

IT was a warm night in Sussex, and the chirp of the crickets was soothing music through the open window in the enormous loft bedroom of Enni and Gay Winter. The sisters talked into the middle of the night. Gay watched as Enni's hands reached down and gathered her skirt. Pulling it up all the way to her waist, she stood two seconds motionless, dropped her skirt and said, "Then I ran up and out of his sight."

"You little tease," laughed Gay. "What color panties?"

"White, the French-cut ones with the lace." Then, in excitement, "Won't it be wonderful if you like him, too?"

"I won't get my hopes up. We haven't loved the same man yet, have we? And you hate Stephen."

"Oh, please. A married man with the nerve to two-time his mistress. He doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath with Jonathan. He didn't love you. He never came close. And I never said I hated him, anyway."

"Don't talk about him in the past tense. I'll decide when I want to stop seeing him. If he doesn't love me, it's probably your fault. And he could have a perfectly reasonable explanation for being with that redhead, couldn't he?"

"He does for sure," said Enni, meaning his reason was sex.

"Very funny," complained Gay, knowing exactly what her sister had meant. "Besides, there's no one else on the management committee we could stand to date."

"Jonathan's just one promotion away."

"That could be as close as he ever gets. We see Stephen until I decide we break off."

"Okay, Gay," she said, knowing there was no reason to discuss it. "You know everything that happened on this trip except that one thing."

"I'll get that, too, Enni. You know I will. You can't handle happy speed like I can. You'll talk until you tell me."

"Will not. And don't try to trick me. You must be completely surprised when they ask you about it. And you must forgive me. You promised." She knew what a tough promise this one would be to keep. "Promise again."

"I'm going to bed. You know I need my sleep. If I can get eight hours, I'll be pretty fast tomorrow." She pulled her sweater off over her head with one quick motion and sat on the bed to remove her socks. "Close the window." The tapestries were already down for the season, and the bare stone walls would make the room cold enough by morning.

"Promise first," teased Enni.

Gay stood and wiggled out of her jeans and panties. "You won't get a hug if you don't close the window." She knew how badly Enni needed physical warmth and reinforcement at the top of her manic-depressive cycle. She hoped that, with mother's help, she could calm her safely down over these two days. Of course, she would promise again before bed. She would not let Enni go to bed with a worry, not with her mind at this speed. She also knew that, if she was not firm with her, Enni would keep her up talking all night, and she could not afford that. She needed to speed up a lot more to make the trip to America.

"Please, please, please, please, please, please, pretty please, pretty please with butter pecan ice cream on top."

"Close the window first," said Gay as she climbed into bed hoping Enni would not have to sleep with her, tonight. She watched her sister cross the room and close the window. "And I'll think about it." She laughed and curled herself up when she saw her sister start to run toward her. Enni jumped onto the bed on top of her. "All right, all right," screamed Gay. "Don't tickle me. I promise. I promise. I won't be mad." Enni got off the bed and went to turn out the light. "What could be so bad, anyway?"

Enni ignored the question. "The moonlight's nice, tonight. Can I leave up the shades?"

"You can keep yours up."

"I'm sleeping with you, tonight."

"This isn't fair," complained Gay, really, really wanting to stretch out and do some serious sleeping. "You come home all keyed up. Mummy and I will have to spend two entire days straightening you out. You're sending me to Cleveland when you know I'm not ready. Now, you're going to keep me up when you know I have to sleep to get ready

to bail your little bum out of what, you won't tell me. Ooooooh. You owe me big time for this one, Enni. I mean it."

"I'll pay you back, Gay. I'll pay you back double." She stood close to the edge of the bed and began tearing off her clothes.

"Skin, too?" asked Gay, seeing that Enni had no plans to put on her nightgown. "You're starting to scare me. It's been a long time since you needed skin."

"Well, I need it tonight. I do it for you. Move it over." With that, Enni crawled in under the covers with her identical twin sister. She lay on her back and raised an arm to put around her sister. She tried to squeeze it under, but Gay would not lift her head. "Come on, Gay."

"All right!" She lifted her head and rolled over on her side, laying her cheek on Enni's shoulder and throwing a leg and arm across her. Enni wrapped a leg and her other arm around her sister and hugged her close. This was as much contact with each other's warm, soft skin as was possible. Gay worried and tried to put it out of her mind. She hoped Daddy had not made Enni do whatever it was she did. She would ask in the morning. She would sleep better without knowing, and she would not leave Enni thinking about it.

"Thank you, Gay," Enni said, lifting her arm to pull her right breast out from under Gay's. She wrapped her arm back around and squeezed a little tighter. "How's that? You comfortable?"

"Shut up and be still. Do equations."

"I did equations for nearly four hours on the plane. I can't bear to look at another equation." The mental scrolling of integral equations was a mechanism the girls often used to occupy their minds when trapped without outside stimulus during a period of intense mental activity.

"Think about anything you'd like then, but try to let me sleep. Wake me if you need me."

Enni kissed the top of her sister's head, a sign she would not say another word. She knew it was important for Gay to get a good night's sleep. She would wait until morning to tell her that she had listened to Daddy . . . again.

"MORE wine madam?" asked John McCall. They had finished dinner and were both pleasantly stuffed.

"Thank you, sir," answered Celeste Robinson holding out her wineglass. "It's time we talked about Beatrice."

"I thought we finished with her. I mean, I answered your questions. We know she's a," he paused to retrieve, "bipolar, suffering from manic-depressive illness. That's the one a person can live with, isn't it? She's normal most of the time, sometime manic, sometime depressed. How bad could it be? I've seen the manic state. It's fun. I'm sure normal will be all right. I can deal with a little depression. You're shaking your head. What's that look for? She's nice, Celeste."

"I'm sorry, John."

"Sorry? What are you saying?"

"Look, John. I know I've encouraged you to take a woman into your life, but not this one. Please trust me. Beatrice is psychotic. She's already on borrowed time. She'll self-destruct. It could happen any day. You can't afford to be involved with her, not with all you've been through."

"I'm listening." He was not going to accept her advice without proof, and of course, she knew that. She understood too well his inability to think ill of any woman since his wife's death. Having chosen the worst possible point in time to encourage him to become involved with women again, she wanted to kick herself. She had inadvertently placed him in great psychological and possibly even physical danger, and it was her responsibility to rescue him.

"I'm going to bluntly tell you what I suspect. And when I say suspect, I mean I'm virtually certain."

"I'm still listening." He poured more wine and sat back.

"Beatrice is now and will always be a psychotic. Manic-depressive illness runs in her family. Sometime, probably in early childhood, she suffered a major, traumatic psychological event that triggered the psychosis."

"All right," McCall jumped in, "say that's true. Are you saying she'll eventually be like the psychotic we met in the street or that she'll commit suicide when she's in her depressed state?"

"Either one's a possibility, John, but it's easier to understand if you don't focus on the negative aspects. Don't interrupt while I develop it for you," she ordered, seeing his questions coming. "The psychotic experience has remained a mystery to all but a privileged few throughout recorded history. The access the psychotic sometimes has to the most powerful and fundamental energies of the mind is viewed as nearly miraculous by people in my profession."

"You're jealous," he interrupted. "This is what you meant by respect for mental illness. I wondered if it was just a poor choice of words when you used it in your office today."

She sipped wine. "Many psychiatrists have been so jealous, to use your choice of words, that they've endeavored to deliberately bring about psychosis in themselves."

"Come on," he said, accusing her of putting him on. They were each well under the wine's influence, Celeste by design, hoping it would help her to communicate and McCall to accept her explanation of the psychotic transformativ experience.

"No, really," she assured him. "That's how we've gained much of our current knowledge. This transformativ experience is treasured by psychotics and envied by psychiatrists. It occurs when there's some sort of great pressure on one's life and mind causing a sort of mental implosion that gives access to a vast subliminal realm of consciousness. Psychiatrists have been seduced by descriptions of the vivid, brilliant, and often majestic moments of the psychotic mind. Many have tried various means, including self-medication and fasting, to bring it about in themselves, with varying degrees of success."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. The transformativ experience is often referred to in the notes of those you have succeeded as a rebirth or a transition from not being to being. It's been said that it happens when contact occurs with powers outside of human control."

Suspiciously, he asked, "Outside of human control?"

"None have had the experience without paying an eventual dramatic price." She saw his question coming and decided to give him a shock. "Madness."

"Madness," he repeated.

"Madness." She watched his intrigue build. "Whether the transformation is brought on by fasting and psychotic drugs or occurs as a result of some traumatic psychotic event, the seductive power of it will bring about an internalization. Some can resist for a period of years, but eventually, all are drawn into their own minds."

"Like the homeless man."

"Like the homeless man."

"What could be so seductive? And how are you so sure it's happened to Beatrice? And why at a young age?" McCall was finding the whole idea a little much.

"Slow down, John. I'll start with the last question. Don't be so defensive of her." She paused to allow him to get a grip. "In order for her to function as well as you say she does, she must've developed some mechanisms for resisting it. No one's been able to do that for very long, but there're a few documented cases of children, who never knew any other state of being, who've managed to live into their early thirties before self-destructing."

"So this is why you're so . . . fascinated with her?"

"Yes. She's doing something few have ever done and no one's done for long."

"But self-destruct? I don't get it."

"Psychotics experience certain . . . energies, amplified senses, intensified mental ability, but they're vulnerable to egoistic impulses, seen and unseen forces affect them. What starts as a glimpse of vastness and a feeling of unity and interdependence ends up as transcendence and confused self-aggrandizement."

McCall took a deep breath and a long drink. "You're making a jump here that I don't see. A person has this psychotic transformation experience. She sees this other realm of consciousness in her own mind. Then what?"

"Then there're dramatic changes in her relationship with her own body. These include a growing physical vitality and mental agility and personal freedom in relationships."

"Hold it," he said. "That's why you wanted to know if she tried to seduce me?"

She nodded.

"Okay, Celeste. So you know about her physical vitality. You know about her mental agility. You know she takes personal freedoms in relationships."

"Yes, John. You see, with all her senses heightened she can be a phenomenal performer in business as well as in other aspects of her life. With the intensified mental activity she'll have a constant flow of ideas, thoughts, emotions, memory, but since there won't be enough stimulation in what appears to her a relatively unstimulating world, she'll take to flights of fancy and wild day dreaming."

"I'm convinced," he concluded, remembering the flight of fancy Beatrice took at Fat Fish Blue, the wild story she concocted to explain the bar's name.

"Just to be sure," she started, "let me tell you about her speed of thought."

"Speed of thought? The mathematical ability?"

"Right. The mathematical ability. You've heard of idiot savants?" She saw him startle. "Don't get me wrong, John. That's not her. You see, the idiot savant has only a tiny piece of the ability Beatrice must have. Remember Dustin Hoffman in the movie Rainman? He was able to remember names and dates and statistics of baseball players and could do calculations in his head like lightning, but other more-common mental activity was not available to him. He couldn't function in society on his own."

"I'm with you. Go ahead."

"Beatrice has it all, but it's too much to deal with for the human psyche. Think of her mind as a pulsating motor behind her eyes. When the environment around her becomes too boring, she has to internalize. She has to watch her own thoughts. If she decides to think about any particular topic, she can immediately play back everything she's ever learned about it." Celeste was not going to elaborate, but she was excited about Beatrice's decision to major in mathematics when her real interest was more likely her second major, drama. A psychotic would become bored using her mind speed to do multiplication and division, but with the ability to do much more demanding forms of math, Beatrice could have a mind-occupying tool no other psychotic has tried. "Of course, John, there's a danger when she thinks about something negative."

Now completely bought in, he asked, "I imagine it can get scary for her?"

"It can. If a psychotic is awakened from a dream, it can be very difficult to turn it off or ignore it." Celeste was happy to gain McCall's acceptance, but the task of persuading him not to get further involved with Beatrice remained. She paused to plan a little. "Regardless of how much discipline a psychotic like Beatrice may have, she becomes intoxicated by the speed of thought. Eventually, her mind will reach a critical velocity where she'll see a confused animation. In her manic state, there will always be the danger of visual illusions."

"Her manic state? Oh yeah. She's still manic-depressive."

"That's correct. We call them rapid-cyclers. They'll seem to alternate between manic and depressive states. Actually, they cycle through six stages, which you would perceive as different degrees of depressive or manic behavior. Think of the bottom of her cycle as her slowest mental activity. When she goes through the six stages, her mental activity accelerates to get faster, faster, fastest, then decelerates to get slower, slower, slowest. She can cycle through the six stages in widely varying lengths of time from as little as an hour to as long as several years."

John and Celeste sat staring at one another. She knew he believed everything. He followed but did not see the danger. Finishing their wine, they prepared to finish the discussion.

"I'll start," began McCall. With a smile, Celeste yielded. "Beatrice is a psychotic who must live her life cycling through six stages of manic and depressive states. At the top of the cycle she'll experience incredible mental agility and physical ability. At the bottom of the cycle she'll be just the reverse, feeling miserable with muddled thinking and potentially, suicidal. In the intermediate stages, she's somewhere between the two extremes and actually close to normal at times."

"Good summation," commended Celeste, "except that you don't see the danger in the manic state." McCall yielded with a smile. "The mind speed is beyond our comprehension, John. There's often repetition, multiplication, and proliferation of ideas and thought. Thoughts can become visualizations, immediately, or they can become voices, immediately. Thoughts can become creatures called infernal animations. The speeding mind attaches visual forms to thoughts just to have more to do. It has the capacity and needs to use it. This leads to an onslaught of perverse impulses. This will

happen. Sometimes it begins slowly, but it only needs a suggestion or innuendo or an urging to get it started. It escalates into a furious onslaught of infernally animated oppositions, thought and anti-thought often appear together. Some give in easily, some struggle against the preposterous ideas rushing into their minds, demanding actions. Indecent ideas from infernal animations that have been fought off in the past will come back the next time she reaches that stage in her cycle. It's inevitable that eventually, the right coincidence of circumstances will come together at the right time and those perverse ideas will be carried out. We don't blame the psychotic. They're not evil. The hallucinations are infinitely more compelling to them than ordinary reality. They're super real. They make ordinary reality and even life itself . . . less important. Are you starting to see why she must self-destruct in the end? She'll either follow through on her perverse impulses in the extreme manic state or decide she can't face them again and end her own life during her most depressed state. There're no other possibilities."

"There has to be. There's something you're not telling."

"What makes you say that?"

"The psychiatrists who take the psychotic drugs to induce psychosis. If they didn't see a third possibility, they wouldn't do it."

"None have succeeded."

"But what are they trying to do?"

Again, they stared. He had to have an answer. She had to furnish it.

"All right. They're trying to master the mental speed. In order to do it, they must have help from someone who truly understands it. Each time they successfully cycle through, they learn a little more about how to handle it. When experiencing the speed they must be made to rest, they must be continually reminded to protect the body, to hold still, to stay attached to the earth. They often have trouble orienting themselves, remembering where they are in time and place. They must be disciplined not to watch the operations of the mind, not to get caught up in them, not to get distracted by them. They have to constantly be reminded not to get caught up in the visuals, not to dwell on anything that happens in the mind. It's as if a movie is playing in the mind and they can jump into it at any time. The temptation is to go with it. They must be extremely disciplined not to get fascinated. The trick is to look ahead of the thoughts and just wait

for the next one to go by. If it's interesting, don't follow it, just wait for it to come along again. Watch the next thought and the next thought and the next thought. Anticipate, don't dwell. Don't struggle against the speed, just let it be. Don't take it personally. That proves to be the hardest to resist, something that's so personal, they can't ignore it. The idea is to eventually be able to disassociate from the speed, to turn away from it when it isn't needed and use it when it is. Some have been able to do it for a time. All fail in the end."

With a sad, thoughtful nod he communicated his understanding.

"It may be possible to master it, but it would take a constant, devoted support system provided by a person or persons who have an intimate understanding of the particular psychotic's needs. No such support system has ever been designed, much less put into practice."

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IN the downstairs bedroom, Lady Helen Winter lay worrying about her beautiful twin daughters. She was thankful that she was in her manic state where she would find the energy to help Gay accelerate her mind a little more quickly so she would be able to leave home and cross the Atlantic without becoming depressed. Then, she would have a whole day alone with Enni to calm her down, to find out what terrible thing her father had made her do. She was proud of Enni for making it back home to her, forced to concentrate and discipline herself. The four hours of scrolling integral equations was a tremendously exhausting accomplishment. She wanted to send her back on the downward side of her cycle, opposite of her sister, so they could get each other through this crisis.

In the upstairs bedroom, Enni and Gay clung to one another. The thoughts and energies, the mysterious forces and impulses of their psychotic minds flowed between them.

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