

Inside “Or So It Seems”

Workshop Introduction

**In which We Present Our
Credentials And Welcome
New Visitors**

This is my life’s story in miniature, spread before your eyes like a schoolboy melodrama.

Paul Peterson is my name. Father of three, husband to none and advertising copywriter by trade. But more importantly at this precise moment, I am a witless victim who with surprising emotional distance observes himself being dragged across the long expanse of an upstairs apartment in a two-family home in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

You need to understand this drama is taking place in slow-motion—painfully slow, slow-motion—as if the universe has shifted into a lower set of gears without warning or asking for permission. So at the same time I am being pulled bodily across the room I find myself with surprising amounts of time to do whatever one is supposed to do in a crisis like this.

I can watch my life flash before my eyes, I suppose. Or curse my fate. Or create a list of all the whimsical things I meant to do with my life. Certainly I can choose from the usual items on the menu. But for now, as one who generally accepts the meager portions sent his way, I do nothing but look around.

Not much to see, is there? The room is poorly lit and barely kept up, the furniture old and mismatched like crude leftovers from an unloved college apartment. As dismal as the surroundings may appear, however, my protests remain quite spirited, as you can judge for yourself. But I do not expect to fool you for long.

How transparent my protests will seem when you realize that all the while I am pleading for release I am also playing the role of mute accomplice. Sooner or later you will notice how unconvincingly I resist, how pitifully I bemoan my fate, but not so loudly that I wake the neighbors or with enough force as to actually free myself.

As you no doubt observe, the villain of the piece is not some big brute of a bully but a thin—make that scrawny!—bleached-dry blonde in her mid-40s named Allison who in a moment of hollow intimacy said I should call her ‘Allie’. As you can see for yourself, Allison’s former incandescent beauty, eerily highlighted in framed photographs throughout the drab apartment, has all but disappeared, leaving vague impressions on her pale features but little of its charm. Still between her jaded air of sexuality and surprisingly round breasts there remains something attractive about Allison in the driest sort of way. Like a magnet that has lost most but not all of its habitual pull.

As you may have also noticed, Allison possesses incredible strength of purpose. And appears to have little difficulty or unresolved emotion about dragging me toward that wide expanse of plushness which in less dramatic moments might pass for a couch but tonight clearly represents our marriage bed in Allison’s plans.

To me of course it remains a couch. A couch whose brown velvety material has grown shiny and threadbare. A couch covered in random gray streaks which on closer inspection reveal themselves as patchy accumulations of dog’s hair, the strands so thick and dry I imagine them to have fallen from the same breed of German Shepherd that Nazi soldiers once employed to intimidate my Jewish ancestors.

I know; I exaggerate.

I must remind myself that I am approaching a worn velveteen couch and not the gates of Auschwitz. And though I call myself a victim I cannot honestly resolve whether being this ambivalent about the situation I can rightly be considered the target of the attack or one of its instigators?

The fact that I am highly aroused—near total erection, in all honesty—only contributes to my confusion and lends more irony to my protests than urgency to my resistance.

What am I doing here if not to have sex with this overexcited woman? What did I think would happen if I let her bring me to her apartment to "check on Sucky" as she repeatedly insisted with wine-coated breath? 'Sucky' being short for her cat Succotash and only incidentally a description of my current emotional state.

Still I was hoping to accomplish something coming here tonight. There was a mission. And sex could have helped in that mission, I freely admit that. But whatever intentions I might have held, despite the obvious arousal of my sexual apparatus, in spite of the rough climax I appear headed toward on that couch across the room—despite all that!—there is no way I could ever maintain sufficient sexual ardor while trapped in this woman's cloying embrace. Not with her shopworn appearance so painfully poignant as she pulls on my arm and coaxes in slurred diction, "Relax, honey, relax."

And no less poignant when she adds, "Y'know how cute you are!" in a burst of wide-eyed appreciation.

"Cute?" I shout, exasperated. "Are you crazy?"

As I mentioned earlier, this is all taking place in slow motion, Allison and I moving through a vast syrupy world where if we moved any slower we would be captured in time like flies in amber.

And since it feels as though I have all the time in the world I might as well take advantage of that abundance to revisit the sequence of events that brought me here tonight.

But just so we have it on record, my mission was never about having sex with Allison.

As for what my mission was...?

Does one ever know the reasons one commits stupid and indelible deeds? As much as I can attribute a cause to my madness I came

here tonight, allowed myself to be caught in Allison's web-like clutches, fell prey to this painfully loud throbbing in my forehead—all because I was trying to be a good father. Attempting in my own ill-conceived fashion to protect my nine-year-old son from colliding with one of life's numerous and inevitably sharp corners. Before we go any further—since I seem to have so much time at my disposal—let me share something with you, an understanding I was given about the purpose of life. It was drummed into me over the span of fifteen years as a member of a 'school of self development'. Others might have called it a cult, I suppose, because it certainly looked cultish from the outside. But it was a school not a cult, perhaps even a spiritual community. At the very least, it was a fellowship of like-minded people searching for some sort of meaning to their existence, all of us trying to live by higher principles while living and working and enjoying 'normal' lives in the regular world.

I guess we were searching for something to believe in besides money, power and pedophile priests. We came from different backgrounds, had traveled by many roads, but found ourselves, like debris in a catch basin, all drawn to a worldwide organization immodestly named The Seekers For Truth and led by a holy man in India known as The Bapucharya. 'Bapu' being the Hindi term for 'Papa'.

And what to make of The Bapucharya!

Seen only in videotaped lectures, His Holiness The Bapucharya always struck me as surprisingly irreverent given the solemn weight of his guru status. Sometimes he acted more like a misplaced Jewish comedian than a fully conscious spiritual leader. A comedian, I should add, who never failed to giggle with almost childlike glee at his own jokes or at The Seekers' silly metaphors.

"Remember to Drink Your RC Cola," The Bapucharya often advised in his high-pitched Indian accent, his laughter bubbling

free at the edges. 'RC' in typical Seekers parlance stands for 'Rest in Consciousness'. So 'Drink Your RC Cola' was merely his way of reminding you to pay conscious attention to all that happens in your life. To live in the present moment rather than letting your mind get whisked away by thoughts or imaginings, which is far more difficult than it sounds given how one's attention generally flits about like a drunken mosquito.

Look at what is happening right now, right this very moment, as this lustful, adrenaline-pumped lady drags me across her living room floor! Rather than resting in consciousness my mind is flapping around frantically like a fresh caught fish. Thoughts, emotions and fantasies rush through my mind so quickly I cannot keep track of them. I am excited, annoyed, curious, sexually stimulated, amused, uncertain—all at the same time! Meanwhile, mental images continuously flash in a strobe-like effect, many of them featuring those fascinating round orbs that belie Allison's otherwise scrawny and underfed figure.

The idea of resting in consciousness at this singular moment—of trying to Drink My RC Cola—seems as ludicrous to me as trying to read a book while traveling down a landslide.

But what was I talking about...?

Oh yes, the purpose of life.