

CHAPTER ONE

Something about the situation kept it hovering, waiting. The *Golden-Yellow Chalcid* sensed movement by the big leaf. This particular specimen of *Spiliochalcis mariae* was in reproductive mode and opportunity presented itself in the sparse shrubbery under the portico of the new house. The wasp descended in an autopilot programmed at the beginning of time.

The *Lapdotera* froze as its senses realized – too late – what was over it, now settling astride it. The caterpillar felt the wasp's dagger-like ovipositor plunging in painfully as the mother-wasp's funnel continued to invade the now-writhing body. Depositing her eggs into her paralyzed victim's back, the wasp's reproductive efforts would soon produce larvae, to feed and eat the still-living host.

The mother wasp, reproducing in the same manner that its own parent had, would thus allow for an extended life of its own to take shape, and the caterpillar would succumb, forsaking a butterfly freedom to give its very life instead to the invading, growing tenant, crowning the slow process with its own inevitable destruction. Unless...

Long Island, New York _ 1954

Having my own bedroom was a new experience. A large wooden placard of a cowboy character replete with chaps and spurs was on the wall, joined by a happy, smiling horse, and a cowboy hat so large it had its own separate peg on which to hang. I had graduated to my first pair of long pants myself, and it was safe to say I was every bit the cowpoke as I settled into my new five year-old world in the Long Island suburb.

The road across from our new house was more like a doorway into a wonderland than a wide strip of asphalt. Magical properties lay beyond. As in all things in life, access to this new domain needed mom's approval, but this was not difficult to get. With permission obtained, opening the front door led immediately to a pathway which held only two minor obstacles: the occasional large flying insect, and a vague anxiety concerning some string with hanging white strips of cloth that ran alongside the walk leading from the front door to the road. Mom said the string and strips of cloth must be avoided because of something called 'grass seed,' and stepping in the wrong place would mean we would not have something else called a 'lawn,' but once past these unfriendly items, I was almost there.

Once it was clear no cars were coming, the street could easily be crossed. Soon I became immersed in sights, sounds and smells that had never existed for me in that other place, which my parents called *Brooklyn*.

The pungent smell of heavy pollen amidst the tall weeds in the warm sun mingled with the towering cattails near the lake. The lake ran to the left, while a few acres of trees on the right held a magic all their own. The dark, cool mystery of the forest umbrella would occasionally allow a beam of sunlight to stream its way down into a small clearing. My older sister chopped away some branches in order to create a small haven within, and it was now complete with a place to sit and branches to climb.

It was magical, and produced something with real-life appeal as well. Mom had scolded us for getting green tree sap on her good cutlery in the making of our "fort." Consequently, a sense of bonding with my older sister became part of my worldly landscape which included my dog running alongside me, the lake with its ducks and frogs; and of course the secluded, secret part of our small wooded secret fortress. Life was good. It was the last good memory I would have.

Out in the field, I heard her call my name. It would never sound the same again. "We have to change these into shorts," mom said, as I arrived huffing and puffing.

“You have holes in your pants, she added, pointing to the thread-worn kneecaps. I’ll make them into shorts.”

Overwhelmed. This is new, and it is bad. Loss is going to happen to my new long pants. That cowboy on my new wall had long pants; I had my first pair. Opposing mom was impossible. *I can’t accept what mom is saying, but I must always obey what mom is saying.* I knew dread when I saw her reach for the pruning shears she had been working with here in the front yard. *Something about me is gonna be cut off.* I saw that she was pointing to the threadbare material over my kneecaps.

“No, Mom,” I said, backing up, too frightened to stay still while entering this new territory of independence – voicing contrary opinion.

My modern-mother, normally a devoted follower of the then-new Dr. Spock child-raising techniques, appeared now a different person. Her face appeared to work strangely; as if she were being watched. Onstage, following a direction only mom was aware of, she was listening to something “other.” Mother then explained a new reality to me in a tone of ‘*anybody-with-any-sense-knows:*’

“What would the neighbors think of a boy with holes in his pants?” I stared uncomprehendingly. “They have holes in them,” she repeated, pointing to my threadbare knees. She moved the pruning shears towards me.

“No,” I said. I was five years old. I could not ask if she might consider buying me new ones before amputating these. I couldn’t ask why pleasing these unseen, unknown neighbors was more important than, well, pleasing me? Wouldn’t that have involved caring for me more than caring about what these neighbors thought? Yes, that’s called love. But in my mother’s case that would have involved facing some of her own demons. This was not about holes in the child’s pants any longer.

I was her only male child, and in our family males listen to mother. She grabbed me hard, and I had never been held in a hostile manner before. We were out in the street in front of the house, and my mother’s self-conscious spirit filled me up with my own. I glanced around seeking these invisible authorities. *Where are these unseen judges we must please? Who, where and what are these forces we need to obey?* There were no other people I could see, but the new houses, without trees in their front yards, peered out upon us through windowed eyes; silent and curtain-less.

“What would the neighbors think of a boy who had holes in his pants? We’re cutting them into shorts right now.” The cold metal of her authority powered the scissor into the hole in my pants’ knee.

I tried to pull away from the grotesque surgery only to find her holding me harder with one hand.

“Hold still!” came the command.

“I hate you!” came my response. *I wish you were dead!* I repressed. Her jaw slacked in disbelief.

She gasped and smacked me high on my left side, the first and last physical punishment I would ever receive from her. With tears running down my cheeks, I stood still during the amputation, as she prayed a demonic mantra aloud in a hypnotized, strangled voice. The curse was chanted over and over from the lips of my transfixed mother, setting in motion its larvic cycle, sealing its dynamism within me with its hypnotic suggestion:

“What would the neighbor’s think? What would the neighbor’s think of a boy who walks around with holes in his pants?”

Centuries before the priests of Moloch demanded male firstborns be thrown into the fire to appease unseen spirits, and likewise this day would my manhood be made forfeit. Adding to the emasculation was her offering of her allegiance to these unseen *other people, this... culture.*

This surrender would not merely be to mother’s power, however, but to a newer authority. We always embrace that which corrupts us. In my traumatized emotions, I would embrace submission, humiliation and emasculation, along with a super-ego on steroids. A self-conscious paranoia of “*what would the neighbors think?*” concerning all my thought and action would readily indicate what was in store for me not knowing the correct answer.

Hurt mixed with hate created a simmering resentment, stewing for evening’s destiny with “father.” Like the drowning swimmer who can still see some light filtering down from the surface, I held out a desperate hand to that one person who – from birth until this very evening – had been identified with JUDGE; with faith, with the eternal courage, wisdom and strength. Father would fix, father would right the wrong. Goodness would be served. Justice would be administered by the chief administrator of such things.

In the re-telling of the day's tragic events to my dad, my five-year old spirit was lifted by early success. I could discern immediately that he also thought it was no big deal to have threadbare knees, and I began to experience genuine hope – he was seeing things just like me!¹ As the incident unveiled through my tearful recounting, however, when he heard about the confrontation, his early empathy disappeared. *He turned to mother for guidance.* She directed him with a few pithy factoids.²

I wanted a heavenly authority. I got a demonic politician. The frozen crease at the mouth along with the smiling eyes; the sudden '*lights-on, nobody's home*' mask of my father returned – newly programmed – to face me, now directing his paternal wisdom into my devastated brain.

“Ohhh, nooo,” he cooed from a Halloween face in that make-believe insincere voice adults use when speaking (insincerely) to children. Mother had given her marching orders and this sudden impostor was now speaking to me:

“You can't walk around...” A dull clown now had to search for words, partially forgetting what he was supposed to say, and, glancing up to his boss, got a look and another cue from mother.

“You can't have holes in your dungarees... oh, no... listen to your mother, mommy knows best...” he stumbled on in obedience, earning her approval and a warm place in her bed that night.

I watched him glancing back to see if that met with mother's approval, and more sounds were possibly uttered, but I could not hear, for those who have drowned – especially as chattel for their father's lust - care little for such noise, and there existed now a new and living replacement that had a voice all its own.

¹ See Sullivan's brilliant work on “consensual validation” as a pillar of human communication.

² It is perhaps not too early to mention Sullivan's numerous statements concerning the woman of the house taking on the role of a man in the culturally-approved way, and the coming of disaster to the offspring.

Paranormal Taxi

Within a year of this new birth, this new creation was ready... apparently, to journey into lands beyond earth and stone. In some mysterious way, however, a small “haven” was created within, a place of existence not so different from the physical forest fortress I had left behind. A sign.

I’m in the back seat of a taxi with my parents on our way to the airport, destination Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We are going for a foray into my father’s import-export business. The taxi was one in which two extra seats in the roomy back seat folded out to face the normal bench seat of the traditional sedan. So sitting with my back to the driver, I asked where my stuffed dog was. I saw the look of panic on my mother’s face, and after a few hurried words between mom and dad it was made clear we couldn’t turn around to retrieve it, but the decision was made to have the dog sent to me via the efforts of my Aunt Sessa.

My aunt, a kindly eighty-year-old who spoke English haltingly and read the Yiddish daily paper, *The Forward*, was in actuality, my father’s aunt. She seldom left the house.

Sitting in the taxi with my parents, I was suddenly no longer there at all, but in some kind of spirit/dream-world. Outside myself – comparable to a dream-state with no consciousness of myself at all – my total existence suddenly consisted of a slightly confused Aunt Sessa appearing not completely confident as she approached some officious powers-that-be at a storefront with a package under her arm; which I knew in the dream could only be my stuffed dog. An unspoken voice emerged silently out of every atom of that scenery – and made itself known to my mind in a still, clear voice: “*You’ll never see that again.*” The voice was not tormenting. Of course, it was one-hundred percent correct.

“If we can’t love the (earthly) father we can see, we won’t love the (heavenly) Father we can’t see.”

Roy Masters