

Excerpt 3 of 6 – “The Whistling Dragon or Every Boy’s First Murder: A Story in Two Voices” II

The CEO’s father stumbled back into what he thought was his son’s life like a dazed beast onto a firing range. I, we, recognized him in the hotel vaguely before the air around him pulsed red. I saw him while riding down in a glass elevator from my suite, then again from an interior balcony. Strange, they would dress janitors in white shirts and pants. But, there he was with his red and blue cap, broom, long handled dust pan and the hotel’s circular logo on his back.

I was about to make some discoveries, the instrument and a memory. The former, a hybrid from the old insect form, was a cylindrical organ that felt as though it was attached to the base of my spine. That was anatomically impossible, of course. The instrument slept in my throat, efficiently stored and dormant until the proper moment. The memory also slept, but in a far deeper recess.

Years ago, as a child, the CEO we were to become was returning home from school. It was towards the end of winter, a surprisingly warm day even for Texas. He removed his jacket and almost skipped home past his friends. While he didn’t smile, his buoyancy was evident.

He arrived at his small wood shingle house to discover the shades drawn and the windows closed. This, he thought, required correction. The sun and sky were too inviting and brilliant to be stopped by such gloomy, trivial barriers. As soon as he let himself in, he called out, got no reply, dumped his coat on the living room couch and began going through the house making sure there was light and air in all the rooms downstairs. He didn’t dare go up to his father and mother’s attic bedroom. Satisfied that the small grayish house had released most of its shadows and stale air, he began rummaging the bread box and refrigerator taking care not to disturb food designated exclusively for his father. Though he thought no one would miss a spoonful of the half gallon of ice cream that had already been scooped.

He heard feet half stumbling down the stairs and fumbled to replace the lid on the ice cream, get it all back into the freezer and clean and replace the spoon before the door to the attic swung open. He was still rinsing the spoon when his father appeared bleary eyed in the kitchen doorframe.

“What you been eating?”

“I just found this spoon in the sink and rinsed it.”

“Don’t let me catch you in something you ain’t supposed to be.”

The father turned his head toward the living room and his eyes suddenly popped open.

“What did I tell you about the couch?”

Stones fell into the boy’s stomach as he struggled to recall which rule he may have violated.

“Where are you supposed to put your coat when you come in?”

The boy dropped the spoon he realized he’d been holding when he saw his father begin to loosen his belt. Just as suddenly, the man stopped and dove with surprising agility to search for something on the floor under one of the kitchen chairs. As he bent down, he passed close enough for the boy to catch the smell of beer. The father got to his feet clutching the tangle of wire coat hangers that was the remnants of the boy’s school project.

My scientists were supposed to have transferred every memory. Every detail was to have been at my immediate disposal. It was the only way I could convincingly take on the life of the CEO. I had dates, times, even the positions in various rooms where he and others had stood, details he could never have pulled to the surface. This was my first experience of the beating the CEO took as a boy. I realized there are memories and there are memories. Seeing his father had popped the lid on a charred crusty pot that had been quietly boiling for decades.

As you know, the juiciest parts of the CEO’s life never made it to the short bio-pic I was assigned to write. For example, it was until the trial that we found out that CEO’s father had not been randomly assigned to clean the

hotel where they held the big to-do for his son. The father actually asked to be assigned to clean that building. He hadn't been in contact with his son for years but saw him in the newspaper, one of those local-kid-is-rich-so-now-we-love-him stories. The father bragged to his coworkers about his son, the big shot. Naturally, they felt even sorrier for him. Only occasionally was he truly sober and even then, he had a story to tell.

He managed to trade building assignments with a guy that owed him a favor. He wanted to be there when his son spoke and made "all those big-wigs bow down." What he somehow hadn't counted on was being too busy to get to the ballroom where the event was. But, no matter, he and his "son" were indeed reunited.

He did not see my face until it was too late. I had watched him wheel a pail of soapy water into the men's room. He'd put a barrier at the door to indicate it was closed for cleaning. I went in and latched the door behind me. His smile lasted perhaps a second before he stumbled backward over the toilet, voiceless in his horror as I tried to speak. But the instrument held my tongue and I realized he could see it protruding from my mouth.

I had wanted to tell him the exact time of day that he'd beaten me, what we were both wearing, the rooms where I'd left blood on the walls, how I'd all almost knocked myself out as I ran from him looking backwards and rammed my head into the edge of an open door. I wanted to ask him why he'd dropped the coat hangers he had been using to beat me. But, in the oddest moment, I suddenly thought the wires would leave cuts that would be visible in the short sleeves I would soon be wearing, whereas his fists had struck me mostly beneath my clothes, or maybe the wire had begun to cut his hand. Did he remember how many days it had taken me to get out of bed afterward, to say nothing of being able to walk to school?

Those thoughts and inquiries spun and raced inside me but I could utter nothing. Our mouths were joined. I heard small, rhythmic, involuntary sounds that may have come from him, from me or the two of us grinding together. The instrument had parted his lips, broken his front teeth and probed his insides searching for internal organs to pry them loose, disconnect them like reluctant, unripe fruit being snapped from a tree.