

Flowers for Algernon

Daniel Keyes



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*For my mother
And in memory of my father*

Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

—Plato, *The Republic*

Progris riport 1 martch 3

Dr Strauss says I shoud rite down what I think and re-membir and evrey thing that happins to me from now on. I dont no why but he says its importint so they will see if they can use me. I hope they use me becaus Miss Kinnian says mabye they can make me smart. I want to be smart. My name is Charlie Gordon I werk in Donners bakery where Mr Donner gives me 11 dollers a week and bred or cake if I want. I am 32 yeres old and next munth is my brithday. I tolld dr Strauss and perfesser Nemur I cant rite good but he says it dont matter he says I shud rite just like I talk and like I rite compushishens in Miss Kinnians class at the beekmin collidge center for retarted adults where I go to lern 3 times a week on my time off. Dr. Strauss says to rite a lot evrything I think and evrything that happins to me but I cant think anymor because I have nothing to rite so I will close for today ... yrs truly Charlie Gordon.

Progris riport 2—martch 4

I had a test today. I think I faled it and I think mabye now they wont use me. What happind is I went to Prof Nemurs office on my lunch time like they said and his secertery took me to a place that said psych dept on the door with a long hall and alot of littel rooms with onley a desk and chares. And a nice man was in one of the rooms and he had some wite cards with ink spilld all over them. He sed sit down Charlie and make yourself cunfortible and rilax. He had a wite coat like a docter but I dont think he was no docter because he dint tell me to opin my mouth and say ah. All he had was those wite cards. His name is Burt. I fer-got his last name because I dont remembir so good.

I dint know what he was gonna do and I was holding on tite to the chair like sometimes when I go to a dentist onley Burt aint no dentist neither but he kept telling me to rilax and that gets me skared because it always means its gonna hert.

So Burt sed Charlie what do you see on this card. I saw the spilld ink and I was very skared even tho I got my rabbits foot in my pockit because when I was a kid I always faled tests in school and I spilld ink to.

I tolld Burt I saw ink spilld on a wite card. Burt said yes and he smild and that maid me feel good. He kept terning all the cards and I tolld him somebody spilld ink on all of them red and black. I thot that was a easy test but when I got up to go Burt stoppd me and said now sit down Charlie we are not thru yet. Theres more we got to do with these cards. I dint understand about it but I re-membir Dr Strauss said do anything the testor telld me even if it dont make no sense because thats testing.

I dont remembir so good what Burt said but I re-membir he wantid me to say what was in the ink. I dint see nothing in the ink but Burt sed there was picturs there. I couldnt see no picturs. I reely tryed to see. I holded the card up close and then far away. Then I said if I had my eye glassis I coud probaly see better I usully only ware my eye-glassis in the movies or to watch TV but I sed maybe they will help me see the picturs in the ink. I put them on and I said now let me see the card agan I bet I find it now.

I tryed hard but I still couldnt find the picturs I only saw the ink. I tolld Burt mabey I need new glassis. He rote somthing down on a paper and I got skared of faling the test. So I tolld him it was a very nice pictur of ink with

pritty points all around the eges but he shaked his head so that wasnt it neither. I asked him if other pepul saw things in the ink and he sed yes they imagen picturs in the inkblot. He tolld me the ink on the card was calld inkblot.

Burt is very nice and he talks slow like Miss Kinnian dose in her class where I go to lern reeding for slow adults. He explaned me it was a *raw shok test*. He sed pepul see things in the ink. I said show me where. He dint show me he just kept saying *think* imagen theres something on the card. I tolld him I imaggen a inkblot. He shaked his head so that wasnt rite eather. He said what does it remind you of pretend its something. I closd my eyes for a long time to pretend and then I said I pretend a bottel of ink spilld all over a wite card. And thats when the point on his pencil broke and then we got up and went out.

I dont think I passd the *raw shok test*.

3d progris riport

martch 5—Dr Strauss and prof Nemur say it dont matter about the ink on the cards. I tolld them I dint spill the ink on them and I couldnt see anything in the ink. They said maybe they will still use me. I tolld Dr Strauss that Miss Kinnian never gave me tests like that only riting and reeding. He said Miss Kinnian tolld him I was her bestist pupil in the Beekman School for retarted adults and I tryed the hardist becaus I reely wantd to lern I wantid it more even then pepul who are smarter even then me.

Dr Strauss askd me how come you went to the Beek-man School all by yourself Charlie. How did you find out about it. I said I dont remembir.

Prof Nemur said but why did you want to lern to reed and spell in the frist place. I tolld him because all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb and my mom always tolld me to try and lern just like Miss Kinnian tells me but its very hard to be smart and even when I lern something in Miss Kinnians class at the school I ferget alot.

Dr Strauss rote some things on a peice of paper and prof Nemur talkd to me very sereus. He said you know Charlie we are not shure how this experamint will werk on pepul because we onley tried it up to now on animils. I said thats what Miss Kinnian tolld me but I dont even care if it herts or anything because Im strong and I will werk hard.

I want to get smart if they will let me. They said they got to get permissen from my familie but my uncle Herman who use to take care of me is ded and I dont rimember about my familie. I dint see my mother or father or my littel sister Norma for a long long long time. Mabye their ded to. Dr. Strauss askd me where they use to live. I think in brooklin. He sed they will see if mabye they can find them.

I hope I dont have to rite to much of these progris ri-ports because it takes along time and I get to sleep very late and Im tired at werk in the morning. Gimpy hollered at me because I droppd a tray full of rolles I was carrying over to the oven. They got derty and he had to wipe them off before he put them in to bake. Gimpy hollers at me all the time when I do something rong, but he reely likes me because hes my frend. Boy if I get smart wont he be serprised.

Progris riport 4

mar 6—I had more crazy tests today in case they use me. That same place but a differnt littel testing room. The nice lady who give it to me tolld me the name and I askd her how do you spell it so I can put it down rite in my progis riport. THEMATIC APPERCEPTON TEST. I dont know the frist 2 werds but I know what test means. You got to pass it or you get bad marks.

This test lookd easy because I coud see the picturs. Only this time she dint want me to tell what I saw in the picturs. That mixd me up. I tolld her yesterday Burt said I shoud tell what I saw in the ink. She said that dont make a difrence because this test is something else. Now you got to make up storys about the pepul in the picturs.

I said how can I tell storys about pepul I dont know. She said make beleeve but I tolld her thats lies. I never tell lies any more because when I was a kid I made lies and I always got hit. I got a pictur in my walet of me and Norma with Uncle Herman who got me the job to be janiter at Donners bakery before he dyed.

I said I coud make storys about them because I livd with Uncle Herman along time but the lady dint want to hear about them. She said this test and the other one the *raw shok* was for getting persinality. I laffd. I tolld her how can you get that thing from cards that sombody spilld ink on and fotos of pepul you dont even no. She lookd angrey and took the picturs away. I dont care.

I gess I faled that test too.

Then I drawed some picturs for her but I dont drawer so good. Later the other testor Burt in the wite coat came back his name is Burt Selden and he took me to a diferent place on the same 4th floor in the Beekman University that said PSYCHOLOGY LABORATORY on the door. Burt said psychology means minds and laboratory meens a place where they make spearamints. I thot he ment like where they made the chooing gum but now I think its puzzels and games because thats what we did.

I coudnt werk the puzzels so good because it was all broke and the peices coudnt fit in the holes. One game was a paper with lines in all derrections and lots of boxs. On one side it said START and on the other end it said FINISH. He tolld me that game was *amazed* and I shoud take the pencil

and go from where it said START to where it said finish without crossing over any of the lines.

I didn't understand the amazed and we used up a lot of papers. Then Burt said look I'll show you something let's go to the experimental lab maybe you'll get the idea. We went up to the 5th floor to another room with lots of cages and animals they had monkeys and some mice. It had a funny smell like old garbage. And there were other people in white coats playing with the animals so I thought it was like a pet store but there weren't any customers. Burt took a white mouse out of the cage and showed him to me. Burt said that's Algernon and he can do this amazed very good. I told him you show me how he does that.

Well do you know he put Algernon in a box like a big table with a lot of twists and turns like all kinds of walls and a START and a FINISH like the paper had. Only there was a screen over the big table. And Burt took out his clock and lifted up a sliding door and said let's go Algernon and the mouse sniffed 2 or 3 times and started to run. First he ran down one long row and then when he saw he couldn't go any more he came back where he started from and he just stood there a minute wiggling his whiskers. Then he went off in the other direction and started to run again.

It was just like he was doing the same thing Burt wanted me to do with the lines on the paper. I was laughing because I thought it was going to be a hard thing for a mouse to do. But then Algernon kept going all the way threw that thing all the right ways till he came out where it said FINISH and he made a squeak. Burt says that means he was happy because he did the thing right.

Boy I said that's a smart mouse. Burt said would you like to race against Algernon. I said sure and he said he had a different kind of maze made of wood with rows scratched in it and an electric stick like a pencil. And he could fix up Algernon's maze to be the same like that one so we could both be doing the same kind.

He moved all the boards around on Algernon's table because they come apart and he could put them together in different ways. And then he put the screen back on top so Algernon wouldn't jump over any rows to get to the finish. Then he gave me the electric stick and showed me how to put it in between the rows and I'm not supposed to lift it off the board just follow the little scratches until the pencil can't move any more or I get a little shock.

He took out his clock and he was trying to hide it. So I tried not to look at him and that made me very nervous.