

A Life of My Own - 5

by J. Mykell Collinz

I'm in love with the teaching assistant who works for my writing tutor. His name is Patrick. He's big and slow and he acts dumb but he's really smart. He doesn't care what people think. He stopped taking his medication, too. When I told him I smoke marijuana instead of taking my medication, he just laughed. He won't admit he smokes. He probably thinks I'd tell. I wouldn't, of course.

His spiritual beliefs are very strange. Something metaphysical is going on in this universe, that much I can agree with, but angels and demons and geniuses gone haywire controlled by evil forces, I've never given that much thought.

Patrick lives with an older man, a defrocked Catholic priest. They belong to a secret sectarian group that communicates with angels. Their prayers help to combat demons, they believe. Some members have special powers and claim angels give them names of important people, people under the control of evil demons whose influence must be negated at all cost if humanity is to survive into the future and achieve its ultimate potential. After meditating on this I conclude there might be something to it. From a metaphorical perspective if nothing else.

Dante's 'Divine Comedy' and Milton's 'Paradise Lost' are on Patrick's suggested reading list. To satisfy my need for immediate gratification, I search the Internet for a quick synopsis. Art works depicting scenes from these epic tales inspire me to visualize Patrick's interior world. If I'm not careful I could get lost, I realize. Yet, to be a writer, I must take risks. I have an intuitive impression of Patrick as an assassin. And if he's not an assassin, I'm wondering why. I can see his fictional character clearly in my imagination. Maybe the story is too real. Rather than write it, I should just join him and do it.

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I'm in this avenging angel mood when my father arrives home in the early afternoon with a group of investors for a lunch catered by the community's clubhouse kitchen.

The investors are all excited about the increasing sales of military drone technology. Countries around the world are being forced to ante up hundreds of millions of dollars apiece to take part in unmanned systems deployment or be left behind in a new dark age.

Listening from the hallway, I hear:

"Trust and accountability, that's what's holding back our robots. Not technology or funding. It's an unwillingness to surrender control to mobile, lethal, thinking machines."

"We can't move forward until we have a clear understanding of who's at fault following an errant drone strike. As of now, machine autonomy falls outside existing laws."

"Combat machines will make mistakes, yes. Just as human warriors do. Missions will go astray, innocents will die. We'll never eliminate that. Unless we eliminate military conflict altogether. And you know that ain't gonna happen."

They all laugh, including my father, who casually lifts his glass from the table to salute their good fortune. It's basically the same group of twelve. I can't say for sure. They look alike to me, especially the men.

Beautiful Sonya is there, again at my father's side, but she is not raising her glass or laughing like the others. She sees me watching her, flashes a friendly smile. I return the smile reflexively before I can stop myself. She's being nice to me because she's after my

father. She's an opportunist like the rest. She'll never replace my mother. Where ever the hell she is. I hate her for running away.

