

A Piece of Henrick

Krystle-Dawn Willing

“I name all fifty states in alphabetical order.”

“You can?”

“No, I do. I *do* name all fifty states in alphabetical order.”

“Why is that?”

“Impulse.” James licked the tips of each of his fingers; pinky to pointer, left hand before right, thumbs excluded. Dr. Gardner made a note of this.

“I like listing.” James rose and approached the bookcase, slowly tapping his fingers; pinky to pointer on both hands simultaneously, against his thumbs. “Listing... alphabetical, chronological, numeral...”

“Are you sure you mean to use the word ‘numeral’, James?” Dr. Gardner believed that word choice was exceptionally important and provided great insight into the mindset of his patients. As a corporate psychologist, Henrick Gardner was very interested in mindsets.

James ran his right thumb over the spines of Dr. Gardner’s books, skipping over every third leather-bound volume. “I mean numeral. I always mean what I say.” His thumb rested on a dictionary and he closed his eyes. “Numeral; of, relating to, or expressing numbers.”

Dr. Gardner raised his eyebrows, letting his glasses slip slightly down the bridge of his nose. He watched James carefully. James ran his thumb up and down the spine of the dictionary. Dr. Gardner cleared his throat, “You like words, don’t you, James?”

“Without words, I would have no lines... for my poems, you know. And without poems, well, I would be a savage. You needn’t infer that from your evaluation, I know it’s evident.” James pulled the dictionary from the shelf and balanced it on his left palm while running the tips of the fingers on his right hand over the cover.

“What happened today, James?”

“I went on a binge, a word binge. You know, so many words...” James opened the dictionary slowly, flipping through the pages “so many words mean so many things and sometimes it’s too much to take in. Literal could mean something similar to concrete, but literal cannot be used to make sidewalks. And sham.” James snapped the book closed and opened his eyes.

“Sham?” Dr. Gardner motioned for James to sit.

“Yes, sham. A falsehood or a pillow covering. Could you imagine the confusion?”

James held the dictionary tightly in his hands, digging each of his fingers into the cover with equal pressure.

“Easy, James...take a seat, please.” Dr. Gardner consulted his notes from previous sessions while James settled himself.

“Last week, you mentioned that ‘bevel’ was upsetting you. Do you recall why?” Dr. Gardner watched as James began to caress the dictionary.

“I like things to be at right angles, to be level... and bevel is not level. But we resolved that issue. Bevel and level rhyme and so can be neutralized in poetry.” James smiled and patted the book on his lap. He placed it gently on the coffee table, parallel to the edge. His brow furrowed as he noticed a deep red stain on his left cuff, which he rubbed carefully with his right hand.

“James... why did you hit Mr. Jeffries?” Dr. Gardner readied his pen as casually as he could, feigning concern and subduing his scientific curiosity.

“He could care less.” James flattened his palms on his knees and looked calmly into Dr. Gardner’s eyes, “but I couldn’t.”