

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

“Everyone carries a shadow...”

Carl Jung.

Chapter One.

Tomorrow will come and it will be just like today.

Barrett Osborne paused before getting into his car, looking back at the semi-detached he shared with his wife Samantha. On days like today, with the rain falling lightly but persistently, he wished he could simply stay at home—lock the door from the inside, switch on the TV, put his feet up and just let it all wash away. None of it seemed worth the effort. Work. Life. The constant grind and predictability.

Samantha was watching him from the bedroom window. He looked up at her and, after a moment's hesitation, waved half-heartedly. She would know. She always knew. They'd been together now for something like twelve years and sometimes it seemed to him that they'd always known each other, that their lives had always been somehow intertwined—vine-like and parasitic, one feeding off the other, a symbiotic draining and replenishing that would occasionally become unbalanced, one demanding more sustenance, one receiving less. That's what it was like now. As she lifted her hand to wave back at him, he saw how much of an effort it was for her, how the movement caught halfway, hesitant and oddly diminished. She was giving, as she so often did. By nature one of life's carers—a loving, thoughtful and long-fused woman—Samantha was not one to crumble at the first sign of trouble. But she was finding life with him difficult, now. Even he could see that.

He wanted to stand there looking up at her all day. The rain came more heavily and still he didn't get into his car. She held his gaze unquestioningly.

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Samantha Osborne understood his needs as well as he did—perhaps even better than he did. She would not abandon him. As long as he needed her to, she would stand there looking down at him, giving him the comfort and predictability that he required. Selfless at times like this, she would ask nothing in return—and Barrett would certainly not offer anything.

He had, he insisted on telling himself, nothing to give.

At the office, he went to his desk without speaking to anyone—sitting down at his computer and booting it up. He had work to do. There was always work to do. Copy to be written, email enquiries to be answered, discussions with clients, the steady drip-drip of monotony and obligation.

The night before, sitting before his laptop in his study at home, Samantha downstairs preparing supper—listening to a CD by someone uninspiring he'd never heard of—Barrett had found himself doing something that he'd never thought he would. Creating an account at WordPress, unsure what his real intention was even as he did this, Barrett Osborne had, hesitantly to begin with, then with growing enthusiasm, started to write his first blog entry. Words were his business but nonetheless this had somehow felt different, liberating, almost—a break from the routine that he, as a rule, clung onto so doggedly.

Except that that wasn't quite right. As he now checked his email, he began to understand that it wasn't a break from the routine at all. It was merely a reshaping of it, an extension of his normal introspection—a solid, crafted representation of his internal landscape. That he might be sharing his world, his *life*, with complete strangers didn't especially concern or attract him; it was the act of giving his thoughts—as dark as they could sometimes be—form, a form that could not be altered without

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it seeming as though he were somehow cheating, that drove him. In what might well have been an uncharacteristic bid for freedom, Barrett Osborne now realised that he had in fact succeeded in adding more rigour and force to his routine... to his *regime*.

He looked at that first entry again now. At work. On another computer. Pulled from a server, if memory served him well, on the west coast of the United States of America. As familiar as he was with the World Wide Web—a veteran of such things, in fact—that still gave him an unexpected thrill. It seemed dangerous, somehow, and yet it was a danger that seemed to fit quite perfectly with the life he was already leading. It was the kind of danger that sat very neatly with the day in, day out drudgery of work and home, work and home, work and home.

Returning to his email inbox, Barrett noticed an internal message that he hadn't initially spotted. Clicking on it, he read the characteristically succinct prose of his departmental head:

Barrett,

Need to have a word with you ASAP. Get a coffee and join me.

Roger.

That was all he needed. As well as the break from his Monday morning routine being extremely unappealing, he really didn't relish seeing Roger—certainly not this early in the day, anyway. Sitting opposite him across the desk and having to contend with his patronisingly obsequious smirk was something that should always, whenever possible, be reserved for later in the day. Nonetheless, the message had been clear enough.

Roger wanted to see him—and he wanted to see him *now*.

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Samantha was just pleased to be out of the house. It felt good to be wearing something reasonably smart for a change, with her hair neatly arranged around her slightly too angular face instead of tautly fastened back, and to not have to worry about how Barrett was feeling—or, more to the point, what he was *thinking*.

Kendra sat across the table from her in the coffee bar on Witherington Street, studying her face as though it were an indecipherable ancient text. Samantha would usually have found her friend's intensity—her unwillingness to take “I'm fine” for an answer—irritating, but today it was somehow comforting. It was good that she still had at least one friend who gave a damn about her, who understood as best she could the life that she chose to share with Barrett and didn't judge her too excessively for it. Sometimes, in those previously quite substantial periods of normalcy, she'd even managed to convince herself that this was all she needed—Barrett at home or work and Kendra waiting for her in the coffee bar, prepared to listen when life with Barrett became a little too demanding.

Now, however, she wasn't quite so sure.

“Bad weekend?” Kendra asked.

Where should she begin? In many respects, it had been a fairly typical weekend. She and Barrett had been together the whole time—Barrett even insisting on going grocery shopping with her on Saturday morning. She'd felt as she so often did that they had, as her mother might have said, been joined at the hip, and whilst there was a certain satisfaction to this, it was surely true that it had had its less attractive qualities.

She smiled at Kendra a little sadly and shrugged. “Fairly average,” she told her.

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“I’ll take that as a yes, then.” Kendra rummaged about in her bag beside the table for her cigarettes, took them out, and then realised that she could no longer smoke in the coffee bar. “Shit,” she said, dropping them on the tabletop and staring at them accusingly. “How long has it been, now?”

Samantha shrugged again. “Two or three years?”

“Two or three years and I still keep falling into the same old pattern. Would you credit it?”

“Old habits die hard.”

Her tone of voice said it all. Kendra studied her features again and said, “Why do I get the feeling that we’re not talking about the smoking laws anymore?”

Samantha did this so often. She hated herself for it but she was no longer sure that there was any other way for her to be. She wanted to talk. In truth, she *needed* to talk. And every part of her rational being insisted that she should. This was the part of her that dropped the hints that Kendra was so adept at picking up on. It was a devious beast, always intent on betraying Barrett—always intent on betraying Samantha herself. And try as she might to keep it confined, it always found a way of showing itself and she would once again find herself retreating quickly, laughing the comment off, insisting that nothing was as bad as it might seem from the outside, promising that if things ever *did* deteriorate that badly she would indeed do something about it. It was an eternal push and pull, a battle that went on within—on the whole quite privately but at times such as these briefly revealing itself to the never-miss-a-thing scrutiny of her dearest and oldest friend.

“Because you want something to take your mind off your craving?” Samantha said, nodding at the cigarette pack and trying—vainly, she knew—to redirect her friend.

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“Well, that might have something to do with it.” Kendra laughed quietly to herself and put the pack of cigarettes back in her bag. “Seriously, though,” she continued, “you aren’t looking well, love. If you need to talk about it...”

“I don’t.” Her tone was rather more abrupt than she’d intended. She took a breath and repeated calmly, “I don’t, Kendra. Really. There’s nothing to talk about—”

“I find that hard to—”

“There isn’t.” There was no way on earth that Kendra was going to be satisfied with this. She could read Samantha perfectly—the end result of years, *decades*, of confiding and conferring, secret-sharing and consolation—and if she wanted to, Samantha had no doubt whatsoever that Kendra could make the morning very difficult and distasteful for her. Kendra could analyse with the best of them, and her circuitous line of questioning could always be depended upon to, with much misdirection and subtlety, get to the heart of the matter.

It would appear that today, however, Kendra was content to go easy on her. Maybe that was another sign of just how bad Kendra believed Samantha’s relationship with Barrett to be, or maybe she actually bought the lie. Either way, Samantha was relieved. As much as her rational self might want to discuss this, now was not—

or was it?

—the time.

“You were telling me about Saturday,” Samantha said, sipping her latte.

“Was I? Oh, yes—of course I was. Well, yes... let me see. I didn’t—I *don’t*—want anything over the top or, you know, too juvenile. There’s nothing worse, if you ask me, than a bunch of late-thirtysomething women trying to act like they’re twenty-one. So, what I was thinking was that just a small, select bunch of us might go to the

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new wine bar on Summerton Lane. What do you think?”

“What do I think?”

“What do you think.”

“I think that’s the perfect way to piss off everyone who doesn’t fall into the small, select bunch category. Either you’re doing this or you’re not, Kendra. Where birthday parties are concerned, in my experience, there are no half measures.”

“That occurred to me,” Kendra said, pitching her voice lower in order to adequately express her (*purely fake*, Samantha was sure) concern. “With this kind of arrangement, you’re right, someone is always going to be left out, but I’ve planned for that.”

“You have?”

“Indeed I have.” Kendra smiled; Samantha understood the horror shark-attack victims felt in their final moments. “They can go fuck themselves.”

Samantha shook her head and laughed along with Kendra. This was a world removed from that which she had inhabited over the weekend—the world she normally considered her own, the *real* world, the only truthful, meaningful existence there was for her. Kendra continued to expand on her distaste for the people she was very deliberately not inviting to her birthday bash, in ever more expressive detail, and Samantha felt herself regaining some of the ground she had lost over the past few days.

“It’s going to be wonderful,” Kendra said. “We’ll have a ball, I promise you.”

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that...”

Kendra sighed and very deliberately looked away. “Don’t do this, Samantha,” she said. “You promised.”

“I’m sorry but I don’t think I did. I said I would if I could, that was all, and

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now—”

“And now Barrett needs you at home. Yes, I know—I’ve heard it before, numerous times.”

“Don’t be like that, for Christ’s sake, Kendra. I can’t just... I can’t just abandon him when he’s like this.”

“Can’t you?” There was an edge to Kendra’s words, now—a challenge that Samantha just didn’t care for.

“What are you implying?”

“Nothing—it’s just that... well, you know, sometimes I wonder if Barrett isn’t just a little too convenient. If you don’t want to come, fine, don’t come. But stop using him as an excuse, Samantha. It just doesn’t wash any more, love.”

Samantha couldn’t quite believe that Kendra actually thought that way. The very idea that she didn’t want to go to Kendra’s birthday party was just ridiculous. She *enjoyed* a good party, especially when Kendra was around. Had she forgotten all those times in their youth when they had partied till dawn and then puked up for two days solid? Had the songs and the laughter simply faded from her memory or had she cruelly hidden them away?

“I *do* want to come,” Samantha said weakly—her voice catching in the back of her throat. “Surely... you must know that, Kendra. You’re the best... you’re the only friend I have and... I don’t want you thinking that of me.”

Kendra held her hand on the tabletop. “Then come.”

“I *can*’t.”

Staring at her a little too pityingly, Kendra finally sat back in her chair. “Well, the offer’s there,” she said with faux frigidity. “If you want to join us, you know where we are.”

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Roger smiled at him as if he had good news to impart. Sitting opposite him across the desk, Barrett wondered how long this was going to go on. They'd been sitting this way for a good minute, now—possibly two—and if one of them didn't speak soon it would begin to look pretty bloody ridiculous. Roger wanted him to know that he was the one in control of the situation, as if anyone had ever really doubted it, but this utterly pointless silence—possibly intended to be profound, achieving little more than tedium—merely served to underscore the man's weaknesses, in Barrett's possibly biased opinion.

Waiting for him to speak, happy to sit here all day, if that was what it took, Barrett studied Roger's receding hairline and thought about just how easy it would probably be to completely undermine the air of confidence Roger liked project. Barrett had seen the signs and he understood. Wishing himself to be thought a world apart, Roger was ultimately fooling no one. He was as vulnerable as the rest of them. Like Barrett, like the girl on the desk at reception—even like the old woman who came in to clean up at the end of each weekday—he had his nightmares, his insecurities. When he turned the light out at night and laid his head upon his pillow he was as alone as the rest of them, whoever he had by his side. The world would creep in, then. As he tried to push it away, hide from it, it would become more insistent and he would find himself hovering over the events of the day, the week, the month—events of years ago, cruel and unrelenting, drawing him down and filling the void he strove to create. It would not be easy for him, Barrett knew. With all his brashness and fakery, it would hit him all the harder. And Barrett couldn't find it in his heart to feel the least bit sorry for him.

“Thanks for coming so promptly, Barrett,” Roger finally said. “I know you

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must have... well, we all have a lot to do but, unfortunately, sometimes..." He shrugged. He was struggling. Not a good sign at all, Barrett thought.

"What's on your mind, Roger?" he said, hoping to make this easier for both of them.

Rolling his eyes and sitting back in his chair, Roger sighed and said, "What have I got on my mind? Shit, where do you want me to start, Barrett, mate?"

"With how it affects me, perhaps?"

Roger nodded thoughtfully whilst Barrett, happy to be as patient as the situation required, sipped his coffee and studied him. He'd never really liked Roger, it was true. He was not an easy man to get along with, even when he was being nice. But as he now watched him Barrett found himself wondering if perhaps Roger deserved a little sympathy. In a world such as the one they shared, maybe everyone deserved a little sympathy—the Rogers of the world especially, as the false demeanour they presented was clearly intended to provide the extra protection they more than anyone required, a crusty carapace to shield the soft, sensitive flesh beneath. Maybe it was too easy for Barrett to sit before his computer projecting all his negativity onto Roger. Maybe that was what his position of authority set him up for. Maybe it was unjust, something else for which Barrett should feel ashamed. Barrett didn't really know. All he now truly understood was that Roger was a man who also struggled. What the nature of that struggle was, he could not say. It was none of his business. But it was clearly true that it impacted upon Roger as solidly as Barrett's problems impacted upon him, and whilst he still couldn't quite bring himself to feel sorry for Roger, he did at least experience a moment of empathy.

Whatever it was that Roger had to say, it was fairly clear that he wished he could delegate the responsibility and the act itself to someone else.

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And however unexpectedly flattering an image of Roger that night present, Barrett nevertheless felt a sudden jolt of fear.

Nodding, Roger sat forward in his chair and laced his fingers together on the desktop. “I wish it were different,” he told Barrett—the professionalism creeping back into his voice, cold and calculated, the guard well and truly back in place. “But it isn’t.” He shook his head despondently; there was nothing real about it. “Times are hard, Barrett. You know that as well as anyone. The economic pressures are... well, there’s less work out there and far too many fighting for it. We simply can’t go on the way we are without getting into serious problems and, so, regrettably, I’m afraid we’re going to have to let you go. There will be an appropriate redundancy payment, naturally, and as soon as we can take you back on—always assuming you’re still available—we would, of course, be delighted to have you back on the team. For the moment, however...”

There had probably been rumours. There were always rumours when redundancies were on the cards. But Barrett, given his nature, was not a part of the rumour mill—the grapevine did not speak to him because he did not speak to it.

“For the moment...” Barrett echoed. “For the moment...”

Roger frowned ever so slightly, not quite sure how Barrett was going to take this, it seemed, and then quickly got back on script. “For the moment, all the necessary details will be taken care of promptly and... well, we don’t expect you to work the day out, Barrett, so if you want to clear your desk and...”

“That’s it?”

Looking a little confused, Roger turned his hands over as if to show that this was not within his control and half-shrugged. “What can I say? You’re one of our most productive and reliable employees, but we are shedding a good ten percent of

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our workforce and... it's nothing personal, Barrett. You're just unlucky."

Just. Barrett didn't know what that meant. He thought about it as he returned to his office, numb but far from surprised.

Just. It was anything but.

Her conversation with Kendra had left her feeling especially low. Sitting in her car at the side of the road—a quiet stretch of country lane where she had parked in order to gather her thoughts—she sat back and let her hands drop in her lap, looking ahead through the windshield at the heavy, cloud-laden sky, trying to convince herself that Kendra had meant well even as it struck her that her friend's forcefulness had bordered on, to her mind, cruelty. She had thought that Kendra had understood her position better than anyone. She'd been there from the beginning, had known Barrett as long as she had. In the early days, they had even gone out on double dates together, Kendra actually liking Barrett almost as much as Samantha herself had. For her to push the issue of her birthday party quite so unrelentingly, given that she was well aware of Barrett's growing problem and how that affected Samantha, prompted her to question just how much of a friend Kendra really was. Had the situation been reversed, Samantha could never imagine herself behaving that way. She would, she hoped, support her friend and be as flexible and forgiving as possible.

Maybe she's just had enough, Samantha now thought. *Perhaps she's simply tired of me not being there for her—of always having to be the supportive one and getting nothing in return.* Kendra wasn't as superficial as that, though. However Samantha chose to play back the events of that morning, which ever way she chose to interpret them, the hard, inescapable fact was that Kendra would never be the kind of friend that required something in return. In order for her to push Samantha like that

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she would have to have a good reason, be able to at least imagine some kind of benefit to Samantha herself.

“She’s doing it for my own good,” Samantha whispered to herself—closing her eyes against the glare of the now brightening sky. “That’s how she sees it. She doesn’t want to hurt me or Barrett, but she knows that—”

Her phone was ringing. Looking down at it, sticking out of her bag on the passenger seat, she smiled to herself, sure she knew who it was calling her. It could only really be one person. Her last connection. The one person who could repeatedly bring her back to the world she thought she had lost. Her friend. Kendra, calling to apologise.

Who else *could* it be?

“Samantha? Is that you?”

It took her a moment to realise that it wasn’t Kendra at all.

It took her another moment to figure out just *who* it actually was.

The voice was familiar but it was weak and grainy—not the fault of the line, as far as she could tell, but the speaker herself. There was emotion there, anxiety and tentativeness. And that barely perceptible and infinitely recognizable lisp.

Samantha checked the caller ID. An unknown caller, typical of Gail’s withheld number.

“Gail? You sound... are you all right?”

“I need to speak to you, Sam. I need to see you. As soon as possible.”

Samantha didn’t enjoy the prospect of being at her sister’s beck and call.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, do you, Gail?”

“It’s important. If you don’t do this, Samantha... I really need to see you.”

There was a brief pause during which Samantha considered reminding her of

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the distance that had grown between them over the past eighteen months—the extreme and prolonged silences between them, their inability to find a way past the choices Samantha had made. She could list the accusations Gail had levelled against her without any real effort, so fresh and raw were the wounds still. She hadn't been there for their mother in the final months. She didn't care. Her family and her past had been squandered for the sake of an obsessive-compulsive who didn't deserve her. She could quite easily have said all that and more, but before she had chance Gail came back on the line.

“Please, Samantha,” she said. “If it wasn't important to both of us you know I wouldn't ask.”

She didn't recall Gail ever before saying “please” to her and quite so convincingly meaning it. It was incredibly satisfying, but at the same time it was also a little scary. “What is it, Gail?” She said.

“I can't tell you over the phone. Can you come round this afternoon—or for lunch perhaps?”

After the morning she had had with Kendra, Samantha just wanted to return home. At times like these she could easily understand Barrett's need for privacy and seclusion, for that locked door against the world. Maybe at home, dug in and cut off, isolated, that sense of safety and control *was* illusory. But it had to be better than this fucked up world where plans suddenly had to be amended or set aside, where anything could happen at any moment—an unexpected encounter, an accident, the rich, rug-like fabric of the world suddenly pulled from under you. At least, at home, the possibilities were limited, the boundaries easily discernible. Yes, it may well be oppressive and dull on occasion, but surely it had to be better than this.

Didn't it?

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“I’m not sure, Gail. I’ve got a lot—”

“Don’t make me beg, Samantha, please...”

Her voice... something really wasn’t right with Kendra’s voice. Samantha convinced herself that it was merely anxiety—the fear of how her phone call would be received after such a lengthy and pointed silence. But it was more than that. Gail sounded wrung out, not her usual screw-you self. Samantha had not the faintest inkling of just what was wrong in Gail’s life, but whatever it was it was significant enough for her to swallow her pride and phone her virtually estranged sister.

It had to be bad.

“I’ll see you in about fifteen minutes,” she said.

“Thank you, Sam...”

In many ways, it was a relief. Having to force himself to leave the house each weekday for what seemed such a pointless, ineffectual task had been beginning to take its toll. The ridiculousness of the people around him, his work colleagues, had chafed for a long while, but in recent weeks it had grown steadily worse. Looking out of his office door at them as they walked by, he would marvel at their obliviousness—at their uncanny knack for finding new ways to deny the reality around and within. The contrast had been stark, a bitter highlighting of the solitary, secret place in which he found himself and which he both loved and loathed. Not having to contend with their glances and whispers, with their nerve-edge laughter and verbal incontinence, made his redundancy—now there’s an irony—feel like a gift. He doubted that Samantha would see it quite that way but, at the end of the day, this wasn’t about her. He was not needed any more. He had been granted leave to pursue his own thoughts and obsessions. Maybe that had not been the intention, but he if no one else saw the

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potential—the opportunity to understand, to give form to the shadows into which most people simply refuse to peer. He did not think of it as a chance to get well. That kind of thinking was based on a superficial assessment of this strange and persisting place in which he found himself. No, rather he saw it as the handing to him of latitude—a space in which to explore and discover, without having to worry about how it would affect him, about how it would touch on the more practical aspects of living.

Closing the front door behind him, he put the chain on and slumped down on the floor—pushing aside the morning mail, unconcerned by it, and briefly closing his eyes. Samantha was not home. Her car was gone. That meant he had time—time to properly examine the morning’s events, time to plan how he was going to tell her... time to plan just how he was going to convince her that this was the very thing that he needed.

For a moment or two, however, he simply sat there listening to the silence—or, rather, the *almost*-silence. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked dependably. Through in the kitchen the fridge-freezer buzzed and gurgled in its usual, slightly melancholic way. Somewhere a pipe clicked, the heating cooling down. It was ineffably comforting and it was the simplest of pleasures to embrace it, to sit alone in this uncomplicated way and feel the outside world take a step back. Roger and his minions might as well have not existed. People like that would never understand the pain they were capable of causing; equally, they would never understand the joy and freedom with which he now found himself blessed-cursed. That obliviousness he had considered earlier. Every good and bad thing they did they simply could not grasp. That lack of intent was their trademark, the very thing by which they were known to the likes of Barrett Osbourne. It set them apart from people like himself, he thought—even as he saw that this wasn’t especially fair. It made them identifiable,

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overwhelming in their majority... the butt of a joke that none of them would ever get.

He had to move sooner or later. He realised that. He couldn't sit here until Samantha returned home. Having her finding him like this would not make matters any easier. He therefore pushed himself to his feet with a groan that came from deep within and went through to his study—sitting down in front of the laptop on his desk.

Taking it off standby, resisting the urge to pour himself a drink so early in the day, he clicked on the WordPress icon in his Favourites and navigated to the new post page. Having every intention of writing about his morning, about Roger and his obsequiousness, the promises and assurances, the multifaceted relief he'd felt as he'd left the building with his possessions tucked under his arm, he instead found himself working on an entry entitled *Depression: The Door to Enlightenment*.

We are socially conditioned to believe that it is undesirable. Chat shows dedicate whole hours to “understanding” the condition and outlining the various treatments. Doctors hand out pills and counselling willy-nilly, determined to “cure”. And do any of them ever ask themselves if, perhaps, this is not in some way a beneficial trait? Did it evolve for a specific purpose or is it simply a byproduct of intelligence, of self-awareness, of consciousness? When the mind and life retreats within, is it merely an escape from fruitlessness and futility or is it trying to tell us something?

Barrett read through what he had written, wondering if anyone out there would actually understand the point—what there was of one—he was trying to make. He didn't want to run from the abyss, as the world insisted he must. He wanted to

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grasp its finer points, stare into it and have it stare back at him. Masking those depths with clumsy analysis, blurring their profundity with medication might work perfectly well for many. And good luck to them. But he needed something different, something beyond an accepted cure.

Barrett Osbourne knew he must first fall *into* the abyss in order to come out renewed.