

The Wings

Ike Karras hesitated half way across the big parking lot beside massive University Hospital. Karras was on his way to The Temple, the building housing Student Psychological Counseling Services and his first session with Dr. Knossos. He hesitated because he was feeling increasingly anxious. What the hell had he been thinking when he made the appointment! Did he really need to see someone? Well, maybe not, except for the vision or whatever it was. It had made him feel crazy, violent and alone. He didn't add possessed because possessed was way too scary a thing to even think. *Yes, Dr. Knossos I have had thoughts, I guess they were thoughts, about hurting others, have even entertained suicide -- that made it sound like a dinner party with invited guests! -- in order to stop them from taking me over.*

As he approached the bland, three story, gray building where Knossos had his office his panic reached attack levels. It felt like something alien inside his heart was threatening to take over, replace him, Ike Karras, with it. The terror this caused caused him to remember the reason he'd made the appointment and drove him toward it.

To fend it off Ike tried to turn himself a frozen jack pine bolt from a hundred cord pile up along some pulp road near North Star in Northwestern Wisconsin where he was from. He hoped seeing Knossos would stop it from happening.

The walk from his room back on Mifflin had been, to put it mildly, hard. It was as if he was traversing a frozen Bosch Hellscape. He half expected a heron-beaked demon to skate forth with a letter informing him to "just let it happen." Because he felt like Frankenstein's monster he decided to walk along the railroad tracks which curved through the city to within a block of big University Hospital and The Temple.

The tracks provided Antarctic anonymity -- meant he would not have to pass rosy-cheeked normal people on their way to classes. Normal he wasn't. He'd been knocked up with something awful. That might have been funny except it wasn't. Bullshit, it wasn't any monster, he was fucking crazy, really seriously deranged or soon to be diagnosed as such. There was no nicer way of putting it. He put his head down, wrapped his coat tighter and bored his way down the tracks through the wind.

Now, cheeks numb, chest heaving he'd made it to the parking lot in front of The Temple. It didn't look like a temple, it looked like a very boring campus building, housing maybe some administrative offices. It was possibly even colder in this gray stone canyon between buildings than back on the railroad tracks. Okay, okay, his terror prompted, you've made it this far, you might as well go the rest of the way. It decided for him, the tightness in his chest eased a bit when it did. As he mounted the steps he noticed a small statue of a Sphinx grinning down from the cornice over the entrance. Was such a statue appropriate or wildly inappropriate? Not an appropriate question for someone with Pazuzu inside to be asking. He turned and continued up the steps and into the building.

"Well, okay," Ike began, describing the nightmare that had precipitated his appointment. "I was on top of Landscombe Hill. All the buildings were temples -- Landscombe was a temple, Commerce, Education and Law were temples, University Hospital was a temple, the building we're was a temple—like the Acropolis except Aztec, Aztec pyramids. All the professors were priests and all the students seminary students unaware they were in a religious school. I was standing in line at a kiosk on top of the hill. They were handing out numbers, draft lottery numbers. When I got to the little window Chancellor Fay Passin was there except she looked like

my mother -- Alma Mater maybe!" Ike joked forlornly hoping Knossos got it. Apparently he didn't, instead stared gravely over at Ike as if he thought his slight attempt at levity an escape from the very serious business of...assessing him. Knossos was a big man with a large head resembling actor Anthony Quinn -- at least he didn't look like Freud or a Velazquez cleric. Not the least hint a smile passed his lips at Ike's feeble joke.

"Please continue, Mr. Karras," he encouraged, deadpan, "I'm listening."

"She, the Chancellor, my mother, was playing solitaire, turning over the cards. When I got to the window she looked up at me, then turned up a card on the counter top.

"'Here,' she told me, 'that's yours.' It meant, well, it was like a fate. I didn't understand this because the university doesn't teach stuff like that. I looked down at the card. It had a picture of winged Icarus on it, a small bed far below him in a labyrinth with a black, bull headed thunderstorm hovering above the bed like one of those clouds from a Spielberg movie." Again Ike looked up to see if Knossos got the picture. He was sitting chin in hand studying him attentively.

"Yes, I think I see what you are describing," he responded removing his hand from his chin.

"'The Wings,' the card said down at the bottom. For some reason this frightened me so much I blanked the whole walk home from campus. Next thing I knew I was scurrying up the steps to my room over on Mifflin." He stopped, looked down, overcome by emotion. It felt like police interrogation.

"That's the whole dream, Dr. Knossos," he muttered apologetically.

"That's the whole thing?" Knossos asked unclear why such a dream should have frightened the young man so badly.

"Except for the part that happened after I woke up."

"What happened then...Ike. May I call you Ike?" Knossos asked. Karras was an attractive young man, his features strong, nothing apparent to Knossos in his description of the dream that would warrant a panic attack leading to a need to consult a therapist. Perhaps he was simply a hysteric seeking an excuse to escape the..."draft?"

Ike looked down, overcome with emotion, tears threatening to spill from his eyes. Knossos leaned forward encouragingly.

"Yes, of course you may," Ike looked down, swiped angrily at the tears. "After that I lay there awake for a long time trying to figure out what the damn card meant. I mean she, Passin, was playing solitaire like she was Raymond Shaw's mother in *Manchurian Candidate* opening Raymond's programming. I lay there a long time trying to figure out what that meant, 'The Wings.' Escape from the Labyrinth or the Minotaur maybe? That was all I could figure out. It took me a long time before I started to fall back to sleep -- that's when it happened."

"What happened?"

Ike felt like one of the little girls in Salem, Massachusetts confessing spectral evidence to Judge Hathorne about yellow birds or the Black Man.

"Well," he continued fearfully, "just as I was getting back to sleep...a black cloud came down from the ceiling and...well, um...raped me!"

Knossos sat back. There was more here than met the eye. He needed much more information. This was serious.

"Begin at the beginning, Ike, right after the cloud came down--what happened then?"

“At first it was just pressure on me as I lay there trying to sleep. I did not sense it as anything unusual -- an incubus, say.”

Knossos wondered where to go with this? Ike Karras, a first time patient sat across the glass table describing a dream that had precipitated his visit. Knossos wondered as he often did if Ike Karras might reveal anything to illuminate his dream of the night previous? Knossos knew enough about dreaming to know a night's dream often presaged the day's events and he'd had a disturbing dream the night before the meaning of which he felt might be revealed in some encounter with patient or colleague, the next day.

Karras, a ruggedly handsome, obviously troubled transfer student in Studio Art he learned in the first few moments of their session had sought him out because he had read his book, Dreams and Human Change. In addition, he admitted he used dreams as a source of inspiration for his paintings. Knossos listened with interest as he spoke of these things, mildly flattered Karras had read the book but careful to maintain his role as therapist, some emotional distance

“Go ahead, Ike, continue with your description.”

“After a minute or so it...it felt like...well, a bull was lying on top of me except there was no bull in the room. That's when I got scared. There was nothing there. The sensation was real so I sat up trying to dispel it. I know dreaming a bit, I know when I am dreaming, having a nightmare, this was different. I was awake. I lay back down, nothing happened. I started to nod off. There it was! Something on top of me, lying on top of me that was not visible in the room, very insistent, very real. I tried to scream, I couldn't -- couldn't scream or move. It pressed down right through the covers onto my body. It felt like a bull muscled thundercloud. Jesus Christ! What is this Zeus raping Io?”

He chuckled but the tears brimming in his eyes gave the lie to any humor. He acted it out, pressing his hands down when he described the pressure, taking his position on the bed when beneath cloud. His hair was yellow-brown, the color of dried asparagus fronds with deep roots of umber. His forehead broad and open as if to make room for something, a “bright brow.” His eyes were brown with flecks of the deep spruce or Lake Mendota viridian. There was a storm cloud of hysteria in him. Knossos could feel it.

“I managed to wake enough to fight it. I sat up in bed, my legs over the side, heart pounding suggesting that my body read what was happening as real, phenomenal -- it was alarmed. I could still feel the pressure of the thing. I wondered if this is what a heart attack felt like, something lies down on top of you and then it happens, you can’t breathe, your heart clenches, next thing you’re dead?” He looked up at Knossos pleading for a simple explanation; Knossos saw patches of snow over oak leaves and still green grass.

“Got me!” he shrugged, “I’ve never had one, but what you describe sounds about right. That doesn’t mean that’s what it was. I doubt it. Continue.” Knossos offered Ike the floor...to make an idiot of himself, Ike thought, why had he done this?

“I lay down again. Maybe it was over, maybe whatever it was had gone away. Maybe this was how God visits you and incubates a dream? Maybe I shouldn’t fear it so much, fight it? Isn’t that what they called it, ‘incubating a dream?’ back in the old days when a sick person went to the temple and prayed for a dream and then slept in the sacred chamber. The God was supposed to come in answer to the prayer and provide some kind of insight about what was wrong, what to do to get well, what sacrifices to make. Was it like...rape? I suppose I should feel special! I had been chosen—what an honor!” Karras turned his face because tears were brimming over. He

was trying to make the description something closer to an academic discussion to avoid his intense discomfort. Knossos decided to stop that.

“Yes, I think you’re right, Ike, but that’s irrelevant.” The point was a nightmare so intense, so frightening it had driven a bright young man to seek out a therapist. Knossos guessed this had been very hard, humbling. “What next?”

He had come on time for his appointment. Knossos could see, instantly he was suffering extreme anxiety though trying hard to hide it. He tried to smile, shook Knossos’s hand, stood awkwardly in the room until Knossos gestured for him to sit in the patient’s chair on the inside of the glass table. The light from the window behind him kept his patients a bit uncomfortable -- Knossos liked that.

He had just finished transcribing his own dreams into the tape recorder. The patient before Karras had cancelled and Knossos had the luxury of a free hour. He read Whitehead while drinking his third cup of coffee and smoking a cigarette. Then sat at his big desk on the north side of the room, his right side to the big window that looked out over campus and dictated his dreams into the recorder while Mozart played quietly from the small stereo on his bookshelves. Knossos would have an assistant type them up later into the computer.

“I was in The Temple,” Knossos dictated, “except the place was like something on the Acropolis — Parthenon maybe, or the Erechtheum, also elements of the Remis Theater in the Music building, there were caryatids holding the place up.

"I noticed a huge snow capped mountain to the West out past the Beltline, maybe twenty, thirty miles away. A dark storm glowered atop the mountain like the cloud of Jehovah above Sinai. *That’s strange*, I thought, *I don’t remember any big mountains like this in Wisconsin*. I was sitting

right here at my desk working on a new patient's file. Just then the phone rang and Chancellor Fay Passin answered when I picked up.

"There's a threat to the Virgin," she informed me.

"What threat?" I asked.

"The one from the bed."

"What am I supposed to do about it?" I asked.

"Play Daedalus, give him wings," she replied, then asked in a friendlier tone "why don't you meet me for lunch at the Union?" The phone went dead. Then someone, a new patient maybe, was climbing the stairs. I could tell the new patient was angry. I woke having to urinate.

"Tentative interpretation: perhaps a new patient will present some challenge to my work, perhaps a student with issues with Alma Mater, the University. Possibly a simple physiological need represented by the pressure waking me to urinate."

Knossos tuned back to Ike Karras with his complete attention. He often divided it when listening to a patient. It was impossible not to. Was he the one predicted in the dream? He maintained the possibility without becoming attached...yet. If he was the threat then how was it he was disguised -- as a patient?

"I lay down cautiously, fearfully," Karras continued, "again it waited until I was almost asleep and then it was on top of me. Maybe it was waiting until I was asleep so it could have its way with me? This time I could not only feel it I could almost see it. It dropped like the whole ceiling on top of me. I was suffocating. No, I was being suffocated. I tried to struggle but found, to my horror I could not move, like I had been injected with some kind of drug, my nervous system paralyzed. I could not move or breathe. It felt like the entire house was lying on top of me.

"Then, horribly, it pressed my legs apart and started to come..." Ike could not continue.

"Yes?" Knossos prompted.

Karras shook his head, snot and tears spewing down his face.

"Then," he gasped, "I redoubled my efforts, but my body was like stone. 'This must be a dream!' I thought, 'nothing this terrible can actually happen!' Then it came in me."

It was like a dam broke.

"A cloud does not have an erection...but it does have a lightning bolt!" An icy fire of horror spread across Ike's scalp.

"It put something in you?"

"Yes, it ejaculated...something awful."

"Let me get this straight," Knossos interrupted, "A cloud like a bull came down on top of you and raped you with a lightning bolt that ejaculated something awful...to what?" This was one powerful, paranoid fantasy.

"Yes, I could feel it! I think it was trying to plant, I'm sorry, I know this sounds crazy, a war machine!"

Ike was terribly embarrassed at what he was admitting. He knew how "crazy" it sounded.

"Finally, I must have fallen asleep. I woke the next morning with this terrible fantasy...in me," he looked down into his lap to hide his humiliation.

"That's quite a dream!" Knossos sympathized. "Here, use this," he offered Ike a Kleenex, "please share the fantasy."

"Keep them there for times like this?" Ike spluttered.

"Yes, I've found they come in handy, particularly for first visits." Knossos leaned back. He saw Ike was not ready to share the fantasy that had frightened him so badly so he asked a less

troublesome question, "You mentioned your own interest in dreams and that you use dreaming in your art, what is it about this particular nightmare that caused you to seek out a therapist?"

"I don't know precisely," he admitted, grateful for the opening, "because it seemed so real. I thought I was awake only to discover I wasn't! It was like a dream within a dream, like the conception of something? It felt like a conception, like someone, something much stronger than me...planting something!" To Ike the dream had a numinous quality that made it categorically different any other dream he had ever had, but he found speaking about it in a psychiatrist's office with all that implied squelched his confidence. His hysteria, tears prevented him from even mentioning the numinous aspect of the experience. He was not here to share ideas he was here as a patient, someone who could not handle his life.

"And what about the fantasy?" Knossos asked again homing in on what had really frightened him.

"It scared the hell out of me, Dr. Knossos. I woke with it in me. I cannot describe this."

"Please try."

"It was in me. I woke with it in me, complete, whole, like some kind of alien reality, some kind of possession thing I had never imagined could be real. God!" He swore shaking his head as if to dispel the power of the memory.

"I was in some classroom shooting. I did not recognize the building. It was so angry it was like molten metal in my blood. I could see them, the little kids, running, running from me like I was a monster." Tears poured down his cheeks without restraint. "I could not stop it. I saw it with my eyes open like it was inside me, the Monster was inside me displacing me with this...rage, this murderous rage! Jesus fucking Christ!"

"It's OK, Ike, it's OK, it's just a fantasy, it isn't real! It will help you get a handle on it if you get it out in the open so we can look at it."

"But, my god, Dr. Knossos! That wasn't me! I would never do that! Something was inside me that wasn't me! I shot them and shot them and shot them. I couldn't stop it. I...enjoyed it, enjoyed watching brains and blood splatter all over everything. It was playing inside me like a movie. It lasted all morning. It made me feel like I wasn't me, like I was possessed.

"I didn't go to class, was afraid to go outside, afraid to be near anyone for fear...it might happen. Finally, about noon it began to fade a little so I got out of bed. Then it began to feel like I had been attacked, raped and impregnated. What is that? Is there such a thing? What can I do to stop it? It's left me feeling very frightened and very angry. I'm a first semester transfer student so I don't have a whole lot of social support. I like to think I can handle this sort of thing, it's part of my work, but this...school shooting thing or whatever it was threw me for a loop so I called Student Psychological Counseling Services and made this appointment. I am still suffering from shortness of breath, chills, anxiety. I still see the gun in my hands and the kids fleeing from me when I close my eyes, their heads exploding when I pull the trigger!"

Ike threw up his hands.

"I don't know exactly why I came. I was hoping you could help me get a handle on it plus I could sure use something for the anxiety." Ike looked up with the same expression of horror on his face as the poor damned fellow in Charon's boat in Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel.

"I WANT A DAMN ABORTION!" he shouted apocalyptically. Knossos jumped slightly in his chair. "I want that monster out of me! I want the rapist cloud thing dead! I want the bull's dick amputated. I want whoever's behind this thing caught and punished!"

Wow! Knossos exclaimed silently, *this is not what I expected. He really needs help. Immediate hospitalization maybe, probably.* The school, the clinic had policies about this sort of thing. They pretty much decided the matter for him.

“Ike,” he began leaning forward looking straight at the young man, “I have to ask you some uncomfortable questions. My position as a therapist here at The Temple demands it, I hope you understand.”

Ike sat back, his face still wet. “Yes, I suppose, I’ll try.”

“First, a tough one, do you have access to a gun?”

Ike twitched like an electric shock passed through him, his face turned pale.

“A gun, what kind of gun? You mean you think I’m a danger to do it?” His chest heaved in gasps.

“A gun, access to a gun. Any kind of gun. I’m sorry, I have to ask.”

“No, Dr. Knossos, I don’t have access to a gun down here. Up north where I live I own one, a hunting rifle, but nothing down here.”

“Okay, another tough one. Are you ready?”

The kid looked like a murder suspect in police interrogation.

“I..I guess so.”

“Are you a danger to do what it is you have described here this morning?”

“No!” Ike stated emphatically. “I mean I don’t think so. It just felt so real and the damn thing was so powerful I did not know if I could stop it or not -- that’s why I came to see you! So you could tell me it wasn’t going to happen.”

Wrong answer.

“I can’t tell you that, Ike, you have to be sure yourself.”

“Then for Christ’s sake, no, it’s not going to happen, I’d...”

“You’d what?” Knossos already knew what he was going to say.

“I’d kill myself before I’d do anything like that! God, I’m not that kind of person.” Twin streams of terror leaked down his cheeks.

“You have already answered my next question -- whether you are a danger to yourself, to commit suicide.”

“Yes, but, I’m really not if I can stop the nightmare, understand it better, what it means.”

“I agree,” Knossos nodded, “leaning back in his chair. He had come to the hard part. “I agree and maybe we can work on that in the future but for right now I think you would be better off in an environment where...you feel safer, less likely to lose control, where you get more help than I can provide.”

“Yes...what sort of a place might that be?” Eyes screaming.

“Right across the parking lot,” Knossos gestured toward the parking lot in front of the Temple, “University Hospital has a top notch psych ward. They can provide you with the kind of care I think you deserve, plus some sense of safety, that none of these things you fear will happen.”

“Yes, but what about my classes? What about my parents? How long will I have to stay? What will they do to me?” Desperation.

“Whoa, whoa, one thing at a time.” Knossos, held up his hands. “Forget about classes for know or maybe you’ll be out or a day patient in such a short time you won’t have to change a thing. I will contact your parents as soon as we set up your admission. I think you need this kind of treatment badly enough I’m not going to ask for their permission first. If, after hearing from me, they disagree with what I have done they can petition to get you discharged. I do want them

apprised of the situation and I do want their help. However, I am worried enough about your...troubles that I am going to recommend immediate hospitalization. Do you agree?"

Ike sat stunned. He had no idea what to say. The idea of hospitalization was, he had to admit, comforting. He had an illness, one that could, with time, be cured. He could relax, share some of the terror. There were people, experts, who knew what was wrong with him, could help him get over it. The idea that he was sick was comforting, like wings, like flying up from that horror at the center of the labyrinth. Sick people were sick, not monsters. Not monstrous mass murderers, he could...relax, be "sick," put himself in the hands of healers, doctors. This sense of flying above it convinced him more than anything to consent.

"Yes, Dr. Knossos, I consent." Just saying yes helped him a great deal. It was out of his hands. He had put himself into other, expert hands. This was comforting, like flying. Infinitely preferable to the reality of the bull lying on top of him.

"Good! I'm glad," Knossos congratulated. "I think you've made the right decision." He smiled comfortingly as he pushed himself out of his chair ending the session. "Why don't you go relax in the waiting room while I call the hospital people and tell them I'm admitting you. They'll send someone over to pick you up. Then I'll call your parents. I have their number from the information you provided the receptionist. I'll come say goodbye before you leave."

Ike went and sat in the waiting room down at the end of the hall. He nodded to the receptionist in a way he hoped she did not see as crazy and picked up a copy of People Magazine and opened it. He saw the bed down at the center of the Labyrinth. It was real, flying away from it and what happened on it to the...false comfort of the hospital was flight, flying away. There was no place to go, to hide from that reality. He had to face it. Knossos wasn't going to stop it. The hospital wasn't going to stop it. A diagnosis of mental illness was not going to stop it. A diagnosis

of mental illness would help him fly over it, pretend it wasn't real. He discarded the wings of false hope, got up from his chair and without saying a word left the waiting room.

* * *

On his way into the Union cafeteria for lunch Knossos noticed groups of students gathered below the several TVs placed high up on the walls.

The students all stared fixedly at the screen where some news story was unfolding. Knossos was not particularly interested in the latest suicide bombing from Afghanistan or whatever it was. It had been a long morning at his office. After lunch he taught at University Hospital and made rounds on the psych ward. When the psychiatric nurse from the psych ward reported there was no new patient to be admitted in his waiting room Knossos turned toward the window and thought for an instant, part of him glad. The kid was no threat to do anything really, but he was a threat to really do something.

"Let it go," he told George, the handsome nurse with the dark pageboy cut. "I'll contact his parents and make sure they know their son came in for an appointment suffering extreme anxiety. That's all we can do except, maybe call campus police. I don't think the situation warrants that yet."

"Okay, whatever you say, Doc," George shrugged and left.

As he made his way down the hallway toward the cafeteria he passed another clump of students staring up at one of the TVs placed strategically all over the Union someone called out to him -- Marsha, a beautiful ex-patient from New Jersey.

"Dr. Knossos, have you heard what happened?" She exclaimed pulling him toward the students glued to the TV.

"No," Knossos replied, more than a bit annoyed. He looked up at the screen at the shattered glass door of what appeared to be a school building somewhere.

"A shooting," Marsha exclaimed, "a terrible shooting in a Newton, Massachusetts grade school. A young man blasted his way in with an automatic rifle and proceeded to murder everyone he could including 20 or more kids! Isn't it terrible?"

Knossos closed his eyes. In that space he saw the entire Temple collapsing down into the Labyrinth of its basement which was connected to the warren of tunnels beneath the entire university including the hospital and knew his words to Ike had been full of darkness. A terrible chill poured over his feet and then up his legs. When it reached his heart he knew he had to harden his heart or change his beliefs. A lamp illuminating a terrible mystery had been brought to him and he had to allow it up or snuff it out. Perhaps Ike was right, terrible news events like the one unfolding on the screen could be aborted? The question was would he have any career left if he did so? The question was did he have one now?

Fay Passin, the Chancellor had said she would meet him from lunch -- suddenly it hit him. Fay Passin -- it was backwards! Passinfay, Pasiphae, Minos's Queen, mother of the Minotaur! He had been talking to Pasiphae!