



# **THE LATHE OF HEAVEN**

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Confucius and you are both dreams, and I who say you are dreams am a dream myself. This is a paradox. Tomorrow a wise man may explain it; that tomorrow will not be for ten thousand generations.

—Chuang Tse: II

Current-borne, wave-flung, tugged hugely by the whole might of ocean, the jellyfish drifts in the tidal abyss. The light shines through it, and the dark enters it. Borne, flung, tugged from anywhere to anywhere, for in the deep sea there is no compass but nearer and farther, higher and lower, the jellyfish hangs and sways; pulses move slight and quick within it, as the vast diurnal pulses beat in the moon-driven sea. Hanging, swaying, pulsing, the most vulnerable and insubstantial creature, it has for its defense the violence and power of the whole ocean, to which it has entrusted its being, its going, and its will.

But here rise the stubborn continents. The shelves of gravel and the cliffs of rock break from water baldly into air, that dry, terrible outerspace of radiance and instability, where there is no support for life. And now, now the currents mislead and the waves betray, breaking their endless circle, to leap up in loud foam against rock and air, breaking....

What will the creature made all of seadrift do on the dry sand of daylight; what will the mind do, each morning, waking?

His eyelids had been burned away, so that he could not close his eyes, and the light entered into his brain, searing.

He could not turn his head, for blocks of fallen concrete pinned him down and the steel rods projecting from their cores held his head in a vise. When these were gone he could move again; he sat up. He was on the cement steps; a dandelion flowered by his hand, growing from a little cracked place in the steps. After a while he stood up, but as soon as he was on his feet he felt deathly sick, and knew it was the radiation sickness. The door was only two feet from him, for the balloonbed when inflated half filled his room. He got to the door and opened it and went through it. There stretched the endless linoleum corridor, heaving slightly up and down for miles, and far down it, very far, the men's room. He started out toward it, trying to hold on to the wall, but there was nothing to

hold on to, and the wall turned into the floor.

"Easy now. Easy there."

The elevator guard's face was hanging above him like a paper lantern, pallid, fringed with graying hair.

"It's the radiation," he said, but Mannie didn't seem to understand, saying only, "Take it easy."

He was back on his bed in his room.

"You drunk?"

"No."

"High on something?"

"Sick."

"What you been taking?"

"Couldn't find the fit," he said, meaning that he had been trying to lock the door through which the dreams came, but none of the keys had fit the lock.

"Medic's coming up from the fifteenth floor," Mannie said faintly through the roar of breaking seas.

He was floundering and trying to breathe. A stranger was sitting on his bed holding a hypodermic and looking at him.

"That did it," the stranger said. "He's coming round. Feel like hell? Take it easy. You ought to feel like hell. Take all this at once?" He displayed seven of the little plastifoil envelopes from the autodrug dispensary. "Lousy mixture, barbiturates and Dexedrine. What were you trying to do to yourself?"

It was hard to breathe, but the sickness was gone, leaving only an awful weakness.

"They're all dated this week," the medic went on, a young man with a brown ponytail and bad teeth. "Which means they're not all off your own Pharmacy Card, so I've got to report you for borrowing. I don't like to, but I got called in and I haven't any choice, see. But don't worry, with these drugs it's not a felony, you'll just get a notice to report to the

police station and they'll send you up to the Med School or the Area Clinic for examination, and you'll be referred to an M. D. or a shrink for VTT—Voluntary Therapeutic Treatment. I filled out the form on you already, used your ID; all I need to know is how long you been using these drugs in more than your personal allotment?"

"Couple months."

The medic scribbled on a paper on his knee. "And who'd you borrow Pharm Cards from?"

"Friends."

"Got to have the names."

After a while the medic said, "One name, anyhow. Just a formality. It won't get 'em in trouble. See, they'll just get a reprimand from the police, and HEW Control will keep a check on their Pharm Cards for a year. Just a formality. One name."

"I can't. They were trying to help me."

"Look, if you won't give the names, you're resisting, and you'll either go to jail or get stuck into Obligatory Therapy, in an institution. Anyway they can trace the cards through the autodrug records if they want to, this just saves 'em time. Come on, just give me one of the names."

He covered his face with his arms to keep out the unendurable light and said, "I can't. I can't do it. I need help. "

"He borrowed my card," the elevator guard said.

"Yeah. Mannie Ahrens, 247-602-6023." The medic's pen went scribble scribble.

"I never used your card."

"So confuse 'em a little. They won't check. People use people's Pharm Cards all the time, they can't check. I loan mine, use another cat's, all the time. Got a whole collection of those reprimand things. They don't know. I taken things HEW never even heard of. You ain't been on the hook before. Take it easy, George. "

"I can't," he said, meaning that he could not let Mannie lie for him, could not stop him from lying for him, could not take it easy, could not go on.

"You'll feel better in two, three hours," the medic said. "But stay in today. Anyhow downtown's all tied up, the GPRT drivers are trying another strike and the National Guard's trying to run the subway trains and the news says it's one hell of a mess. Stay put. I got to go, I walk to work, damn it, ten minutes from here, that State Housing Complex down on Macadam." The bed jounced as he stood up. "You know there's two hundred sixty kids in that one complex suffering from kwashiorkor? All low-income or Basic Support families, and they aren't getting protein. And what the hell am I supposed to do about it? I've put in five different reqs for Minimal Protein Ration for those kids and they don't come, it's all red tape and excuses. People on Basic Support can afford to buy sufficient food, they keep telling me. Sure, but what if the food isn't there to buy? Ah, the hell with it. I go give 'em Vitamin C shots and try to pretend that starvation is just scurvy.... "

The door shut. The bed jounced when Mannie sat down on it where the medic had been sitting. There was a faint smell, sweetish, like newly cut grass. Out of the darkness of closed eyes, the mist rising all round, Mannie's voice said remotely, "Ain't it great to be alive?"

Dr. William Haber's office did not have a view of Mount Hood. It was an interior Efficiency Suite on the sixty-third floor of Willamette East Tower and didn't have a view of anything. But on one of the windowless walls was a big photographic mural of Mount Hood, and at this Dr. Haber gazed while intercommunicating with his receptionist.

"Who's this Orr coming up, Penny? The hysteric with leprosy symptoms?"

She was only three feet away through the wall, but an interoffice communicator, like a diploma on the wall, inspires confidence in the patient, as well as in the doctor. And it is not seemly for a psychiatrist to open the door and shout, "Next!"

"No, Doctor, that's Mr. Greene tomorrow at ten. This is the referral from Dr. Waiters at the University Medical School, a VTT case. "

"Drug abuse. Right. Got the file here. O. K., send him in when he comes. "

Even as he spoke he could hear the elevator whine up and stop, the doors gasp open; then footsteps, hesitation, the outer door opening. He could also, now he was listening, hear doors, typewriters, voices, toilets flushing, in offices all up and down the hall and above him and underneath him, The real trick was to learn how not to hear them. The only solid partitions left were inside the head.

Now Penny was going through the first-visit routine with the patient, and while waiting Dr. Haber gazed again at the mural and wondered when such a photograph had been taken. Blue sky, snow from foothills to peak. Years ago, in the sixties or seventies, no doubt. The Greenhouse Effect had been quite gradual, and Haber, born in 1962, could clearly remember the blue skies of his childhood. Nowadays the eternal snows were gone from all the world's mountains, even Everest, even Erebus, fiery-throated on the waste Antarctic shore. But of course they might have colored a modern photograph, faked the blue sky and white peak; no telling.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Orr!" he said, rising, smiling, but not extending his hands, for many patients these days had a strong dread of physical contact.

The patient uncertainly withdrew his almost-proffered hand, fingered his necklace nervously, and said, "How do you do." The necklace was the usual long chain of silvered steel. Clothing ordinary, office-worker standard; haircut conservative shoulder-length, beard short. Light hair and eyes, a short, slight, fair man, slightly undernourished, good health, 28 to 32. Unaggressive, placid, milquetoast, repressed, conventional. The most valuable period of relationship with a patient, Haber often said, is the first ten seconds.

"Sit down, Mr. Orr. Right! Do you smoke? The brown filters are trunks, the white are denicks." Dorr did not smoke. "Now, let's see if we're together on your situation. HEW Control wants to know why you've been borrowing your friends' Pharmacy Cards to get more than your allotment of pep pills and sleeping pills from the autodrug. Right? So they sent you up to the boys on the hill, and they recommended Voluntary Therapeutic Treatment and sent you over to me for the therapy. All correct?"

He heard his own genial, easy tone, well calculated to put the other person at his ease; but this one was still far from easy. He blinked often, his sitting posture was tense, the position of his hands was overformal: a classic picture of suppressed anxiety. He nodded as if he was gulping at the same moment.

"O. K., fine, nothing out of the way there. If you'd been stockpiling your pills, to sell to addicts or commit a murder with, then you'd be in hot water. But as you simply used 'em, your punishment's no worse than a few sessions with me! Now of course what I want to know is why you used 'em, so that together we can work out some better life pattern for you, that'll keep you within the dosage limits of your own Pharm Card for one thing, and perhaps for another set you free of any drug dependency at all. Now your routine," his eyes went for a moment to the folder sent down from the Med School, "was to take barbiturates for a couple of weeks, then switch for a few nights to dextroamphetamine, then back to the barbiturates. How did that get started? Insomnia?"

"I sleep well."

"But you have bad dreams."

The man looked up, frightened: a flash of open terror. He was going to be a simple case. He had no defenses.

"Sort of," he said huskily.

"It was an easy guess for me, Mr. Orr. They generally send me the dreamers." He grinned at the little man. "I'm a dream specialist. Literally. An oneirologist. Sleep and dreaming are my field. O.K., now I can proceed to the next educated guess, which is that you used the phenobarb to suppress dreaming but found that with habituation the drug has less and less dream-suppressive effect, until it has none at all. Similarly with the Dexedrine. So you alternated them. Right?"

The patient nodded stiffly.

"Why was your stretch on the Dexedrine always shorter?"

"It made me jumpy."

"I'll bet it did. And that last combination dose you took was a lulu. But not, in itself, dangerous. All the same, Mr. Orr, you were doing something dangerous." He paused for effect. "You were depriving yourself of dreams."

Again the patient nodded.

"Do you try to deprive yourself of food and water, Mr. Orr? Have you tried doing without air lately?"

He kept his tone jovial, and the patient managed a brief unhappy smile.

"You know that you need sleep. Just as you need food, water, and air. But did you realize that sleep's not enough, that your body insists just as strongly upon having its allotment of dreaming sleep? If deprived systematically of dreams, your brain will do some very odd things to you. It will make you irritable, hungry, unable to concentrate— does this sound familiar? It wasn't just the Dexedrine!— liable to daydreams, uneven as to reaction times, forgetful, irresponsible, and prone to paranoid fantasies. And finally it will force you to dream—no matter what. No drug we have will keep you from dreaming, unless it kills you. For instance, extreme alcoholism can lead to a condition called central pontine myelinolysis, which is fatal; its cause is a lesion in the lower brain resulting from lack of dreaming. Not from lack of sleep! From lack of the very specific state that occurs during sleep, the dreaming state, REM sleep, the d-state. Now you're no alcoholic, and not dead, and so I know that whatever you've taken to suppress your dreams, it's worked only partially. Therefore, (a) you're in poor shape physically from partial dream deprivation, and (b) you've been trying to go up a blind alley. Now. What started you up the blind alley? A fear of dreams, of bad dreams, I take it, or what you consider to be bad dreams. Can you tell me anything about these dreams?"

Orr hesitated.

Haber opened his mouth and shut it again. So often he knew what his patients were going to say, and could say it for them better than they could say it for themselves. But it was their taking the step that counted. He could not take it for them. And after all, this talking was a mere preliminary, a vestigial rite from the palmy days of analysis; its only function was to help him decide how he should help the patient, whether positive or negative conditioning was indicated, what he should do.

"I don't have nightmares more than most people, I think," Orr was saying, looking down at his hands. "Nothing special. I'm . . . afraid of dreaming."

"Of dreaming bad dreams."

"Any dreams."

"I see. Have you any notion how that fear got started? Or what it is you're afraid of, wish to avoid?"

As Orr did not reply at once, but sat looking down at his hands, square, reddish hands lying too still on his knee, Haber prompted just a little. "Is it the irrationality, the lawlessness, sometimes the immorality of dreams, is it something like that that makes you uncomfortable?"

"Yes, in a way. But for a specific reason. You see, here ... here I ..."

Here's the crux, the lock, though Haber, also watching those tense hands. Poor bastard. He has wet dreams, and a guilt complex about 'em. Boyhood enuresis, compulsive mother—

"Here's where you stop believing me." The little fellow was sicker than he looked. "A man who deals with dreams both awake and sleeping isn't too concerned with belief and disbelief, Mr. Orr. They're not categories I use much. They don't apply. So ignore that, and go on. I'm interested." Did that sound patronizing? He looked at Orr to see if the statement had been taken amiss, and met, for one instant, the man's eyes. Extraordinarily beautiful eyes, Haber thought, and was surprised by the word, for beauty was not a category he used much either. The irises were blue or gray, very clear, as if transparent. For a moment Haber forgot himself and stared back at those clear, elusive eyes; but only for a moment, so that the strangeness of the experience scarcely registered on his conscious mind.

"Well," Orr said, speaking with some determination, "I have had dreams that ... that affected the ... non-dream world. The real world."

"We all have, Mr. Orr." Orr stared. The perfect straight man.

"The effect of the dreams of the just prewaking d-state on the general emotional level of the psyche can be—"

But the straight man interrupted him. "No, I don't mean that." And stuttering a little, "What I mean is, I dreamed something, and it came true."

"That isn't hard to believe, Mr. Orr. I'm quite serious in saying that. It's only since the

rise of scientific thought that anybody much has been inclined even to question such a statement, much less disbelieve it. Prophetic—"

"Not prophetic dreams. I can't foresee anything. I simply change things." The hands were clenched tight. No wonder the Med School bigwigs had sent this one here. They always sent the nuts they couldn't crack to Haber.

"Can you give me an example? For instance, can you recall the very first time that you had such a dream? How old were you?"

The patient hesitated a long time, and finally said, "Sixteen, I think." His manner was still docile; he showed considerable fear of the subject, but no defensiveness or hostility toward Haber. "I'm not sure."

"Tell me about the first time you're sure of." "I was seventeen. I was still living at home, and my mother's sister was staying with us. She was getting a divorce and wasn't working, just getting Basic Support. She was kind of in the way. It was a regular three-room flat, and she was always there. Drove my mother up the wall. She wasn't considerate, Aunt Ethel, I mean. Hogged the bathroom—we still had a private bathroom in that flat. And she kept, oh, making a sort of joking play for me. Half joking. Coming into my bedroom in her topless pajamas, and so on. She was only about thirty. It got me kind of uptight. I didn't have a girl yet and . . . you know. Adolescents. It's easy to get a kid worked up. I resented it. I mean, she was my aunt."

He glanced at Haber to make sure that the doctor knew what he had resented, and did not disapprove of his resentment. The insistent permissiveness of the late Twentieth Century had produced fully as much sex-guilt and sex-fear in its heirs as had the insistent repressiveness of the late Nineteenth Century. Orr was afraid that Haber might be shocked at his not wanting to go to bed with his aunt. Haber maintained his noncommittal but interested expression, and Orr plowed on.

"Well, I had a lot of sort of anxiety dreams, and this aunt was always in them. Usually disguised, the way people are in dreams sometimes; once she was a white cat, but I knew she was Ethel, too. Anyhow, finally one night when she'd got me to take her to the movies, and tried to get me to handle her, and then when we got home she kept flopping around on my bed and saying how my parents were asleep and so on, well, after I finally got her out of my room and got to sleep, I had this dream. A very vivid one. I could recall it completely when I woke up. I dreamed that Ethel had been killed in a car crash in Los Angeles, and the telegram had come. My mother was crying while she was trying to cook dinner, and I felt sorry for her, and kept wishing I could do something for her, but I didn't know what to do. That was all. . . . Only when I got up, I went into the living room. No Ethel on the couch. There wasn't anybody else in the apartment, just my