

A Little Bit Of Peace And Quiet

By Eugene Boria

Jackie Ruiz just *loved* to whistle.

He couldn't carry a tune, and his musical selection was limited, so he frequently repeated the same snatch of melody over and over. No one but Jackie himself ever knew what the seemingly random notes were supposed to represent, and no one within hearing distance would have been surprised to know that even he was not altogether sure. As he lackadaisically swung his mop back and forth across the highly buffed floor in 9 West, he was currently butchering what might have been the chorus of a Latin classic, Ruben Blades' "Pedro Navaja" – then again, it might have been a Mediterranean polka, for all anyone knew.

Still, Jackie whistled unabashedly, especially when he worked in 9 West, which he still referred to as "The Circus," a term that had lost its popularity among most of the employees at Haven Memorial Hospital. 9 West was of the low-security Psych Ward in Haven, where the patients were largely voluntary admissions. Another term that was rarely heard, especially by the patients, was "looney", which is how Jackie classified the patients in this ward. To him, there was a definite difference between the "loonies" in 9 West and the "retards" in 9 East, who were born the way they were. Jackie felt sorry for those poor, drooling mongoloids. They really couldn't help their conditions. But the loonies were another matter altogether. Jackie felt he could see through all of the psychological bullshit that the doctors and staff spouted around here all of the time. Regardless of all the fancy names for all of the disorders and syndromes, most of which Jackie couldn't pronounce, he knew why these people were here. They were here for the free ride. The three square meals, the constant attention and, of course, the drugs. In Jackie's considered opinion these were weak willed people, too soft to deal with the real world, so they came here to get doped up. They were no better than the crack heads that wandered the streets of his neighborhood looking for handouts.

And so, Jackie whistled. He would have called it passive opposition, if he'd been familiar with the term. He considered it simply a mild form of payback; just a little adversity to bring these people back into the real world, to remind them that while they spent their days in a drugged out stupor, other people, himself for instance, had to struggle for their daily bread. Sometimes the piercing, high pitched wail would bring some of the loonies out of the haze for a minute; dazed, befuddled, swatting at unseen insects buzzing around their ears. Some would hardly stir, but they'd absently cover their ears and squeeze their eyes shut. Some would actually cry out in outrage. Jackie would

glance into whatever room he was passing, gauge the patient's reaction to the cacophony, then go on his merry way, mildly grinning to himself. Mission accomplished.

This morning, though, the orderly wasn't getting much of a rise out of the residents of the ward. Every door was closed, and the few whose windows he glanced into revealed patients sleeping the sleep of the innocent. After the ninth door, his brow furrowed a little. By this time, there were usually three or four loonies up and about, shuffling towards the common room to begin their regular regimen of dreadful daytime TV, or whining about their breakfast, or some other nonsense. Sally, the night nurse had stepped out to smoke a cigarette. Her shift was just about to end anyway. Jackie mentally shrugged his shoulders. He was just about finished as well. He went back to his mopping, moving just past Old Man Ohlman's room, taking a deep breath to continue his horrible rendition of "Pedro Navaja", when a voice suddenly startled him out of his thoughts.

"Is this how you want to spend your last moments?" asked Elmer Ohlman, "Riling up a bunch of loonies?"

"Wha!" Jackie jumped, instantly angry. Like most practical jokers, he hated to be snuck up on. He whirled around to face the small old man, who did not flinch away. "What the fu..." he began, but he caught himself. You really couldn't get away with being rude to the patients these days and you never knew who might be around the corner or behind a door. If anyone overheard, he could be reported and summarily fired. "Mr. Ohlman," he corrected himself, showing just a hint of annoyance but forcing himself to calm down and even to smile a little. "What are you doing out of bed so early? Sheesh, I nearly jumped out of my skin!" He broadened his smile to show that all was forgiven, All was right, and he got a good look at the little old man for the first time. He realized that he had hardly ever spoken to Elmer Ohlman other than to say "good morning" or "good night". The 87-year-old man could usually only be found in one of two states. Either he was riding high on so much Thorazine that he had to be fed, changed and cleaned; or he was doing god-knew-what out on the roof, in the green house/garden that the hospital had built a few years ago. Jackie had never been up there himself. He'd actually never spoken to anyone who had. Twice a week, some nurse or other would clean the old geezer up and help him into the elevator to the roof, and then the nurse would come back down alone. They'd bring him back down in two or three hours and he usually had to be helped into bed. Jackie had seen the grimaces of pain on Ohlman's face on those

return trips and it he would silently thank God that, for him, arthritis and other such old-timer ailments were still pretty far in the future.

Now the old man was standing in front of him in blue and white hospital issue pajamas, at least two sized to big, smiling broadly and openly, eye's shining a little. There was no sign of pain on his wrinkled and pinched face. He looked like a child with a secret who couldn't wait for someone to try to pry it out of him.

"This isn't early, son," Ohlman replied with mock gravity, "Most people are already on their way to work by now. It wouldn't do to waste such a lovely day, don't you think?"

"Yeah, It's nice outside" Jackie replied, perfunctorily, already bored and ready to get back to work. For a hospital employee with several years of experience, Jackie Ruiz had very little patience for patients, and he thought he could see the "When I Was Your Age" soliloquy coming. It was time to run. Then he remembered the old man's opening statement, the words "final moments" finally registering in his head.

"Hey," He began, and turned. He saw that the old man had made no attempt to go back to bed, or anywhere. He stood in the doorway without the aid of a nurse or a cane, with a slightly bemused look on his face, as if he'd been waiting for Jackie to ask the next question, "What're you talking about, 'last moments'?"

Ohlman shrugged, waving his hand dismissively, and stepped further into the corridor. "I only meant that we never know when our last moments are at hand," He began to walk toward the main community room while continuing to talk over his shoulder, "They say that Jesus will return like a thief in the night and that might be, but death is bolder than that, I think. Death'll snatch you away in broad daylight, in crowds or alone, like a clever cutpurse instead of a cowardly thief," He stopped for a moment and regarded Jackie earnestly, "That being the case, I just thought you might want to be up to nobler pursuits when death comes sneaking up on you. Something better than annoying the loonies. You wouldn't want to be snatched up and miss the bus to heaven, would you?" He chuckled lightly.

Jackie, who had been following Ohlman down the corridor without even realizing it, said, "Well, I don't know about that, Mr. Ohlman, but you know we don't like to use the word 'loony' around here." They had come to a stop in front of the large bay window with Ohlman looking out onto the street and Jackie watching the back of his head. "Besides,"

he continued, "I think I'm okay enough with God that he might overlook a little bad whistling!" He started to chuckle a little himself and Ohlman turned to face him.

"Really!" Ohlman exclaimed, a look of genuine surprise on his face. "I don't think Stacy Williams would agree with that assessment."

The entire world came to a complete halt for Jackie. His grip on the mop tightened painfully and his breath caught in his throat.

"Wh...what did you say?" Jackie's thoughts were racing in circles all through his brain, careening off of the walls in his head and colliding with one another. "What?"

"Stacy Williams," Ohlman repeated, nodding agreeably, "You remember her, don't you?"

Jackie was about to reply, but he found himself incapable of forming coherent speech. He regarded the old man with a fearful and suspicious glare. Of course he remembered Stacy Williams. When they were sixteen years old, he'd cajoled her relentlessly until she agreed to come to his house while his parents were at work. They'd been making out, and he kept pushing the envelope, moving his hands, touching, exploring. He mistook her head shaking back and forth to be passion. He took her, on that summer day, and was honestly, deeply confused when she burst into tears when he was done. His older brothers had always told him that girls liked to play hard to get so you wouldn't think they were sluts, although that's just what most of them were. It took Jackie a long time to realize that he'd raped a girl, and that was why she never spoke to him again, or looked him in the eye when they passed each other in the hall at school. The realization had filled him with shame at the time, but he'd since come to terms with it. Apparently she was no worse for wear. She got pregnant a few years later and, last he heard, she was married and had a whole litter of kids. Still, the image of her tearfully buttoning up her shirt, her long brown hair spilling over her face so that he couldn't see the tears, only hear them, haunted him from time to time. Especially whenever conversations turned to matters of heaven and hell.

He'd never spoken of that day to anyone. Not his friends, not the girlfriends that came later, no one. So how did this old man pull that name right out of his ass just to shake it in Jackie's face now?

"What is this?" He asked, coldly, quickly glancing from side to side to make sure they were not being overheard. There was no one else in the corridor and all of the

doors were closed. "What are you, related to Stacy somehow? What did she tell you?" He shot the questions at Ohlman while advancing menacingly, hoping to unbalance the old man, to intimidate the truth out of him. The small, wrinkled man did not shrink back. In fact, the expression of delighted amusement never left his face.

"Never had the pleasure of meeting the girl, myself." He replied, "I know her the same way I know Jared..." he paused, squinting up in the air, "what was his last name?"

As if pushed, Jackie backed away from the old man, eyes wide. He could not believe this. He knew exactly whom Ohlman was talking about, although he'd forgotten Jared's last name he'd never forgotten the nine year old whose arm he'd broken when he was eighteen.

It was an accident, of course; Jackie and his friends had only been messing with the little kids in the neighborhood, good naturedly terrorizing them, like the bigger kids had done to him when *he* was little. This kid, Jared, was one of those loud mouth kids that cried "uncle" easily enough when you had them in hand, but would shout curses at you while they were running away. Jackie had caught up to him three times and was tiring of the stupid game. He'd warned the kid, "You mouth off one more time, I'm gonna brake your fuckin' arm." And the boy had tearfully agreed to behave, but he'd done the same the last two times Jackie had caught him. So, to prove his point, Jackie had twisted his scrawny arm behind his back. Jared cried out in pain and fear, which Jackie liked just fine. He whispered into the boy's ear, "You got me, dipshit?"

And the unfortunate kid had responded by shouting in that penetrating, nine-year-old voice, for all to hear, "Yeah! You fuckin' ape! I got you!"

Jackie was thunderstruck. The kid had the nerve to crack wise while his arm was about to be twisted off like a grape from the vine. The other kids were laughing now, pointing at Jackie and admiring the little kid's balls. In an instant, Jackie was gripped by rage and embarrassment (a lethal combination, as any teenager can tell you). He pushed the kid's arm violently upward, intending to teach the little loudmouth a lesson, and the boy's scream rose in volume and intensity. It continued to rise, octave by octave, until everyone there clearly heard a loud *snap*. Then the silence was deafening. Jared's eyes took on a glassy, far-away look and when Jackie released his arm, it fell limply to his side. Tears streamed down his dirty face, creating streaks of clean. Someone quietly said, "Oh shit," and, one by one, kids started running off in separate directions. Jackie

himself began to back away from the softly whimpering boy, shaking his head slowly. He couldn't comprehend the full significance of that loud *snap*. What was large in his mind was the concept of *Trouble*. He was *In Trouble*. Jackie turned and ran home, running right past his mother without saying a word. He locked himself in his room and he was still there when the cops came for him.

"Mr. Ruiz..." Ohlman's voice woke Jackie from his reverie, "You still with me, buddy?"

"Yeah." Jackie replied. *What the fuck is your game, old man*, he thought to himself. *What do you want from me, and how do you know these things?* "Mr. Ohlman, I don't know how you know these people, but..."

"Oh," Ohlman interrupted, "You told me. I read them in your head."

Ah, Jackie thought, greatly relieved. He suddenly remembered with whom he was speaking. Elmer Ohlman was one of the looneys, a hair's breadth away from thinking he was Jesus. Looneys talked crazy shit all of the time. Especially this particular brand of looney, an old man who spent most of the week doped up on so much Thorazine and the rest by himself in a garden no one had ever seen. You never knew what one of these crazy fucks was going to say when they woke up,

Ohlman watched Jackie keenly, as if following the flow of his thoughts. Then he patted Jackie's arm lightly as he walked past him, towards the window that faced Cemetery Row. Oh, Mr. Ruiz," he continued, shaking his head, "you've obviously never heard of Occam's Razor."

Jackie, of course, had absolutely no idea what the old man has talking about. It sounded like the science fiction crap that his friend Eddie was always talking about. On some level, though, he had to admit that his presumption was illogical. The old man's words were too specific. No one but Jackie himself was associated with those too names, he had never told anyone about Stacy Williams and Jared Brown.

"Ah!" The old man exclaimed, clearly delighted, "Yes! The boy's last name was Brown. Isn't memory a strange and wonderful thing?"

Shit! Jackie thought. *Stop that!*

"No." Ohlman said quietly.

Fuck you! Jackie thought. He was beginning to step backwards.

“Watch your language, son,” said Ohlman.

You can't read my fucking mind! Jackie shouted in his head.

“Yes. I can,” said Ohlman sternly. “Now just calm down and listen to me.” His tone of voice had taken on an elementary school teacher’s authoritarian quality that Jackie couldn’t help but respond to. “We don’t have a lot of time.”

“What do you want with me?” Jackie said, a little loudly, although no one responded to his outburst. They were still seemingly all alone in the ward. He was becoming deeply frightened at the thought of all of his darkest secrets being laid out for this old man’s entertainment.

“Don’t flatter yourself, son.” Ohlman said, almost kindly, “We’re not talking about Hitler or Jeffrey Dahmer here. The skeletons in your closet aren’t much bigger or meaner than anyone else’s.” He sat down on the ledge of one of the big bay windows and patted the cushions next to him. “Now sit. We really need to talk now.”

“How’re you doing this?” Jackie asked, “What are you, like a mutant or something?” He made no move to sit. Right now, he didn’t even want to be in the same room with this old man.

Ohlman laughed easily, “No, son, this isn’t the X-men. I’m not going to invite you to join some kind of mutant strike force or something.” Ohlman stood up and began to pace in front of the window slowly. “Let me explain, Jackie. Maybe that will make this easier for you to swallow,” He continued, “When I hit sixty, I discovered I could read minds. I wasn’t struck by a meteor, or bitten by a radioactive spider, or part of some government experiment. Nothing so cut and dry. I just woke up one morning next to my last ex-wife and just like that”, he snapped his fingers, “I knew every detail about the young parking attendant she’d fucked the night before. That’s how it started. No bright lights, no dramatic music, just me and an adulterous bitch.” He chuckled ruefully, “Then, when I called my lawyer to get the divorce proceedings started, I simply knew that the sonofabitch was grossly overbilling my hours, and that he thought I was a gullible old fool. I also learned that he had a pretty extensive collection of kiddie porn in his computer at home and he was terrified that the F.B.I. was monitoring his Web searches. There was a whole bunch of other stuff that popped out of his head when I mentioned adultery. Apparently, he was no stranger to that subject either. And you know, it wasn’t so much that I read his mind, more like I read his guilt and his fear. It’s like I was given a

key to all of the closets and basements, the dark places of the mind. To this day I never see graduations or childbirths, wonderful holidays or vacations, major accomplishments, or good deeds. I've never seen a mental replay of a couple making sweet love, though I have seen lot of people fucking, if you get the distinction". Jackie nodded to signify that he did, indeed, see the difference.

"I see hatred, in its many varied forms; I see fear, prejudice, everything sordid, everything dark. I also discovered something else pretty early on...

"I couldn't turn it off."

Ohlman sat down then, and for the first time, Jackie thought he saw the grin on the old man's face slip just a little. For that moment, Ohlman looked every bit of his eighty-seven years. "I couldn't control it, and its range was getting wider. I started getting these images from neighbors across the hall, then from neighbors down the block, then people passing by on the street. By the time I checked myself into this wonderful establishment, my radius was about a half a mile. Picture that, Jackie. I was privy to every hateful, fearful, shitty thought, within a half mile radius." He ran a thin, liver-spotted hand through the wisps of hair that remained on his head, "Now, don't get me wrong, I was no choir boy myself. There were more than a few skeletons in my own closet by the time I hit sixty, but no one is prepared for the sheer weight of so much sin, so much negativity..."

Jackie, with dawning fascination, interrupted, "So that's why you're here, zoned to the gills all the time." although he was still afraid (and, truth be told, he felt a little violated), Jackie had to concede that the old man's predicament was rapidly placing him in the "retard" category; people who couldn't help their ailment. He finally relaxed enough to sit next to the old man, on the ledge of the bay window with his back resting on the warm glass. Still, he felt a nagging suspicion, like he was putting together a puzzle, but there were still missing pieces.

"So why are you awake now?" he asked, although what he really wanted to know was how any of this involved him. He was beginning to feel like a man drowning in a seas of information that was way over his head.

"I'll get to that, my boy," was Ohlman's reply. "Let me finish my narrative. I've never told the whole story before, to anyone," (and, again, Jackie wondered to himself what he'd done to deserve this distinction). "I've learned some amazing things over the

last few years,” Ohlman went on, “At least until all of the many sins of my neighbors became impossible to ignore and I had to check in here. You would be absolutely amazed at what secrets can be unlocked just surfing the web! The Internet is the greatest information-gathering tool known to man. Do you surf?” he asked, raising an eyebrow. Jackie nodded again, guardedly. “Not only did I find information about my peculiar gift, or curse, as I came to regard it, but all manner of fascinating things. Do you know what a necromancer is?” When Jackie shook his head, Ohlman waved it off, “No, you wouldn’t would you? That would be your friend Eddie, he’d know. This is a classic case of a deficient educational system. Of course you don’t know what I’m talking about! I’m fairly certain that you’ve never studied the arts of Vodoun, or read the writings of various Bocor as they detail the finer points of the worship of Nzambi!” as an aside, he added, “They are notoriously guarded, the Bocor are, but I managed to extract so *much* information from them...” Ohlman paused, seeing the look of incomprehension on Jackie’s face, and explained, “Bocor are Vodoun priests; practitioners of dark arts. You know it as voodoo.”

“Ok, Mr. Ohlman,” Jackie interjected, rising to his feet. “I’m sorry, but I don’t understand. What does this have to do with me? I don’t know anything about no voodoo or Bocor, or any of that stuff.”

“This has a lot to do with you, Jackie,” Ohlman replied, “The times they are ‘a changing, my boy, and you’re at the ground floor. Haven’t you noticed anything strange about this particular morning?”

Jackie looked around at the empty room and finally gave voice to what had been gnawing at the back of his head all morning, “Yeah”, he said after only a little thought, “It’s too quiet. Where is everybody?” Throughout his dreadful rendition the Ruben Blades’ classic song, not one patient had complained. No nurses had peeked their heads over counters to tell him to cut it out. Still, all this time, he and Ohlman were the only ones up and around. “What’s up with the residents? Why aren’t they up yet?”

“Well,” Ohlman answered, “As you know, business has been slow around here lately. There are only eleven other patients beside me. They’re all still in their rooms, thanks to a little extra help I was able to procure for them.” He smiled slyly at Jackie’s shocked expression, “Oh yes, Jackie,” he said with a laugh, “Over the years I have managed to make some connections while I was here, and access to a person’s darkest secrets provides excellent fodder for blackmail. That’s how I gained such...access. In

fact, that's how I got my magic garden. Do you remember that TV show?" he asked, suddenly. Again, Jackie just shook his head.

"*This is the garden of make-believe,*" Ohlman began to sing, in a sweet, almost girlish little voice that was somehow deeply frightening. For the first time Jackie began to wonder if he wouldn't be safer somewhere else. He stared at Elmer Ohlman as if seeing him for the very first time, as the old man clapped his hands lightly, keeping time with his little song. Jackie wondered how he was going to get home

"*The magical garden of make-believe,*" Ohlman sang and burst into a fit of giggles. "I haven't spent all of my time here under medication, you know. My studies have continued, especially in the areas of botany and druidic horticulture. Anyway," he said, when he'd regained his composure, "The patients are fine. It's the staff you should be asking about."

And indeed, Jackie realized that no one on the morning shift had arrived yet. Sally Stevens, the nurse on the late shift that had stepped out for a cigarette had not returned. No other orderly, staff member, or doctor had peeked in to check on the patients. Jackie hadn't heard a page over the loudspeakers since he'd started mopping this ward. Even his supervisor hadn't been in to check on him.

"Let me answer your next question." Ohlman said, before Jackie even opened his mouth, "Nurse Stevens went outside to smoke. She's not coming back, I'm afraid. The entire afternoon shift is still out there on the streets. Some of them might make it. Most won't."

Jackie, increasingly frightened, abandoned all notions of decorum and company policy, asked, "What the fuck are you talking about? What's going on out there?" He turned, intending to glance briefly out of the bay window that overlooked the street below, with the vast expanse of cemetery row across the wide street. Instead of a brief glance, he found himself transfixed.

Jackie's eye weren't very good, he routinely refused to wear his glasses, but from his vantage point he was pretty sure he saw that there were mobs of people wandering throughout the cemetery and in the streets. Traffic was backed up as far as he could see, with many cars pulled over diagonally, some with doors wide open, as if the drivers had left them and run off. He couldn't hear anything because of the thickness of the glass and the distance from the street, but he imagined there were cars horns honking

frantically. Here and there he spied people running through the crowd, and in several places, he saw small mobs of people converge on smaller groups or single runners. It almost looked like they were fighting, but he couldn't be sure.

"What the fuck is happening out there?" Jackie repeated, although he wasn't sure he wanted to hear the answer. He was pretty much at the end of his patience. Soon it would be time to boogie, to make himself scarce. Time to run back to his room until the cops came.

"Well, earlier this morning," Ohlman explained, returning to his place at the window seat and sitting down, "A man had a massive heart attack and died while waiting for a bus. Do you want to know why?"

"Mr. Ohlman, I..."

Ohlman went on as if he hadn't asked a question, "The man died as a result of witnessing the birth of a new age. He just couldn't take it. His heart just burst. He was the first recruit in a new kind of army. Today, a new age began. It's dead time."

Still transfixed by the scene below, Jackie asked, "C'mon, Mr. Ohlman, man, you're not making any sense. I don't know what you're talking about man."

"No! Of course you don't, my boy!" Ohlman clapped Jackie on the back, and the orderly almost recoiled from that touch. "I know it's very confusing for you, but it's very important to me that you understand your role in all of this. It's very important."

That's it, thought Jackie, This motherfucker's crazy and I am getting the fuck out of here, Jackie thought, and immediately regretted the thought. Ohlman's grin turned into a grimace, not of pain, but of fury and madness that was barely contained. That face was a dam that was about to burst and Jackie thought that it wouldn't be water that poured out of that face in torrents, but venom and bile, sludge laden with dead things.

"Yes, Jackie," Ohlman said, bringing his face closer to Jackie's. Although Jackie easily outweighed the old man by at least sixty pounds and practically towered over him, he found himself straining to lean back, away from that awful face and all that was hidden behind it. "I'm afraid I've become a little..." he paused and looking up at the ceiling in search of the proper word, "unhinged, shall we say. But can you blame me, really? For the past twenty seven or so years, I've been mired in a mental cesspool, surrounded by this deafening roar of shit with no way to lower the volume except by

keeping myself knocked out on drugs. All I need is a little peace and quiet. Is that too much to ask?" he was standing right in front of Jackie now. Jackie could smell the familiar smells of the aged, urine and stale breath.

"Oh, I think," Ohlman, said, just above a whisper, "My fellow residents are starting to arise."

Jackie turned his head towards the rooms. Although he thought he heard some kind of shuffling, like a sack of laundry being dragged across the floor, none of the doors moved. *Fuck this.* He thought, no longer caring if the old man could read minds or not. No longer caring about the other residents or the staff or his friend Eddie who was probably still down in the morgue or any of the other friends and acquaintances he'd accumulated over the years. It was time to go. *And fuck you too, Ohlman, you crazy fuck.* And he had every intention of running out on the entire situation when Ohlman whispered, almost in his ear (which was patently impossible since Jackie had at least a foot on the guy),

"*Jackie*"

When Jackie turned, Ohlman was standing there, one hand up to his lips, palm up. He blew sharply into his hand and suddenly Jackie was blind. His eyes shut reflectively and burned. He shouted, outraged, and staggered back into a wall.

"What the fuck!" He rubbed his eyes furiously, and found he wasn't blind after all. The old fuck had blown powder into his face! He looked down and found the front of his blue coverall was covered in a fine white powder. His first reaction was to pull the old man's arms out of their sockets, like a kid pulling the wings off of a fly. He thought better of it, though, when he heard crashing noises from one of the rooms, like a tray table being knocked over. Ohlman was watching him with amused interest.

Fuck it, he thought, and meant to run. Instead, he stood exactly where he was, completely unmoving. His brain issued the "run" command to his legs, but apparently, his legs were not taking requests at the moment. They felt like they had become glued to the floor. No, he realized, it wasn't just his legs, his body was simply not responding to any of his commands. He couldn't even strain, he could only think, blink, and be horrified.

Ohlman stepped over and took his hand like a child. "Come." He said simply, and suddenly, Jackie found his body responding to the command walking stiffly beside the

old man. He tried to cry out; to scream in outrage but what escaped from his lips was little more than a dry wheeze. Ohlman guided him to a chair, said, "sit," And Jackie did.

"Now that I have your undivided attention, I can tell you about the important part I need you to play in all of this. I'm sorry if I've dominated our conversation." Ohlman shook his head apologetically. Jackie blinked. "It's been so long since I've engaged in simple dialogue, you understand. And besides, I must admit I was stalling for time," His smile returned, broader than ever, and he winked roguishly and his prisoner, "I had to keep you here while my former companions completed their...uh, change."

Jackie blinked again. He hardly felt the single tear that rolled down the side of his face. Ohlman had positioned him so that he could see the patient doors, and now he saw some of them shudder a little, just a little. The old man continued to speak offhandedly, as several of the patients room doors slowly swung open.

"One of the many documents I came across in my research is what has become known as The Satanic Bible." He snorted, "Don't think I don't know how corny that sounds but it is a real document. It was written by Anton Szandor LaVey, who..." He paused, glancing over his shoulders at the figures that were beginning to step out of the patient's rooms. They came shuffling slowly, some in pajamas, some naked. Ohlman returned his attention to Jackie, clearing his throat, "Well, never mind about him for now. Let's just say his book had some interesting things to say about human sacrifice."

Jackie's eyes, the only parts of his body still under his control, darted back and forth. He saw one of the patients, Mrs. Petersen, who was missing a leg, crawling on her stomach, elbows sliding on the waxed floors. Apparently she was the source of the laundry bag sound he'd heard earlier.

"I know," Ohlman went on, "When you think of human sacrifice, you automatically assume that the victim has to be a virgin or a child; some nonsense about innocent blood. Actually, the power is not in the blood at all, but in the death throes of the victim, according to Mr. LaVey. I can personally attest to the veracity of his statements

"But there is power to be had by sacrificing a life, Jackie. One could utilize that power, say, to extend one's own life almost indefinitely." Jackie could now see the faces of the figures shambling towards them. Their mouths hung open, lines of drool dripping from cracked lips. There was no life in their eyes. He felt a slow warmth on his legs as his bladder let go.

“So,” Ohlman continued, “If virgins and children are out as viable sacrifice material, who can we use?” Ohlman closed one eye and tapped his forehead, then opened both eyes wide and extended on finger, “Ah!” he exclaimed, “You kill someone who’s been a pain in the ass to you! Some one who’s gone out of their way to hurt or bother you! That makes sense, doesn’t it? A little poetic justice, right? Leave it to the Satanists to cut through all the bullshit”

The undead things that were formerly Jackie’s “loonies” now encircled the pair of men. They did not attack; they simply waited and watched until Ohlman said, “All right. Let’s take our little lamb to the garden, children.” As one, the creatures moved in and many hands lifted Jackie, carrying him like pallbearers. His head lolled back so that, for him, the world was turned upside down. Ohlman moved in close enough so that his mouth was very close to Jackie’s ear and began to stroke his short-cropped hair.

“And you know what, Jackie,” he whispered, almost lovingly, “You really can’t whistle for shit”

Then Ohlman began to whistle himself, a fine rendition of Sinatra’s “Fly Me To The Moon,” as the macabre funeral procession shuffled toward the elevator.