Morgan - Unhinged

This draft calls on memories of the inspiration for several versions of the Traumatic Flashback theme, featuring Morgan Erin Wildmuir from Abyss.

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Night. In myth and legends a time for unearthly visitations and dark omens. For Morgan Erin Wildmuir, night had always been a close friend and ally. Sleep, however, had long been an unrelenting enemy. Moonlight streamed down upon the Colorado Rockies. A cliff house, on a remote edge of the Wildmuir estate, gleamed under the silken light. Within that glass walled house, the estate’s sole heir slumbered fretfully.

Caressed by the moon, her body writhed and arched; her arm rising as if to fend off attack. This night’s ghosts were different from her usual nightmares. Her simple presence had aroused demons long buried and forgotten on this land.

Like a drowning victim, her throat struggled to give voice to inarticulate pleas for help. In her dream she was a child again—her vocal chords frozen with terror and confusion. Her mind—embracing the past—revisited an eternal moment, where memories tore at her heart and tried to rend her soul the way they could not have done in the instant they had first seared her. Her mouth framed the strongest word of denial known to a child—over and over—as her spirit toured a hell within.

Her body wrenched itself around the desperate need to scream and break the spell, but only a faint rasp in her throat escaped. A part of her danced under the surface of sleep’s paralysis, desperately aware of how near the haven of waking lay. Her mind stabbed desperately at the barriers between consciousness and sleep. Only a simple shift of mental state and her wounded soul would be rescued from memories painful enough to override a lifetime’s worth of self control and training; harsh enough to crack the discipline of a mind strong enough to pry between dimensions...

Her eyes flew open.

Pain. She resisted the urge to moan. The edge of danger remained in the air as she struggled vainly to assert *here* and *now* over the chaos in her mind. *So much pain,* she thought, *and I haven’t even come near the scene of...* The truth she had fled eleven years ago. Even now, she could not make herself complete the thought. She sat up hesitantly in bed and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. What she saw was as natural to her as sweat tears and bleeding, but rationally, it had nothing to do with reality. She lifted her hands before her and appraised the state of her body. To herself she groaned, “This is a bad sign.”

She closed her eyes and focused on the wings of her mind. A simple way to explain it, would be to say that part of her had woken up in bed, and another had woken up somewhere in the remote wilderness of earth and sky. Ever since her entire extended family—with only one exception—had been slaughtered, her reality had refused to obey the rules of everyone else’s. She did not know which version was closer to the truth, because it seemed that everyone’s reality had a few exceptions, all the worse for that they were ignored. Pulling her attention back together she closed the most dangerous door her desperate mind had opened.

When she was satisfied that her reality was once again safely conforming, she opened her eyes and glanced over at the clock glowing on her dresser. “Almost three. God,” she exhaled. She slid off of the bed, wrestling her night shirt back down for the sake of modesty. The sheets and comforter had all been thrown off the bed in her convulsions. She bent over to grab them but when she stood up, she simply tossed them down again, shaking her head.

*Not worth it. I’ll never get back to sleep.* Morgan ran her hands through her disheveled hair, sorting out her thoughts in a still awakening mind. *Richmond—that parasite—won’t get up to Aspen for another nine hours...* she realized. With a grimace, she dropped her hands to her hips. She looked upon the bed and its invitation to renewed dreaming. *I’d rather wait it out.* She toed the comforter, but she was hot enough from her fit to forgo the added insulation. Approaching the door, she reflected, *I expected to find some painful memories waiting for me—coming home. I didn’t expect them to nail me at the cliff house though... or, for that matter, before I’d gone back ... home.* Her throat clenched, because for all the evil that had happened to there in one night, it remained, in her heart, just that.

Home.

In the hall, a back lit silhouette of herself, she turned and punched the wall. The shock passed through her, but the impulse to rage and destroy was harder to ground out. “Damn!” Feeling no pain, and not bothering to examine the result of her impact on the wall, she glared inwardly at herself. *I can’t believe I lost control like that,* she frowned. A flash of memory from her awakening followed. *Or like that either.* She composed herself against further outbursts. They would only reverse and end up hurting her. Like everything else it seemed, this property had been held in trust her entire life, only rarely to be visited by her. By her father’s express wishes, the buildings on this property had been meticulously maintained and provisioned, in spite of the fact that she and only she could permanently reside there, and *that* only when she inherited at twenty-one. It belonged to her, but that did not mean she could afford to knock holes in the walls.

She continued on through the connecting hallway and came out on the balcony overlooking the common room below and the majesty of the Aspen slopes beyond the glass walls. She slunk through the dark, gliding down the stairs into room that was once the heart of a hunting and skiing lodge. *I wonder what other omens of ill fate are lurking in wait for me...*

*...Here.* the thought twisted, and she glanced down reflexively. A thick leather bound book lay on the mahogany table before the couch. She could not just walk away from it, she found. Dropping softly into the couch, she laid a hand lightly on the cover. *God...* she breathed projecting to the absent author, *you knew I would have to come—after seeing this.*

She picked it up warily, and as she flipped open the cover, her fears, her nightmares, her impatience were all blown away by the magnitude of what came into focus before her eyes. The words were written in her father’s elegant longhand, and they spoke with an immediacy that brought an ache to her heart. But what they said was like a blast of storm winds to her mind.

All that we can ever truly know we know only in the mind. The world we exist in is a field of raw information which our perceptions are somehow able to make sense of... but the world we are aware of is an image, created and interpreted by our minds from that information. What that information really is or what it represents we are unable to know, because it can only be observed indirectly and solely through interaction. Psychology is not engineered to explore this prospect, which is more consonant with the study of Physics. The study of the mind as a component of reality falls under the science of Psionics.

Despite efforts made—even by Morgan Eve Wildmuir, your great-grandmother—to establish this field, it remains barely acceptable as merely a venue of fiction. Admittedly, the topic of psionic ability is a murky one at best. There has really been no serious investigation into the very basis of mental ability, as there has never been a coherent recognition of the mind's role in the very expression of existence. For this reason, much of the work related to the field has been disorganized and incoherent. There are fundamental constants that unite the many profound phenomena found in fiction with the natural process of psychic existence in which we all are grounded. Understanding the state dependent nature of psionics, and the effects of basic interpretation on freeing these abilities is a prerequisite to even beginning an inquiry into the subject.

I am sorry to say, my daughter, I never had the time to find all the answers you will need to deal with what you will experience. I have collected my insights here for you sort of as a framework within which you might find a way to search for the answers yourself. You might as well know that my own experience with the secrets of the mind have been provocative and while you may feel that you are reading predictions of your life, I can only tell you that the powers of perception are little understood and falsely limited. I am watching you and I am only sorry I can do no more to aid you with what is to come. Perhaps someday, you will understand, and you will be able to look my way and realize that you were never alone.

*I feel like I’ve opened Pandora’s box,* she realized to her own amazement. But this was her father’s last gift to her and it had waited until she had dared to probe the tragic legacy of her loss. *This is the most unnerving inheritance, Dad. Why did you do it? How did you ever know I would need this? It’s like confronting an abyss—and here I am poised on the edge.*

In the morning light, the rich dark wood of the coffee table gleamed identically with the lustrous radiance of her hair. Morgan sat curled up on cushions with her feet tucked under her, the heavy book in her lap. She glanced up as she felt a cat’s weight land on the cushions beside her. “Hey Bozwell,” she greeted the black tom, smiling. “You hungry kitty?” she asked him. Bozwell squinted his eyes and meowed assertively. She suddenly noticed the daylight streaming in the vast picture windows, realizing that she had not moved an inch since sitting down. The enchantment of reading broken, she arched—stretching languorously to relieve the cramping that had set into her muscles. “Jeez, how long have I been reading?” she wondered aloud, absently setting the book aside.

Bozwell slid into her lap just as she was about to move. Curling an arm to support him, she stood up and started off for the kitchen. “Well,” she said to her cat, “let’s see what they’ve got here for us to eat.” In its time, the cliff house had been an innovation, and it had been maintained and refitted over the years to compensate for the weaknesses an open and airy mountain house could suffer. The glass walls that overlooked the north, south and east were all double paned insulated glass. The floors were all fine wood parquet with plush islands of carpeting in most of the rooms. The interior was staggered in three levels, but was at most only two stories at any particular point.

It was once a guest house, and for an entire family it would be very cozy, but for her alone it was elegantly spacious. The upstairs was a loft, containing a master bedroom and two other rooms flanking, all of which shared the same view as the common room and the elaborate balcony and double staircase. The kitchen and a small dining room dominated the northern corner of the house, and the common room spread through out the rest. Nestled under the loft, the westward corner of the house protected the entry, a small sitting room and a workroom off of the garage. Morgan had toured every square inch upon her arrival the previous day.

Crossing into the kitchen, she rubbed Bozwell behind the ears, assuring him, “Don’t worry Boz, I brought some tuna and a carton of milk, just in case, but maybe there’s—ooouchh!!!” she exclaimed, dropping the poor cat in a sudden stab of pain. “What the...?” she glanced down, lifting up her foot reflexively. The kitchen floor was sprinkled with splintered shards of silvered glass. “Glass... did you break something Boz?” she asked turning a stern eye on her familiar.

As she reached out to snatch up the broom and dust pan from the nook by the refrigerator, she glanced at the clock on the stove. It read ‘11:11’. *When all is one,* her mind fished up the old saying. Then she had to grab the cat. “No Boz, let me sweep this up first.” The cat glared at her a moment, then hopped up to the counter to lick at his paws. Morgan quickly attacked the mess, but she couldn’t help wondering *where* the glass had come from. Upon closer inspection the silver fragments obviously came from a mirror. Setting the full dust pan on the counter she frowned. *...but there aren’t any mirrors in here...* Directly in front of her the clock changed to eleven twelve and it finally clicked. “Oh shit!!! The time! I’m going to miss my appointment!” she exclaimed in sudden alarm. In a flash, she was bolting down the hallway. The cat stared after her emitting a plaintive, “Mew???”

A door popped open under her hand and then slammed shut. Morgan continued on past the linen closet with a towel in her hand.

Entering the utility bathroom, across the hall from the work room, she stopped short to look at the mirror. At first, she was absorbed by her own reflection. Green eyes shone under the dark arch of eyebrows in a dark frame of lashes, peering through long sheer bangs. Her face, fair skinned and framed by a rich mahogany mane, had even, regular features. A little stronger than she liked, but androgyny was attractive now anyway. She cocked her head, and regarded herself for a moment.

Her focus shifted to the surface of the glass and she bent closer to examine a faint crack in the mirror, catching the reflection of the shower behind her in the edges of her vision. For a moment her mind flashed back to the mystery of the mirror shards. Not finding the answer here, she shrugged and turned to start the water. Behind her, the cat appeared in the doorway. Her towel remained on the counter where she set it down. She was still upset with herself for having lost track of the time so completely. *With my luck the shower will blow up on me next! How did I ever manage to read for so long, without realizing it!?* She fondled that thought for a moment.

The book, like the experience of the night before, had tipped her reality on edge. It had posed a possibility that was at once tempting and horrible. On one hand a vindication of her sanity, but on the other, a vexing quagmire of paradoxes. Reading it had been like pawing through a catalogue of answers. Unfortunately, even if she knew what the right questions to ask were, she had no idea how to justify them with what normally passed for reality. A line from the book flashed out of recent memory. *One has to draw the line between what is and what is not.* The words formed unbidden in her mind. It was less than the current of a thought, but as she undressed, a sense of it nagged at her. She slipped easily out of the night shirt as the impression evolved.

Coming at her like that it was as if her father had spoken to her from beyond the grave. She couldn’t help directing an uncertain response to him as he was in her memory. *What is... what? And what is not... what did you mean by that?*

She did not know the answer, and the moment left her dwelling on the loss of her family—*when do you draw the line between ‘might have been’ and what is?* Another line resolved itself. *Were you trying to help me deal with your loss?* she asked her father’s memory. *Did you know what was going to happen?* The way the whole book was written it was easy to believe it *had* been written for that purpose. Another line manifested from the book, and she wasn’t sure who it made more sense coming from, herself or her father. *When do you draw the line between chance and intent?*

She could accept that possibility about as well as she could accept her own experiences, but that still did not tell her how to make either fit into reality. Morgan shook her head, realizing that even though she had put it down it still consumed her attention, allowing time to run away from her. Thinking about her fixation on the book, the truth of her distraction came clear. *I let myself lose track...* Behind her, in the misting mirror, the reflection seemed to stir, clipping the edge of her awareness. She turned to gaze at it full on but whatever it was, it must have been her imagination. Leaning back into the bath stall to test the temperature of the water,the voice intruded on her again, *When do you draw the line between here and there...?*

Shaking her head, she stepped down into the sunken basin of the steaming shower. She tried to pin down the direction of her thoughts with an uneasy feeling. The water was raining down on her back, letting her get used to the heat. As she bent back to let the water run over her face and chest, she kept thinking about dreaming. About her nightmares. That made her pause. She flipped back in the stream of thought and picked up the thread. *Drawing a line... Is that it?* She slid her hands down her body to spread the water’s warmth over her. *Trying to draw a line... between dreaming and reality... between here and there...* her skin tingled as the direction became clear, *and I don’t want to make it to the meeting, which means I don’t want to face the memories...* She opened her eyes and wiped the water off her face.

Turning to face the shower head and grab the soap, it suddenly clicked together. The limits of her reality suddenly rose up. The opening passage from the book suddenly connected with her reality. Her reality, her experience with the safety of the normal world, only existed in her mind. Whatever was really out there, it had to get through her mind to reach her, and in that regard, reality was no different from dreaming. *But... what does that that have to do with the line..?* All of a sudden it was right before her.

At that instant, the power went out. In the work shop bathroom, everything was flooded in darkness. Her concentration was snapped. “Sonovabitch! I knew it! If it isn’t one thing...” Hurrying, she quickly soaped her body and washed her hair. She rinsed herself down, trying to slough off the unease her thoughts had left her with. Finally, she reached through the darkened mist and traced over the glass door, “Where’s the bloody towel...?” Sliding the shower door open, she glimpsed what appeared to be eyes looming deep within the mirror. She hesitated for a second, shaken by the image but when she cleared her eyes again, the misted mirror was only a darkened fog. The thread of her broken thoughts suddenly returned.

The line, she realized, was between sanity and something else. Reality and something too big to face. Something stirred in her. *What happens when you reach that line, and something pushes you over it?*—a strange dread darted into her head.

Morgan stepped carefully out of the sunken tub and slinked over to the counter, dripping a sheen of steaming moisture. Her hand reached out for her towel, but her eyes were drawn to the mirror. The misting made it impossible to make out a clear image, but darkening currents writhed in the distorted glass. Suddenly, the cat hissed, drawing her attention away. “Bozwell...?” she queried as the cat leapt past her through the shadows. Her eye tried to follow the streak of midnight. The black tom arched in a bristle of charged fur. “Damn, cat, you scared me!” she breathed in relief as her mind painted the feline into her overactive imagination.

Grinning at herself, she turned back to the counter mocking her thoughts. *How strong is the boundary between here and nowhere...?* a remembered line challenged. Casually she picked up the towel, and before wiping herself down, she gave in to the temptation. Balling up the towel in her hand, she swabbed over the glass to clear the fog. Behind the mist a dark form reared back. A shocked gasp escaped her throat. The demonic image, a horror from her chaotic memories, immediately burst forward. Morgan reeled back as the figure hit the inside of the glass and the mirror exploded into fine fragments of slivered glass. She passed through the open door of the shower and wracked her head against the tiles. A sharp crack, and a blinding flash in her head proceeded her down into darkness. Her inner voice murmured tonelessly, *strong enough,* as she landed in a warm, wet oblivion.

Her numb body came to rest over the drain, blocking the water.

Alex Wildmuir let himself into the cliff house with his own key. He reached for the light switch inside the door, and frowned as the entry remained dim. Then he heard the distinct sound of shattering glass. A solid thump vibrated through the walls immediately after. The former soldier froze into listening silence. Because of the house’s acoustics, he could not pinpoint the origin of the sound. Dropping his coat and his bag inside the door, he soft stepped toward the kitchen; into the small back hall between the front of the house and the dining room.

As he moved down the hall, he heard a shower running.

He realized that Morgan must still be in the house. He had expected her to be gone for her meeting with the family lawyer, Richmond Bale. Still careful, he did a quick circuit of the house before going to the utility bathroom door. Finding nothing amiss, he knocked on the door to advise her that he had shown up early. He knocked harder when he didn’t get a response. He listened again for a pause. “Mew? You taking a nap in there?” he asked loudly, using her childhood nickname. He began to get a little worried and the quality of the sound of flowing water penetrated just as the first of the flood leaked from under the door. Without a second thought he slammed his shoulder to the door, easily splintering the oak framing. He burst into the bathroom, almost choking on the steam.

He whipped around and saw her laying submerged in the sunken tub. The cat was sitting grimly on top of the toilet, “Mew?!?” Bozwell cried. Alex plunged into the tub and wrenched his niece out of the water. He doubled her over his shoulder to drain her lungs and when the flow stopped he dropped her to the streaming floor, too pressed for time to be gentle. CPR was a built in reflex and he didn’t even give himself time to reflect on the intimate contact the motions demanded.

For an uncle he was not that far from her in age, only ten years—and in the absence of her father, he had become the focus for about eight years worth of Electra complex. This was the first time he had ever seen her naked. And if she wasn’t dying, he would be having a heart attack over it. Constantly telling a pretty young girl no did not make a man serene, even with the specter of incest. As soon as she could manage a choking imitation of normal breathing, he grabbed for the sodden towel laying on the floor beside her and flung it over her nude form, his face glowing deep red.

Morgan rolled over, moaning, and he quietly reassured her until she could limply respond to his questions. Confident that she would survive, he went to the linen closet for a dry towel. When he came back in, he had his own distress under control. Morgan was sitting there examining the floor of the bathroom with piercing scrutiny. When he asked what she was looking for she said, “There’s no glass... I guess I must have dreamed it all...” He didn’t follow the comment at all, and just as he was about to ask what she thought she had dreamed, she looked up and saw the broken mirror. He followed her gaze but he didn’t know what to make of it.

[INTRO: MEW.]

Wildmuir Estate, near Aspen, Colo.