The Wantons

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Clinton Rodgers

The man lay flat in the brush looking over onto the village. It was quiet and serene, the clouds forming a slight haze. The creek moved slowly to the larger river; the trickling, splashing sounds sending shivers down his spine. Was he being followed? Were they trying to find him? The patter of his feet on the ground was the only sound in the muted silence. Yet, he suspected that they were more than capable of tracking. A sense of fright came over him as he imagined them stalking behind him. Turning, he saw nobody and was for a second reassured. Yet he knew that soon they would be following him if they were not already. He had to get to the village; he had to hide.

He stood, hoping that they would not discover him. How he wished to be free of their tyrannical evil. If only he could get far enough away, they would never find him again. He hooked his arm around the nearest tree. The trunk was curved, as if the sun had not reached it well enough as a sapling, twisting it slowly towards the light. The bark was rough and if he moved his arm, he knew he might get scraped. Below the roots, the river swayed in a small gully. Would he be able to get away fast enough?

The sweat poured from his skin as he began the sharp decline. He could barely imagine how his life had suddenly changed. At one moment he was just a regular art dealer, the next they were following him all across the countryside. His profound fear prompted him to step up the pace. He hoped to reach the settlement before sundown, since he was forced to walk and the night would make a chance of attack even greater. If he could only reach the village, perhaps he would be able to hide. The church tower in the distance was just visible and it gave him a slight bit of hope.

These vain hopes were dashed suddenly as he stumbled, crashing down the hill. He was scraped and bruised as he finally righted himself. Had anyone heard him? He tried to perceive if anything had changed, if anyone had noticed his descent. A bird twittered in a nearby tree, making him jump. Could it be a spy? He got back to his feet and began to run the rest of the way, fearful of the pursuit behind him. Would he be able to get away?

In the small gully, he found the creek, flowing with a purpose known only to itself, and he followed it towards the city. He assumed that its edge would provide the fastest trail to follow: at least that was what he hoped. The city did not seem to grow any closer, but if he could reach it, he would be safe.

At first, he only felt slight trepidation. This turned into a sinister feeling that persisted until he felt it coursing through his body and mind. Someone was nearby. He felt energy shock through his body, and he knew that they had found him. They had used their great technology to halt him. Fear flew up his spine as he fell to the ground, thrashing back and forth through spindly brambles. Looking up, he saw the face. They had found him. The next thing he knew, a rock came pelting down onto his head from above, and his brain relented. Consciousness left him as his eyes grew dim. They had found him. All was lost. His hope did not prevail. They had found him.
Dreams came upon him after a short time of his mind being free. He was bound to a table from which he could not rise. The walls were bleached white, as if he was in a hospital, or perhaps this was their operation room. The thought frightened him so much that he could not stand it. Nightmares. He had never been in such a place before. His mind’s eye blurred as he recoiled in his sleep. Why could he not awaken? The thought perplexed him; he needed to wake!

The man who haunted his dreams, Dr. Vorn, appeared by his side. Vorn was the man he had killed: the man who had been the ringleader of the evil operation. But he knew that Vorn was actually dead; he had seen it happen. In fact, he had cascaded the blows to Vorn’s temple, murdering the man. Yet he had felt little guilt over this. It had been justice, the man had deserved it. “How are we feeling today?” Vorn’s nightmare-phantom asked in a slow monotonous tone, simultaneously removing a syringe from beside the bed. “It’s time for your medicine.” He screamed aloud at the very idea, and suddenly woke up. Thank God! He was awake. The visions of evil had left him.

He discovered himself to be on a tan beach. They had left him alone. They had dropped him off at the sea. “Oh Lord!” he called out. “Thank You!” There was no response except the waves crashing against the shore. The ground was verdant not far behind him and a cliff appeared on his left. Past the small grassy sward began a forest that continued up on top of the cliffs in the distance. It was so recognizable; he felt exhilarated. He was home. He could remember coming here when he had been young, with his father, mother, brother, and sister. What a happy time it had been! He smiled at the thought.

Yet, he also knew that they would not be finished with him. This was a test. They were going to see whether he would run away or not. He would flee. He would run away. Happiness circulated through him as he saw figures out on a distant sandbar. Maybe they would help him. They would of course. He was home.

Hurrying forward, he found the water was fairly shallow. After continuing further, he discovered that the depth increased steadily. The wetness sloshed against him. He would escape, and they would never find him again. But where would he go? Thoughts of strange and distant places occurred to him. Maybe he would go to America, or perhaps South Africa, or even Australia. Happiness flamed through him as the thoughts roiled through his mind. The water got deeper as he continued forward. The sandbar was just in the distance out of his reach. He knew he would have to swim soon.

He plunged into the water, joyously stroking through the waves to the sandbar. The people there would help him, maybe they had a boat. He could take the boat to America. Happiness conflagrated through him as he saw the figures on the distant sandbar. All of his life, he had hoped for a way of escape, and now it was appearing before his eyes.

Something was wrong, the sandbar was not getting any nearer; instead the water just got deeper and deeper. He could see it in the distance, the people standing there waiting for him, calling to him. He began to run out of energy. He looked back and discovered that the beach was no longer in sight. He was feeling highly perturbed. The
waves of the sea washed over his face, and he struggled for air. For a few heartbeats he was entirely engulfed by the press of the water, but finally he regained his balance and floated to the surface.

Finally, the sandbar began to come closer. The faces of the people upon the shore were now visible. The odd familiarity about them forced him to stop in his tracks. Happiness blazed into his body and soul as he saw his mother and father waiting for him, faces white as death. It was impossible, he said to himself, for they had died many years ago. Then, he finally understood.

In the Dedham Institution for the Mentally Unstable, Dr. Johan Vorn looked upon his former patient. He wished he could have helped him, the man having been in such a poor state. How he had broken the bonds that tethered him to his bed were beyond Vorn. It must have taken a great amount of energy spurred on by his hysterical dreams. He stared at the body slumped over the water basin. In one of his episodes, the man had drowned himself. How the mind could play tricks on those susceptible. Dr. Vorn averted his eyes, there were reports to fill out now.

Sherri Quirke Bolcevic