

The Clinton Fantasy (as transcribed by David Cohen)

It was another night of fitful sleep in the psychiatric hospital they had sent me to. I had been placed in treatment two years before; or maybe it was longer ago. My memory has been affected by the drugs they've been treating me with, and much of what I write is mostly guesswork. I could only judge the season by the frost on the window. A nurse was bringing me to consciousness and bearing a tray of food that I understood was my breakfast. Rather than the usual gentle shaking on my shoulder--for I was in the habit now of sleeping on my back--she simply announced her arrival by turning on the lights. She set the tray on a wheeled stand that could be moved easily around my bed. The coffee, for institutional fare, was surprisingly good, but the omelets were served without any salt, as usual. In deference to my religion, there was no bacon, but there was some orange juice from a carton, I could tell. Young woman, prettyish, bosomy, but my interest was hardly stirred; I was shaking off the lingering effect of a pill I remember being given in the middle of the night. I saw the walker I was using, folded up and placed against the wall under the mounted television screen that was directly in front of my bed. I kept the set off most of the day.

I asked for a cigarette. Of course I was refused. Health mongers everywhere. She scanned with some hand-held instrument the information on the plastic bracelet I was wearing, the one that indicates my name and birth date, took my blood pressure, gave me two more pills. They gave me constipation and prune juice had been added to my breakfast. It wasn't effective.

Dr. N came into the room after an hour, which had given me time to wake up. Dr. N. was middle-aged, a bit younger than me, in a gray coat with his signature flourishing in red stitching

followed by the initials M.D. He kept his gray hair short, wore spectacles, was part of my treatment team.

“What day of the week is it, Mr. L.?” he asked.

“The day after yesterday,” I answered, with some acuity. We did not get along well.

“It’s Tuesday, and every patient on the floor was able to answer that question.”

“Constipation affects my memory,” I said, trying not to sound sullen. A moment of silence fell between us like a curtain. I tried to say something that would further my argument, but my mind felt as empty as a paper bag.

“I think you’re snapping out of your fantasies,” he finally said.

I had elaborated an extensive fantasy that had lasted for two years. I don’t remember what I was doing before my illness set in. I knew that I was a bricklayer in Cleveland, and that my economic decline began after the housing market crashed some years ago. The election of 2016 had pushed me over the edge, somehow, and I believe that was when I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. I cannot even remember for whom I had voted in the last election. I disliked both of the main candidates, and I may have supported one of the fringe alternatives. I heard Donald Trump offering a victory speech at two in the morning, and I thought I was dreaming. Everything was an incoherent blur.

Dr. N kept insisting that Hilary had won the election. He even brought in newspapers to prove it. Her name was blared in headlines that announced another initiative. But I continued to believe, improbable as it seemed, that Trump was now the president. How long he had been in

office--if he in fact was—was not something I could answer. Dr. N called this a misogynistic fantasy.

“You can’t accept that a woman has won the election,” he told me. “Maybe you didn’t actually vote for Trump. It doesn’t matter. You persuaded yourself that he won. That’s the decisive thing. That you believe such a preposterous fantasy speaks volumes about your mental life. You’re the worst patient I’ve ever had.”

“Millions of people must have voted for Trump, doctor,” I said. “He *did* run on the Republican ticket, didn’t he?”

“Yes, he did.”

“And are you saying that voting for the man is a symptom of some illness?”

“Millions of people voted for Trump,” Dr. N conceded. “Probably of the same ilk as you. Uneducated hillbillies from the South Side of Cleveland. But I doubt that many of them believe he was elected.”

“Is this your idea of expediting my recovery? By insulting me?”

“The truth comes in blows, Mr. L. Besides--`Know the truth and the truth shall set you free.’ Isn’t that part of your religion? Was that Isaiah or Daniel?”

“Oh, you’re an ignorant doctor. You may know plenty about the cerebellum and the hippocampus, but you’re a dunce in the humanities. You’re quoting from the Gospel according to John.”

“Doesn’t matter. Religious people all believe the same thing. A collection of fantasies.”

“What does that have to do with what you call my Trump delusion?”

“According to Freud—you have heard of Freud, haven’t you? Even ignorant bricklayers who never made a buck in the building boom know who he is. According to Freud, God is nothing more than an exaggerated father figure. ‘Hypostasized’ is the term educated people use. No, I don’t expect you to know it. That’s probably why you think Trump won. He’s a father figure for you. To compensate for the deficient father you had. That’s why you believe he’s president. But not even your rabbi believes Trump won the election.”

“You talked to my rabbi? I thought my medical condition was confidential?”

“Your wife—your former wife—insisted. She asked us to try anything.”

I retreated into silence. These docs have all the answers. They all give different answers, of course, but they’re all persuaded that they have the right ones. It leaves me at a disadvantage. I don’t know the pancreas from the esophagus, and that thrills them. Nothing is more appealing to a physician than an ignorant patient. You’re completely at their mercy then. But I had worse handicaps, even more to regret, to feel defensive about. I wasn’t aware of the day of the week, nor could I accurately identify the occupant of the White House. School children in the neighborhood apparently knew more than I did. I stayed silent, unwilling to betray more inadequacies.

But I had a distinct memory—I thought—of an inaugural speech. President Obama was sitting without expression on a platform while Trump nattered on in that nasal New York voice about all of his plans. I remember trying to put my hand through the television screen. I thought I could tear off that weird wave of hair that sticks out over his forehead like the fantail of an aircraft carrier. I wasn’t sure it was attached to his head. My memories become a bit dim after that. A relative—or was it my wife? I can’t remember—placed me Logan Psychiatric Hospital in

Cleveland for treatment. I don't think that had happened, yet. That is, at the time of the inauguration. Maybe afterwards, when I insisted that the entire population of Cleveland had taken buses to attend the inauguration. But the drugs they have given me, as I said. . .

“Now,” said Dr. N. “Who is president of the United States?”

“Donald Trump.”

“Everyone knows that it's Hilary Clinton. And I think that it is high time for you to recover your sense of reality. Even for a bricklayer, that's not asking for much. You do seem to know that you're in a hospital in Cleveland. That's a step forward. Now we need to extend your grasp of things. Who was in the last World Series?”

“The Indians!” I shouted out. I was certain of that. My conviction may have added some timber and confidence to my voice. I was a life-long Indians fans. My father took me to their games in the 1960s. I saw Rocky Colavito in his prime. “And they beat the San Francisco Giants.”

“They lost to the Cubs, and that was three years ago.”

“Well,” I answered, a bit chagrined, “They'll be back.” I didn't know what else to say. I had learned by now that Dr. N was not a baseball fan, and for once I couldn't be ridiculed. My knowledge of the game was actually quite extensive. I could identify the Indians' outfield in the 1951 World Series.

“Hilary Clinton is president of the United States.”

“And is she still with Bill?”

“No. They divorced. And she’s having a high time of it. Hoo boy! You should see those YouTube videos! She’s learning merengue and bachata and taking dance classes with the Secret Service.”

“Cool,” I said, though I didn’t even know what bachata and merengue were.

“Mrs. Clinton is the first female president of the U.S. We think that’s why you fell into a prolonged delusion. It was too difficult to accept. So you’ve imagined that Trump won the election. Grabbing a woman’s privates was your fantasy. And you imagined that he said it because you couldn’t admit to yourself that you wanted to do the same thing. Or *have* you done the same thing?”

I wasn’t sure what to say. If I denied it, Dr. N would say I was lying. If I stayed silent, he would interpret that as a tacit confession. So I changed the subject. “What about working with the Russians? I imagined that, too?”

“You have told three different analysts that you want to live in Russia. We don’t know if you wanted to defect, exactly. And we haven’t ascertained what a bricklayer would do in Moscow. But you definitely had Russian fantasies on your mind. Maybe it’s those Russian women. We have tape recordings of you talking about female Russian bricklayers in your sleep. So the business of Trump and the Russians is another transposed fantasy of some kind.”

“You can’t tape record people without their consent.”

“You don’t have any rights, especially when you’re sleeping. This was established in *The Interpretation of Dreams v. Jung*. A unanimous court ruling. Anyway, you’re in the psych unit. You have no rights. Read *1994*.”

“Do you mean 1984?”

“Doesn’t matter. The second edition wasn’t updated.”

“Dr. N., did you even graduate from high school? Or does all of your training come from dissecting frogs?”

He ignored the question. “Who is president?”

“I don’t really remember who ran. I always support the right candidate.”

“I’ve told you that Hilary won the election. She divorced Bill and started taking dance classes. She’s wooing the Latino vote for 2020. You should see those dance videos. Her instructor keeps the top three buttons of his shirt open and wears very tight jeans. Let’s try another subject. Can you explain this wall you’ve been talking about? Anymore thoughts on that?”

“I just know that someone wants to build a wall....What about my wife? Where is she?”

“You’re no longer married. You’re wife invoked the loss-of-sanity clauses in your prenuptial agreement. Any evidence of mental incompetence is grounds. Of course, that was just a pretext. Voting for Trump was bad enough. We think you *did* vote from Trump. But when you insisted he won, that was too much for her.”

So I’m a single man, I thought. I’m free. Helen could go look for a Hillaryite. I was free! I began contemplating the nurses and my new life as a single man. But then I remembered Dr. N’s question. “I just think that someone wants to build a wall.”

“We think there’s a touch of castration anxiety there. You’re actually really pretty safe

here, you know. None of the nurses here are really interested in you, if that's what you're thinking. They've told us that."

"Thanks for letting me know."

This was what I learned from Dr. N, who felt he could safely break the news to me. My recovery was sufficiently advanced. I was unhooked from the IV drip, given a fresh set of clothes, and led out at the entrance to the hospital. I may be dreaming this, but Trump was there, it was as if he'd been waiting for me. Melania was with him, she leaned over and whispered something in my ear. Then her husband spoke up.

"I've read all about you Mr. L. No, I really did lose the election. But you should know that I'm running again in 2020. You'll have a second chance to vote for me!"

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