

The Gods of Ethan Holloway

by D. M. Riemer ©2010

Every morning, Ethan wakes to an offering of gems resting in a small puddle of milk. There are five: a tiny disk of amethyst, an oblong of pale jade, another of turquoise, a flat lozenge of citrine and a tiny oval of rare yellow sapphire. They are achingly beautiful, but blurry. Ethan's vision is always poor first thing in the morning, his eyes wet and gummy, as if he had been crying in his sleep. He rubs them.

“Let's go, Holloway.”

Ethan lowers his hands and looks up. Farley, a psych tech on the morning shift, stares back.

Ethan rubs his eyes again and looks at the offering. The gems have transformed. (This also happens every morning.) Now he sees pills in a tiny plastic cup. Ethan doesn't know their names, but if he did, he would appreciate their lilt and music, nearly as compelling as the ancient names of gems.

The amethyst is Clozaril, 250 milligrams. Clozaril is an atypical anti-psychotic indicated for acute schizophrenia, particularly effective at repressing auditory and visual hallucinations. It's paired with Risperdal, 75 milligrams and jade green. (This is Ethan's favorite color.) Risperdal is another atypical anti-psychotic, intended to mitigate the more internalized effects of schizophrenia: loss of emotional affect, flat mood, lethargy. The turquoise is 25 milligrams of Klonopin, an anti-anxiety medication intended to correct the agitation caused by anti-psychotics. Together, Klonopin, Risperdal and Clozaril form a drug cocktail for the treatment of acute schizophrenia. Ethan's case manager, Doctor Reichenbach, is a great believer in drug cocktails. In theory, they permit smaller doses of each drug, which helps lower the overall incidence of side effects. But Ethan receives the maximum of each drug anyway. No one wants to risk Ethan Holloway decompensating, not ever.

The citrine is Eskalith, 75 milligrams, a form of Lithium for the treatment of bipolar disorder. It would normally be paired with an anti-depressant, like Zoloft, but Rispardal and Klonopin together appear to have a comparable effect. The yellow sapphire is Bumex, an antihypertensive. Individuals suffering from psychosis often must be treated for the same chronic medical conditions as other people. Normal people.

“Come on, bottoms up,” Farley says. Like all the psych techs, Farley wears peach scrubs. The color reminds Ethan of agate, ground paper thin and backlighted by a setting sun. His own clothing, of similar cut but without pockets, is a color called British khaki; it suggests the layer of caramel inside a Milky Way candy bar. Ethan has exceptional color perception. At one time he kept a color diary, detailing rare color sightings and associations. It was seized by police after his arrest.

He lifts the small plastic cup, trying to remember a time when things didn't move so slowly, a time before peach scrubs and pills like gems. He tips the cup into his mouth and five chalky lumps land on his tongue. He gulps water, swallows. For a moment he imagines the pills as bits of bone, or fragments of unburned incense, unsaid prayers.

Ethan slides off the bed, stands, and Farley scurries back. Even medicated nearly to the point of sedation, Ethan makes people uneasy. Bears might feel comfortable with Ethan, as might tigers, wolves, and very young children. But men and women never will. At Ethan's trial, a special chair and defense table had to be installed, and a delivery van modified to ferry him each day from the county jail.

As he backs up, Farley doesn't see Patrick Cantwell standing in the doorway behind him. The two men collide. Farley spins, shoves Cantwell back. “Need my stuff,” Cantwell says. Cantwell, another patient, is nothing like Ethan. He committed only a single murder. He is more than twice Ethan's age, a dried out, wiry scarecrow of a man. He has lived at various facilities in the state hospital system for the last 52 years. “Need my stuff.”

After a nervous glance at Ethan, Farley pulls himself together. “Wait in your room, Cantwell,” he says. Cantwell squirms, twitches, then sidles away down the hall, beginning another quiet conversation with Claudia Straub, the child he stabbed 27 times before nearly decapitating her on a balmy October day in 1971.

Farley steps into the hall and closes Ethan's door; it will remain unlocked until nine o'clock that evening; but there's really nowhere to go. Ethan looks around. Nothing has changed

in this room for over ten years.

The Lockwood Forensic Psychiatric Center is a relatively new facility. It has more in common with a modern Supermax Prison than with popular impressions of an asylum for the insane. The building has no ornamental belfries, no stone lintels, dormers or cornices, no solaria or hydrotherapy rooms or underground tunnels. Instead, Lockwood is a functional amalgam of right angles, non-porous surfaces and unbreakable materials. In Ethan's room, the bed, desk, sink and toilet are made from the same synthetic composites as the walls, molded into place like the cabin in a toy boat. There are no shadows anywhere.

Ethan has a bathrobe, one set of pajamas and one change of daywear, all made from a Velcro-fastened cotton-polyester blend. He also has five books, a toothbrush, some crayons and notebooks and felt tip pens. The one concession to his size is a special chair, though to use it at the desk he has to hunch over awkwardly. Light comes from one remotely controlled ceiling fixture ten feet overhead and one narrow polycarbonate window. This window doesn't open and offers only a hazy view outside, yet Ethan spends hours each day with his nose to the plastic, peering into the 27-acre yard behind the hospital. Standing that close he can see a grove of trees near the back of the property. The grove is the center of Ethan's universe.

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Ethan sits in Doctor Reichenbach's office. He is confused because the man behind the desk isn't Doctor Reichenbach, who Ethan has known since coming to Lockwood. Doctor Reichenbach is elderly, silver-haired, short and pale, and favors tweed jackets with leather elbow patches. By contrast, this stranger resembles a TV news anchorman: fortyish, dapper, trim, tanned, square jawed and clear eyed. His lab coat is a stark, unnatural white. It's the utter absence of color, like a hole in space.

When Ethan first entered the office, the stranger had risen from his seat, ventured a cautious smile, said, "Hello, Ethan," and gestured to a chair in front of the desk. Ethan didn't entirely understand, but he managed "Hello" and squeezed into the proffered seat. The man in the white coat sat and began to read aloud from a sheet of paper: "Ethan, Lockwood Forensic Psychiatric Center recently became part of Delaware Valley Managed Care, a full-service behavioral health enterprise committed to the welfare of every patient. This transition is ongoing, and you will notice some changes in the day-to-day operation of this facility."

Ethan's eyes wander. The office is nothing like his room. A compact stereo offers a

whisper of cool jazz. There are bookcases, displays of diplomas and certificates, stacks of medical journals, and a number of birthday cards, charming things of cardboard, glitter, and decoupage, the sort of things children make.

“My name is Doctor Arthur Crowe,” the stranger continues. “As part of the transition, I have taken over your case management from Doctor William Reichenbach. He and I have spoken about your needs, and I am fully able to step into his role. Rest assured that you will continue to receive the same level of care.” The man lowers the paper and looks up at Ethan. “Ethan, do you understand about the transition?” Again, that cautious, tentative smile.

Ethan considers this. “I guess so. Things change.”

Crowe’s smile gets a bit bigger. “Yes, they do. Okay,” he says. “I’d like to ask a few basic questions; the same kinds of things Dr. Reichenbach would ask. Okay?”

“Sure.”

Crowe opens a folder and begins making notes on a sheet of lined paper.

“Headaches?” he asks.

“No,” Ethan replies.

“Stomach upset?”

“No.”

“Sleeping okay?”

“Yeah.”

Crowe scribbles a note. He leans back in his chair, his face softening. “So, Ethan,” he says. “Overall. How do you feel?”

Ethan isn’t used to conversation. He has to think for a moment. “Okay, I guess.”

A longer scribble.

“I understand you keep a journal. Is that right?”

“Yeah.”

Scribble.

Crowe’s internal wheels are turning. While he dislikes the intimacy of clinical practice, he is an absolute wizard at matching symptoms with drugs. His pharmaceutical second sight whirs, flashes, spits out a quick decision. Another scribble. “Ethan, I’m going to reduce your meds. I think you’re making real progress, and I want to see where we can go with it. Okay?”

Ethan has no idea what this means. “Sure,” he says.

Crowe, since onboarding with Delaware Valley Managed Care, has come to feel that many patients at Lockwood are over-medicated. He has reduced dosages of antipsychotics and other drugs for over half his charges. So far, all of them are responding well. He assumes Ethan will, too.

Crowe flashes his biggest smile yet; it looks almost genuine. “Great. Well, that’s about it. Any questions?”

Ethan doesn’t move. “Will I ever get outta here?” he asks.

While Ethan’s color perception is far better than most, his olfaction is just ordinary. He’s unaware of the alarm pheromones flooding the room as Crowe’s heart rate spikes. A thousand scenarios race through Crowe’s mind. He knows Ethan has never hurt anyone at Lockwood. His file doesn’t show a single outburst of anger. Still, the human mind is full of boggy ground. And though Ethan may be the largest and most storied psychotic Crowe has ever treated, he’s far from the first. He meets Ethan’s eyes, now donning the mask of a caring but no-nonsense ally. “Ethan, when you came here ten years ago, you were very sick. Do you remember that?”

Ethan stares back, wearing the same expression as before. “Yeah.”

Crowe leans forward slightly, speaks each word with care. “Do you remember what you did, Ethan? In the church? Those eight people?”

Ethan remembers. The ritual he had spent years preparing, the light, the prayers, the glorious color. So close. Then the agonizing failure and shame. He drops his eyes, lowers his head. “Yeah. I didn’t finish.”

Crowe knows that Ethan has made this statement many times, knows that leaving something unfinished—Ethan never explained what—caused him more regret than what he had done to five adults and three children. But Crowe trusts Ethan’s passive state, because Crowe trusts medication. He relaxes. “Ethan,” he says, “we can’t let you leave until we’re sure you won’t ever hurt anyone again,” he says. “You’re getting better, but you’re not well yet. You understand that, don’t you?”

Chin on his chest, Ethan’s voice is a muffled groan. “I understand.” He swivels his head to look out Crowe’s window, another cloudy polycarbonate panel that doesn’t open. He can’t see the grove from here.

#

The next morning, Ethan opens his eyes to discover a different offering. The citrine and

yellow sapphire are still there, but the amethyst, jade, and turquoise have changed, replaced by slightly smaller baguettes of serpentine, carnelian, and malachite. Ethan doesn't know the new colors indicate lower doses of the same medications. To him the difference seems ominous, suggesting perhaps a change in status, but up or down he doesn't know. He rubs his eyes, looks up at Farley.

“For Christ's sake, come on.”

Ethan swallows the pills.

And then Ethan is walking toward the grove, morning forgotten, evening unimagined, aware only of the approaching trees. Other patients stand behind him like movie extras waiting for a scene. Though free to move within the grounds at will, they are as isolated as utility poles on a desert highway. Some pace in slow circles, some sit, some merely stand, utterly lost. Few wander more than fifty yards from the building. None speak to each other. And no one but Ethan ever enters the dappled, aromatic shade of the grove.

According to township records, the grove predates the hospital by at least one hundred years. A collection of naturally seeded white oaks, black walnuts, and other native hardwoods, it became a recognizable feature on the grounds only after a contractor decided to clear out the undergrowth, remove half the trees and plant grass all the way to the security fence. This transformed a half-acre of scrubby, unruly woods into a trim, shady retreat.

Ethan steps into that shade, pulling it around him like a blanket; it feels like safety, home, hope. He's been in the grove hundreds of times, but the sensation today is sharper, more alive. He leans his head back, breathes deep. A breeze ruffles his hair and the sound of a million restless leaves whispers over him. He remembers that sound and listens for hidden words. He scans the tree trunks, looking for a messenger, but doesn't see one.

And then Ethan is in the Common Room. Rows of plastic chairs the color of ripe nectarines are bolted to the vinyl floor, surrounded by robin's-egg-blue walls with cornflower accents. In the center, a dozen patients sit facing a 50-inch flatscreen TV mounted inside a locked cabinet. The programming is controlled from the psych techs' station. Someone had chosen a weather channel. The color on the TV is painfully bright, and Ethan doesn't stay long.

And then, during lunch, Ethan catches a juice box. He's sitting on his bed, halfway through his meal, a turkey sandwich and an apple and a cupcake and he knocked the juice box off the plastic tray and now it's in his hand, caught in mid fall without a thought. Ethan sucks on

the tiny paper straw, swallows a mouthful of unsweetened apple juice, puts the box on the tray and takes another bite of sandwich. If Farley or Dr. Crowe had seen Ethan demonstrate such precise motor control, they would have been very interested indeed.

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Ethan's footsteps down the hallway are steady, relaxed, almost silent. He'll visit the grove this afternoon. Maybe he'll see something, hear something. Maybe he'll be given another chance.

A strange voice in the Common Room pulls him forward. Ethan can't make out the words, but he recognizes the cadence immediately. Someone is praying. He stops just outside the door and peeks inside.

A handful of patients are scattered among the seats. The staff has spread a blue surgical drape over a folding table, creating an impromptu altar. It supports a crucifix, a star of David and an Islamic star and crescent. A priest stands in front of the TV, reading from a book. "Hear my cry, God," he says. "Listen to my prayer. From the end of the earth, I will call to you, when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been a refuge for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will dwell in your tent forever. I will take refuge in the shelter of your wings."

Ethan begins to take deep, gasping breaths. Only he should be offering such a prayer. No one else can know about Her Wings. No one else was chosen as celebrant, no one else received the messages. If this man in Sable and Argent speaks these words, Ethan thinks maybe he is damned after all, failed and forgotten because of his unfinished sacrifice. Maybe She will never forgive him. Maybe there will be no passage, no transformation, no rejoicing in Her Presence. Ethan's face twists into a mask of grief. He rushes to his room, fighting back tears.

He passes an open room as a PT enters with afternoon meds. On the medication cart, below the stacks of charts and rows of tiny gem-filled cups, there's a first aid kit. Ethan stops. He thinks about actions, realizing he has done nothing to redeem himself, to show his faith, since the church, over ten years ago. He opens the kit and takes what he needs.

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Ethan waits until after dinner.

The door to his room is closed. The ward is quiet. The overhead fixture casts a flat, harsh light. Ethan steps to the window, reaches into a pocket and takes out his prize from the med cart: a roll

of white surgical tape. Holding it close to his eyes, he teases up the end and tears off a strip about ten inches long. He presses it into place near the center of the window, choosing the angle and position with the care of an artist setting the perspective for a new landscape. He tears off another strip, presses it into place, and then another.

Strip by strip, Ethan creates a careful shape on the window, something like a distorted hourglass lying on its side.

He adds two strips of tape at the top of the window to make the rectangular panel come to a point; he remembers there were windows like this in the church.

Ethan sits on the bed watching the window, his face lifted by the faintest sense of hope.

The overhead light goes out.

He stretches out on the bed, his mind beginning to grope for prayers and rituals he hasn't thought of for far too long. Smiling, he recalls *The Canticle of the Rising Wind*, one of his favorites, which is always spoken at births, deaths and to begin a long journey. He begins to recite silently as sleep takes him, and soon is dreaming of endless forest under a jade green sky.

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The roll of surgical tape rests on Crowe's desk. Crowe keeps glancing at it, then up at Ethan, who sits squeezed into the visitor's chair, then down to his file, back to the tape, his eyes following the same three-point course over and over. Ethan shifts on the too-small chair. Farley shuffles his feet near the office door.

When Ethan woke that morning the image on the window startled him. What had been white strips on a black background had turned into an odd negative: black lines against the glaring white of morning sun. Farley stood just inside the door, staring at the window, the usual offering of gems in hand. He turned to look at Ethan the way he might look at a dog that has suddenly begun juggling.

Crowe picks up the roll of tape, holds it out like an accusation. "Ethan, what's this about?"

Ethan squirms, shrugs. "Just... just making a picture. Just a picture."

"We have paper and markers for that. Ethan, you stole something. You remember the rules, don't you?"

"I remember."

"Are you going to follow those rules, Ethan?"

“Yeah.”

“Okay. No TV privileges, no books for one week. Those are the rules. You can work on your journal. I’ll see you next month, and I don’t want to hear about you stealing anything else. If you feel you need something, you ask, and we talk about it. All right? We always talk about whatever you need. That’s all.”

“Okay.” Ethan stands. Farley opens the office door.

“Will I ever...”

“Goodbye, Ethan.” Crowe opens another file.

Farley and three other psych techs watch as Ethan peels all the tape off the window. He understands that this is penance, and doesn’t resist, but by the time he finishes tears are running down his face, dripping from his chin to make small, wet circles on the floor. Farley collects his few books: Lord Jim, Dandelion Wine, The Hollow Hills, Cosmos, and The Wind in the Willows. He leaves Ethan’s journal.

Ethan continues to stare out the window. He hears the techs leave, the door close. His grief is a hot stone in his chest. He wipes his nose and wonders what to do. He could go to the Common Room, or simply pace the endless, looping halls of C-Ward. He reaches for his journal and slumps into his creaking chair.

Hours later, the writing in the cheap marble notebook is becoming ghostly as Ethan’s green PaperMate Flair runs dry. He has black and blue Flairs as well, but prefers green, so every few words he moistens the tip with his tongue. He has moved his chair to sit directly in front of the window, cradling the journal on his lap. He imagines that his picture made from surgical tape, memory, and hope is still there.

In high school, influenced by his Catholic upbringing, Ethan had created his own rosary, a circle of counters to give his prayers structure and create a pattern reflecting the greater rituals. He had strung together nine groups of nine acorn caps, each group separated by a complete acorn. It had no beginning and no end, which symbolized the cycle of transformation. Ethan would say the Queen’s Prayer on the caps, and the Devotion to the One and Many on the acorns. The police took away all his relics and devotionals when he was arrested, so now he used his journal. He wrote the Queen’s Prayer nine times, then one Devotion, and so on.

Praise be to the Queen of Mysteries, One and Many, blessed in all your numbers and over all creation. Most holy are you in earth, air, light and darkness, and blessed am I for the

gift of your grace. Divine transformer, giver of joy, wisdom and justice, whose multitudes bring the Word and whose body flies above the multitudes. Abide us within your Grove and grant us refuge beneath your wings, until we are borne away into your eternal sky, amen.

Ethan is about to begin writing the Devotion when the overhead light goes out. He sighs, lowers his hand. As his eyes adjust, Ethan realizes he's sitting in a shaft of moonlight, a pale rectangle shaped by the window. The journal seems to glow on his lap. He shuts his eyes and begins reciting the Devotion aloud.

“One and Many, hear my devotion. From the depths of my soul, this I swear. From the height of my love, this I swear. To nourish your children, this I swear. To sanctify the Grove, this I swear. To carry your Word, this I swear. To tender the offerings, this I swear. To bestow the blessings, this I swear. To protect the faithful, this I swear. To reward virtue, this I swear. To avenge wickedness, this I swear. For yours is the union, the changing and the journey, forever and ever. Amen.”

Ethan opens his eyes just as a shadow appears on his journal. It has an odd shape.

Ethan begins trembling, eyes fluttering, muscle spasms racing along his limbs. He looks up.

A messenger clings to the center of the window, back-lighted by the rising moon. Its outline suggests a distorted hourglass lying on its side. The wings draw back once, very slowly, then lie flat again. The messenger is in fact a luna moth, but to Ethan it is a doorway to eternal mysteries.

And so it is that in the tenth year of his exile Ethan Holloway is delivered from evil. He leans forward, eyes locked on the moth, and brings his hands together in prayer, tears of release burning down his face. His lips fumble for words. With the tenderness of a lover, he presses his face to the window, just a thickness of hazy plastic between his flesh and the divine.

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Actias Luna is a near-arctic Saturniid moth in the subfamily Saturniinae. It is most notable for its size, nearly five inches across, and its distinctive coloring. While most near-arctic moths display camouflage patterns of browns, creams, and grays, the luna moth is a startling pale green, with small eye spots and delicate, tapering hindwings. Though considered common, the adult luna moth is rarely seen, due to its exclusively nocturnal behavior and one-week lifespan.

The adults do not eat and possess neither mouth nor digestive organs. They live only long enough to breed, laying their eggs in hardwood forests at the height of summer.

Ethan first encountered a luna moth on his fifteenth birthday, June twenty-first, the summer solstice. Already, certain genome variations, prenatal malnutrition and domestic abuse had begun to distort the natural rhythm of his neurotransmitters, coaxing dopamine and serotonin into a dark, alien tango. Ethan had become withdrawn, solitary, a silent, hulking shadow. He took to spending evenings in a small stand of trees behind his house, smoking marijuana stolen from his mother, lying on his back and staring into the shifting layers of shadow. With a little effort he could shut off the traffic, the barking dogs, the neighbor's television, his parents' screaming, until he heard only the leaves whispering, whispering. On that particular night, a new voice spoke. He'd never been able to understand what the leaves were saying, but this voice was clear. He sat up, eager to see who it was, and discovered the moth on a tree behind him. Ethan had never had any interest in animals, but he was immediately drawn to this fragile, beautiful creature. He wanted to touch it, to connect somehow but feared it would fly away. Ever so slowly, he offered his hand. The moth didn't fly away. Instead, it calmly shifted onto his finger like a falcon moving onto a handler's glove. It beat its wings once, then spread them flat again. Ethan saw a message in this gesture: acceptance, affection, respect and something more. He had a duty, a calling. He was needed. Ethan understood perfectly. This wasn't a moth, couldn't be a moth. He wasn't sure what it was, not then, not yet. But it asked for his devotion and he gave it, body and soul. Later that night he began writing the first prayer.

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And Ethan walks toward the grove as every blade of grass, every breath of wind speaks to him in a unique voice. He drinks in the air, and it invigorates him like a rare wine: the dark sweetness of wildflowers, the pungent mold of earth, worms and beetles, the musk of snakes and toads, the hospital laundry's flowery, synthetic note and fainter still, a trace of diesel drifting from the unseen highway. Ethan's eyes swallow the colors. A thousand shades of green, pale as the winter sea washing over a pearl, dark as ivy at midnight, brilliant as burning emeralds. He feels something pulling him toward the trees, a holy energy. He is alive again and blessed.

Ethan walks to the center of the Grove and approaches the largest tree, a shaggy black walnut cloaked in the spicy fragrance of last year's decaying husks. He stands very still, head

tilted back, eyes closed. The air feels thick with purpose and the leaves are whispering. He waits, repeating the Devotion over and over, silently.

“Hey Holloway, come on!”

Ethan opens his eyes. The sun is lower, the colors warmer. He doesn't know how much time has passed, but sees Farley near the building, waving at him. The other patients are drifting inside. Ethan turns back to the tree and presses both hands against the trunk, head bowed, eyes squeezed shut. “Please,” he mutters. “Please. I am here. I am here.” He opens his eyes. Farley begins trotting toward Ethan.

A messenger clings to the tree directly in front of him. Ethan drops to his knees. He begins to nod, receiving the words. A person standing nearby would hear one side of a conversation.

“Yes... Yes... Yes. I understand. Yes. Always... Oh... Oh... Thank you. I am yours, now and always. Thank you.”

Farley has approached to within forty feet. He has never seen Ethan on his knees, praying. He should report this to Dr. Crowe, or at least make a note in Ethan's chart, but will forget. “Holloway, back inside,” he calls. He is too far away to hear Ethan finishing *The Benediction of the Moon*.

Bless the Redeemer and all Her works, bless the coming and the going of Her. Bless the perfection of Her loveliness. Bless Her Grove and the beating of Her wings. Bless Her messengers and Her celebrant. Amen.

From under the moth's wings, two tiny hands, each no bigger than a buttercup, reach up and clasp the bark of the shady oak. Ethan stops breathing. He has never seen this before. And somehow, the moth smiles. “Thank you, thank you,” he says. “I will watch. I will be ready.”

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From that moment, Ethan exists in a state of quiet but alert anxiety. He hopes to identify a moment of challenge or crisis that will offer a chance at transformation, a way for him to complete the ritual he had begun in the church. Beyond that, he has no idea what to expect.

After lunch, he sits in the Common Room as other patients watch a TV documentary about life in the deep oceans. Ethan watches the patients. Cantwell sits next to him, muttering to Claudia, his unseen companion on most days.

The TV image flickers, flashes, and the audio cuts out. There's a whiff of burned plastic from the locked cabinet. The image begins to stutter and strobe, and the patients shift uneasily in their seats. Ethan finally looks toward the TV, just as the screen fills with a chaotic field of indigo and scarlet. Cantwell cocks his head at the screen. Ethan swings his eyes everywhere, certain that something important is about to happen.

Doctor Crowe enters the Common Room at the back. By his side walks a tall, attractive young woman wearing a smart navy suit and matching four-inch heels. A black leather briefcase swings from her left shoulder, and a large cell phone dangles from her right hand. The woman, a pharmaceutical sales representative, asks a question and the pair talk quietly as they survey the patients.

Crowe notices the TV problem and beckons to someone outside in the hallway. A moment later, Farley steps in and approaches the front of the room, juggling a set of keys.

Ethan tracks Farley across the room, anger darkening his face, because this moment is horribly, impossibly wrong. Farley no longer wears peach scrubs. Instead, his shirt and pants are a delicate bud green, the exact shade of a messenger's forewings.

Farley grows impatient; he can't find the right key to open the cabinet. He calls to someone outside the room. Two more psych techs enter, also wearing new green scrubs. The color change is simply part of Lockwood's corporate branding as part of Delaware Valley Managed Care. But this particular shade of green is Ethan's most sacred color, and no one should be wearing it. The two other techs approach Farley. One grabs the keys, and they squabble over which one will give access to the TV. Crowe and the pharma rep keep up a soft murmur of conversation.

Ethan jumps to his feet: seven feet of sudden fury. "NO!"

The room, already quiet, takes on the silence of frozen gestures, interrupted thoughts, held breaths. No one at Lockwood has ever heard Ethan raise his voice above a murmur. Everyone looks at him. He takes a step toward Farley and the other techs. They are like statues, too stunned to be immediately afraid.

In the blink of an eye, the pharma rep raises her cell phone and begins filming Ethan from across the room, her face suddenly like that of a child at a carnival.

Ethan swings both fists up to pound on his chest. "I am the Celebrant! Who are you to dress in her color? Who are *you*? I AM THE CELEBRANT!"

Crowe is on a radio: “Code blue, C-Ward Common Room, code blue.”

Ethan’s aggression spreads through the room like a tide of army ants, upsetting precariously balanced psyches, knocking down behavioral walls built of routine and medication. One man begins pounding on the arms of his chair. Others pick up the rhythm. Cantwell has noticed the pharma rep and her cell phone, and is taking slow, small steps toward her. She keeps filming Ethan.

“I presented the eight offerings,” Ethan screams at the psych techs. “I bestowed the gift of transformation! I am blessed by the One and Many! The Messenger spoke to me! ME! Who are you? Take off those vestments. Take them off!”

Crowe inches forward. “Ethan, you have to calm down. We can talk about this later, but...” Crowe falls silent as Ethans begin to weep, his enormous face a living mask of tragedy. He turns to Crowe, pleading. “Don’t you understand? The Messenger came to me. They have no part in this. It’s not right.”

Six burly, green-clad psych techs trot into the room, the smallest easily topping 200 pounds.

“Ethan, are you going to calm down?”

“These men,” he gestures to the techs, “These men must take off those vestments NOW!”

Crowe turns to the senior tech. “S and R.

S and R is not what Ethan wants to hear.

He ROARS.

Ethan was frightening before, but this explosion of sound thunders pure rage. The other patients scatter into the corners, though Cantwell holds his ground. Crowe shrinks against the wall. The pharma rep is lost in the image on her tiny screen, oblivious to the very real risk the situation presents. She keeps filming, swinging her camera between Ethan and the other patients.

Most people who followed Ethan’s trial shared the misconception that he was habitually violent. In fact, Ethan has never been in a fight, as a child or adult, and didn’t resist arrest. The police led him away calmly, like an embarrassed child. The six psych techs don’t know this and probably wouldn’t care. They rush forward in a blitz attack and have Ethan on the floor in seconds. He struggles and manages to throw one tech off, but these men are well trained; several are ex-military. Controlling the leverage points at wrist, elbow, knee and ankle, all six lift Ethan

and carry him from the room. Crowe follows a pace behind them and speaks into his radio. "I need 50 migs Haldol oral, S and R twelve, stat. Still code blue."

Ethan's struggles weaken, his anger drowning under a tide of despair. This is all so wrong and he doesn't understand. Something was coming, something important, the Messenger made that clear. He watches the light fixtures pass by overhead. He moans, long and low. As his roar gave voice to primal rage, this new sound is the dismal heart of sorrow. It's the sound of mothers identifying the bodies of their children. It's the sound Ethan made when the police arrived too soon, interrupting the rite before the ninth and final transformation.

The techs take Ethan to a Suppression and Restraint room. Lockwood has two on each floor. It's the same as the other patient rooms, except that the bed is padded and equipped with heavy leather straps for the ankle, wrist, elbow, head and chest. Crowe hovers by the door. The psych techs wrestle Ethan into position on the bed, begin securing the straps.

A nurse trots in and hands Crowe a dose of liquid Haldol in an oral medication syringe. Haldol, a brand name for Haloperidol, is a conventional antipsychotic used to control motor and verbal tics. However, with certain violent patients, Haldol is often used as a chemical restraint. Crowe is going by the book.

Ethan is almost limp, and the psych techs have an easier job than expected. They secure Ethan's left ankle and wrist and are about to do the same on his right side. And then a new sound enters the room from outside, a sound that should never be heard anywhere in Lockwood: a shrill woman's scream. The techs freeze. Everyone looks toward the open door. In a blur of khaki three patients run past the open door. The men in green turn to Crowe.

"Tony, Cesar, check it out." The two men about to secure Ethan's right ankle sprint out the door, heading for the Common Room.

Ethan heard the scream, but dimly. Halfway to the S and R room he had closed his eyes and begun to recite The Queen's Prayer. It has always brought him comfort. And halfway through he begins to smell the moist, spicy sweetness of the Grove. He opens his eyes and sees a messenger on the overhead light. He screams, "It's time! It's time!"

Ethan pulls his right leg free and kicks the nearest tech in the face, swings the leg to slam the opposite man into the wall. Both men drop. The remaining two grab the leg and try to force it into a strap. Ethan alternately kicks out and pulls back, making their efforts nearly useless. The men are too preoccupied to notice Ethan releasing his left wrist. As the arm comes free he snaps

upright, grabs both techs by the neck and simply throws them against the far wall, like dolls. Crowe drops the syringe and shrinks into a corner.

Ethan frees his left leg and runs from the room, slams the door, bolts it. The smell of the Grove is stronger. Ethan breathes deep, smiles. He lopes down the hallway.

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After Crowe and the psych techs had rushed out with Ethan, there was a moment of stasis in the Common Room. For about half a minute, no one moved. The patients remained packed into the corners. The pharma rep, alone in the southwest corner, continued filming with her phone, all the while providing an impassioned commentary. Only Patrick Cantwell seemed to have purpose. The stick-thin old man continued to take slow, measured steps toward the rep, so slow his progress went unnoticed. Then the tension in the room broke and the patients fled, like children scampering out of class for recess. Only Cantwell and the pharma rep remained behind. She swung her phone to frame him. At last, she noticed his fixed, manic gaze, his steady approach.

Cantwell had never expected to see Claudia Straub again. He had reduced the eight-year-old to bloody rags many years ago, and though she had never left him, her presence was that of a ghost. And yet here she was, alive and all grown up. Cantwell felt obscurely proud, like a parent, to see her so tall and lovely. He is overcome by a profound surge of joy: he'll get to kill her again.

"Surprised to see you here," Cantwell says, and smiles. It finally dawns on the pharma rep that she is far from safe. If she drops the phone and runs for the door, she might escape. But instead, she continues filming and sidles slowly toward the exit, quite sure that a heavily medicated psychiatric patient poses no threat.

Ever since he recognized Claudia, Cantwell had been considering his options for something that could cut or stab. There is virtually nothing of the sort in the Common Room. But on the device Claudia held, Cantwell had seen the unmistakable sheen of glass. That would do nicely.

When Ethan rushes in, he finds the pharma rep sprawled on the floor like a broken puppet, her blood seeping from a head wound. Cantwell straddles her, holding his prize: a shard of glass the size of a bottle cap, pried with his teeth from the shattered cell phone, which proved to be surprisingly durable. In fact, the camera is still recording, the smashed screen a shifting pattern of color with flashes of camera view.

Ethan rushes up to Cantwell, crouches down to catch his attention, shakes him by the shoulder.

“Not her, me,” Ethan says. Cantwell ignores him, begins using his tiny glass scalpel to slice into the pharma rep’s neck. “Me. I’m the final sacrifice! Stop!” Ethan knocks Cantwell off the woman, drags him over to a window from which the grove is visible. “You must be the celebrant.” Cantwell ignores Ethan, begins to crawl back to the rep; he is driven to repeat his glorious murder of long ago. But Ethan needs him. He rolls Cantwell onto his back, grabs his neck with both hands and begins to squeeze. “I am the final sacrifice,” he grunts. “You must help me transform.” Cantwell tugs at Ethan’s hands but has no hope of dislodging them. Instead, he reaches up with his bit of glass and digs for the left carotid artery on Ethan’s neck. Ethan sees the arterial spray, feels the warm flow pour down his neck, and the room becomes the church and the Grove and all Groves everywhere. The fragrance of leaves, earth and moonlight fills the space and runs into Ethan’s veins like fire.

Ethan speaks with an ecstatic sigh. “Since before the light, I have been appointed.” He squeezes Cantwell’s neck harder, finishing the words he had begun ten years ago. “Since my birth, I have dreamed of Her airy spaces. Since my sacred promise, I have dwelled in the shelter of Her wings.” Cantwell struggles like a demon, but can’t shake Ethan off. He shifts the bit of glass to his other hand and slashes Ethan’s right carotid artery. Another river of red begins to flow.

Ethan releases Cantwell. His eyes fall closed. The Grove is all around him. He lifts his arms, reaching up into the shadowy, endless leaves, toward the messenger, the doorway and the perfect sky beyond. “And I shall be borne on Her wings,” he says. “Borne away on Her wings.” His smile is the smile of a baby recognizing its mother for the first time.

Ethan has lost more than half his blood supply. The drop in systolic pressure can no longer keep his brain sufficiently oxygenated to sustain life, much less consciousness. He collapses onto Cantwell, who wails like a lost child, trapped under Ethan’s 360 pounds. The floor is awash with blood. Ethan’s deepening hemorrhagic shock triggers a cascade of hormonal and circulatory changes, all aimed at sustaining life in as many parts of the body as possible, but he has lost too much blood. Twenty seconds later his heart stops.

When Crowe enters the room with his squad of psych techs a moment later, the pharma rep has recovered her damaged phone. She holds her wadded jacket to her head wound. The

phone is still recording, and she continues filming the carnage on the Common Room floor. To his credit, Crowe calls for EMTs, then the state police, and provides first aid until the rep's bleeding has stopped. His orientation and training program with Delaware Valley Managed Care was first rate.

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The staff at Lockwood has never experienced an event like this, but they know what to do. There are procedures. The entire facility is placed in lockdown. Cantwell is sedated and locked in his room, under video surveillance. The pharma rep's territory manager is summoned to drive her home, after debriefing by the police. Law enforcement from state and local agencies spend hours photographing, measuring, collecting, and swabbing. A crime scene cleanup team soaks up the liquid blood with diatomaceous earth, which can be swept, scooped, and contained. They remove the remaining blood using a solution of antibacterial detergent mixed with isopropyl alcohol and hydrogen peroxide. This is left to soak for ten minutes before mopping. All clean-up materials are triple-bagged and transported for disposal according to approved CDC guidelines.

Though his cause of death is apparent, state and local law demands that Ethan's body be autopsied by the county medical examiner; but Ethan doesn't fit in a standard body bag, or in the usual coroner's van. Several psych techs place his body on a gurney, cover it with a plastic tarp and roll it out onto the hospital loading dock, waiting for the coroner to return with a larger vehicle.

It's well after midnight when an extended cargo van arrives and pulls into Lockwood's driveway. A full moon has ridden halfway up the sky. The coroner backs up to the loading dock, where Crowe and three psych techs have been waiting. Crowe had given up smoking three years ago, but has finished two packs since the afternoon. He lights another as the coroner steps out of the van. Crowe nods a greeting, too weary for words. "Got the release?" the coroner asks. "Shit," Crowe says. "My office. One minute." Crowe walks back inside.

The coroner greets the techs and looks down at the gurney. The tarp seems to glow under the brilliant moon: a shroud of light.

A luna moth flutters down and lands on the tarp, over Ethan's chest. The coroner has never seen one before. "What the fuck." He leans in for a closer look. A second Luna moth, even larger, lands on the tarp over Ethan's head. The driver steps back, looks up toward the moon.

The colorless light is just bright enough to reveal the shock spreading over his face. The techs follow his gaze. And they all back against the wall.

Crowe returns a minute later, shoving open the door with his head down, papers in hand. “Here you go,” he says. No one answers. He looks up, sees the men looking at the gurney and follows their eyes.

Ethan’s body is hidden under a blanket of luna moths, hundreds of them. Some are big enough to span a human face. All their wings beat in the same slow rhythm, hardly moving at all, yet all moving as one. Beneath them pulses a faint, impossible suggestion of light.

The papers and cigarette drop from Crowe’s hand.

No one speaks. A moist, earthy wind blows toward the building.

A minute passes. One of the larger moths flies away, soundless. Another follows. Then two more. And one by one, all the moths rise and stream away toward the Grove. They glimmer and shine, glowing abyssal fish in a sea of air, origami cranes of silver-green foil, until they vanish into the trees like mist.

The tarp lies flat on the gurney. Ethan’s body is gone.

As a result of the police investigation into possible illegal trafficking in human tissues, the coroner and the three psych techs are suspended without pay. Doctor Crowe resigns the following day. He finds a position as medical director for a pharmaceutical marketing group at double his previous salary. Officially, the incident in the Common Room is recorded as a tragic, unpredictable event that was handled as effectively as possible by the Lockwood staff. The records suggest nothing unusual. Nothing at all.

Several weeks later, Valentina Salazar, a member of the Lockwood housekeeping staff, finds a scrap of paper in an A-Ward room formerly occupied by Malcolm Poehler, a 25-year-old graduate student diagnosed with acute schizophrenia. Poehler had responded well to medication and had been released into a community halfway house. Salazar tacks the paper onto the bulletin board in the staff break room, because she finds the writing on it, in green felt tip marker, deeply moving in a way she can’t explain. *Bless Her grove and the beating of Her wings. Bless Her messenger and Her celebrant. In the name of the Light, and the Shadow, and the Rising Wind. Amen.*