've got a firm grasp on what I perceive, and you can't convince me otherwise."

"If you believe me to be throwing dust in your eyes, you are greatly mistaken, Marcus. I interpret your findings with the utmost sensitivity." - But what I said just now was a bold-faced lie. Marcus was a total nutbag; and now I was adamant in securing him the proper care.

"Have you not been listening to me, Nicholas? I know *secrets* - secrets that'll strip our world of all that is mundane."

"What do you mean?"

Marcus blinked. "You know... Paradise, Elysium, the Firmament. *We can undercut reality.*"

I was beginning to feel numb and desensitized. The walls were receding and the ceiling caved in. Weightlessness was abounding. This is what happens when you must hurt someone close to you: reality loses its verisimilitude. And as I continued to lapse into a stupefied remorse, I thought: Why did my friend - of all the people in the world! - lose his mind?

I presently said, "You're in a bad way, Marcus. I can help you."

Marcus was silent as he brooded over the developing quandary. And in that instant, there was a fundamental change: his presence was suddenly bereft of human qualities. Listless and alien were the descriptive terms that became the department of Marcus Ryser.

But then another change incurred. There was squirming and writhing. Bleakness was swaddling him like a blanket. It appeared that I had gotten through to him, but he seemed to be experiencing an "anti-catharsis."

Equilibrium: shattered.

Marcus spoke: "I can't believe it..."

I spoke back: "Don't believe *what?*"

"You're a..."

"I'm - what?"

"You're the Quotidian Monster! You were masquerading!"

"I don't know what that means, Marcus!"

"Animus! Animus!" Marcus' head snapped back violently. He clutched his right eye in a frenzy of disturbing apprehension. "Those are the sirens I hear!"

"Get a grip on yourself, Marcus!"

Still heedless of his crumbling sanity (somehow), Marcus made a break for the hallway. I promptly followed after him.

In mid-retreat, he yelled at me: "I had an intuition that you were an agent of the Evil Creator!" He turned the corner towards a remote section of his home.

"Marcus!" I shouted back, turning the same corner.

"Godless heathen!"

"Marcus!"

"Don't make me hurt myself!" He entered a bedroom at the far end of the hallway...

...I then, too, entered the bedroom. "Marcus!"

And he jumped out the window.

A second later I heard a dull thud from outside. The sound itself had a macabre effect. Horror began to set in. I was weak and scared. The shock wouldn't go away, so I waited it out. Time crept along. Then, after mustering up enough courage, I inched my way over to the window. And when I peered out of the aperture, and saw Marcus, inert, unstirred, sprawled out on the ground like a sack of wasteful flesh, I nearly lost it. However, I was able suppress most of my erratic emotions, albeit with great struggle.

Panic has its catalysts. Things can go wrong at any moment. God inflicted harm on my dear friend - where's the predestination in that? But I shouldn't be mad at the Deity. Some of us are more vulnerable to condemnation than others.

The good news was that Marcus survived the fall, but not without an aftermath. He's got a stigma now: mental illness. He would go through life with obstacles too daunting to overcome. There would even be a pivotal juncture in his life where the mounting pressures of psychological disorder and excess medication would nearly push over the edge and induce him to "take his own life."

Don't worry. He's still alive.


I vividly remember the moment when the paramedics arrived. There I was, demoralized and mad at universe for manufacturing such a travesty, a distortion of all that was, at one point, unadulterated. I could barely look at Marcus. I cried and moped.

And as they were wheeling Marcus away on a stretcher, the little wretch turned to me and said, "Nicholas, Nicholas." He looked me square in the eyes. "Promise me that you will contact the League of Emissaries and inform them that I am indisposed, for otherwise I would gladly relay the information that the Gods have conjured for my own benefit."

"Absolutely, Marcus. Absolutely."

From that moment on my poignant thoughts would never cease.

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