

The Outpatient

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

Dwayne P. was a man of forty years with a short and slender frame and a slightly graying brownish beard that covered most of his cheeks and chin. Classified by the Pharma-research Branch of the Centre for Psychiatrico-genetic Disorders as a patient exhibiting the symptomology of 'Mental Complex Stage D', he recently was granted a fractional discharge pass and told to seek mandatory follow-up in Tower Complex C located at _____ & _____ in the heart of the Metropolis of T.

On an early June evening, Dwayne is called in to get a brain-map scan done on the Neuro-chemical Research Floor of the tall columnar fourteen-floor concrete mind-treatment facility. After being instructed to take a metalloid tracer pill thirty minutes prior to the scan, one of the male laboratory aides places a cap on Dwayne's head with various coloured wires jutting out of the top and begins probing different areas of the outpatient's brain with a metal wand linked to an AEG brain wave reading device.

"The machine is overheating again, Mr. P.! We're going to have to repeat the probe of your visual cortex where there appears to be evidence of a heavily-stimulated neuro-chemical irregularity."

"Ok. Sir. How much longer until I can go home?" Dwayne asks.

"We're going to repeat the test, then we'll run a brain stimulus and reflex test and you'll be on your way home shortly after that."

"Thank you, sir. Are you sure that machine isn't radioactive or something?"

"There is a risk when it overheats there will be mild radiation emanating from the wand, but it is likely to be minimal and mostly at low-risk levels"

After an additional forty-five minutes of wand probe application followed by a lengthy reaction test—where a slight 'shock' is sent to a specific part of the brain and the patient is asked to push a button as soon as the 'shock' or 'zap' is felt—the brain-wig with its many snaking wires is removed from Dwayne's fatigued and profusely sweating head.

"We're all done for today, Mr. P... We ask that you stay in the building for another twenty or thirty minutes until the metalloid tracer's effects dissipates and the potentially harmful radiation decay reaches a level of minimal consequence. I will be leaving now. You can take the elevator once you hear the sound of the timer alarm go off."

Sitting in the same chair with a view of Enclave South out of his research cell window, Dwayne drifts into a state of drowsiness and sleep brought upon by the interaction between the metalloid tracer and his compulsory daily round of opiate-like

pharmaceuticals. Nodding off and failing to hear the sound of the alarm, Dwayne remains in his research chair as the cityscape out of his window turns dark, lit only by the dim hue of the light poles at street-level several floors down below.

After about two or more hours of chemically-induced sleep, Dwayne awakens to the high-pitched sounds of screaming and distress one floor down. Jumping out of his padded chair, he approaches the small desk in a far corner of the cell and puts his right ear next to a ventilation duct connected to the adjacent floor. With the ability to barely make out only a slight murmur of voices, Dwayne listens acutely to the hidden commotion located one platform level beneath his feet, on a floor known by other patients as the 'quaky-research' or 'electro-adjustment' level with its notorious locked-down 'research recuperation' unit.

Suddenly, Dwayne hears even more pronounced sounds of intense structural violence through the small duct, with several ill-fated cries of desperate and even fatal distress. Without a mobile phone in his pocket, he quickly picks up the receiver of the corded phone on the desk nearby and tries to reach an emergency switchboard but instead finds that the Complex's land-line is temporarily disconnected. Determined to stay hidden in case the armed perpetrators start to patrol other floors for potential witnesses, Dwayne hides below the desk anxious for night to pass and for the way to be clear before attempting his exit out of Tower Complex C. Waiting for several hours below the same desk with an alert ear at the ready, the sounds of patients and hospital staff being herded into slaughter eventually calm to an eerie silence. Poking his head from beyond the small wooden desk, Dwayne looks out of the same research cell window and sees a striking white van speed out of the facility's perimeter, racing southward down _____ toward the lake. Happy to have survived a deadly night of potential institutional carnage, Dwayne leaves Research Room 4 of the Seventh Floor and looks for an emergency exit and a flight of stairs, instead of risking an escape through the conventional main elevator route. After contouring the quadrangle of halls, he finally locates a stairwell and descends downward, praying that mysterious presences in the security desk below will not detect his frail fleeing figure. Hit by a rush of morbid curiosity, Dwayne stops at the exit to the Sixth Floor and listens for any sound of activity within the unit. Tapping into and eavesdropping the same eerie silence heard through the single layer of concrete slab and duct-scape, he cautiously approaches the reinforced glass entry to the locked-down unit, expecting to see evidence of a severe and bloody hospital massacre. Going right up to the glass to peer into the foggy haze of the clinical trauma area, Dwayne looks both ways with a lingering terror in his eyes to scope out the mysterious hallways of the Sixth Floor and notices that the sheet vinyl flooring appeared to have been immaculately mopped and sanitized. Terrified that the hidden massacre of the night before had been erased without any recorded evidence, Dwayne rushes back to the stairwell and jogs downward toward the main level of Tower

Complex C. Upon reaching the exit to Level G, he pokes his head out of the double doors and notices a security guard pacing back to his nearby post in the security desk. Spotting that the guard has his back to him, Dwayne rushes the opposite way and sprints out of the main doors onto _____ Street. Relieved to have survived a frightful night of invisible knifed presences and stalkers that seemed to escape without a trace through the walls and locked wards of the concrete tower at _____ & _____, Dwayne continues his emancipatory flight outdoors for another kilometre or so before collapsing under the canopy of an old Oak tree in a neighbouring downtown parkette.

[The End...]