

THE OBSERVER

By

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Prologue

There is a dark chamber in the mind of every person where their deepest secrets are hidden away from friends, neighbors, and even themselves.

For some individuals the door to this secluded room is slammed shut and locked tight by the conscious mind – never to be revisited.

For others the gateway never fully closes and the horrors revisit them with increasing frequency until they take a rope, a knife, a gun, or perhaps too many pills in a fatal attempt to seal the portal.

The tale that follows is of a man whose dark compartment of unforgiveable sins is firmly locked – even to himself.

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CHAPTER ONE: AN OBSERVER MUST OBSERVE

“By definition an observer must observe, but not get involved. So when I saw the white squirrel atop a drift of new fallen snow, I knew that I was supposed to ignore the hawk that was flying above it in ever decreasing circles. With only 95 years on the job, I had little rank or privilege to do otherwise.

You could argue that saving a tiny rodent-like creature hardly qualifies as interference and I would agree, but does not mean the Boss would.

True, I did save that scarlet cardinal without consequences - the one in the cage in my room. It had fallen from the nest and had broken a wing. For weeks the baby's valiant parents stood guard and brought it food in anticipation of the time when it would be developed enough to fly back to the nest it had shared with three siblings.

While one parent tended to the trio above, the other was constantly at the side of the injured one. Tenderly, the offspring was fed sustenance transferred from Mommy or Daddy's loving beak, depending who was on duty.

Danger arrived one morning in the form of a five pound osprey, which had ventured from its usual lakeside feeding grounds. With its grappling claws extended, it was swooping towards the fledgling cardinal. The voracious predator was poised to carry off the little bird with its four sharp hooks on each murderous claw - two in the front and two in the back.

The mother bird in the nest saw it first.

“Chep, Chep, wheet, wheet, deet-adeet-adeet-ADEET-WHEET-WHEET”, she screamed in alarm and zoomed down to the side of her mate.

They stretched their wings out as far as possible and puffed up their feathers to make themselves appear larger. Together their wing span of two feet matched that of the predator, but their combined four ounces of weight didn't even qualify them for a bantam weight fight, let alone a death-match against a massive 80 ounce monster!

And yet when the male redbird thrust out his chest, and the onyx mask on his face was highlighted by a sharp beak twisted into a grimace: the keen eyed osprey took notice and slightly checked the speed of its dive.

A second twinge of doubt quickly followed, when he noticed that the gray mask of the female cardinal also had the same corkscrew shaped beak.

The mated pair of cardinals bravely flew towards the rapidly descending predator. The eagle-like bully soared close enough to nearly lose an eye to the slashing blades of the crimson tandem; before deciding to go back to his regular diet of helpless fish that do not fight back .

I watched all this as a good observer should; never stepping in even when it looked as though all three birds plus the babies in the nest would end up as the osprey's morning meal.



A Mated Pair of Cardinals

CHAPTER TWO: THE MANNER OF HIS DEATH WAS UNCERTAIN

One week after that crisis the three youngsters in the nest took their first test flights. All went well and with a final glance at their parents, they flew off to make their own earthly way and continue the cycle of life. Ever mindful of their duty, the pair who had mated for life, waited for their injured child to expand his wings and soar away. He flapped furiously, but was unable to get even a fraction of an inch off the ground. It was his broken wing. Never properly healed, it was as functional as a fallen log.

The parents stayed for three more sunrises by the side of the young one-winged redbird. Finally they had to leave as it was time for them to restart their cycle. Soon they would start their next nest and would have two to four new fledglings to feed and care for.

One-wing, as I now called him, was alone in the harsh world and would soon lose his life to a wandering feline or perhaps a random hawk. The manner of his expiration was uncertain, but not the fact of it.

I had to step in. What harm could it cause? I had to give him special treatment. I took in One-wing and he became the most handsome cardinal I have ever seen. His hue was of the deepest scarlet; with a crest that was high, regal, and sharply defined above the shiny sepia mask surrounding his beak.

A fine singer, he entertains me day and night from his cage; with a variety of pleasing notes and sounds that often mimic human words.

“What-what-what. Wow-ow-ow. Hoo-loop, hoo loop, hoo loop,” he sings using his favorite phrases, often repeated in definite patterns and series.



Three Legged Chester

CHAPTER THREE: THREE LEGGED CHESTER

A few months afterwards, I again broke the rules by interfering. This time, it was a land turtle. The size of a dinner plate, he had a snaky head with a yellow throat, and was dappled on the underside with splashes of orange, red and yellow.

Apparently, the poor thing had been struck by a car. I found him more dead than alive by the side of the street. His right hind leg was missing. A three legged turtle can hardly survive any better than a one-winged bird, so I took him in. I had to give him the special treatment.

Slowly I nursed 'Chester', as I called him, back to health. In summer he stays in a little square of land I fenced in for him with chicken coop wire. He has a miniature wading pool, a few smooth rocks to sun himself on, and an ample supply of food, both natural and that which is provided by me.

During the cold weather, Chester lives indoors in an aquarium where he happily munches on lettuce, bits of hamburger, and the occasional dab of bacon.

Later on, I similarly acquired a few other distressed creatures such as a three legged cat with no tail, and a blind dog.

CHAPTER FOUR: IN WW II AN OBSERVER INTERFERED

It's not like other Observers haven't interfered. The most famous case happened during the 1940s in the midst of World War II. A wounded soldier from the alliance of the U.S. and the U.K. held off several hundred Nazi soldiers and half a dozen heavily armored tanks for more than an hour. He was atop a burning vehicle called a tank destroyer that was just moments away from blowing up. He kept a line of fire going from the machine gun turret; eventually killing more than 200 enemy soldiers and forcing their tanks to withdraw.

The observer on duty in Germany that cold winter's day felt compassion for the brave soldier, but remained true to the directive. He did not interfere - not until the concussion from two mortar shells knocked the American G.I. off his feet.

The Nazis by then, had closed to within 20 yards. The observer laid unseen hands on the little warrior and helped him get back to the machine gun.

The weapon was unloaded and the badly bleeding soldier was unable to reload it. The invisible observer reloaded the weapon and the soldier was thus able to

lay down a new rain of hellfire on the disbelieving Nazis.

For his heroics that day, the Allied forces awarded the baby-faced infantryman every single medal that they possessed. As for the soldier, he never knew that the observer had stepped in to aid him and give him special treatment.

I'm told that the observer was given a mild reprimand but was not dismissed from his position.



Nazi Panzer Tank



A Tank Destroyer

CHAPTER FIVE: SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR THE SQUIRREL

Except for rescuing injured animals, I have always been a good observer and have never interfered. This time it was different. The white squirrel was not injured like the other creatures I rescued.

But if I did not give it special treatment, the beautiful snow white creature would surely have fallen to the hawk. I had rescue him and give him special treatment. Do you understand?”

The old man who called himself an ‘observer’, was speaking to a middle aged man in a black pinstriped suit who sat across from him in the cafeteria of an assisted living facility.

The hard faced man in the suit was listed in the facility’s records as the head of the HR department of the firm that had once employed the 95 year old retiree. He had been summoned to the home because of the old fellow’s pets. The rules prohibited residents from having dogs or cats or even small birds.

“I am leaving now old friend,” said the man in the suit. He spoke with a quiet raspy voice that did not seem to be compatible with his oversized, muscular frame. “I

don't think the Boss will be angry at you for saving the white squirrel. Good luck. I will see you soon."

The man in the suit walked briskly from the cafeteria to the building's main office, where the facility's manager was waiting to speak with him.

"Mr. Shade, I am sorry that I had to call you but it's really becoming too much. We let him have the bird and the turtle. Then he got the cat and the dog. Now we simply cannot have the squ....."

"Just a moment superintendent Carter. Has he caused any problems with other residents?"

"No. He's fine with everyone. He doesn't say much he just watches everyone."

"Yes, yes. He's under some sort of a delusion that he is something called an 'observer'. He thinks he has a directive from a secret organization to watch people. I would suggest to you that this is a harmless thing. Your company is being paid for the services you provide. I strongly recommend that you allow him his eccentricities since they do not affect anyone but himself. I trust this settles the matter. Good day."

Something in the manner of Mr. Shade and the quiet, confident way he carried himself, prompted the manager to abandon his prepared arguments and simply nod his assent.

Shade let himself out. The manager watched him leave and remained at his desk for a time, wondering

if perhaps he had been silently threatened by his visitor.

It wasn't so much what Shade said as the grim, forceful look on his face. His countenance was like that of a skilled warrior who could appear calm on the surface yet with little provocation, instantly explode into a maniacal fury. The manager decided that he had made a wise decision in agreeing with Mr. Shade.



CHAPTER SIX: WORK MAKES US FREE

Shade pushed open the facility's exit doors without waiting for them to part automatically. As he reached the sidewalk, his car pulled up to the curb. He didn't wait for the driver to open the rear door, yanking it quickly ajar, he sat down next to Shaffer.

"Take us to headquarters," he instructed the driver.

"How'd it go?," wondered Shaffer. "Is it him? Did you take him out? If not, when do we get him?"

"Enough Shaffe! Enough! The guy is 95 years old. He's non compos mentis!, daft, lost his fac....."

“Okay, okay, I get it.” Shaffer barked. “The old guy is nutty as a fruitcake but so what? If he’s our guy we gotta live up to our motto.”

“Arbeit Macht Frie – Work Makes You Free”, said the man in the suit. “It was written on the entrance to the concentration camp where my grandparents were killed. Yours too.”

“Work Makes You Free,” Shaffe repeated. It’s also our mantra. When we joined the organization and swore to hunt down nazi concentration camp killers, it was that work which made us free. It doesn’t matter if the guy is 95 or a hundred and six. If he’s the guy, he must die. We have to take him out. That’s our job and our work.”

“Listen Shaffe. It’s over. The war is over. It’s been over for more than 70 years. We have to put it behind us. The guy thinks he’s an observer. He thinks ‘Special Treatment’ is saving lives. He doesn’t remember that in 1941 Hitler put him in charge of ‘Special Treatment’ – the extermination of six million people.

Throttling the old man is not going to bring them back. I think that from now on instead of chasing down the last of the old killers, our group should just focus on keeping people aware of what happened. “

“You mean we should forget about the few remaining Nazis, but make sure the world never forgets what happened?” Said Shaffer, bitterly.

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